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ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

PRAYERS OF LOVE AND MOURNING:
THE EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUAL QUESTIONING IN MY
PERSONAL WRITING

by

Yona McGinnis

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College
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Dedicated To:

All the poets who have yet to unleash

the power of their verse

ABSTRACT

Like many people living in this current era, I have been victim to the cultural stance of alienation from our essential spiritual centers. My personal writing, that spans the decades of late teens to early fifties, holds questions I was unknowingly asking about the nature of spirituality. This questioning took place even as I denied the existence of anything greater than the scientific world in which I lived. In this research I engaged in a heuristic self- study, using a phenomenological viewpoint to tease out the nature of my questions. The intention of this study is to generate an understanding that, parallel to my own experience, many individuals seeking support in our society deny any need to explore spiritual questions even when spirituality is the most pertinent puzzle piece missing in their lives. The illumination of this paradox can be helpful to care- givers to assist those in need to be open to spiritual conversation.

Keywords: spirituality, phenomenology, heuristic study, poetry.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

INITIAL ENGAGEMENT & IMMERSION/ HOW MEANING HAS FOUND ME

Images take me apart; images put me back together again, new, enlarged, with breathing room. For twenty years I have kept a record of my inner life in images, paintings, drawings and words- sometimes haphazardly, sometimes more diligently, but continuously throughout my days...

(Allen, 1995, p. ix)

Research Question

Is there evidence of spiritual questioning in my personal writing that spans four decades?

Background

Creative and personal writing are artistic expressions of the 'here and now'. As such, they provide phenomenological evidence of underlying processes that are otherwise not readily accessible. In speaking of poets, Lengelle (2008) tells us that, "...instead they show us a picture of reality and therefore offer a nudge- less nudge that helps us surrender to the 'is- ness' of things." (p. 6). These pictures, painted in words, are metaphors for the pain, joy and uncertainties that the writer experiences.

I believe that sometimes, writers are unaware of all the colours they have used in painting the picture of their internal process- a metaphor for the unconscious manner in which the stuff of our internal being can sometimes arrive at the surface in unexpected ways. In examining and reflecting on our own work, it is often possible to get a different understanding or insight of the manner in which we have been.

Examination of my own writing as a learning tool, comes from such a place as described above. While it was evident to me that my work reflected the pain of transformation, for many years I was blind to the fact that spiritual growth was an important aspect of that change. More than that, I put on blinders, in the form of anger and dismissiveness, as an attempt to equalize my inner and outer experiences. It is my ardent hope that in providing an analysis of my own writing, hidden clues of my spiritual evolution will become more clear and provide a sense of the essence of parallel changes that occur for others that may present themselves to helping professionals. This, in turn, may develop into the recognition of the importance of spiritual growth and healing in the helping professions and sensitize them to recognition of spiritual questioning where it has previously gone unheeded.

Using Sela- Smith's (2002) language, the period of engagement in this question: 'Is there evidence of spiritual questioning in my personal writing that spans four decades?' has been lengthy. While some of my writing and research has consciously flirted with the issue, driven by the knowledge that there is more for me to learn from this exercise, there has been an unconscious sifting of the material, and a need to come back to it continuously to examine yet another facet. Sela- Smith calls this stage initial engagement and says, "When someone feels an internal draw and hears the call from the deepest recesses of the self, it is almost impossible not to notice." (p. 64). It is the time of noticing and awareness that the same question presents itself in a number of different ways. This led me to a larger scale way of looking at this idea, and a deeper commitment to applying a rigorous standard of study to the analysis of my own work.

'Immersion', in Sela- Smith's terminology, is the time the researcher "lives the question consciously and unconsciously" (p. 65). This accurately describes my relationship with this question for the past two years. In my current learning environment, I have been tweaking this question unconsciously, and, it seemed, that the question came to be asked in every aspect of my life, written, metaphorically, on the inside door of every bathroom stall. This is akin to the time in people's lives when they are considering starting a family, and everywhere they turn, they see only pregnant women and nursing mothers, tantalizing the individuals even more with desire. In some moments it feels like I had looked in the mirror so long that every line etched around my eyes screams at me to look away- and I cannot, because, there it is again, written even into the lines on my face.

