

St. Stephen's College

Embodied Sacred Knowing With Relational Consciousness

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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I dedicate this thesis to the respondents who participated in this study, and to my husband

Kevin, my sons and friends who stood beside me as I journeyed this path.

Abstract

*Much of the suffering today comes because people do not have a place to tell their story.
C. J. Jung*

This research recognizes the value of people narrating their awakening experiences. I used a process of narrative inquiry to discover the meaning of these stories, which disclose a sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness. Such experiences are difficult to put into words. Few are prepared to witness an experience of divine meaning transcending human understanding, but these experiences offer valuable knowing for the self and, potentially, for others. Although they transcend concepts and words, awakening experiences may deepen a person's consciousness and ways of relating in the world. Potentially, the value of the experience could be woven into one's personal and public spaces. As a result, respect for the divine, and the value of the knowing from the divine in the experience, would not be lost. I have written this thesis in a non-linear way; the movement of this work is an open and ongoing spiral. It revisits methods, stories and themes from different places. At each point in the spiral, our consciousness opens to new meaning of an embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness. This study invited respondents to tell of their awakening experiences. Suffering, awakening, relational consciousness, death, rebirth, and self-identity transformation emerged as themes in these narratives. I have presented an understanding as to how sacred experience influences human development, consciousness, and narratives.

Key words: sacred experience, embodied knowledge, mysticism, narrative inquiry

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The description “Embodied Sacred Knowing With Relational Consciousness” is a mouthful; for me these words resonate with the experience of consciousness the awakening experience brings. By embodied sacred knowing I mean: a sense of unplanned noetic knowing that is non-verbal, ineffable, located in the body, maybe experienced as somatic. An indwelling love, or what is Holy, efforts to penetrate matter and combine with it to get a foothold on the physical plane (Underhill, 1913/1992, p. 13). The awakening experiences in this study were unmediated; the respondents’ awakening experiences were an unexpected unplanned moment. As Kakar stated, James (1902/1994) distinguished between unplanned mystical encounters and experiences of the sacred that come through practice. Kakar suggested that this difference “between sporadic and cultivated mysticism [. . .] corresponds to Deikman’s separation between untrained-sensate and trained-sensate mystical experiences (Kakar, 1991/2007, p. 1). In this thesis, I explored the influence of the unmediated experience on the respondents’ lives.

In the moment of awakening, I became aware of many levels of thought that are distinctly different and separate from the consciousness of embodied indwelling love. I was awakened to the realization of our divinity. After the experience, I wondered why I had not been taught this or heard it spoken by others. The experience shifted the authority of relationship with the sacred from externalized authority to the internal authority of the

sacred relationship within. My early understanding and consciousness of God was informed by my family, church and community from them I learned the narratives of my Christian upbringing, which taught me some basic necessary rules, morals, and values, for participating and navigating within the landscapes of my community and relationships. Religion is often described as teachings from a community's sacred text for its members to learn and live by. Consciousness is often not discussed so we can remain in dualistic consciousness of right and wrong, it is each of our responsibility to navigate towards higher levels of consciousness. In the process of human maturation, some spiritual practices intend to nurture spiritual consciousness and non-dual consciousness. Attending church brought me into religious institution consciousness, spiritual consciousness entered through prayer and music, I believe their purpose is to lift us into spiritual consciousness as a community. Yet, mystical or awakening consciousness was unknown. I was not taught to navigate the internal or external terrain of the awakening or direct mystical experience referred to by Underhill's indwelling love. Love that penetrates to get a foothold is the sacred entering the world through each of us. This indwelling relationship is a knowing, it is the inner sacred text from our inner experience of the sacred. It is sacred embodied knowing drawing the word from within the relational consciousness; this is when word becomes flesh. It is living the internal experience of the sacred out into the world from within. While morals and values can be narrated, understood, and predicted, they are found in life as patterned. What is otherwise referred to as awakening experiences or the Holy efforts to penetrate matter are not possible to pattern (Underhill, 1913/2000).

In researching why some events are narrated and others not, I turn to Michael White, who was influenced by Bateson's suggestion that "narrative is the interpretation of any event determined by its receiving context, but those events that cannot be 'patterned' are not selected for survival; such events will not exist for us as facts" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 2). I realized that for myself and the research respondents the awakening experiences that awoke us to sacred embodiment and relational consciousness were not within the information that is patterned and possible to know. This informed our narrative consciousness, including what was possible to story and with whom when we attempted to put word to these experiences.

Relational consciousness is a relationship that is alive in the moment where a person is fully present to the sacred and the true self that is also sacred. In the awakening experience to the mystery, the divine quality is experienced in an embodied way, which includes mind, body, and spirit as unified. Afterwards one carries the memory of the experience of relational consciousness. According to Bird (2004), one can use this quality of presence in other relationships; using presence listening with relational consciousness is presence with a reflective quality.

Relational consciousness is experienced during an awakening experience when one is completely present to the relational consciousness "Divine" that is ever present. The experience I had was both external and internal, an inwardly moment of a larger consciousness and an embodied knowing infused with wordless meaning, while experiencing the sacred in relationship within our selves and within the relational consciousness space of knowing as talked about by de Chardin (1960). In our everyday

lives, the way to have something of this awakening relationship is through practices of presence in any moment: presence in relationship; practices of meditation; centering prayer; contemplation; exercises, such as explored by Savary (2010). A person's practice of presence to be fully aware of the experience of daily living allows small moments of awakening into a larger consciousness; living this into one's life then informs something of how to participate in life influenced by relationship of relational consciousness.

Narrating The Experience That Began This Study

My thesis direction was influenced by my own awakening experience. In his mid sixties, my father began a process of forgetting; eventually he was diagnosis with early Alzheimer's disease. When my father was ill, I began to notice his narrative consciousness was changing. He was relying less and less on cognitive functioning and more on his embodied experience of any situation.

While my father was still able to be in the family home, I would drive out to his home in the country and pick him up on Wednesday mornings. From there, I would take him to a day home for those with dementia and Alzheimer's. Later in the day, I would pick him up and bring him home for a few hours. I valued the opportunity to spend time with him. I was thankful that I could do this small thing with my father; there was something, special about having this time with him, and I knew it was limited.

As Alzheimer's disease took away my father's brain function he lost the ability to remember or participate in life in the way he had previously, he began forgetting the stoic behaviors and ideas of his socialization. The gift of my father's forgetting is that he was no longer bound by the rigid perceptions and rules that had both formed him and

informed who he was to be for most of his life. I was experiencing my father having experiences and making sense of them in new ways; he was free from old meaning making ideas; he was in the moment. I witnessed my father, in forgetting, openly express enjoyment of small things in everyday life, things he would not have noticed or commented on before. For example, at the end of the day, I would pick my father up from his program and we would go to the school and pick up my boys. My father would comment on small things he noticed like the playfulness of the children and the colors they wore. He could be in the moment just experiencing joy. I saw delight on his face. This was precious and limited time, coming to know and experience my father in this way.

A Time of Suffering

I watched my father suffer over a long period as he experienced the loss of every aspect of himself. I remember how we all suffered as we grieved layers of losing him as the Alzheimer's slowly ended my father's life. Soon my father's stage of Alzheimer's disabled him so severely he was moved into a care facility as his memories and capacity to engage in life continued to diminish. When his connections to the multiple narratives that had storied his life were no longer available to him, they no longer defined or limited him. This was both an enormous loss and a freedom for him. In time when he could no longer verbally communicate and was confined mostly to his bed, I would sing to him and apply lotion to his hands, arms, feet, and face. I wondered if it was possible that we were communicating on a soul-to-soul level. One cool evening in March, I received a call from the nursing home; the time had come when my father was passing from this physical world. I changed my clothes into something warm and comfortable planning to

be with my father through the night while he passed. I wanted to be with him in a present, attuned, loving, spacious, comfortable, resting way. I now know this way of being is called contemplative.

Storying My Awakening Experience

The room was cool and dimly lit; it was late at night and most of the other residents had been sleeping for hours. Tenderly my sister and I sang “The Lord is my Shepherd” keeping one ear on the irregular rattle of his breath. As my sister and I ended the song, we witnessed my father’s last breath. It was as if his last breath were breathed out of him, returning him home to the mystery. In the absolute stillness of the room, the air above him became colored like amber with movement of light shining through. I then experienced heat, not from within, but on my external body. It was as if I were standing in front of the warmth of a campfire, feeling the soft heat of the flames warming my cool face and body.

From this experience my awareness was drawn to my own body as I experienced felt sensations, a quality of what I can best describe as an ever-so-tender caress on my face. The experience shifted from external sensations, to internal felt sensation drawing me to the immediacy of being in the body, fully present and aware. I felt heart-opening expansiveness, spaciousness within, peace, grace, joy, coherence, and clarity. I was imbued with a purity of love, and in those moments of unity, I was both love and loved completely. After the experience was over it lingered and I had a profound sense of becoming that invited a journey into being.

In this awakening experience, I experienced having been in the knowing of mystical consciousness. I experienced a timeless embodied wordless knowing. In the moment of experiencing a non-dual mystical consciousness, I experienced coherence. I was directly connected to the sacred in the moment. I was not informed by human thoughts, beliefs, and ideas that often take me into them and out of presence in the moment. I was present to the direct embodied experience of what is Holy. Unity consciousness illuminated my own consciousness in a moment of awakening beyond ordinary human consciousness to embodied sacred knowing and relational consciousness.

The name embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness came out of the awakening experience. This experience invites and informs one to live from a relationship that is love and grace. The experience is unplanned and it does not last; yet, it reveals the mystical consciousness. At the time, I did not know others might call this an awakening experience or mystical.

Death and Rebirth

One of the themes the respondents and I experienced was death to what we thought was reality. My body had the embodying experience of union with the Holy, birthing a Reality not previously known to my consciousness. I now understand enlightenment as brief moments in time, where within the awakening experience the veil is lifted, exposing the limits of some of the narratives we take on which are embedded within our culture and daily lives.

Spiritual awakening, then, involves death of created beliefs and birth of consciousness and the narratives that describe the reality of the mystical consciousness.

Frequently leaving a life-long impact, such experiences may involve a profound realization or opening to a sacred, numinous dimension of being (James, 1902/1994). This shift creates a change in the person, and a pathway that enhances the relationship with the sacred; these pathways grow and evolve as the person matures (Pargament, 2007).

Birth of Experience

The birth of our self through experience is a lifelong process that will happen many times throughout our life. As we die to old ideas of who we think we are, we open to new realities shifting our perceptions of our experiences. Experiences are continually birthed in our lives; we may notice them or not, some are developed, some not. The multiple narratives that bring meaning to our experiences are often not available within our everyday consciousness. Consciousness supports and makes possible what is supported to grow. Once an experience is birthed, what does or does not get realized and acknowledged depends on whether or not it fits the available conscious narratives. The awakening experience is of sufficient intensity that it does not go unnoticed, however it may not become a part of the narratives we share in our everyday storying of experience. The interview process in this research intended to invite an externalization and exploration of the awakening experience. Questions inquired and initiated a storying of the experience, ongoing questions conveyed recognition of a story's relevance. "People (clients) engage with the linguistic space which is generative of a relational construct that inevitably builds a sense of hope and possibility" (Bird, 1994, p. 8). Storying the sacred holds hope for realization of experiencing the sacred in the immediacy of our lives now.

Sometimes, it might seem as if the experience is in search of one to experience it, dwell with it, grow with it, for it is possible to have new experiences that do not result in growth. One almost goes on as if they did not happen or did not matter much. What does it take to link up with the experience that is coming into being? To link up and to be further born, undergoing development with experience that is developing and needing attention. (Eigen, 2014, p. vii)

This research sought to invite respondents' stories of the awakening experience, and used further questioning as a way of storying the experience and the ongoing relationship and influence of the awakening experience in the person's life narrative.

Change Of Self Identity: Transformation

The everyday consciousness is made up of dominant worldviews and discourses, which privilege some experiences and knowledge over other forms of experiences or knowledge. The less privileged knowledge can virtually remain invisible or outside what is considered knowledge or experience by dominant world views. For the purpose of this study, I used narrative inquiry to invite the telling of the less privileged story of the awakening experience. Through this research I hoped to gain knowledge into the meanings of the lived experience of relational consciousness that gives voice to embodied sacred knowing and meaning in our lives.

I found storytelling is a bridge that gives possible voice to the sacred that is within the awakening experience manifesting itself directly into our world. Myerhoff refers to Rothenberg, "soul-making is actually the making of the world, that the telling of one's story is at once the making of self or soul and the making of the world, that these acts go

together, and they are inseparable. This is why the listener becomes so important” (Myerhoff, 2007 p. 19). Therefore, this story matters. Atkinson states a life story plays an important role in the community. “Stories can bring us face to face with an ultimate mystery” (1998, p. 10).

In the telling of the encounter with the Divine, the respondents bring us face to face with the ultimate mystery now; their stories bring the mystery into the community now. The story can be a bridge to the Divine, in that as one lingers in the moment with the wordless; we are brought forward once more into the inner experience of sacred. This knowing in the moment brings the Divine consciousness directly into our everyday lives. Telling our stories helps to integrate our experiences into our lives and form coherent narratives. Narratives continually change as consciousness grows old narratives die, we experience rebirth, we grow and change this is an on going process of storying our new consciousness into our lives.

Narrative Inquiry and Awakening

My unplanned awakening experience was outside of my everyday experience-it got my attention. The experience was one of presence, clarity, grounded. As it was outside of the everyday experience, consciousness and narratives it was also difficult to articulate. I experienced a kind of being in the wilderness of wordless territory trying to articulate the experience into everyday life in a living way.

The awakening consciousness experience can ground one into being, yet from our everyday consciousness, the listeners may not understand the awakening experience and consciousness. As a result, I am aware within our everyday consciousness and discourses, awakening experiences may be understood from everyday dualistic consciousness of

right and wrong judgments calling the experience magical thinking, or inflation. It is known the mystical consciousness is a much higher or expanded level of consciousness than magical thinking consciousness, which is in childhood. The attitude taught in our culture is often suspicious; this entitles denial and diminishment of the experience. Those without spiritual training and understanding may speak of the mystical experience as dissociation, fragmentation, or a spiritual emergency, as they are making sense from a consciousness that does not know the awakening experience. It has not been my experience that the available dominant narratives speak of this experience in a knowledgeable or grounded way. Nor does the everyday human consciousness understand the awakening experience, or mystical consciousness. According to Buckley, “Our human vocation is to wake up to the mystery of God’s presence and action in all human experience” (2005, p. 19). The process of awakening to your spiritual existence is development of spiritual consciousness. Most people in mainstream western society are not taught the path of sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness found in contemplative practices that reveal mystical awareness and consciousness.

In that awakening moment I recognized my own narrative attachments that presented veils of realities within my consciousness; veils removed for the moments of the awakening experience, meant death to many narratives informing how to understand my life. Veils of narratives outside the awakening experience are small “r” realities; the awakening experience is a glimpse into the big “R” Reality. The awakening experience transcends the everyday narratives and identifications. The experience is embodied; we are required to transcend our mental narratives.

It has been difficult to convey this experience in words. We do not speak of the awakening experience or mystical consciousness in everyday life. As a result, we do not develop the narratives and consciousness that would help us develop and formulate the narratives to speak about this awakening experience thus the experience remains outside of unrecognized. After the awakening experience at my father's death, I experienced the absence of hearing these experiences spoken into our world, as few around me could relate or speak to the experience in any way. Even without words, I had the memory and body memory of the experience. "Sacred experience is expressed not only through language but in the immediacy of bodily experience" (Griffith & Griffith, 2002 p. 57). As a result I needed to explore this experience more, I needed to choose a methodology I felt would support this exploration.

Narrative Inquiry Stories

The sacred experience is considered wordless, difficult to accurately express in words, as the mystical is non-temporal. Although it cannot be accurately expressed, the value of putting it into story is, I believe, important. For Polkinghorne, "narrative is the cognitive process that gives meaning to the event by bringing it through word into the temporal and identifying the events as parts of a plot. The narrative structure is used to organize events into various kinds of stories" (1991, p. 136).

Narrative inquiry provides a way to enter into the awakening story and a way for the awakening story to enter into our lives, communities, and society at this time in history. As I listened to the respondents' stories, I heard the meaning the sacred

experience had for their life. I also heard how their awakening experience has come to shape their world of meaning.

“Therapists working with clients as they reconstruct their self-concept through ‘re-employment’ must understand the operation and power of narrative configurations in the creation of stories of self-identification” (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 136). Although it is never possible to understand the mystery or actually capture the awakening, it is possible to form a coherent narrative of the experience into a person’s life, in the process developing thick descriptions of the wordless, allowing for rich and meaningful understandings of the awakening experience. “Narrative structure in the formation of the concept of self It allows the self to be grasp as a whole in which the meaning of the individual events and actions of one’s life are derived from their relationship to the whole” (p. 137). In the process of the ongoing storying of one’s life, a story is always in process.

Psychotherapy and spirituality helps one develop structures to explore and to hold the awakening experience while acknowledging the mystery of the experience. Spiritual practices explore the sacred inward experience while also providing structures to recognize the experience of the sacred. Spiritual practices help a person to organize cognitively the experience of the divine embodied and to recognize the divine in their life. This brings about the whole; an experience when organized and storied allows a person to experience the awakening of the divine experience in life as a part of the whole of life. This pulls the sacred into the whole of our lived experience, forming into coherent relationship.

The Respondents

This study is intended to support the telling and understanding of a mystical encounter and the meaning of this awakening experience for the respondents and potentially our society. Two of the respondents I interviewed became aware of my topic at work-related meetings. They approached me to be a part of the study. The other respondent I met at a community gathering. I invited the three respondents to share their mystical encounter through narrative, which was followed by an interview to explore with them the awakening experience. Narrative provides a means to find meaning, value, and place for mystical encounter in our society.

In hearing their stories, I gained insight into the meaning these experiences held for the respondents' lives at the time of the experience and in their current lives. It is my belief that we do not have a context in our euro-centric society in which to tell or hold the mystical experience and therefore we miss out on understanding its meaning and potential development in our lives. Those I interviewed said they had told very few about their mystical encounter. The respondents had found few places for the acknowledgment of their experiences, or opportunities to share and explore their meanings.

I used narrative questions to support the inquiry in the telling of the stories. I developed my questions from sheets received at a variety of narrative workshops. Questions invited the tellers of the stories to explore the meaning present in their stories in ways that been shrouded by the dominant consciousness. I used narrative presence listening, an intentional use of consciousness where I listen from a consciousness that understood something of the awakening experience and could listen for this in their experiences.

I taped the interviews, transcribed them into written narratives, and found themes in the data. The respective respondents' verified the transcribed narratives. The collected narratives were a process of gathering information through storytelling for the purpose of research.

White (2007) is a narrative therapist. He has mapped a research process through which people tell and retell their stories in order to be listened to and heard. This process invites them "to continue to develop and tell stories about their lives," and also helps them to "include some of the more neglected but potentially significant events and experiences that are 'out of phase' with their dominant story lines" (White, 2007, p. 61). I used this process to invite the research respondents to tell stories of their awakening experiences. With a series of questions that supported a revisiting of the spirit of their stories, they were able to become aware of the nature of their experience and its continuing influence in their lives. The work is consistent in that all respondents were asked the same questions in the same order directly after the telling of their stories.

Finding My Way

Finding someone who speaks the language or understands the awakening experience helps to validate the experience. A pastoral psychologist introduced me to the word mystical, and this word helped me to understand my awakening experience. I was familiar with the use of the word mystical in relation to Saints. I had not heard it used in the everyday life experience from which I came to know it, as did the respondents in this study. I recognize there is a tension between religious consciousness and spiritual consciousness. Awakening consciousness does not have a tension towards religious and spiritual consciousness as it encompasses them. There is a need in our society for the acknowledgment of awakening

consciousness. The mystical is not reserved for Saints, it is time for the story of the mystical encounter of sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness manifesting into this world into our direct experience of the sacred within us. “The Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21, KJV). Speaking this experience and having it understood or known is a challenge.

How does one speak about the sacred experience? Finding a way to speak to the heart of the sacred experience through the lens of the academic eye has been a challenge for me. My head felt like a snow globe that had violently been shaken up. A mad whirl of constructed ideas and concepts became a blizzard that blinded me. Unable to work, I closed my eyes and sat in silence for a long, long time. All that created the blizzard began settling like snowflakes. I thought of Teresa of Avila, finding her way in the interior castle. I surrendered and rested into the deep silence; when I could finally see with my heart, my eyes could open. I have gained a deep respect for the lives and writings of mystics such as Teresa of Avila, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Ignatius of Loyola, G. I. Gurdjieff, Carl Gustav Jung, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hildegard of Bingen, and Rudolf Steiner. Their stories have made significant contributions. Their dedication to enter the world from the place of value for the sacred is inspiring.

My style of writing is not linear; it is a spiral. I find this research topic is best suited to a spiral, as I am inquiring into that which is not patterned or from a linear model. In finding the spaces to the non-patterned, I spiral, around gathering moments of non-patterned, embodied knowing that contribute to developing my own and perhaps others' consciousness and vice-versa in the relational field. The sacred embodied

knowing with relational consciousness experience cannot be understood or known by linear thinking, as it can not be thought, it is an experience that informs conscious development. Narrative therapy uses a scaffolding process. In many ways, the narrative inquiry process of questions is similar. Questions are along the spiral they explore the stories from a slightly different place, as we explore the awakening consciousness of the respondents. Within the spiral process, I use a variety of disciplines to support understanding the respondents' experiences. Understanding and finding the meaning the awakening experience has for the respondents and trying to point towards the experience requires being informed from different disciplines. Each discipline provides a lens through which to understand and make meaning of the awakening experience. The lenses I have used are the methodology of narrative inquiry, narrative therapy, psychotherapy, and theology. These disciplines support finding a way to speak to, understand, and find meaning in the respondents' awakening experiences.

The Pilgrimage

Perhaps in the process of awakening consciousness one enters life as a pilgrim. I took my first course from St. Stephen's college a few months after my father died. I was moved to choose this topic for my thesis research. I had no idea how ill prepared I was to write on this subject. It has been a pilgrimage in which I have needed to engage in a variety of areas to develop my knowledge and understanding of awakening consciousness for this thesis topic. I have spent years researching; going to lectures, courses, reading, writing, participating in discourses, seeking out multiple spiritual teachers and practices from many religious traditions including mystical traditions. I have traveled to counties where I could learn spiritual practices in the atmosphere of the county, their people, land,

cultures, consciousness, narratives, temples, churches, and tombs. I have taken training in such fields such as contemplative spiritual direction and deepening years, transpersonal spiritual guidance, the alchemy and archetypal dimensions in spiritual guidance, Ignatian exercises, reading the Bible using midrash, Rumi, and “the way of the passion.” I have explored such concepts the feminine Christ and the feminine mystic, and St. Teresa of Interior Castle. I participated, too, in a thirty-week class in which we studied writings by Savory (2010).

I also attended numerous classes and practices as I strived on my journey to develop my own awakening consciousness, presence, and awareness in order to understand something more of mystical consciousness. I have taken a variety of psychology and psychotherapy courses grounded in narrative therapy, somatic awareness, processing, integration and embodiment, plus a number of Jungian courses including *Psychotherapy as a Spiritual Practice* (2013), taught by Lionel Corbett, whom I reference in this thesis; he skillfully brought psychotherapy and spirituality together.

In this research I heard within the respondents stories the meaning the awakening experience has in their lives, how and if, it continues to be an ongoing relationship in their lives. I was curious to know if awakening, to embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness continues to be a relationship they consciously participate in.

A Description of Chapters

In this Introduction, I began with defining embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness, then, I shared my own awakening experience, and the journey

of writing this thesis. In Chapter Two, the literature review, I cover the material that supported this thesis research. Several sections cover a variety of disciplines. Each of them had a lens that helped create a clearer understanding of the awakening experience. In chapter three I discuss the methodology, I used. Storying the awakening experience at one time was an oral tradition. I lay out in detail the steps I used in my research. Ancient texts such as the Bible reveal through story, religious, spiritual and mystical consciousness. Narrative inquiry intends to understand what gives meaning to our life. In this research, I explored the respondents' awakening experiences to understand what from this experience gives meaning to their lives. This narrative inquiry recognizes the place and importance of a sacred story in the respondents' lives and for our world. I included a theological method by William James for determining a mystical experience in the method chapter. Chapter Four invites the respondents to tell their awakening experience. The first section invites the awakening stories to be told by the respondents. The second section finds shared themes in their stories. This chapter includes the results and discussion where I used a number of authors to support the stories and meanings; in the last section I included a series of questions which invited further storying and externalization of the ongoing influence of the awakening experience in the respondents' lives. Chapter Five is the concluding chapter where I summarize the findings, review the literature, discuss further topics of inquiry and potential areas of application of the research. I make a personal statement of significant findings and the value of storying the sacred experiences.

The Relationally Conscious Story

There is something about the experience of embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness that informs the initiate about the pathways of meaning revealed in the experience. In the healing quality of the relational consciousness experience, in that awakening moment the sacred informs the initiate of the value of this unity for themselves and others. The respondents directly experienced the transformational qualities. What is transmitted is a knowing and a deepening of this sacred relationship. Relational consciousness has implications for self-understanding and for our relationship with God and others. Relational consciousness asks, in a sense, for one to enter the world in this way. Relationally conscious stories, birth into the world an awareness of this awakening, and potentially, a way to navigate life from this consciousness.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them.

William Carlos Williams

Telling our stories is an act of transcending the personal and entering the realm of the sacred.

Robert Atkinson

Myth Reveals Life's Purpose

The literature review provided shape for this thesis process and questions by focusing on a number of different areas. To begin I felt it was important to explore the theme of myths as I was asking the respondents, to tell their story of the experience of sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness, which can potentially become a personal myth. From their stories, I would be gathering the meaning and themes of the mystical encounter in their life. I found it interesting to read Armstrong's suggestion that Neanderthals probably had an understanding of the place of the sacred and myth; they told each other stories (Armstrong, 2005, p. 3-5). In our scientific culture, we often have

rather simplistic notions of the divine. Armstrong stated that studying Neanderthal graves tells us five important things about myths. They

- 1) reflect our fear of death and extinction;
- 2) are inseparable from ritual;
- 3) force us to go beyond our experience;
- 4) are not stories for their own sake, but shows us how we should behave;
and
- 5) point to an invisible but more powerful reality that is sometimes called
“the world of the Gods” (p. 3-4).

“Myths enable men and women to imitate, and experience divinity within them”

(p.5). Armstrong has described a history of myth and how, over time, our world has become demythologized with no way to understand the mystery (p. 118). “Because we do not use myth, many will lose all sense of what it was” (2005). “Without myth people now read the bible without the ability to understand it, so they take it literally” (p. 122). As Hollis has put it, “To literalize mystery; the image once contained is now lost When the image no longer points beyond itself to the precincts of mystery, then it is dead. But the mystery lives on elsewhere” (1995, p. 9).

Death

Armstrong addressed Nietzsche’s claim God is dead. In her work, she suggested that today we have lost the life and the spirit of God in our churches she goes on to connect this to when we lose our connection with myth how we then lose our connection to the spirit within the myth (Armstrong, 1993). Armstrong helped me form a possible

distinction between the everyday stories and the story of a religious mystical experience and its connection to myth. To understand myth we also need to have it in our lives (Armstrong 2005). This information gave me a clearer sense of the value and importance of storying the religious mystical encounter into our everyday life story as a way of developing consciousness. The mystical encounter is one of no words it is difficult to put words to the experience that awakens us. It then takes time to formulate this experience and speak about it. According to Armstrong, “Language itself can be a limiting faculty since it embeds us in the concepts of our mundane experience” (1993, p. 211). She suggested a linguistic connection between the words myth, mysticism, and mystery. “All derived from the Greek verb *muster ion*: to close the eyes or the mouth, to be in darkness and silence” (p. 211). This is a description of contemplation. Although this is not a concept our modern world holds with value or importance, it is a way to put word to the experience as it arises within relationship with the sacred. During the Enlightenment mystery became regarded as a bad word, “mysticism is frequently associated with crank, charlatans or indulgent hippies” (p. 211). Therefore, in the West we have “little understanding of the intelligence and discipline that are essential to this type of spirituality” (p. 211).

