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ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

THE DESCENT OF INANNA: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY  
OF THE LOSS OF SELF IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

by

Jane Doe

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN  
PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING

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BEEN CHANGED.

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE  
MASTER OF ARTS IN PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY  
AND COUNSELLING PROGRAM

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Academic Senate of St. Stephen's College for acceptance, a thesis entitled *The Descent of Inanna: An Autoethnographic Study of the Loss of Self in Domestic Violence* submitted by Jane Doe in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Pastoral Psychology and Counselling.

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## **Abstract**

Emotional and psychological abuse are often overlooked as forms of domestic violence because they are neither against the law nor necessarily visible to the onlooker. Yet, the daily barrage against the victim diminishes their understanding of themselves and undermines their relationship to the world. In this study, I use an autoethnographic method to explore the experience of emotional and psychological abuse within an intimate relationship. Overlaying my story with a variation of the Myth of the Descent of Inanna, allows the segmentation of my experiences into seven clear categories. Although these 'gates' make for a non-linear story telling method, they allow for a means to understand the implications of emotional and psychological abuse on the various aspects of my own life. These gates are labeled (a) control; (b) objects; (c) comfort; (d) community; (e) identity; (f) madness, and; (g) death. They can be used to not only understand the descent of an individual in domestic violence, but also in the ascent – the recovery from abuse.

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## Chapter One - Introduction

*I'm sitting on my couch in my little one bedroom apartment. It's delightfully quiet. I live alone now. No husband. No child. I am neither full time mother nor full time wife. I am no longer living on a counter-culture farm. I am no longer growing old with someone. I am no longer responsible for the day to day needs of another. I feel peace ... a peace that comes from the surprising lack of fear. No one will yell at me today. No one will berate me. No one will threaten me, make me feel small, tell me repeatedly what a horrible person I am. But in the quiet, with no one to tell me, I'm no longer certain who I am. I am only myself. With no idea what the future holds. Where once there were many ideas, now there is only a void – a void waiting for something to fill it, but I have no idea what that will be. I feel both lost and found; on a precipice, but safe; grounded yet afloat. I am no longer who I thought I was but not yet certain who I will be. (Journal Entry: Month 3, Year 4)*

Despite public education, work by social service and police agencies, and the judicial system, intimate partner violence (IPV) continues to exist in homes across Canada. In fact, journalist Brian Vallee (2007) reports that approximately 500 women were killed in Canada by their intimate partners between 2000 and 2006. The Canadian Women's Foundation website (2013/02/11) reports that one woman is killed every six days in Canada by their current or previous intimate partners (<http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>). These statistics are staggering to me, as they should be. Broad questions about how one becomes involved in a violent relationship emerge, as do questions about the overall impact of IPV on women.

Realizing that every story is unique, my interest lies in the question of the descent of a woman involved in a relationship where intimate partner violence exists. In particular, I am interested in emotional and psychological abuse that is typically expressed verbally by the abusive person, and how ongoing emotional and psychological abuse can contribute to the loss of self, piece by piece. Utilizing an autoethnographical

approach, the purpose of this research is to explore how one might lose parts of oneself during the descent into emotional violence with an intimate partner. I will explore my personal experience of living in what I believe to be an emotionally and psychologically abusive relationship and explore my own descent. Questions that emerge include: “What are the parts of myself that I lost?”; “How were those parts removed from my being?” and “Can those parts be categorized and labeled?”

While I was in this relationship, I maintained a daily journal. This journal will provide me with the field notes necessary to trace my own loss of self. Through analysis of these journals, I will categorize the ways in which the essence of who I was at the time began to disintegrate. I will be working with the Sumerian myth of the *Descent of Inanna* to interpret this loss of self. The story of Inanna will serve as a metaphor for the loss of self in this investigation.

### **Methodology**

I will be using an autoethnographic methodology. An ethnography is the study of a culture from within. It can be found in many anthropological and human ecological research projects. “Auto”, as the study of the self, places the self within a specific cultural context and reflexively explores the culture from within. In the context of my thesis, I will examine the culture of intimate partner violence from within – that is, from my personal and lived experience of it. I hope to understand how I, (a professional, educated, feminist), could find myself losing more and more of how I had previously defined myself. Olson (2004) referred to this enmeshment within a relationship noting

that self-identity becomes lost or enmeshed with that of the abusive partner. I hope to explore this loss of self from an academic perspective, applying existing literature to my own experience.

An autoethnographic study is not just an autobiographical writing, but reflects the interplay and place of the personal experience within the cultural environment as a way of understanding the social context (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Glesne, 2006; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Ellis (2009) suggested “(a)utoethnographies show people in their process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and what their struggles mean” (p. 317). An autoethnographic study reflexively studies one's personal story within the context of a culture; it allows for and recognizes the power of the personal telling of a story and invites the reader to experience the author's experience.

For approximately two years I was in an intimate relationship that I came to describe as emotionally and psychologically abusive. During that time I kept a journal where I recorded daily events as well as my thoughts and feelings. These journals will serve as field notes for this investigation (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2009). Through the analysis of these field notes, I will explore themes that arise to understand the topic of loss of self .

The literature review specifically discusses women's loss of identity and self. For the purpose of this thesis, I deepened into the myth of the Descent of Inanna with the intention to determine the extent to which the structure of the gates offers a means to understand my personal descent in an emotionally abusive relationship. Through the autobiographical telling of my own experience, my intention is to examine the validity and utility of the metaphor of gates as a tool for understanding the impact of psychological and emotional abuse on me.

## The Descent of Inanna

An ancient Sumerian myth tells the story of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, who wants to visit Her sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld. Inanna knows that any descent into the underworld is perilous, and there is always a risk that one will not return from such a journey. Perera (1981) noted “These deepest descents lead to radical reorganization and transformation of the conscious personality” (p. 50). Inanna advises her faithful servant, Ninshubur, that if She does not return, Ninshubur must do everything possible to seek help. Inanna gives specific instructions to Ninshubur on what he must do if She does not return (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983). Then Inanna dons Her necessary garments for such a descent. According to Wolkstein and Kramer, these are called “me”:

She placed the *shugurra*, the crown of the steppe, on her head.  
She arranged the dark locks of hair across her forehead.  
She tied the small lapis beads around her neck,  
Let the double strand of beads fall to her breast;  
And wrapped the royal robe around her body.  
She daubed her eyes with ointment called “Let him come,  
Let him come”,  
Bound the breastplate called “Come, man, come” around her chest,  
Slipped the gold ring over her wrist,  
And took the Lapis measuring rod and line in her hand.

1983, p. 53.

Upon Her approach to the first gate, Inanna requests entry to Erishkigal’s world. The gatekeeper, Neti, seeks approval from Erishkigal to allow Inanna entry. Erishkigal instructs Neti to ask Inanna to remove an item of clothing at each gate. In this way “Let the holy priestess of heaven enter bowed low” (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, p. 57). And so, as She descends into the underworld, Inanna passes through seven gates and at each gate, She leaves behind an item of jewelry or clothing (Meador, 2000; Perera, 1981; Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983).

In an adapted version of this story, at each gate, instead of items of clothing or jewelry, Inanna journeys with us and we are asked to examine and extricate parts of ourselves from our soul (Beshderen, 1997). According to Beshderen (1997), these gates are called control, objects, comfort, community, identity, madness, and death (pp. 46-48). At the first gate, Inanna's crown is removed; Beshderen called this gate control, where one surrenders the ability to plan their personal life. At the second gate, Inanna loses her small lapis beads from her neck (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983). Beshderen called this the gate of objects, where one gives up possessions, personal wealth; the things that s/he worked hard to attain. At the third gate, Inanna's double strand of beads are removed from her chest (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983); for Beshderen, this gate is called the gate of comfort, where one gives up those things in the world that bring comfort, that soothe. At the fourth gate, Inanna's breastplate is taken (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983); Beshderen called this the gate of community, where one gives up those relationships that stabilized, offered feedback, support, and love. At the fifth gate, Inanna's gold wrist ring is taken from her (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983); Beshderen called this the gate of identity, where one gives up the way that s/he sees self in the world - work, name, reputation. According to Wolkstein and Kramer (1983), at the sixth gate, Inanna's lapis measuring rod and line are taken from her; this is called the gate of madness, where one relinquishes memory – that is, the ability to understand how or why she or he is at this place. It is the forgetting of where and why you *are* (Beshderen, 1997). And finally, the seventh gate, the gate of death, Inanna's robe is removed (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983) and Beshderen suggested

one faces mortality, and questions whether he or she will survive this descent. With Inanna, we find ourselves at the gate to the Underworld with virtually nothing left of us. We are hung on a meat hook to rest.

It is important and interesting to note that in the early poems of Inanna, She does not willingly hand Her belongings over to Neti, the gate keeper. Instead, each of Her belongings is taken from Her and each time She protests against the taking (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983). Equally important is that Inanna willingly made the decision to begin the descent and at each gate She might have refused to hand over Her belongings and ascended to the world above. Instead She continued Her descent.

The myth actually continues with Inanna's rescue plan kicking in. As requested, when Inanna does not return to the world above, Ninshubur seeks out assistance and collects a small band of loyal subjects to find Inanna, to revive Her, and to bring Her out of the underworld. As She ascends through the gates, She collects Her belongings again, however is warned that "no one escapes from the underworld unmarked" (Wokstein & Kramer, 1983, p. 68). And so it is for a woman exiting a relationship where IPV exists. This thesis will not include my ascent; there is insufficient space / time to explore that aspect of my own story, however the study of ascension is vitally important in planning community treatment and support for individuals leaving abusive relationships.

I first encountered Inanna in my early explorations of eco-feminist Goddess traditions, including the study of witchcraft. Through the practice of guided meditations or "trances", I have journeyed into the underworld as a method of exploring various aspects of my own life. I have found this journey to be a deeply reflective experience, and have developed an abiding bond with Inanna and with Her sister, Erishkegal, during these

journeys. In a Christian culture, one might understand this bond as being similar to a personal relationship with Jesus. This means that I carry an ongoing dialogue with Inanna; I sing Her songs and feel comfort in my connection to Her. I reflect on the lessons She has taught me through her willingness to descend and her strength to ascend again. Inanna seems to be alone in Her descent; however, She is aware that She has Ninshubur waiting to act if needed. Also, Inanna relies on Her allies when it comes time to make Her escape.

## Chapter Two - Literature Review

In the year that I spent writing this thesis, the statistics mentioned on page one would suggest a minimum of 52 women were killed by their intimate partners in Canada. In the time frame that it took me to complete my Master's Degree, over 200 women will have died at the hands of their current or previous intimate partners.

How is it that the “civilized” world can allow such destructive behaviours to continue? Many theories relate to patriarchal systems and dominance by male power interests. Despite advances of the Feminist Movements, people are conditioned, in many ways, to believe that men are dominant over families, including women and children, (Doyle, 1995; Flood & Pease, 2009; Herman, 1992; Olson, 2004). Herman (1992) described that rape was the initial focus of the feminist movement's transitioning into addressing violence against women. Feminists' exploration of sexual assault by strangers led them into further discussions of date rape and marital rape. This naturally progressed to discussions about other forms of violence within intimate relationships. Herman went on to discuss the trauma experienced by women living in violent relationships, comparing the trauma to that of war veterans. She stated, “The subordinate condition of women is maintained and enforced by the hidden violence of men” (p 32).

Despite apparent progression in the Western world towards equalizing the status between men and women, sex role socialization continues and is reinforced by the interests of patriarchal society (Doyle, 1995; Flood & Pease, 2009; Olson, 2004).

Sex-role socialization perpetuates a dualistic social construction of gender (...) whereby, as the dominant members, males are viewed as superior. Women, socialized to

be relationship-keepers, learn that it is their responsibility to maintain relational harmony – it becomes a part of their sense of self and self-worth (Olson, 2004, p. 20).

Flood and Pease (2009) invited us to consider two factors that influence attitudes about violence towards women – gender and culture. They further suggested that attitude formation occurs at four levels: individual, community, organizational, and societal (p. 125). Vives-Cases, et al (2009) followed a similar train of thought, agreeing with Heise (1998) about the “multi-dimensional or ecological explanatory model” (p. 172). This model presents four concentric circles: the microsystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and personal history (p. 172). Both models suggest that violence against women does not occur in isolation and is rather, a social condition that needs to be addressed at many levels. Flood and Pearse (2009) argued, “There is consistent evidence of an association between violence-supportive beliefs and values and the perpetration of violent behaviour, at both individual and community levels” (p. 126).

Research also suggests that there is a direct correlation between men’s patriarchal views of family and dominance and their likelihood to initiate and use violence within the family (Flood & Pearse, 2009; Vives-Cases, Gil-Gozalet, & Carrasco-Portine, 2009).

In general, men are more likely than women to agree with myths and beliefs supportive of violence against women, perceive a narrower range of behaviours as violent, blame and show less empathy for the victim, minimize the harms associated with physical and sexual assault and see behaviours constituting violence against women as less serious, inappropriate or damaging (Flood & Pearse, 2009).

Likewise, women are less likely to report violence perpetrated against them if they hold “traditional” gender role stereotypes. They are more likely to “self-silence” and to blame themselves for the violence. As a result, they seem more likely to suffer long term emotional and psychological effects (Flood & Pearse, 2009). One of the many concerns surrounding the social acceptance of gender roles and violence is the potential for counselors, police, and other professionals to misdiagnose or not recognize the signs of intimate partner violence.

The issue here is not so much that some counselors didn’t understand the dynamics of control in a relationship; it is that the culture has sanctioned the control of women to such an extent that a therapist might unwittingly advise a human being already suffering greatly to act like a slave (Evans, 1993).

### **Definitions**

When talking about Intimate Partner Violence, one often considers physical and/or sexual violence. For the purposes of this thesis I will primarily be discussing emotional / psychological abuse; however much of the literature includes physical battering with psychological / emotional abuse. One of the difficulties in trying to define psychological abuse is that there is no available standardized definition. When discussing physical violence in the home, one is talking about activities that contravene the Criminal Code or border on contravening the Criminal Code. Psychological abuse of adults is not against the law and can be difficult to prove (Burks, 2006). Follingstad (2009) noted “scales purporting to measure psychological abuse range widely in terms of the categories represented” (p. 272). Follingstad also noted that most scales are developed

from self-reports of one half of a couple in a psychologically abusive relationship; and the information collected is information about “certain behaviours *designated by the individual researcher as psychological abuse*” (p. 273). Follingstad suggested that researcher bias about what are and are not psychologically abusive behaviours influence the types of questions asked.

Evans (1993) believed that verbally abusive behaviours are indications of a perpetrator’s need to control his partner; she noted that emotionally controlling behaviour is demonstrated by verbal abuse, body language and deprivation (of goods, finances, the perpetrator’s time, etc). Evans (1996) also suggested that verbal abuse is “words that attack or injure, that cause one to believe the false, or that speak falsely of one” (p. 81).

Evans (1993) believed that the purpose of psychologically abusive behaviours is to exert control in the relationship. She suggested that there are eight distinct means that one might be *controlled* in a relationship. This includes: (a) having one’s time controlled (i.e. the controlling partner is chronically late or doesn’t consult their partner about how they spend their time); (b) having one’s space controlled, (i.e. invasion of privacy, sleep, quiet or alone time); (c) having the material resources of the home controlled (i.e. finances); (d) feeling controlled through the partner’s body language (i.e. the partner’s withdrawal of affection and time, threatening behaviours, withdrawal of physical intimacy, forced physical intimacy); (e) having one’s reality defined by another (i.e. being told what is and isn’t true); (f) having one’s motives or intentions defined by another (i.e. being told why one is thinking, feeling, acting in a certain manner); and, (g) having one’s status determined by another (i.e. being told that one is second class) (p. 33 – 37)

Burks (2006) described six methods of “covert” abuse. These are: (a) discounting i.e. having one’s accomplishments minimized; (b) negation (i.e. restating positive perspectives into negative ones); (c) projections and accusation (i.e. blaming another for one’s own feelings and actions); (d) denial of abuse, leaving one doubting their own experience; (e) negative labeling (i.e. being told that one is inferior in some way); (f) subtle threats of physical and/or emotional abandonment (p. 17-18).

It is possible to become even more specific about categories of psychological / emotional abuse. Here are 15 more specific tactics: Withholding, countering, discounting, abuse disguised as jokes, blocking and diverting, accusing and blaming, judging and criticizing, trivializing, undermining, threatening, name calling, forgetting, ordering, denial, and abusive anger (Evans, 1983, 1996).

Murphy and Hoover (2001) incorporated many of these characteristics into four general types of abuse. The first is described as *restrictive engulfment*, which “involves tracking, monitoring, and controlling the partner’s activities and social contacts along with efforts to squelch perceived threats to the relationship” (p. 41). The second, *hostile withdrawal* entails “avoidance of the partner during conflict and withholding of emotional availability or contact with the partner in a cold or punitive fashion” (p. 41). The third type, *denigration*, “involves humiliating and degrading attacks on the partner’s self-esteem” (p. 42) and the fourth, *dominance and intimidation* “involves threats, property violence, and intense verbal aggression” (p. 42).

In trying to devise a comprehensive definition, O’Leary and Maiuro (2001) observed:

Domestic violence is now viewed as a cluster or pattern of interrelated behaviours, which can not only impact another person's freedom and rights but also affect various aspects of physical health and emotional well-being. A comprehensive definition of domestic violence now includes all behaviours that can exert physical force to injure, control, or abuse an intimate or family member, forced or coerced sexual activity, destruction of property, acts which threaten or abuse family pets, as well as nonphysical acts that threaten, terrorize, personally denigrate, or restrict freedom (p. ix-x).

Although psychological / emotional abuse does not always lead to physical violence, emotional abuse typically precedes physical violence in an intimate relationship (Evans, 1996; O'Leary, 2001). One of the difficulties in identifying situations where psychological / emotional abuse is occurring is that there are very few outward indicators. Yet, it can be equally, if not more, painful than physical violence (Evans, 1996).

These definitions suggest that emotional / psychological abuse in an intimate relationship can be seen by the degree to which one partner controls another's activity within the home and also within the community. Emotional and psychological abuse are reflected by the abusive partner systematically engaging in behaviours that denigrate and injure the recipient's self-esteem, sense of self, and sense of belonging. This can happen by interfering in the recipient's involvement in community and employment; by interfering in the manner in which the recipient of the abuse tries to make sense of the world around her; and by the use of threats, coercion, name-calling, and sabotaging of successes.

## **Understanding the Dynamics**

One might find themselves wondering how it is that an individual *chooses* to be in an abusive relationship. Evans (1996) offered the metaphor of the frog in the pot of boiling water – if a frog were placed in a pot of boiling water, the frog will attempt to jump out. However, if the frog was in a pot of cold water and the temperature slowly rises, the frog will boil to death without realizing what is happening. Similarly, individuals do not purposely choose to become involved with someone who is psychologically or emotionally abusive. Rather, they select partners who are courting them, showing them their best side (Evans, 1996). Doyle (1995) suggested that when one attaches romantic symbolism to another, the relationship can become filled with metaphysical meaning. Along with this magic making in love relationships, Olson (2004) noted that social constructionist theory suggests that we come to know ourselves through the perspectives that others offer about us. She noted, however, that during the courting stage of the relationship she experienced no warnings her partner was abusive: “I cannot identify a moment in these very early stages when I should have seen a sign of what was to come” (p. 12). Herman (1992) drew a comparison between domestic violence and a hostage situation, suggesting that “a hostage is taken by surprise and is initially suspicious and untrusting ... in domestic violence ... the victim is taken prisoner gradually by courtship” (p. 82).

## **Mutuality**

If a woman views her partner with love and kinship, and if she derives pride and self-esteem by sustaining a positive relationship, it is reasonable that she will do what she

can to sustain that relationship (Evans, 1993, 1996; Herman 1992), To understand this, one must consider that females are more likely to view relationships from a position of *mutuality* – that is, they seek to co-create their environment. Women are more likely to consult others in their day to day affairs; to use consensual kinds of decision making; to view themselves through the eyes of the other. (Evans, 1993, 1996; Sackett & Saunders, 2001). While women are more likely to view themselves as *relational*, men are more likely to view themselves as *individualistic* (Kashima, Kim, Gelfand, Yamaguchi, Choi, & Yuki, 1995; Knox, 2006). Knox (2006) pointed out women are more likely to use the mirror of *other* to understand *self* and that defining and understanding *self* is generally based upon the appraisals of others.

The fact that she can't come to an understanding with her mate simply because he is abusive and will defeat her through abusive power plays is almost incomprehensible to the partner. Not coming to this realization, however, leaves the partner living in an incomprehensible reality where she is blamed for the battering of her spirit (Evans, 1996).

Because a woman strives to co-create the relationship and to understand her partner's dissatisfaction, and because she is (in most cases) socialized to feel responsible for the relationship, she is vulnerable to the domination of an abusive partner. Through the partner's dominance, he takes control of all aspects of her life; "In other words, because he takes control of the relationship and his partner, he simultaneously assumes control of her identity and sense of self" (Olson, 2004, p. 4). A woman believes that her partner must be trying to say and do something that is beneficial to the relationship; it is incomprehensible that he is merely exercising his power, domination, and control over her. She therefore tries to behave in a better manner in the relationship. She believes that

if only she can say or do the correct thing, the “problem” in the relationship will be resolved (Evans, 1996). Because of her sense of mutuality, and because of the abusive partner’s blaming tactics, the victim in such a relationship holds herself responsible for the abuse (Evans, 1996).

### **Post-Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Bonding**

Many women who have experienced intimate partner violence exhibit indications of post-traumatic stress disorder (Abel, 2001; Follingstad, 2009; Herman, 1992; Lundberg-Love & Wilkenson, 2006; Street, Gibson, & Holohan, 2005). Abel (2001) suggested that 33% to 85% of women experiencing intimate partner violence will exhibit signs of PTSD. Lundberg-Love and Wilkenson (2006) suggested 40% to 60% exhibit signs of PTSD “and that even psychological abuse or ‘mild’ intimate partner violence can result in PTSD” (p. 43). Herman (1992) drew a comparison between individuals caught in intimate partner violence and political prisoners, hostages, and survivors of concentration camps. She noted that in all cases, the methods used by the “captors” are very similar:

The methods of establishing control over another person are based upon the systematic repetitive infliction of psychological trauma. They are the organized techniques of disempowerment and disconnection. Methods of psychological control are designed to instil terror and helplessness and to destroy the victim’s sense of self in relation to others (Herman, 1992).

The victim loses autonomy. Herman (1992) noted that victims often describe long periods of sleep deprivation during “interrogations” and close supervision. The author believes that following repeated incidents of psychological abuse, there are two final moments that complete the state of “brokenness” in a victim. These include the loss of

inner autonomy – the inability to think for one’s self and follow one’s own moral principles and values and eventually the victim loses her will to live.

Intimate partner violence has been compared to Stockholm Syndrome or *traumatic bonding* (Graham, Rawlings, Ihms, et al, 2001; Herman, 1992; Lundberg-Love & Wilkenson, 2006). “Cognitive confusion of emotions may occur in victims of violence where physiological arousal caused by fear is interpreted as attraction” (Graham, Rawlings, Ihms, et al, p. 79). When the “captor” alternates kindness with threats, the victim can become confused with interpreting the meaning of the behaviours. As mentioned, she struggles with meaning making and with trying to make the situation liveable. When a kindness is offered, the victim’s hopes are raised about the potential for the relationship and she is more likely to look to the future rather than the past (Evans, 1996; Herman, 1992; Lundberg-Love & Wilkenson, 2006). This hopefulness causes the victim to seek out what it was that she did “correctly” that caused the perpetrator to treat her kindly. While she seeks to repeat this behaviour, the perpetrator of psychological / emotional abuse does not seem pleased on a consistent basis. These behaviours, in effect, brainwash a victim to believe that the abuse is her fault and that there is some thing that she can do that will alter the perpetrator’s behaviour (Evans, 1993).

### **Why does she stay?**

In a psychologically abusive relationship, the perpetrator uses a variety of techniques that ultimately keep his partner “off-balance.” These can include threatening behaviours such as facial expressions, voice tone, body stance, invasion of space, and sudden movements meant to startle (Evans, 1993). Evans (1996) described behaviour known as “raging” by the perpetrator proposing that some abusers might be considered

“anger addicts” (p. 106). When one is chronically raged at, yelled at, feeling threatened, their inner equilibrium is disrupted (Evans, 1996). The victim might make attempts to ignore the aggressor in such anger scenarios. Conversely, she might adjust and become inured to the aggression culminating in the aggressor increasing his expressions of anger (Evans, 1996). Herman (1992) noted “Chronically traumatized people no longer have any baseline state of physical calm or comfort” (p. 86). This lack of comfort can result in the individual seeking alternative methods to end the pain she is in. Herman (1992) also reports that in a study of 100 battered women, 42% had attempted suicide at some point (p. 95).

Herman (1992) noted that observers who have never experienced captivity or abuse often judge individuals living in abusive relationships, believing that they, themselves, would never remain or sustain such a relationship. This frequently results in perpetuation of blaming the victim. Researchers have sought to find common characteristics of victims of abuse. Herman suggested that thus far, none have been found. However, Street, Gibson, and Holohan (2005) indicate that women who have experienced traumatic events early in life are more likely to self-blame and find fault with their own behaviour in domestic violence situations later in life. If a victim is told with increasing frequency that she is responsible for the psychological / emotional abuse, she is likely to experience increasing levels of self-doubt and becomes accustomed to accepting responsibility for the situation she is in (Evans, 1996; Olson, 2004). The abuser negates the victim’s experience and invalidates her feelings and responses to the abuse. The victim increasingly begins to feel unacceptable, unlovable, and unwanted (Evans, 1996). In many cases, the most debilitating form of psychological / emotional abuse is

when the abuser reframes what the victim identifies as her outstanding characteristics or talents by disparaging and problematizing them (Evans, 1993; Olson, 2004).

Sackett and Saunders (2001) discussed how many women identified “*ridicule*” as being the most damaging to their self-esteem. In many ways, criticisms of behaviours are destructive and a woman may come to believe that she needs to change the behaviours. However the behaviours are external to her and slightly less likely to be taken personally; “Ridiculing of her traits, however – an attack on her character – is more likely to shatter her sense of hope, security in the relationship and even her sense of self” (Sackett & Saunders, 2001, p. 199). In this way, ridiculing was related to the severity rating of psychological / emotional abuse. Sackett and Saunders also indicate that, although jealousy and controlling behaviours seem more related to physical abuse, they are viewed as a less severe form of psychological / emotional abuse as they are less likely to be taken personally by the victim. They were, however, quite concerned about *ignoring* in the intimate relationship. Their research indicated the “finding on the use of ignoring shows that it needs to be taken seriously as a form of abuse, with the potential for long-term consequences. Being ignored may give one of the most negative messages possible about self-worth” (p. 208). The victim of psychological / emotional abuse continually tries to make sense of incomprehensible situations, believing that her abusive partner is rational and that she will be able to make sense of his unpredictable behaviours. It is unimaginable to her that no understanding can be reached (Evans, 1996). The abuser continues to deny his role in the abuse or even that any upsetting situation occurred. He continues to blame the victim for her feelings and reactions to his behaviour. “As long as the partner believes the abuser is being honest and sincere she remains a victim” (Evans,

1996, p. 55). The partner tries repeatedly to explain herself and her behaviour, but continues to be negated, ridiculed, dismissed by the abuser. Evans noted that “in order to recognize when one is de-valued, one must have extraordinary self-esteem” (p. 38). The difficulty with this is that from the moment that psychological / emotional abuse begins, one’s self-esteem is consistently undermined and damaged (Evans, 1996).