In living this process, I became unsure of how, when or IF to separate the first two phases of engagement and immersion. In my own experience, in the awareness with which I approach the noticing and understanding of my body- felt sensations and knowing, I cannot tease out the bodily cues from the articulation of the question. For me, there is a dynamic process of going back and forth between these two aspects. Wonderings and flashes of a fundamental question occur, at times simultaneously with the conscious and unconscious sensational reminders of quandary, and at times one is first and then the other. There are moments when the feeling in my body may clarify a thought or give form to the question that I must ask, and other moments when asking the question gives rise to sensations that give me information about that articulation. By allowing myself to travel back and forth between these parts of the process, ultimately, I arrive at a crystallization of the question to be asked.

My yoga training has familiarized me with the term Zen Mind- Beginners Mind (Suzuki, 1973), and this is apt, as I consider the need to come to this project with an open mind and a generous heart. It is an almost torturous task, as it demands complete self- appraisal and to fully shed the illusions and stories I have created about my stories, and to look at them anew, with the intention of seeing simply, what is there. In this way I will be able to honestly appraise the experience that I have recorded in my writing, lightly wrapped in the gauze of metaphor, waiting to be illuminated. As said earlier, in many ways, I do not think I was even aware of what I was preserving so carefully. And, at some profound level, I was planting a seed that has germinated for a very long time and is now ready to yield its fruits.

The relevance of this undertaking is to uncover examples of evidence of spirituality where they might otherwise have been ignored, and to show how these are similar to the ways in which many people in our current social environment may have parallel experiences. These examples can then be applied in the best interest of those seeking the guidance of helping professionals, as an entry into the exploration of spiritual wellness.

I have created the following definitions to assist both my readers and me in keeping clear. The subject matter is, at best, a bit slippery, and can be experienced as obscure without the use of clear, concise language. These are the working definitions that come from my understanding of the focus of study, and will represent my meaning as I use this terminology.

Operational Definitions

Phenomenology- Phenomenology is the study of phenomena as the representation of first- person experience, "...the attempt to clarify and answer and question of *BEING*." (Flew& Priest, 2002. p. 303). For the purposes of this work the term, phenomenology, will be used to indicate a perspective that focuses on the artistic object (poetry, words and language) as the phenomena that articulate the artist's experience of that present moment.

Spiritual Growth- The development of awareness of a spiritual entity or consciousness. This will be expressed as an ability to reflect in a meaningful way through the artistic elements, and further, to create objects (primarily metaphor) that are phenomenological evidence of the growing awareness of one's Self in a greater context.

Spiritual Questioning- Refers to the understanding of the impetus for spiritual growth as spiritual questioning. This will be identified through metaphor that depicts my experience of spiritual questioning. Images and language that are indicative of this will include archetypes and reference to specific culturally accepted ideas of spirituality.

Metaphor- In the body of this writing, metaphor will refer to the use of poetic language that is descriptive of experiential being. This has an interpretive element that will be defined in the process of this work. .

Archetype- Images or metaphor that are reflective of culturally embedded icons.

Heuristic- The application of theoretical perspectives to the data at hand. This process allows the researcher to understand his/her findings in light of the most relevant theoretical standpoint and, "...involves offering an explanation, inspecting whether all the

data fit the explanation, and, if not, continuing to offer new explanations until all “deviant” cases are accounted for...” (Palys, 2003. p. 39).

Further, I have set out aims and objectives, as a standard against which I can check in on myself. In this kind of self- study, it is tempting to go in whatever direction takes my fancy in the moment. This statement of goals will ‘keep me honest’, requiring that I have some accountability to myself.

Aims and Objectives

Research Problem: To determine the evidence of spiritual questioning in my personal writing and to determine theoretical perspectives that support this type of assessment.

Objectives:

- To use a phenomenological perspective to examine my personal writing for evidence of spiritual questioning as depicted by the use of language and metaphor.
- To use or adapt a phenomenological method that identifies the spiritual component of my used language
- To determine the philosophical perspectives that explain all, or part of the phenomena that are evident in my personal writing.
- To understand the interplay of a heuristic self- study and impact on empathy and compassion for others through discussion of the place of heuristic study as a means of understanding our communities and environment.

- To gain an appreciation of the range of spiritual issues and presentations in my writing.
- To use my personal writings in a case study format, applied with academic rigor.
- To provide a rationale for using this process with others who express spiritual discomfort.