As I researched, I considered the multiple separation myths, heaven from earth, earth from the water, woman and man from the Garden of Eden, humans from nature, and now God from church. I reflected on my literature review of mystics and the interviews with the respondents where they spoke about their realization from within the religious mystical encounter the knowing of no separation, the separation being the illusion. I wondered about the separation myth playing itself out now in our time in our culture right

now. It seems to be colluding with the dominant notion of our time that what cannot be explained with the rational does not exist. Churches study scripture and talk about God, encouraging religious consciousness, yet most do not teach the personal relationship through practices such as contemplation that nurtures spiritual consciousness. Often they do not have a place for the mystical encounter and the on going awakening experience to be told, received, storied, and understood. So, this relational consciousness is not put to word so it can hold something of value for us.

We have a misunderstanding of the role of myth in our own development, “Jung pointed out the existence of ‘myth forming’ deep structural elements in the unconscious, so that mythologems reflect the dynamics of the psyche. When the myth in which we live is unconscious, we are like a fish in water; the myth creates the atmosphere in which we live and is taken for granted. Corbett stated, “Our fundamental attitudes are derived from it” (1996, p. 84). Armstrong (1993) has suggested the movement in our society towards eastern traditions and their narratives reflects a turning again to the value of myth. Yoga and meditation provide an environment in which to integrate study, discipline, practice and experience (p. 30). As Atkinson stated, “When a living myth breaks down, dies, or is no longer effective, we go through a period of chaos, confusion, meaninglessness, and spiritual loneliness. This is a result of the values and truths breaking down that hold a society together”(1995, p. 108). Once our inner and outer landscapes have been cleared of myth we lose the consciousness from which it comes thus our ability to understand the mystery of myth.

Stone has referred to this as “the landscape of destorification with our current environmental issues, such as clear-cutting of our old growth forests, causing

deforestation that strips the landscape, these two phenomenon's are devastating ecological cousins." He has suggested that, because, "Our inner landscapes have been stripped of our myths, our stories," our first step towards transforming our lives is to make space for story (2004, p. 9). This work leads us to using story to heal the wound of destorification.

Burns has used storytelling as a therapeutic tool. This process becomes a way to healing and restorative development (Burns, 2008, xix). To tell them is recognize the power stories have in our lives as they shape our relationships and our understanding of ourselves. In this research, I used narrative inquiry to invite untold stories and support the development of related consciousness.

Fulford (1999) has written about the difficulty in our time to be with the unformed consciousness and stories of the mystery it may hold. We are in a time where wonder and loose ends are not accepted in our work, we want rational, concrete answers. We do not want to hold the tension of the unknown; we do not want to hold the mystery. We are expected to have an answer. Our modern thought, stories, movies, films, TV shows, mass market he said, have "a tendency to make every story explain itself clearly and conclude neatly. It has become a kind of rule that neatness counts in narrative: don't leave the audience wondering" (p. 8). These socially constructed narratives are in contrast to what Fulford calls a "master narrative" (p. 32). "A master narrative always speaks with the confidence of unalterable and unassailable truth-and yet paradoxically, it is always in the process of being altered" (p. 32). This is true of the chief narrative of western civilization, the Bible. "A master narrative is a dwelling place we are intended to live in it" (p. 32). It would be reasonable to say there is complexity to a master narrative.

Atkinson (1995) examined the complexities of the knowing of enduring elements of sacred stories such as metaphor, symbol, archetype, patterns, and repetitions. He shares a knowing that I find expressed in many spiritual teachings; he suggests, within the core of a master narrative, there is a constant, even if everything around us changes. This is the essence of the spiritual life. Stories told from looking inward help us find the core of the self. It is important to know your own story; he refers to this, as the title of his book makes clear, as “the gift of stories” (1995). When one knows their story, they can see the sacred has been with them on their journey; they can universalize their story; this is personal myth making. “Your personal myth takes you right into the sacred realm of your life.” (p. 83). Atkinson used Jung’s concept that “what we are in our inward vision...can only be expressed by inward myth. We can then merge our personal myth with the collective myth” (p. 107). He shaped a structure giving insight and value to myth and story. “Our personal myth highlights the strong threads that make up our own life experience and at the same time reveals the common threads that we share with all humanity” (p. 107). A significant thread which humanity shares is the life we find when a story is told and heard.

Life

When we interview others, we are supporting them to experience the life of their story through telling their story and to find a connection to the core self in the process. Our stories reveal something about our consciousness in the moment. Stories provide consciousness to self and culture. So, story matters. A story makes it possible to know; it has the potential to opens us to a larger consciousness. In this thesis, I use a storytelling method to hear the respondents speak the awakening experience, the meaning and

consciousness it reveals. Myerhoff proposed, “We story our lives... it is how we communicate, stories are a way to come know our self” (2007, p. 1). An anthropologist, Myerhoff recognized, “stories have multiple meanings, they are scholarship, self-knowledge, cultural, transmission, public service, and the sacred” (p. 1). Themes in the stories she discussed are those of suffering and growing a soul. She discussed what happens not just to the “teller, but with the listening what happens to the listener” (p. 17). Myerhoff’s argument suggests we speak our self into existence. We do the same with listening. “Listen. Stories, they go around in circles, not in straight lines, so it helps to listen in circles” (p. 17). In her research, she explored many ways and reasons why our stories are important. She found we do not have places to tell our stories. “When cultures are fragmented and in serious disarray, appropriate audiences may be hard to find” (p. 32). Inventing occasions becomes important “definitional ceremonies” (2007). When this essential commodity is scarce in community, everyone competes for it with astonishing fierceness (2007). Myerhoff recognized a need in our time for people to have a place to tell their stories. Myerhoff’s work encourages reflecting on our current time and forms of technology that make possible an opportunity to tell one’s story: Facebook, Skype, twitter, texts, YouTube, blogging. Does this point to a society where there is no place to tell our stories? I wonder what the impact may be on the development of our consciousness when we do not tell or listen to the sacred stories.

Birth of Consciousness

Wilber’s goal in describing an integral psychology is to honor and embrace every legitimate aspect of human consciousness (2000). He suggested other methods are needed to understand that which cannot be explained by science. He used the example of

studying Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. It cannot be understood empirically (2000). "You need to enter into its interiority, its meaning, its intentions, and its depths. Science here is worthless because you need to enter into the interior domain and symbolic depths which cannot be accessed through exterior empiricism but only introspection and interpretation" (p. 160-161). He suggested the surface could be seen, and interior depth interpreted. I see this as a way to understand the importance of entering into the sacred story as a way of understanding the relationship with the sacred.

Wilber also suggested it is important to recognize, "postmodern movements often end up subtly embodying and even extending the reductionist agenda. In fact, postmodernism would eventually go to extraordinary lengths to deny depth in general" (2000, p. 169). I recognized the limitation of narrative inquiry might be the simplification of what is the story of the profane, trying to point to the story of the sacred, and only having the story of the profane. Fulford spoke to this by reflecting, "We may mistrust large-scale narratives that attempt to shape society, but our narrative drive persists," (1999, p. 7). Is the narrative drive the deep longing for the sacred to evolve into our personal myth?

Studying the data from my interviews with the research respondents, I recognized the sacred story enters into myth realm; what it points to is the divine manifesting into the material world through the human relationship. In a way the sacred story is more than the individuals, it is also the divine within the awakening experience; the experience is one where the divine seeks relationship, the experience of relational consciousness. A story that involves more than one is shared story. As Eliade said, "Myth reveals the absolute sacrality, because it relates the creative activity of the gods, unveils the sacredness of

their work. In other words, the myth describes the various and sometimes dramatic eruptions of the sacred into the world” (1957, p. 96-97). For the respondents, the awakening experience brought the sacred directly into their world; each of them expressed a changed worldview, which reveals a changed consciousness.

Mystical Consciousness

In such awareness, we experience ourselves concurrently as limited and eternal, as both the one and the other (Jung, 1961/1989, p. 325). In this moment, one knows we are ultimately limited. It also opens capacity for becoming conscious of the infinite (p. 325). Awakening in Jung’s view happens in a variety of ways including the mystical encounter he looks at how it enters memories, dreams and reflections.

As I interviewed respondents on their awakening experience, it was important to research the area of mystical consciousness as I was focused on hearing a story that is not a part of our dominant discourse. Eckhart taught the value of the mystical encounter; he tried to relate the knowing that came through his experiences. Eckhart’s message point us towards a life intended to “help Christians return to the ground of the hidden God” (McGinn, 2001, p. 131). In his early work, he spoke of God’s presence in everything. He developed “Talks Of Instruction” where his message was “God is a God of the present, not of the past” (p. 133). Eckhart asked, “How is one to attain God’s presence in the ground of the soul” (p.133)? I think this may be similar to embodied sacred knowing in this thesis, the reference to ground and present. As time went on his sermons became increasingly about prayer. There were three processes he understood as important in gaining awareness: detaching, birthing, and breaking through (p. 133). This echoes the themes found in

respondents' stories, the themes of death, birth, and transformation. A scholarly mystic, Eckhart showed his desire to bring forward the experience and importance of the non-static experience in the state of being. Relational consciousness is how I understand this. A common theme among mystics that "There is a kind of stasis, a mystical awareness of elemental harmony running through all things, Augustine's 'we are restless until we find our rest in thee,' and Julian of Norwich's 'all shall be well' " (Yungblut, 1988, p. 17). Values of practices such as focus, prayer, and contemplation are an important part of the mystic's daily life that de Wit (1999) referred to as "the metaphor of the path. " The metaphor of the path also includes the idea of certain borders or constraints. These borders point to the spiritual practices that place certain restrictions on us, a certain form of discipline that influences the cultivation of our mind and action" (p. 62).

Practices inform and develop our consciousness and ability to become conscious. Evelyn Underhill reports in her work on the "importance of understanding the non-dual consciousness of the mystical experience" (Underhill, 1913/2000, p. 2). Underhill defined mysticism as "the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or lesser degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment" (p. 2). Fear, as we know, creates distortions, non-realities which we take as reality. Underhill referred to the mystical realm as the world of reality; her book offers practical suggestions to the reader on preparation for the mystical mind, forms of contemplation and discernment and the mystical life (1913/2000). Underhill describe the experience of the mystic as one of being enticed inward by the draw of an indwelling spirit of love, and described stages of contemplation. Her work teaches how to be present in the body and

allow the spirit to emerge putting thoughts to the side, allowing for bodily experience of this indwelling love (1913/2000).

Respondents in this project claimed they had been changed by the experience of the sacred; they had a different understanding about themselves and what is important in life. Sinetar (1986) explored themes of self knowledge, naming, silence, solitude, simplicity, and stewardship. She also proved several real life stories of those who have lived, or were living as mystics (1986). Speaking of the ability to know one's self, she meant an ability to have presence and awareness. "Knowledge/action requirement of wholeness is yet another idea; there is truth within the self that longs to be known. The expression of the truth makes one exist" (p. 17). Sinetar explores mystics as ordinary people in their homes instead of a traditional cloister. For her, everyday mystics meet their need for solitude and silence in the progress of their day. This book is a guide to the everyday person who is drawn to live the path toward spiritual wholeness.

I want to be clear the mystical encounter does not make one a mystic, however it might start one on a journey of disciplines and practices, that would over time shift their level of consciousness and they may continue on this path of growth. In his explanation of levels of consciousness, Marion stated that "each level of consciousness has its own 'worldview' —that is, people at that level of consciousness see and understand the world in a specific way, one that is distinct from the level of consciousness below them and from the level of consciousness above them" (2004, p. 3). He explored the impact of a mythic God, suggesting that because it is egocentric "tolerance and understanding for others points of view and behaviors, and compassion for people who hold these views and practice these behaviors, are simply not possible for a child or adult with mythic

consciousness” (2004, p. 7). Understanding the mystical experience then becomes challenging, as others do not understand the mystical consciousness. That which is outside of one’s consciousness does not exist. Therefore, Marion recognizes that, nor can they see any good reason for even attempting any tolerance because, for them, this would be betrayal of their external God” (p. 7). As this level, the consciousness still influences our beliefs of an external God. Therefore, those with a mystical encounter and the embodied sacred knowing of God within have very limited potential or place to tell their story. “The mythic level could not know the ineffable quality of the mystery, as the mythic level is concretized; therefore god became separate from humans” (p. 8).

For Marion, “Christians go to church on Sunday as if entering a time warp, putting the modern rational worldview aside for an hour or two to submit to an old mythic worldview” (p. 32). Marion named the split as “then they reemerge into the rational worldview by which they operate their lives and professions during the week” (p.32). Everyday influence of this worldview has made our religious institutions split from the mystical. In the data review of the respondents’ churches were not a place where they went to tell the awakening story. Priest did not tell fellow priests. According to Marion, Jesus and many of his disciples were mystics. Paul, however, did not have the non-dual consciousness of a mystic; his letters show the message is being compromised (2004). Further, Marion described how this misunderstanding has influenced our current teaching of a mythic God in Christianity. “Most people would label themselves spiritual but not religious; they are interested in personal inner spiritual growth but not organized religion” (p. 69). This to me shows a developing awareness of religious consciousness and spiritual consciousness. He also described nine levels of conscious development in

the process of spiritual growth. There is a respect and value for all levels of consciousness; each is needed for the next stage to emerge (2004).

Respondents were cautious with whom they shared the mystical encounter, demonstrating a knowing in regards to who may have been at a level of consciousness to understand the experience. They did not share the experience within a church setting. Similarly I was told, by a Pastor that we do not believe in mystical encounters. As I have researched, I have developed a hope for our religious institutions, to remember who they are, their mystical beginnings, and to bring back the mystery and support the spiritual consciousness and growth people are seeking. Marion stated that “Though I believe Jesus taught a path that combined mystical, spiritual, cognitive and psychological development, I do not know what that path was in terms of meditation techniques, rituals, or behavioral practices Jesus path, which he taught orally and secretly to his disciples, has been lost” (2004, p. 151). He goes on to discuss how the step-by-step practices were steps to the development of higher consciousness. The drive for higher consciousness may become the new spiritual practice, it is important to remember it was and was not about conscious development it is therefore a paradox. For many that are moved to be on this path, it is a contemplative nature with a deep longing for union with the beloved mystery, the impulse to love all, just as they experienced in the mystical union (2004).

Many contemplatives were also moved to do the works of mercy in the world for its betterment. As they developed an attunement to the Divine, their own divine nature unfolded naturally into their lives. The Sufi mystic Hazart Inayat Khan, lectured initiates about the spiritual path through the problems of the day:

When religion has lost its hold on inner life and faith there is nothing left. Many people, especially among the intellect have lost their religion, and among the younger ones, there are a good many that even dread the name of God. What is needed is an education which will teach humanity to feel the essence of their religion in everyday life (1979, p. 244).

He wrote “We need today the religion of tolerance. The need today is not learning, but how to become considerate towards one another” (p. 243- 244). I think he is pointing here, to consciousness that is often formed by institutional knowledge without the experience of personal knowing. Without practices that support the development of personal experience and knowing, there is the risk of developing dualistic thinking of right and wrong. Thirteenth-century Sufi poet Rumi points towards this human experience:

Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing,

there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,

the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*

doesn't make sense. (Rumi, n.d.)

Khan taught spiritual disciplines that practice discernment in how to be a person for today. How to attune toward the one? How to attune towards the experience and

become the love we are? I believe he is speaking about relational consciousness and embodiment. As I did my research, I found the message of love, of loving one's neighbor, and of being loved, was a common theme among mystics. This sense of giving to the world, being a better person in this world, to be changed in this world in a positive way, was a theme of the respondents I interviewed. It spoke to me of the importance of their experience and what they were now bringing to the world because of the experience.

Bauerschmidt offered ways to learn disciplines of seeing what real compassion is. He explored the teaching of major mystics, their paths and practices, wisdom from their lives, and why they are needed now. Their words and experiences had various themes such as self knowledge and inescapability from one's self, practices of love, and a way that, consumed by love, one see's one place in nature and God's desire towards us (2003). I could sense hope in myself for our world and for each other as I read his book. Therefore, I invited the respondents to tell their awakening experiences as a step towards bringing mystical consciousness into our time. I do not think we can separate the story from the consciousness the story brings. Understanding and meaning are present in what the respondents had to say.

Bourgeault invited the reader into mystical hope, offering five meditations with the themes of hope, God's mercy on the inward journey, and carrying this into the world (2001). In the respondents' stories it is apparent they are engaged in the practice of mystical hope.

The inward journey is one of solitude and contemplation. Both themes reflect the essential nature of finding and connecting to our humanity and developing a spiritual life.

Merton's writing point towards a practice that brings about knowledge more meaningful than the knowledge that one obtained through external means (1956).

“According to Dionysius,” said Johnston, “there are two ways in which man can know God: one is the way of reason; the other is the mystical way of contemplation” (2000, p. 32). Johnston looked at the value and contribution of the mystical theology.

According to James (1902/1994), there are four hallmarks of the religious experience:

- 1) Ineffability: words cannot adequately describe the experience.
- 2) Noetic quality: a knowledge or comprehension of it.
- 3) Transiency: it does not last.
- 4) Passivity: will power is insufficient to make it happen. (p. 414-416.)

These themes matched those I found in the research data.

Tart looked at the mystical experience and paranormal events trying to understand how he might use science as a way of describing the unseen. According to him, paranormal experience brings science and spirit together (2009, p. 2, -3). Rohr has used modern concepts and the idea of learning to see as the mystics see. He looked at the ego and dual-thinking that keep us separate from our true self (2009). He referred to the Christian gospels and to contemplatives to relate what it means to be spiritually awake (2009).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative approach to researching experience and story. The reader/researcher is invited to think about their perspective to make sense of the narrative world. “For us, life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—[is] filled with narrative

fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin, 2000 p. 17). I find a grounding quality in narrative inquiry because the inquirer is not separated from the inquiry. The inquiry is done in relationship. The inquiry moves beyond space and time, a flow in which silent spaces for lingering in the moment are a part of the story. This was referred to as three-dimensional space and was a part of the inquiry when I sought themes in the stories (p. 50).

Narrative inquiry develops the concept of how exploring stories shapes us there is an opportunity to know intimately the influence story has on what is possible to know, and informs what takes shape. Inquiring into the small parts of a story can have the effect of making it larger, so you can see it. In exploring the small details around the mystical story, the respondents are brought into what is possible to know. Once storied this information was then available and brings what is possible to know into others consciousness when making meaning. Engaging in conscious storying about the awakening experience brings this experience directly into our life (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray, Orr, Pearce, & Steeves, 2006, p. 5). My research questions invited respondents to further their relationship with their awakening stories. They supported reflecting on the meaning and values of the unfolding awakening stories. The respondents all recognized the experience they storied had changed them. As Carr stated, a story of a past event told in the present influences the future (1986, p. 27). In his book, he described the complexity of storytelling as a sequence of events and actions, and explored the temporal structure of a story, or and a sequence of events and actions over time, or that unfolds in the telling of the story. All of these are ways of listening for

meanings found within the respondents' stories. Webster and Mertova (2007) provided a significant resource for my research as I used their critical events narrative analysis to examine the respondents' narratives for significant life changes.

Narratives and Pastoral Counseling

In narrative pastoral counseling, the audience and characters take part in relational participation, bringing the storyteller and the story telling event further into shaping stories. According to Dinkins, through the process we come into the realization of "each person as a collection of stories" (2005 p.11).

Dinkins discussed a variety of themes and kinds of conversations within a person's narratives, arguing it is important to recognize distinctions such as faith, spiritual, and religious conversations. He included a variety of questions one could use to support further reflection on the story. His description of the storytelling process makes the important point that, when we hear a story of a mystical encounter, we are in the presence of a conversation that is filled with meaning.

In the conversation between Christian faith stories and stories of religious mystical encounters, a healing story is in the making and coming into a larger consciousness (Cook & Alexander, 2008). As Cook and Alexander stated, in using narrative to explore Christian spiritualities, one may be liberated from the normative patterns of a Christian social world (2008). In their work, they engaged in narrative conversations on Christian perspectives concerning power, explore narrative theology, and, and describe the self that God knows and the social construction of self (2008). How pastors and pastoral counselors can use these ideas in their practices and faith communities are discussed. They describe the rise of emergent church, organic forms,

non-institution faith communities, home-based communities, and the use of narrative ideas to help people experience God and Christian community.

Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy is therapeutically a way to enter into story it inquires into story supporting an individual to explore where a story is for them now and what it means. It then explores beyond what is known, bringing into consciousness what is possible to know. This can be understood as the possible development of consciousness. In the moment by expanding, one's story in many directions of what is possible to know one expands their consciousness. I have chosen authors who are narrative therapists as I admire in their capacity to explore the possibilities of human growth and consciousness.

White and Epston, the fathers of narrative therapy wrote about the theories, ideas and philosophies behind narrative, creating a narrative therapy. When White and Epston came together, they had both been separately engaged with people through narratives. Through their collaboration, they have clearly articulated this therapy approach. Their use of narrative questions reflect an understanding of stories that linger just below consciousness, or what White (2000) calls "absent but implicit" (p. 35). Narrative questions scaffold beginning with the known and familiar, then scaffold moving into what is possible to know this can be understood as developing one's consciousness. Multiple questions invite telling dimensions and parts of a story lie just beyond what has been possible to know. This understanding invited me to consider two things. In therapy, one needs to be present in the very moment of the telling of a significant story. To be present, the therapist needs to be free of assumptions surrounding the content of that story and the person telling it. One must listen for what is being told and seek to hear what

longs to be told (White & Epston, 1990). In workshops I have attended with White, he made it clear that narrative therapy is not a technique. Rather, it is a way of being in relationship.

It was helpful to research Neuger's use of a narrative psychology framework to explore women's spirituality. Her work reflects the relational aspect of storying White and Epston's "absent but implicit relationship" in women's spirituality. She writes from a feminist perspective about various issues women face, and enlarged the landscape of narratives (2001).

Jenkins (1990) has been important to my research. His deconstruction of how people are socialized into external ideas and practices that are abusive is insightful, and he respects the practice of narrative therapy. He challenges dominant worldviews and oppressive beliefs and ideas, and brings people to a place of taking responsibility and accountability in relationship. In this research the invitation to the respondents to tell their stories stands up to oppressive beliefs challenges dominant worldviews that diminish the voice and stories of awakening experiences.

How does one go about encountering the sacred? This was directly related to my research. In psychotherapy, the use of narrative is a way to assist people in exploring their spiritual lives. In this exploration, Griffith and Griffith (2000) recognize spirituality and one's spiritual narratives are encountered and expressed through the body. They have also written about relationships between language and the body (1994). The authors recognize the body holds a story and, in the healing process, listening to both the body and mind are essential. They have suggested that language cannot be separated from the

body if we want to know the story. This was an important resource as I was working with the embodied sacred knowing that is wordless and within the body.

Freedman and Combs (1996) discussed the philosophy and methods of narrative practice extensively as they explained the significance of deconstructing realities and co-authoring a person's preferred reality. Their work helped me understand that the awakening experience reveals our socially constructed realities are not the preferred reality for those who are initiated into mystical reality.

Denborough (2006 & 2014) explored how narrative therapy supports a person's retellings of his/her story in ways that do not re-traumatize. I found his information on preparing for the interview helpful as I designed the interview process, prepared respondents for their interviews, acknowledged them, wrote their narratives, and met with them for follow-up reflections. This author recognized our lives are not fixed pathways, but are shaped by our stories. He discussed the value of using stories to transform our lives; how we tell a story is directly related to the reality we create.

Bird explores the realm of in-depth descriptions of working with people whose lives have been devastated by abuse. She describes the importance of working from our heart as a way of really meeting people in our conversation. She calls this spiritual conversation (2004). Bird describes, "talk that sings" as a relational linguistic practice that changes consciousness, identity and how we speak (2004).

Embodiment Somatic Therapies

Research has shown body therapies are a way to support becoming embodied. They invite a process of events that have not been tolerated by the nervous system and

remain in the nervous system unprocessed. I use several authors in exploring this.

Levine's works describe a process that works with the physiological aspects of trauma, as a way of working with emotional and cognitive issues (1997). Levine has also developed a method that regulates the nervous system. Levine refers to a set of channels, which he calls by the acronym SIBAM (Sensation, Image, Behavior or movement, Affect, and Meaning). Levine's works with these channels on the edge or blue zone where one experiences less sensation and the nervous system is less stimulated (2010).

For this research, process I rely on Gendlin who discovered a process of focusing that has become a staple in somatic methods. Gendlin uses focusing as a mode of inward bodily attention, deepening clients felt sense and ways of making meaning. He considers it a valuable resource for noticing what is happening within one's self, and to beginning to put words to that for which we may not have had a language (Gendlin, 1996). The focusing process was very useful as I sat with the research respondents both during the initial interviews, and then in the follow-up with their transcripts.

Gendlin has been the most influential source in my personal and then social use of listening within. "Focusing," he writes, "moves inward, drawing on information from the deeper, wiser self ('the body')" (1981 p. xi). There is an acceptance of one's experience in focusing without judgment. It seeks to gain understanding and knowing beyond the intellect. For me focusing provides a way to access and dialogue with the body to hear the wisdom that is embodied. It helps to make the implicit explicit (p. xi). He refers to this as preverbal and fuzzy knowledge. In the felt shifts, words, phrases, and images become known (p. xi). Focusing discourages a person from responding in accustomed ways of meaning making, and encourages the admission of something wider. "If the

focuser stays with the bodily sense of the shifting constellation, eventually new language and new metaphors, appropriate to the fresh understanding will emerge” (p. xi - xii).

This is an optimistic process, states Gendlin. “It sees the individual in terms of process, not pathology” (p. xi). I have used principles of focusing with the methodology informing how I would be as a research with this research, and with the respondents. To focus is to be listening with one’s whole body (p. 118). In focusing, “Words touched the experience, and an experience supported the words” (p. 157). In this, there is no pattern to rely on, as each moment is a new experience and ever changing.

There are six steps in focusing. To begin is preparation. In the first movement, you sit quietly, clearing a space to stay quiet and notice how you feel (p. 52). In the second, you wait for a sensation of what may be a problem, or what may be trying to get your attention and become known (p. 53). The third step is to find a handle, or a quality of the felt sensation. “What you are after is the core of the felt sense,” says Gendlin (p.55). The fourth is to use a word, phrase, or image sense to evoke an interior response (p. 56). The fifth step is to ask for words, images, or phrases as the body shifts, opens and closes. In the sixth step, the body will open and let a word settle if it is right, and will contract if it is not (p. 57). Because I have greatly valued Gendlin work, it is natural I that I also refer to the work of other focusers.

An important piece of work within the focusing community is that of Hinterkoff who has written a manual on the focusing method used in counseling settings. It is useful for working through religious and spiritual problems, and for deepening the spiritual

experiences of the person (Hinterkoff 2008). I use focusing in my daily personal, work, and social life.

The philosophy, method, and practice of Hakomi are a body-centered therapy. He uses focusing, and integrates it with the practice of mindfulness as a way of noticing what is happening in the body (Kurtz, 1990). Closely connected to Hakomi, and rising out of it, is the work of Ogden, Minton, and Pain (2006). This one of the most in-depth books I have read on understanding trauma and the body, ways we dissociate, and the implications for our lived experiences. Their work is relevant as it heals trauma and dissociation from the body. Therapies that work with healing traumas large and small make possible living in an embodied way. Somatic therapies were important in this research as the body is essential in the awakening experience. Somatic therapies teach persons body awareness and support them to become embodied. For therapists working with psychotherapy and spirituality somatic therapies can be very helpful.

In my literature review, I engaged a wide variety of methods and approaches: myth, mystics, embodied sacred knowing, phenomenological narrative inquiry, narrative philosophy, therapy, mapping, relational consciousness, and focusing. In this thesis, I have used knowledge from a rich diversity of writers, including narrative researchers and therapists, somatic therapists, transpersonal and Jungian psychotherapists, spiritual practitioners, theologians, and counselors. This combined knowledge is helpful when working with clients whom have experienced sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Relational Narrative Inquiry Process Reflects Researcher's Position

This study was ignited by my desire to hear and to learn from the stories of others who have experienced the phenomenon of embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness. The purpose of this study was to gain understanding and meaning into the lived awakening experience of the respondents and learn how they make meaning that informs and invites them to live from sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness. Experience is often unspoken and unformed. With Fireman, McVay & Flanagan, I wondered how

the skeletal kinds of emerging narrative skills lead into the further and more enriching and humanizing aspects of the mature genre, in the process of establishing a new consciousness of self, of others, and of self in time, place and society (2003, p. 29).

Experiences not spoken into our world can remain skeletal and, therefore, the rich meaning they may hold for life remains unknown. From childhood to adulthood, our ability to understand and make meaning of our lives is shaped by the consciousness available to us, and the narratives created from life. Life stories shape the identity of a person, family, community, culture, and society and we story our lives in relation to what

is socially recognized (Fireman et al., 2003). People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories.

Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 375).