### **Disintegration of Self**

One of the many effects of psychological / emotional abuse is the ultimate disintegration of the self. “While the victim of a single acute trauma may feel after the event that she is ‘not herself’, the victim of chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocably” (Herman, 1992, p. 86). Evans (1993) discussed how the partner in a psychologically abusive relationship struggles with understanding *truth*; that is, her intuition and intuitive knowing is challenged and she is told that her experience / knowing / understanding is false. This has a disintegrating effect on her. Frequently, what her senses tell her to be true (what she hears, sees, tastes, etc) is discredited, ridiculed, and called false, and her own integrity is assaulted. “The ability to act in accordance with the dynamics of life unfolding within and without is impaired” (Evans, 1993, p. 45). She comes to believe the abuser’s version of truths instead of her own and, ironically, she is blamed for her own disintegration (p. 76).

### **After Effects**

As noted above, the individual that exits a psychologically / emotionally abusive relationship is rarely the same as the person who entered it. Herman (1992) notes that people who have survived abusive and traumatic relationships often share their stories in

a “highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner” (p. 2). This has the effect of calling into question their credibility. Herman recommends that the survivor of such abuse requires support and assistance in overcoming her shame, guilt, and remorse for her own actions and to develop a picture of herself that is factual and fair (p. 66). Future relationships are viewed through the “lens of extremity” (Herman, 1992, p. 92) by victims. Surviving psychological / emotional trauma alters the individual’s identity:

All the psychological structures of the self – the image of the body, the internalized images of others and the values and ideals that lend a person a sense of coherence and purpose – have been invaded and systematically broken down (...). Whatever new identity she develops in freedom must include the memory of her enslaved self (...). The result, for most victims, is a contaminated identity

(Herman, 1992, pp. 92-94).

## **Self**

If I am to talk about the “loss of self” how might I first come to some deeper description of what *self* actually is? The over-arching question of “who am I?” is a common one and Gergen (1971) suggested that the question is important primarily because, without an answer, humans become anxious . He said “For one to know his identity, then, is to grasp the meaning of his past and his potential for the future” (p. 2). Crapanzano (1982) suggested that to talk about *self* is to refer to a “snapshot” in time: “... the ‘self’ is an arrested moment in an ongoing dialectical movement between self and other” (p. 181). Basch (1983) said “The self is not a thing or entity; it is a concept; a symbolic abstraction from the developmental process” (p. 53). Crapanzano (1982) explained that *self* actually helps one to distinguish their own uniqueness from the many

others by adding a sense of cohesion in a world of varied experiences. Rogers (1961) held a similar perspective when he suggested that to be *one's self* is to be able to find some sense of pattern and order in the chaos of everyday life: "... being herself means to discover the unity and harmony which exists in her own actual feelings and reactions" (p. 114).

The *self* is also a combination of what was and what might be (Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Strahan & Wilson, 2006). That is, it is how one reflects on their past experiences and what one hopes for and fears for his/her future self. Along with this idea, is the ability that the *self* has to try out new ideas and new ways of being, to explore a variety of roles in the world (Marshall, Young, & Domene, 2006). How we interact with others, and how we understand ourselves in relation to others can be a reflection of the *self* (Goldberg, 1982; Marshall, Young, & Domene, 2006; Masterson, 1988). "(...) Self is viewed as a social phenomenon that emerges out of social interactions. Self, as a motivated system ..., is constructed through experiences in the interpersonal world" (Marshall, Young & Domene, 2006, p 144).

It does not seem to be surprising that men are more likely to view themselves as *individualistic* and women are more likely to view themselves as *relational* (Kashima, et al, 1995; Knox, 2006). Knox (2006) pointed out women are more likely to use the mirror of *other* to understand *self* and that defining and understanding *self* is generally based upon the appraisals of others. This means that one's self-reflections are not the primary way of understanding one's *self*. Taking this one step further, Crapanzano (1982) suggested that not only is *self* relational, but the development of *self* is cultural. How one

views oneself is reflected in the culture of media and community. Swami Anand Nisarg (2002) said,

In your life, you create certain definitions of ‘who you are’ (or more often, these definitions are created for you, by your family, religion, society, and education). In time, you come to think that these definitions are your true self. In fact, they deny your true nature ....” (p. 24).

### **Past and Future Selves**

If it is true, as suggested earlier, that the *self* is a snap shot image of who one is at any given moment in time, then can it be that temporal definitions exist so that *self* also includes who one was and who one hopes (or fears) they might become? Frazier and Hooker (2006) suggested that asking the question of who one hopes to be offers a broader definition of *self* by including goals, ambitions, and desires. A *past self* is not just who we were, but how we recall who we were. Flood (2006) suggested that we use memory as a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding ourselves; those pieces of our remembered past are what form our basic perceptions of *self*. It seems relevant that memories might form a very life of their own within the interior being of the *self*, living on, sometimes despite the potential lack of benefit for an individual. Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) suggested that these memories, or *past selves*, are particularly important when held up against future thinking and goal attainment. For example, if I set a goal and achieve the goal, my *past self* memory is one of success / attainment. If, however, I fail to achieve the goal, my *past self* memory is one of failure. “Autobiographical memory is of fundamental significance for the self, for emotion, and for the experience of personhood, that is, for

the experience of enduring as an individual, in a culture, over time” (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000, p. 261).

In her developmental psychology book, *Adulthood* (2007), Bentley discussed D.J. Levinson’s concept of “The Dream” (1978). The Dream recounts the idea that individuals develop a life plan or goals that they imagine their lives will move towards. This concept fits closely with the idea of *possible self*. Strahan and Wilson (2006) defined *possible selves* as “hypothetical images about one’s future, including the ideal selves that we would like to become .... as well as the selves that we are afraid of becoming” (p. 3). *Possible Selves* serve to motivate the individual to move in certain directions, either to achieve or to avoid, certain futures (Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Knox, 2006). *Possible selves* can be either hoped for or feared and create a certain amount of tension in the *current self*.

*Possible self* is a co-creation between the *self*, and others that the *self* is in relationship with, including the culture and God/dess (Crapanzano, 1982; Flood, 2006; Frazier & Hooker, 2006; Knox, 2006; Marshall, Young, & Domene, 2006). The *possible self* is in constant motion of something that is evolving and being created from moment to moment (Crapanzano, 1982). This concept gives the *present self* hope for all possibilities in the *future self*. We become limited only by our ability to imagine *possible selves*. However, if *self* is co-constructed by our relationships with others and within an influence of culture and community, perhaps one’s ability to imagine *possible selves* is also impacted by these same relational structures. Frazier and Hooker (2006) suggested, “... possible selves are the product of normative, non-normative, and historical forces that become integrated into self and motivate behaviour in the present” (p. 42).

Discussion of *possible selves* with others contributes to which *possible self* one might choose to pursue (Marshall, Young & Domene, 2006). In this way, as mentioned earlier, gender becomes a factor in development of *possible selves*. Research indicates that females are more likely to integrate others' thoughts and opinions into their definitions of themselves and also into what they think they can become (Belenky, et al, 1986; Knox, 2006). Belenky, et al (1986) noted "If one can see the self only as mirrored in the eyes of the others, the urgency is great to live up to others' expectations ... ." (p. 48). Women include in their repertoire of *possible selves* those possibilities that others see for them (Knox, 2006). One of the difficulties, as I see it, in this development, is that others' perspectives for females can often be more limiting than what a girl / woman might have had for her *self*. Although gender roles are slowly shifting, they are still likely to be limiting for women. If the roles that one can perceive are limited by one's culture and community, then one is less likely to pursue a *possible self* that is outside that limitation. This is particularly true when one's sense of *self* is derived from relationship with those others (Anthis, 2006; Knox, 2006). Anthis (2006) said: "The choices one has regarding the content of possible selves are endless, yet those possible selves most salient to an individual are frequently a function of one's socio-historical context" (p. 123).

Knox (2006) noted that women are more likely to consider / emphasize "interpersonal issues such as interpersonal conflict, family roles, and self-description" (p. 63) when thinking about *possible selves*, while men are far more attentive to their goals and their own self-agency. Although I have not seen any recent evidence to suggest that intimate partner violence has a greater emotional impact on women as victims than on men as victims, I would wonder about future research pointing to a direction that might

suggest this. If women interpret their *current and possible selves* primarily based upon their understanding of the relationships they are in, it seems likely that the experience of domestic violence can have a more dramatic impact on them.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

If the concept of self, particularly for women, is co-created, and one's sense of self is formulated within the contextual mirror of relationship, it is easier to understand the negative impact of psychological / emotional abuse within an intimate relationship. This is particularly true when one's past and future selves are connected to the understanding of the relationship. If women are more inclined to see themselves as co-creating their relationships from a place of mutuality, it is easier to understand how a woman might continue to try to make their relationship more successful. A woman in a psychologically abusive relationship continues to try to make sense of what is happening in the relationship; she is less likely to believe that her abusive partner does not have the same goal / outcome in mind. It seems that she is less likely to actually see his controlling behaviours for what they are. When he uses name-calling, denigration, ridiculing, and isolation as means of control, she tries to alter her behaviour to enhance the relationship. She is more inclined to blame herself rather than him, because she cannot accept that his behaviour is intentionally to harm her, rather than to better the relationship. These behaviours are reinforced by a patriarchal system of beliefs that places certain roles and expectations on women that involve responsibility for the relationship.

### **Chapter Three - Methods**

For this thesis I will be using an autoethnographic methodology. Chang (2008), citing Ellis and Bochner (2000), described autoethnographic studies as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 46). An autoethnographic study is a form of autobiographical writing, but not *just* an autobiographical writing. It reflects the interplay and place of personal experience within the cultural environment as a way of understanding the social context (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Hesse-Beber & Leavy, 2006; Glesne, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Ellis (2009) suggested that “(a)utoethnographies show people in their process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and what their struggles mean” (p. 317).

#### **Crisis of Representation and Qualitative Research**

“Qualitative research in sociology and anthropology was born out of concern to understand the other” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 p. 2). Denzin and Lincoln identified seven historical moments in the development of qualitative research in ethnographic studies. From approximately 1900 to 1950 *traditional* forms of research were done. Ideas began to change and form; around 1950 to 1970 *modernist* ideas were developed. In 1970 genres of research began to *blur* and cross over; this period lasted until around 1986. Ellis (2004), noted that during the 1970s there was a shift from participant observation to the observation of participants. From about 1986 to 1990 came a *crisis of representation* when questions were asked about whether it was possible for the researcher to remain impartial. The *postmodern* period followed until about 1995; this was a period of experimental ideas and alternate ways of looking at ethnographies. Denzin and Lincoln

(2000) described the period from 1995 to 2000 as being the *post-experimental inquiry* time, and from 2000 onward as being *the future*. The authors said:

The future, the seventh moment, is concerned with moral discourse, with the development of sacred textualities. The seventh moment asks that the social sciences, the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community (p. 3).

It would be interesting to know if Denzen and Lincoln would still consider us to be in the “future” now, or if they would believe we have moved to yet a different stage.

Denzen and Lincoln (2000) suggested that qualitative research actually does not privilege one form of research over another. They also suggested that qualitative research “has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own” (p. 6). That is, as a form of research it borrows from other ideas and allows creative ways of doing research to emerge.

Denzen and Lincoln say “qualitative research, as a set of practices, embraces within its own multiple disciplinary histories constant tension and contradictions over the project itself (...)” (p. 7). This tension creates a sense of doubt within the postmodern researcher about whether any methodological approach has the best claim of “authoritative knowledge” (Richardson, 2000, p. 928). Ellis (2004) said “There is no privileged, objective, or neutral position from which to observe ... (p. 266). Tierney (2000) reminded the researcher how facts used in research affect how the reader thinks about truth and even how they read the truth.

Reviewing the above information, we might come to understand in the early days of quantitative research, attempts were made to understand humanity and society. There was some belief that quantitative research could be done in a qualitative manner,

providing “truths” to questions about individuals and society – that the researcher could stand in full objectivity. As research matured, so did this perspective, eventually coming to believe that these “truths” were evasive, and perhaps permeable in their absolutes. “Truth” has come to be understood as being directly influenced by the researcher, and more fluid in nature. In this way, the research methodologies have become more experimental in nature.

Historically, in the process of developing research methods and approaches, researchers developed the idea that the researcher’s emotions must be left out of the research; that somehow, emotions interfered with data collection. Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wog (2000) noted the history of considering the observer as a “potential contaminant” (p. 108) in the research process. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggested that one cannot step away from the ambiguity of human knowledge:

All truths were contingent on the describing activities of human beings. No sharp distinctions could be made between facts and values. If you couldn't eliminate the influence of the observer on the observed, then no theories or findings could ever be completely free of human values (p. 747).

The post-modern response to this was to begin to use the pronoun *I* (Tierney, 2000). Tierney went on to say “When we write vulnerably, we invite others to respond vulnerably (...). If we are to shed the role of the disengaged observer who records data from afar, then our voices must reflect our own vulnerabilities” (p. 549). Ellis (2004) added that “postmodern, post-structuralist, and feminist writers ... were contesting issues of authority, representation, voice ...” (p. 17). These researchers were also adding the connections we now see between the social sciences and literature. Ellis credited feminist

researchers with not only contesting issues of authority, but with advocating starting research from personal experience.

Autoethnography was born out of these discussions. Researchers had a desire to examine their personal experiences from a research-oriented perspective. Ellis and Bochner (2000) referred to “breaching the conventional separation of researcher and subjects” (p. 744) and also the convention that desires “generalization across cases to the generalization within a (single) case” (p. 744). Richardson (2000) referred to these projects as “creative analytic practice” (p. 929). Autoethnographers might focus more on *self* (auto), on *culture* (ethnos) or on *process* (graphy) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 740), but the term *autoethnography* has become the widely accepted term, despite there being numerous other terms that mean something similar. Ellis (2004) suggested that the widely accepted use of the term (even by critics) suggests that the genre is becoming increasingly acceptable as a genre of research.

### **Autoethnography Defined**

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretation ...As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition (Mertens, 2005).

Ethnography is the study of culture. It can be found in many anthropological and

human ecological research projects. Auto, as the study of the self, places the self within a specific cultural context and reflexively explores the culture from within. Vidich and Lyman (2000) described that *ethno* is a Greek term that implies a *people*. When the suffix *graphic* is added the word becomes one that we know as *descriptive anthropology*. “*Ethnography*, then, refers to a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 40). Tedlock (2000) noted that ethnography attempts to expand on the understanding of a variety of information. It is not just the information collected, but the way in which the information is presented and understood. She described that “ethnography is both a process and a product” (p. 455). It becomes possible to intertwine stories and emotional experiences so that the works take the form of “travelogues, chronicles, or diaries” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 463). “Just as in feminist critical theory, which denies the split between epistemology and politics, ethnographic critical theory became simultaneously reflexive and political” (Tedlock, 2000, p. 461).

Reflexivity is the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher (...). It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183).

Mertens (2005) described an autoethnography as an “autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 269). Johnston and Strong (2008) described an autoethnography as a diverse research approach with ambiguous aims. Their article described the challenging process of integrating the personal story with academic work,

including carrying on the research and speaking to it in the voice of *I* .

Hesse-Beber and Levy (2006) said that an autoethnography connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. “Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection” (p. 183). Autoethnographic writing offers a personal, autobiographical story to the reader. Researchers might feel a deep need to tell their story, both for the purpose of their own healing, and for the potential benefits to the reader. The reader in similar circumstances to the writer is able to compare her own experiences and responses (Ellis, 2004). Ellis described that the autoethnographic narrative is a story “replete with a narrator, characterization, and plot line” (p. 30) similar to novels or biographies.

The story often discloses hidden details of private life and highlights emotional experiences. The ebb and flow of relationship experience is depicted in an episodic form that dramatizes the motion of connected lives across the curve of time. A reflexive connection exists between the lives of participant and researcher that must be explored. (Ellis, 2004). The story is generally written in the first person perspective and can appear in many forms including “short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (Ellis, 2004, p. 38).

In summary, an autoethnographic study reflexively studies one's personal story within the context of a culture; it allows for and recognizes the power of the personal telling of a story and invites the reader to experience the author's experience. It is comfortable with the first person narrative and other creative forms of telling the story, and accepts the validity of the story of one as being representative of the story of many.

## **This Thesis**

In the context of my thesis, I will examine the culture of intimate partner violence from within – that is, from my personal and direct experience of it. I hope to understand how I (a professional, educated, feminist) could find myself losing more and more of how I had previously defined myself. Olson (2004) referred to enmeshment within a relationship so that self-identity becomes lost or enmeshed with that of the abusive partner. I hope to explore this loss of self, applying existing literature to my own experience. For approximately two years I was in an intimate relationship that I came to describe as emotionally and psychologically abusive. During that time I kept a journal where I recorded daily events as well as my thoughts and feelings. These journals will serve as *field notes* for this investigation (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2009).

## **Loss of Self**

The literature review specifically discusses women's loss of identity and self. My thesis question invites me to delve into the myth of the Descent of Inanna and determine the extent to which the structure of the gates offers a means to understand my personal descent in an emotionally abusive relationship. Through the autobiographical telling of my own experience, my intention is to examine the meaningfulness and utility of the metaphor of gates as a tool for understanding the impact of psychological and emotional abuse on me.

## **Data analysis**

In this research project I made photocopies of all of my journals from the time period that I was in the abusive relationship. I used the copies and cut them into “events” or “experiences” (i.e. something that happened in the physical world and / or some

emotional experience that I was having and trying to understand). I overlaid these events and experiences on each of the seven gates as described in the myth of The Descent of Inanna (Meador, 2000; Perera, 1981; Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983) depending on where they fit. For example, a moment when I isolated myself from a friend fit into the gate of *community*. Events and experiences that did not fit within a gate category were set aside for later analysis. There were too many stories to tell and so it was necessary for me to sift through these stories and choose which ones best narrated my general experience and relationship to the particular gate that they fell under.

Once I categorized my journal entries, I wrote about the experiences and how they related to each gate and how that also related to the literature. My writing is narrative and will tell about my experiences from a narrative perspective. Because I am telling this story from the perspective of the gates, the stories will not be chronological, but instead will be reflective moments in time. When I completed this exercise, I spent time reflecting on the journal entries that did not fit under the gate categories. It was an opportunity to explore at a greater depth my own experience.

### **Ethics**

In an autoethnographic study, I am telling the story from the first person perspective. In this way, I will be telling my own story, not the story of someone else. Where, inevitably, the lives of others intersect my story, I have used character composites and pseudonyms to hide their identities. Although this research will be regarding my own experience of “loss of self”, the story will unavoidably intersect with the story of my ex-partner. It is possible this person might feel embarrassed by the potential public nature of this story. In this case I have used the masking of time and non-gendered language to

describe this individual. It seems inevitable that those that know me well will, for obvious reasons, be able to tell the identity of my ex-partner. Those individuals know me well and they also know the story that I will be telling. But for those anonymous readers, there should be little likelihood that my ex-partner's identity will be revealed.

Throughout exploration and analysis of the data, I will hold an attitude of respect and will make certain the story is recounted from my personal experience of it. Ellis (2009) suggested that an autoethnography be written as though the “others” in the story will be in the room listening to the finished product . Ellis (2009) also wondered if autoethnographers “consider others too much” (p. 316) when writing their stories. She suggested that many researchers cleanse their stories too much, rather than putting forward the full “truth” of a situation. She noted that some topics are just not “nice topics” (p. 316) and that writing the stories anyway helps “to reveal important truths” (p. 316). Ellis also noted “(...) the question of how to honor and respect our relationships with intimate others while being faithful to what we perceive to be the truth of our story is a difficult ethical issue with which researchers must grapple” (p. 307). I believe that there are “many truths” in any given story. I accept that my truth might be variant from the truth / perspective of another.

In this thesis I believe that the benefits of telling my story outweigh the potential negative impact. Survivor's stories offer the potential of healing both for the writer and the anonymous readers of the story who share similar experiences (Ellis, 2004; Goyette, 2005; McKenna & Larkin, 2002; Olson, 2004). Considering the direct account of my own experience as it is documented, could certainly offer other “victims” of intimate partner violence information about their own experiences. Ellsberg and Heise (2005) said: “In the

case of gender-based violence research, the risks are potentially large, but so too are the risks of ignorance, silence, and inaction” (p. 45). I believe my particular story will be of benefit to social workers, therapists, and others working with women who are currently living in, or who have escaped intimate partner violence. There is a risk of backlash from my former partner. To this end, I will do what I can to treat my ex-partner's portion of the story with respect, dignity, and truth and to address my own safety considerations.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) suggested that the writing of the autoethnography can risk re-awakening and heightening emotions. They also suggested that these emotions might be clues about parts of a story that would benefit from deeper exploration. They advise that it might be useful to have increased support when moving through the emotional telling of the story; “Keeping track of one's emotions during the process can thus serve as both data and signals to the researcher and how he or she is coping with the autobiographical process” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 184). To this end, I will have available to me a therapist who has helped me move through the process of healing from the intimate partner violence. I will also have a support system of friends that I might debrief as necessary and can debrief my emotional reactions with my thesis supervisor.

St. Stephen's College has an ethics review committee that has reviewed and approved my thesis proposal and ethics proposal.

### **Validity / Reliability**

Ellis (1999) suggested that there is a continuum between art and science and the methodology chosen for research in these areas falls along that continuum; where one would like to situate themselves on the continuum between art and science helps the researcher to determine what rules to follow when working with autoethnographies. For

example, if one is located closer to traditional ethnographic research, then one might want to have field notes to reflect upon. She cautions, however, that the field notes “are just one perspective at one moment in history” (p. 673). If one is locating her research closer to that of art, it would be more important to pay attention to the *meaning* of the narrative rather than the *facts* (p. 674). Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggested “Researchers disagree on the boundaries of each category and on the precise definitions of the types of autoethnography. Indeed, many writers move back and forth among terms and meanings even in the same articles” (p. 740).

Ellis (1999) suggested “validity means our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is life like, believable and possible” (p. 674). Accordingly, there is no clear form of orthodox reliability confirmation in autoethnographic studies, however one can take his or her work back to others for feedback and when others are involved in the story, have them read the story. Ellis also warns that if one is not willing to become a ‘vulnerable observer, then maybe (they) ought to reconsider doing autoethnography” (p. 675).

It can be difficult, however, for others to give feedback that might be perceived as negative, given the very personal nature of autoethnographies (Ellis, 1999; Mercer, 2007). Taking this concern into account, I will address Richardson's (2000) criteria for checking validity. These criteria include: “(1) the work makes a substantial contribution to the research; (2) the work has aesthetic merit; (3) the work demonstrates reflexivity; (4) it has an impact on the reader; and (5) it demonstrates an expression of reality” (p. 937). Ellis (2004) reminded that, although a story might initially be written for oneself, ultimately, as an autoethnography, the final product needs to “point to the commonalities

as well as the particularities of our lives” (p. 200).

Christina Gonzalez, during a panel discussion on autoethnography, suggested that when she is writing an autoethnography she is “coding and keeping a track record of the way that I make my decisions” (Flemons & Green, 2002, p. 121). I have kept a journal of my own process of writing this autoethnographic thesis. This journal has helped me to remain reflexive as well as to step back and look at my thesis in the context of the larger body of research.

### **Summary**

In a traditional thesis, the methodology chapter would be followed by a Data Analysis chapter and then a Discussion chapter. In the case of this autoethnographic study, these chapters will be replaced with the journal entries and storytelling. These will reflect a non-chronological story of my experience living in a psychologically abusive relationship along with some reflections throughout.

## **Chapter Four - Descending the Gates – An Autoethnographic Re-telling**

I grew up in Northern Alberta on the same farm that my dad grew up on. Both of my parents were raised in this rural community and met when they were in their late teens. I have four siblings, and am the second born. In what was a “normal” rural upbringing in Northern Alberta at the time, my dad “farmed” and my mom worked off the farm to support the very low income of the farm. We were chronically on the financial edge, as was/is often true for the small family farm. My dad went away to work on the oil rigs in the winter, leaving my mom to look after the kids, her job, and the 100 or so head of cattle they continually had. We weren’t much different from most of my friends and the neighbours in our community. My dad had a problem with alcohol until I was in my mid-20’s. In my family, the men worked the land and looked after the cattle. The women cooked, cleaned, and looked after the men.

Both of my parents always believed that their children could do and be anything they wanted to be, however they never pushed us in any particular direction. In this way, we were allowed to find our own selves and follow our own paths. In my family of origin, however, formal education was not valued. Neither of my parents graduated high school. We never discussed post-secondary education as a possible path for me or any of my siblings. I learned, however, as a young woman, that education was a way out of poverty for me.

When I was 19 years old I met and married my first husband. He was 20 when we married; two individuals who were barely out of their childhood. He was, however, so wildly beautiful and exciting when I met him that he was absolutely irresistible. Unfortunately, where I loved his wildness when we first met, I did not appreciate it as

much once we married. He was unpredictable and drank heavily. He also became quite physically violent when he drank. He was not aggressive when he was sober, but I soon learned that being around him when he drank was a dangerous proposition for me. I kept his violence to myself for the most part, feeling embarrassed and humiliated by it. When I was 21 I gave birth to a magnificent baby boy. Bringing him in to the world helped me to see the reality of the situation I was living in and to end my marriage. I could not fathom raising a child in a family where his dad beat his mom. The ending was not so clean as it sounds on paper. But end our marriage we did. Me, by creating a “trial separation” and him by falling in love with another woman.

I raised my son as a single mom – that is, his father, who lived 1000 km away, popped in from time to time, but I was primarily responsible. As a fiercely independent young woman, I needed to know that I could do it on my own. I moved away from my family, coming to Edmonton where I knew a couple of friends. After living on welfare for a couple of years, I realized that I needed an education to lift myself and my son out of the cycle of poverty. I studied social work and the values within the profession of social work were woven into the fabrics of my own values. That is, the values of equality, of compassion, of empathy, and of action were honed and polished. I became more challenging of systems and less accepting of the status quo. I became increasingly politically active; I called myself *feminist*.

During those growing years I remained single. Oh, of course I dated and had lovers and boyfriends. But I could never quite bring myself to commit to a long term relationship, nor could I find myself involved with anyone that I could imagine raising my son with. Yet, I dreamed of that love; I dreamed of a family with many children; I

dreamed of growing old with someone. When I was about 29 years old I experienced an unplanned pregnancy. The pregnancy was an ectopic one, and after losing this baby I entered my own *Dark Night of the Soul*<sup>1</sup>. I abandoned my eclectic faith and went into a cocoon of sorts for about a year. Oh, I maintained my job and parented my son, but it was a time for me to completely re-evaluate my dreams, desires, goals. During that time, I allowed the dream of *husband, kids, picket fence* to fade into my past. And as I emerged from this *Dark Night of the Soul* I began to embrace the Goddess centered traditions of witchcraft. In particular, I became enamored with the ecstatic eco-feminist Reclaiming Tradition of witchcraft.