The scope of this research spans a range of disciplinary inquiries. In order to focus on the subject matter, it will be necessary to take into account a variety of perspectives, and to tie them together in a new and creative way to find ‘the best fit’ to answer the research question and to understand the applicability of this process. I will be bringing a phenomenological lens to the heuristic process of making sense of the research focus. At each stage of the study, I will be viewing the material from the perspective of identifying the internal experience represented through the language of poetry and metaphor.

Hansen (1999) uses a prism metaphor for the examination of biography as a sociological source of data. She says, “Prisms are transparent from a particular vantage point, almost like windows. But if you turn them at a specific angle and catch the sunlight in a particular way, they refract multiple colors and shaded images.” (p. 355). In this work, my writing constitutes the biography of my growth and development, an entry into my internal experiences. The prism can be seen as the portal to glimpsing the multiple layers of understanding the experience and context from which it arose.

The body of this work will look at Expressive Arts theory, specific attributes of therapeutic writing, philosophy of spiritual development as well as the application of

heuristic methodology as seen through a phenomenological lens. With this in mind, it becomes a work of integration: the integration of interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the integration of many threads of my life that are ready to be woven into a new tapestry that, not only will be on display to the larger community for perusal, but can be an interactive exhibit to be touched, taken apart and reconfigured once again. This work is intended to be a starting place- a stepping off point for those who are interested in supporting the myriad of individuals who are thirsty for spiritual exploration and don't even have the language to begin, the people for whom 'pushing against' is an unconscious expression of their longing. I hope the plethora of helping professionals, psychologists, pastoral care- givers, social workers, physicians and the like, will tease out the learning that can open a space for those they work with, to ask the question of, to delve and even, to resolve their spiritual yearning.

The structure of this work will follow the six stages of self- inquiry set out by Sela- Smith (2002) and reiterated by Pettinger (2006). This is a particularly apt way to discern the present moment experience, as it, "requires that participant-as -researcher focus on the feeling dimension of personal experience to discover meanings embedded therein." (Sela- Smith, p.63) As I engaged in this process of self- inquiry, I found that I shaped and bent the frame of Sela- Smith's stages to fit me. In stature, I am a tiny woman- only five feet tall, in spirit I stand much taller. Therefore, I have become accustomed over the years to altering things to fit, both physically and psychically. This was no exception; I fell in love with the language Sela- Smith uses to define her approach and also the way that it takes the researcher deeper into the true consciousness of the moment. However, I am not a linear thinker (or doer) and I feel the need to cycle back and forth, to be unrestricted in

moving back a step and re- engaging, or to jump ahead and move back into the previous step when I feel ready. I don't think I departed from Sela- Smith's purpose in applying her heuristic self- study in this way. In fact, I believe I truly entered the experience in a way that was true for me.

In this chapter, I have already spoken of the initial engagement with the question, wherein the researcher seems to stumble over the issue at every turn, and the immersion phase, in which the researcher lives and breathes the question- even when it is unconscious. Pettinger (2006) says that in Sela- Smith's formulation the next stage, incubation, is described as a time to step back and allow new formulations to make themselves known. I will be taking a more active role in the creation of new ways of thinking about this question by discussing a range of theories and applying definite techniques to the subject matter, and THEN, stepping back to see 'what has shaken loose'. Illumination, Sela- Smith's next stage, will, hopefully, occur as a result of looking at the question from different perspectives, at the point that new ways of understanding the experiences under investigation become clear. Explication is the time of fully understanding the depth of meaning that has been glimpsed. It is a way of understanding the 'data' organically, by noticing what internal processes are shifted as a result of the inquiry. Creative synthesis might be described as 're- storying'. It is the creation of new information or theory that gives its receivers a new set of parameters within which they may explore their own experience.

Sela- Smith (2002) speaks of validation as a separate aspect of the process. I believe that as this study is a qualitative way of looking at a personal experience, the validation must

necessarily come from within. There is no standard to meet, per se, rather, an honest expression of the learning that has come about as a result of engaging in this process. It is expected that the validation comes from an inner knowing that one's story can be told with deep compassion and awareness.

Within the frame set out above, I will be using a phenomenological perspective- an analysis of the language that indicates lived experience, as the underlying methodology of this case study using my own written work as the subject matter. Phenomenology is the subject of study, and the heuristic process is the guiding technique.