This study intended to invite respondents' to tell their awakening experiences and to listen for the movement of the awakening experience in the respondents' narratives. Narrative inquiry worked well for bringing the awakening experience of the sacred into word and story. I wondered how the respondents came to understand and give meaning to the event of an awakening experience in their lives. I was curious and hoped to create space for the telling of these stories, and I felt a sense of humility as I listened to these stories.

Engaging through intentional presence while listening, I entered into the respondents' stories. I was fully engaged and listened to the telling of each respondent's story of the lived experience and meaning of the sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness and what it holds for their life. When the first telling was complete, their stories imbued the atmosphere of our shared space; there was the felt sense of being on holy ground. From this place, I asked a series of questions inviting

them into a retelling of the stories, a further exploring into the meaning and influence the awakening experience continued to have in their lives.

The telling and retelling, allowed for me, with the respondent to listen and hear the influence the telling had on the ongoing experience of the awakening story. I asked multiple narrative inquiry based questions. I wanted to know how they came to formulate their stories. The challenges they faced, events that contributed to it being told, to whom they told their stories, how others responded and what their experience has been to others responses (Nelson 2003). I was interested in how they identified with the awakening experience; I was curious to discover how the awakening influenced their self-identity, their social identity, and place in their life, including ongoing life stories. I explored if and how the non-temporal aspect of sacred experience contributed to them personally, in their relationships and community. I explored values that the awakening experience brought forward in their lives. Bringing values into life story brings them further into consciousness.

Narrative inquiry questions are a way for both the respondent and me as the researcher, to enter further into their experience. This relationship was “collaboration between researcher and respondents, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin, 2000, p. 20). The relational consciousness was shared knowledge of the relational experience of the sacred; this allowed for entering into the relationship with presence in the moment to the embodied and relational mystical experience that was being told.

Once the interviews had taken place, texts were created out of the recorded stories. The respondents' stories stand on their own as significant stories in their lives. Any themes, data, references, contributions, stories, written works of others awakening experiences, other sources or reflections are intended to contribute to understanding and supporting the awakening experiences.

Shared themes emerged in all of the respondents' stories. Narrative inquiry allowed for the respondents telling and finding shared themes; these themes reflected the phenomenon of the awakening experience, and themes of spiritual development in relationship to these experiences. "To use a narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience a phenomenon under study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 375).

Ethics in Relationship

I was intentionally sensitive to the respondents when asking them to share the awakening experience as this experience is outside of everyday discourse. "The ethics of this methodology are deeply steeped in the value of relationship" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). My intention in this study was to be in relationship with the respondents in every aspect of the process. In the inquiry relationship, I recorded and later transcribed each session. Each of the respondents was given a copy of their interview transcript for validation. The respondents' approved of the transcript of their interview.

In religious institutions, mystical experiences have traditionally needed to meet specific requirements for validation. Underhill has been a great source of knowledge in knowing how to listen for and recognize the mystical (p. 1913/2000). I used James'

points of validation for this work and critical events narrative inquiry as both share criteria for validation of the mystical experience (1902/1994). “Telling a life story can be an act of transcending the personal and entering the realm of the sacred” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 14). If we can keep conscious presence in the moment, our consciousness may be influenced by the relational consciousness of the sacred embodied moment. This informs an ethics in our everyday life and holds a respect for the ongoing relational value in life.

Research Question

Narrative inquiry supports my research in bringing forward the meaning of my research-question; what is the meaning of the experience of sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness? “We might say that if we understand the world normatively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). The question becomes the doorway into the relationship with the respondents awakening experience, inviting rich descriptions of their stories. Questions explored the inner and outer landscapes of the moments when the respondent experienced awakening in the relational consciousness that was with them in that moment of awakening. Questions invited a presence reflecting on the awakening experience that shifted them to the possible knowing available in the relational consciousness moment. This moment for the respondents was a critical shift in awakening to reality. I listened to the respondents’ narratives of the awakening experience. I transcribed and read the verbatim in both the initial deep listening and the engagement with the initial transcript range of insights and understandings emerged.

Narrative Research Methods

Storytelling is ancient. Various narrative research methods have been around a long time; however, the practice of using narratives in therapy further emerged in the 1960s gaining momentum in the 1980s. In this thesis research, I drew on the work of several writers concerning narrative inquiry, including Atkinson (1995, 1998, & 2012), Connelly and Clandinin (2000), Riessman (1993), Webster and Mertova 2006, and others. I also used the work of Myerhoff (2007) on the value of stories. Most influential in my thinking have been White and Epston (1990), two narrative therapists who were my first introduction to narrative inquiry. I also used the relational narrative externalizing conversations of Bird (2008).

Narrative Therapy

In the late 1980s, I discovered with delight the narrative therapy work of Michael White and David Epston, which began in the 1970s. In their book Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends, they write: “The interpretive method, rather than proposing that some underlying structure or dysfunction in the family determines the behavior and interactions of family members, would propose that it is the meaning that members attribute to events that determines their behavior” (1990, p. 3). This perspective was important to me when hearing the awakening stories, as primary focus of a narrative is to make sense of people’s experiences.

Some experiences are not given narrative shape because they fall outside of what we consciously know and are able ask to speak about. Writing about life experiences they suggest, “a fraction of this experience can be storied and expressed at any one time, and

that a great deal of lived experience inevitably falls outside the dominant stories about the lives and relationships of persons,” (White and Epston, 1990, p. 15). Bird suggests “relational externalizing enquiry frees us from the static internalizing representation of experience, which is embedded in everyday usage of language” (2004, p. 13).

The interviews made space to examine and go beyond dominant discourses, which influence meaning making and limit the understanding of the awakening experiences. “Words that have previously imprisoned, tormented, limited and pathologized people are reshaped and reformed in order to act as medium for transformation and healing” (Bird, 2004, p. 13).

Do the respondents’ stories hold value for the respondents and society? Bird suggests the “traditional constructs of the English language orientate us (therapist and client) towards inhabiting a binary world. When experience is described and known within binaries, experiences outside of these binaries may be defined as not real, true or valid” (2004, p. 86). For many people experiences such as the awakening experience are not real, as they have no context from which to know or understand them. Naming another’s experience as real or not real is not sufficient as it is based on the limitations of our own experiences and consciousness. In this relational inquiry, the researcher is holding a position of curiosity and discovery.

Narrative therapy has the potential to move us beyond the patterns of what we know. Narrative questions invite us to go beyond our usual understanding. It provides an opportunity to gain a deeper and often new way of understanding our experience and of speaking about it (White & Epston, 1990).

Experience And Story

How is a story different from an experience? “A story has shape, outlines, limits; an experience blurs at the edges and tends to merge imperceptibly with related experiences. In many cases, experiences are what happen to us, whereas stories happen to other people” (Fulford, 1999, p. 4). This narrative inquiry intended to support the respondents’ awakening experiences and shape them into life stories through a relational interview practice of conscious questioning. “Experiences are intensely complicated and hard to recount” (p. 4). When does an experience become a story and is there value in bringing an experience more closely into one’s life by way of story? I believe so. Narrative inquiry provided a model for engaging the awakening experiences in ways that allow the experiences to be intimately known. Stories may change and grow with our own continued development, healing, and ever-evolving spiritual consciousness. We can bring our experience more fully into our lives through storying.

Using narrative inquiry, I asked questions that supported living into the fullness of all life potential. The respondents’ stories informed me how they think about their awakening experiences and lives. If an experience, such as an awakening experience, happens with no structure to support its telling or to reflect on it, or put it into words through story, the awakening experience may stay outside of consciousness and remain a thin or skeletal description (Nelson, 2003). “Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 477).

My interest in this research was to know the meaning of living with an awakening experience for the respondents, its influence on their lives, including what have been their struggles. Bell suggests “narrative inquiry rests on the assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures on them” (Bell, 2002, p. 207). I was curious as to how the respondents have storied this sacred experience, and how the story they told had molded their life experience, as there parts of this experience that have yet to be recorded. According to Webster and Mertova, we select those elements of the experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those elements in ways that reflect stories available to us (2007, p. 3).

“To use narrative inquiry methodology,” wrote Fulford, “is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. Stories ostensibly begin in order to explain something, or to make an event clear” (1999, p. 8). Aspects of experience that do not fit neatly into our story structures or run counter to it may remain unknown and unnoticed. According to Atkinson, an awakening experience may not be told, yet holds the potential to teaches us “about our spiritual self, about our personal quest for wholeness and authenticity” (1995, p. xiii). It is a loss for the person and community if the teaching about one’s spiritual self does not happen.

The Spirit of Narrative Inquiry

The spirit of narrative inquiry is to value the individual’s narratives over the expert’s theories. Formalists begin inquiry with theory, whereas narrative inquires, begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40). The research method is relational and happens within the interview relationship.

We become fully aware, fully conscious of our lives through story. Reclaiming story is part of our birthright. Telling our own story enables us to speak our truth and be heard, recognized, and acknowledged by others. It is only through story that our truth can be told, that the meaning of life can be identified. Story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear. (Atkinson, 1995, xiii).

“When we make sense out of our world we need to consider our influences. In narratives, our voices echo those of others in our sociocultural world, and we evidence cultural membership both through our ways of crafting stories and through the very content of these stories” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 2). When we craft our story, we draw from our experience of how and what is storied in our culture. When we share our experience with community and family, what we are aware of and give voice to, usually participates with the known and familiar understandings available within our society (Webster & Mertova 2007). This kind of shared participation continues to influence what is known and spoken and what remains unconscious and unspoken. Narrative inquiry gives voice to the experiences that often are outside of the known and familiar, experiences that are often wordless.

Narrative Inquiry Theories

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through “collaboration between researcher and respondents, over time, in a series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). This inquiry was carried out in this spirit of collaboration.

What are the skills needed that can lead to enriching and “humanizing aspects of the mature genre, in the process establishing a new consciousness of self, of others, and of self in time, place, and society” (Nelson, 2003, p. 28-29)? An emerging new conscious awareness of self and world, like narrative itself, is neither an either/or thing nor dependent upon one causal element in the developmental scheme. Evidence suggests that experience with forms of narrative contributes importantly to this new level of consciousness” (2003, p. 28-29).

We enter into the respondent’s world through story. My intention in using narrative inquiry was to give voice to the awakening experiences of the respondents. By inviting them to share the experience, thus create their story of this sacred experience. I positioned myself in narrative inquiry as a way to further explore and learn from the respondents’ stories, discovering what it has meant and means for them now. “Narrative inquiry is set in human stories. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 3).

In this research three positions were used to study the respondents’ narratives; temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As these are specific dimensions in the inquiry, they offer a conceptual framework. These three positions examined in depth, lead to an understanding of this experience and of what this story tells and what it hides. They need to be held simultaneously when exploring the respondents’ stories during narrative inquiry (2006). This way of attending is partially what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other inquiry methods. Attending to all three of these

positions enabled me as the researcher to study the way the respondents relate to their awakening experience in life. This involved their lived experiences, of both inner and outer inquiry and inquiry into their possible future (2006). The relationship between the respondent and researcher cultivates further awareness through questions. Questions that linger in the moment with the intention of being aware of what is present yet not yet spoken may move one out of the constructs of what is known, to the possibility of what is possible to know (White & Epston, 1990). In this case, I was looking to know what is present yet unknown, and explore what is possible to know of the sacred experience and its ongoing influence in the respondents' lives and the meaning this holds for them.

As the awakening experience is outside of our everyday story; we do not usually have a way to talk about and make the experience personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry supports exploring the respondents' stories in a non-dominant discourse. Having one's story told and truly really heard is affirming of one's experiences. Narrative inquiry offers acknowledgement of stories that are often outside privileged sphere. "Powerful insights offered by stories have often been ignored, perhaps because of the traditional prominence in research of modernist-empiricist view" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 14). Within a culture, the narrative has a chance to evolve as consciousness evolves.

Jung spoke of the collective unconsciousness of the human species. Social and cultural life, shape both our consciousness and unconscious world. Sociality attends to both personal conditions and simultaneously, to social conditions. By personal conditions of the respondents, "we mean the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 480). Social conditions are understood as

the conditions under which the respondents experienced events unfolding; these include cultural, social, institutional, and linguistic narratives (p. 480). The inquiry relationship between researcher and respondent is included in the social event. The awakening experience and whether or not it is known and spoken into one's life is informed by the social conditions.

Place is defined as “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 480). The key to this common place is recognizing that “all events take place some place” (p. 481). I also think of place as a field of consciousness we may or not be aware of. All of the respondents spoke of the physical place, where the awakening experience took place and the sequence of places in life they moved to, because of the awakening event. All respondents also spoke of a relational consciousness field, as central to the awakening experience. One respondent spoke of being alone at home, as she came to know within this field of relational consciousness herself in a new way. Another respondent spoke of being alone in a large building where children's services were located as she came to know her place in the unfolding of a new relational consciousness. The third respondent spoke of the retreat center as the opportunity to the field of relational consciousness.

Entering into the life of the respondents' through story shows the significance of temporality. As I came to understand something of the respondents' past, present and future, I saw what has not been in their consciousness comes into consciousness. Story becomes storying. Temporal positioning made possible the unity of existence and

informed my questions that encouraged multiple stories with rich descriptions (White & Epston, 1990). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide a description to help understand this position they suggest they speak of temporality as not just linear. In this, they say it is also a spiral. In my interviews I also found spiraling was both horizontal and vertical within the many levels of the spiral exists the consciousness of the past, present, and future. We are in a dynamic relationship with our inner world, of feelings, hopes and dreams, our outer world of the social, cultural, global, our place in life; these are all within the spiral of our ongoing and continual life storying. “Stories are a reflection of the fact that experience is a matter of growth, and that understandings are continually developed, reshaped and retold, often informally” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 13-14). Our human psychological and spiritual development is ongoing throughout our lives.

This research supported the respondents to reach back in time to connect experiences that may now have a context and be spoken. “Attending to the negotiation of relationships with respondents’ as the inquiry unfolded was important, both in the living and the telling of the stories” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 24), because these reflections and negotiations are important in the development of our coherent thoughts and life stories.

At the end of the research interview, each of the respondent and I expressed the value of the narrative inquiry experience, the gift of sharing their story, the gift of listening, the experience of being heard, followed by the experience of acknowledgment and validation of their story. The narrative inquiry facilitated the telling of richly described stories finding meaning and further understanding of the awakening

experience. Myerhoff (2007) indicates there are bearers of culture whose stories will die with them. Narrative inquiry, like post-modern theory, gives more recognition to the individual as the authority of their story. I believe narrative inquiry provided a way to move beyond constructed notions of how to interpret a person's experiences, and opened possibilities for rich stories.

Themes and meanings came forward as the respondents told their stories. I was the researcher, listener, I read and sat reflectively with the transcripts. Stories we tell reveal something of the human consciousness (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 15). I believe we are changed by our experiences, and further change happens by stories that integrate experiences. Human consciousness has the potential to develop and grow because of our life stories; as the respondents reflected on their stories, further integration took place. My personal reflection and contemplation have been a significant part of this thesis work. I have actively participated in my own spiritual development and growth throughout the writing of this thesis; psychological and spiritual perspectives have also contributed to the understandings and meanings of this inquiry. These three positions of temporality, place, and space concurrently took place in my life.

Verifying Critical Event Narratives

Narrative inquiry does provide a model to validate life-changing events and the story told about the event. Critical life changing events occur to everyone and are identified through the impact on the storyteller. The level of gravity becomes evident as the story is told. The experiences are unplanned and unanticipated, and they have the following qualities. They:

- 1) exist in a particular context, such as formal organizational structures or communities of practice;
- 2) impact on the people involved;
- 3) have life changing consequences;
- 4) are unplanned;
- 5) may reveal patterns of well-defined stages;
- 6) are only identified after the event; and
- 7) are intensely personal with strong emotional involvement. (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83)

The experiences revealed within the respondent stories are best understood using the critical events framework based in narrative inquiry. Critical events had a significant impact on life, change worldviews, and occasion relational consciousness. Narrative can be analyzed through the highlighting and capturing of critical events contained in stories of experience (p. 71).

In this research, the respondents met the criteria for a critical event, as told in a story, which reveals a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller (p. 73). An event was set in motion for Orchid, Doc, and Priest that changed their lives.¹ Telling their stories is a way to further understand experiences that changes one's worldview.

¹ For the purposes of confidentiality, the actual names of the research respondents are not used in this thesis. Instead, I have given them the names of "Orchid," "Doc," and "Priest."

Religious Themes Validate Sacred Story

Along with critical events narrative, I also used James' method of verifying the mystical experience, to identify themes of meaning of the sacred experience for the respondent's lives. James (1902/1994) developed the four hallmarks used to validate the authenticity of a mystical experience. As I listened to the respondents' stories, I heard those hallmarks.

- 1) Ineffable: The experience cannot be described by words (p. 414). In my research I use the words "sacred embodied knowing" to describe mystical experiences that have no words.
- 2) Noetic quality: The mystic gains a state of knowledge where spiritual insights are gained that cannot be accessed by the intellect alone (p. 414). In my research, relational consciousness is the noetic quality of spiritual insights.
- 3) Transient: The experience cannot be sustained for long periods (p. 414). The research respondents' stories describe experiences of the sacred that did not last long.
- 4) Passive: One cannot make such experiences happen (p. 415). The research respondents were surprised by what surfaced in their awakening experiences.

All respondents in this research meet William James's hallmarks of a mystical experience. I found as I read the respondents' transcripts using these two methods of validation worked well to validate the life-changing experience I heard within their stories. As we recall experiences, we unfold the story of those experiences (Webster & Mertova, p. 73). It was important for the respondents to be given the opportunity to unfold the stories of their experience. Questions invited further development of rich

descriptions, and multiple ways to understand the landscape of their awakening experience. The story, in turn, for the respondents “is associated with the sacred experience as the memorable event” (p. 73). The awakening “experience is an uninitiated, unplanned, unanticipated event that is uncontrolled” (p.73). The respondents in this study all told the story of a spiritual awakening; the purpose of the sacred experience is to awaken us to another reality and the inner immediate experience of the sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness.

Storytelling: Four Moments

Narrative inquiry gathers information through the relationship, storyteller, the listener, and the retelling. “We participate in the co-creation of stories by our way of our listening, our questions, and our reflections” (Griffith & Griffith, 2002, p. 89). The therapeutic relationship supports and nurtures a safe space for the respondent to tell the sacred story. Care was taken to create a relational space for inviting the telling of the respondent’s story.

I listened with the intent to hear the experience through their words and observations of what the story pointed to. The respondent’s sacred story is acknowledged in the relationship through uninterrupted listening and a quality of presence that conveys a deep listening.

The relationship of the storytelling, and the listener is open and engaged. This allows for later questions that open new telling’s and new insights.

Relationship

Relational consciousness is a kind of authentic communication in relationship where one human spirit meets another human spirit as it formulates beyond that which has been formulated (Bird, 1994).

Finding respondent' was much easier than I had anticipated, as people became aware of my thesis topic, possible candidates surfaced. All candidates were grateful to have a place to tell their mystical experience. My initial sense that there are few places to really tell the story of the sacred experience was confirmed (White & Epston, 1990).

Storying and restorying one's life provides opportunities to create new and possibly liberating narratives (Atkinson, 1998, p. 12). Part of negotiation is a respectful and transparent conversation. I found myself continually engaging with the respondents being transparent in what I was trying to do (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 p. 73). To engage in another space, the researcher participates in the gathering of stories. Participating relationally is essential to knowing; the interview has movement, outward, back and forth, inward. Presence is a way of discovering authenticity of narratives (p. 89). In the gathering of the story, the relationship is essential. I was asking the respondents to potentially speak the unspoken or wordless story. The relationship is one that is negotiated and seeks to support a respondents' personal narrative in the midst of the influence of social narratives, as social narratives also have an important role in finding our place in life. Social narratives can affirm, validate, and support our own experience in relation to those around us. In the interviews, I was attentive to the landscape of relationship (Atkinson, 1998, p. 10). As this

awakening experience was an important life event telling the story was social, it held the potential to affirm and validate their experience.

Relational narrative inquiry “can reach across a narrative space to work meaningfully with respondents,” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 66). In this relationship, the research made space for telling’s and retellings by asking a series of questions following the initial invitation to tell their story. These questions were intended to birth forward threads of the stories not yet storied. It was important for me as the researcher to have questions, as questions can engage the storyteller to reflect on and share parts of the story not yet explored or spoken. The process of the questions in this research intended to support opening new places of meaning. When the pace is slowed down, one can become aware of the space that opens in the body, one becomes aware of the embodied knowing (Bird, 2004). This research intended to support a relationship where we were making space for threads in the story to be told that had not been told or received before (Clandinin, 2006). I would like to note a story has many threads, which I, as the researcher, could follow. To access the process of three-dimensional space the respondent is asked to tell the story, traveling inward into the lived experience. The experience is explored in depth with questions inquiring about the significances the story holds, how they began to formulate a way to tell the story, and challenges faced (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70).

Story helps one find their way to the original heritage of their sacred experience. “Stories relate the life journey of the human species and the changes that have marked our development as thinking beings” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 15). I reflected on the importance for all of us to have the opportunity to share the stories of our experiences in

the hopes of yet further developing our informal everyday human consciousness and spiritual consciousness.

Inquiry begins with building relationship; this relationship will influence what the respondent is able to share (Glesne, 2006). The relationship influenced the data I collected. The research was done with the intention of developing a kind of relationship that was honoring and holds a space for the sacred story of the respondent. It was through the conversation that further meaning began to surface. “The relational externalizing conversation style is experienced or felt rather than heard” (Bird, 1994, p. 8). Such relational space creates a sense of hope and possibility in those who tell their stories.

Telling

Relational narrative inquiry provides a way into the experience by way of inviting the telling of the respondents’ stories. The stories we live and tell are profoundly influenced by, the lived and told narratives in which we are embedded (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 1). When I invited the respondent to tell the sacred story, it brought the lived experience into our lives, our present consciousness. Telling a story is a way of reconnecting with something of the quality of the atmosphere and the space at the time of their sacred experience. To engage in another space, the researcher participates in the gathering of stories, and participating is essential to knowing (Clandinin & Connelly 2000 p. 89). The respondents went back in time to remember the experience. They told the story and how it brought them to this moment in time, how the sacred experience affected them.

This first telling of the story was often framed in society, in what is available in the dominant discourse of their society. This inquiry was intended to initiate insights, understandings meanings of past events in present time; within relationship, the respondent and the researcher meet the story in the past present and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70). Secondly, “at the level of individual consciousness, stories recorded personal consciousness from infancy, through youth and childhood, to old age,” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 15). Each of the respondents had their own personal life journeys and development that influenced their personal story. Narrative inquiry is human-centered in that it captures and analyses life stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 13).

I asked the respondents to tell their sacred story as “narrative inquiry opens up the possibility of storying that which has been linguistically difficult” (Bird, 2000). When we have experiences, we make meaning of our experiences through linguistically constructed reality. When we story our lives, we use linguistic structures and patterns as a way of making sense. Therefore it is no surprise that, individually, persons come to similar conclusions (Bird, 2000). All respondents shared the difficulty of putting words to the mystical experience; the experience is known as ineffable, is experienced in the body as noetic insights, or a knowing without words.

In this research, the choice to use narrative inquiry was a choice to invite a telling and a retelling. In listening to the respondents’ stories, I could hear the respondents struggle with dominant discourses that colonize the meaning of the sacred story. “Story makes the implicit, explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confusing clear” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 6). In our work of telling and retelling, “Stories take us beyond the here

and now, beyond our everyday existence, and allow us to enter the realm of spirit, the domain of the sacred” (p. 10). Telling the story opens up the potential for freedom from small stories into the realm of a large story. Referencing Jung’s famous statement, Hollis says “Walking in shoes too small, we live in lives too small” (Hollis, 2003, p. 16). In this research, I invited the respondents to explore the larger stories. “The life story narrative may be the most effective means for gaining an understanding of how the self evolves over time or at least in seeing the subjective perspective on that” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 11).

Some stories that are outside of our dominant constructs of life stories can be understood as problem stories. Narrative therapist, Michael White often said in his workshops that the problem is the problem; the person is not the problem. “Narrative studies problems as forms of storytelling involving characters with both personal and social stories” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 13). “Narrative inquiry is concerned with analyzing and criticizing the stories we tell, hear and read in the course of work. It is also concerned with the myths that surround us and are embedded in our social interactions” (p. 7). Freedom from limited ways of understanding one’s life can be a result of examining a life story.

Listening

In the constructing of one’s stories, the relationship with the listener is crucial (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I used presence listening as the respondents told their stories. Using presence listening allows for something like Buber’s “I and Thou” relationship (1937/1970). In the listening, I was engaged as a mostly silent, present, listener. It was important to me to have a quality of deep presence and respect as I listened to and learned from the respondents’ stories (Bird, 2004). When the story is

being told, it is important to learn how to listen for it. In the role of researcher, we become co-creators. Steindl-Rast suggests, “To listen in this way means to listen with one’s heart, with one’s whole being. The heart stands at the center of our being at which we are truly together” (1983, p. 10). “We participate in the co-creation of stories by our way of listening, our questions, and our reflections” (Griffith & Griffith, 2002, p. 89).

“Spiritual experience is expressed not only through language but also in the immediacy of bodily experience” (p. 57). When the experience is recalled and told in stories, the body is also recalling the memory of the experience. In this research relationship, I am attuned and present to word and language of narrative consciousness. “As human beings we live our lives in relationship [and] the very development of our nervous systems arises through our connection and emotional resonance with others” (Hamkins, 2014, p. 24). In the interviews, it was my intention to be attuned, and embodied in my connections with the respondents. “The quality of that attunement determines what is possible for us to feel and know of ourselves” (p. 24). The interview relationship was a place of belonging for their selves and their awakening experience stories, the questions in this environment allowed for further becoming of the experience into the relationship space. It supported parts of the stories not yet told. The immediate experience of attuned embodied relational consciousness within the relationship had the potential to breathe new life into their self-identified stories. “The meanings we give our experiences and feelings, the stories we tell about who we are, arise in relationship” (p. 24).

In telling our life stories, it is essential to be present to our own words, to sit and let our own words resonate within us. “By listening deeply to the message of any given

moment I shall be able to tap the very Source of Meaning and to realize the unfolding meaning of my life” (Steindl-Rast, 1983, p. 10). In this research, I attempted to listen in this way, listening with openness, resting into relational consciousness and for sacred movement and meaning to the best of my ability. This kind of listening comes from the awakening experience it reveals. This is necessary in the development of our humanity, spiritual and relational consciousness.

In this research study, respondents expressed gratitude for having been listened to and heard. This listening points to an inner and outer movement towards really meeting the other. We are a part of the social narrative structure that influences the story told. Our practices change in our life and continue to change if we are in co-creation. This kind of listening tells us, there is support to really tell the experience. Presence listening supports an authentic relationship. “There is a listening, through which both the teller and the listener are changed, through which the listener enters the cycle of generations of the teller” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 34). As I heard the respondents’ stories, the process was three-dimensional for both of us; we traveled inward into the lived experience of the individual, then traveled outward to the societal influences of the story, backward into the history, and forward in time (Clandinin & Connelly 2000 p. 89). And what happens in this moment of deep listening is the realization of a connection that defies explanation; it is like encouraging the growth of a soul that exists beyond one’s self (Atkinson, 1998, p. 34). We tasted something of the experience of relational consciousness in the research relationship.

There is something important about narrative listening, what influences our listening, and what we listen to and for. In listening to the awakening stories, I was listening for what is usually outside of a dominant discourse or knowledge. Narrative

listening is the quality of spaciousness for the many directions any story can hold. Those that often are outside of the dominant discourses can be made into a problem story or they can remain invisible and unknown. “By listening deeply to the message of any given moment, I shall be able to tap the very Source of Meaning and to realize the unfolding meaning of my life” (Steindl-Rast 1983, p. 10). It is in the careful listening to a sacred experience that we begin to form the words that speak the sacred into our story. In this relational narrative inquiry, “storytelling is a fundamental form of communication. It can serve an essential function in our lives” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 1). For me, using narrative listening meant supporting sacred experiences to enter into consciousness, through word a story is reborn.

As the listener, I let the words enter my being as I felt for the resonance of the experience in my own body. Listening in this way requires a kind of capacity for holding, providing a relational space that is a container for the words spoken. I think this kind of listening helps the storyteller hear and listen to his or her own stories as they choose the words they speak. This kind of listening is powerful for both the teller and the listener. There with us in the room were the ever-present influences of dominant discourses. In any moment, a dominant thought or idea could have taken us out of this carefully negotiated relationship where we had entered into the sacred story. According to Corbett, our reliance on the teachings of classical Western science, has colored how we perceive reality, and is one of the major reasons we do not have a sense of our connectedness with all things at the deeper level of consciousness (Corbett, 2007, p. 25).