Being a witch became central to my understanding of myself and my relationship to the world. Reclaiming Witchcraft tradition speaks to political activities and using magic to heal the world. This particular story that I wish to tell you begins here ... in magic and politics. It was in this place that I met the person who was to become my second spouse. To protect this person's identity, throughout this story I will refer to the individual without gender. This can be awkward in story telling, as personal pronouns are not gender neutral. I rename my former spouse "Z".

### **Meeting**

It seems that some explanation is necessary when calling oneself "witch". In being a witch, I believe the earth is sacred and alive, and it's important to me to try to protect Her, as I would my own mother. In accepting the Reclaiming Tradition<sup>2</sup>, I accept

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<sup>1</sup> A Dark night of the Soul is in reference to the Christian theological experience of a crisis of faith. It initially referred to St. John of the Cross' poem "A Dark Night" written in the mid-1500's.

<sup>2</sup> For more information about Reclaiming Tradition see [www.reclaiming.org](http://www.reclaiming.org). Of particular interest to a reader might be The Principles of Unity that explain the guiding principles if one is to consider whether this particular tradition is of interest. For a broader based discussion about Goddess traditions, see Margaret Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon*.

that I have a responsibility to protect the earth and to try to effect political change within the world. I'd been a self-identified witch for perhaps four or five years at the time I first laid eyes on Z.

Before I travel further in this story, I feel compelled to tell you a bit more about who I was at the beginning. I think, if you were to ask some of my closest friends (and I did), they might have told you that I was a strong willed, kind hearted, loving woman. They might describe me as articulate, intelligent, well-read, and outspoken. Like Inanna, I was a woman with my own mind – not to be owned and not likely to allow others to take advantage of me. I want to tell you this about me, because I want you to have a picture of me as I approach the gates to my own underworld story.

The Reclaiming Tradition has a longstanding practice of becoming deeply involved in political activism. A group evolved out of that tradition that refers to itself as the Pagan Cluster. They have been present during the new activist revolution of Global Justice Activists. In Seattle in 1999 during the “Battle of Seattle”, the Pagan Cluster wove magic in the streets. We believe magic is “changing consciousness at will” and so we can use magic to make changes to the political climate. The Pagan Cluster was present in Genoa, Italy when the police attacked a number of sleeping activists, bashing their heads in while they were still in their sleeping bags. In Year 1, the Pagan Cluster would be in the next city over for the meeting of the G8. And I would be there.

I was unprepared for the impact this meeting would have on me. In my adult life I recall that I was political. My political awakening began when I went to college to study Social Work. How could I not be? I was a single mom of a little boy. I lived in poverty until I started to live on student loans when I was in college. It was easy

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for me to see the disparity all around me and to recognize the disparity had nothing to do with me and everything to do with the inequities within my world. And I knew I wasn't the only one affected by the inequities. I became involved in the political realm, even running for political office.

The political movements, however, were never very fulfilling. They lacked a certain amount of *heart*. They were so intellectual and there was little, if any, real change that occurred. Then I heard about the Pagan Cluster, where I might work with people who held similar spiritual beliefs. I had no idea, really, what that meeting would entail, but I prepared myself to travel to the neighbouring city and "meet up with" the Pagan Cluster.

The meeting was like an awakening. I had finally found my home. There I was, moving through the streets of the city in massive demonstrations against the G8, openly practising my spiritual beliefs. I was chanting slogans against the G8 and then weaving Spiral Dances so that magic could bring about the changes I desired. I sang spiritual songs and joined in ritualistic theater in the streets. I met, for the first time, a group of people who became my *tribe*. They were people from all over North America and Europe who held the world as sacred as I did and who believed that we could change it by our belief, our presence, and our magic.

And amongst those people was Z. I recall looking at this person, dressed in a blue turtle neck sweater and wearing a toque, even though it was over 30 degrees Celsius; so young and very beautiful. I was attracted immediately. I was too shy to ask questions or engage Z in much conversation; the questions might give my interest away. Z was engaging and charismatic and smiled constantly. Z later told me that s/he was equally

attracted to me, and that s/he followed me around that week. It seemed to be true because every time I turned around, there was Z.

And then, that September, my world changed. My dear friend, M and I joined the Pagan Cluster in the United States. Z intended to come but couldn't get across the border. M and I were arrested. This experience forever changed my life. How was it that I, a peace loving, law-abiding citizen of Canada, could be arrested and abused by police in the United States? I was terrorized and traumatized. I discovered that, in fact, police are not to be trusted. That, in fact, as I'd heard over and over in the first city, "cops lie" and they do so to get you to do what they want.

I returned home to My City a different person. I was angry. I was afraid of the police. I wanted to rebel against every institution I had been taught to revere. And the world seemed to be echoing my experiences. 9-11 had occurred in the U.S. the fall before. The U.S. was gearing up to retaliate against anyone possible. As Canadians, we were afraid for our brothers and sisters south of the border, and we were afraid for our brothers and sisters across the sea. It was in this energy that I fell in love with Z

Z started to visit. In My City we were having regular peace marches; times when the activist communities came together to raise our voices against the impending attack on Iraq. We knew it was inevitable, and we hoped in some way we could stop it. In My City we worked within our own newborn Pagan Cluster. And Z was a part of that. We marched down the streets hand-in-hand. We sang, we chanted. We spun magic and danced the spiral dance. Z slept on my couch. We talked long hours into the night. We wove our own magic.

The expression is that “hindsight is 20/20.” I see, now, that some of my attraction to Z had to do with the non-traditional way Z had of looking at the world. We talked about our dreams and desires of living communally in the country; of growing our own food; of living *off-grid* with no connection to the government. I was angry and wounded and filled with reactions fueled by my post-arrest trauma. I wanted to shout “Screw this world” and live on my own. I wanted to buy a little trailer and live like a gypsy. I wanted to walk away from bills and debts and rent, and responsibilities and do what I wanted. I wanted to fuel and feed a revolution worldwide that would allow anarchy to rule supreme.

And Z wanted the same thing.

Z spent many months coming to visit, sleeping on my couch, and hanging out with my friends. It was only a short while after we became lovers that Z moved in with me. I had never been so impulsive or spontaneous in my life. But Z lived in another town and had decided to move to My City to be closer. We knew that Z could take an apartment, however would most likely be at my house all of the time, anyway. I rationalized my impulsivity – my son was almost grown; I didn’t need to protect him anymore; it was time to do some living for myself. So Z moved in.

And so began my descent.

## **Control**

Inanna stands poised at the first gate, preparing to descend. Neti, the Gatekeeper, tells Inanna that She must remove Her crown if She is to enter the kingdom of Erishkigal. Inanna considers Her options. She readies Herself to face what She believes She is capable of facing – Her ego feels strong and solid. She believes She has no need for a crown. And so She removes it from her head and sets it aside. Neti allows Her entry beyond the first gate.

Control is not an easy thing to explain. I cannot say that I was fully aware that I was being controlled. Or that I was giving up control. I wasn't completely unaware, either. I felt frustration and discomfort during the process of losing control over my own self. Like Inanna, each step deeper into the state of being controlled was largely decided by me. But also, was invisible to me. That is, despite the many difficulties that I recognized in my relationship with Z, I continued within the relationship. As Evans (1996) pointed out, I was courted by Z and fell in love with Z's finer characteristics (p. 209). I did not initially fall in love with an abusive partner, but instead someone who was interesting, fun, exciting to be around. Because we fell in love surrounded by political action, and the mysticism of our relationship, it was easier to see the relationship as "magic" (Doyle, 1995, p. 49). If the relationship was considered by both of us to have magical properties, it made it much more difficult to walk away from.

Z and I started living together in Month 1 of Year 2. We did not discuss how that would look; what kinds of shared responsibility we might have; how we would resolve difficulties if we faced them. I found myself, however, frequently mired in confusing

conversations with confusing language about how to resolve our difficulties. These difficult and confusing discussions often left me wondering what it was that we had just talked about and what I had just agreed to with Z. This communication style started almost as soon as Z moved in to my home.

*Month 4 Day 13 Year 2 Journal Entry*

*It's been a difficult couple of weeks – sort of. Difficult but filled with love, tenderness, and support. We've been working on our process for working through stuff – it really is as crazy as it sounds. I take so much longer to work through something and Z moves or at least believes that s/he moves into the core of an issue. S/he really wants me to do it the same way, and I feel very stubborn about not doing what I'm told. I really feel like I don't want Z to be the boss of me. It's like s/he has ideas that are good ideas, but s/he pushes them on me and so I fight. I feel like I'm losing control of my life, my situation, who I am as an individual. I feel afraid that I will lose myself and my own groundedness in how I do things.*

*It feels like if I'm going to be willing to try this, I have to swallow my pride and just admit to a willingness to try it Z's way. Weird how I'm rebelling against that. Weird how I feel like I'm losing myself – a bit of myself every time I concede to Z. I'm afraid of not only losing control, but being controlled. Losing my autonomy is hard enough, without having someone else force themselves on me. I am afraid of being in so deep that there won't be any piece of me left on the other side.*

Only a few months after Z moved in with me, I began journaling about how I felt controlled. I spoke about the process of feeling coerced in to doing everything Z's way,

including how we talked. Evans (1993) might have suggested that the abusive partner's overwhelming need is to control the relationship, and I cannot say if this were true or not for Z. What Z's intention was will forever remain a mystery to me. My experience, however, was that Z's unpredictable behaviour left me feeling constantly off-balance. I could never quite be certain if Z was going to be angry with me, or happy with me. Because of that, I struggled to guess what Z's actions might be when next we encountered one another. I found myself both trying to please Z and rebelling against what Z was demanding of me. In the earlier days of our relationship, I would refuse to do things the way that Z insisted, trying to maintain my own level of autonomy.

Z could talk circles around anyone we met. That is, Z had a way of presenting an idea that might sound kind of weird and occasionally offensive, but then would explain it in so much detail and in a way that one would feel like a fool to disagree with the idea. Z was always trying to convince me to resolve problems in a manner that worked for Z.

*Month 4, Day 26, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*We've been through another "thing" a couple of days ago. I'm left feeling afraid of Z; anxious about any confrontation and being attacked. I feel less trustful – like I'm not sure when the next attack will come. I want to protect myself and I know that putting a wall around myself will lead to our demise. There's a part of me that screams to get out now. And this is the confusing part because I don't know if it's the part of me that is fearful of relationships that wants to run away or is it my true intuition warning me.*

*As we are making wedding plans, I particularly have apprehensions. I think because of how bruised I feel from our most recent incident. How can I manage with*

*these sorts of situations where I believe Z's been abusive. The trouble is that I don't feel like I can talk to Z about it because I think that s/he will tell me to be responsible for myself and that "no one can make you feel anything". It's confusing because Z went from this high level of attack and blame to gentleness, smiles, and kisses. Like nothing happened. S/he says that s/he let it go; doesn't have any problems with our conflict.*

*Month 7, Day 3, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I don't want to be in the midst of trying to control. I feel blamed / shamed. Which leaves me insecure because it seems like it must be something wrong with me.*

Z frequently and repeatedly told me I was very controlling – in my own life and in the life of our relationship. S/he insisted that it was my desire to control my environment that created the conflict between us. Z controlled me but tried to convince myself that it was me, not Z that was controlling. My reality and experience became quickly confused.

*Month 8, Day 5, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Z and I have had a difficult day and I'm so sad about it because it's our one day together between two weeks of steady work. I wanted to get out of the city for the afternoon – I felt suffocated by the noise and energy. As we started to drive, Z became increasingly agitated for no reason that I could pinpoint. Somehow my need for nature got completely lost in a screaming match about control. Z wanted me to consider that my need to solve / fix whatever my problem is (my need to get out of the city), was me again trying to control the situation. S/he wanted me to admit this, and to not need to get out of the city to feel better. Z finally pulled the car over on the side of the highway and was screaming so loud at me. S/he got out of the car and was banging on the car and pacing*

*around while s/he yelled. When another car drove by and slowed down to see what was going on I was mortified.*

*I don't understand what is going on with Z – there's something and I find myself guessing, but if I try to point Z at Z's own issues, s/he says I'm deflecting from my issues. And I don't know how to respond to this because s/he could be correct about that. But it feels like issues are constantly raised that are my issues. I don't feel safe giving Z feedback because s/he attacks me, verbally. What I've learned already is that if I'm quiet, and really hear Z, without sharing my own thoughts/feelings, we can move on. If I start to talk, or start to share my thoughts / feelings, the argument continues. I'm fearful of fighting more, of being criticized more; of feeling like I need to defend myself more.*

Control was established through verbal aggression and psychological violence. The mere threat of Z's yelling became, within six months of living together, a sufficient method for keeping me quiet. There were two standards of communication – how we communicated about what Z believed were my issues, and how we communicated about what I believed were Z's issues. I would find myself wrapped up in a conversation that I could no longer make sense of. And the conversations would last literally for hours on end. By the end of the conversations, I often was unable to tell where I began and Z ended. Often the discussions would last late in to the night and I found myself sleep deprived and trying to make sense of some thing that Z was trying to convince me of. This is congruent with Evans (1993) who described that control could be established by controlling one's space, including sleep deprivation and invasion of privacy. I often found myself in a bedroom with the door closed, listening to Z extol my many faults. I came to think of these moments as “lectures” and also came to learn that if I could

manage to sit quietly through them, they would end quicker (perhaps three hours instead of six). If I argued, or tried to defend myself, Z's behaviour would escalate.

*Month 8, Day 10, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*It's 2:00 a.m. I can't sleep. Z and I were having a "discussion" that, of course, ended up with Z telling me that I was trying to control the way the conversation went. Which, if Z's perspective of what control is, is correct, then I was trying to control the conversation. I don't fully agree with Z's perception, but definitely understand what s/he's talking about. What the conversation ended with was Z accusing me of being unwilling to humble myself enough to admit that s/he was correct or perhaps rather that I was unwilling to humble myself enough to admit out loud that what I had been trying to do was control the way the conversation went. My perception is that to admit something like this to Z is to give Z power over me.*

*I start to talk about something; Z interrupts me to talk about Z's perspective without my even getting to talk about my own perspective fully. I end up interrupting Z because I don't think s/he's understood what I've said and we end up in a power struggle with me defending what I'm talking about even though I initially had no desire to do so.*

*Month 8, Day 17, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Another night of "fighting" and feeling bad for me. Z says it's not fighting. Z doesn't even think it's conflict. Z's perspective is that if I see this as fighting that's my own issue.*

*Z has instructed me to make lists of all the things I try to control to help me see what a controlling person I am. I am to work on these lists daily, adding to them when I notice myself trying to control my environment.*

*When Z gets frustrated s/he moves to name-calling, etc. “that’s so fucked up”. I’m filled with resentments / anger, also. Only I turn my anger inwards and it becomes sadness. I resent that all of these fights seem to be about what I do. I resent that if I try to defend myself the fight becomes bigger. I resent that I’m the one that has to take the initiative to say “I’m sorry”. I resent that Z lectures me non-stop in a “you, you, you” language and rarely talks about him/herself.*

*Z has asked me to write out the definitions for Humility, as s\he doesn’t believe I truly understand their meaning. So I’ve done that:*

*Humble; 1. Free from pride or vanity; modest; meek; unassuming. 2. Lowly in station, rank, condition, etc; unpretentious; modest. 3. Servile; fawning; 4. Respectful; 5. To reduce the pride of; make meek.*

*Humility; 1. The state or quality of being humble; a modest sense of one’s own merit. 2. An act of submission or deference.*

As discussed earlier, because of the concept of mutuality (Evans, 1993, 1996; Sackett & Saunders, 2001), I was prepared to do the homework assignments that Z demanded of me. It was incomprehensible to me that Z’s intentions were meant to be destructive in any way; it seemed only possible that Z had the best interests of our relationship in mind when Z would demand that I do as Z instructed. As the relationship with Z moved forward, I found myself submitting to whatever Z asked me, just so I could

avoid another argument – more hours of berating, name calling, lecturing. I found myself only thinking about my relationship with Z. I was constantly trying to figure out how to make it better; at least how to make it liveable. With each argument, however, my sense of self fell further away from me. I no longer could see beyond what was happening at any given time between me and Z. Z, for his/her part, continually tried to convince me to try harder to understand Z – to listen better; to argue less; to be open to believing whatever Z told me.

*Month 01, Day 30 Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Seems like all I write about now is my fighting with Z. I went to see a counsellor today. I described the relationship and felt horribly disloyal; as I talked I realized how awful it sounds and I tried also to discuss the joy and the love, but the truth is, I'm not really feeling joy and love, but rather pain, discomfort, anger, remorse – all sorts of uncomfortable emotions. I talked to Z a bit about the counselling session and Z got upset because Z thinks that I was manipulating the counsellor and not being honest; we ended up having a great big fight again. I'm unhappy. Z thinks I'm unhappy because of myself, so I need to only look at myself, and I think we need to look at "ourselves" together.*

*I think Z wishes that I would just try to understand Z's position. Which is fair enough – if I weren't trying to convince Z to look at Z's self and open Z's mind – if I weren't trying to convince Z to look at things differently, then I wouldn't argue. It wouldn't even be necessary to share my perspective. There has to be a place in there to share my own opinion but I'm not certain how that fits. Maybe it doesn't.*

*Month 02, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I had a dumb argument yesterday and so s/he's chosen to be silent and not talk at all. In fact, s/he stayed on the couch all night. Seems that unless I go to Z the fight carries on. The counsellor said it takes two people who are willing to compromise. Unfortunately, Z had told me s/he doesn't believe in compromise – ever. I'm feeling scared to face my day as I know I'm going to be watched by Z. Z's monitoring my progress*

Z warned me that Z would be watching what I did. Z was watching for moments when I was trying to control my environment and when I was unwilling to give up control. Z believed that I had a lack of willingness to change, and so Z wanted to see me demonstrate a willingness to change – that is, if Z asked me to alter something I was doing, willingness would mean that I would do what Z asked without argument. Z continued to hold me responsible for the struggles in our relationship, repeatedly emphasizing that it was me that lacked communication skills. I became increasingly brainwashed, using Z's language to describe myself; becoming better at noticing my own faults as Z saw them. Z would test my willingness by telling me to do things a certain way – and then watch how I responded. If I noticed that Z was displeased, I would then have to try to figure out where I went wrong. Often times, Z would appear unhappy and I would ask Z what was wrong – the response would be for me to figure it out. This was a difficult task, given that Z was so very challenging to understand.

*Month 2, Day 29, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*When we went to bed it was obvious that Z was really unhappy. I asked Z to explain what was so upsetting. Z told me to “figure it out”. I immediately went to that tense, uncomfortable place of “oh, oh, I have to get the correct answer”. From past experience this is a tough game. Z had said “an entire day of old patterns”. I could identify two things and I didn’t think it was enough. A whole day is a lot of things that I had obviously done wrong in Z’s eyes. Rather than just talking about the two pieces that I identified, I avoided the possibility of being wrong and asked Z to tell me. Which Z did ... in great frustrated detail. This was really painful because I heard “look at all of the things I’ve done wrong”. Z escalated and I became increasingly fearful of a fight. I began to try to placate; scurrying for the correct answer.*

We began a pattern of wanting to end our relationship. We discussed breaking up; of Z moving out, but without follow through. At the last minute, Z would come to me with sorrow and regret and a request that we continue working on our relationship.

*Month 1, Day 7, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z is moving out tomorrow. This time there’s no ambivalence on either part. Well, unless feeling sad about it is ambivalence. I wish I could figure out an answer, but the only answer I’ve come to is that I need to keep conceding to keep the peace. Or we keep arguing and I’m so tired of arguing. I don’t see any way that Z is willing to compromise Z’s position, and so it would have to be me again. Last night Z suggested I ask my Alanon sponsor to mediate before Z leaves. Then, a bit later, Z said that because I didn’t phone*

*my sponsor right away, I didn't make a good enough effort. Z was no longer interested in mediation.*

Z became obsessed with my journals. It had been my practice to keep a daily journal and it was where I processed my thoughts and feelings. Z believed that my holding the journals from Z was a way of keeping us separate; it was a reflection of my lack of intimacy and trust of Z. Although my journals were never hidden or kept secret, it was my expectation that Z would never read or review them. Z began asking on a regular basis to be allowed to see the journals. I struggled enormously with this, given the many things I had written about our relationship in my journals. I knew there would likely be very serious repercussions for this. Eventually, in the name of making peace, I agreed (Evans, 1996; Herman, 1992; Olson, 2004,). I dropped all of my journals on Z's lap, telling Z that I decided s/he could read them. Z responded by telling me that s/he expected me to read the journals out loud. I refused. Ultimately, I don't believe Z ever did actually read the journals.

*Month 1, Day 20, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I saw that we fell into an old pattern of Z giving a long dissertation on the things that I do that bother Z. Z talked while I listened quietly and became increasingly hurt. I don't really understand that process. Why do I let it happen when it's so hurtful to me? There's a great deal of focus on the negative and none on the positive. And the negative is all in me.*

I began to use the language of the one who is wrong. I sought out feedback from Z, seeking to please. I was eternally cautious and careful about how and what I talked about myself and the world around me, using only terms acceptable to Z.

*Month 2, Day 2, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's been a really good week between Z and I. I'm working very hard at being present; being clear and truthful about what's going on for me. Z has been very good at reminding me gently and clearly. I need to be cautious of complacency.*

*Month 2, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Last night was a weird night. We were laying in bed and talking about AA and Alanon step work. I thought I did very good at not reacting and at just listening to Z. I was having a few residual feelings, but drifted off to sleep. Then I woke up when I heard Z crying. I immediately felt responsible and looked for what I might have done wrong – realized I went to sleep and so Z might have heard that as “going silent” so I quickly apologized and admitted that. I think I drifted off to sleep again and then found myself awake, listening to Z playing the radio. I couldn't return to sleep with the radio playing. After about a half an hour of tossing and turning, I told Z that I was frustrated with the radio. Z immediately jumped out of bed, said that s/he was frustrated with me because I was blaming the radio then left our bedroom.*

*Now I'm feeling anxious. I guess the anxiety comes from a sense of having no control – I can't predict Z's reactions and so I can't control my environment. And that's perhaps where the resentment comes from.*

*Month 2, Day 24, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*At the end of yet another long talk, Z has asked me to spend an hour a day just thinking about what I want – I guess in our relationship. I can do that for the next four or five days.*

*Month 3, Day 6, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I had an argument last night. I hate it. Z stayed up all night again. When I got up this morning, Z was carrying pretty big angry energy. I recall that I can set boundaries for myself. Certainly, then, I must also accept the consequences of setting boundaries. Last night I tried in my usual clumsy way to set a boundary. I was fearful and anxious at the time and I'm sure that influenced how I did it. Z reacted hugely and started accusing me of just being focused on myself instead of on us. I don't have a clue what Z was feeling because Z just launched into this huge attack that I had to figure out how to recover from. I reacted back and told Z to leave the bedroom, which s/he did, and then stayed up all night. After a bit I went to Z again and stated that what I "meant" to say, was that what Z had to tell me was important, however I couldn't hear anymore at that moment and we could talk about it the next day. Apparently this wasn't sufficient information, as Z carried on for a bit longer and then stopped talking all together. So, I told Z that if s/he wanted to talk s/he was welcome to come back and wake me.*

*Month 3, Day 6, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm feeling so hopeless right now after fighting with Z this afternoon. I've once again heard all of the things that are wrong. I hear blame blame blame. I don't know*

*how to get out of this place, and I'm frustrated, extremely sad, and feel like bailing on the whole marriage.*

*Month 3, Day 7, Year 3 Journal entry*

*Z says that s/he thinks s/he's living in a hierarchical marriage and that I have more power than Z. Z also feels abused by me. These are not my experiences, however I'm sad that they're Z's. I feel insecure right now. It seems that I can't trust any decisions that we've made so far. And I'm feeling blamed for all of the decisions that have been made that Z "capitulated" to. I feel anxious as I write – I don't know what to expect and I'm scared about how the day might go. What do married couples do when they have different dreams? How do they negotiate those differences? I guess other couples do negotiate, but Z says that's not how s/he wants things to work. Z believes only in consensus, not negotiation.*

Because I was so intent on keeping peace in the home, and perhaps because I am a "people pleaser" (now in recovery), I tended to bend to Z's whims and plans. We wanted to live in the country; we weren't going to live in the country; we were going to do some travelling; we weren't going to travel, etc.

Z developed a new mantra that went something like "do you want to live in FEAR or in LOVE?" This question became the focal point of many criticisms about our relationship and my behaviour.

*Month 3, Day 17, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Today I'm making a pact with myself to live without FEAR. Just to check myself every half hour to see if fear has impeded me in some way. And if it has, I will correct it. When we were fighting the other day I randomly picked a counsellor out of the phone book and called. She has called back this morning to book an appointment. I have fear about just doing that without Z's okay.*

We bought a Boler Travel Trailer, took a month off work, and made arrangements to travel to the USA, for the G8 meetings that were occurring there. This was a big trip for us. We were in the car alone together for many days as we travelled. While in the United States we met up with a group of activists – The Pagan Cluster – and spent the week with them and hundreds of other activists doing education and protests against the G8 meeting. This particular trip was especially stressful on our relationship. Z had told me that Z had much experience as an activist, but in reality it was another exaggeration on Z's part. The lack of experience in street activism was evident in Z's high level of stress while we were in the United States. I mark this time as being “the beginning of the end” as the level of verbal and psychological abuse inflicted upon me increased exponentially. Z practised far less restraint than s/he had in the past, yelling and berating me in front of others. I found myself in a constant state of fear, anxiety, and humiliation as Z attempted to control all of my behaviours, including who I talked to; how I talked (i.e. what language I used); whether I associated with my peers, and where and when I slept. At one point, after a particularly grueling day within our relationship, Z threatened to abandon me in the United States where I would have to find my own way home.

*Month 4, Day 09, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We've been fighting the past couple of days and I think it finally reached its head last night. Which is good because I don't think I could stand anymore of it. I feel like I'm walking on eggshells, never knowing when Z's going to blow up. Z says that Z's so frustrated because I'm not being direct and honest, but I'm not being direct and honest because I'm afraid of the blow up.*

*Month 4, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*(Returning from the city we were protesting in) We've been fighting for over a week now – it's not constant but our blow-ups are happening on a daily basis. I'm feeling very depressed and really quite hopeless. I feel panicked at Z's threats to leave – a few days ago Z said that we might have to take separate routes home. What's difficult for me is that I go into a place of fear – if I don't get it right Z will leave. As I write that I become filled with fear.*

*Month 4, Day 14, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z has requested that I read a book called *The Four Agreements*. The first agreement talks about being impeccable with my word. It talks about the power of the word, which I understand, being a witch. If I want to live impeccably with my word, I need to state what I am. I always talk about what's going on for me, particularly when I'm resistant to doing so. I need to just talk about me – Z has instructed me to not use the word "you" in any ways that I talk. I am only to use "I".*

This book (which is actually quite a lovely book) became a source of “brainwashing.” I was to study the book on a daily basis, learn the tenets the author held out, and demonstrate that I had learned them by the way I lived (as evaluated by Z). A great deal of my own personal trauma is imbedded in this book and still, to this day so many years later, I cannot bear to look at this book.