At the conclusion of this work, I will reflect on the perceived outcomes and extrapolate the benefits and usefulness of this process in working with others. This is an important part of this process as it, in Sela- Smith's (2002) language, validates the effort put forth in this inquiry. This is the integrative aspect of this work that will make it possible for both me and others to grow from these findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This work is informed by literature from a varied range of perspectives and fields of study. It is therefore pertinent and judicious to provide a literature review that clarifies some of the theory that gives grounding for the direction I took in examining my own writing. I will look at it from a narrow scope to streamline and filter the vast amount of information. Following are the most significant pieces that became the basis for this undertaking.

Here, I will review at the psychological research that has investigated the healing effects of writing practice, the expressive arts theory that underlies the understanding of creative endeavour as a healing practice, the myths and archetypes that represent spiritual presence, and the developmental approaches that focus on spiritual growth. I will look at the methodological literature that discusses the heuristic form of study and the use of phenomenology as a way of understanding and the practice of using biographical/historical writing as a research focus.

Psychologists and others promoting writing as a tool for personal growth and development, have been researching the effects of writing on the well-being of a number of populations. Their work points to the conclusion that writing, in a number of genres, has a positive effect on physiological health as well as psychological relief.

Pennebaker (1995) gives us an overview on some of the psychological research being done on the effect of disclosure through writing on the health of the discloser. His work

and that of others has shown that writing about emotional trauma to be beneficial physiologically as well as psychologically. In his 1990 work, he laid the foundations for his explorations in the field of writing and enhanced immune function. Petrie, Booth & Davison (1995) contribute their recommendations for the further study of the effect of disclosure through writing as it affects the immune system. After reviewing the positive work done in the area, they raise methodological issues that could be confounding to the research being done in this area. The findings of their work and that of others they cite corroborates Pennebaker's (1990) initial findings showing enhanced immunological effects from disclosure through writing.

Lepore and Smyth (2002) build on Pennebaker's earlier research and discuss the potential for using writing as an intervention for a range of physical and emotional complaints.

When examining the emotional impact of expressive writing in their book *The Writing Cure*, they conclude that the research shows,

...multiple, intersecting, and interactive pathways linking expressive writing to different health outcomes. Early models that focused on disinhibition of trauma-related thoughts and feelings are not adequate to account for the myriad benefits of expressive writing. It is clear that expressive writing modulates activity in emotional, cognitive, and physiological systems, although the precise manner in which it does so, the clinical significance of these various changes, and who is affected in this way have yet to be fully determined.

(p. 9)

Smyth and Pennebaker (2008), recently took an updated look at the criticisms that have been levelled at the initial findings about expressive writing. For example, a meta-analysis undertaken by Joanne Frattaroli (2006), concluded that, "experimental disclosure was found to be beneficial

for one's psychological health, physical health, and overall functioning, with an average effect size of .075."(p. 860). After discussing the various findings and critiques, they concluded that while there are problems in application of their theories, it is definitely an area that demands more research to fully understand the parameters of the positive effects that they see. While this potentially leaves researchers and clinicians in a quandary regarding the efficacy of this approach, there is sufficient evidence to support the use of expressive writing in therapeutic practices. It is the definition of the range of presenting problems and the population that must be more clearly delineated, or as Smyth and Pennebaker (2008) refer to it: the "boundary conditions" of effectiveness must be ascertained.

Moskowitz (1998) is a psychodynamic counsellor and writer who has used case studies and literary examples to show how writing can help a person understand the conflicts and internal dynamics that the writer is undergoing. Her assertion is that these inner workings are the source of creative work, and the writing can also provide a story board or map of what is taking place within. She endorses using personal awareness work as a means of inspiring the creative energies. In her article on Frances Driscoll's *The Rape Poems* (2001), Mitchell (2001) documents the process of healing that Driscoll underwent through the writing of, publication and presentation of her work. Mitchell's article gives us insight into the power of sharing our creative endeavours, how it is liberating for the writer and the impact it has on others who receive the gift of that work. Hunt and Sampson (1998), attempt to tie together the disparate work being done in the area of creative writing and personal growth and development. They offer guidelines for practice and ask questions about the implementation of this infant discipline. Their work suggests

the need to continue to research the area from an academic perspective and to continue to define the discipline.