When we perceive reality, this subtle movement can take us in or out of relationship with our sacred stories. The intention of this research was through a

relational narrative inquiry process to support presence and awakening by noticing more deeply our own stories, “even though we will bump up against institutional narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The telling and retelling of our stories allows for a shaping which reflects our lived experience clearly in contrast to the social ideas that shape and form how we interpret our lives, the reliving helps us deal with questions of who we are (Clandinin, 2000). While listening to the stories, shared themes and meaning was found in the respondents’ stories. In finding meaning, narrative methods provide insights into the complexity of community, societies, and cultures (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research offered hope to bring awakening experience stories of the respondents and all humans into the everyday conversation, healing our relationship to our soul. Myerhoff recognizes “the healing does not take place in the same way if the story is not heard, if there are not witnesses” (2007, p. 19).

Retelling

Every retelling births a new thread, bringing new meanings and understandings. They open the way to further meanings being birthed. In the relational narrative inquiry, the respondents participated in opening the way to a deeper consciousness of the awakening experience. Atkinson suggests, “stories can bring us face to face with the ultimate mystery. Stories awaken feelings of awe, wonder, humility, respect and gratitude in recognition of those mysteries around us” (1998, p. 10).” As we shift, change, and grow in consciousness our stories change. My research questions supported me as I listened for the influence on the respondents’ consciousness of their awakening experiences.

I invited the retellings of the story by asking new questions. These questions ask the storyteller to reflect differently. In the retelling of the story, relationship is essential in the questioning and the retelling. If a question is close enough to a person's lived world for them to grasp, yet just outside of what is already known, then the questions expand our current consciousness of what is possible to know. So, our questions matter, opening up the potential story of sacred experience reverence for the sacred experience. I asked the questions with sensitivity and curiosity that supported engagement in the relationship and engagement with the sacred experience going beyond the known and familiar. Each separate telling revealed who we are and who we are becoming. In exploring who we are and who we are becoming, in viewing ourselves and our respondents as always in the midst of storying each moment, we embody our ontological and ethical commitments to live and inquire alongside one another (Clandinin & Caine, 2012).

Retelling: A Relational Process of Inquiry Questions

“Sacred questioning and the reverence that generates questions makes witness to God possible. Without reverence, there is no witness” (Dark, The Sacredness of Questioning Everything, 2009, p. 25).

The sacred experience of each respondent was like an invitation to live from the sacred relationship. This became clear as they were present to and reflected on the questions. In my interviews, I was intentional in using narrative questions; “these questions were ones of positioning ourselves in order to facilitate discovery” (Bird, 1994, p. 2). I have provided the questions in the appendix. During the interviews, I was aware of remaining present to both the other and myself, to facilitate the presence listening that

informs using these questions. Bird asks the question, “How do we prepare to meet the challenge of spirit-filled-conversations, using a relational externalizing conversation” (1994, p. 19). In the preparation for the interview, both the respondent and I understood I would ask a series of questions. We both felt a bond, a connection in the opportunity to share the sacred story.

According to Bird, relationship is experienced or felt rather than heard (1994, p. 8). She explores how most people cannot hear the difference in a question. The difference is felt. Articulating the embodied sacred knowing experience is a process of articulating the felt sense beyond words. The interviewer listens to hear the embodied story. Responses that hold a richer context have been supported by questions that artfully support another kind of telling. These questions rely more on the direct and embodied experience of the individual, rather than the patterned response found in already known discourses (Bird, 1994).

The questions are a scaffold to support the telling and retelling of the respondents’ stories throughout the process. I asked narrative inquiry questions, about the problems that have influenced ways of telling or of not sharing the awakening experience. Starting with the external and moving towards inward questions of the initial experience, moving to the external, back and forth while exploring meaning, value and then intent, and then weaving questions in all dimensions. “As a researcher you want your questions to stimulate verbal flights from the important respondents who know what you do not. These flights translate into important data” (Glesne, 2006, p. 79).

Considering Birds’ work on questions and narrative therapy questions, I attempted to feel my way into the questions. I had obtained a relationship to the questions

by reading narrative texts and taking courses where I experienced asking and being asked narrative questions. Contemplative ways of reading cultivates this stance. I used “Lectio Divina,” a practice of reading slowly, an inward presence listening. This contemplative practice nurtures a rhythm and one’s relational conscious in the everyday world.

This kind of reading, “reverential listening”; attunes us to the sound of God in our lives. In this practice it assumes, “a God who is active and present to us across time and who speaks through texts and offers us a gift each time we make room to receive this presence” (Valters-Paintner, 2011, p. 64). The presence of the mystery is not limited to written text, “but also in the book of Nature and in the sacred text of our daily lives” (p. 65). Understanding, the many ways to witness and story the texts of one’s life informs our listening and questioning. Using the framework of these questions and Clandinin’s work on questioning, I worked with the questions, keeping the intention and attitude of the relational narrative research. My intention was to honor their story and holding the space of relational consciousness from which their stories could enter the relational space and be spoken in new ways.

In the research with the respondent, the conversation moves into the space of self-reflection. “Self reflection enhances and expands our experience. It can add greater meaning to the experience than we have already had. Reflection and introspection helps put feelings and events in order. The more we reflect on what has happened, or how we feel, the clearer it all becomes” (Atkinson, 1995, p. 14). The inward questions, in the context of the sacred mystical experience, provide the opportunity to explore what James says is a noetic quality; states of consciousness or knowing that are not solely of the intellect (1902/1994).

Narrative therapy questions also seek to create space through particular questions designed to open space in the interior and in relationship. Neither the therapist nor client will know in an exploration what they will be opening to which was not previously known or able to be known within the everyday landscape of reality. Narrative questions seek to open up space in our interior landscape, which is normally scattered with dominant ideas, beliefs, discourses, and so on. A narrative question seeks to find the spaces not yet known or known intimately in the interior landscape. This invites another kind of telling of story, suspending previous ways of telling, much like the contemplative and meditative practices of non-attachment to one's interior dominant thoughts, ideas and beliefs that make up our stories.

We carry our past with us and evoke strong emotional experiences in the process of telling a story. In making sense of the experience, we can experience relief with new insights (Bird, 1994, p. 227). The questions are subtle in their differences, inviting this past experience into the present, to draw further insights and meanings. When telling the story, we are in relationship to the past. According to Bird, this defies silencing practices and expressions such as, "what's done is done," or "the past is the past." Researching and reflecting on the past can be liberating (p. 227).

Narrative inquiry seeks to deconstruct unhelpful dominant cultural meanings that can be informing how one makes meaning of their life. Moss writes, "All the great world religions have at their origin and scattered within their lineage some individuals who have had profound mystical experiences resulting in a fundamental transformation of their consciousness. Thus there is a mystical core in all religions that supports our potential to realize our true natures" (Moss, 2007, p. 19). In each story of the sacred

experience, I heard and sensed this potential. “But most religions do not understand or acknowledge this mystical core, this experience of realization that is potential in everyone. Instead they deify and elevate only their spiritual icons, such as Jesus and Mohammad” (p. 19).

The place of the listener is to develop a sense for what lens is defining or describing the story. This is the place of the therapist; through our questions we can help people move from the everyday dominant discourse of storying their lives to, at times, using another lens, one that is spiritual and perhaps mystical. I have found in this research that people have mystical experiences and need a place to tell the story, to have a witness. The role of the therapist is to discern by listening for the qualities and subtleties of the awakening experience that opens one to the mystical. This then implies that the listener may develop practices that engage them in their own life in ways that nurture the spiritual lens.

I used a series of questions that are intended to explore the story in detail and invited the respondent to reflect on the story in ways not usually considered. This research method assisted me in capturing the respondents’ stories and in finding common themes the respondents’ stories shared. As stories are a part of our social, cultural, community, family, historical, present, future, and personal lives; they have great influence on how we live our lives. Our stories reveal what we know and how we make sense of our lives (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 7).

Ethical Issues

The ethics of this methodology are deeply steeped in the value of relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

There are many ethical issues to consider when undergoing data collection and analysis. Confidentiality is always a concern and part of the research relationship with respondents. Permission to do the interview requires obtaining signed consent. Informed consent involves the respondents' full knowledge of what is involved with the process and what will be done with their interview material. Relationships with interviewees involved honesty and trust, in the interview and presentation of the interview. The well being of the interviewee is always a concern.

Interviews for narrative inquiry require the interviewer to have a good knowledge of narrative inquiry methods. In order to obtain good information, the relationship between interviewer and respondent must have trust and sensitivity to where the respondent is in the interview. Narrative questions are scaled; they begin with outward inquiry, exploring the issue or problem, and then the inquiry weaves in questions about the problem's relationship to past, future, and present, eventually moving into inward questions of value and then intent, and then weaving questions in all dimensions. The questioning process is not horizontal or linear, yet is sensitive to understanding meanings in each dimension before moving to another dimension. In order for the respondent and interviewer to understand the meanings at each dimension, the questions cannot get ahead of the respondent. If the respondent does not know responses to the question, the

interviewer may be ahead of the person they are interviewing; they need to scale the question down. The value of this sensitivity is reflected in the quality of interview.

The inquirer is aware of their own experience during the interview, as well as that of the respondent . Being aware of one's own experience helps to know what is influencing one's own direction and possible questioning. To stay present to the directions of the respondent means not to have one's own agenda. There are ethical considerations to take into consideration when inviting a story that persons do not readily volunteer to tell. I recognize the courage of the respondents in their willingness to share their stories in an interview.

I met with each potential respondent in his or her own spaces of choice. The first meeting introduced the potential respondent to the project. I went over a respondent letter, which explained the purpose and nature of the project. I read the letter aloud and the respondent followed along with their copy. I paused to discuss the contents of the letter and answer questions as they arose. After the respondent agreed to participate in the project, I had them sign a consent form I had prepared, including the confidentiality form. Then I began by inviting the respondent to tell their story or stories of embodied sacred knowing. I asked them if they had a name for their experience and used their name to title the interview. At the end of the interview, I asked a series of questions for the teller of the story to reflect on and respond to. I reminded the storyteller they could choose to decline any question. The interviews took, on the average, one-and-a-half hours. The respondent commented on the value of the opportunity to be asked to reflect on and share the story in such depth.

Once the interview had been transcribed, the respondent received a copy of the transcript. The respondent could suggest changes, edits, and add to the material. Collaborating on the material is a part of the narrative style and allows for a richer more developed understanding. The communion between researcher and co-researcher is a part of the spiritual nature of narrative inquiry research. To be the witness and fellow journeyers to the storyteller is to witness them coming into being, to be known; this is a holy ground.

Narrative Intentions For Valid Research

Narrative inquiry attempts to understand how people think through events and make meaning, what they value and how people make meaning of what they value. Narrative inquiry does not make general assumptions; it is interested in examining how people talk about events and what influences their perspectives in making sense of such events (White & Epston, 1990). People's lives and relationships are shaped by the stories that people tell and engage in to give meaning to their experiences. Narrative inquirers practice narrative ideas. They understand stories are possible because of a larger cultural story that informs our understandings and ways of making meaning. Individuals internalize these stories, often not knowing sometimes ideas and beliefs can be oppressive some life experiences will not be storied. In this research, I intended to support the telling of stories that are often not storied (Denborough, 2006).

Narrative inquiry seeks to recognize unhelpful dominant cultural meanings that can inform how one makes meaning of their life. It seeks to support the co-authoring of the lived experience by inviting a process of intentionally putting language to their lived

reality. Narrative therapy encourages people to author their own stories, based on preferred realities and preferred self-identity and ways of being in the world. Narrative theories attempt to understand the person's experience, meanings, and expressions of life beyond internalized expressions.

Narrative therapy arises out of a post-modern view that studies our narratives and how we internalize information. This process in therapy also uses a deconstruction theory. It is intent on understanding the person's meanings in life (White & Epston, 1990). The primary focus of a narrative is to make sense of people's expressions of their experiences of life. These are the expressions of people's experiences of a world that is lived through, and all expressions of lived experiences engage people in interpretative acts. It is through these interpretative acts that people give meaning to their experiences in the world. These interpretative acts render people's experiences of life sensible to themselves and to others. Meaning does not pre-exist the interpretation of experience.

Narrative inquiry offers intentional ways of understanding the embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness and people's spiritual lives. It offers an opportunity to step out of the known and familiar externally taught meanings we give life and to connect inwardly drawing meaning from another source within the experience of relational consciousness. Drawing up the words that give rich descriptions and meaning to one's life is a process of storying; it is an ongoing moment-by-moment, presence to life.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The intention of this study was to use a narrative inquiry to collect the respondents' narratives of awakening experiences, an experience that in the moment brought them into embodiment and conscious awareness of relationship with the sacred.

In this study, I interviewed three respondents who had the experience of sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness, a mystical experience. Two of the respondents were women aged between 45 and 55; one was a man in his 70s. At the time of the mystical experience one of the women taught in adult education and the other was a social worker. The male respondent was a priest who led spiritual direction retreats for nuns and clergy.

All respondents' stories met the criteria for critical events narratives (Webster & Mertova, 2007), as their experience was unplanned and life changing. The respondents also met the criteria for a mystical experience (James, 1902/1994). The respondents expressed feeling comfortable and trusting with the interview process.

I intended to ask questions to facilitate a conversation with the respondents' awakening experiences and experience of mystical consciousness. Inviting the externalization of the story allowed for connection between the story, the storyteller, and researcher. "The use of language in the questions is externalizing, it is used to shift the

storyteller away from subjective language; it shifts the individual from a focus on individual self to self always in relationship. This is the relational externalizing conversation, meaning in this style of conversation, the 'I' is never single; we are known and experienced always in relationship" (Bird, 1994, p. 7). "Engagement with the self in relationship to whatever has been named is significant or meaningful, it creates linguistic space" (1994, p. 8); this provided the respondents with a perspective of distance, which illuminates the relational paradigm. Together, through a process of questions, the respondents and I explored their experiences and stories born out of the experience.

Awakening Stories

This research intended to make space for the telling of the respondents awakening experience, I included their entire transcribed awakening stories in this section. This was done intentionally as these stories need to be available in our world today. I then discuss the shared themes I found in the awakening stories. Next, I asked a series of question's which explored the on going relationship, each respondent had with this story. I then discussed the results of these questions. Questions were an invitation for the respondents to reconnect to the awakening experience. I gave lots of time for the respondents to tell the sacred story. My first question was simply "can you tell me about the awakening story?"

Orchid

Introduction.

I was at a meeting Orchid was attending when someone asked the topic of my thesis; later Orchid who was also at the meeting approached me, thinking she may have

had an experience that was mystical. If I were interested she would volunteer to be interviewed. The day of the interview, I sat on a small love seat across from Orchid; she had agreed to meet with me in her new Counseling office. I was pleased to have the chance to meet with her in her own space. She expressed feeling nervous as she had not shared the story for a while and then only with a few close persons. Orchid took a breath before she began. I assured her we had lots of time and she could take all the time she wanted. I was consciously joining with Orchid and was open and relaxed as I sat with her.

Orchid's story.

In my childhood into my adulthood, I experienced a lot of abuse, which has profoundly affected my life. I think I was born with a strong spirit, a strong character, and a little fighter inside. The abuse that I experienced compromised me a tremendous amount; I had a great amount of difficulty realizing the person that I was born to be.

Unfortunately also being raised with abuse conditioned me to choose partners who abused. I ended up going through a divorce with my husband and right back into another even more abusive relationship that went on for about seven years. I was in a very high level position at that time in my life. I was working around the clock. I came to a point where I just could not fight anymore. I had fought and fought and fought and I felt like I could not get ahead and it wasn't worth it anymore. That fighter well, finally the flame went out. I lost all my hope, all my energy, and all my will to live.

I made the preparations to die and I made them very precisely because I was not planning to live. This wasn't a cry for help. I was planning to do this once and that's it. I

had no contingency plan so I acted on it. Basically I took pills but enough that it should have killed an elephant. I gave it enough time that it would not be discovered until it was done. As the pills started taking effect, of course it's a rather violent process and the body shakes dramatically and I lost all feeling in my legs and feet and hands and arms and I was freezing to death and my body was shaking. This took hours until I knew I was going to die, I could feel death just right here, and I knew that I was going to die and I wasn't afraid. I just was resigned and I could feel the cold coming into the core of my body and by then I couldn't feel anything else. At one point it was like I couldn't see it but I could feel it. It was like this white-blue energy came down into the core of my chest, just this white-blue energy just came down to the core of my chest and just started to radiate and just started to push the black and the cold out from my chest. It just started to push and push and push and push it out until my – the core of my body, the cold and the black was pushed out of all around the core of my body. It was like this kind of aura just holding back death, which the black cold was death. Was just holding. It was kind of like this battle like this going on around the core of my body. I still couldn't feel my hands or legs or anything but it just held it and held it and I was there. And I didn't really know what was happening but I thought, oh my God, gods or whoever is not going to let me go.

They aren't going to let me go. Whoever, whatever it is, it's not going to let me go. I don't know how long that went on but it went on long enough that my partner came home from work. He called the ambulance and they hauled me off to the hospital and pumped me out and I was in critical care for several days and woke up in the hospital. At first I was like, oh my God, I hadn't planned on this. I had no contingency plan. But I will

never forget that experience and I know without a doubt that it was divine intervention of some kind.

I thought, okay, if that, if you are so meant to be in this world that the powers that be were going to intervene in your unworthy little life then you had better make it count.

So, you do whatever it takes to make this life worthwhile. From that point, I started doing the work that had to be done, and I got a lot of counseling. I also went through programs. I did the healing that I had needed to do for years. I prayed. I got down on my knees and prayed on a regular basis. I was on my knees pretty well every day there for about three years. I realized then without a doubt that (a) I have spirit; that (b) there are powers beyond us, and that (c) I, and only I, am responsible for turning my life into what it needs to be and if I do, then the powers that be are going to help me. If I don't, then I'm going to be miserable for the rest of my life. That's when I got some very profound help because I'd always lived my life in fear and misery and not being able to realize who I was born to be, being terribly scared. I got several years of help and I went through this one women's trauma group; I can remember when the fear that had been pushing down on my body and my psyche all my life, it actually lifted.

I felt like I was, it sounds really hokey but it felt like I was being born into my body for the first time. I felt like the being that was Orchid was finally being released to live and that's when I became me.

That's when I took control of my life. I stopped being what others wanted me to be, expected me to be, demanded that I be. I stopped living in fear, I sat myself down, and I said what do you need in your life for fulfillment. I need to contribute to others. I

need challenge. I need open spaces and daylight. I need nature. I would like love, but if it's not being granted to me, I'm not going to curl up in a ball and die. As long as I am given the opportunity to use my intellect and abilities to give to others and help, and that I can live a fairly simple life and not be trodden on, then I feel like I am respecting the gift that was given to me that day.

I feel in a way a responsibility that I was given a gift that day and in being given that gift, my part in it is be everything you can be. You don't waste it.

That's why you see me doing what I'm doing. At times maybe not being as grounded as I'm supposed to be, but trying too hard and perhaps being oversensitive at times as well. But being far more aware of what it means to be a whole person. That it's mind, body, heart, soul and that we have as much need to take care of our spirit as any other piece of us.

I didn't know that before. As a counselor, I know that all the individuals that come into our keeping one way or another, have that same need whether they're aware of it or not and that spiritual awareness is a huge part of counseling whether you're a pastoral counselor or not.

Well, it has significance on a couple of levels. Number one, it absolutely solidified for me the spirituality aspect of being. And that we're not alone in this life, there's a power greater than me, or humanity, that's somewhere. That's profound. It's frightening and it's comforting at the same time. Also it, for someone who had never been valued in her life, it was kind of like, well, somebody values my life.

Doc

Introduction.

I met with Doc in the airport. Doc had experienced a number of what she refers to as numinous experiences beginning in childhood. This particular sacred experience had qualities of the ineffable and noetic that compelled her to seek out a community with spiritual practices. Doc's narrative holds the theme of death and suffering resurrection. As a child her parents were in a car accident and her father died. Her mother spent time in hospital recovering and was not the same on returning home. Doc, at 16, took on the role as parent to her siblings. One night her father came to her in a dream and told her where to find a wallet he had hidden in a bookshelf he had built. The money was very badly needed in the family. When Doc went to the bookshelf and looked, the money was where she had been shown it would be in the dream.

Doc's story.

It was so validating. So now, I want to tell you the story that is the story that I'm going to tell you. And it's a story of how I found my spiritual path. So I got a contract to provide Mental Health Services on an Indian Reserve up north, I won't say which one. And the reserves have their own counselors. So I was hired as the clinician to deal with sexual abuse and the cases that were like just too difficult for the, you know, for the reserve counselors to deal with.

So the first case that I was actually referred was one of the local medicine man was also a pedophile. And he married a woman with six kids and actually, on his wedding night I subsequently found out, I didn't know this at the time of the referral but

subsequently, he sexually assaulted the five-year-old boy that became the stepson and the seven-year-old sister. And then gave them each a buck after he assaulted them. So anyways, the kids didn't tell their mother for about a year and when they told the mother, she developed cancer. Like basically overnight and died with six months. And this man continued to sexually abuse the step-kids.

And in the meantime, you know, she and he had biological kids actually they had a couple of biological kids so it was a little while and he, as they grew, he abused them also. So eventually child welfare discovered this; they apprehended the kids. And this man would psychically attack anyone. Like put a spell on them-in the First Nations culture they call it bad medicine-on anyone who became involved in his case. And so it took child welfare like eight months to investigate because the child welfare worker would pick up the file and get such a terrible migraine that she would land up in emergency, like in the hospital for a couple of days.

Anybody who had anything to do with the case would kind of be psychically attacked. And so in my case what happened is well, two things happened. One of the things that happened is that I started getting horrible nightmares that my children were going to be murdered. And I knew that I was being psychically attacked but I still couldn't stop the nightmares.

And the other thing that happened was that I would go to the reserve on Wednesday, sorry, on Thursdays. And so every Wednesday night for weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks, something would happen to my car. I'd be rear-ended,

I'd have a flat tire, you know, yadda yadda yadda, and accumulating in my engine melting. Well, I didn't even know an engine could melt.

And so I knew that I was being psychically attacked and what I didn't know was how to protect myself. And so I phoned up my friend in the Yukon who was married to a medicine man there and I said, help. And he said fear is the doorway through which you can be attacked in this kind of way. If you have no fear then, you know, they can't, it won't come in, you know.

So I made a decision then and there to be fearless. I just went, okay. That's what I need to do. That's what I'm going to do. And I kind, and I also asked for whatever God there was, to just I, just said okay, you know, I'm just like giving this up to you and I'm going to be fearless and, you know, that's help.

And so that night I was laying in bed and three men appeared at the foot of my bed. I saw them in the same kind of way that I saw my father when he visited me. And I would have been really concerned except that, first of all, I had that experience with my father many years before and in the meantime I had heard hundreds of other experiences. And secondly, I felt such unconditional love from these men. I had just never felt so loved in my entire life. And they discussed me. They discussed me and then they left. And then I had a dream.

[*Nola*] You "heard" them discussing you?

[*Doc*] I guess I heard isn't the right word. It's like I understood or a knowing. Yes, that's right. I knew they were discussing me but while they were discussing me, I just relaxed in this love. Just this love, and, Nola, that night I had a dream and the dream

said go to this place. So I woke up and I had this place to go to. I looked it up in the Edmonton phone book, and I phoned and I said, who are you guys? Can anybody come? And they said, oh, yes, anybody can come. It's a spiritual teaching. It's a spiritual teaching. And they said anybody can come. And they said, as a matter of fact tomorrow we have an event on, why don't you come. And so I went and I knew it was for me because my dream had told me so. And so, very quickly, this was in 1989, I figured out who two of the three men were because they had photographs of them at the center. The last one, the third man? I figured out who he was this past October. I went to a conference in another city I go twice a year. But this time it was at a big center I walked around there was a new piece of art that I hadn't seen before. And it was it was the man. I saw him and I said, that's him that's the third person.

I recognized him. They talk about different spiritual teachers that can teach you through your dreams. And it's a path where people learn from the inside. But the spiritual teachers are teachers that can teach you through the dream state.

Yeah. And they also talk about different levels of heaven. So, they talk about the astral plane, the causal plane, the mental plane, and the etheric plane. So to me then it made sense about, you know, what I saw when my father took me to where he was going to be living. I was thinking, what? You know there's buildings? There are people sitting around drinking a beverage? There's vehicles? Like, how can this be?

Then I came to an understanding for myself. Other people don't have to believe this but you know in the astral plane it's very similar to the physical plane in many ways. And there are buildings and there are vehicles and there are people, you know? But

anyways, so that's not the end of the story. So, once I found this, I recognize there's two more parts of this story. So, I had always, I mean for years, I used to live in the Yukon and in the Yukon I used to go to sweats. Do you know what a sweat is?

[*Nola*] I have been to a sweat.

[*Doc*] You've been to a sweat. I always went to sweats. I joined because my dream told me to, right? So, I go to the reserve, they say, you know, there's a sweat on, and it would have been like really inappropriate for me to refuse to go. So, I began going regularly. I thought well, you know, it's okay for me to be a member of my spirituality and still go to a sweat. And the answer is yes. But you know back then I was so new and I didn't even know.

But I knew that I needed to go and I thought well, you know, basically the path consists of them giving you spiritual exercises for you to see the light and hear the sound of God, and for you to have spiritual experiences. So you know, it's a very individual path. So one of the exercises that they recommend is just singing the word Hu. You know, as a mentor? And so I thought, well, you know just go to the sweat and I'll just sing this word Hu. So everybody else is doing his or her own thing, and I just kind of went into contemplation. I started singing the word Hu. Bang, I'm transported to the Cree happy hunting grounds. With these elders around a fire they say to me, what is this Hu? I said, well I don't know that much yet, but here is my teacher and the head of my spiritual faith. This faith always has a living leader who's based on being able to be the inner teacher also. So you know sort of, the form of who is the outer sort of teacher, but also who teaches us on the inside and through the dreams this appeared. I introduced them to

these Cree elders and a curtain fell. A see-through curtain so that I could see them meeting but I couldn't hear what they were saying. I was not part of the meeting.

And they sat around the fire and they met for a long time. And I was able to watch the meeting but was not able to sit in on the meeting or to hear the meeting. And then after a long time they stood up and they shook hands. My teacher left, and the curtain rose; my teacher left and these elders turned to me and they said, you might work with our people. Then, bang, I was back in my body in the sweat lodge. It was such a profound experience, Nola. It was such a profound experience.

[Nola] It sounds really powerful. [I met Doc with a short response her words were reaching out to meet me, I reached back with a short comment. I could see and feel the power this experience held for her.]

[Doc] Yeah. And then there was a third part to this. So the third part was several weeks later I am working, they had me working at that time, actually, and I stayed and worked on this reserve for 15 years. I worked out of, you know, a variety of places. I worked out of the Health Centre; I worked out of Child Welfare; I worked out of the school; I worked out of counseling services. But at this time, I was working out of the Child Welfare Office. The Child Welfare Office was in this very, very long, and narrow building. It was a complete death trap as many buildings on the reserves are. The entrances were at the two far ends of the building. The Child Welfare Office was smack in the middle. So, you know, I'd have to walk up these stairs to the second floor and then trudge to the middle of this building. So, I'm trudging to the middle of, you know, down this long, long, long, long hallway, when who comes from the other side but this

medicine man who had been psychically attacking me. And the minute I remembered, I had that dream. And joined it. Like, I mean the psychic attacks stopped. The nightmares stopped. The things with my car stopped. I hadn't had any trouble.

But now here it was, it was like weeks later and now he's coming up the hallway. And at the same time it dawns on me that it's lunch hour and the Child Welfare Office is going to be closed. And so my options run through my head. I can turn around and run away, but actually, I don't want to be running from this man. I can continue to the Child Welfare Office, but actually, I've just figured out that it's lunch hour and although I am like within probably 30 steps of it, it's going to be locked. You know, this man has that glint in his eye. It's like, I've got you, you, bitch.

By now I'd been counseling his children and his children informed me that not only would he psychically attack people, he would physically poison them. Like he knew which kind of herbs and stuff were poisonous, and he would you know, like drug them by the herbs and poison them. I mean the stories the kids told me were just horrible, but anyways that's a whole other story. I thought, well then, I thought, no. I'm going to be fearless and I'm just going to sing Hu, and I'm going to continue to the Child Welfare Office. And so, Nola, he was, he was, you know, walking, I want to demonstrate to you which is hard to put on tape but.

[*Nola*] Yes, I want to see.