*Month 4, Day 17, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Today, again, I intend to work on all of these things. I intend to be impeccable with my word; I won't take anything personally; I won't make assumptions – or at least will check all of my assumptions out; and I will do my best. In all of this, I will talk about myself, only. If I find myself avoiding something, I will confront it immediately. Those are lots of things to be working on.*

*Month 4, Day 22, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I don't argue so much anymore – instead I just retreat. Last night that's what I did – and I didn't even acknowledge that to Z. Of course Z would be frustrated – who wouldn't be? I'm afraid to say honestly where I am in those moments. I know there will be repercussions to my saying that. But there are repercussions, no matter what so really I'm choosing one over the other. I need to just be honest. I guess the going inside myself was a way of avoiding my discomfort and what I perceived to be my own risk – the risk of reprisal. Once again today, I need to talk only about myself. I commit to waking up each time I use or almost use “you” or “we”. I reaffirm my commitment to not avoid, so that each time I'm tempted to avoid something I will plow right through it. And then I will work on the Four Agreements.*

*Month 5, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*The depression, heaviness is related to fighting with Z for the past two days. I'm just feeling very discouraged. I don't want to write about it. I don't want to list all of the same intents as I do every time. The feedback I got from Z is that I'm rarely doing things the way Z needs me to. Therefore, I'm tired. I feel like I try. I feel constantly blamed for our problems. I'm not permitted to throw blame back (even when I want to). I want to give Z feedback on Z's behaviour, but I don't know how to do that without there being a massive fight. I'm back in the place of inequity – Z can talk about my behaviour all the time and I can never talk about Z's. I need to find love in my heart, even though I don't feel any. And of course, that will come back. I know, as soon as Z starts feeling / acting with love again, I will respond. It's the pattern. And then I'm conscious for a while. I believe we're having real conversations and trust them – I think that what's being said is the truth and I slip into complacency – trust, if you will. And then...BOOM!! There's a blow up. And then I stuff some of my resentments / frustrations in all of that. And eventually they come out as a reaction.*

*Month 6, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I was moving along, cleaning house today, and Z snapped at me because I was cleaning up Z's stuff. We then had to have a lengthy discussion about how I didn't tell Z what I was doing, etc. I was just rushing around cleaning the house. Once again, I heard a string of things that I "never do" or "always do".*

Despite our difficulties, we found a farm that we intended to purchase. We were going to rent for a year, and then we would qualify for a mortgage.

*Month 7, Day 17, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*One of the things I found in our argument was how I feel like a little kid being chastised. I totally relate to the child who is being berated by the parent about all of the things they haven't done. It's a horrible feeling – in some ways it feeds my sense of inadequacy. For example, last night Z was berating me about the fact that the packing for our move wasn't completed. It's true; I haven't finished packing everything yet. And then I go to guilt, because I can't argue with that – if I was only more together, less lazy, etc. I would have had this done. Underneath that is a seething resentment that I am responsible for it all and that, rather than offering to help, Z is pointing out my deficiencies. Which is the other point, and Z raised this last night. I blame Z – I know that, but it's a bit more. It's about these resentments that I allow to build without saying anything. For example, Z and I talked about our two possible ways of moving. I wanted to move everything out to the farm and start living there right away. Z wanted to leave “a bed and two chairs” here because Z wanted to stay here so that Z could have access to the internet. I could get my way if I went ahead and did it on my own. I didn't want to do that, so I sit in limbo wondering exactly when Z's going to agree to do everything else.*

*Month 7, Day 19, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We stayed at our farm last night. We had a terrible fight two nights ago. I'm still feeling quite traumatized by it. I don't know how to get over these feelings. I feel very resentful about Z's yelling and berating me. I feel deeply humiliated both personally and*

*socially. I've never heard Z discuss this rage as being anything other than an aspect of a reaction to a situation and also as Z's feeling hopeless. Because I am now traumatized by this anger/rage, when I think it might be building, I start trying to avoid it. This never helps. Then, as it seems inevitable and/or as the rage is being expressed, I try desperately to control that – I tell Z to stop yelling at me; I ask Z to sit down; sometimes I yell “quit yelling at me.” In the past I've tried to take time outs. I have a difficult time doing this because I don't like the tension in the air and I want to fix it. Even as I'm writing all of this stuff, my anxiety level climbs and I feel scared in my stomach. The feedback I got from Z is that Z gets frustrated with my many annoying character defects. This leads Z to an increased escalated behaviour.*

*Month 7, Day 28, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Last night the police came to our house. Someone called them because of all the yelling – Z's yelling, of course. I feel so embarrassed and humiliated. I'm just grateful that I didn't recognize the officers, or them, me. I feel dazed, in shock; huge balls of anxiety in my belly. It all feels so sick and I keep being hopeful that it will get better – but it doesn't. There are moments of reprieve – of love and joy, but on the edge of that I'm waiting for the next blow-up. I agreed with Z last night to not talk about Z for one week. That's fine. In the past, when we've been in this place it's been helpful for me to make an agreement that I won't use the words “you” or “we”. And if I catch myself saying “you” or “we”, I will immediately correct myself.*

*Month 8, Day 5, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Earlier today we were going to work on the water well to try to get the water running in our house; Z got busy downloading things on my computer. I knew Z had to go to work and I started feeling anxious about the delay in working on the water well. I finally got brave enough to say “I feel anxious that we aren’t going to get the water done”. I saw Z react – Z threw some things down, threw his/her head back and rolled his/her eyes, rubbing his/her face. I realized that I had presented my feelings without an action, which is what Z says Z wants. So I pointed out that I should have added that I wanted to go and do that right away. Z told me that Z felt manipulated and that I had put my anxiety on Z. Z was looking forward to working on the water and now was just anxious. I heard that as being “Yet again you haven’t expressed yourself the way I want you to and now look at what you’ve done”. I felt really hurt and shook up because I had made a choice to be vulnerable and express myself and felt like I’d been smacked as a result.*

*Z left the house then returned, called me some names; “victim” comes to mind and left again. After some time I felt that I could go and “take my responsibility”, whatever that means. I went outside, I said “I was feeling anxious and shared that and what I wanted to do was to influence you to get you to go and work on the water pump. In that way, I wasn’t straight forward”. Z then continued to berate me – told me all the things I could have done: “Do you want to communicate with me?” “Yes”; “Are you?” I just felt like a piece of shit – a bug on the floor barely worth spitting at. Now some of that is mine, no doubt, but I am deeply affected by Z’s constant berating. At one point Z was yelling at me again – I pointed it out and Z immediately dropped his/her voice, but said “I’ll stop yelling if you stop interrupting me”. I wasn’t even talking, except to point out*

*the yelling. I was feeling so humiliated by the berating that I couldn't even speak. A bit later, while we were still working on the well, I told him – again risking and being vulnerable – that in moments like these, when we've had an argument, I would appreciate for him to touch me and tell me he loved me or something like that. Instead of taking that opportunity to reach out to me, Z name called – called me co-dependent and that he could give me my drug if I wanted but I needed to recognize that I'm co-dependent.*

*Month 9, Day 8, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I had a big fight on Thursday night. Z put a bunch of conditions on me that I have to do or Z's moving out: (1) go for counselling on my own – a minimum of six sessions; (2) do a "timeline" of my life; (3) write a journal every night defining the points of when I'm not living the way I want; (4) the next time we have a fight, I have to leave for the night. I refused the last one, although Z insisted that the terms were non-negotiable. I just felt that the last one – leaving for the night – goes against my values, the same way that sleeping on the couch does. I resent being treated like I'm sick and need to be in treatment, however, I know that my behaviour dramatically affects our interactions. I realize that I have very strong reactions to believing that Z is judging me or telling me that I am wrong.*

*Month 9, Day 24, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We just went from 0 to 100 in 20 seconds flat tonight, exploding in a massive fight. Z has driven off somewhere in my car, leaving me stranded here on the farm. I'm at home wondering what in hell happened. The whole day was going great. I went to town and when I came home, Z said "you're in high speed". Our pattern is that we argue at*

*the times that Z perceives that I am “racing about”. I commented that I would need to be aware of this. Then we moved on to watch a video. I got up just as it started to put the spaghetti in the pot of now boiling water. Z commented that it bothered Z that I said that I’d like to watch the movie, then wasn’t. I agreed that I wasn’t giving it my full attention, but was thinking that Z was being quite controlling about how I should watch the video. The spaghetti started to boil and Z became really frustrated that it was splashing. Z asked if there was anything I could do about that and I commented “no, there wasn’t”. Then I tried to explain my “no” and Z went into a full blown confrontation behaviour. Z yelled, swore, called me names, and at one point threw him/herself on to the floor yelling and crying.*

The attempt to control seems to be a primary function of abusive partners in relationships. In my case, it could be seen by the external forces that Z placed upon me as we moved through our day and our lives. It was my experience that most aspects of my life were under control including what I thought about. I believe those external controls placed upon me helped to set the stage for me to traverse the other gates.

### **Objects**

Inanna stands poised, now, at the second gate. She has traversed the path following the first gate. She waits, knowing that she can turn back, but wanting to press on ... move further into the Underworld. Inanna knocks and seeks passage through this second gate – this gate where she gives up those objects in her life that reflected her success; her personal wealth; those things that she has worked hard to attain. Inanna hands over her lapis beads and passes through the gate.

I was a successful social worker with a professional job. I had been earning a relatively good income and had a good reputation in my work place. I had worked hard to develop this reputation and to feel comfortable in my own life. I had grown to feel confident about my ability to meet my son's and my day to day needs without worry or question. I had come to believe that people in relationships shared expenses and lived equitably when they could. Z loved to spend money, even when it was mine. For some reason, I went along with it. We spent money we didn't have and continued to accumulate debt. At the time the marriage ended I owed close to \$30,000.

I spent a lot of time worrying about Z's lack of gainful employ. It was embarrassing to me that Z not only frequently didn't have a job, but also didn't seem all that interested in having a job. In many ways, this seemed like a reflection on me, and I was conscious of what my community and family believed to be true about this. Very early in the relationship, Z challenged me about my attachment to comfort and making money, suggesting that I was supporting the current corporate / capitalistic paradigm. Z requested that I take less shifts at work so that I would have more time at home with Z. Because it never occurred to me that Z did not have my best interests or the best interests of the relationship at heart; because I held a belief around mutuality in the relationship (Evans, 1993; Evans, 1996; Sackett & Saunders, 2001), I did as Z requested, causing increasing financial stress in my home.

*Month 3, Day 5, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I love the relationship, but there are moments when I find it especially challenging. Z is at home on the computer. It's difficult for me to see how that is productive. I know Z tells me it's productive, however, I don't see any money coming in,*

*so it's hard for me to see it. I buy Z's tea when we go out, and I feel slightly resentful about that. But I don't want to bring it up because then I think Z won't go out with me because Z doesn't have any cash. Somehow, it doesn't feel like a reciprocal relationship. I mean it is to some degree. I am getting lots of love and intimacy, however I'm the one bringing in the money and I do most of the cooking and all of the housework. I guess this is something that I need to discuss – clearly it's bothering me and not being dealt with.*

*Month 7, Day 22, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Z has left the job, so there are some financial things that we're going to need to work out, however, I'd way rather avoid the discussions and the anxiety of worrying about it. I know that Z was not happy with the car selling thing, so I'm totally supportive of Z's leaving. I'm just going to worry about the money.*

*Month 7, Day 30, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Z is at work, at a new job – telephone survey stuff.*

*We've been talking about money and my being able to trust that Z can bring in an income. It's a difficult place for me to have full faith. I'm fearful of being poor like I was in the past – of having bill collectors chasing me and trying to figure out which bill I can pay. I've been there, done that, and have absolutely no desire to do it again. Still, at Z's request, I won't take absolutely every shift offered to me at work. I will work slightly less.*

*Month 9, Day 26, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Sitting in my hotel room with Z – the Emerald Lake Lodge. It's such a beautiful hotel. We got here this evening – there's no TV. Our room has a fireplace – you can't drive in – they pick you up in a golf cart. We've just been to the outdoor hot tub – even*

*though it's at least -10° outside, it was so fabulous. Neither of us can afford this trip, but we decided that we could just put it on my credit card. Z doesn't have a credit card – or good credit for that matter, so it will be me that pays for this trip.*

*Month 10, Day 12, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Sitting in Second Cup downtown waiting for Z. Z's at a meeting that started at 1:00 pm – it's now 3:00. I thought for sure that Z would be done by now, but s/he's not. I was/am anxious because Z's supposed to be at work, and has been sloughing off the last couple of shifts. I'm anxious because I think Z might 'get in trouble' which is fine, except that I don't want Z to be unemployed again. Anyway, I just have to keep telling myself that it's Z's job, not mine.*

*Month 10, Day 16, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I've been Christmas shopping and feeling increasingly anxious about it because I don't really have any money. I'm shopping on my credit card this Christmas, which is a thing I haven't done for many years. I'm not spending lots, but because it's on credit, it creates more stress for me. Anyway, I have to trust the process, so to speak. It seems like I have less money since Z started working, which doesn't make any sense at all. And we're going to Victoria after Christmas – which will be an added expense. Ahh, but why worry? As Z says, I need to just go with the flow a bit more.*

*Month 2, Day 11, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm feeling a bit panicked about making financial ends meeting. Over the past few months, at Z's request, I accepted less shifts, so now less are offered. I may need to take*

*another job, for a while. Anyway I can just let that ride for a bit and not worry. I'm okay for another month yet.*

*Month 2, Day 16, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's almost noon – I can't believe I slept so late today – again. Although I was up late last night. I bought a new laptop computer for myself. It's very exciting and I thought I would feel anxious about the money but I don't at all. I'm calling it an investment in myself as writer. This is how Z has suggested I look at it.*

Z and I began planning to move to the country. Or to give up our lifestyle and travel around, gypsy fashion. We had many discussions about it, and there was great appeal for me in changing my current lifestyle. But I was also confronted with my own personal sense of responsibility to my life. Z pressured me to apply for additional credit, despite my better judgment. I knew it wasn't a good idea, but agreed to do so just the same. Again, I believed that Z had the best interest of our relationship at heart. We were talking about freeing ourselves from debt and accumulating more debt at the same time.

*Month 2, Day 19, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*11:30 in the morning. I have to go to work at 2:30 today and then have 3 night shifts. Z hasn't been working at all so I don't know what's going on with Z's job.*

From my point of view, we were constantly in a spiral of Z working and not working. It was frequently difficult for me to even know if Z had a job. If I asked too many questions about Z's employment state or financial state, I received a lot of recrimination.

*Month 2, Day 21, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We paid the rest of the money for the trailer and now it's ours. We just have to figure out whether to put a tow bar on this car or another diesel. Z would really like to buy a 'junker' to use. I'm reluctant to do that and I don't know why. I guess I'm resentful about having to pay for everything. I'm annoyed that Z's so lazy and resistant to working. I'm confused; wounded at the blame around money again. Maybe that is a trigger for me. It's a trigger because I feel guilty about not sharing or trusting Z with my money. I'm having a hard time being okay with my boundary. And I'm not being honest about how I feel that Z is choosing not to work. I'm having huge resentment that Z won't get a job and I'm afraid to talk about it – I might make Z feel bad.*

*Month 2, Day 25, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I spent all day Saturday engaged in conflict. Really, I think that it stems from money. My need to control it. Z's lack of it. My resentments that Z has chosen not to work. The fact that I've avoided the resentment rather than just talk to Z about it.*

*Month 3, Day 11, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's just after 11 am. Z is still in bed. Z and I started talking seriously yesterday about going to G8 in the United States next month. Driving down. It's very exciting and this morning I am feeling apprehensive about the money. We've been working towards a longer term goal of buying a farm, and now, if we do this, many of the plans for the farm will need to go on the back burner. That's not the end of the world but I know I like to stay on the straight and narrow. I like to just travel forward on my goal. We've talked about Z buying and selling Bolers to make some more money and we've also talked about*

*Z buying diesel vehicles to convert and sell. These goals would be set behind us for a while, until we could earn enough money ahead again.*

*I'm not so sure that this is the priority, then, to go to G8. Now, if I got money from the union, maybe. But even then, it's still going to cost us money to get everything ready to go. Get the trailer road worthy and the car road worthy for a long trip.*

*I think we'll need to talk a bit more – a lot more about this. We still haven't discussed buying a farm together since our last fight. It's my intention to have that discussion today. It's stressful for me because I bear the full financial responsibility of it all.*

*Month 3, Day 18, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I promised Z that I would go apply for a line of credit today, but I might put it off until tomorrow. I guess that's an avoidant behavior. I just hate doing lots of stuff on days when I have to go to work. And I'm scared of applying, so I want to avoid it. We don't really have any collateral that we can apply for a line of credit with, but Z insists that it's possible for me to do it.*

*I want to plant flowers. Maybe after I go to the bank tomorrow I can buy a few, although I feel like I have a very limited amount of money with which to do that. I don't have to be too extravagant. And I can plant more veggies too, which is what Z has done so far.*

*Month 3, Day 27, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I got up early this morning and washed the trailer down, so that we could paint it today. Z was putting the caulking on the windows when I left. I am, of course, very*

worried about all of the money we're spending – actually all of *my* money Z is spending, but I guess it's things required. Yesterday I was feeling extremely anxious – today I'm okay. I have to believe that it will all come together the way it's meant to.

*Month 5, Day 19, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I've been thinking about the mortgage, and thinking that if CMHC comes back to me and wants more than 5% down on the farm we should just let it go. I have, in the last week or so, agreed with Z that we could keep looking for more money and borrow more, but now I'm feeling uncomfortable with that plan. It seems like it would be okay to let this place go as part of our process and just find a really cheap place to rent and save our money.*

*Dreams. I'm supposed to meet M for lunch today, and she's going to loan me \$5000 for our down payment – assuming it goes through.*

*Month 5, Day 24, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We're at mom and dad's. Since we got here we found out that the bank flat out denied us for the mortgage – that's because CMHC doesn't see the value of the house – which is what I feared all along with no running water and no central furnace. When I phoned the people who want to sell the house, to tell them this, they have now offered to finance us. Their terms are a lot steeper than a bank mortgage. And I think we're going to do it. In fact, I want Z to phone him today and tell him that. I'm tired of dealing with it. And I want to farm! It's as simple as that.*

*I'm scared of the cost commitment – scared that we're making a decision based upon our hearts and not our heads. I'm scared that Z won't hold up Z's end of the*

*agreement to pay the mortgage. And all of these fears are fantasy 'what ifs'. There's no way of eliminating them other than to recognize them as creations of my own anxious mind. I can have faith that the Divine has moved us through this process and brought us here to this place. And then move through the fear to accept this miracle that has been offered.*

*Month 7, Day 7, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm hoping that Z will have a job in the next week or so. It's time – even though there's so much work to do. Once we get the fireplace and bed in to the new house, everything can be done as we have time.*

The house we moved in to was an older home on a quarter section of land. The owners wanted to sell to us, and made a deal for an option to purchase. This gave us the opportunity to try to save for a down payment and arrange financing within one year and to be able to buy the property for the same price as was being asked. Unfortunately, the house had many problems, including that there was no running water. It was equipped for running water, but something was wrong with the water well and pumps. The entire time I lived there with Z, we never had running water. The house also did not have a furnace. There was an old fireplace that was crumbling and likely unsafe to use.

*Month 5, Day 26, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We worked on getting the water running all day yesterday. We think we know the problem is a foot valve. Z replaced that, but we still don't have water. Z is sure that it's that one of the hoses wasn't tight, so once we tighten it, we should have water! That will be so great. Then we have to flush the whole system with bleach to decontaminate it.*

*Once that's done, then we'll have to tackle putting the fireplace in. Then – everything that has to be done, will be done. Thank goodness.*

*Month 9, Day 24, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm intending to gather wood today. Z cut a bunch yesterday and I did collect a bunch of it, but there's a lot more. I also would like to do some baking, but I'm out of butter and I don't really feel like running to town. Maybe I will later. Also, I just don't know how much money I have, so don't even know if I have enough to buy what I need.*

*I have a busy worried mind, all of a sudden – I certainly didn't earlier.*

*Month 10, Day 16, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*(After a big fight, I went to stay with my sister) This is my third morning at my sister's. I've just gotten a new cell phone hooked up, so I can start to have some contact with people. It's a bit impulsive of me, and I didn't go about it in the best way possible, but never-the-less, I have it. I need to go to the farm tomorrow to pick up my winter boots, so I have them when I go to my parents' at Christmas. I actually don't really feel like going home at Christmas. I'm not feeling like being around all of that energy. That could change in a heartbeat though. My thoughts and feelings are pretty chronically scattered.*

It was a very difficult experience to hold the values of socialism, anti-capitalism, and cooperative living and still enjoy the rewards of working full time and reaping the benefits of the pay cheque that came with it. Although I thought I would enjoy “roughing it” in the home that we moved to, I actually found it quite challenging. Many of my friends later told me they saw this as illogical progress in my life – to give up the comfort

of the home that I had to move to a home with no running water or central heating. In addition to this conflict, was the conflict I experienced as a social worker giving advice to clients who were experiencing domestic violence. I was incongruent in this experience.

### **Comfort**

Inanna stands, now, in front of the third gate. She has left behind her sense of control and her attachment to the objects of her life – her financial success. As she waits for entry, she is asked to now let go of those things that give her comfort, that soothe her. Inanna hands over her double strand of beads and prepares to descend further.

Increasingly, in this relationship I turned my comfort over to Z. I moved further and further away from those things in my life that brought me comfort. I felt discomfort in my own body. I began to avoid responsibility in a way that I had never done in my life. Where my house was always orderly and calm, it began to reflect the chaotic nature of my new life and my relationship.

My initial struggles with *comfort* had more to do with the loss of personal space and time. I'm sure this is not an unusual experience when two people start living together, however I found it quite difficult to create space for myself to do the things that kept me sane. One of the things I used to do regularly for myself (pre-Z) was to go for tea and write in my journal. Evans (1993) spoke to the loss of time alone and to having one's time controlled in the abusive relationship. Increasingly, I found myself minimizing my time away from Z. Z would rarely have told me that I couldn't go out, or couldn't attend to my own desires, but Z would frequently respond in a punishing fashion upon my return (i.e. silence, ignoring, confrontational behaviours). I quickly learned that if I wanted to have time alone to engage in the activities that gave me deep comfort (writing, dreaming,

talking with friends), I would also need to be willing to accept the consequences as Z saw fitting. I also used to pray and meditate. I created sacred life around myself, however that seemed to disappear when Z moved in. I struggled with my sense of being judged about what and how I acknowledged the Sacred.

*Month 1, Day 27, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Z went home yesterday, and I am rather enjoying having my house to myself. When Z's here, there's a sense of needing to entertain a guest. I guess, as usual, I want to just carry on with my life. That always works the best for me. Perhaps I need to focus more on living in this moment – I keep saying that, too. But I really just want everything the way I want it. What could possibly be wrong with that? Anyway, along with living in the moment, I need to continuously monitor my thoughts and feelings to ensure I'm being honest with Z and with myself. There's some anxiety that I'm having around Z's level of honesty – with me and with others. Z is the perpetual salesperson – constantly 'on' and not actually lying, but more manipulating the truth. I not only need to raise that with Z, but I need Z to stop it! It's embarrassing and I feel like I can't trust everything Z says. That is not a good basis for a relationship. There is a part of me, however, who feels concerned about Z's self-esteem if I raise this issue. I don't want to hurt Z's feelings. I guess that's the co-dependent in me – taking care of and tip-toeing around the truth/feelings.*

*Month 2, Day 26, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*It's been awhile since I've been able to just sit by myself at Steeps and write in my journal. It's hard to get time alone – Z and I are always together. Not that I mind so much, but I'm so used to being alone that it's a big adjustment for me.*

*I was just having a remembrance of sitting in Steeps one night writing and being so deep into the writing with Z phoning me, and just being so deep that I could hardly hear Z. I need to do more of that magical kind of work that puts me in that deep place. I guess it's the other thing that I've been not doing since Z moved in. My room is no longer my own, so I don't have the space/time to practice. I kind of miss the privacy of a place for a daily practice. I guess I need to find a way to build that in. I like routine, but I may need to break with routine and just really use the time I have to get into the daily practice.*

*Month 6, Day 14, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Steeps, Thursday afternoon – I've stopped for tea alone. It's the first time in what feels like ages that I've been able to spend any time alone.*

*Month 1, Day 8, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Well, we're back home from our vacation. It's bed time, and I'm in bed, but thought it good to clear my mind before sleeping. I have to go back to work tomorrow and I really wish that I didn't. I liked our time away – I liked how we gave each other our undivided attention. Back here, in the house, that's changed yet again. It's a real challenge to remain in this magical place in the mundane world; I want to keep looking at all things through the eyes of magic.*

*Part of what seemed magical on our trip was the constant exposure to nature. Today I've been in the house almost totally, and so I don't get that exposure. That's a good awareness to have and a helpful one, knowing that I need to lose some weight – I can force my lazy body to go for walks.*

I used to spend a lot of time writing fiction. I wrote short stories and poetry.

*Month 2, Day 12, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Yesterday I was also thinking about my writing and how I make such excuses for not getting any writing done. The short stories that I started writing about Steeps are waiting to be finished. Perhaps I need to set that as a goal. Just to finish that as a book. How many short stories make a book? I don't know. But the stories are there. Also, today, I want to accomplish an exercise in the Writer's Way book and in my Al-anon book. I have lots of homework to do before I go to work.*

*Month 2, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's just after 11:00. Z's still asleep. We're planning to go to Steeps today, and I want to do some serious writing. I haven't done any for a while – with all of the fighting I have not been very motivated to write or be creative in my way.*

*Month 2, Day 21, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm feeling pretty calm today. I went with a skiing metaphor yesterday and just allowed myself to sit down gently. That's where I feel that I am – not flying down the hill out of control, and not at the bottom of the hill, but just sitting and looking around. It's quite lovely, really. Yesterday, I went for a long walk and when I came home, Z was in bed (Z had been up all night). I laid down with Z and we cried together and made love. I was grieving – really feeling the sadness of where we were and it felt so healing to make love in that pain. I was reminded of how much I love my Z and also that Z loves me.*

*What else is there to write about today? I haven't been working on the 'Writer's Way' exercises like I had intended. I guess I've been pretty unfocused – perhaps I'll get*

*started again on Monday. Despite taking each day as it comes, there is a real sense of just sitting in limbo that's slightly uncomfortable. What I need to do is just move ahead with my own desires and plans – work; pay off the debts; move along. Whatever that means.*

*I also think that I'll get some serious house work done today. I'm so tired of the house being such a mess. I jokingly said to my friend yesterday that that will be one advantage of Z moving out – my house won't be filled with mess and clutter anymore – at least not in the same way. I look forward to having that organized feeling around me again. It comes with a feeling of peace to me.*

Before Z moved in, I used to be a morning person. I would get up early and do interesting things, get my chores done and enjoy the peace of the morning. After Z moved in, we started sleeping later and later in the day. This was another way of my accommodating Z's lifestyle. It also frequently reflected the late nights that I experienced with Z when Z was lecturing me. Z seemed to go through periods of staying up all night and sleeping all day. This, too, would impact me, as Z did not want me moving around the house with too much activity if Z was sleeping.