A newer body of literature has emerged, particularly from the United Kingdom, where focused research has been ongoing regarding the establishment of creative writing as a therapeutic modality, and also as an arts based therapy. Willig (2009) writes about her own experience of making meaning of her experience of being diagnosed with cancer. She undertook this exploration through writing, and with the guidance of a therapist. She found that she was able to clarify her feelings and meaning using this modality, in a way she was otherwise unable to access. Nicholls (2009), expands on the premise of expressive writing. She notes that creative developmental writing includes the ideas of expressive writing and goes far beyond that. She maintains that expressive writing is just one component of the process that should include sharing the writers' written work adding that facilitators should work towards that goal. Nicholls talks about the creation of an environment that is healing in nature, fosters safety and is supportive in the tasks of healing and growing. She focuses on the creative aspects of writing as being therapeutic and also on the process as a whole entity, rather than the narrower scope Pennebaker has taken.

This avenue of writing and healing continues to grow. In an upcoming book tentatively titled *Writers' Routes* (Bolton, G. Fields, V. & Thompson, K.: Eds.- provisional title, 2010), I contributed a piece called *Giving Perspective*. This was born of other analytical work I have done with my poetry, and asserts that creative writing (or writing of any genre) has the potential to show us exactly where we have come from and help us situate

ourselves in the present with greater ease and comfort. Other authors write on their personal journeys through the manipulation of their writing implements. This is a sequel to Bolton, Fields and Thompson's previous volume *Writing Works*.

Other authors offer practice techniques and exercises to assist those attempting to use writing to heal from trauma. Progoff (1992), created a workbook approach to journaling that is helpful for those who require a structure to step into the world of creative writing. In a 1993 interview, Progoff described his method as a way to help people enrich their lives.

The method can help people further develop the various facets of their lives. One major benefit from working in the *Intensive Journal* workbook is to gain a perspective on the major periods of their lives so that they can draw their present life situation into focus to answer the question, "Where am I now in the movement of my life?" Through this process, they can realize inner strengths, new possibilities, and discover resources and talents within themselves.

([Inner Workbook At A Journal Workshop Revised Edition: Amazon.ca: Ira Progoff: Books](#))

Metcalf and Simon (2002) have developed a methodology they have dubbed The Proprioceptive Writing Method to guide people in the path of writing for personal growth. Their approach is rigidly prescriptive and may not appeal to all practitioners, but is a good starting point for those without previous experience in this kind of writing.

Zimmermann (2002) writes from her own experience in using writing as a tool to conquer trauma and offers exercises to teach others to do the same.

While the former authors provide an academic psychological frame for understanding the healing effects of writing, the expressive arts, as a field that is growing in its depth and scope, gives us the tools for dealing with the ways in which our creativity gives form to

the expression of the body and spirit. The following is a sample of the literature that will be used to give theoretical grounding to the use of poetry and personal writing as a way of understanding the author's internal process. These and other authors will be referenced when looking at particular aspects of the pieces under examination to ascertain the expressive processes being observed.

In *Art is a Way of Knowing*, Pat Allen (1995) relates her experience in working with images throughout her career. She uses her own experiences as an artist and a teacher to illuminate the ways in which our images teach both, ourselves and those around us. Allen describes, using her own life as an example, how working with the metaphor and archetype of an image, allows an individual to know their inner being with depth. She refers to this way of knowing as a personal spirituality.

Levine (2003) tells us that creativity is akin to a fire that has the potential to energize and keep us vital. In *Tending the Fire*, she encourages us to look at the ways in which we can create space that invites the exploration of our inner landscape, through art as a link between the outer world and the seat of our souls. In discussing the theoretical underpinnings of her own work, Levine tells us that, "Both Klein and then Winnicott drew their ideas from the work of Freud, especially his later work where he tried to understand the relationship between phantasy and reality in terms of the role of the symbol as bridge between the two worlds." (Levine, 2003. p. 51).

In *Foundations of Expressive Arts Therapy*, Fuchs (1999) writes, "Poetry is transcended personal experience and conviction. It doesn't belong to a school of thought, its imagining body of thought is whole. It tricks thought to get lost and to be found

transformed.” (p. 205). Fuchs tells us further that, “ Poetry as an intervention comes between one’s own spinning little world by praising and lamenting what usually gets lost and hidden. It comforts and confronts us by its belief that life stays alive and that life is living on life. It separates individual concerns from their isolation and it weaves them into a bigger connection.” (p. 207). Her work helps us to understand the place of poetry in the expressive arts and can add to the ability to discern the nature of my writing and poetry as it pertains to the ‘bigger’ question of spirituality.