[*Doc*] You know, he was like marching towards me with this, you know, I've-got-you look in his eye, and with that kind of attitude. I'm continuing to the Child Welfare Office and all of a sudden he like bangs into, there's nothing there. It was like he hit an

invisible wall. And this man actually like he was like, I mean, he reeled back. He was like, standing there with his mouth hanging open. I'm like going, what just happened? And I'm standing there with my mouth open. And then we're both standing there going, what happened? What happened? And so this man steps forward to continue coming towards me, and he hits this invisible wall again and the look of bewilderment on his face is obvious. I mean, he's like completely bewildered, as I'm sure I am. Like we're standing maybe thirty feet apart. In this narrow hallway, there's no one else. Like this one hundred and twenty foot, hallway and we're like 30 feet apart and we're both the only ones there. We're both standing there like just stopped, still like wondering, what is going on, what's going on? Then he tried to get past this point in the hallway a third time and he could not get past it. He turned around and the only word I could use is he slunk back and away.

You know, shortly after that the police had sufficient evidence to charge him. They arrested him and charge him with his offences. I worked on that reserve for 15 more years and as a matter of fact last year I was called to consult on that reserve again. I never had another problem. I was protected.

I was absolutely protected. I had the spiritual blessing, yeah. It's phenomenal. And so, when you say to me your thesis question, this is why I asked you what you meant by relational consciousness because that experience I had when I was 10 changed me. The experience I had when I was 16 made me not afraid of death. Like, what's to be afraid of? Because I knew that we're here for a purpose and we all have our purpose. And then we step into the next phase of our life with soul. And then these experiences I've

had, it's hard to express, I don't know, it's not a relational experience in the same way. It's more experiences of being protected, but in such a clear and direct way.

Yeah. And not experiences I can share with just anyone. I guess every time I have one of these experiences it reminds me that our physical body is like a coat that we put on to wear for a while. And that we are soul so is everybody else. And you know, we're here to learn something. And this is like just one stage of life or soul.

Priest

Introduction.

I met with Priest at his home for the interview. Priest was known as an excellent spiritual director; later he taught at a University and eventually he left the Priesthood, as he needed to live a larger spiritual life. Priest continues to share his gift of spiritual direction with his community; he also teaches Contemplative Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Direction.

Priest's story.

Yeah. Sure. Actually, I was thinking about different experiences I've had and the one that stands out most for me, the most startling experience I had was about, well, it was early to mid-1970s. So, it's over 30 years ago now. I was giving a retreat, an eight-day silent directed retreat to a community of nuns. That involved me meeting with each one each day. I would give them some suggestions for prayer, usually something from the scriptures to pray on and they would pray on that five times a day. Then we would meet the next day and talk about what their experience was and then on the basis of that try to

discern the movement of spirits in them. I would then suggest where they might go from there. So that kind of was the structure of it. Among the nuns, there was one who was director of nursing at a very large city hospital, had a very demanding, stressful job and she had come right from work to this retreat. She was having a really hard time getting into it. It was a real struggle for her. It was a really dry time. She just couldn't relax into this atmosphere and had no real enjoyment out of her prayer at all. It was just very dry. So we, you know, we talked each day about what was happening and tried to understand it and talked about her job and the stresses that she was going through and so forth. I thought maybe that's all we're going to accomplish in these eight days. I was kind of concerned about her. The last day when I was talking to her, I just felt she's going to leave this and I don't think she's going to leave it in a good frame of mind.

So, she was the next day at the end of retreat she was leaving for a weekend of hiking with a lady friend of hers, I said, "I'd, like before you go, I'd like to see you once more after breakfast just to kind of sum things up." So after breakfast I was in my room and she came to me. She knocked, and she walked in the door, and as soon as she walked in, I was just awestruck because it was like she was a transformed person. The only analogy I can think of is she looked to me like a bride on her wedding day. She comes in and she just, she actually, she sat down at my feet. She was just glowing and was telling me about this encounter with Jesus that she had had and, I mean I didn't have anything to say. It was just a remarkable thing.

So I, you know of course, I was really happy about it and, you know, said goodbye and she was off. And then she had told me that her birthday was coming up at one point in the week. So, I knew she was going to be having a birthday. So I was staying

on another day and I decided I would go and get her a birthday card after lunch. So I went out to the mall after lunch and for some reason I don't know why, when I bought this card I looked at my watch and I remember it was two o'clock when I bought this birthday card. So, then I went back to their community and I was back in my office there and about three o'clock or so the phone rang and I answered it and it was Mother Superior and she said, Father, I have some awful news for you. Angie, that was name of the girl on the retreat, was just killed in a car crash. And I remember saying, what time? Two o'clock. And I started trembling. I couldn't stop shaking because the experience I had been, it was like the veil had torn between here and eternity and I got a glimpse.

It was like I was a witness at a wedding between God and one of his creatures. He decided, this is the moment. And it was just a glimpse; it was like there is something going on that I am not aware. There's a whole other dimension, and I just well, I was a wreck. I couldn't stop crying. I cried for three days straight. I constantly, I would be celebrating mass for the community and I would burst out crying. I would be trying to give a homily and I couldn't finish it because I'd start crying. And it what it taught me was what true consolation is. Like in discernment, I'm always trying to help people understand the difference between what is consolation and desolation. And people usually think consolation means you feel happy and desolation means you feel really lousy, but that's not the case at all. Because I, for these three days I was experiencing a deep consolation but I couldn't stop crying.

To the observers it looked like I was in desolation but it wasn't grief I was experiencing. It was profound joy. And it would just, it was awe. That's the only word I can think of. It must have been what it was like when Moses encountered, and the

prophets encountered, God. It was just like, you know when they talk about the terrible God, not in the sense of being fearful, but invoking a, sort of a sense of terror. In the sense, oh my heavens. He's in charge of everything and who am I? I thought too, how ironic, you know. At the moment she was dying and going into a new life, I was buying her a birthday card. I had no idea I was buying it for her for her new life.

But, actually it took me a couple of weeks to, I couldn't still, I could hardly function properly because I was just so overwhelmed. Just completely overwhelmed by that experience. It was just, like I say, it was like a glimpse into eternity and I thought, oh my God, I can't, thank God it's only a glimpse. I can't, couldn't, possibly live like this all the time. I'd be just a wreck, you know.

So, that was the most striking experience I ever had of that and it was really mediated through another person, but I will never forget. I've never, ever before or since seen a person that I would say actually was glowing. It was like she just radiated this from her. Unbelievable.

It was, she came in it was like complete surrender. She had just surrendered herself completely and she was at such peace and joy and, you know, after that week of struggle it was, well, it was such a grace for me to be part of that, you know. To be able to experience that, I was so grateful, but that's always stuck with me. So that, I think always now when there are events in the world that seem distressful I always think to myself, well, we're seeing one dimension of things here. That's all we are privileged to see normally. Occasionally we might get a glimpse of something else but that doesn't happen a lot.

It's changed my perspective in general. Like I, I don't know. I'm just aware all the time of a different dimension going on in life. I feel much more connected to everything. And know that that's the more ordinary everyday mystical experiences, a sense which is more or less strong depending on the circumstances, but of being connected with everything. Like, I don't feel a separation between me and other people or between me, and creation. It was a very powerful experience. I mean I'm not normally a very emotional person. I don't show my emotions a lot to people but it was like something had taken over me. I couldn't control anything. I would just burst out crying.

I had no control at all. I mean it was really embarrassing. You know, I'd be up speaking and I'd suddenly start crying and I couldn't stop. I mean it wasn't a very, I don't know how to describe it, but it was embarrassing. And from the world's point of view, and I know a lot of people were really upset at me because of it. They thought I was just being silly and, you know, get over it. They had no idea what it was. They just thought I was upset because she had died and I wasn't upset, I was, I was feeling, its like, don't you understand? I'm seeing something here that I can't explain to you. I can't describe it.

Shared Themes

Reviewing the transcripts common themes were found in the respondent's stories. Themes arose within the respondents' stories. The words they chose held the lived experience containing their process, memory, qualities of being, shades of emotions, internal movements of contractions and expansions, meaning making, knowing and mystery. I listened to their stories as they spoke of their struggles, awakening into consciousness, death of ego, rebirth and transformation with ongoing relational

consciousness (Wilber, 2000)(Marion, 2004)(Fowler, 1976/1995). The mystery is a continual expanding and coming into knowing. The awakening stories shared themes of suffering/struggle, awakening, surrender/death, relational consciousness, rebirth and change of self-identity/transformation. These are the themes within their stories.

Suffering/Struggle

All respondents' in this study shared that, at the time of the sacred experience, they were in a place of struggle and suffering. Each respondent shared an experience of awakening that brought healing, and meaning to their lives through struggle. In the psychotherapy relationship Corbett suggests, "whatever our attitude to suffering, when we try to make sense of it in this larger context we slip beyond the technical aspects of psychotherapy into spirituality" (2011, p. 19). Suffering and struggle appears to be a doorway for the respondents' awakening experiences. Corbett recognizes, "the value of discovering meaning within suffering, a process which may be important to individuals with a spiritual sensibility" (2011, p. 261). As Orchid had experienced a life of suffering, she made a choice to surrender to death; as she lay dying, she opened to death and was reborn.

Buddha taught that the path of meditation is one that co-emerges with the path of suffering. Each of the respondents struggled in their own way. Initially they identified with stories that did not serve their wellbeing. After a time of struggle, they found spiritual meaning that connected them to the sacred. Suffering forces us to open up to the unconscious (Corbett, 2011, p. 267). Suffering brings with it questioning of one's life and forces us to discover our real spirituality rather than accept what we have been told (p.

262). Our willingness to engage in healing around our own suffering, helps us develop a capacity to be with all of life-our suffering and moments of pleasure. In Priest's, story the nun struggled between her work life as well as settling into the retreat space. In our attachments and stories of who we are, along with ideas of how to live our life, we may unknowingly close ourselves to the direct relationship with the sacred. According to St. John of the Cross, we suffer because we do not know how to open to the brilliance of God (2003, p. 3).

Corbett suggested this is because most people cannot hold the non-dual perspective needed to ask the larger questions: "who is suffering" (2011, p. 262)? For each of the three respondents this sacred experience put in motion a change for life. In our suffering not unlike Christ's suffering, we are not alone. God is present in the suffering. The respondents' suffering, according to Jung, may have been the "attempt of the Self to stimulate greater awareness of neglected aspects of the personality" (Corbett, 2011, p. 273). For Jung, Corbett stated, the Self is not God, but the image of God in us.

As the respondents shared their narratives, they went back in time; their suffering began early in life, as Priest shared he experienced depression at age nineteen. Since the awakening experience, the respondents have accessed healing and spiritual teachings. They go into the past to story a sequence of events, which brings meaning and a coherent narrative. The impact of these histories shows the ongoing power narratives have in our lives. For Orchid, the narrative of suffering became a burden so she chose to escape through death. Orchid's narrative reveals she had been living with narratives of suffering for some time and had resolved to end her suffering. "I was planning to do this once and

that's it," she said. "I had no contingency plan so I acted on it. Basically I took pills, but enough that it should have killed an elephant."

At this time, for Orchid, death was a narrative of liberation as a response to a lived narrative of suffering. In this expression, we hear Orchid's suffering and her plan to end the suffering by ending her own life. After the awakening experience, the story changed to a narrative that was conscious of her own value and the experience of being loved by God. In her words, "God was not going to let me go." The sacred continues to have an ongoing relationship and influence in her life.

Doc's narrative of suffering began as a child when her parents were both in a car accident. Her father died; her mother spent time in hospital recovering, but she was never the same. At 16, Doc took on the role of parents to her siblings. She became a social worker, and while working up north, she experienced what she named as physical attacks from a medicine man. Doc expressed, that she was under constant attack from this man; she was suffering both in her dream life as well as waking life. Doc shared a narrative local to the culture. Doc lived in fear for her safety and for the safety of her children, causing her great suffering. In the moment of Doc's awakening experience she opened to a consciousness beyond the immobilizing fear. These experiences brought death to fear, including fear of the medicine man transforming her relationship to life.

Priest's narrative of suffering began early in his life he developed depression. His suffering stemmed from his concern for others. He was directing a group of nuns on a retreat and this nun was experiencing difficulties. The other, as Bourgeault and Almaas have suggested, may be seen as the key to our experience and development of our

mystical self (2014). The nun, Priest said, “was glowing. It was as if she just radiated this from her.” Calling it “the most striking experience I ever had,” he seems to have been overwhelmed “that it was really mediated through another person.” This mystical experience was one he “will never forget.” It was “Unbelievable.”

Priest’s suffering, care, and concern in this relationship came through in many ways. He asked to have more time with the nun, as he does not want her to leave the retreat this way. “Relationships, then, are more than a pathway to a continued connection to the sacred; they are carriers of their own sacred meaning (Pargament, 2011, p. 85). Relationships can be profoundly spiritual. One can not plan what happens, yet we can hold the intention or knowing of the possibility of being a key to spiritual resonance and shared experience in relationship to the other. In this story, it seems they may have been each other’s key to the sacred experience. Priest describes an experience that was unexpected or passive; one cannot and does not make the experience happen (James, 1902/1994). The unplanned experience (Webster & Mertova, 2007) changed Priest. During the retreat, Priest and the nun stayed present to the suffering. We cannot avoid suffering and we cannot avoid struggle. We struggle for understanding with other human minds, and we struggle through love to truly understand another human being, therefore understanding ourselves as well (Strickling, 2007, p. 12). Priest saw that the nun

was having a really hard time getting into it. It was a real struggle for her. It was a really dry time. She just couldn’t relax into this atmosphere and (had) no real enjoyment out of her prayer at all. It was just very dry. I was kind of concerned about her. The last day when I was talking to her, I just felt she’s going to leave this and I don’t think she’s going to leave it in a good frame of mind. (Priest)

In the world of spiritual practice, the metaphor “dry time” refers to a yearning for the Beloved and, while not finding consolation or deep rest, having faith it is there to be found. Perhaps what Priest awoke to was his own suffering as he felt compassion for the nun in her “dry time.”

Struggle and suffering may force us to develop a level of wisdom and understanding that may otherwise be unattainable (Corbett, 2011, p. 275). The suffering of the respondents and where it led was outside of what they could have known was possible. “Suffering may lead to new realizations about how we want to live our lives and about what really matters to us” (p. 276). Each of the respondents narrated the story of suffering and struggle into their life narrative. Their narratives held a sense of wisdom in life, the kind of wisdom gained through suffering and struggle finding a way to story them in ways that ground. There is a spiritual relevance to suffering, and Corbett used Jung to suggest suffering could be thought of as our subjective experience of the Self-trying to incarnate (2011 p. 280). Suffering for the respondents became the catalyst to be with others in their suffering with empathy.

Awakening

The awakening experience brought the respondents’ into conscious relationship with the sacred. John Welwood asks the question, “What happens in the process in which the unconscious becomes conscious? In answering this question we had better reformulate it” (1983, p. 66). The narratives of the respondents’ awakening experiences are a narrative of the unconscious becoming conscious. In the process of consciousness we die a death of what we thought was real. We begin to re-member who we are.

Welwood's idea fits with Atkinson's suggestion that "there is no such thing as the conscious and no such thing as the unconscious" (2012, p. 66). For Atkinson, this life is a preparation stage for consciousness, leading to knowledge of the awakening of the Self to its eternal nature; it concludes with our understanding of our eternal journey and our task in this life in order to open to the future (2012, p. 65). For Welwood, "there are degrees of consciousness-awareness, and unconsciousness-awareness" (1983, p. 66).

In psychotherapy, there is a strengthening of the ego that allows the Self to emerge; when the unconscious becomes conscious, we experience a moment of awakening. When our consciousness is awakened, we become curious and begin to ask questions; this is a part of re-membering and the transformation of consciousness (Atkinson, 2012). For Welwood, our question then should be: what happens when I become aware of what I have not been aware of before (p. 66). In the moment of awakening the consciousness one continually awakens throughout a lifetime awakening will be varied. The moment of awakening to mystical consciousness, according to Roy, is "the presence of the divine consciousness is within us" (2003, p. 49).

In this study, I asked questions about what happens to respondents when they are now consciousness of the sacred through a very personal experience. How does this continue to inform their lives? How does this awareness continue to inform their consciousness? In relational consciousness of the research, they are in a process of co-creation the ongoing story affecting both the past and future.

The experience that Orchid storied into a narrative is one outside of any she had known before. It is clear she is not alone, something, in her words, was "radiating an aura

holding back death.” This is a powerful movement into realization of what Underhill calls “Reality.” Orchid has an experience of the sacred that changes her everyday reality to an expanded multi layered “Reality.” Suffering is not uncommon when we live in a space with no room for our own suffering. Therefore, we contract against life rather than become curious to what life holds and may offer us. Orchid’s experience opened her to see her suffering, that which is in life and that which she created by holding on to realities that did not allow her to see “Reality.”

At one point it was like I couldn’t see it, but I could feel it; it was like this white-blue energy came down into the core of my chest, just this white-blue energy just came down to the core of my chest and just started to radiate and just started to push the black and the cold out from my chest. It just started to push and push and push and push it out until the core of my body, the cold and the black was pushed out of all around the core of my body. It was like this kind of aura just holding back death, which the black cold was death. Was just holding. It was kind of like this battle like this going on around the core of my body. (Orchid)

Such an experiences does not last. It is transition (James, 1902/1994). Narratively, Orchid is capturing the experience of the feeling of this mystical event. It was Jacob’s experience when he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” (Genesis 28:16, NSRV). Looking to the saints and mystics can give us further insights into the mystical consciousness. They acknowledge it is outside of our everyday narratives while opening us to seeing the mystical narratives in our lives. There is an expression of suffering and not being alone in the suffering; she experiences a white blue energy at the core of her chest radiating and pushing the black and the cold out from her

chest. In such a moment, she is not alone, and something is working in her to save her life as she faces death.

McGinn refers to Eckhart's statement, the "metaphysics of flow." Hopkins expressed this vision of reality in a poem:

Thee God, I come from, to thee go;

All day long I like fountain flow

From thy hand out, swayed about,

Mote-like in thy mighty glow. (In McGinn, 2001. p. 72)

In the flow of mystical consciousness, Orchid experienced healing. We do not have commonly known narratives in our everyday life for the white-blue energy that came down onto Orchid's chest and radiated holding off death. Yet, we do have images of a light at Christ's chest. Also, Mary and Sophia wear the color white and blue; it is symbolic of a healing color. My experience was confirmed when I was told two more stories by persons being visited by a blue-white light after a death of a loved one. The theme of illumination by a flow, metaphysics, glows or auras is known to, at times, be a part of the sacred experience. Stories of the respondents challenge our perceptions of reality.

Priest experienced an awakening in the space between life and death, "We see something here of the space in the liminal space the significance of relationship, and a transition" (Corbett, 2007, p. 62). There is in the atmosphere a quality of the ineffable;

Priest is in this atmosphere. Perhaps it is something created together; we cannot know when we speak of the Mystery. As he said:

So after breakfast, I was in my room and she came to me, she knocked and she walked in the door and as soon as she walked in I was just awestruck because it was like she was a transformed person. The only analogy I can think of is she looked to me like a bride on her wedding day. She came in and she just, she actually, she sat down at my feet. She was just glowing and was telling me about this encounter with Jesus that she had had and, I mean, I didn't have anything to say. It was just a remarkable thing. (Priest)

Priest's story is about his awakening through his relationship with the nun; she enters into their relationship differently. In (St. John of the Cross, 2003), St. John speaks of our need to prepare our vessel.

To help me understand the awakening stories, I use the writings of others. Their work, brings stories of mystics to the world, and helps build the capacity of knowledge and understanding of this type of experience. Clarke writes about Henry Suso, a spiritual guide and a follower of Eckhart who had visions. In one of his visions, he was standing in front of a crucifix, "feeling deeply sorrowful suddenly a brilliant heavenly light shone down, with a voice saying he must do a hundred meditations a day" (Clarke, 2010, p. 146).

Doc experienced a similar kind of vision "I was laying in bed," he said, "and three men appeared at the foot of my bed. I saw them in the same kind of way that I saw my father when he visited me in a dream." This is a description of a vision similar to that

found in the writings of mystics. Some visions are a type of mystical experience. They are unplanned and unexpected (Webster & Mertova, 2007). One cannot and does not make the experiences happen (James, 1902/1994). Visions have been known to come to mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard always insisted that her visions were not the result of ecstasy, meaning she did not experience the numinous as in a trancelike state or in emotional rapture but received her visions in full consciousness, “with eyes wide open” (Clendenen, 2012, p. 61). I have found in these interviews the experience of the sacred is grounded, as Priest said. He quoted Paul Tillich’s concept “grounded into being.” You can hear the sense of ground in Doc’s comment in this narrative.

“I would,” said Doc, “have been really concerned except that, first of all I had that experience with my father many years before, and in the meantime I had heard hundreds of other experiences.” Doc’s narrative reveals she has had other mystical experiences. Some experiences from earlier in life are converging with this moment; they may reveal patterns of well-defined stages (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The deep knowing beyond the intellect that is the mystical experience is similar to “Universalizing Faith” in Fowler’s six stages. It is not one that many people achieve (1976, p. 211). Each of my respondents, nevertheless, experienced some form of an illumination or vision within the realm of mystical consciousness. Their lives were transformed immediately.

After the awakening experience, one needs “a willingness to give reality the initiative in the act of knowing, which is the work of Fowler’s fifth step, “Conjunctive Faith.” This is necessary if one is to become fully conscious of what is available (1976, p. 185). It is a time for a “willingness to give reality the initiative in the act of knowing” (185). There are stages beyond this one. The respondents also shared narratives of being

and becoming in service and support of their new narrative and in service to others as a result of their experiences. They have been awakened to the sacredness of life in all beings. All of the respondents sought out healing and spiritual practices. Additional awakening occurred for each of them, a continual process of deconstruction and reconstruction of experience throughout life (Aten, O'Grady, & Worthington, Jr., 2012, p. 17).

Those involved in this study were changed by glimpses into mystery, and made changes to their lives. The task of awakening can thus be viewed from one perspective as a progressive dis-identification from mental content in general and thoughts in particular (Walsh & Vaughan, 1980, p. 58). There is freedom from all mental content as one awakens beyond ego consciousness to consciousness of Self and the sacred. This has been difficult for many individuals to understand, for cognitive knowledge cannot begin to know in the noetic way (Ferrer & Sherman, 2007, p. 282). In psychotherapies that take spirituality seriously there is recognition of working with unconscious identifications that influence identity and ego consciousness this is a part of the process of individuation. The respondents in this study, as a result of the sacred experience, were initiated into this process. In this participatory view, both an experience of "pure consciousness" and "knowledge by identity" are interpreted as moments of participation in the divine ground of human consciousness (p. 282). These moments are a glimpse into the mystery.

Surrender and Death

The respondents all reported a point of surrender. All of the respondents had experiences related to actual physical death. In the theme of dying in Christian faith, there is the notion that suffering is necessary for spiritual attainment (Corbett, 2007, p. 137).

The noetic embodied knowing discussed by James (1902) describes how after shedding the normal mental ideas we discover in the end we still have what is real, we return to this sacred love that has always been there. Some might call this the death of the ego. When we let go of ideas, we surrender and get a glimpse of reality. It is a purity of love beyond human comprehension and words. Priest's moment of surrender was in relationship to the nun's surrender. At the time, he was unaware of the ongoing influence of this moment. He said that as she entered the room, "It was like complete surrender. She had just surrendered herself completely and she was at such peace and joy and, you know, after that week of struggle it was, well, it was such a grace for me to be part of that, you know." The experience Priest is describing meets James criteria for a religious mystical experience (James, 1902/1994). He is a witness to the sacred experience of another; somehow, in the process she is the key to his sacred experience. I think of the sacred experience I had when my father died, how as he was entering into the realm beyond life he was in liminal space and somehow this was the key to my own sacred experience. It also was my own liminal space, as I was changed.

Was Priest changed?

To be able to experience that, I was so grateful, but that's always stuck with me.

So that, I think always now when there are events in the world that seem

distressful, I always think to myself, well, we're seeing one dimension of things here. That's all we are privileged to see normally. Occasionally we might get a glimpse of something else, but that doesn't happen a lot. (Priest)

In the moment of this experience, he was surrendering to the knowing somehow revealed in the experience, that there is something that is a part of and beyond our selves.

I looked at my watch and I remember it was two o'clock when I bought this birthday card. So, then I went back to their community and I was back in my office there, and about three o'clock or so the phone rang and I answered it, and it was Mother Superior and she said, Father, I have some awful news for you. Angie, that was name of the girl on the retreat, was just killed in a car crash. And I remember saying what time? Two o'clock. And I started trembling. I couldn't stop shaking because the experience I had been, it was like the veil had torn between here and eternity and I got a glimpse. (Priest)

Priest got a glimpse into the mystery of finitude. In the moment, he was buying the nun a birthday card she was dying. The sacred experience is a glimpse that changes one's life.

I had no control at all. I mean it was really embarrassing. You know, I'd be up speaking and I'd suddenly start crying and I couldn't stop. I mean it wasn't a very, I don't know how to describe it, but it was embarrassing. And from the world's point of view, and I know a lot of people were really upset at me because of it. (Priest)

We cannot know in what way, if any, this participation in the mystical experience will happen. Orchid plans for death; she has detached from this world she has known and

awaits death. The experience she has next, is unplanned, unexpected, the ineffable; characteristic of the mystical experience (James, 2002, p. 415). This kind of experience fits as a critical event narrative; it doesn't last, it was unexpected (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In fact it was the opposite of what Orchid thought would happen. In her words, "I made the preparations to die and I made them very precisely because I was not planning to live. This wasn't a cry for help." Orchid had planned for death.

This took hours until I knew I was going to die and I could feel death just right here and I knew that I was going to die and I wasn't afraid. I just was resigned and I could feel the cold coming into the core of my body and by then I couldn't feel anything else. (Orchid)

In her encounter with death, Orchid is getting a glimpse into the Mystery. In this research we get a glimpse of the mystery through Orchid's story. In the research for this thesis I spent time at the Metta Institute with Frank Ostaseski and others, and at the Upaya Zen Center with Joan Halifax and Sharon Salzberg. Both offer courses on contemplative being with the dying; the idea is to die before you die so one can sit with those who are dying. Orchid's attempt to die created the experience of dying before you die.

St. John of the Cross speaks of the narrative of death of the ego, or what he calls passions. He understands that we need to know our passion. "They must die in order to attain living the sweet and delectable life of love with God" (2003, p. 3), he wrote. "When God leads the soul into this night of sense in order to purge the sense of its lower part and to subdue it, unite it and bring it into conformity with the spirit" (2003, p. 29). St. John of the Cross speaks to the complexity of ego; it gets in the way of understanding

or being present to what is revealed in the awakening experience. In this awakening moment, ego finds its place to be in service to the soul.

The narratives of death for Doc are multiple. We learn from her past narratives about the death of her father in a car accident. Her mother survived, but never returned psychologically for the children in the family so they experienced two kinds of death—that of a parent and that of her childhood as she took on the role of parent.

When, later, she confronts the medicine man that practices bad medicine, Doc learns about the death of fear. Letting go of fear in her experience closed the door to the power of the medicine man's attacks and opened a door to the mystery. Anthropologists describe tribal cultures in which people die soon after being condemned by a medicine man and expelled from the community the so-called "voodoo death," which may be due to terror and hopelessness (Corbett, 2011, p. 272) This is what Doc refers to when she says:

I made a decision then and there to be fearless. I just went, okay. That's what I need to do. That's what I'm going to do. And I kind; and I also asked for whatever God there was, to just, I just said okay, you know, I'm just like giving this up to you and I'm going to be fearless and, you know, that's help. (Doc)

The balance or ability to live knowing we will face death, our own and those we love, is a part of our universal human reality. Holding the reality of both life and death, yet neither too tightly is essential.

Relational Consciousness

Relational consciousness is the experience of union. It is through this type of union that one is awakened to the sacred. In the awakening one becomes conscious of the sacred as it reveals its self and we come to know in new ways. Ineffable love is felt and conveys one's worth. In union one experiences noetic knowing. For Orchid, "gods, or whoever, is not going to let me go." This expression is one of awe in the moment. This begins a new narrative for Orchid as she expresses "coming into a knowing of her worth." James refers to this experience as ineffable, noetic, one has a felt sense of the Divine love, informing her worth, insights, knowing not accessed through the intellect alone (James, 1902/1994).

After her sacred experience, Orchid reflects on the divine intervention.