*Month 2, Day 25, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We've been awake since noon, just laying in bed, making love, talking. Z is leaving today and I'm slightly in denial about it. It means that things are going to change. I feel scared that this new found peace/honesty that I have is going to slip away.*

*Month 1, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*And I need to find a way to be comfortable in my body. Stop feeling sick. Let my back relax so that I can turn my neck again.*

*I need to do my income tax. I got a 'threatening' letter from Revenue Canada telling me I had 30 days to file so I'd better get at it. That's the goal for tomorrow. The house will be clean, so it'll be easy to just settle in.*

*Month 1, Day 14, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's almost 10:30 on a Sunday morning. Z stayed up again all night, so will likely sleep most of the day – again. It's Z's business, but it irritates me – I don't know why, I guess I'm judging how healthy I deem it to be. Anyway it really isn't my business. I'm not Z's mother and it's not my job to take care of Z. I'm really aware that I want to remove myself from drama and have peace. That's what I'm striving for. I used to live peacefully and I can again.*

*I have to go to work today at 2:00. I thought I would spend the morning doing some self-work – re-start the Artist's Way; do a tarot reading; maybe some al-anon stuff. It all helps me to grow.*

I began to notice ill health in my body. Symptoms of pain in my stomach, lack of energy / motivation, nausea, and other signs of stress. My last refuge of comfort – my body – was letting me down. I was frequently experiencing low levels and high levels of stress. Where, prior to Z, I was a generally very relaxed individual, I became increasingly uptight and unable to relax. I came to realize that so much of my time was spent thinking about Z and about our relationship, where, prior to the relationship, I thought about

spiritual things and human things. My journals reflect constant states of “exhaustion” and sleeplessness. The journals frequently mention “heaviness” in my body – an uncomfortable sensation.

*Month 1, Day 16, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I realized how much of my time is actually spent thinking about someone else. Perhaps it's why I have so much anxiety – obviously I can't do anything about anyone else, but if I'm thinking about them every day, then I feel helpless and worried. Z is still awake or at least, hasn't yet come to bed. This bothers me – I really want Z to be doing the things that I think are productive. I'm worried about Z's health, etc, and I'm not Z's mom.*

*I can hear a bird singing and it's a sign that makes me think of summer. It reminds me of other birds, the warm sun, slight warm breeze, sitting down at the valley and listening to the silence of the place. The feeling makes me nostalgic for home and for an extended visit to the river.*

*Month 1, Day 17, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Maybe it's a good day to discuss housework with the others in the house. I'll see how the energy is flowing. Although I've gotten a lot of sleep last night, I still feel exhausted. I guess it feels a bit like I've been working hard and now I need to rest. Maybe I have been and now something else has shifted in me.*

*Month 2, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*(After two nights of fighting)*

*Well, finally a good night's sleep. I feel better today. We're going to the farm as soon as we're ready. I feel like I had been in a big workout and all of my muscles are stiff. Not physically but emotionally. I'm emotionally stiff - I'm scared to move in case it hurts. Emotionally. An interesting feeling.*

*We seemed to get mostly past what we needed to put behind us last night. I still have resentments in me and I need to do something with those. I still want us to come up with a better way to fight. I'd like to present /offer some alternatives but I'm scared to bring it up.*

*Perhaps that's one of the learning places is that the writing keeps me still for a period of time when I might otherwise be moving. It stills me long enough to clear my mind of all the leftover crap. And for me, that's a very positive thing. My mind races – particularly when I'm stressed or anxious about anything. I hate that, but I haven't yet learned how to quiet my mind. A good skill to figure out.*

*Month 2, Day 23, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's around 11:30 am. I'm showered; got a load of laundry in, and I'm intending to do some housework before I go to work. I'm feeling hugely irritated at how messy the house is. It's like – if I don't clean up it stays like this. Actually that's not completely fair because in the past two weeks Z has been doing some cleaning. But, it's irritating to every day have to look at the mess. There are no clean plates in the house. None. So now I have to wash all of them. Well, I don't have to, but I'm tired of them sitting on the counter.*

*Month 2, Day 25, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*My son's radio is blaring and I'm finding it really difficult to concentrate. It's kind of annoying. No peace in my own home. Perhaps I need to take my writing and just go to Steeps. I haven't been there for some time and Z's still asleep, so I can do that if I like. I still feel guilty going off and doing things without Z. I don't know why. I think there's a part of me that still feels like Z's a guest and I need to entertain Z.*

*Month 5, Day 7, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm frustrated with the state of the house, and I don't know how to get my needs met here. It's not only messy, but dirty and no one seems to care but me. I guess I need to fully address that with Z and my son – perhaps without the expectation that they will rush to fix my need. And just carry on for myself.*

*Month 6, Day 4, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm feeling so exhausted today, but I don't know why.*

*Month 6, Day 5, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I still feel wiped out, but not quite as bad as yesterday. Maybe the fact that the sun is shining has been helpful. I've called my massage therapist to see if she will give me a massage today. I'm doing some laundry, and I might clean the house a bit. Everything just feels so unmanageable to me right now. It's like there is no way I can deal with it all. And I don't even know what 'it all' is. There's an energy moving through me – it's like I*

want to say 'I feel a disruption in the force, Luke.'<sup>3</sup> It's a huge weight – oppressive invisible exerted from within and out.

*Month 6, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I've actually been feeling really heavy for the past couple of weeks. I'm exhausted and unmotivated. I've been tired and stubborn about cleaning the house, and consequently it's just become dirtier and dirtier. I know, in myself, that a chaos in my environment feeds chaos in my inner self. I have a difficult time relaxing when the house is filthy. And what I hear Z say is that that's a problem, because I'm blaming something outside of myself for something I feel inside of myself. And that's partially true – if I were perfect my environment would never affect me. But I'm not and it does.*

*Month 6, Day 20, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I've been physically ill for a number of weeks, now, and still am. I'm actually thinking it might be due to stress. I'm shaky, nauseous. I guess stress can do all kinds of things to your body. And this house buying, as well as the struggles in our relationship have combined to create extraordinary stress.*

*Month 6, Day 22, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I can't believe how anxious I feel. It's really quite unbelievable. My whole body is jittery with anxiety. I was just reading in my Al-Anon book about remembering Step two – 'came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity.' That resonates with me.*

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to Star Wars, in case you're not a fan.

*So along with coming to believe, I also am making a decision to turn my stress, anxiety and controlling over to Her, the Great Divine Mother who will take care of everything. And I see her smiling and accepting this burden and reminding me that it was hers all along.*

*Month 6, Day 23, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Yesterday, after writing I felt really good and I actually experienced 'serenity' for about half an hour. This morning I woke up with my mind racing yet again and had to remind myself that this process is in the hands of the Divine.*

*If I think about the future, the anxiety returns. Which is interesting, given that that's how I believe I have to plan.*

*Month 8, Day 2, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I tried watching TV but it felt too fast. Z bought DVDs for the TV show "Millennium" so I watched the first show. I want to phone in sick tomorrow and carry on this deep personal work that I'm doing, but also I feel guilty about doing just that. I feel like I leave them in a lurch, and yet I really need to continue; to rest; to reflect; to keep opening these doors inside of me.*

*... I just phoned work and am taking a sick day tomorrow. I am carrying some guilt/fear about that, but I've done it, and now I can let all things go for tomorrow.*

*Month 8, Day 20, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It feels so early for winter, and us without our running water or fireplace yet. Today I need to do a little cleaning up. Z's mom brought Z's pets yesterday. They (the animals) brought so much stuff and it feels so cluttered, so I'd like to organize it a bit.*

*Same with the porch – now we've got 2 dirty dogs out there. They've taken over. We had the couch out there for us to sit on and the big dog has taken it over; it's now one big hairy wet mess. But whatever, that's how it is.*

*Month 9, Day 2, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Yesterday Z almost totally got the woodstove hooked up – just needs one little piece for the stove pipe and we'll be ready to go. We decided to hook into the existing chimney for now, and then work on building the new chimney. The water is an ongoing saga. I was expecting that we would reach a point where – tada! – it would be working. It seems like Z has been 'tinkering' to get things going, trying different things; figuring things out; but not in any real rush to get it going. I've decided that I need to get some more water containers, and a camping solar shower and use that. My greatest wish is to have access to a shower in my own house. If I have enough water containers, I should be able to do that.*

It seemed like my life moved from a state of enjoyable comfort, where I lived in a comfortable home, had good health (physical, emotional, psychological) and practiced the things that I wanted to practice. As the relationship with Z progressed, I found myself displaced in to a new home with few physical comforts; my health deteriorated; and I no longer sought comfort in the manner that I sought before.

### **Community**

Having been willing to give up those areas that created comfort for her, even comfort in her own body, Inanna stands poised at the fourth gate. This is the gate of community – the gate where Inanna feels connected to those around her. It is the place

where she sees how she fits in to a greater whole – a larger context. It is the group of people identified as friends and family. Inanna must be willing to give these up if she is to continue her journey downwards.

I am a gregarious extrovert. I gain energy and direction from being with “my people”. As Knox (2006) suggested, I also gain understanding about who I am based upon my interactions with my family and my community. Z was initially well accepted in our community. Z’s apparent enthusiasm for magic and ritual as well as Z’s knowledge of the political realm seemed enticing to many people. However, within a short period of time, Z did not just have conflict with me; Z seemed to have conflict with many people in the world. Z struggled to hold a job and within our own community, Z’s dominating personality began to both rub on and offend people. As my relationship with Z progressed, I became increasingly embarrassed, humiliated, and uncomfortable being around my friends when Z was with me. I knew that many of my close friends did not want to spend time with Z, and so I found myself having to choose.

*Month 1, Day 25, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*The world is changing so fast, so much from my small circle to the world at large. Z has been here for a week now. It’s been great – I’ve really enjoyed it, however, there are moments of anxiety, as well. Just the last couple of days I think I’m dealing with some of my own elitism – Z doesn’t really seem to have a job and I want Z to. It’s a challenging process because I have to look at what I value, and how I perceive what is important in the world. In some ways I really wish that we could go away together, so that I could work through my insecurities without the outside influences of the world. In some ways Z’s being here so much does facilitate that – we’re spending tons and tons of time*

*together. It feels a bit like a constant holiday. Maybe that's one way I can keep my authentic self touched and active.*

*In a slightly larger circle, I'm watching my son closely during this time. It's a big adjustment, I think, to watch his mother fall in love and know that she's being intimate with someone. He feels the energy. He is witness to it. He says he's okay with it, but his mood fluctuates a lot. But he says he's fine with having Z around all of the time. Says it doesn't bother him at all. Anyway I guess I have to trust that.*

*In a slightly larger circle – the AB Reclaiming community – is also growing, changing, transforming. I gave up my coven and am now able to immerse myself and commit to the relationships in this larger community. We have breakfast on Saturday mornings and Pagan Cluster and informal Friday morning teas. There are drumming circles and dinners with some of the women. It's all really fabulous and spinning into cohesiveness. There are some conflicts, but I think that we can/will work through them – I can no longer imagine my life without the AB Reclaiming community.*

*In still a larger circle, we've been holding Peace Marches in my city, mobilizing against the war. I've loved having the Pagan Cluster, and doing that magic. I love tapping into the energy that is here and holding that, as healing for the conflict. This is a powerful place, but in some ways I continue to feel so powerless to create change. The effect for me, however, is that I am more often finding myself living in 'Otherworld'. I have more moments of clarity about the world and more moments when I look out at the world from more conscious eyes.*

*Still larger, the US attacked Iraq a week ago. It's been a bit devastating and numbing at the same time. I wonder how one brings the power of Otherworld to a war –*

*a conflict. What is Otherworld? It's a place where magic lives daily, and every interaction is a magical interaction. I feel like that is truer and truer in my life. It becomes truer; however, it's difficult to change the world when I'm only one. And yet, I have to believe that it's true and possible – that I can change situations just by being around them.*

*Perhaps this is always the magic – remaining conscious in the moment to the intricacies of the world; recognize the magic that lives and breathes around us and through us.*

*Month 4, Day 30, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*We're at the '1<sup>st</sup> Annual' Alberta Reclaiming Camp-out. It's quite wonderful. Today is Monday. We came on Saturday evening – Z, my friend and I in the bus. It's been great discussion, warmth, acceptance. The weather has been fabulous. Yesterday we went skinny dipping in the river. How fun to hang in the water with everyone naked.*

*There's something very pure and honest about public nudity. It's primal – it's – well, it's vulnerable. This has been a bit like Witchcamp in that way – a companionship and sense of vulnerability – everyone looking out for each other, away from the traffic and the busy life of the city. It just feels like a chance to live directly in the moment. A place to practice an alternative lifestyle.*

Within a very short period of time, Z and I decided to get married. We had only lived together a few months, but decided that we knew we wanted to be married. Even as I planned the wedding, I had misgivings about the relationship. We were already having arguments. It seemed the right thing to do, however. Neither Z nor I wanted a legal

marriage, but we did want to have a formal ceremony indicating our commitment to each other and the relationship. In Pagan tradition, this is called a *Handfasting*, where your hands are literally tied together.

*Month 6, Day 4, Year 2 E.mail invitation*

*Hello Beautiful Family & Friends:*

*Our wonderful Handfasting Ritual is quickly approaching, and we thought it would be kind of us to share the details with you!*

*The Handfasting is on Month 5, Day 16, Year 2. We are holding the energy that it will be a beautiful day. As most of you are aware, the ritual will be at Z's parents' farm just outside of (a little town).*

*As most of you know, you are welcome to camp at Z's parents' for the Handfasting. There will be a 'porta-potty' outside, and there are outside taps for water. We are planning a potluck dinner around 5:00 pm with 'grazing' all afternoon. Plan to bring a dish that's enough for your family, and two or three other families. Z's parents have kindly offered to do a pig roast, so there will be ample amounts of meat available. There will be coffee, tea, and a punch available. If you want anything else to drink, bring your own. Alcohol is okay with us. The Ritual will occur after dinner. If you aren't in to camping, my sister has reserved 5 hotel rooms in town. If you are interested in taking one of those rooms, call her directly to make those arrangements. My parents have kindly offered to make a pancake and sausage breakfast on Sunday morning for those that stay overnight.*

*If you play a musical instrument, please bring it. We hope, weather providing, to have a big campfire after the ritual with lots of music and singing. If it rains, we will likely be in the machine shed.*

*Many of you are saying ‘and what do I wear to a handfasting?’ The answer is... whatever you like. Really, it’s an informal party. If you want to wear your princess dresses, that’s absolutely great – I definitely am! And Z might. Just know that we’re going out into the pasture, and there are four dogs that love to rub their gorgeous white hair against you! Part of a pagan celebration is to be in nature, and honor that, and that is recognizing that staying clean is not necessarily the goal.*

*We do not want gifts. We both believe that your being able to be with us on this day is gift enough. We also believe that we have been blessed with a gift beyond belief... our love for each other. If you still feel that you need to bring a gift, please try to make it a recycled one.... One of our magical goals for the Ritual will be to bind the love and blessings of our community within our relationship. To that end, we ask you to bring a bead, and a wish attached (metaphorically speaking) to the bead.*

*It’s likely that some of you will still have questions. Feel free to email either of us, or both of us, or call us. We’re both looking so forward to seeing you at our Handfasting, and we’re thrilled if you can come.*

*With deepest love to each of you from both of us*

My friends, although very loyal, increasingly did not want to spend time with Z. They would invite me to join them and would either explicitly or implicitly imply that Z

was unwelcome. I frequently felt in a position of having to choose between my friends and Z. Z would indicate it was fine with Z if I attended events, however would withdraw from me, or create conflict as a result afterwards. If Z did attend events with me, Z's behaviour often created conflict around us, so that Z was often involved in heated debates / discussions with people. I generally felt embarrassed about this, and also felt a need to defend Z from my friends' judgment, believing that my friends just didn't understand Z. I felt torn between feeling validated when others were as confused as I was by Z, and feeling a sense of loyalty to defend Z. In many ways, I felt like I was one of the few people who really did understand Z. It seemed important that I should be on Z's side.

*Month 9, Day 4, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*At Steeps – Tuesday morning. I've taken Z to work and I've just invited R to come and join me for tea. I'm feeling very tired. Z has had the last 4 days off and we've actually been quite busy. L was in town and spent the night of Oct 31 with me/us. Then Z's parents have been in town for the farm fair with their goats, so we spent the afternoon of Saturday and Sunday there. Then yesterday D came over to talk about different job prospects. Yesterday my son got offered a job at a magazine store – I'm thrilled with that. It's been a bit of a long haul waiting for that to happen. Some of it was so awkward, however. Z monopolizes the conversation and when we were with L, Z got into one of those long detailed conversations where Z does all of the talking, and everyone else listens. Afterwards, L confided that she felt so confused in the conversation, and didn't know if she was "coming or going". Although I was embarrassed, it also felt affirming that L saw some of what I see with Z.*

*Month 1, Day 2, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I have had a wonderful chance to dream about our gypsy life together. We stayed December 27-30 at Z's cousin's house in another city and province. Then we stayed December 30-31 at Z's aunt's, who has an R.V. trailer at a beach resort that she doesn't really stay in during the winter, so we had it to ourselves. That could have been nice, except we had a big fight New Year's Eve. Then last night we stayed on an Island with our friend J. I enjoyed that, but I was still feeling tense, and nervous with Z, so had a harder time relaxing. This morning over early tea, while Z was still sleeping, J asked me about how I could make any sense out of how Z talks and what Z talks about. She told me she felt so confused trying to converse with Z and felt attacked when she disagreed with Z.*

*Month 1, Day 30, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I've realized in the past week that I've isolated myself more; that I've taken myself away from my friends; I don't do all of the things that I would normally do. Part of that is because I want to hang out with Z and part of that is because I have a sense of obligation to stay home with Z. Z doesn't really go out all that much. Anyway, I guess the point of writing that was that I need to build some of my own life again, and not be so emotionally dependent.*

*Month 2, Day 9, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z's pulled out of our Reclaiming Community as Z was having issues with some of the other people, and I'm feeling sort of responsible for repairing that in some way, even though Z's issues are not necessarily my issues. There's a piece of me that wants to*

*repair it all – say “can’t we all just get along”. Why do I need to fix other people’s relationships? I don’t know – maybe it helps to take the focus off my own self.*

*Month 2, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Yesterday R asked me to join her tomorrow for a ritual around her son’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Just me and my son. And she said she preferred not Z as she wanted only people who had known her son most of his life. Although I agreed, I felt really weird about it. Divided from my partner somehow in a way that wasn’t right. I felt guilty that I had accepted this after and I felt stuck because I didn’t know what to do.*

*Month 2, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I went to the birthday yesterday with my son. I enjoyed the ritual when there was hardly anyone there, but then I got bored and a bit overwhelmed with the large number of people. It was so loud and I didn’t really know too many people there. Although I did get to sit down and visit with an old friend and that was good. I haven’t talked to her in a couple of years and so it’s like we just picked up where we left off.*

*I might have stayed longer and visited more, but I could see how my son wanted to go home so it gave me the excuse that I needed to flee. And I kept thinking about Z at home and I wanted to be with Z. I guess I was feeling guilty for leaving Z at home. When things are positive between us, I just want to be with Z. When things are negative between us, I just want to make it better so that I can be with Z. It’s funny – I love loving Z and I love feeling loved by Z.*

*Month 2, Day 16, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I need to call the potential Al-Anon sponsor today. I tried yesterday but she wasn't home. Speaking of avoiding and shame – I feel embarrassed about calling her, so I've procrastinated to the best of my ability. Although I tried to call yesterday, I did it when I thought neither Z nor my son would hear.*

*Month 2, Day 19, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I feel like yesterday I came up against the wall and knelt in submission. Yesterday I had tea with a bunch of women friends. It was a really awful day of intense grieving and coming out of the closet about the problems I'm having in my marriage. It felt good to be able to talk about it. It felt validating and supporting; however, I'm feeling guilty about talking to other people – I feel like I've been disloyal, somehow, and asked/forced others to form a judgment against Z. I realize that I don't have control over what others think, that I have a big ego in this area, however I still feel like that. I am fiercely loyal to Z – that's the truth of the matter.*

After finally admitting to so many of my friends the difficulties I was experiencing in my relationship, I felt validated and supported by them. However, following this disclosure, I later felt embarrassed to see them. Going out with other people when Z wasn't invited became a challenge for me. Herman (1992) noted that observers who have never experienced captivity or abuse often judge individuals living in abusive relationships, believing that they, themselves, would never remain or sustain such a relationship. This frequently results in perpetuation of blaming the victim. I judged myself for remaining in the situation I was in, and believed that others were judging me, too. This seemed to increase the distance I experienced from those who I cared about.

*Month 1, Day 9, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I met M for lunch and she told me that she is worried about me and my getting back into old patterns with Z. It really was a powerful thing to say – I'm so scared that I might.*

*Month 1, Day 14, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Speaking of mothers – I think I might phone Z's today. I haven't talked to her in a long time and I think I need to feed that relationship. When we were going through the bleakest times, I didn't want to foster it because I was sure our marriage would end. Now I'm not so sure. Now I feel more optimistic.*

*Month 3, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It was R's birthday yesterday. She's having lunch with some women friends and invited me to come as well. I'm ambivalent. I don't know that I really feel like talking too much. On the other hand, that might be Divine Spirit saying – 'here's some info for you'. It also just seems like an awful lot of work to get it together to go and sit and visit.*

*Month 4, Day 22, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*This was a difficult lesson for me when we stayed at E's for several days because there was huge conflict between E and Z, and I wanted to fix it and make it better. It wasn't my job but I was hugely uncomfortable, so wanted to ease my discomfort. I did a fairly good job, however, of not engaging in gossip between the two, although I did listen to each of them. I'm not sure if it would have been better to just say 'I don't want to hear it; you need to talk to them about it.' I think, though, that because I like to have a place to vent about things, I want to provide that to others. But as I write, I realize I was complicit*

*in the building of tension by agreeing to listen without suggesting something different. Particularly with E who built a whole big drama and fear around the situation. Given a similar situation, that's what I would do differently.*

Eventually, Z and I moved to the farm that we had made arrangements to rent then purchase. By moving out to the farm, I became even more isolated. I had already begun to socially isolate myself, partially because of how embarrassed I was about Z's behaviours towards me and others, and partially because I didn't have the energy required to sustain other relationships. All of my energy was being applied to trying to maintain peace in my home. A friend told me, after Z and I had finally separated, that she had been very concerned about my personal safety so far away from other people. She recalled stories of women being isolated and injured and even killed by partners. When we moved to the farm, Z was freer to yell louder and in a more sustained way, as there were no immediate neighbours to practice discretion with. It was not unusual that we would have an argument, and Z would leave the farm in my car, stranding me on the farm with no way to leave.

*Month 7, Day 16, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I took my son yesterday to sign his lease for his new apartment. He was so cute about it all. I love this process, and feel so proud and so anxious all in one. While he was putting his name sticker on his door, I could hear him say 'this is so cool'. It is cool. It's a bit surreal, really. I want to support him as much as possible, and yet I want to be careful not to take over. And I'm also busy with my own life, and so feel a bit guilty that I'm not spending more time with him.*

*Month 8, Day 14, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm expecting some friends to visit me on the farm shortly. I'm excited about someone coming to visit today. I even made Saskatoon pie for them. It's a little chilly outside, so I hope they're up for a walk.*

*And Later ... That was a fun visit. We had a really nice walk, and then I got to feed them homemade borscht and homemade bread followed by the pie. I enjoyed myself enormously.*

*Month 8, Day 30, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We just go up – it's almost 11 am. Today's our Samhain community ritual. I'm really looking forward to it – largely because I'm looking forward to seeing lots of people in the community.*

*Month 8, Day 1, Year 3*

*Z and I managed to step through this fight, finally. We had another argument, I went to R's for a number of hours to seek support and comfort, and then came home to tough it out. R and her husband suggested to me that I am in an abusive relationship. They held me and hugged me and then I left.*

*Things have been pretty good since then. I'm feeling guilty that I talked to Z's mom about our fighting. It's like she phoned and I just blurted my pain and frustration. I guess it was the truth and I wasn't trying to hide what was going on. But I was blaming Z to her and that's what I feel bad about. I can make amends by phoning her and discussing it with her.*

My community was central in how I understood myself and how I made sense of the world, prior to my relationship with Z. As I became more and more deeply immersed in the relationship, I found myself increasingly isolated. Some of the isolation was caused by me, trying to make room to just be able to function on a daily basis. Some of the isolation was also caused by my friends who didn't know how to respond to Z or the relationship.

### **Identity**

Inanna has moved to a place where she no longer sees the support and guidance of her community (it isn't gone, only no longer visible to her). She stands, poised yet again, at another gate. This one signifies Identity. At this gate, Inanna is asked to give up the way that she sees "self" in the world – her work, her name, her reputation. Inanna, though weakened at this point, hands over her gold wrist ring and stands poised in preparation. And the gate begins to open.

When Z and I first met, I would have said, and most of my friends would have agreed, that I was a very confident woman who had great communication skills. People around me would have described me as being caring, considerate, thoughtful and filled with integrity. I saw myself as very introspective and I believe that most of my friends would have supported that perspective. That is, I looked at how I moved in the world and evaluated my impact on others as well as their impact on me. I wanted to grow emotionally and spiritually, so I was a witness to my own life, evaluating what happened, the outcomes, and how I could improve. As my relationship with Z progressed, I came to doubt myself tremendously. I no longer knew who I was.

I believe, largely because of my concept of mutuality (Evans, 1993; Evans, 1996; Herman 1992; Sackett & Saunders, 2001), and how I lived this mutuality in my life, I was more inclined to begin, early in my relationship with Z, to take Z's feedback and try to apply it to myself. It would not have occurred to me until after the relationship ended, that Z did not necessarily have my best interests at heart. That's not to say Z didn't. Only to say, that I don't know what Z's motivations were for how Z behaved in the relationship. What I do know, however, is that very early in the relationship I began to reframe how I saw myself and my communication style and abilities. I doubted my abilities, coming very quickly to believe that I did not know how to communicate effectively within a relationship.