I will never forget that experience and I know without a doubt that it was divine intervention of some kind. I thought, okay, if that, if you are so meant to be in this world that the powers that be were going to intervene in your unworthy little life, then you had better make it count. (Orchid)

She expresses a narrative that is now very different; life now counts. She has had an experience of something she did not know in this way before, something that can intervene beyond what is in her everyday consciousness, and her consciousness is changed to take in the mystical Reality. Orchid reflects a shift in consciousness that affirms a sense of embodiment and knowing of her worth. For this to happen there has been a death to the old consciousness.

Critical event narratives identify the experience as life changing, yet are only identified after the event (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This is expressed by Orchid as she transcends the reality of abuse she lived, to a life that recognized value for her life.

So you do whatever it takes to make this life worthwhile. From that point I started doing the work that had to be done, and I got a lot of counseling. I also went through programs. I did the healing that I had been, needing to do for years. I prayed. I got down on my knees and prayed on a regular basis. I was on my knees pretty well every day there for about three years. (Orchid)

The resurrection theme offers hope and new life, triumph over evil (Corbett, 2007, p. 137). Awakening experiences are intensely personal with strong emotional involvement (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83). The experience of the ineffable, the felt love of the sacred, informs her of her worth (James, 1902/1994). The prayer one participates in is informed by the sacred experience; one knows something of the ineffable; one continues relational consciousness through engaging in prayer; one meets the sacred here. Orchid said:

I realized then without a doubt that (a) I have spirit [she expresses the ineffable]; that (b) there are powers beyond us [she expresses noetic knowledge], and that (c) I, and only I, am responsible for turning my life into what it needs to be and if I do, then the powers that be are going to help me [in relational consciousness]. (Orchid).

In the respondents' stories, the resurrection is the movement into a different consciousness. Love seems to be the healing balm for old wounds shifting them into new

consciousness. Doc tells us of this experience when he said, “I felt such unconditional love from these men. I had just never felt so loved in my entire life.” It is difficult to describe this kind of love there are no words to really express the ineffable the experience cannot be described by words, the noetic knowing is wordless (James, 1902/1994, p. 414-415). “They discussed me,” said Doc, “and then they left. And then I had a dream—I knew they were discussing me but while they were discussing me, I just relaxed in this love. Just this love.

How can we identify dreams about the divine? Some dreams about the divine have a numinous quality that carries with it a sense of self-evident transcendence and meaning (Strickling, 2007, p. 35). Dreams like this carry with them this feel of the sacred, the ineffable, and noetic. Jung calls “dreams with internal experience such as feeling subjective numinous dreams” (Jung, 1961/1989). The quality of the experience itself produces in the dreamer a sense of having encountered something of the metaphysical kind, not only from ordinary human experience, but also, from most dream experience (Strickling, 2007, p. 35). The numinous dreams are life changing.

The power of the experience can bring with it powerful emotion as in Priest’s experience. Corbett argues that powerful emotion is an indication of the presence of archetypal energy (Strickling, 2007, p. 35). Jung made it clear that image and affect are equally important effects of the archetype and that emotion is a bridge by which the archetype enters the body (Corbett, 2011, p. 279).

“I started trembling,” said Priest. “I couldn’t stop shaking because the experience I had been, it was like the veil had torn between here and eternity and I got a glimpse.” In

such glimpses, “the archetypal is a spiritual principle that embodies itself in the form of emotionally important, soulful experience, which is a way that spirit enters the body” (Corbett, 2011, p. 279). This powerful experience is the ineffable. The experience cannot be described by words so Priest used the metaphor of a “veil torn between here and eternity” somehow sharing something of these worlds connecting. There is also the experience of temporality. This experience of Priest’s meets James’ criteria for ineffable and noetic (1902/1994, p. 414-415). The experience is intensely personal with strong emotional involvement (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83). In Priest’s words, “It was like I was a witness at a wedding between God and one of his creatures.”

Jung believed that the underlying archetypal form itself is empty, but consciousness fills it with material so that it can be recognized (Corbett, 2007, p. 45). In his words, “Archetypal ideas are locally, temporally, and individually conditioned” (2007, p. 45). As the witness he gains a state of knowledge where spiritual insights are gained that could not be accessed through the intellect alone (James, 1902/1994). The consequences of the experience were life changing for him (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83).

It was just a glimpse; it was like there is something going on that I am not aware. There’s a whole other dimension and I just well, I was a wreck. I couldn’t stop crying. I cried for three days straight. I constantly, I would be celebrating mass for the community and I would burst out crying. (Priest).

A critical event has impact on the people involved (Webster & Mertova, 2007). “I would be trying to give a homily and I couldn’t finish it because I’d start crying” (Priest).

Priest's experience lasted for three days, but not longer than that. The experience cannot be sustained for long periods (James, 1902/1994). Priest was changed. During a process, St Ignatius began to cry uncontrollably; he was experiencing "a vision flooded his heart with such sweetness, that the mere memory of it in the after times made him shed abundant tears" (James, 1902/1994 p. 447). "To the observers," said Priest, "it looked like I was in desolation, but it wasn't grief I was experiencing. It was profound joy. And it would just, it was awe." This process may be understood as alchemical in our transformation, water as a solution dissolving old ideas, often experienced in emotion such as tears, water-the dissolving of what is not reality in the sense of the mystery.

Rebirth

The experience of rebirth was thus not originally just a symbolic term used to describe the Christian new life with Christ as it is today, but was originally a term used to describe an actual mystical experience of rebirth and personal transformation (Myers, 2011, p. 193).

Orchid in rebirth has come to a moment of seeing-through. In this, she sees what is reality (Underhill), and this informs her life. The importance of such seeing-through has been echoed by many in-depth psychologists such as, Freud, Jung, Adler, Horney, Sullivan, and Fromm; their advocacy for seeing-through cultural ideas has often been forgotten or neglected (Watkins, 2000/2004, p. 217). Many traditions have practices intended to support a seeing-through, such as contemplative prayer or meditation.

One who has the mystical experience becomes an initiate, meaning there is hard work to do in the process of continual birth, death, and rebirth into new life. One has been

given the glimpse of the new consciousness continuing to develop one's consciousness it in a culture that unknowingly imposes a dominant consciousness requires work. Jung called this "individuation," by which he meant a process through which we fully realize our inner potential. It is a continual maturing or unfolding process in which the ego is born, symbolically dies to its self, and is then reborn as a fully integrated, whole Self" (Atkinson, 1995, p. 34). Orchid shared having been changed by the sacred experience and how this has continued; she continues her development process now. In critical events, these changes and points are only identified after the event (Webster & Mertova, 2007; James, 1902/1994). "I felt like I was, it sounds really hooky, but it felt like I was being born into my body for the first time."

The theme of rebirth emerged after Orchid has experienced the themes of suffering and death. In keeping with the theme of death and resurrection, Orchid leaves the old life behind. Orchid left her marriage and her old job. To be resurrected is having a new life and a new story about one's life. It became clear as I listen to the respondents that something has changed. I heard a change in their master narratives.

Doc experienced the divine in vision and dream. She spoke to a new way of living her life, a new path; "it's a story of how I found my spiritual path." A dream, for example, may reveal the possibility of transformation, although the power of the dream to bring about a lasting change in consciousness depends on whether or not it is consciously integrated with waking life (Vaughan, 1995/2002, p. 79). This kind of experience is one of union; for Doc it is clear this sacred experience began her spiritual path. The noetic quality is experienced where spiritual insights are gained that could not be accessed through the intellect alone (James, 1902/1994). For many this is an initiatory experience

that begins their conscious spiritual path. Therapeutic context can allow other narratives to inform how to understand a sacred experience.

The experience has life-changing consequences, (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83). In the relationship between Priest and the nun, birth and rebirth were experienced. The nun birthed into life beyond the life in the body, and Priest was being reborn into a new consciousness.

Angie, that was name of the girl on the retreat, was just killed in a car crash. I thought too, how ironic, you know. Now she was dying and going into a new life, I was buying her a birthday card. I had no idea I was buying it for her for her new life. To the observers it looked like I was in desolation, but it wasn't grief I was experiencing. It was profound joy. And it would just, it was awe. That's the only word I can think of. It must have been what it was like when Moses encountered and the prophets encountered God. It was just like, you know when they talk about the terrible God, not in the sense of being fearful, but invoking a, sort of a sense of terror. In the sense, oh my heavens, this – He's in charge of everything and who am I? (Priest)

In Priest's story, a space opened up another sub-plot and alternative story, another way of understanding oneself, the world, another way to define reality, another reality. An alternative story, not well storied or expressed, is thin in its description. White suggests that, although life is rich in lived experience, we give meaning to very little of the experience (2007, p. 219). Much of our experience passes by and is never known. Many of these experiences are "out of phase" with the plots or themes of the dominant

stories of our lives and thus are not registered or given meaning (2007, p. 219). These “out of phase” experiences are important as in the right circumstances; they may constitute what White names exceptions, or “unique outcomes.” White draws this name from Goffman (1961; in White, 2007). Each respondent had a clear understanding that God is simply present in what is. This is the third stage for Teresa of Avila; the experience took them to a stage of trust in God, a deep knowing of the existence of the sacred. The healing of God’s love gave each respondent new life.

Self-Identity/Transformation

Narrative identity is understood as an internalized and evolving story of the self that connects the constructed past to the perceived present and to the anticipated future (Wink, Adler, & Dillon, 2012, p. 50). A sacred experience wakes one up to knowing they are not their roles, ideas or beliefs that they thought they were. They are part of something of the sacred at their core. Their worth is not what they do, how much they earn, or their social position. Their worth is in their being.

“I felt like the being that was Orchid was finally being released to live and that’s when I became me”. This carries a new narrative a revelation of new life, a self free from the limitations of our socialized view of who we are. Orchid’s narrative identity is now influenced and shaped by the sacred experience. The Biblical narratives give us a relational contrast to construct our narratives. These texts describe human encounter with the divine; this is why they are called revelation. The Biblical resurrection theme of hope offers new life, triumph over evil (Corbett, 2007, p. 175).

Corbett expressed that all texts including the Bible are filtered through human levels of the psyche in order to be written. The wordless experience such as sacred embodied knowing, the ineffable felt sense of one's real self as a part of this noetic pure love, cannot be described by words yet reveals profound insights (James, 1902/1994, p. 414-415). The ineffable, noetic experience is wordless, and cannot rely on dominant discourses that exist, as most everyday discourse fail to know the experience from the consciousness of the sacred experience. Dominant discourses do not generally speak words that give the sacred real life. This sacred experience happens and may be outside of what has been formed into word and therefore there is no context to speak of it. In inviting the telling and retelling of the story not yet told one comes to explore and know their narrative identity in a new way. To put forth one's experience into the universe matters. A story told matters. I have sat with persons as they come to put words to experiences that they have never before articulated. I have seen their own words bring life to there very because they discover from their own experience a sense of inner authority. The sacred story asks the initiate to live into the sacred story; this is the story of their sacredness and the world's sacredness. This continues the mystical experience of relational consciousness and the ongoing narrative identity.

Orchid's narrative identity reveals she is changed; she knows through the sacred experience she is loved, she is of value, and there is a "God who will not let her go." She is born into herself; from this experience on, she lives her life differently, and the subjective sacred experience is made present to the world. She is participating in her life narrative differently as her self-identity has changed.

I need to contribute to others. I feel in a way a responsibility that I was given a gift that day and in being given that gift, my part in it is (to) be everything you can be. You don't waste it. That it's mind, body, heart, soul and that we have as much need to take care of our spirit as any other piece of us. I didn't know that before. As a counselor I know that all the individuals that come into our keeping one way or another, have that same need whether they're aware of it or not and that spiritual awareness is a huge part of counseling whether you're a pastoral counselor or not. (Orchid)

Mystical conscious emerges in her from the core of her being. Orchid engages in her own healing. She goes back to school to become a psychologist; in this, she is now in-service to the healing of others. Orchid had become aware of holding together both the everyday psychological dimensions of life as well as the mystical.

Orchid's sacred experience extended the invitation to become an initiate. Orchid accepted this invitation she began doing both psychological healing and spiritual healing and practices knowing she can live a meaningful life and support others in living the meaningful life. This invitation to become an initiate happens when the person experiences the embodiment of the Holy love. The Holy love embodied in us creates in the moment a relational conscious. The ineffable, noetic embodiment in relationship is a way for the sacred to manifest itself through us into the world (Underhill, 2000). The psychological job of the narrative identity is fundamentally to provide the self with a sense of unity and purpose (James 1902/1994, p. 414-415). Orchid's sacred experience provided her with a new sense of unity and purpose.

Narratives that achieve such unity provide a deep sense of integration for the individual and high levels of coherence have been shown to correlate with a variety of psychological outcomes (Aten, et al., 2012, p. 50). Priest's identity narratives point to ongoing integration and coherence in his life.

I think always now, when there are events in the world that seem distressful, I always think to myself, well, we're seeing one dimension of things here. That's all we are privileged to see normally. Occasionally we might get a glimpse of something else, but that doesn't happen a lot.

It's changed my perspective in general. Like I, I don't know. I'm just aware all the time of a different dimension going on in life. I feel much more connected to everything. And know that that's the more ordinary everyday mystical experiences, a sense which is more or less strong depending on the circumstances, but of being connected with everything. Like, I don't feel a separation between me and other people or between creation and me. (Priest)

Corbett suggests such experience is "to recognize that at the deepest level there is no separation between me and the other, or that we both participate in the same transpersonal field of consciousness, is a further form of spiritual realization" (p. 162).

Doc also reflects on this theme when she says:

I guess every time I have one of these experiences it reminds me that our physical body is like a coat that we put on to wear for a while. And that we are soul; so is everybody else. And you know, we're here to learn something. And this is like just one stage of life or soul. (Doc)

It has become very clear to me that awakening experiences are powerful and filled with a depth of meaning for the respondents and their communities, families, friends and culture. The experience itself is an awakening to a greater dimension and an invitation to daily surrender to live from this reality. Spiritual autobiographies characteristically create meaning and coherence in a person's life story through narration of the spiritual adventure (Ruffing, 2003).

Deepening The Story

I asked further questions that invited retellings for me narrative inquiry shares a similarity with contemplation or meditation. The narrative questions are a process of bringing into consciousness the inner landscape; this exposes social constructions, thoughts, images, emotions and experiences. It is similar to some meditation practices of awareness. Conscious thought as well as conscious meditation allows one to see what influences our narratives of self, other and society. Such disciplines help us see patterns of socialization. They bring into our consciousness how we limit reality in any moment. Spiritual practices are different from narrative inquiries, yet both desire to bring us into consciousness, both recognize the influence of social constructions, concepts, ideas influencing thoughts, discourses and narratives which keep us from rich descriptions and transforming narratives. Narrative therapy and spiritual practices work to free us from internalized constructions of what we are; or are not. Narrative inquiry seeks to bring socially constructed realities into consciousness using questions that invite the respondents to externalize these constructions. Narrative therapies also invite exploring the inner landscapes that could remain unknown and externalizing the inner landscape through transforming life stories. Narrative therapy begins with the known and familiar

and intends to scaffold questions while developing consciousness. Contemplation is to rest into infinite relational consciousness with God. This can be understood as “the restricted openness of the human mind that enables the subject to become conscious of itself in its orientation to God” (Roy, 2003, p. 49).

The research questions intended to open the respondent into relational conversations bringing into consciousness what has not yet been known or storied, creating the possibility of birthing new consciousness and realizing meanings not previously expressed or perhaps known. I was curious if and how the respondents had told their awakening stories to others; if they had what meaning it had for their lives and for the listener. I wanted to know if their lives continued on the path of the awakening consciousness they had been opened to. Through the invitational questions I learned about social influences on the respondents in relation to the awakening experience. I recognize that I, as the listener, was a part of the social world that supported their telling of the awakening experience. I used presence listening, as it is relationally attuned and supports an intentionally relational space for the respondents to tell their stories. Each of the respondents expressed gratitude for the opportunity to continue exploring their experience through further storying. It was obvious their “personal narratives are produced in conversation; are the product of a particular interview context, a dialogue between a particular teller and listener” (Riessman, 1993, p. 31).

Inviting these reflections made it possible to tell a new story, a story that arose from inner attunement in relationship. The respondents attuned inwardly in the present to their story at the embodied level which made it possible to speak about what is felt most deeply (Hamkins, 2014, p. 28). As my questions supported the respondents to recall and

feel their way into the memory of the experience more deeply a new story arose. The questions helped the respondents, 'to discover and nurture narratives that open up new possibilities for healing' (2014, p. 28). The awakening experience brought the consciousness of belonging.

I began deepening the story by inquiring: "what is the particular significance the story holds for you?" The question invited the respondents to explore if the awakening experience continues to inform their conscious way of being in the world. As they reflected on this question, it revealed how the respondents were thinking and living differently in their lives, since the awakening experience. This question, in a process of mapping, explores the experience's contribution to the respondents' lives (White, 2007, p. 163). Orchid clearly spoke to the influential role of her experience: "Number one, it absolutely solidified for me the spirituality aspect of being, and that we're not alone in this life. There's a power greater than me, or humanity, that's somewhere." Priest also identifies the ongoing significance of his experience.

Well, two things. First of all, personally it's helped me to accept things in a much more serene way, because I realize that there's a meaning to things that often I'm not privy to. And the other influence it's had on me is in my work of directing people. It's made me much more sensitive to how consolation and desolation manifest themselves. True consolation and true desolation is not from what the person says or from their surface emotions, it's from this felt sense. (Priest)

Finally Doc explores how these experiences are deeply significant.

I guess every time I have one of these experiences it reminds me that our physical body is like a coat that we put on to wear for a while. And that we are soul so is everybody else. And you know, we're here to learn something. And this is like just one stage of life or soul. (Doc)

This question gave me a sense of the significance the experience of the sacred consciousness is in their lives now. Stories reflected change in consciousness; change informs self-identity stories and re-authoring. Arising from this question I hear an awareness of spiritual consciousness that is ongoing. The initial awakening experience, as Granfield understands it, makes a difference. "The unrestricted openness of the human mind enables the subject ...to become conscious of itself in its orientation to God" (Roy, 2003, p. 49).

I also asked respondents whether they remembered when they began to formulate a way to tell their story. This invited a more richly described process of what took place in the respondents' inner landscapes as they sought a way to articulate their understanding. As the respondents engage in narrative conversations they are engaging in what White refers to as re-authoring conversations. This question looks at structure: how does one formulate telling the story of the sacred experience?

Storying allows for using metaphors to bring the story into the social realm and recover its significance in the social space. It can take sometime to begin to formulate the awakening experience. When a story is formulated it takes time to describe the awakening plot that gives structure allowing for a representation of an experience and how people begin to make sense out of an experience in their lives the past, present, and

future. As I asked each question, the respondents put the sequence of events in an order. A sequence of events becomes a larger story and process of storying. The questions I asked moved in and out of this sequence. The questions served to support the respondents' externalization of the internal subjective material of their experience in a way that could be understood and enter the social space and place of relationship. "I don't know that I actually formulated a way to tell it, at the time." said Orchid; "I think it just tumbled out of me. I have not told it for a long time."

The question invites the respondents into remembering. White suggests, "remembering conversations provides an opportunity for people to revise the memberships of their association to life and revoke others; to grant identity, and to disqualify other voices in regard to this" (White, 2007, p. 129). The sacred experience was not a usual part of social life, yet it changed each person. I think of how life experiences add to different memberships and associations in life that support our experience. I can also hear how Priest's story took time to form into words he knew the story but took time to find words before he spoke. "It took me several months before I really understood what had happened. Well, no, that's not a good way of putting it. I knew what had happened immediately.

Re-authoring is telling aspects of the story differently. Re-authoring conversations invite people to tell multiple and richly developed stories about their lives; these conversations can help people include some of the neglected but potentially significant events and experiences that are "out of phase" with their dominant storylines. These events and experiences can be considered "unique outcomes" or "exceptions" (White,

2007, p. 61). As I listened to Priest speak, I was aware of the ineffable quality of the experience he was referring to, wordless. It is clear there had been a necessary silence for a time as Priest at some level of being was forming his words out of the silence. This too was my experience. “The words lose the linearity of a spoken sentence and form into a whole pattern within the silence, a pattern that is not seen but felt. The known content of the prayer begins to recede and each word becomes a world” (Sardello, 2006, p. 113). The task of describing an experience that is embodied asks a lot of the teller, particularly when the experience is outside of our dominant structures of perception and scripts that story life experiences.

“When I began to formulate a way to tell the story,” said Doc, “the first people that heard these stories are the clients that shared their stories with me.” One of the gifts of Doc’s experience is that she could validate her client’s experiences, supporting them to story rich narratives. Furthermore, validating the awakening narrative in a positive story line supports the individual to not take on stories of diminishment around the experience. Doc expressed that earlier in her life she did not have a context to realize the sacred experiences. Doc understood the importance for her clients to have a place to share their sacred stories and have them validated. In our meeting, Doc reported that she was thankful for training she had received in being able to tell the difference between a hallucination, delusion and the mystical experience as this assessment, on her part informed how she might proceed with her clients. Doc’s personal experience and training gave her insights and knowledge beyond what most persons have when making meaning out of her own and her clients’ experiences. The respondents’ new telling’s are unique outcomes with an ongoing relationship of significance to the awakening moment. “It is

normal for persons to want to make meaning out of life. In the effort to make sense out of difficult life experiences, many clients find themselves confronting a crisis of meaning” (Pargament, 2011, p. 272). My questions invited the respondents to reflect and retell in ways that opened further meanings in their stories. As Orchid said, “Well, it is hard not to be able to tell that experience to people sometimes.”

I heard where the respondents were at the time of our interview, the social aspect of their story of belonging and their concerns: will the story be received, understood, given value? Giving value to awakening stories gives value to the teller of the stories. By acknowledging the value of their experience and what is important in their lives we support a sense of belonging.

That was the biggest thing. I couldn't, I've never been able to adequately express it. Actually it's probably only at this point in my life that I can talk about it with some coherence because for a long time afterwards I never could talk to anybody about it because I didn't know how to talk about it, and I think also I was afraid. Sharing it with my colleagues, it would sound like I was blowing my own horn, you know? (Priest)

Diminishing the story or the teller is a way of influencing which stories are told and what is left unspoken. All respondents shared the sentiment of the sacred experience as a story that was doubted. They experienced an inability to understand the mystical dimensions of the experience because there was no room for it in the dominant discourses within our society. Yet, as humans our social storying helps us to make sense out of life events and our untold stories have significance as well.

This was a part of Doc's story:

You know, I mean how does one explain? I mean how can I explain the music that I heard when I was ten because it was kind of inside of me. And who could I explain to that my deceased father tried to tell me something, but I didn't know how to listen back then, but now I know how to listen better because it's not actually in words; it's more kind of like an understanding inside of you, you know? (Doc)

In contemplative prayer, the process I experience just before I move into quiet and then stillness is a process of seeing-through. The process of seeing through our old stories and restorying our life is a challenge. Each of the respondents engaged in this challenge to bring the sacred story into their life story and reality.

“What were some of the events that contributed to the story taking shape and being told?” In asking this question I was interested in exploring what in the respondents' lives allowed or made possible the respondents' awakening experiences to come forward and be told. Narratives are formed from an event or experience that takes shape when space is made for the awakening story to be told. This question, central to narrative therapy, supports what contributes in a life-giving way for the respondents' stories to be told (White, 2007).

Mm-hm. Well, actually energy. I certainly would not sit down and tell this story to someone with whom I didn't share that energy. You know, this is such a, this isn't a part of me that I would share without trust. Absolute trust. If I don't feel that energy with a person, then it would not be a safe story to tell. (Orchid)

As I hear Orchid's answer, I reflect on the importance of persons who could hear the respondents' story, along with a sense of trust, influencing what is told to whom and our need for human belonging. Priest echoes this position:

I think actually it wasn't until I had more experience in dealing with people and, because I was, I would have been, how old would I have been? Probably about mid-thirties, it wasn't until I was in my forties that I began to recognize that there were a lot of other people who were having mystical experiences although they didn't recognize them as such. And I began to feel that maybe this wasn't such a strange thing after all. I could start talking about it and people would understand what I was, had gone through. Because up until then it just, it seemed so out of the ordinary to me and so strange that I was really hesitant to talk about it because it just didn't seem to fit into, at least it didn't fit into the way I had been trained in the spiritual practices which were, you know, ascetical practices which were supposed to lead you along this path and it didn't; we never talked about mysticism.

I think it's only when, I don't know when the shift occurred exactly, but something happened where people started feeling freer to speak about the realm of the consciousness and amazing things that can happen there. And so the atmosphere changed in the extent that I could feel comfortable sharing this because people would understand, you know? (Priest)

As the researcher, I hear all of the respondents' ability to be embodied. This is an essential component to knowing one's own experience in the process of individuation and

maturation, as this process of transformation impacts their thoughts and speech regarding all experiences including the awakening experience.

Yes, it really was. I mean that was one of the best jobs for me ever. And when I still think about it, I still think of it as being my favorite job. You know, people go, you know, don't you get burnt out working in emerge? No. I didn't because I heard these stories that I couldn't get enough of. I couldn't get enough of. And I love doing grief work with people because if people can grieve, most people, if they can like, grieve and open themselves up, they'll have these experiences with their loved ones. Not everybody, but most will, in one way or another. (Doc)

“What was it like to tell the story, how did others respond”? This question inquires about the relationship between teller and listener, the question recognizes how a story is received by the listener impacts the teller. Stories are shaped in relationship by the receptivity of the listener. In this narrative inquiry, “speech and practices are both structures, the language of practice aims to clarify the purpose of practice. This relationship suggests we should become more aware of our practice, as well as seeing practice change as part of this understanding” (Weber & Mertova, 2007, p. 22). Our practices change in our lives and continue to if we are in co-creation. Consciousness is revealing itself in our stories; to change we must be attentive to our language as it is a practice (2007). I was curious as to how the experience was influencing the respondents' practice of life; in the moment of awakening this is transformed, I wondered who they had told, who they had not told and why?

All the questions intended to support the recounting of complicated experiences. Within the relational inquiry, I, as the listener, was present to a place that invited lingering to experience the embodied and relational consciousness. Lingering contributes to the contacting and recovery of embodied and mystical consciousness and allows for the complexities to be richly described together over time. I asked questions that provided the opportunity to go back into parts of the experience that had not been told and understood. As Orchid comments: it's actually very important for me to share the story because it's actually been quite some time since I have shared this story now, and so it's quite a gift to have today and be able to share it with you.

When I invite the narrating of the story it becomes further realized. The embodied storying holds for the respondents a way back to the experience in the present moment from this consciousness. So in the telling they find their way back to the gifts of the awakening experience.

Because, as time goes by, I can get distanced from it and because there isn't a lot of opportunity to share it, and when life catches you up, like I told you, I haven't been very grounded lately and I've been just going faster and faster and faster. Sometimes it's easy to almost think that it happened to somebody else. I don't know if that makes sense. (Orchid)

Orchid recognizes her disembodiment and has gratitude for the opportunity to take time to become more fully embodied. As Orchid puts her experience into narrative, Orchid and I, the storyteller and the listener, are both transported into relationship. As Orchid and I connect in the relationship, I am aware, I hear her reconnect to the embodied

experience and consciousness through telling the story. “The relational narrative conversation is a re-membering conversation” (White, 2007, p. 129).

And I need to tell the story. It’s grounding to take me back through my own journey and the work that I have done, the transformation I have gone through, through the experience that was granted to me and the hard work that I have done following up on that experience. And so to validate myself when I get frustrated or frightened or overwhelmed, you know? (Orchid)

The responses that other people have had, the few people that I’ve told have been generally well, very similar to your own. People are affected, you know, with gratitude to share in it and sort of a sense of awe, but also, well, because I’ve only shared it with people that have known me for a long time and who love me, I think they’re also very grateful that I was spared and I’m still in their lives.

When I finally told it, I told it in a fairly safe environment to people who I knew had an understanding of the mystical and its place in the world. So, I felt awkward and I still feel awkward when I talk about it because, and the reason is, I feel that it throws light on me. I feel like when I’m talking about it, I feel like I’m making myself sound special and, when I’m not. Like it’s, I had nothing to do with it. It just happened to me. It’s like you read so often in the scriptures. These things happen to the simplest, humblest, insignificant people.

They didn’t earn it or anything. In fact, you know, often the response was why me? Or, why me? So I still feel awkward in talking about it, so I don’t talk

about it very much because I just still feel like it sounds like I'm blowing my own horn, you know. So there are very few people, you know. Like, I feel safe in sharing it with you and some other close friends of mine who are in touch with the spiritual dimension of things, but the ordinary acquaintances and that, I wouldn't. It would probably sound just too bizarre to them, you know.

You know I pick and choose who I tell these stories to and mostly I share them with people that are either spiritually seeking or that have a story to share themselves. Some people just can't take them in. And I know that previously I told you about one of my clients at this same hospital, this Hell's Angels biker.