*Month 2, Day 26, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*We've had a tough week, trying to work out our relationship with each other. Z's been stressed out because all of Z's websites crashed, and the company Z was using went bankrupt. And Z doesn't really have the money to just re-establish, although has managed to do so. I'm really conscious and judgmental about this money issue. But don't want to talk about it because I don't want to hurt Z's feelings around it. And, Z's met my whole family now, and so there's no going back from here. I am committed in this relationship. Even as I write that, it scares me so much I want to hyperventilate. And yet, I believe in my heart, in my soul, that this is what's supposed to be. I have such a sense of astounding love for Z – I want to wrap Z up in my arms and gobble Z up. Part of the panic remains in that I still struggle with believing that Z loves me. Part of that is my belief that no one can truly love me. Part of it is that I don't trust that Z isn't 'selling' me something. I've seen the 'salesperson' side of Z more in the last couple of weeks than I*

*have in a while. So I have doubts around how much of what Z says to me is the truth, and how much is a sales pitch. I guess it's all about trust issues.*

*We talk a lot, though, and when there's a problem we really try to work it through. I mean we really talk about it. As I write that, I'm having some thoughts about control. I am partially feeling controlled in this relationship, that's not the right phrase, but I'm thinking about our last conflict and I do feel like I need to remain so conscious in everything that I do/say/feel/react. This is difficult. There's little room for imperfection is what it feels like. With my friends, I can just talk, and I'm allowed to backtrack, make mistakes, say things I don't mean. But with Z there is always the sense that I have to be on guard and say precisely what I mean. That's very difficult, as I don't feel like my true self is able to come through. Z's told me that s/he feels that way, too. We have such different communication styles, and I guess that that's one thing that will work itself through – eventually.*

*The benefit of this is that I'm learning a lot about myself and how I interact with others. I guess I need to watch my own authenticity, however. Make certain that I remain true to myself rather than mold myself to become who Z wants me to be. Perhaps I really need to go back and review the writings around Inanna's gates. A reminder. I do feel pretty grounded though.*

*Month 3, Day 5, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I guess for me, I really just need to recall my priorities. I am not responsible for caring for Z. It is not necessary for me to take care of Z. And yet there's a part of me that believes it's necessary to do so. What is that? How is that related to my authentic self? Z always comments on how I like to take care of other people so much. That's true about*

*me. But I get real joy out of caring for others – with helping them and assisting them to feel comfortable. I am a nurturing person. Is that part of my core? Is that an authentic characteristic – to be nurturing? It seems like it comes very naturally to me.*

Z and I developed a pattern of communication that went from our seeming to connect and communicate on a spiritual level to Z's becoming angry and frustrated about something. Z's anger showed itself in many forms, from loud raging to silence, distance, and ignoring. Evans (1996) talked about the negative impact of being chronically raged at, yelled at, feeling threatened. In this case, one's inner equilibrium is disrupted (Evans, 1996). Z's attacks on me left me questioning my skills and abilities. I wondered about what Z said about me, and the validity of the information. Over a brief period of time, I came to doubt what I formerly had believed about myself, and came to believe the false definitions of me provided by Z (Evans, 1996). Z seemed to re-define for me what my experience of reality was by Z's lengthy lectures. Z explained my negative behaviours, then denied the explanations and redefined them. I kept trying to make sense of what Z would tell me, but found myself frequently confused and doubting what I heard. Evans (1993) discussed how, in a psychologically abusive relationship, one's intuition and knowing are under constant attack and so one begins to doubt this knowing. Not only this, but one's sensual experience of the world (what one sees, hears, tastes, etc) are challenged. This was true for me. I found that everything that I experienced became suspect for Z. As a result, those experiences became suspect for me. I came to distrust my experiences and sought validation from Z about what my experiences were.

*Month 3, Day 27, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*After a big argument with Z, I went for a long walk. As I came through the walk, I had a thought that we were an addict and a co-dependent coming out on the other side. We are dancing this dance – or at least last night we were. It feels like there's a power struggle going on – but it's so subtle that I'm having a hard time putting my finger on it.*

*I feel like I'm focusing on the negative – can I find the positive. Can I remember how it feels to be deeply in love? I'll try but there's a wall around me, and so what can I do to break it down. As I write that, I know that I have to continue being vulnerable. This is a risk, because I don't know the outcome. I don't know how to trust it.*

*Month 4, Day 2, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Anger, then, to me is about being out of control. It's about losing control of myself. What I realize that I do when I start to feel that anger is subdue it in silence. Because I'm afraid of my own anger, I silence myself and build a wall around me. This removes me from the 'point of danger' but also isolates me from my own feelings. The result of this is that I push my feelings in. This is one of the things that happens with Z that becomes 'issues'. I feel angry; don't want to, so in fear I push it inside of myself. Then, to keep it there, I build a wall around myself and distance myself emotionally to protect the barricade. But there is still resentment inside, that seeps through my wall.*

*Month 7, Day 30, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I really feel like I came back from Cancun in a different place. I have completed a phase of my life, and feel as though I am in a transitional place. Not quite at the beginning, yet, of whatever new phase is going to unfold. A part of me has finished some*

*major work and I'm not even certain what that work is. I'm at a place where I want to be more authentic, more true to who I am. I want to be more vulnerable, less shielded. I want to understand/banish this part of me that believes I'm unlovable. I want to embrace that part of me that is ugly, and welcome that part into the light. I want to accept that I am beautiful.*

There were moments when I came to see the dissonance between how Z saw me, and how I had previously seen myself. These were both moments of great pain and also strength. Those moments allowed me to experience some sense of rebellion against what Z told me to be true about myself. My journals reflect my desire to not see myself as a “victim” of Z’s behaviour. I tried to make sense of my own responses to Z’s behaviour, and noted that I always had a choice about how I could respond to the moments of arguing with Z. In hindsight, I believe there is truth in this thought process, however it’s not as clear as it seems to be when written. I suspected that I could better control my environment by not engaging in arguments with Z. I certainly would not have been successful in trying to control Z’s behaviours.

*Month 8, Day 16, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*The other piece of these interactions/dynamics with Z that I recognize, is that I have assumed the role of victim. I am shocked about this. I haven't seen myself in the role of a victim for quite some time. This I need to shake myself out of – to do this I need to just accept that Z is either going or staying – Z decides, not me, and no amount of being a 'good girl' is going to change that. I can't believe I spend so much energy trying to please Z – trying to guess what will make Z happy, and then when I 'fail' – when Z's unhappy, I beat myself up over it.*

*Month 9, Day 22, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I spent some times talking to C yesterday, as I'm having real moments of insanity with Z. I question myself, my understanding, my hearing, my communication skills, and my interpretation. So it was good to talk with her about the situation. She reaffirmed my own sanity, and suggested that much of this difficulty is in relation to Z's own control issues. This was re-assuring to me. Because I feel like the difficulties are related to that, but Z denies it, and blames me.*

*During the night I was awkward about snuggling Z because Z's told me that physical contact makes his/her skin crawl when we haven't connected emotionally. I prayed to the Goddess to be between us and hold us together. This prayer seemed to help me a lot. This morning I felt detached from Z's behaviour and also didn't really feel anything.*

*Month 10, Day 3, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*On what if's...*

- *What if I could wake each morning believing that I was re-born with all the opportunity that that means...*

- *What if I moved through my day with a deliberate consciousness; being conscious of each moment without my head being filled with countless random thoughts...*

- *What if I prayed at times I was thankful/grateful, not just times that I needed help...*

- *What if I greeted each person I met during the day as if they were a friend, smiling, saying 'good morning' and making gentle loving eye contact...*
- *What if, when a stranger smiles or greets me, I were conscious enough to notice Divinity within them and honour it in the moment....*
- *What if I had enough belief in myself and faith in others that I could speak my own truth as I experienced it – without censor...*
- *What if I loved myself as much as others love me...*

I began to respond to our arguments with a trauma response (Herman, 1992). My body was frequently tired and exhausted. I spent a great deal of time being anxious and worried about arguments. So much of my energy and time was spent trying to figure out how to make Z happy or at least trying to figure out how not to fight with Z. I blamed myself and tried to change how I acted and reacted around Z. As noted in the Literature Review, if a victim is told with increasing frequency that she is responsible for the psychological / emotional abuse, she is likely to experience increasing levels of self-doubt and becomes accustomed to accepting responsibility for the situation she is in (Evans, 1996; Olson, 2004). I believed Z when Z told me that if I just did this one thing differently everything would be better, but I could never really figure out what the one thing was, because it kept changing. I tried harder and harder to change and become the kind of person Z wanted me to become.

*Month 1, Day 20, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z just dropped me off at the tea shop after a fight in the car. Z said s/he thought I was feeling 'tentative' and 'walking on eggshells'. I did not feel that way, I said so and Z*

*thought that I did not spend enough time considering this suggestion as a possibility. That feels unfair to me – what I should have said to Z was ‘that’s an interesting possibility’. I get so frustrated with Z. It’s like I can’t ever say or do anything right. Z says “don’t pick the words, talk from the heart.” I don’t have an emotion that Z says I have but I have to give serious consideration to the idea that I might have the emotion. That seems like crazy making. It is so tiring to have Z tell me what I’m feeling. Z’s so reactive about it and focuses everything on me.*

*So, what part of this is about me? It’s true, I did not open myself to the possibilities that I might have been tentative or ‘walking on eggshells’.*

*It really can be confusing. If I believe I’m being honest, then I have to speak that. When Z doesn’t accept that, then I question myself. Why do I do that? Why can’t I just believe what I believe without doubting myself?*

*Month 1, Day 23, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I managed to resolve our differences – or at least we came to a place of peace where we could get along. I’m still feeling not so sure about things – hesitant, I guess. I need to find my own boundary. I’ve set an appt for counseling. I go on Monday, and I’m looking forward to that. I’m catching myself planning what I’m going to say, and then trying to stop myself, so that I’m not trying to control the process. Anyway, it can’t hurt, and I’m sure that I can grow in some way. I’m having a hard time drawing a line between the perception that I have about myself based on what other people say about me, and the perception I have of myself based upon what Z says to me. And maybe that’s part of the issue. My perception of myself is based upon the feedback of others, as opposed to my own feedback.*

*I need to know who I think I am and go from there. Perhaps that's directly related to that co-dependent bias of trying to be everything for everyone. Interesting. Although as I write that I think I'm less affected by what my friends think of me now, than in the past. But I'm still greatly affected by what Z thinks of me.*

*Month 2, Day 6, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We're starting again, Z and I after yet another fight. So each time we start again it feels good although I realize that I'm still behaving in a nervous fashion. What Z has told me is that Z doesn't feel loved when I'm cautious and scared with Z. Which of course, I understand. When I'm fearful, I don't behave in a true/natural way. If I can soften my own self – I recall that Z is my best friend, and treat Z like that. Somehow I keep forgetting that – if I can truly just let things go.*

*And what are the things that keep me from being true to myself? Fear, of course, but fear of what? Fear of conflict, but why am I afraid of conflict? There's no rational discussion when we have a fight. As far as I can see, there is no progression made when we have a fight. So what am I afraid of? I'm afraid of the loss during the fight. We might break up. If I don't get it this time, Z might leave. This will be proof that I'm not good enough. Holding my own truth means holding myself with love. I am good enough! The problem, here, is that I need to learn to love myself.*

*Month 2, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I did a ritual last night and burned some shame that I had. I liked doing that and think that I would like to do some more of that. One thing at a time. I'm filling myself up with work from the Artist's Way; Spiritual Solutions; Al-Anon, and work around my past.*

*It's like I was floating along just dealing with issues kind of as they came, maybe suppressing a few but not doing too badly, and now, here I am confronted with all of these issues and looking within and without for an answer. It's like I'm drowning and need to find the solution as quick as possible but everything I grab for, disintegrates or sinks so I'm left with nothing at all.*

*I don't feel like swallowing my pride and going to Z yet again. Just once, I'd like the apology. What's wrong with me? What's the balance in this? Is it my fault because I have issues of trust? Is it my fault because I'm so stubborn? How far can I carry my own silence and resentments? Why would I want to? What's the benefit? I just would like to teach him a lesson and it's not my job to do that; not my role or my business. I need to just follow my own heart.*

*Anyway, I'm a mess as usual. I feel like I've been a mess for several months and I need to get a grip on myself.*

*Month 2, Day 11, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I was surprised when I woke up this morning because I thought I'd wake up lots in the night and I didn't. I was sad/disappointed that Z wasn't in bed with me. Another night of not sleeping together. Z says s/he's moving out because s/he can't live like this. I keep going over and over what I might do better and then I catch myself and remind myself that I can just be me and be true to myself. I can't control Z. Nothing I can do at this point will convince Z. I don't mean that I'm a victim in this, it's just that I will make myself crazy if I keep trying to be the perfect wife. That's one of the lessons in this for me, I guess, is loving and accepting who I am.*

*Month 2, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's so uncomfortable for me – this wanting to be with Z and wanting to push myself away so I don't get hurt any more than I already am. I feel like an open wound moving through my house. And I'm working on healing that wound, but it's a painful place. I'm starting to think these journals are one big whine. Have I nothing positive to say? Do I wake every morning with anxieties like these or is it just recently? What have I done with them in the past?*

In moments of my own lucidity, I was able to recognize the dissonance between how I had previously seen myself and how Z saw me now.

*Month 2, Day 18, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We deteriorated in our usual cycle of Z ranting about how awful I am and me trying to either appease Z or convince Z that I'm not so awful. I was trying also, to hold in my awareness everything that I had learned about myself in the Transformation Game. And I was finding that in the place of the verbal assaults, I had a very difficult time doing it. I wasn't unconditional in my love either for Z or myself. I'm very confused because my feedback from everyone else around me is that I am an honest and loving person with good boundaries, but from Z it's the opposite. I slept only a couple of hours last night and prayed for many of the hours. I seek a solution and don't see one at hand. I love Z; I like being in a relationship; when we're in a place of loving kindness it's very fulfilling for me. And each time I come back to this place of hate/fear, I lose such hope – in myself and in Z. I question my own truths and knowing; I feel deeply hurt and unloved. What I wish, if I had a wish to be granted, is that Z would accept me for who I am.*

*And in all of that, I need to preserve my own self. I need to honour my own truths and love my core being which is this being of light. And to do that might mean that the marriage has to end. It's possible that I made a mistake, and I need to just bow out gracefully. Which is a horribly painful thing to think about. I know that there will be great pain and loneliness, and also relief. I intend to love myself.*

*Month 1, Day 8, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*At other times in my life I would have just told Z to hit the road. I wouldn't have been as willing to make the effort to overcome the problems we face. In this case, I want to. I can't think of any reason why, except that I love Z. But I'm not feeling the deep joy that comes with that love – or at least has been there in the past. I'm feeling an expectation that I should feel joyful and I don't.*

*I'm looking for a solution. I need an answer to this place that I am in that would take me out of this place. I don't feel comfortable here, so really need to move on. And perhaps that's all the more reason to stay. Z and I talked about how we are such clear mirrors for each other. How all of the negative qualities we see in each other are also very present in us.*

*Month 1, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I really feel like I've made an agreement with myself to not engage in any more drama. I think I keep saying that, and it feels like I need to continue saying it. I better recognize what I can do for myself, and I better recognize that I can't change Z.*

*I'm not certain about counseling. I'm not certain about what it is that we can be working on. I like that we're getting along now, although in some senses I still don't feel*

*all that close to Z. So maybe counseling could help with re-establishing that closeness; with assisting me to feel safe enough to talk to Z.*

*Month 1, Day 20, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I know that I'm growing/changing. I know that I have a long way to go to say that I'm not a control freak and to say that I share my thoughts and feelings honestly.*

*Month 1, Day 21, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Almost noon – I feel like crap. We fought until 6:00 or 7:00 this morning. I'm really sad and to be a good wife Z is going to ask me to let everything go. And I feel really sad and don't know if I can. I'm hurt about the 6 hours or so of hearing all of the things I'm doing wrong. I feel hopeless today. What an awful feeling to wake up feeling hopeless. To wake up sad.*

*Z has a way of telling me all of the things I do wrong – blaming me and interspersing with little bits about Z's self and then when I point it out that Z is only talking about me, Z doesn't own that. Instead, Z tells me that I missed the points Z was making - so it's my fault for not listening close enough. I again feel like I need to have a tape recorder for our conversations. Because Z really doesn't have any idea how Z sounds.*

*I end up arguing with Z – I react and I start to feel hurt, scared, sad. I move in anger around those emotions – I hide them in anger. I guess it would be better to express those. The thing for me is that it seems like I've been flayed several times and then to bring out my vulnerabilities is like taking my shift off and saying 'you missed a spot.'*

*It was our old pattern last night – we ended up by professing our love and it didn't help me to feel better. In fact, I didn't even believe it, really. What I want is to get away from Z today. I don't want to be around Z. I don't want to touch Z, or look at Z, or be looked at by Z. I want to grieve and heal on my own.*

*And I don't want to be in the drama of a fight. I don't want to be in the drama of feeling like a victim. I could have chosen to end that conversation at any time last night and I didn't. I have a compulsion to resolve it. I know that if I had said after an hour 'I've heard enough' Z would have slept on the couch and this would carry into another day. So that's why. I had a choice, I made it. I was not a victim. I'm sad and in pain as a result of the consequences of that fight – those choices – and so that's how it is. We make choices, and live with the consequences.*

*Month 2, Day 4, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's 3 in the afternoon and I just got up & showered. We fought all night long. Maybe we've reached a place of peace, I don't know. I'm exhausted. I feel resigned. I feel like there's not much else to do but resign myself to Z's will. I don't communicate outside myself; I don't reach out; I fight; I don't accept Z as a person. If Z feels those feelings, then they must be true. We can never discuss any possibilities that those things aren't 100% true.*

*Month 3, Day 2, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm kind of hard on myself and maybe need to be a bit more forgiving. I'm feeling a bit stressed.*

*We had a bit of an argument last night; not really anything but I couldn't sleep after – it was like 6 am or later before I finally got to sleep. I was just feeling so shut off from Z. I put my arms around Z and Z didn't respond. What I want is forgiveness and for Z to show me that s/he still loves me. I guess what's happening is that I feel very insecure and cannot reassure myself internally.*

*Month 3, Day 7, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I can't make Z agree or disagree. I can, however, be close minded and discourage discussion. I need to learn to be more open to different perspectives, other than my own.*

*Month 3, Day 7, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I talked – worked through some of the stuff – well, it's an ongoing issue for Z that I'm a controller and Z feels controlled. We did some stuff together and throughout the day I just wanted to keep crying. I still feel the remnants of that heaviness. I still feel insecure and uncertain. I will work today on just remaining aware of me in the moment and how I am interacting with Z.*

*Month 3, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Along with the millions of other things I have to work on, is that I need to release my expectations. Today, I had expected that we would be spending time talking. I need to release that. I need to have no expectations of Z and if I want something I can put it out there. That's all.*

*There are many moments of late when I'm just not sure that I believe there is a Divine Energy, I used to have such a deep connection to that force and now I don't have the same connection. I cannot fix, control, move this problem in my life. I'm not powerful*

*enough. Therefore I have to trust in God/Goddess/All That Is to work out this problem for me.*

*I guess that's all the writing I need to do today. I'm quite tired – I had a hard time sleeping last night since we'd had a fight in the afternoon and there wasn't any resolution which is why I believe Z didn't come to bed again.*

*Month 3, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm at home. It's almost 7:00 pm. Z stormed out about an hour ago – yet another fight. The 'what's this one about' isn't even important. It's about power and control to me. I told Z, in the fight, that I'd been thinking all night and I thought our marriage needs to end. It's the truth – most of yesterday and all night long it just kept coming to me. And it's not the drama this time. It's just that I see this power dynamic between us and I don't like what I'm becoming. I get myself into a place of being willing to speak my mind and then boom! I'm yelled at and told how inappropriate it is. I spend all of my spare time trying to get along with Z.*

*It's not that I want my marriage to end. There are so many good things about it. I love when we're having fun and doing things together. I love the companionship and the challenge for me being in the marriage. But I can't bear the constant fighting. I crave peace – no drama. Just peaceful loving. Now I know I have lots of issues to work out and I also know that I have a pattern of avoiding, but I think I've done a remarkable job at my own personal growth. I agree with Z that I have a hard time admitting to Z that I am very stubborn. I'm working on those issues. It's a life's journey to keep working on them.*

*Month 5, Day 30, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z and I stayed up late last night talking. There are many many issues to resolve. Things that we're both carrying. After Z provided me with the very long list, I've started to realize that I actually do suck as a wife. One of the things we discussed was how I make plans without telling Z; or I change plans and don't share that. I know I do that. It's a very thoughtless and egocentric behaviour. It requires me to be extremely aware about whenever I'm making plans for something – anything. And if I realize that I haven't done it, I need to bring it up. The other thing around that is that I have to find a way to communicate with Z about something that I want to do without making it a “sell job”. I don't quite know how to do that, but will give it some thought.*

*Month 6, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Last night, one of the revelations I had in my big crying jag had to do with more core issues of not being loveable. What I realize is that every time Z corrects my behaviour, I hear Z telling me that Z doesn't accept me as I am. When Z's not accepting, then, it's obviously because I'm not lovable. The other thing is that I have a great deal of fear that if Z's right about it, then I must really be a terrible person. I suck at being in a relationship.*

*So, what. Back in this same old place of being in deep pain. I feel victimized and hated. I feel incapable of measuring up to all of the things that Z wants me to do – even if I think I can take them piecemeal, I still fall off, so to speak.*

*I can't believe I still have enough tears left in me to cry. And I don't want to be here.*

*So what are some positive things I can do right now? Well I'm writing, that's positive. And I left a message for V to ask if she could recommend a counselor. I can meditate when I'm done writing. I can feed my body healthy foods. I can be honest each moment of the day with myself and I can look at just my own self, not at Z. The temptation is great to hold Z responsible for my misery, yet at any time I could choose to end the marriage. No one but myself is forcing me to stay here.*

*August 19, 2004 Journal Entry*

*It's around 10:00. I spent yesterday feeling very very heavy. I did make a counseling appointment for today at 4:30. I went for tea with T and I found some forgiveness, which I'm grateful for. Although, there's still fear in me about the 'next time'. I believe that counseling will help.*

I began regular counseling with a very skilled therapist. It was with the help of this therapist that I began to find the strength to end the relationship.

*Month 7, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We have counseling again this week. I love the counseling process and am finding it interesting and helpful. I've realized two things – that Z's core issue is around being trusted, therefore it's important for me to acknowledge that I trust Z. The second thing is that I was able to see the difference in our styles of living – I like order and predictability, Z likes chaos.*

*Month 8, Day 2, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Well, it's Saturday morning, around 10:30. Z has gone to work. It seemed like Z was upset with me again, but for the life of me I don't know why. I'm glad Z's gone,*

*because I really feel like I need a day out of Z's energy. I need a day to grieve, to walk, to write, to pray, to do ritual. It's my plan to make this a day of returning to myself.*

*Even as I'm writing today, I'm fading out. I hope that some of my activities today will help me become more present; more focused in my body; more balanced.*

*I feel like I'm trying to decide whether to stay or leave my marriage. In the past, when we've been in this really hard place, I've surrendered to love, which has allowed me to forgive and move on. I don't feel like doing that right now. I believe that that is setting me up for more abusive treatment. So I don't know what to do to move ahead. I'm lost in that – can I surrender and accept my partner, knowing that the outbursts and negativity will continue. Can I live with that?*

*One of the things that I've said is that if I don't do this work with Z, I'll have to do it somewhere else. The thing that gets triggered in me, with Z, is this part that continuously hears that I'm not good enough for Z. I hear constant criticism that's painful and I argue it. "No, that's not me...you don't see the real me; you've created an image of who I am in your mind" and I'm constantly battling against that.*

*Maybe the point is that I don't accept who I am. I'm triggered because I don't have confidence in myself. Surely this is true, because Z's criticisms wouldn't faze me if I believed completely in myself. And this feeling of not being known is big. That's also not a new feeling. I know it well because of the Fortress I've built around myself.*

*If we are mirrors for each other then how is Z's out of control rage a mirror for me? How is Z's unwillingness to listen, my mirror?*

*Month 8, Day 3, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*There are two aspects that I'm aware of: the first is the wounded me that doesn't believe I'm lovable; the second is the part of me that fears humiliation. Over the years I have managed to control the risk of humiliation by avoiding certain things. But it has come up – the humiliation and embarrassment I've felt each time a relationship ends – humiliation feeds the 'not good enough' aspect. So these two old wounds play off of each other.*

*Living with Z has certainly triggered this old wound. Every time Z yells at me, I feel deeply humiliated and I react by either retreating deeper inside of myself, or by lashing out. I have a very strong response to try to protect this wounded part. By this awareness, I am exposing the wound. I gently remove the old band aid, whose initial purpose was to protect this wound. The band aid, however, has allowed this wound to fester and spread infection.*

*I feel a bit more emotional strength and resolve. I'm not feeling quite so emotionally fragile.*

*Month 8, Day 30, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I like that Z and I are getting along so much better lately. We've still had some disagreements, but they don't seem to degenerate into the all out war that can happen. I think that what I'm doing different is using lots of self talk to remind myself that Z is not my adversary; is not trying to be judgmental. I'm also trying to engage in our discussions from a place of learning about myself, rather than a place of believing that I need to*

*defend myself. I'm not as good at that one – that's still the place that often leads us down the slippery slope of arguing.*

*Month 9, Day 29, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*After meditating, I accept that I can only do the best I can – 100% of my 50% and I cannot control how Z reacts to me. I am a kind and lovable person. Either Z loves me or Z doesn't. But I need to love myself completely; accepting me without judgment or anger. Accepting all of my parts in all ways as being perfect and continuing to strive for truth.*

*What do I want? I want to live honestly, peacefully and fearlessly. Fear is my biggest enemy. But fear is an illusion – nothing but a shimmery wall that holds no power. I can find joy there.*

*Month 8, Day 3, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Yesterday was kind of a yucky day for me; I was anxious and edgy all day. After finally really talking about it with Z last night it was like it melted away. If I can hold myself in a space where I can discuss without being defensive then I move to a place of even greater trust with Z. And Z is much kinder in return. So it's like we feed positively off of each other – in the same way that we feed negatively off of each other.*

*I realize that I am very easily 'wounded'; I take so much personally that I can't see beyond the possibility that everything Z says might not be a personal attack.*

I came to believe that I was responsible for the conflict that we were mired in within our relationship. Z would tell me all of the ways in which I was not living up to the relationship that Z had defined for us. I continued to try to meet Z's expectations, although I was unable to do so because Z changed Z's mind so often. It was easier,

however, for me to accept the responsibility for the failures in our relationship (Evans, 1996; Olson, 2004) than to continue to argue with Z about it.

Prior to my relationship with Z I imagined myself to be a certain kind of person and believed my friends would have agreed. Ironically, it was this “self” that Z reported to have fallen in love with, but expressed such deep dissatisfaction with. As the relationship progressed the way I viewed myself changed quite a lot. My opinion of myself deteriorated substantially.

### **Madness**

Inanna has been willing to relinquish her identity in the world. She becomes frailer, fragile, weak as she prepares to move through the next gate – that of Madness. This is the gate where Inanna relinquishes memory – that is, the ability to understand how or why she is at this place. This gate causes the forgetting of where and why you *are*. Inanna hands over her lapis measuring rod and line and she descends further.

Identity and Madness are closely linked. As identity drifts away, madness moves ever closer. As I forgot who I was at different points in the timeline of my life with Z, I felt out of my mind in many ways. Things that I thought I understood or knew so well I no longer seemed to understand. Ways that I had once made sense of the world were no longer relevant to me – no longer made sense.

In the early parts of my relationship my emotions were up and down; I described them as being like a “roller coaster”. I seemed to cry at the slightest event, happy or sad. I was more easily irritated and irritable. I had moments of total elation. As time passed, I found myself chronically obsessing about my relationship with Z. It became my primary

focus. Where previous to the relationship, I was politically active and thought and read about politics, within a few months of Z moving in with me, all I could really think about was how to improve the relationship, how to avoid fighting, and how to try to understand Z's perspective. I became increasingly melancholic, and anxiety became a regular part of my day to day experience. I wrote in my journals about feeling despondent, depressed, and hopeless. I voiced that I often couldn't even identify my own emotions any longer and that I often felt "numb". I wrote that I felt "shattered".

*Month 1, Day 18, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Steeps, waiting for B. I'm feeling awful – I have to figure out how to shake this melancholy/anxiety. I'm carrying it in a way that I don't quite understand. I'm feeling some kind of anxiety about work too.*

*Month 2, Day 17, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*At Upper Crust restaurant, waiting for M and S for dinner. I came early to have a few minutes to write. How are things? They're wacky!!! Z has moved in – we're trying to find our way in the relationship and in our house. S/He's brought some stuff, but not too much. The house feels a bit fuller – more cluttered.*

*But me?!? My goodness, I've been riding a roller coaster.*

*Earlier this week – actually all week I've been having horrible PMS type of chaotic emotions – not the other stuff that goes with PMS for me – just the emotions. I want to cry at the drop of a hat or I feel a rage boiling inside and have to tell myself to get a grip. I feel better today; happier, more at ease, more grounded.*

*But I find it all quite difficult, this up and down. Z says that it might be related to the amount of changes going on in my life – of course this is possible, however does not feel like the truth. But of course, why not? My son is graduating and turning 18. I'm falling in love for perhaps the first time in my life. My love has moved in, and this is a first in my life. So really, my whole life is in the biggest transition ever. Maybe ever since I got married/ had a baby.*

*I was realizing this morning too that I still don't completely believe that Z is in love with me. I believe that I love and am in love with Z. There are moments when I fully grasp/believe that Z loves me. In those moments I am completely overwhelmed with the truth of it – it is almost unbearable to me. I would like to believe it all of the time, but I'm not sure I could stand that.*

*Month 2, Day 23, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I feel like there's something that I don't understand about Z. Or more, that there's something I'm not being told. Some of it stems from hearing how Z talks about Z's self to others. And although Z doesn't outright lie, Z leads people to believe things about Z's self. So I guess part of the trust stems from this. I don't know how much of what Z tells me is the truth and how much is sales type deception.*

I questioned my own thinking. I doubted my own perceptions and questioned how I understood our interactions. Z challenged what I perceived to be the reality of life around me – we would have a disagreement and it would become a huge fight that would last for hours, and then Z would act as if nothing happened. Instead, Z would challenge what I experienced in the argument, telling me that it was only because I “held on to” the negative emotions that they remained with me. I came to doubt my own perceptions and

experiences. I became more tentative and cautious in my interactions with Z, never quite trusting what might happen, believing that there was constantly a risk that Z would lose Z's temper and there might be a big fight if I did something incorrect or wrong. In trying to make sense of the situation I found myself in, I began to adjust my actions and behaviours. I analyzed what I did and tried to alter it so that I could find a way to live with Z.

*Month 3, Day 27, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*I feel like I'm in an abusive relationship today. I don't really believe that it's true, but I feel like I'm being so cautious today after last night. I feel bruised, battered, and scared. Which is a surprising feeling – this feeling scared. I'm uncertain about how to act, what to say; I feel like if I'm not cautious the situation could blow up. Z is being very loving, cuddling, and that makes me feel more scared because I don't know how to act/be. I don't want to talk about last night because we have people coming over, but it sits between us like a ... what – like the elephant in the living room.*

*I went for a walk last night because I thought I would lose my mind if I stayed in the room with Z. The walking was good.*

*Later...after the friends left ...*

*It's the same. It's like I'm being treated with love and then there are little digs – why? I don't know. Are the digs a way of maintaining power? Are they attempts at drawing attention to something? Are they a message that Z is feeling something? I just have no idea. And so I tiptoe, and feel resentment and am hurt. But I don't want to fight*

*either. Because I dread the confrontations. My self-esteem is feeling more fragile than ever.*

*How do I respond to this? How do I want to respond? Well, I know I'm feeling like running away. I know I feel scared, overwhelmed, anxious, hurt, vulnerable. I don't feel love in that passionate way – I don't want to end the relationship and so I guess I feel fearful that it might end. I still don't trust that Z won't turn around and walk away from me. Why wouldn't Z? We're both quite miserable. Well I guess I am, and it's difficult for me to imagine that it's not the same for Z.*

*And yet I want to work through all of this. I'm committed to getting to the other side. I just am dreading jumping into this croc-infested lagoon and swimming through it.*

*Month 8, Day 10, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*So what of this is my stuff that I have to work with. I can set a boundary when I want to just talk about something. I need to be aware, and consciously hold in constant awareness that if I am telling a story about a part of me or an experience, that I do not need to defend that piece. I choose whether I continue talking or not. I choose whether I engage with the unsolicited feedback or not. Now, of course, these are all pieces of control, and what I'm realizing is that perhaps it's not so bad to maintain some control or choice about how I respond/react to a situation.*

*Month 8, Day 17, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Evening again – will we ever reach a place of peace? I feel numb tonight. Like I've put a wall around me to protect myself. And I feel like if I open that wall, I'll crack beyond my control.*

*Ah, control – the \$24,000 issue tonight as every night. I can't help but feel resentful. I've asked Z what Z thinks I should do – I asked Z because Z insists that I never ask – I thought I ask all the time but as usual apparently I don't ask the correct question. There's definitely sarcasm, resentment, bitterness in this. I am tired of being blamed; I'm tired of being yelled at; I'm tired of sitting in silence and hearing all of the things that Z is freaking out about and how if I just did something different it would be better. But I'll do what Z suggests.*

*Month 8, Day 24, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*It's partly why I've felt so out of control – I do not know how to be married. Not that I thought I did, but it's a bit more surprising than I expected. I think I expected Z would just slide into my world – Z would adjust but I wouldn't really have to adjust to anything. The thing I'm starting to realize is that I really do need to alter myself and a lot of my world view – how I shop, what I buy, how I spend my time, who I spend my time with, etc. Now I always have to have Z in my mind. And I have to do that from a balanced perspective so that I don't lose myself completely in that.*

In my madness I began to wonder about whether I was in an abusive relationship or not. I tested the word, and challenged myself with the possibility of it. And then I negated my knowledge about this. It seemed beyond my own comprehension that this could be the case for me.

*Month 9, Day 4, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Last night I just felt crazy. I finally reached a point of surrendering to Z and just saying that I did not know how to fix the situation. I went to bed and Z joined me. But I*

*felt so much pain. I was so sad about the process; I feel sad that I'm in love with a person who behaves like this. I feel battered down. I feel really scared that I've married an abusive person – I feel really really scared writing that today. I feel like I'm exaggerating - I want to make all kinds of excuses for Z's behaviour and explain Z's reactions based on my behaviour. And yet there's a small part of my mind that says this – that this is an abusive relationship. Is it a true part, or a part of me that is sabotaging my trust in the relationship. I believe that I love Z. My feelings for Z are deeply powerful and I feel such joy when we're together and in a good place. And I guess the other piece of this is that I know that I can step out of this pattern at any time if I remain aware. I cannot allow myself to fall spiritually asleep, so that I'm reacting. This is difficult, because I don't think in this watchful state that I have the ability to be spontaneous in my expressions – to be real.*

Having never been in a relationship like the one with Z, I began trying to make sense of the verbal, psychological, and emotional assaults upon my person. I thought things through; argued in my own mind; replayed attacks over and over to see if there was anything I could do differently in the future. Z would often give clues of what I could try differently, however these clues were always inconsistent and changed dramatically on any given day. I tried to convince myself that there was a way that I could do something differently – ask better questions, listen with more attention, alter my perceptions of what Z was actually saying to me, so that the situation would be better.

*Month 10, Day 16, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Z and I had an argument a few days ago – it seemed to me to be about nothing at all - it was almost like Z needed to rant about something and I got to take the brunt of it. I*

*found it extremely confusing and destructive. It's been a few days and I still feel like I have to keep a shield around myself. Those 'attacks' scare me and I don't think I can talk to Z about it because Z gets frustrated and says I'm blaming Z for my feelings. Which is true, in a way. I'm feeling scared and I could choose not to feel scared. I don't want to express myself for fear of the judgment and chastisement that I experienced with Z. Z keeps telling me that if I feel judged to turn that around and look in the mirror to see if I'm judging myself. Again there is truth in this statement, but it's also an exaggeration of the statement. What I need to learn is how to keep myself extricated from the intensity of these attacks by Z. And part of the key to doing that is to stay grounded, to shield myself, and then I think I can hear Z from Z's own perspective. Rather than defend myself, ask Z questions of clarification about Z's intent or motive in the attack. This isn't easy, because the attacks are so personal & sometimes so very brutal. And it's very confusing to be told 'I love you' and to be attacked at the same time. As I write this I know that I want Z to understand what Z's doing and to stop it. And I see that this is an approach of trying to change Z/to fix Z.*

*Part of the difficulty for me is that frequently these attacks come out of a discussion that we're having. So we're in the middle of a discussion and Z becomes frustrated. This then escalates. What I need to be able to do, I think, is to call it as soon as I notice it.*

Along with the stress of trying to make sense of conflicts that we were having, I was trying to make sense of Z's unpredictable moods. Sometimes, Z would seem to be behaving "normal" and seemed to behave in a loving way. Z's mood would change, and I would try to understand why now Z was suddenly angry or grumpy or withdrawn. In

response to my questions, Z would frequently say that Z wasn't prepared to tell me what the problem was, and that I should just think about what I had done. This would leave me in a position of trying to guess which of my behaviours had most offended Z in some way. I hold a body memory of "scrambling" to make sense of what the problem might be. Ultimately, I would start guessing, so that I could know, apologize, and move on, however my guesses were usually incorrect. Z would express higher levels of frustration and anger towards me.

*Month 1, Day 3, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I don't think I can ever win with my partner. We spent last night enjoying a great long talk. I thought it was great, anyway, trying to understand where Z was coming from; explaining ourselves to each other. Then this morning, all of a sudden Z got all grumpy. So Z doesn't want to tell me what's wrong until just before Z dropped me at the tea shop; I feel like I'm on a time out – Z tells me that Z just wants me to go inside and think about what I've done.*

*Month 2, Day 11, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I spend so much time thinking about Z and that's sick. God Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference. It's a good prayer and one I've been saying a lot lately – Serenity that's what I deserve. No more drama. There's so much in this house. I think that is my goal for today – no more drama.*

While attending Alanon, a group for family members of alcoholics, I learned a principle that I came to understand as “act as if”. It was something like, even if I didn’t believe in a Higher Power, I could act as if one existed; if one did exist I could turn my troubles over to that Higher Power. I began to convince myself that if I could just act as if I were in a loving relationship, it would make it easier to manage the high levels of conflict. This principle increased my level of “madness” as I was telling myself something that was completely converse to what I was experiencing. I was lying to my intuition and my experiences of the situation. I seemed to know intellectually what was in my best interests, but generally acted against that knowledge.

*Month 2, Day 12, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Slept in nice this morning. I think it’s around 11 am. Z came back to our bed last night and I’m very grateful for that. Yesterday I kind of decided before Z went to work to respect Z’s distance but to not tiptoe around. I was still feeling bad when I went to work yesterday afternoon – that “uncertain I don’t know what’s going to happen” feeling but I just kept telling myself over and over that I only have control over myself and that’s it. I can’t make Z be happy here, nor can I make Z stay with me, no matter how much I try. I cannot make Z love me anymore (or any less, for that matter). So I might as well just be me, and live with the consequences of that.*

*Each time I felt uncertain; insecure, etc I just told myself ‘act like you’re in a loving, nurturing relationship. Absolutely nothing is going on but loving and nurturing.’ It became a mantra and each time my stomach clenched I could repeat it to myself. It seemed to help a lot. And I felt more loving, more trusting and more accepting of Z and this process.*

*I need to work on staying just in the moment. Just this place of balance and truth. If I move through my body I can still feel some anxiety in my stomach; some uncertainty that can threaten to take over if I allow it.*

*Month 2, Day 20, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I've been trying to sleep because I work a night shift tonight, but my mind is abuzz and won't settle down. I keep going through the "coulda, woulda, shoulda's", and then stopping myself to try and just be focused on right now. And then I end up in more obsessive thinking. It's like my mind is out of my control.*

*Z intends to move out this weekend and I feel very panicky about it. I feel like I'm on skis heading down a hill and I just keep picking up speed so that now I'm even scared to fall down to stop myself because it's going to hurt so freaking much. I'm not even sure how to fall, if the truth be known.*

*I see that I need to address my issues around trusting. Although I don't think they've been as big as Z says. Of course if they are big for Z, then they are big and so I've missed the boat on acknowledging Z's needs around that. I thought I was trusting, and Z was feeling a wall between us that I refused to acknowledge. Z needed me to talk more about me and Z needed to hear my stories and for whatever retarded reason, I never shared those with Z.*

*There's a part of me that just felt that was all history and not important. I see now that is was important.*

*Month 2, Day 29, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We're at Mom & Dad's. It was my plan to come alone, and spend some time on my own. Because we were getting along so good, I waffled and invited Z. I thought that if it's my goal to keep working on my marriage then being apart was not going to facilitate that. I'm just writing that because this morning I'm sorry that I invited Z.*

*In the car, we were trying to decide what videos/movies to show for the workshop I was presenting at, and Z got quite short. Although I've told myself that the reason Z did was because I wasn't listening – I rationalized Z's behaviour – I still felt hurt. I avoided sharing that – the hurt as well as whatever else I felt in that moment as usual. Then I felt kind of bad for holding that reaction in the first place – why did I react?*

*Z dropped me at the hospital to visit my grandma. My intuition said everything was okay. Last night Z said that I demanded to know what Z was going to do while I was with Grandma. I don't quite recall the conversation the way that Z did. Z told me Z was just going to drop me off and then had some running around to do. I was surprised as we were in a strange city and it was the first I heard of having errands – I recall asking what kind of running around. Z says I asked for more & more detail – which I also recall, but I recall it as coming from a place of curiosity, not control. I certainly could have chosen to let it go, but that would have been dishonest; I wanted to know something so I asked. I'm confused about those things and feeling resentful that Z dropped that on me last night rather than mentioning that he didn't appreciate it in the moment. I'm left second guessing all sorts of things. I really thought that we had had a good day. I see his points and acknowledged them. He became frustrated that I couldn't identify those on my own and change those patterns. I moved right into being defensive and couldn't get over*

*feeling hurt that I had been misled throughout the day. I guess that's how I feel – misled and all of that trust I built up last week has again been damaged. And I know that the only solution is to let it go. When Z wakes up, if I raise these issues, Z will accuse me of either holding onto stuff or blaming Z. What is my responsibility here?*

*I feel so untrusting because of how I interpreted my day and how different that was from the feedback that I got.*

*Month 1, Day 8, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*(On the day that Z was to move out.)*

*Yesterday morning I was getting ready to go out for tea before work. I checked my email at the last minute and Z had written an amazing love letter to me. I just sat and cried as I read it. Z asked me to wake Z when I read the letter. I did and we just cried together – sobbed really. And we both agreed that we do not know what to do. I don't know what to do. If I love Z so much, then how or why do I hurt Z. If Z loves me so much why does Z strike out at me? This isn't like that still place that we found before. I don't really trust this place. My stomach is swirling and I keep feeling like I want to throw up. I want to love Z, but I don't want to risk anymore roller coasters. That's really where I am.*

*I really feel like I need some time to sort myself out. To make decisions about whether or not the marriage is salvageable. Because I just don't know. I'm happier that we aren't striking out, but in some ways that is so much clearer. So I feel scared; anxious; uncertain.*

From time to time it seemed a part of me would surface, and remember who I had been prior to my involvement with Z. I longed for that “me” again; I tried to return to that “me”.

*Month 1, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I just woke up feeling sad and then was thinking ‘what’s wrong with me?’ I don’t need to be sad. I can be happy, even if there are problems day to day. It seems a bit silly to spend so much time being down.*

*I’ve also been thinking about the drama I’m in, and how I need to step out of it. I think I’m using the drama to avoid something – I suspect it’s a deeper intimacy with Z. Everything always comes back to my struggle for intimacy.*

*I need to step through that fear into intimacy all around me. And the only way to do that is by speaking completely from my heart. And breaking my patterns of avoidance and fighting. Just taking feedback for what it’s worth. I need to go back to living and just letting things happen the way they happen.*

I was constantly trying to determine how to communicate with Z. I became increasingly obsessed with finding the “right way” that would finally alleviate the animosity that I felt from Z. I sought out Z’s interpretations and explanations about how to communicate. I experimented with different ways of communicating, as I understood them to be from Z’s explanations. I was rarely successful. I lost my previous ability to communicate effectively – I became more and more afraid of direct communication.

*Month 1, Day 12, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm feeling not great this morning. Despondent; depressed; hopeless yet again. I got all kinds of feedback from Z yesterday and I guess I've allowed myself to take it all on. I'm sad. I don't even want to write, honestly. I just want to sit in my despair. I don't want to try to work it out any longer, today. I feel like the changes that I'm making aren't good enough – they don't count and aren't quick enough. I feel like the only thing Z sees in me are negatives and that's not a loving relationship.*

*I guess there are many times when I question Z's motive/intent. Z says s/he's coming from a place of love/acceptance and I don't believe Z. I can now see how painful that that was for Z.*

*I realized that speaking my truth; saying that I felt hurt with Z's reaction – would be breaking a pattern. Normally I would just tuck that inside of me, let it fester with other stuff. What happened instead of going the way I expected was that Z immediately pointed out that the problem started when I went inside of myself. There was not real acknowledgement that I had felt hurt by Z's reaction. Instead I heard Z blaming me because I wasn't trying to have a conversation with Z but was 'talking to'. And then there was a lengthy discussion about how I shut down. I became frustrated – I felt blamed and unacknowledged. Z felt like I was blaming Z – the old pattern and the fight was on.*

*Month 1, Day 14, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Parts of the time I felt a bit uncomfortable about the fact that Z and I weren't talking but I couldn't think of anything to talk about. I guess I could have said that. That would have been the honest talk that Z asks of me.*

*I'm so used to spending so much time inside of my own head. It's like I just don't know how to get the words out. And quite frankly, it's not easy with Z as Z doesn't help to support me – instead it's like Z takes the stand that Z won't answer or won't respond if I don't ask/talk in the way that Z wants. Which is contrary to Z's mantra that 'there is no right or wrong.' Anyway, what happens for me in those moments is I start to get anxious and start looking for the right words.*

*Month 1, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I still have an awful lot to learn about how to communicate with Z in a way that's clear and honest. And I'm learning as I go. And I'll keep learning. And it's a lot of work and I think I'll get discouraged but as I said earlier; right now I feel hopeful. It's also my bad communication skills, but when Z is patient there doesn't seem to be the same argument. Listen to me, doing all of this blaming again.*

*I still carry some anxiety in my stomach. I fear Z becoming frustrated with me because I see that as being the place where we start to argue.*

*Month 1, Day 20, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*When I think about it, it felt like the whole day held an edge of antagonism yesterday. After hours of being berated by Z, I don't know what that was about, but I know that I surely didn't like it. It's a good thing I get to start over each day.*

*Month 1, Day 22, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*(After a really big fight – 6 hours of lecture)*

*I feel better this morning than I did yesterday. Yesterday started off a bit rocky but anyway, we got past it and moved on.*

*Although I say I move on, I know that I also carry these left over feelings in me. Maybe these are resentments. I'm not sure. And I'm not sure what to do with them. I feel like I can't speak them, for fear of another argument and it's not fair to stuff them inside of me. But obviously I need to do something. What is it that I feel resentful about. I resent being blamed for the argument Saturday. I resent that even though I think I 'took my piece' Z didn't hear it so I had to say it over and over. I resent that I got a lengthy lecture about how I could have come back to Z at any point in the day and didn't, when Z could have done the same. I think the thing is that when I get a lecture like that, I feel like I've been a naughty child and I'm being severely reprimanded. If I argue back the repercussions are worse than if I just stay silent, however if stay silent then I feel worse within myself. I don't know how to change the pattern of being lectured. I don't know how to intervene in that process. I want Z to be able to talk about how Z feels, but I guess I don't want to be reprimanded. And I don't know how to say that. I just know how bad I feel.*

*Month 2, Day 3, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm feeling sad and hurt – left over from last night. When I tried to talk about that, Z reacted. I don't quite understand why – and I guess I don't need to. Now, I'm feeling like Z's blaming me for something – I have no idea what. I tried to approach Z – Z says I'm coming at it inside myself. It's our pattern to carry things for hours until we have a yelling match. And then it breaks.*

*What happens for me in the yelling match? I usually find a place of submission. If I come at Z from a place of love and acceptance, where will that bring me. If I accept that Z's not trying to pick a fight with me but try to understand how Z's feeling, then that*

*takes me to a place of love. Of course, I love Z. Why would I want to argue with Z. I don't. Why would I want to fight with Z. I don't fully understand what it is that's bothering Z, and I guess I'm trying to guess to make it better. I was feeling sad/hurt when I woke up. Somehow, sharing that with Z has created this new experience. When I shared it, I was feeling very vulnerable/exposed. I guess I just wanted to be heard, and it was a bad time to share because Z is almost always edgy in the morning. I was thinking about myself. Yet I don't know the appropriate way – if I'm trying to be honest in the moment and I find myself doing that at inappropriate times.*

Increasingly I began to experience that classic sensation of “walking around on egg shells”. I tried to time my discussions, my experiences, my sharing with Z so they occurred at the right time and not an inopportune time. I increasingly used language given to me by Z. I began to try to make sense of my world, using the language that Z told me to use. Z found a book that Z really liked, and began to insist that it become our “mantra” in our relationship. This meant that we both spoke the language of the book, and whether I believed it, or not, I began to use the language in my journals. Z put more and more rules around the relationship so that I was forced to avoid certain words when talking with Z (or myself or others). I was not permitted to speak in “you” language, however Z frequently did. This contradiction generally left me feeling resentful, but unable to complain about it.

*Month 2, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I was feeling a bit uncertain as Z was so grumpy this morning and I was feeling like I might have done something to set Z off – usually – in fact, almost always, when Z's in a bad mood, what I hear is that I've done something to set that off. Not that Z says that*

*directly, but if I ask, like I did today, if Z has something on Z's mind, then what Z says back is that I should just look at myself and not at Z. And I get so reactive – as soon as Z says 'look at yourself' I hear that as a cue that I've maybe done something wrong. It's like a hidden message that Z believes I've been bad.*

*Month 2, Day 21-22, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Actually it's like midnight, and just past so in reality it's April 22.*

*Z appears to be going to sleep in the office tonight. And I can see that if I don't unload my feelings I'm going to be up all night. I'm so annoyed with Z. I'm feeling shut down and blamed and not heard. We were having an argument earlier – a stupid thing. I'm confused because first I'm blamed that I've taken over the process and then I'm told that Z's in agreement with the outcome. Z feels powerless in the process. Somehow this is my fault, because I make suggestions and open discussion. It's likely true that my discussions are more negotiations than consensus decision making. That's possible. I still don't fully understand Z's version of consensus. Then Z tells me that the reason all of the other options can't be fully discussed is because I have the money therefore there's a hierarchy in decisions. Somehow, because Z has no money Z has become a victim of my decision-making.*

*Month 2, Day 24, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Still, already today, I feel like I started the day saying the wrong thing. I asked Z if there was anything special Z would like to do today, since our plans to go and get the trailer have changed. Z completely ignored me, closed his/her eyes, then turned the TV*

*on. So did I do something wrong? It feels a bit crazy making for me. It seems like there's a formula for what I should do, but the formula keeps changing.*

*Month 3, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Z read to me from the book "The Four Agreements" and then we discussed the idea that if we live in a dream, we can do whatever we want. If I want to be rid of all of the past agreements I've made, I just can. I just need to choose to. I like the way of describing it. I like that I've made agreements that I didn't even have a choice in and now those don't work for me but I keep doing them.*

*For me, it's the places where I feel fear – I need to just walk through those. I realize that fear is an illusion to stop me from moving forward. It isn't real. Once I move through it, I no longer am afraid. There was nothing there to fear. Now that's true in most things, but what I've learned with Z is that sometimes when I walk through fear and do something, I am punished. I guess the place I have to go, then, is to the belief that no one can hurt me unless I allow it. I can choose to feel those negative sides or not. I do this because I want to live freely and without restrictions. I want to live in a world of love, not fear. I want to live in a world of unconditional acceptance and to do that I have to accept unconditionally.*

*Month 3, Day 18, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I feel like I need to write things down or find a way to fully clarify every little thing that we talk about because it's my experience that Z changes the reality down the road and then says that that's what we talked about. I guess that's one thing I can do, is just stop assuming that I know exactly what Z's talking about and clarify, clarify, clarify.*

*Month 4, Day 5, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*We camped at a rest stop last night just outside of this American town. Once we get through the city, we'll be in in the state we were headed for, and only a few hours from our destination. And that means a few days without driving and trying to get somewhere.*

*Yesterday we had a very big fight. Yelling at each other and everything. We finally pulled over to a rest stop to talk it over – it still wasn't resolved and so we finally left it. It wasn't the kind of thing that can be resolved, really. It's been exactly three weeks since we had a fight. I think that's excellent and I'm happy to start over on that. I know that if I can avoid reacting and just hear Z then there isn't a fight. I just learn more about Z. The thing that I do is I react when I think Z is blaming me or talking about me instead of Z's self. I've been using self-talk at those times over the past three weeks, and that has helped me. I did not use it yesterday.*

*Anyway, I don't have a lot more to say this morning. I feel nervous – I'm not sure what about.*

*Z placed many rules around our relationship. I tried to live up to the rules; to fulfill them so that we might peacefully co-exist.*

*Month 4, Day 15, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's quite early, but I'm awake, showered, had breakfast. Z and I had a much better day yesterday. I just talked about where I am. I know I need to keep doing that. Speak the truth and not avoid. Be impeccable with my word and how I create things with it. The second agreement in that book was to not take anything personally. This is great*

*advice. That makes things so much more simplified to me. When criticisms come flying my way, I can choose to internalize them or not. If I believe what's being said about me already, then I will internalize the criticisms. Each time I hear a criticism, it's a chance for me to look closer at myself and my own insecurities. This is something I will do today.*

*One of the other things I did yesterday was I tried to talk only in 'I'. I caught myself when I wanted to say 'you' and tried to re-work it. That was helpful to me, and I will continue doing that today. And, as before, each time I feel the need to avoid something I will address it – with 'I' discussions, not 'you'. That's a lot of stuff to stay aware of today, but what is there to worry about? I have nothing else to really think about besides working on myself and my relationship.*

*Month 5, Day 19, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Yesterday, after writing and meditating, I felt really good – grounded, relaxed. While I was on my way to work, I was thinking how difficult it must be for Z and my son to have to live with my many moods. And I move through many of them. I guess though, that that is where I am right now.*

*Month 5, Day 28, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's around 10 am and everyone else is asleep. Z is still in Z's unhappy place and stayed up all night, finally coming to bed around 9. I went to an Al-anon meeting last night and that seemed to help me get past all of the anger and shit that I was carrying. We had another yelling match first however.*

*It's a very strange place for me to be in. Coming back from a place of such love and dropping into this place of pain. I know that I have a big issue with my reacting. I*

*think it's a problem. The times that I don't react to all of Z's blaming are times when I use self-talk and hold myself in a calmer place. That works well for me.*

*Month 6, Day 26, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's not quite 10 am. Everyone's still sleeping but me. Z still isn't sleeping with me. Yesterday Z told me that Z wasn't rejecting me, but that Z just needed to work on Z's self. Z did not talk to me the rest of the day. Throughout most of the day, I was able to feel compassion for Z, and for myself. Last night, as I went to bed, however, I felt really sad. Still compassionate, but horribly sad.*

*So today I am trying very hard to be compassionate and to not react out of my own emotions. I want to, and my natural reaction is to do so. This is an opportunity to practice a new behaviour. Knowing that I want to withdraw, be hurt, act angry, I can choose, instead, to be kind, compassionate and loving. I can also be honest about how I'm feeling, however if I choose that, I also have to choose to do so without any expectations. That's the more difficult place for me. What I wish in telling Z how I'm feeling is that Z will stop this behaviour and become loving to me once again. That wish can easily become an expectation and so I release it. This pure intent in telling Z how I feel is to be honest and straight forward. This is what I'm striving for in my marriage.*

*I'm trying to use lots of self talk to remind myself to not take this personally. It's not about me – it's about whatever process Z's going through. I'm afraid that somewhere in this process Z's going to find me guilty of something. At the end of this, I'm afraid Z's going to blame me for something so I guess that part of me wants to figure out if there's something else I can do to make it better – to fix it. Somehow, if I was better at*

*everything, Z would love me enough and would no longer hold expectations of me. There's where I could make myself crazy.*

*Month 7, Day 1, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I intend to definitely do some packing when I get home. If I don't avoid the work it will get done. It's so messy in here right now, it's very difficult for me. I can't stand mess. At counseling we had a whole discussion about chaos and how I like order and being with Z means I have to accept chaos. Last night Z and I were talking and one of the things that Z said was that "you don't have to like something to accept it". Now, I think that I've been under the assumption that to accept something I had to agree with it or like it. So this is good news to me. There are many times when I've felt that I don't like something and even though I felt I was accepting it, I still thought I wasn't because I hadn't learned to like it yet. Weird.*

As time passed, even my journals began to reflect my mind's inability to process all of the information. I began to display trauma like symptoms – forgetfulness, and fazing out while writing. I would write about an experience, and my mind would disappear. Perhaps I was disassociating. Because I didn't document what my thoughts were during those times, I can only guess about it.