You know he had the same experience. He went through a tunnel, he felt love, he didn't want to come back and then he was like, told: You have more to learn and he was sent back. But he couldn't take it in. He had no frame of reference in which to understand his own experience. He couldn't integrate it into his being. And in the time I worked with him, it didn't change him at all because he couldn't take it in. (Doc)

As I hear Doc's experience of this person, I wonder how his community received his experience, or if he told them, and what either of these influences had on his ability to integrate the awakening experience into his life. Doc's words captured an important reality of experience. She said, "It didn't change him at all because he couldn't take it in." The groups around us are a part of the shaping of our reality what gets known and what realities get denied. It is a powerful experience for anyone to have his or her reality denied. "From a clinical perspective, how we might understand the breakdown of this

meaning-making activity and its consequences for our relationship to our own biography, as well as our lives with others” (Fireman et al., 2003, p. 168). Our ability to tell coherent narratives of our life experiences is greatly influenced by what gets to be told or denied. Denying our life experiences creates incoherent disembodied life narratives. Our growth and development is greatly affected by whether we have communities that support us to tell embodied narratives from the present moment. They are told in relational conscious with our self, another, and the sacred. These all impact what stories will be told.

“What has it been like for you to tell the story? Has it contributed to your life in any way?” These questions explored the complexity and vulnerability of telling the experience to others, and how and if in telling the stories, it contributed to their lives. Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) argue that narrative inquiry awakens us-to our own stories, even though we will bump up against institutional narratives that may not all agree. For example, societal and religious institutions can hold different narratives. Yet the telling and retelling of stories allows for a shaping of that which reflects the respondents lived experience more clearly. The embodied retelling helps us deal with questions of who we are and how will we fit into institutional narratives.

Just in reflecting on that, I think, I need to perhaps create something physical that will do something that maybe will, like I'll make my potted flower, the orchid, my reminder. That when I look at this it will remind me and remind me to sit down and ground myself or get down on my knees and pray or do some of the things that came into my life through this experience that have served me very, very well, because since that experience my life has been completely changed. Completely changed. And things have started going right in my life. Not that there

aren't challenges, but it's been going right. Whereas before everything always went wrong. So, it's kind of a funny way to answer that, but it's that I need to connect to this story more often in a very conscious way. Telling it, but even telling it to myself, you know. And have ways of, a touchstone that reminds me and makes me connect to the story and what it has done in transforming my life and me. (Orchid)

The awakening consciousness that changed Orchids' life is reflected in her words. Orchid's feelings and beliefs came through in her description within the narrative and it continues to be transforming in her life. The experience of unity with the Divine was, for Orchid, an experience of attachment. "It is interesting to consider how these strategies may influence the cognitions, stories and narratives that we hold" (Dallos, 2006, p. 29). I can hear in Orchids' narrative how her life is now an attachment into life. She has touchstones that connect her to the moment, presence to discover and nurture new dimensions in narratives of her transformational story, and her attachment to the sacred.

It's made me conscious that in some way I am special. And I don't mean more than others. I'm special, different than anybody else because I think everybody is special. But most people aren't aware that they are special and that made me feel I'm special to God. (Priest)

In a culture that has lost a language for and a regard of mystical consciousness it is easy to deny its existence. "It is our bodies that require us to feel, to experience, to engage in community, interact with others as a part of the interconnectedness of everything, and so to suffer. No wonder we resist letting them do their part in helping us heal" (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2015, p. 202).

And you know what, some family members don't want to know. My father also visited my mother when she was in the Glenrose Hospital and she said to the nurses, I'm hallucinating. I want you to give me medication. She didn't, she could not accept it. She couldn't take in that experience and she didn't want to hear mine. One of my other brothers, he doesn't want to hear it. You know, I, one time one of his daughters, my niece, said to me, have you ever had an experience like this and I said, yeah. And I shared how my father visited me and my brother said, "why are you telling my kids this? I don't want you to tell my kids.

Yeah. And, you know, I so like the PhD program I did because it was a Jungian based program. Carl Jung. And also Lionel Corbett, who wrote the Religious Function of the Psyche, taught me a class on psychopathology and he spent a lot of time with us differentiating between hallucinations and psychosis and spiritual experiences. Like, how do you differentiate that in a mental health setting? That's great knowledge; not every University covers that. It's essential knowledge. (Doc)

"Would you say the story holds meaning for you and your life"? How about those, whom you have told the story to, has it contributed to their lives? Hearing the awakening story provides new meaning-making ways from which to understand and make sense out of our mystical experiences; this makes possible mystical consciousness. "One of the primary functions of a sacred story is to provide us with a view of the world, paralleling our own experience, while clarifying the meaning of our existence in the world" (Atkinson, 2012, p. 101). The "attainment to the numinous experiences" Jung refers to religious experiences of a quasi-mystical nature (2006). "By itself and without

any further reflection or interpretation, this attainment might well persuade a person life is meaningful” (Stein, 2006, p. 32-33). This has been the inner and outer journey of the respondents. This question invites storying that narrates a sense of security and solidarity in relationships (White, 2007).

Yeah. Well it definitely has meaning and has contributed to my life. I think I’ve probably answered that. I think it has meaning and has contributed to those who I’ve told. I couldn’t necessarily answer for them as to how, but I know that the people that I’ve told it to have been deeply touched and they are the kind of people that are spiritual anyway and they’re like minded people and so it’s going to go in and affect them and it’s going to add to their wealth of knowledge and understanding of self and the world around them. So they’re going to process it. They’re those kinds of people and if they weren’t, they wouldn’t hear the story. (Orchid)

I am suddenly aware of how Orchid’s changes in life touch all she knows and meets. Regardless of if they know her stories, they will experience her presence. We all try placing our lives in a context to give a sense to our lives; for those who know, it is another level in which this story can contribute. “The first is by telling the story of their contribution to a community. The second way is to describe themselves as standing in an immediate relation to non-human reality” (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 319). For the respondents the intimate relationship with the sacred is mostly not known by others, yet intimately known by the respondents. “I shall say that stories of the former kind exemplify the desire for solidarity, and that stories of the latter kind exemplify the desire for objectivity” (p. 319). Priest’s story reflects this.

I think the main way in which it's contributed to their lives is that it has validated their own experiences and reinforced the fact that this is authentic and it should be accepted and not thought of as strange or kooky, you know. And that, I would say, that's probably whenever I do share it, that's my main motivation, is to encourage and support people in their own experiences and to let them know this is not weird. It's quite a normal part of the spiritual life. If you're lucky enough to have an experience of that kind, be grateful. But you'll probably, you are probably already having experiences and maybe not that extreme, but try and get in touch with that part of yourself and you will find maybe that these things are happening.

So yeah, I would say mostly I share it to help people who are trying to deal with that dimension in their life. I'm sure you've had this experience too, that it sensitizes you to, it's almost like you can sense in other people whether or not they've had this sort of experience. It's something like, its, like soul talking to soul, you know. Yeah. Yeah. I think, you know now that I reflect on it a bit.

If I could sum up the effect in one phrase and this, actually this is a phrase that the founder of my Order used as the motto that he wanted the men he trained, he wanted them to be in the world, but not of the world. And I would say from that moment on I was able to understand what that meant. And, in fact, when I left the priesthood and I started, I went into business, was working in the business world, I didn't fit in at all. I mean I did my job and I did it well, but it was a foreign world to me. But the highest compliment I ever got was one day a co-

worker of mine said to me, she said, you know there's something different about you. It's like you're in the world, but not of the world. (Priest)

Doc also summarizes his understanding of being in a spiritual relationship.

Well, of course it holds meaning. I mean it's what makes life meaningful. You know, what would be life without this spiritual undercurrent that holds everything together. Like, what would be the meaning of life otherwise? Like, to me, this is what makes life meaningful, you know? And what was the second question then? You know the people that are open to it; it enhances their life also. It's like the stories I heard from my clients or other people. I go, yes. That's like mine, you know? And so the people that kind of experience, the reality of that other, that spiritual level of existence, it's real. And for the people that don't, it's not. And you know that's just the way it is. Yeah, different people are in different states of consciousness. (Doc)

To understand the respondents we can use Dewey who suggests narrative ideas of reconstruction of experience, to uncover meaning among our past, remake the past, this is, for him, the essence of growth is to develop and improve in the future. We need to do more than tell our stories; we must retell them, finding meanings not yet discovered (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

“Who knows about the story? Is there anyone who does not know, that you would like to know?” Atkinson suggests “some people are ready to tell their life story at the slightest hint of another's interest. Others, however, may need much more prompting or even prodding” (1998, p. 25). Atkinson discusses many reasons for those who are

reluctant to share their story. Feeling unsafe, intimidated, unsure and shame are just some of the reasons people do not share their stories. He also speaks to the benefits of telling our life stories. In embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness, addressing the need to find language through the very act of telling the story is essential. “For therapeutic purposes the new avenues for embodied connection give rise to a need for a new language to express them” (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2015, p. 206). This question allows for exploring the landscape within the problem of telling the awakening story; in this telling it opens spaces for this part of the story (Freeman & Combs, 1996).

Would the research respondents tell others the stories of their experiences? All three express hesitation.

Friends and family members. You know that’s a very interesting question. Yes, there are people who do not know the story and for whom I would like them to know the story but they aren’t capable of knowing the story. And so that’s like a Catch-22. They will never know the story even if I told it to them. That’s like wishing they were different people. It is. They are people who are very close to me. (Orchid)

Yeah. I think, well actually two people. One person I would have liked to have, told, it to was a fellow priest who I lived with who was also my spiritual director, but he was the director of our retreat house and kind of the director of our group of people who were doing this work. I don’t know why I never shared it with him. I shared another story with him-it wasn’t as dramatic as this-one but he was directing me in a thirty-day silent retreat. (Priest)

There are family members that I'd like to share the experience with. But you know, they're not open to it so it's not going to happen, you know. Unless maybe someday, you know, they are open to it. (Doc).

I hear in each of their stories a longing to connect from the sacred relational space with family and friends. Van der Kolk, in studying trauma, recognized the isolation his patients experienced with trauma stories that challenge everyday narratives. He suggested that “this is one reason why trauma victims often withdraw and why their stories become rote narratives, edited into a form least likely to provoke rejection” (2014, p. 244). From the moment we are born, attachment in relationships informs our sense of belonging. There was an intelligence the respondents displayed in their stories that showed their ability to story according to what their audience could comprehend. In our development, ordinary consciousness teaches how to fit into our culture. It is the first and necessary step. We expand our consciousness throughout our lives.

“Has the story of the mystical experience been ongoing; is it more or less influential than it once was? Have you played a part in this?” Questions allow for mapping the influence of the awakening experience and development in the respondents lives. The question is to bring forward the continued relationship the respondents have with the experience. Re-membering conversations are shaped by the conception that identity is founded upon an “association of life” rather than on a core self (White, 2007, p. 129). In the awakening experience, the respondents were connected to a larger consciousness than self-alone. For Orchid, “It's definitely ongoing and I have definitely played a part in it. I think the powers that be threw me the ball and I picked it up and ran

with it.” For Priest, because of his mystical experience he says that he has “developed a greater relationship with silence.”

The times that I don’t feel some connection I feel like I’m floundering or like I’m lost. I feel like the meaning of my day-to-day life starts to, it just doesn’t have the same meaning. And those times feel really lonely. Whereas when I’m doing my spiritual exercises and feel more connected that way or more aware, then I notice the little daily miracles, really because every day there’s like something where I say, thank you. You know? I can’t, I mean just like the synchronicity of life. You know, just, you may have a question in your mind and you turn on the radio and there’s the answer. (Doc)

Something about the sacred experience invites one into a consciousness, which knows the sacredness in each moment or the reflective space that supports another kind of telling of our life stories. Silence also gathers to make sure that we do not simply transfer our earthly desires to spiritual domains (Sardello, 2006, p. 20). “Within the heart we learn to wait in silence with patience for God’s words, which may come even when we have not asked” (Vaughan-Lee, 2012, p. 5). The mystical consciousness attunes one differently because the sacred story requires a listener who is conscious of listening for the movements of the sacred in one’s everyday life.

“Would others say they notice the way the story influences you in your everyday life?” The awakening experience for each respondent challenged how he or she previously constructed his or her identity story. The sacred experiences brought into consciousness a deeper story that often does not have an existing context in which it is

known. When this comes into consciousness it has an opportunity to become known and this changes how their narrative is constructed. Narrative construction supports expanded interpretation of self. As they recognized their value and experienced the pure love of the sacred for them, their narrative changed. Generally we exclude experiences and events that would undermine the self-identity that we believe we are. The sacred experience for the respondents was challenging their previous self-identity. This question may open up how this is currently in their life. “Re-membering conversations provide an opportunity for people to revise the memberships of their association to life: to upgrade some memberships and to downgrade others; to honor some memberships and to revoke others; grant authority to some voices in regard to matters of one’s personal identity, and to disqualify other voices with regard to this” (White, 2007, p. 129).

Orchid, who immediately made life changes, responded, “Oh, absolutely, absolutely, yes. They remark on it very often actually.” Priest indicated a less dramatic shift in his comment: “I don’t know. Nobody ever specifically said that to me, but people have sought me out for guidance for reasons, I don’t understand, but they sense something in me.” And Doc talked about the many life changes in her personal life: she had become aware of her personal impact on another level. “You know, when I’m attuned, yes.”

The back and forth rhythm of an interview creates a rhythm of inner and outer connection in relationship that reminds me of contemplation. While resting into the deep stillness I become aware of the movement of the sacred. Roy suggests “whereas the outward immediacy is perceptual, the inward immediacy characterizes our whole intentionality, including its openness to the transcendent” (2003, p. 43). He explores how

our “every consciousness of our self is at the same time the consciousness of a variable state of being” (p. 103). It seems the respondents’ answers reflect this statement of inner and outer, negotiating these landscapes the lived reality of our human experience influenced by our everyday lives and moments of connecting to the embodied knowing in the moment of awakening consciousness that informs something of how to live one’s life in the world.

“Do you have any ideas about the direction you would like the story to take in the future?” Atkinson has said that “An individual life, and the role one plays in the larger community are best understood through story” (1998, p. 7). In asking this question I was supporting a possible direction of the awakening stories finding a future place in our culture.

Yeah. I mean the key for me, when I said, I’ve awaked up to being me, was what is essential. Not what do I want, but what is essential? And the essentials were contribution, challenge and learning, freedom to being me. Just be me, and stop being crushed. Just to be able to breathe and just be quirky me, you know? Just to make a difference whether it was big or small. And to be able to live with nature and light and, I don’t know, community. Community is really important to me. And those were the things that I needed. You know, and then as I said, you know, other things, wants, love and, you know, all those things. So, yeah, that’s where I want this story to go. I want this story to evolve in such a way that I can fulfill those things as fully as possible. And I don’t know, you know, eke out a real sense of community in this place that I’ve chosen and make a difference, you know? And not be hyperventilating while I’m doing it. (Orchid).

Priest made a similar point this way:

To tell you the truth, I would not like to have another experience like that because it was so shattering to me. So, that's just being honest. Like it was pretty unnerving, I don't, but I'm glad because it's shaped my view of life and it continues to. It just, it just makes me feel like I'm being carried in this life. So in that way it saves me, that sense of being held and carried along. But, no, I wouldn't want to go through that again, although I didn't cause it, so who knows? What I learned was a new way of integrating what I already know. Or maybe not what I knew intellectually, but what I sensed. And now finally, at this point in my life, I'm starting to get in touch with that and let it guide me instead of planning and, you know. (Priest)

Priest continues spiritual direction and contemplative practices to be in relational consciousness, turned towards the sacred in all ways in his life. Doc agrees in her comments:

Yeah, and what I want at this stage in my life is to surround me with people that, you know build a life for myself with people who also see that side of life, whatever they call it. I don't care about the language; I don't care about the spiritual teaching or the religion.

You know the elders on the reserve, they knew. They knew I was connected. They said to me, you are the only person, the only counselor that approached us in the right way, they said to me years later. And, you know, those elders like, the Cree people have their own spiritual hierarchy and I met that

spiritual hierarchy that time. And they wanted to know who I was and they gave me permission to work with their people. I didn't tell the people on the reserve that. I didn't tell them, but some of the elders knew that. They were connected to their own hierarchy. They know something's different, yeah. (Doc)

“Stories are a reflection of that fact that experience is a matter of growth, and that understandings are continually developed, reshaped and retold, often informally,” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 13, 14).

“Has the experience of embodied sacred knowing contributed to your relationship with yourself, others, your god?” This question explores the awakening experience, the relational consciousness, and its influence on identity. Landscape of consciousness questions encouraged respondents to examine meanings, preferences, commitments, and so forth, which might be attached to the unique outcomes they identified. These questions invite the “respondent” to render an account concerning “the performance of alternative preferences, desires personal and relationship qualities, and intentional states and beliefs, and this culminates in a ‘revision’ of personal commitment in life” (White, 1991, p. 31). Orchid describes an influence on consciousness that changed her relationship with self and others.

It's certainly made me much less afraid of others, much less susceptible to others, much more valuing of self, more confident of self, more appreciative and respectful of self. Far more connected to the whatever, the powers that be, the ancestors, grandmother, whatever way you want to put it. I'm much more conscious of my spiritual self and the spiritual self as an entity, you know, that

goes with the physical. The emotional, the psychological, the mental, you know, the spiritual is a very, very big part that for me is all those others. You know, if I don't take care of the spiritual self whom probably I haven't been doing lately, it affects all the others. That everything goes wonky. This points to relational consciousness. So, yeah, certainly a raised awareness of me as a whole person and you know, even, you know, like, you know, even this thing about community. You know, I've always been aware of community and the need for community and how communities have been dying and everything. But even in community, there's energy and almost a spiritual essence that's beyond religion, you know? I definitely have an increased awareness of that. So, yeah, it's affected lots. All of my life, it's changed everything. (Orchid)

Priest shared his response this way:

Well, first of all it made me realize that my God was so much bigger than anything I had ever conceived of. It made everything I had studied in theology I wouldn't say call into question, but made it lose a lot of its significance. You know, I thought here we are. We're so arrogant, we're, you know, studying theology for four years and we've got God divided down into Christology and soteriology and ecclesiology, and dogmatic, and moral theology and Old Testament, New, and we've got all these categories where we're explaining God and it just got shattered in that moment. So I would say my approach to God now is completely irrational in that sense of not being without reason, but not according to the rational standards of the western world. And so I now look to

every tradition in the world for their perspective on God because He is so big that nobody's got the answer. (Priest)

Doc answered:

This is a way longer discussion. Geez, I don't even know where to begin. Yeah. I don't know, I don't know how to talk about, I don't, I mean what I can say is that without this aspect in life, life has no meaning for me. I mean I might as well be dead, right? This is, yeah. But at the same time I'm, these last few months, I'm feeling like I need to go to a deeper stage of embodiment somehow and I'm going, how do I do that? And at the same time you probably don't know this about me because I don't, but I have a chronic illness. And I'm really acutely aware of how my health impacts my spiritual attunement. When I'm really overtired, I can't be spiritual attunement. When I'm overly tired I can't be spiritually attuned. When I'm in a lot of pain, I'm not spiritually attuned. And so, I'm realizing that I need to create a balance in my life that spiritual attunement needs to be number one. (She is referring to the ongoing relationship of relational consciousness.)

It was clear the contribution the awakening experience had in the respondents' lives was deeply significant. In contributing to the respondents' lives, "re-membering conversations are not about passive recollection, but about purposive reengagements with the history of one's relationships with significant figures and with the identities of one's present life and projected future" (White, 2007, p. 129). It was also clear the opportunity to story their awakening experience consciousness allowed for finding ways to speak, and

explore how it continues to bring it forward a new world of meaning. Telling our “story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, and the unformed formed, and the confusing clear (Atkinson, 1998, p. 7).

“Has the experience of embodied sacred knowing made any difference in what’s important to you in your life?” “How are you managing to integrate this experience into your life?” These are questions of rebirthing that provide the possibility to reflect on what informed how they would live and tell the awakening experience. These questions are outside of how we usually think about our stories; they allow us to access the self in new ways, to go beyond what is already known, then travel outward to the societal influences of the story, backward into our history, asking what it was like to tell the story, how others responded, what was the relationship to those you told, what influences has the story on your life, in the future and forward in time and questions about what direction you want the story to take (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 70).

Orchid responded, “Oh, absolutely, absolutely, yes. Others remark on it, very often, actually.” Priest said:

You know I’m not sure if it’s made a difference as to what is important to me, as it’s allowed me to actually pursue those things because I’m not living in fear anymore. I think those things were always important to me I just didn’t know how to realize them and now I’m not so afraid. And how am I acting on them?
Well, I’m living it. (Priest)

Doc expressed uncertainty about wanting “to be part of like everything I do. But when I let myself get overtired or something, it’s not.” When she was in the hall with the

medicine man, she talked about overcoming fear and facing him. As consciousness shifts, so does our ability to live into the new consciousness. Narrating the new consciousness creates ongoing storying, reflecting on the influence of the awakening experience in the respondents' lives. As the attacks against Doc stopped, this indicates influence of the shared experience on the medicine man.

Priest, Doc, and I all experienced some level of shared awakening experience. It takes one beyond oneself into the larger whole. "Conversion, then is "the larger world-consciousness now pressing in on the individual consciousness. Often it breaks in suddenly and becomes a great new revelation. This is the first aspect of conversion: the person emerges from a smaller limited world of existence into a larger world of being. His life becomes swallowed up in a larger whole" (Underhill, 1911/2007, p. 177).

"Does this experience in any way inform you as to how you might want to be with yourself, or others? What's important about that for you?" I have come to this value question through a process of scaffolding; it inquires into a change in life narratives through values. The values the respondents speak too, express transformation of self-identity. In the awakening it is experienced in relationship with the sacred. This brought the respondents further into relationship with themselves, the sacred, and then others in this relational way. This is the relational consciousness experience. The experience reveals and gives one the experience of non-attachment to ideas. This is distinctly different, from the developed defenses that often become fixated, which each respondent named, before the initial awakening story. The grasp of the sacred experience was to bring them into a consciousness that reveals a reality beyond what they currently understood. This new knowing invited them into a living presence. The awakening

experience is an initiation process, which continually brings oneself into presence and relational consciousness with self, the sacred and others. The respondents created within their careers the possibility to be in relationship this way.

Doc said, “if I could just have lived out of that place of spiritual embodiment, you know really that’s the only thing that counts.” Orchid responded to these questions this way:

Totally is to just living, be honest with self. Totally, a hundred percent always and maintain that integrity at all costs, really. And with others I would say the same thing. In my interactions with others is maintaining my integrity and try really hard not to let them throw me. (Doc)

Priest said his experience has “had a big effect on what I consider to be important in life.”

Now that we are involved in raising these two young girls, then I’m very keen to pass onto them the sense of security that comes from knowing that we are being carried along in our life. Because I think that for children of their age, probably the most important thing they can have is a sense of security. It’s not going to, you know, ruin their self-esteem or anything, so I spend a lot of time trying to build up their positive sense of self and sense of security and then they can depend on us and we’ll be there to support them. And I think being retired; the greatest gift I have to give them is time. Like, I can just sit and talk to them and I don’t have anything, I don’t have to rush off to a job or something, you know. If they want to just sit, cuddle up or have me read to them or something,

what else is there to do that's more important than that? You are the most important person in the world. (Priest)

Rohr states:

Only when two come together, inner and outer authority, do we have true spiritual wisdom. We have for too long insisted on outer authority alone, without any teaching of prayer, inner journey and maturing consciousness. The results for the world and for religion have been disastrous." (2008, p. 5)

As the researcher, the inquiry was meaningful in many ways. I was curious as I asked the respondents. Asking respondents my final question about what this inquiry had been like for them, I felt privileged to sit and engage with respondents, learning from them as they shared their intimate stories of the awakening experience and how this mystical moment continues to inform their lives. I was seeking to give them an opportunity to reflect on their experience of our time together.

Orchid said:

It's been an opportunity to reconnect with my own experience and the value of it and the impact it's had on my life, and the transformation that was brought about for me and the possibility for me to become who I truly am rather than that frightened shell of a person that I lived as for forty years. You know, not surprising that I got to that point because it was so impossible to live that way. So, it's really been, it's funny that it's happening on Good Friday. It's kind of like a resurrection. It's been a gift. (Orchid)

Priest commented:

Well, it's been really good for me because I've never had a chance to go into it at that length before. Especially with somebody who, you know, understands the meaning of it and can empathize with what I'm talking about because I've never, you know, expanded it to that degree before. You know, I've sort of given hints about it occasionally, but I've never really had the chance to talk at length about, it so it's been actually, as I've been talking to you, it's kind of woven things together in a way that I hadn't before. It's kind of, its knit things together for me in kind of a nice way actually. It's allowed me to see the perspective of forty years since I've, well, I really appreciate it. It's been really helpful for me to have a chance to articulate a lot of this stuff that I never did before. (Priest)

And Doc stated:

Good. You know and I so appreciate that you understand enough of it to understand my sorrow of my not being to embody that more often, you know. And my struggle in trying to find a way to balance my day-to-day life and make the spiritual aspect, you know, number one. Yes. Thank you. Thank you for the experience. (Doc)

The sacred experience is often referred to as wordless. I think of the Bible: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NRSV). It can take a long time for word to become flesh, for mystical consciousness to becoming the actual ground on

which we stand to understand our experience. The mystical encounter awakening consciousness may be a moment of communing in relationship with God and gaining insight and illuminations on how to live. “Spiritual experience is expressed not only through language but in the immediacy of bodily experience” (Griffith & Griffith, 2002, p. 57).

A theme shared by the respondents was difficulty finding others they could tell the awakening experience to. Their experience of telling me allowed for developing the conscious narrative of the experience and further exploring the influence of the awakening experience in their lives. The interview process helped us to address some of the tensions regarding the awakening experience. The experience awakened us to notice our own stories and to live by them as we came into contact with dominant discourses and institutionalized narratives of the awakening experience.

As I asked questions, I was conscious of a respectful rhythm. The questioning process is not horizontal or linear, yet is sensitive to understanding meanings in each dimension of consciousness before moving to another dimension. In this sense it is spiral. It comes around, yet always to a different place. There is a healing that takes place in the telling of our stories and a healing that takes place in the telling of the story that is in relationship to the soul. “The healing does not take place in the same way if the story is not heard, if there are not witnesses” (Myerhoff, 2007, p. 19). In the therapeutic relationship healing takes place when the therapist meets the client in a relationally conscious way. Creating safe space within the interview relationship was essential for the respondents telling of the sacred story. It can be a process of relaxing into one’s essential

self. My intent was for this interview process was to support any healing that may take place, for anyone, as a result of the respondents telling their stories.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This conclusion chapter seeks to summarize the findings of this research and revisit text that supports meanings and understandings found within the awakening experience stories of the respondents. I choose narrative inquiry methodology as it invites the respondents to tell their stories of this experience, making it possible to find meaning. In this chapter, I summarize the findings of themes from the core narrative and the ongoing influence of the awakening experience on the respondents' lives. I look at areas of possible application and make a personal statement.

The awakening experience liberated and opened the respondents to a reality of awakening consciousness. It made possible the potential of liberation them from the never-ending concepts and constructs humans knowingly and unknowingly take part in.

Narrative as Transformation

To summarize, the respondents in this research found telling their stories was valuable as they expressed and put language to parts of their experience not yet formed and storied. "The psychological understanding of any phenomenon begins with the narrative, with the echoes and reverberations of individual history" (Kakar, 1991/2007, p. 6). In the interviews, I attempted to respectfully inquire into and listen to the respondents' experiences by inviting them to tell their stories; for this I choose narrative inquiry; I also used the lens of psychology and spirituality. In the words of Atkinson, "everything we encounter as adults that gives us a new and deeper meaning in life is spiritual" (1995, p.

xiii). This then is a direct connection to the levels of conscious development that bring us to mystical consciousness, and unity.

I was humbled as I listened to the respondents' stories of struggle and the moment of the awakening to a relational consciousness. This initiated and continues to initiate the birthing of new meaning for their lives. As they became conscious of what had been informing their lives, they experienced a death from the old consciousness and the rebirth of a new one. Their new consciousness liberated them from limiting constructs. Freed, they entered life differently having been transformed by the awakening experience. I used the written work of those who have lived and researched awakening consciousness and mystical experiences. I looked at a variety of authors' written work for guidance, their embodied knowing, and learned knowledge. It is reasonable to suggest in order to understand the sacred experience, the researcher must listen to the respondents' stories from a narrative perspective that holds a consciousness that can understand the spiritual and mystical consciousness as it is revealed in the respondents' stories. "Telling our stories," Atkinson maintains, "is an act of transcending the personal and entering the realm of the sacred" (1995, p. 11).