*Month 7, Day 6, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Well yesterday was moving day. I thought everything went pretty smoothly. I thought I coped very well with the whole day. I felt anxious in the morning – without direction – and once Z sent me off with Z's dad, it was like I gave up control of the situation and then I was good. Z seemed to have a couple of minutes of stress and*

*snappishness (snapping at Z's dad), and although I felt uncomfortable, I moved through it rather quickly.*

*I had a really bad headache yesterday, and today I feel quite light headed. But at least there's no pain. I'm such a wimp about pain!*

*Boy my mind just wandered all over the place. Sometimes I have a hard time holding my attention to something. Seems like I'm tired of writing already. I keep looking around and seeing all of the things that need doing, yet. And how messy everything is!*

*Month 8, Day 5, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*Yesterday was a day of a lot of talking – I feel exhausted talking at that level all day – trying to keep up to Z. I don't know why I get so anxious in our conversations. I don't react that way when I'm talking to R or M. Part of it is my fear of reactions. I trust that R or M will not get mad at me if I don't answer the question, or if I work my way around the circle to get to the answer – in fact they fully understand that process. Z gets frustrated and short and I'm afraid of a fight.*

*This fear of fighting is paralyzing for me. When I think about all of the times over the years I have tried desperately to not be in a fight.*

*I'm having a hard time concentrating on what I'm writing here. My mind keeps wandering away.*

*Month 8, Day 6, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's around 1:30 in the afternoon. Z just got up and it seems that Z isn't talking to me. Perhaps I'm just being sensitive. I slept, finally, after writing last night's piece. I got up around 10 and even did some yoga.*

*We are supposed to get the water running today, and then go get Z's car. I guess I'll wait to see if that's still the plan.*

*I'm aware that I'm feeling anxious about how today is going to go. But I did nothing wrong by bringing up that stuff last night. I'm a good person and I have a right to express my feelings. And Z has a right to not listen to them. I need to accept Z's right and not hold it against Z.*

*Month 6, Day 13, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I don't know how to decide where I am and where we are. I guess I'm right here. We've come out on the other side of a really bad patch. And where we go on this side I don't know. I feel 'cautious'. I also feel inattentive today – like I don't want to examine myself too hard – just let things go.*

*Month 6, Day 25, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm feeling terribly insecure. Two nights ago we had an argument. We both worked yesterday and when I got home from work, I found Z to be very detached from me. Z didn't touch me once. Staying up until I went to sleep; and each time I've tried to touch Z this morning Z pulled away.*

*Those are Z's behaviours. I'm feeling completely alone and rejected. I see a cycle that happens. I'm not fully certain what brings Z to this place, but when Z pulls away from me like this, my wound of being unlovable is scraped wide open. I find myself believing and accepting that Z's love is quite conditional. When I behave in a way that's good enough – the right way then Z is loving towards me. So that feeds my desire to be 'good enough', which is always impossible because I am an imperfect human. So then I*

*lose trust in Z. I doubt that Z will always be available to me and this feeds Z's wound because Z needs me to trust Z unconditionally.*

*The only way out of this cycle is for one or both of us to step free of it. I'm in lots of pain and am aware that I want to react – maybe to push Z further away from me.*

*To step free of all of this means again that I need to 'surrender to love'. I need to just trust that the Divine is guiding this process. I cannot shield myself from that. Her love will take me to the place I need to be. What I want is to be in love and be loved by Z. What I need to do is to love Z unconditionally. To just hold Z in my heart and hold my heart open to Z. I'm aware that I think I've done something wrong but since I don't know what it is I don't know how to correct it. I need to remember that 'nothing is broken'. If Z chooses to remove Z's self from me, that's about Z not me. It doesn't mean that I need to remove myself from Z.*

*The hard part of this for me is the fear of the rejection. I can act in a loving way all I want, and if Z keeps rejecting me I will still have to cope with my feelings of rejection – which means that I'm not good enough or loveable enough the way I am.*

*Anyway, I feel completely filled with fear. I feel distracted. I have to go to work today, and will likely leave in an hour or so. Z is still in bed and will likely be until I leave for work.*

*Month 9, Day 2, Year 3*

*I'm feeling very positive about my life and my relationship with Z. It seems like we're getting better at working through the conflicts – or at least I am. Perhaps Z always*

*has been, but I am getting better at not reacting. Not perfect, yet, of course, because I do still react.*

*Month 9, Day 9, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I love the feeling I have when Z and I are in love. It feels so ...loving... I don't know what else to call it. Although there's still a part of me that stands back, anxiously waiting for the next big fight. I don't like that piece. Well it's not so much that I don't like her, but more that I wish she weren't there. I understand her 'necessity', so to speak.*

From a spiritual perspective, we talked lots about choosing to live in love, not fear. Many of my journal entries reflect this world view but there is a great irony in trying to live fearlessly when one is living in a chronic situation of fear, abuse, and violence.

*Month 9, Day 16, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Z and I are doing okay. There's lots of tension for me, as I keep expecting that I'm going to screw up and Z's going to get mad at me. I am having a hard time trusting and just being direct & honest because of this fear. And this just feeds Z's frustration. I'm sure I've written this scenario before.*

*I think that I'm making progress in making connections in my own behaviour. The only thing I need to do now is make a clear decision to change my behaviour. The first step, as I see it, is to clearly admit that I want the kind of life that we've talked about.*

*What do I see in this life? First of all, I want to live fearlessly. To live fearlessly means to move through my day not worried.*

*Month 9, Day 28, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's around 2:30 in the afternoon on Sunday. Z's at work. I worked the night shift so just woke up a short while ago. I woke up with this knot of anxiety in my belly. I feel a tremendous amount of stress and uncertainty. I see patterns more and more clearly. And less and less clearly. I feel very poorly treated by Z and manipulated. Whenever we're in a fight, the only way I can move us out is to agree to only talk about myself and my behaviour. That way Z never has to address or be accountable for Z's behaviour.*

*I guess I'm feeling angry at being in this place. And yet, really, I only have myself to blame. Although I did not create and maintain this fight for this many days, I participated and did things to feed it. I became quite stubborn about not 'making up' and doing the things that I know can lead to peace. Then I allowed fear and panic to take over and started to do that cartoonish running in place as I tried to fix things – make them better. I have analyzed, assessed, talked to myself like mad over the past couple of days.*

*Today, I don't even feel like I want to continue in the marriage. I'm not ready to pack up and leave yet, but there is such insanity in these places. This dark cloud that passes over me is not my creation. I don't know when a mood is going to hit Z, so I sit in constant anticipation of it, or I can pretend that it's not going to happen and act like everything's great.*

*I feel incredibly sad as I write this. It's not a good place. The behaviour is never going to change because we can never address it. And I guess as I write this, I realize that I have a responsibility to myself and to the marriage to at least try to address this problem. The trouble is that I don't know if I have the ego strength to do it today.*

*Month 9, Day 29, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's about 12:30. Z is still asleep. I've showered, but haven't really had breakfast. I'm feeling extremely depressed. I keep playing over and over in my mind the scenes from the past few days. I don't want to be here – like here, physically in this house. I feel crazy. I want to run away and don't know of anywhere to run.*

*Z has once again told me that the whole fight has been because of me. Z admits, of course, that Z had a role when Z joined me in my place. Z has said that Z is no longer going to be “cuing” me on the proper way to behave. Z might ignore me, and walk away from me, but won't point out what I already should know. I feel totally deflated and hopeless. There's no way Z will ever see Z's role – Z will never look at Z's own controlling behaviours.*

My outer life began to reflect my inner chaos. Prior to the relationship, my house was usually orderly and clean. I had regular chore days, and tasks were generally kept up to date. Towards the end of the relationship, our house was chaotic, filled with clutter, and unclean. I felt little motivation to clean up, and Z would often be angry if I touched Z's belongings. My journals note that my house reflected depression within the chaos.

*Month 10, Day 10, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's around 12:30 on Friday afternoon. Z has gone to work. We talked some more last night. I again found myself being hopeful maybe, just maybe, this time I understand how I can communicate so that we get along. It's so easy for me to just fall back into that place 'I am the problem'; 'if I could just do it the right way, there would be no problem'. But even as I was aware of the part of me going 'okay, this time I think I've got it,'*

*another part was observing and noticing that Z still believes too, that the only problem is that I don't own my own actions; that I'm not accountable in some way. Z does not see Z's own behaviour as a problem. Except as it relates to Z's reactions to me.*

*And so, I can go away and work on myself as much as I can, but that would mean only half the problem will be 'fixed'. So where last night I felt a bit more hopeful, today I feel far less so. Today, I think I should just pack my stuff and get out while the getting's good.*

*Anyway, I'm feeling a bit despondent, and not quite certain what to do next. I was going to do housework today, because the house is a pigsty, but then I just don't feel like cleaning up after Z. Why should I?*

*It's later in the day...I'm feeling really scared that I'm missing out/stepping away from an opportunity to experience a truly awakened relationship. I know that most of the time I'm asleep and some of the times I wake up to that 'knowing.' I don't know how to reconcile how I feel. I want to continue to do this work with Z, but I can't bare the aggressive interactions between us. I believe that we can feed the awareness between each other in a magical way that is beyond all other relationships. I don't want a mundane relationship. I want the mystical relationship that I've had glimpses of with Z.*

*I am battling myself this afternoon; I want desperately to not make a mistake. I want desperately for Z to get the help Z needs, as well.*

*Also I have put Z into this villain role in our lives. If someone else gave me the feedback Z gives me, I wouldn't jump all over them. But also, no one else in my life gives me feedback at the high volume and high intensity that Z does.*

*Month 10, Day 21, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I don't know what I'll do today. I don't want to fight anymore with Z. I wish that we could have a really lovely, kind day with each other. It's one of the parts that are frustrating for me. If Z is lighter I can meet Z there. If I am in a lighter mood, Z can't meet me there. One more of the many things that I resent. I guess the thing is that I don't need Z's permission to be in a lighter mood. I can still choose to hold myself there. I allow all of my feelings to be impacted by Z, and that's so wrong. I am an independent strong and loving woman. I have my own feelings.*

*The thing is that so often I don't even know what my own feelings are anymore. If they're really obvious, I do but so often, like right now, I just feel numb. I can spend a moment looking at my feelings... there's fear; depression. I was thinking about this yesterday. My house reflects depression – it's disorganized; things aren't unpacked; things are stacked around.*

*I've just gone off into a fantasy of some kind and stopped writing completely. One of those 'faze out' moments.*

*I still need to determine what kind of day I intend to have. I want to have a loving day, so I need to behave in a loving way. Z and I talked about 'fanning a spark' of love for each other. I said that I could do all sorts of things to be loving – I just need to do them. I need to think only loving things about Z today; I need to only talk about him in a loving way to others; if I find myself thinking negatively, I will reframe it. This is an 'act as if' experience. I will reminisce about times that were really good, and bring those warm feelings into our house. Even if Z isn't there in this space with me, I will continue to behave in a loving way. I will continue to 'fan the spark'. When Z talks to me, I will*

*hear everything Z says with curiosity and no other (negative) emotion. When Z talks to me, I will hear love from Z. Z is my partner and I chose Z as such for the rest of my life. This, to me, is surrendering to love. Not thinking about what doesn't work, but instead thinking about what does.*

*Month 10, Day 29, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*It's almost 12:30. I just got up. Z is sleeping on the couch. I feel horrible. Depressed. Hopeless. I keep trying to talk myself into believing that we can get along. I keep pushing ahead, putting these blinders on to all of the outside information. I keep blaming myself for how it's not working. I need clarity. I need to accept the clarity. Time after time I hear that small voice in my head say that it's time to go and I pretend not to hear it. I put some other voice in its place.*

*Despite the pain of the situation I keep hoping for a miracle. I keep trying to 'get it'. I keep trying to be what Z needs me to be – for Z. And only so Z will love me enough. I need to let it go. Accept the fact that I've gone as far as I can down this particular path. Acceptance is very hard for me. I want to fulfill my own agenda.*

*Anyway, that's where I am. Recognizing that there is very little else I can do to move forward in this relationship. If I were to look at the other possibilities as Z has asked me to do, I could see that I could choose to keep working; I could tell Z I am no longer going to work on his model of responsibility and see what is born out of that. I could shift and believe right now that it's all going to come together; I could pray and have faith; I could ask for a sign and follow that. I don't know which of those I'll pick. I feel like I can't even make a decision.*

*My desire is to phone someone and ask them to tell me what to do. I know that my friends have already said – I don't need to be this miserable all of the time.*

*I feel shattered and my choice to keep up this process is contributing to that feeling. I need to just stop...*

Madness took me from a confident knowledge of myself to one where I was confused, distressed, and constantly trying to make sense of the world around me. I experienced increased levels of anxiety and obsessive thinking related to the relationship with Z. My experience of my relationship was incongruent with my previous experiences of my own self. Z denied my reality and so, to keep the peace and to make sense of my experience, I denied my reality, too. I did this, in part, by trying to convince myself that I was in a loving relationship. Increasingly, my life began to reflect the chaos that I was experiencing. The madness was within me and all around me.

## **Death**

As in life, the final chapter is often brief. It came down to a decision. Was the misery I was experiencing likely to end? And if it didn't end, could I cope with it? If it didn't end, and I couldn't cope, what were my options? In the story of Inanna, she reaches the deepest part of her descent and she confronts death. She is hung on a meat hook to rest. This is where I came to. I contemplated death. I felt so hopeless that I could see no way out of the situation I was in. I sat in my contemplation and waited to see what would happen.

If it was my role, as wife, to be the relationship-keeper (Olson, 2004), and if it was my perception that I had significantly failed at this role, what was my place in the

world? Herman (1992) described the state of “brokenness” (p. 85) that occurs after repeated incidents of abuse in an intimate relationship. I no longer felt any sense of inner autonomy. All of my thoughts were controlled both by Z and by me (in my attempts to appease Z). Herman discussed that individuals eventually lose their will to live, and this seems to be the spot where I was at. It seemed incomprehensible that I could continue in my current situation, and I could no longer develop a strategy to move on.

*Month 1, Day 30, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*In the end I never feel heard and Z mostly doesn't feel heard and so we both keep talking. I guess, if I don't want to fight, I need to come to a place where I can accept that Z is unable/unwilling to just listen, understand and acknowledge what I'm saying, or, alternately, if I don't come to that place, I will not survive in this relationship.*

*Month 6, Day 18, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I'm a mess. Plain and simple. I'm not coping well with the 'down' parts of my marriage. We fought all day yesterday and until 5 am this morning. I'm emotionally and physically exhausted. Z is miserable. I am miserable and we don't know how to find our way out of this. The way that I see it is that I just do things Z's way because Z refuses to accept that my way has any merit. I feel dangerously close to giving up. I feel alone. I feel unloved.*

*Month 8, Day 5, Year 3 Journal Entry*

*I am triggered by this face of the woman on TV, and traumatized by it. How much am I willing to take?*

*Month 9, Day 29, Year 2 Journal Entry*

*Basically, the way I see it is that my only option at this point is to accept Z's perspective as being the truth. If I don't accept it, I will continue fighting with Z. And I can't do that, because I can't make any progress or headway. If I didn't have my son I would seriously consider ending my life right now. Everything feels extremely hopeless.*

And in the end ... I chose life. I escaped this situation. But I am haunted by the women who were unable to make this decision and have remained in the underworld.

### **The Rescue**

In Inanna's story, she had pre-arranged for her friend, Ninshubur, to come look for her if she did not return as expected. Ninshubur calls on other helpers in Inanna's community to assist. I became my own Ninshubur. Despite my fear and angst, but out of my frustration and exhaustion, I spent a few days with my sister. This distance gave me some rest. I returned to live with Z. And on the last day of the year, I packed my clothes, loaded my car, and drove away while Z remained in bed. It was cold, icy, and snowy that morning. I hit an icy patch on the isolated highway, and after my car spun around twice, I found myself in the ditch, with no one to call for help. I sat, with my heart pounding and burst in to tears. I was filled with such an overwhelming understanding of my true aloneness.

But my stronger self, my Ninshubur self, did come to the rescue! I was able to organize my thoughts to call a tow truck operator, and despite my sobbing instructions he was able to find me quickly, pull me out of the ditch, and send me on my way. Z and I continued to try to resolve our differences for several more months, but I did not return to

live with Z. My community, that had been invisible to me, surrounded me, held me up, and supported me as I walked forward.

I began my own ascent ....

## Chapter Five - Concluding Thoughts

The story of the Descent of Inanna and the metaphor of the Gates serves as a tool to deconstruct the experience of loss of self and to label the parts of oneself that have been impacted by living in a psychologically and emotionally abusive relationship. The Gates place an imposed structure upon the experience, and because it interferes with the chronological telling of the story, it can be confusing. However, the deconstruction of experience allows the researcher / counsellor / victim to identify specific areas of affect. One of the situations I faced as I deconstructed my own story was to realize that different experiences could just as easily fit under different Gate categories. For example, an experience that was labeled as fitting under the “control” Gate, could also just as easily have fit under the “comfort” Gate. It was necessary for me to force a fit for many experiences.

I also found, however, that the variation of categories offered by the Gates, is effective in fully understanding the experience of domestic violence. The range seems sufficient to categorize most experiences. While I was sorting my journal entries I did not find experiences that could not fit under any of the categories. Certainly, I found writings related to my life outside of the relationship and some of those writings might have been categorized as personal growth, or spirituality.

I believe that the Gates would offer a means for someone to understand their experience living in domestic violence. In some of the counselling work that I have done with women who have exited or who are planning to exit relationships where various forms of domestic violence exist, I frequently hear them ask questions about how they

ended up in the relationship. “How could I have been so stupid?” is the question that arises; certainly it is a question I asked myself frequently after the relationship ended. Women in these situations want to be able to make sense not only of their partner’s behaviour, but of their own. They want to make sense of how they could have succumbed to the dynamics of the abusive partner. Certainly this was my own experience. I spent many hours following my separation questioning and re-questioning my own experiences and motivations. By examining the areas of one’s life that were impacted by the abuse they experienced, recipients of the abuse are able to see the specific ways they have been affected. This allows them, then, a model for recovery. The Gates could be particularly useful from the perspective of healing. If one is providing therapy or psychological support to a survivor of domestic violence, the Gates could be utilized to identify areas for enhancement and reintegration of the self in healing and personal development. This would help to develop a plan for “ascent”. In the story identified by Beshderen, Inanna ascends backwards through the gates. As She approaches each gate, She has an opportunity to examine what She left behind and choose what She will take back. In this way, each of the Gates could be utilized to identify areas for enhancement, and development. This would certainly be an area that would benefit from further study.

The lack of linear timelines makes it difficult to understand the story as it occurred. This can be challenging if one is attempting to fully comprehend the emotional decline of someone living in an abusive relationship. Most victims of domestic violence have a need to tell their stories. It is possible that the non-linear approach of the gates could interfere with this re-telling. I would recommend that a therapist allow any survivor of domestic violence to set the pace for the re-telling of their story. I would draw

attention to Herman (1992) who noted that it's not unusual for people who have survived a traumatic relationship to share their stories in a manner that is often "emotional, contradictory, and fragmented" (p. 2). The Gates could offer a structure to assist in the re-telling of the story.

Finally, to address Richardson's (2000) criteria for checking validity of autoethnographic research, I answer her five questions (p. 937):

(1) The work makes a substantial contribution to the research: My story has merit within the research of the experience of domestic violence. It offers an alternative method of exploring the loss of self within the culture of violence. It also offers a professional analysis of a deeply personal experience.

(2) The work has aesthetic merit: The story is written in an appealing and interesting fashion; it is readable and engaging. The interaction with the Goddess offers a poetic way of looking at this difficult subject.

(3) The work demonstrates reflexivity: I explore my experience as it intersects with the literature and examine my own experiences from a reflexive perspective. My journals are a deeply personal examination of those experiences.

(4) It has an impact on the reader: Hopefully the reader will express an interest and some emotional response to this story. This point remains to be assessed by the reader herself.

(5) It demonstrates an expression of reality: Given that this is a true story, and is told in first person prose fashion, it seems apparent that the story expresses reality.

This thesis has been a challenging project for me. I have struggled with my own triggers around the reading and re-reading and re-reading yet again of my journal entries. It seemed that I needed to read the journals enough times to develop some level of desensitization. Despite the living of my own story, the re-reading of it caused me to sit in judgement of myself. Sharing the experience of so many other women, I found myself silently shaking my head at some of the thoughts I shared in my journals, wondering how in the world I got myself into that situation. In some cases I felt embarrassed about leaving the journal entries available for others to read. This is likely the experience Ellis (1999) wrote about when she discussed the vulnerability of the writings when one assumes the role of “vulnerable observer” (p. 675). When the stories are in the public realm, there is no bringing them back. Some of my own shame, guilt, and remorse are tied up in the knowledge that some people will hear this story and will judge me. This is inevitable. It is a reflection of a patriarchal culture mired in violence and the normalization of violence. I am regularly witness to colleagues (professional social workers, police, and other helpers) who speak negatively about women who remain in abusive relationships. When I hear this talk, I find myself in a position of remaining silent about my own experience or risking vulnerability by exposing my story as a frame of reference and understanding for those around me. Despite the time that has passed since the ending of the relationship, I remain vulnerable about my experience of it.

My deep abiding relationship with Inanna as well as Her sister, Erishkegal, have offered me many opportunities over my time in the Reclaiming Tradition to reflect on different aspects of my life. Inanna is a deity that serves as a fearless guide to anyone willing to do the deep work of self-reflection leading to self-awareness. As a guide on

this particular journey, She served as both companion and teacher to me. The re-telling of this ancient story provides me hope within despair.

### **Future Directions**

This thesis points to a couple of areas for further research. I believe, given the analysis within the Literature Review, further research needs to occur around the suicidality of women living in psychologically / emotionally abusive relationships. It seems self-evident that living in a violent relationship can lead to depression (Abel, 2001; Burks, 2006; Evans, 1993; Follingstad, 2009; Haqqi and Faizi, 2010; Herman 1992). Haqqi and Faizi (2010) found evidence of a possible correlation between depression related to violence and thoughts of suicide, as did Herman (1992). This could be a challenging area to research, given there is little tracking of these emotional and psychological forms of domestic violence. In my own lived experience, suicide began to seem like a realistic “out” for me. My thinking was so significantly impaired that I could not imagine any other way to escape the situation I was in. Research on suicidal thinking and attempts in all forms of domestic violence would be valuable to begin to plan successful interventions. Women’s lives are literally at stake without this research.

Within my own biases, I would like to see further research in the area of ascending out of domestic violence, and whether the Gates do provide a workable framework for the ascension. Once an individual has begun to recognize the impact of violence upon them, I believe the Gates offer a path for the redemptive process necessary to recover from intimate partner violence. This will likely point me to a specific practice within my own realm as counsellor.

Secondary to my research on the loss of self, the process of this thesis also encouraged me to reflect on my own healing journey. One of the areas that I became aware of was my search for redemption. That is, along with trying to make sense of the violence that was inflicted upon me, and trying to make sense of my own responses to the violence, I came to realize that I was seeking redemption in some way from the experience of living in domestic violence. Herman (1992) discussed a need for trauma survivors to try to engage in some behaviour that gave purpose to the trauma. For example, one might counsel battered women, or provide public education about family violence. Vallee (2007) noted this with both Elly Armour's and Jane Hurshman's drive to help other women who experienced domestic violence.

Understanding the drive for redemption could assist helpers to move victims through the healing process with a more balanced approach. When a victim feels driven towards redemption, it can be more challenging to collect the various parts of the self during ascension.

Along with healing myself - ascending the gates, so to speak - I am aware that I have tried to find some purpose out of my own experiences of domestic violence. Perhaps this thesis is a reflection my search for redemption.

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## Afterword

When I first embarked on this thesis, I took all appropriate steps, including submission to the Ethics Review Committee. Unfortunately, as the time of the thesis drew to an end, it became apparent that risk and liability existed in publishing my thesis, despite the many precautions I tried to take in the writing of the thesis. It is for this reason that the thesis you are reading is under a pseudonym. It is this step that can best assure that my ex-partner will be unable to discern this story as “our” story.

In many ways, these protective steps are a reflection of our broader society’s engagement with domestic violence in its many forms; they parallel society’s fear. We speak against it, and try to build some social laws around it, but in the end, there is a profound silence surrounding it. We try to respect the “victim” and her privacy. We don’t want to rile the perpetrator for fear of placing the “victim” at greater risk. We exercise caution when we speak about the perpetrator, knowing that the controlling manner that these individuals live their lives might, in some way, place the rest of us at risk. There’s a complicity in the silence.

And yet ... what are our options in a litigious society? How do we engage domestic violence openly and genuinely when there is so much protecting going on?