Birth of Self Identity

The respondents in this research expressed that their meaning of reality changed as they became conscious of what they thought reality was and opened to awakening consciousness Reality. They recognized thoughts are often embedded as truths we use to make sense of the world. Priest now saw himself as a priest and spiritual director living in the world. He left priesthood, married and took part in the everyday details of life with a

consciousness of seeing the sacred is already in the person across from him. Doc became a psychotherapist, and she continues to do spiritual practices that nurture the awakened consciousness. She supports others to heal and live consciously, seeing through limiting concepts, liberating others from narratives that produce living in fear. Orchid changed the direction of her life because she saw the reality of her worth. She could see clearly her trauma was a result of social constructions that entitle violence and victimization in relationships. The awakening reality informed Orchid of her own worth and others worth. She continues to live her life, informed by the awakening experience. Orchid has become a psychologist. She feels liberated from fear and the belief of not being worthy. She supports others to see through limiting perceptions, and to awaken their consciousness and experience freedom to live in the present moment.

The respondents' stories brought forward the importance of awakening stories for our culture, as stories can enlighten us and expand our consciousness beyond current constructs in our world. Stories make possible a way to bring meaning to the awakening experience. "It is through story that we gain context and recognize meaning" (Atkinson, 1998, p. 7). The thesis interviews were another step along the respondents' journeys of recognizing and formulating dimensions of the awakening experience that had not yet been formed into speech and story. Further understanding, claiming, reclaiming and acknowledging the meaning of their awakening experience was possible in the interview process. As I witnessed them tell their stories, I witnessed the mystic as one who is free from the limitation of old story and opens to what mystery reveals, throughout a lifetime. I explored the origins of narrative in human life and its implications for human conscious awareness. The work of Karen Armstrong invited me to read and reflect on human

evolution and consciousness. Armstrong looks at the history of myth in our world and discusses how mystery is central and has existential implications in our own lives. Narrative seeks to make the landscape of the mystery known through a storying process. Using narrative inquiry to explore the territory revealed the diversity of the respondents' awakening experience. Engaging in interviews with the respondents' as they told their story opened us further to the landscape of the awakening experience, expanding our understanding and meaning of spiritual and mystical consciousness. By telling and re-telling our stories we create further opportunities to make meaning and coherent narratives.

To support this research I relied heavily on Jung's ideas regarding the importance of myth for our psyche. I also used the transpersonal work of Corbett who integrates psychology and spirituality. I also drew from a variety of others work that contributed to understanding and meaning of awakening stories. Richard Stone speaks to the destorification of our society and how we lose a way to make meaning of the sacred experience (1996/2004). This affirms for me the importance of telling the awakening story as a way of re-storification, making possible understanding and meaning.

Two of the respondents chose careers in psychotherapy as it engages in increasing consciousness and self-awareness (Corbett, 2011). The other respondent continued to develop as a spiritual director. They each choose paths that supported their continual development. The research questions explored their relationship to the awakening experience over time. "As the individual psyche evolves through various stages of self-awareness, a series of basic structures or levels of consciousness emerges. Basic structures emerge in time as consciousness awakens, and they remain as a foundation for

further development” (Vaughn, 1995, 2000, p. 5). For Jung, “Consciousness is continually widened through the confrontation with previously unconscious contents, or, to be more accurate, could be widened if it took the trouble to integrate them” (Robertson, 2007, p. 68). This statement reflects the themes I found in the respondents stories in the research. The awakening experience did not take the respondents out of life; in actuality the stories revealed it brought them into life. Psychological and spiritual practices suggest ways to navigate the territories of consciousness. All of the respondents’ sought and participated in spiritual practices as a way to navigate the inner and outer landscapes.

It has been essential for me to look towards the mystics and theologians while researching this topic. The respondents and myself have all looked for teachers to develop practices that bring us into consciousness and help us to understand the mystical encounter. A mystical process is valued by many traditions, the retreat experience embodies an important spiritual principle: one cannot begin to perceive the subtle levels of reality without first quieting the grosser vibrations of the outside world (Khan, 1979, p. 37). Contemplative or meditative practices are becoming a part of mainstream psychology. Practice helps sort out created notions of reality, for the “Reality” Underhill refers to. “Everyday reality is so striking that one has to make a conscious effort to downplay it in order to see the other Reality that lies behind it” (Khan, 1979, p. 37). All faiths and traditions have practices intended to support development of those who practice. There are narratives of spiritual practices that help prepare us for everyday life. Jones says; “in working with the primal experience of alienation from Self and Source, the first example involves alienation, conflict, or division within our selves” (2003, p.

145). He suggests primal experiences are fundamental to human life and have both psychological and spiritual dimensions. “I think that being a spiritual person, a meditator, a woman or man who prays regularly, a person who communes with the natural world in a disciplined way, shapes the person I am, when I am being a therapist, and a teacher, and a citizen” (2003, p. 145).

I heard this movement in the respondents’ stories. There are many varieties of practices cultivating disciplines, which bring one’s focus and awareness from external to the internal. External beliefs internalized become thoughts, that become stories, that arise and distract one; without a developed conscious relationship with our emotions, they may sweep us away. Practices teach one to hold one’s center, the core of our being. “Depth thinking is the process of consciousness that descends deeper and deeper, you move from a peripheral mode of thinking towards the creative source of thought itself: ‘ex nihilo’, out of nothing, come creative thoughts. Here thought is uninfluenced by language concepts” (Khan, 1979, p. 57). “If you practice remaining speechless for a long enough time, you can begin to realize how limited your thinking has become by the words and concepts of everyday, middle-range consciousness” (p. 58). “Thoughts arise and take shape. If you watch the assumptions behind them you realize the need to return to the life force of creativity beyond words” (p. 58). There is also that which is behind thought, one becomes aware of when, thought no longer has all of the attention or answers.

The respondents in this research talked of their awareness of their awakening experience and embodied knowing, the inner relationship. It informed an unarticulated knowing of who they really are and did not have the consciousness to understand. Kahn

points out that Bohm, a physicist, refers to this as the ‘implicit state’ (1979, p. 58). The awakening experience initiates living in a more intuitive way. My research brought me to the place of looking to both the psychological and spiritual areas of study and practice that develop our understanding of our consciousness, unconscious and mystical experience. Both the psychological and spiritual engage one to increase consciousness and awareness. Each of us is an evolving consciousness. Research results revealed all respondents had an awakening experience that was unplanned, ineffable, and noetic (James, 1902/1994). “A kind of newness of “non-participation” is often a step toward something new indeed, towards a new participation” (Ferrer & Sherman, 2008, p. 267). I am reminded of the respondents awakening experiences, how in a moment of non-participation something took place that was unplanned; they were participating, however passively, with mystical consciousness. They all described moving beyond the known and familiar. When we become aware of this, our consciousness expands. The research shows each of them was changed for life.

Narrative methodology is a way we can learn from the respondents’ experiences and perhaps re-story our cultures and make room for mystical narratives. Narrative inquiry is interested in how we learn through our life stories and the meaning we give these stories. Meanings given are often limited by what is available within a culture’s stories. Steiner speaks on “development of consciousness and the importance of our awareness of the spiritual; non-recognition of this impulse of the spirit working in the inner life of man is the greatest hindrance to the attainment of an insight into the spiritual world” (Gerhard Wehr, 1990/1960/2002, p. 137). Insight was considered “development of self-observation” and “observation of the spirit” Steiner referred to this as “the

beginning of waking consciousness” (1990/1960/2002, p. 137). Spiritual practices help bridge the everyday consciousness to mystical consciousness.

Many refer to the split of our human and spiritual selves. The respondents’ stories share their personal struggles with this split. They show the effect of the awakening experience on psychological and spiritual work and practices of healing the split and the dualistic-mind the egoic-mind we think we are. Corbett proposes that the problem of dualism arises when our psyche conflicts with our body and suggests we think of psyche and body as existing on a gradient of different densities of emotion from a unitary source. Therefore he gives us the image of the physical body at one end of this spectrum, while the psyche is situated at a more subtle level of the same continuum (Corbett, 2011). Historically mythology has been a way for us to understand how to balance these differing sources.

Modes of Knowing

When the universe as a whole seeks to know itself, through the medium of the human mind, some aspects of that universe must remain unknown. With the awakening of symbolic knowledge there seems to arise a split in the universe between knower and the known, the thinker and thought, the subject and the object; and our inner most consciousness, as knower and investigator of the external world, ultimately escapes its own grasp and remains as the Unknown, Unshown, and Ungraspable, much as your hand can grasp numerous objects but never itself, or your eye can see the world but not itself. (Wilber, 1980/2000, p. 234).

For me the mystical experience is one of unity and wholeness, the momentary healing of our alienations. In this moment we rest in a knowing presence. Underhill says, “reality is there at the door, once consciousness has been lifted up to the level at which communion with it becomes possible” (Underhill, 1913/1992, p. 292). Paul Tillich (1951) wrote about it as, “the ground of being;” and Priest used this expression to speak of his mystical experience. “Some of the more recent work in psychoanalysis recognizes that mystical states lead to more rather than less integration of the person” (Kakar, 1991/2007, p. 4).

The respondents in my study experienced the mystery directly. They were changed. Their sense of self-identity was profoundly developed. They were able to let go of negative beliefs of self-understanding. Orchid went forward making significant life changes that were psychologically, and spiritually healthier, freeing her from the past. All respondents came to a sense of belonging, a new consciousness. The themes I explored in chapter four map this transformation. They became clear about life and made life changes towards a psychological and spiritually integrated life. Doc eventually became a Psychologist with a PhD. in Jungian psychology. She worked on a psychiatric ward in a hospital and eventually had a private practice and taught at a University. All have intentionally contributed to their communities. Their narratives continue to integrate all aspects of the narrative self, storying and grounding the non-temporal, the temporal, social and place in their lives. These aspects of our humanity are also aspects of our human vulnerabilities. With consciousness they allow us to become closer to our best human potential. All respondents discovered a sense of love; this love is greater than our

human vulnerability. Such love became more than an inner experience; it became part of their presence in the world.

Spiritual and Mystical Consciousness Narratives

Listening to the respondents' narratives asks something of the listener—one within who “will teach you everything” (John 14:26) and whose “law is already written on our hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33). This is essential because the sacred story requires a listener who can hear the movements of the sacred. Rohr writes, “All that a spiritual teacher really does is “second the motions” of the Holy Spirit. The first motion is already planted in us by God at our creation, (Jeremiah 1:5; Isaiah 49:1), and that probably gives spiritual wisdom both inner conviction and outer authority” (2008, p. 1).

It is important that we hold a position of presence to the awakening consciousness of another. Part of the therapeutic task is to nurture the awakening consciousness and encourage the client in the difficult task of understanding and letting go of those ideas and beliefs that hinder their opening to their potential core Self and the inner sacred. The respondents went through a process of death, liberation and rebirth after the awakening experience. The sacred experience stands on its own ground of being. In assessing such experiences, it is important to understand where the story comes from in the client. In some areas of psychology and spirituality there is an awareness of dominant world views which are inclined to diminish narratives of spiritual emergence and the awakening experiences. The therapist can listen with attunement and presence to the sacred experience and support integration and coherent life narratives.

I greatly valued the opportunity to take a class with Corbett, as he is skillful in integrating the sacred into his work. “Crucially, we also hear profound spiritual

importance attributed to material that the culture deems to be secular and nothing to do with spirituality. We do not have a way of speaking of it in a particular vocabulary. Our approach is simply stated: rather than dictate the way in which the sacred should appear, rather than appealing to traditional, to biblical authority and to dogmatic assertions, we simply try to discover the ways in which the sacred actually appears. Then to clarify the significance of this experience for the subject, using the experience itself as its own self-authenticating statement” (Corbett, 2004, p. 73, 74). The meaning of an awakening experience is not only for the initiation of the nonparticipant, it is also the invitation to becoming a participant. The experience comes to its fullness when a person develops their sacred story from which to make meaning and understand life in participation with the sacred.

It was my intent for this research to support the respondents by valuing and listening to their sacred narratives. In the prospect of learning how to listen and from where we listen, I gathered the themes and meanings available through the respondents’ stories. As we listen to the respondents’ stories we understand how the sacred movement is always present in our lives. I hear in their stories how they embraced participation after the initial awakening by continuing to learn through spiritual and contemplative practices, combining psychotherapy and spiritual practice. When a new consciousness is emerging, we ourselves are developing a new consciousness we are learning how to listen for spiritual emergence. From the open position of detachment from old narratives and old systems we can recognize instead a continual spiritual or mystical emergence. The respondents in this story experienced their own emergence into life as a result of awakening.

The psycho-spiritual transformation often follows the religious, spiritual, mystical experience. “This can involve changes in thoughts, emotions, attitudes and core beliefs about the self and the world, and behaviors” (Beauregard & O’Leary 2007, p. 291). The change in consciousness changed the meaning the respondents made of the world. Maslow named the peak experience, a high point in the life of the self-actualizer, during which the person feels ecstatic and more alive and whole (1962). Maslow thought the more emotionally healthy a person the greater likelihood of real experience. “The great lesson from the mystics is that the sacred is in the ordinary, that it is to be found in one’s daily life, in one’s neighbors, friends, and family, in one’s own backyard” (Maslow, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/679395>) The respondents in this study did not plan or expect a mystical experience as they went about participating in their ordinary lives. Orchid had decided to end her life. All of the respondents’ experiences had a relationship to death that awakened them into life.

Maslow’s work and other pioneers such as James and Hardy have shown that religious, spiritual, mystical experiences are commonly associated with a transcendence, with the personal identity and lead to an enhanced sense of connection and sense of unity with others and the world. This transcendence awakens one to the transcendental or spiritual self (Beauregard & O’Leary, 2007, p. 291). Practices of contemplation are intended to develop consciousness. It is helpful in developing another kind of listening, a deep listening to the sacred. This helps us become attuned to the skeletal kinds of movement within the sacred relationship. In the still listening, we may hear the sacred emerging.

Developing coherent narratives of our life experiences supports making meaning out of our lives and life experiences (Siegel, 2007). When we compose memory, the internalization of memory and experience along with the facts of our life into a story, this helps us become who we are. As Siegel described it, “Narrative integration is more than just making up a story—it is a deep, bodily and emotional process of sorting through the muck in which we’ve been stuck” (2007, p. 308–309). Narratives of the awakening experience bring forward the opportunity to integrate an experience that has been dismissed or poorly understood in our current cultures self-understanding. According to Siegel, to narrate our experiences is healing; it integrates the brain. Themes found in the awakening stories were significant markers of the spiritual journey. We live in a time when we don’t understand these markers; these moments of experience, so we cannot evolve the story (Siegel 2007). It is all a question of story. Stone (1996) wonders how is it we now need books to guide us on our inward journey, something so fundamental to most traditional societies. Stone names this as “The destorification of our lives” (p. 9). It is in the reading and re-reading of the transcripts a new narrative begins to shimmer through. I listened to the respondent’s stories through several lens, narrative, and psychotherapy, theological, spiritual and mystical. The respondent’s stories of the sacred experience are autobiographical in that the story has not yet reached its end. From the awakening consciousness storying is an ongoing part of life.

Spirituality And Psychotherapy

The combination of psychotherapy and spirituality offers healing and a awareness of language and meaning, this is important for the continued awakening experience of sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness. In honoring another's story we also hear our own story in new deeper ways. Myerhoff speaks of storytelling and the storyteller. She says the soul one finds in the storytelling journey is their own.

And the soul that the storyteller has been on its journey is oneself; one finds that this soul is oneself, the story of oneself in the story of the world, which is a story of the great cosmic round. It is the message of continuity, the message of connectedness of each life with the whole of life. And it is this that we mean when we say a life matters: that it has come from someplace and it goes to some place (Myerhoff, 2007, p. 19).

Therapists also need a contemplative spiritual formation and discipline to hold a space for the sacred in the counselling relationship. This is essential because the sacred story requires a listener who can hear the movements of the sacred.

This process is then one of mind, heart and body. "Consciousness is not separate from the body, the body is a portal for the experience of Self" (Corbett, 2007, p. 224). The awakening experience reveals something of the Self to those who have intentionally developed conscious awareness in relation to the awakening experience. The awakening experience includes the mind, heart and body, intuitive and instinctual knowing. One glimpses the Self. "Self is an aspect of the divine within the personality; the personality is spiritually determined" (Corbett, 2011, p. 163). "A spiritual approach to psychotherapy,

development includes the incarnation of the spiritual potentials of the individual” (p. 163). The combination of spiritual practices, psychotherapy and spirituality can have a healing effect.

Inviting The Telling Of The Awakening Story In The Therapy Space

According to Myerhoff there is “a mending, a kind of fundamental healing that takes place when a story is told and heard” (2007, p. 20). One of the gifts of therapy is that it can be a place to tell one’s stories. I was curious to know the experience of the respondents: did they have places to tell this awakening stories, would they experience value in telling the stories? Myerhoff speaks of a simpler time when everyone had a listener. “This made for the connectedness between one’s soul and one’s world. And being in a world where one’s story was known by others, went along with conscience”(p. 21). She goes on to say, “All creation stories tell of the birth of consciousness. The essential telling of one’s story into the world is the birthing of our own consciousness” (p. 21). This research intended to support the telling of the respondents awakening story. As Myerhoff states, “Life histories give people the opportunities to become visible and to enhance their reflexive consciousness” (p. 29).

“In cases where the subject is not sure of the nature of the mystical experience, the therapist’s capacity to recognize its true nature may tip the balance between rejecting the experience and valuing it” (Corbett, 2011, p. 74). When one has had as awakening experience it is a symbol of the possible relationship with the sacred. In exploring this awakening the therapeutic relationship can be a safe container. In my experience it was essential the therapist had psychotherapy and spirituality training and participated in their

own practices that inform them of this sacred awakening territory. Furthermore, it is helpful if the therapist is aware of developmental psychology. This assessment informs the therapist of the client's capacity to process life events, this of course can be somewhat determined in the initial assessment and ongoing assessments within the therapeutic relationship.

My personal experience was one of solidity, I was grounded into being and clarity; it was peaceful and strengthening of my being. I experienced the embodiment of what is sacred knowing and love. There can be a difference between faith in the Divine and an unwavering knowing of the Divine, and the Divine reality. In the words of Corbett, "as a culture, we are beginning to rethink our conventional ways of speaking about the sacred, but so strong is our cultural conditioning around the meaning of the word "God" that we seem to need permission to acknowledge that we are experiencing the sacred in our own ways" (2011, p. 75). Stories are more than research; the respondents in this research told stories that mattered for themselves for their communities, culture, and world.

Personal Story

In the moment of the mystical encounter the, respondents and I awakened to the immediate, intimate relationship with the sacred. I felt as did the respondents the reality of the sacred alive in our lives in that moment. The moment does not last, the memory, knowing and love do. From that moment on we were very aware, the sacred informs our lives, whether we are present to it or not. It desires our presence in relationship. Within the awakening we gained an unquestionable curiosity to know the sacred mystery and

desire to seek out a relationship with the sacred, while understanding this sacred is in all of life. For that moment in time this experience, revealed the grace of consciousness of divine unity. In that moment, we were liberated as we saw the constructions that impose fear, and create rigid and incoherent self-narratives and non-authentic stories. Freed in the moment, liberated from fear, we got a glimpse into the reality of the mystery. The impact was significant, respondents' made life-giving changes that enriched their lives and others. This glimpse informed me and the respondents of a life not yet lived, the soul had the potential to unfold more organically for awakening and bring the awakened spirit to the world through our lives and story. The invitation is for one to continually be present, open to living the presence of love. In this relationally conscious relationship, our consciousness will continue to experience struggle, death, rebirth, and transformation. We will experience life as continually storying and restorying. When consciousness awakens we come to know the sacred mystical. Presence to this knowing allows the story to unfold, emerge, manifest.

The wordless experience described the struggle of using everyday language to speak about an experience that is not in our everyday consciousness . Using everyday language to talk about an experience, outside of the everyday experience is challenging. When we use language to speak about the mystical experience, the same words used for everyday consciousness can have very different meanings, when the same word used is coming from mystical consciousness. The teller is attempting to use the available language, to story an expression of mystical experience and consciousness. Therefore the awakening experience cannot be known or regarded for the experience it is. When the

listener cannot listen from mystical consciousness. When this happens this singular experience remains unknown.

Storying from mystical consciousness is to attune to the sacred embodied knowing with relational consciousness experience. These words are drawn up from within the intimate experience of the divine within the entire body, heart, and higher mind. Words speaking about mystical consciousness convey the awakened moment, a moment of initiation to touch life directly. “Stories can bring us face to face with an ultimate mystery” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 10). “When we communicate from belief, it is an abstraction” (Griffith & Griffith, 1994, p. 48). To story from the embodied sacred knowing experience brings us closer to mystical consciousness. In this study, we hear both the stories and their ongoing influence in the respondents' lives. Webster and Mertova suggest, “stories allow us to watch what an experience can do to people who are living the experience” (2007, p. 20). Stories outside of the dominant discourses can challenge norms, known and familiar. “Ordinary dominant discourses often affirm, validate, and support our own experience in relation to those around us. They enforce norms” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 10). However, stories also illuminate us to what is possible to know. To shift everyday consciousness to mystical consciousness is to move back forth in a process of bridging everyday consciousness to the sacred consciousness. Spiritual practices done from spiritual consciousness can cultivate this capacity. It can feel vulnerable, in the moments, when positioned outside of the everyday discourses and cultural sense making and yet I feel compelled to seek the mystical knowing. The awakening experience, creates a desire within ourselves to develop these bridges and thus, live into relationship with the sacred in all of life.

To be in relational consciousness is to be attentive to what is unfolding in our presence. The awakening experience provided each of us with the lived experience and embodied knowing of the mystical consciousness. Awakening is ongoing; it asks us to contribute consciously to life's unfolding of the human spirit. Story is one way we can choose to bring our experience of the sacred forward into the world. "Telling our story, and sharing the meaning we find in our own life, helps to connect us more to the human community" (Atkinson, 1995, p. 15). The personal importance of telling the awakening story is that it has the potential to become a personal myth. "Without a powerful mythology to explain people's subconscious fears, they tried to rationalize those fears into fact" (Armstrong, 2005, p. 129). Such a personal myth, she asserts, "is what is most deeply true about our own experience of life. It is our own expression of those personally sacred and timeless elements of our lives" (1995, p. xv). Myth, then, helps us see the entirety of the world. It helps us stretch, to expand beyond what we now know, and to grow our consciousness through ever-spiraling levels. Myth holds the complexities of life as we struggle to understand life. Myth reveals life's answers as we grow our capacity to understand them. "The personal myth teaches us about the universality of life" (1995, p. xv). Personal myth is what can take place when an awakening story is given the relationship it needs to become embodied, known and actualized into our lives. This story told brings relational consciousness into our lives, our communities and the world.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO CO-RESEARCHER

St Stephen's College Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality

Dear Co-Researcher:

My name is Nola Sharp; I am a graduate student in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality program at St. Stephen's College.

I am conducting a research study as a part of the requirements of my degree; I would like to invite you to participate in an interview to further my research.

The project I am researching is the experience of embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness.

The title of this project is: **Narrative Inquiry: Telling the Story of Embodied Sacred Knowing with Relational Consciousness**

I will be interviewing three co-researchers for this study.

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the meaning of people's lived experiences of a mystical experience with relational consciousness. As these experiences are not the norm it can be difficult to put them into words. Within the public sphere we generally do not have audiences prepared to witness the experience of divine meaning...transcending human understanding. Such experiences permeate you with valuable knowing for yourself and potentially others. The experience of the mystical experience transcends human knowing. It is an experience beyond words and ideas. Such an experience may raise one's consciousness and way of relating in the world. Potentially the value of experience could be woven into one's private, personal and public spaces. Respect for the divine in the experience and the value of the knowing from the divine in the experience would not be lost.

If you decide to participate you will be asked to tell a story of a time you had a mystical experience with relational consciousness. The meeting will take place in my office, or at a mutually agreed spot and time, lasting between 1-2 hours. My intent is to allow time for you to tell your story, and answer a sequence of questions. If you choose not to

answer any of the questions your decision will be respected. The interviews will be audio-taped so they can be transcribed accurately and I can reflect on the interviews. The tapes will only be reviewed by me and a professional transcriber. Co-research involvement is confidential; the audio tapes will be treated professionally and with confidentiality. The audio-tapes will be destroyed at the end of the thesis project. All information that could identify the co-researcher will be removed and not be on the transcripts. Any confidential research information will be kept in a secure location in my office in a locked file cabinet.

Verification/review, when the interview audio-tape has been transcribed, the transcript will be given to you to review. A second meeting will take place to give you an opportunity to comment and add or delete to the material. You will also be given a synthesis of our conversation to review and comment on.

Through your participation, I hope to gain insight into the relevance of the mystical experience with relational consciousness. I hope the results of this research will encourage, acknowledge and be helpful for those who practice therapy using both psychotherapy and spirituality, and individuals whom seek support understanding them. The results of the study may be published in my thesis, presented at graduation, and possibly used for secondary research or articles. Practices of confidentiality, and the protection of your identity will continue to be practiced at all times.

Your participation is voluntary; at any time you have the right to choose not to participate in this project. If you choose not to participate, all material from your interview will be destroyed, or returned to you personally.

If you have any questions or concerns throughout the interview, questions will be welcomed. My number is 780-xxx-xxxx.

My Thesis Advisor is Professor. David J. Goa dxxx@ualberta.ca

If further questions or desire for conversation arise from the interview and you would like to explore them with a therapist, I am prepared to supply you with the name of a therapist who would honor your experience of embodied sacred knowing.

A consent form is included with this letter, should you agree to participate in this project.

Sincerely,

Nola Sharp

Thesis Researcher

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO USE INFORMATION GIVEN IN RESEARCH INTERVIEW

Researcher: Nola M. Sharp

Project Title: Sacred Embodied Knowing With Relational Consciousness

Method: Narrative Inquiry

Thesis Supervisor: Professor. David J. Goa dxxx@ualberta.ca

I have been given information about this project and the way in which my contribution will be used. I understand that I will be asked to describe and reflect upon experiences of embodied sacred knowing. I understand the transcript from our conversation will be returned to me for review and opportunity for further discussion. I understand I have the opportunity to review the researcher's synthesis of our conversations. I understand how the information I give the researcher will be kept confidential. I am aware my name and identifying information will be removed from all writing including transcripts.

I understand the audio-tapes, will be listened to by the researcher Nola M. Sharp and a professional transcriber for transcription. All audiotape material will be returned to the researcher and destroyed at the end of the project.

I understand that I can withdraw my consent to take part in the research at any time.

I give my permission for the information that I am about to give the researcher Nola M. Sharp, for the thesis project to be used for research purposes, presentation, and possibly secondary projects or articles.

Future contact: YES---- NO----

Signed by the Co-researcher:

Signed by the Researcher:

Date:

Date:

APPENDIX C

NARRATIVE INQUIRY: STORIES OF EMBODIED SACRED KNOWING

Researcher: Nola M. Sharp

You have been asked to reflect upon a story of embodied sacred knowing with relational consciousness. We will have 1-2 hours for the telling of your story and answering some questions. At the end of your story, I will ask the questions on this sheet. This should allow for lots of time, should you need more or less time this is flexible.

Questions:

- 1) Can you tell me the story you have chosen?
- 2) What is the particular significance the story holds for you?
- 3) Do you remember when you began to formulate a way to tell the story?
- 4) What were some of the challenges you faced?
- 5) What were the events that contributed to the story being told and taking shape?
- 6) What was it like to tell the story; how did others respond?
- 7) Can you say something about the people whom you told the story to? Describe them and say something about their relationship or connection with you?
- 8) What has it been like for you to have told the story? Has it contributed to your life in any way?

- 9) Would you say the story holds meaning for you and your life? How about those whom you have told the story to, has it contributed to their life? Who knows about the story? Is there anyone who does not know that you would like to know?
- 10) Has the story of the mystical experience been on going; is it more or less influential than it once was? Have you played a part in this?
- 11) Would you say others say they have noticed the way the story influences you in your everyday life?
- 12) Do you have ideas about the direction you would like the story to take in the future?
- 13) Has the experience of embodied sacred knowing contributed to your relationship with yourself, others, your god?
- 14) Has the experience of embodied sacred knowing made a difference in what's important to you in your life? How are you managing to integrate this experience into your life?
- 15) Does this experience in any way inform you as to how you might want to be with yourself, or others? What's important about that for you?
- 16) What has this inquiry been like for you?