Knill (1999) writes of the basic tenets of arts therapy and describes how an intermodal approach can nourish the soul, thereby creating a healing environment. He speaks so eloquently of the interconnectedness of our range of experiences and the place of the arts as healer:

We need to consider the complex weaving between the threads of being in the world, history and selfhood. These threads come into the light and disappear continuously; they are experienced over and over again with pain and pleasure, expressed with acts of fear, folly, words of wrath and wisdom, songs of soul and sadness, dances of good and evil in bold and base images, In doing so, we cannot help seeing all the psychotherapies, including expressive arts therapy, as interrelated with religion in a field fertile only with the mud and manure of human concern

(p. 37).

In *Art Heals*, McNiff (2004) lays an important base for this work when he says, “Chaos theory has revealed that fragmentation leads to new and higher levels of organization which is practically a definition of the creative process.” (p. 214).

This is an important concept to keep close to the work of understanding how a creative process has shaped a healing path, and to give some structure to the analysis of what we are seeing in the representations of an individual.

McNiff (1999) discusses the use of Expressive Arts as the ground in which research is cultivated. He writes of the process of using our own creative productions in the study of how the arts act in a therapeutic environment. As a supervisor of masters theses, McNiff found that his students truly embodied what they had learned in their studios when they worked with their own images, as he said, “They wanted to focus more attention on the process of making art and their relationship with their creations. When given the freedom to follow their interests, my students chose to focus on how they could integrate their personal creative expression with the production of a masters thesis or doctoral dissertation.” (p. 68).

The arts based perspective puts emphasis on the phenomenological process as a way of understanding the ways that people represent themselves in their creations. As Malchiodi (1998) tells us in speaking about working through the arts with children, “A phenomenological approach allows the therapist to comprehend children’s drawings from an integral orientation rather than from a limited perspective.” (p. 35). Using a phenomenological lens with which to look at an individual’s renderings, then, allows us to understand the meaning, through metaphor of the experience of that person. This lends itself to the task of understanding past experience by looking at productions of ‘in the moment’ experience.

Reinders (1992) has looked at The Experience of Artistic Creativity from a phenomenological perspective. In this doctoral dissertation she reports the experience of three different artists as described by them during an interview process, working in different fields of the arts, and she has created ‘meaning units’ based on psychological

structures. This way of understanding the product of artistic creativity allows the integrity and meaning of the object to come forth as a representation in the 'here and now' of the artist's experience. This, in turn, permits us to know the meaning of the experience as rendered in the object. Reinders provides a loose format for studying the artistic object in a phenomenological way. This author, along with the writings of the other Expressive Arts therapists cited above, will give the lens of phenomenological research its shape in this inquiry.

Groenwald (2004) provides a historical overview of the phenomenological process and then gives an in depth explanation of the use of Hycner's (1999) explication process. Groenwald's précis provides a workable format for conducting phenomenological research- up to a point. The last two phases of Hycner's explication process are not relevant to this work, when taken from a literal perspective, do not fit with this project. Therefore, the last two parts will be adapted to provide thematic threads of the material.

Two areas that will also be used as a basis for understanding the metaphor in my writing, and the stages of development that they represent are cultural mythology and developmental theories. Pinkola Estes (1995) provides an overview of some of the female archetypes that occur across cultures and gives a reference point for the importance of those archetypes in spiritual development and awakening. This is an alternate understanding of what spirituality may look like in a woman's experience. Further, the Old Testament will be accessed as a grounding in biblical archetype and mythology that may appear throughout my writings and has a definite root in spiritual understanding. As an augmentation to the biblical references, I will look at other representations of those

mythologies. Rose (1987) created a pack of cards, *Walking the Motherpath*, that depict the mothers of the Hebrew bible in their archetypal meanings. Further, Wiener (2009) and others have written of the Jewish experience of mythological figures. In *Seeking and Soaring: Jewish Approaches to Spiritual Direction* there is a section devoted to understanding the Jewish spiritual sources and guides. Other mythologies that will be looked at throughout this project come from eastern cultures and traditions. Among those that I will use to understand the presence or absence of spiritual mythology will be the *Bhagavad Gita* as translated by Mitchell (2000). The *Bhagavad Gita*, as represented in Mitchell's work helps to contextualize and simultaneously expand the idea of spirituality to encompass a broad expanse of internal sensation.

There are many developmental theories that will help to situate the location in human growth and experience of the writing I am examining. Particularly germane to this discussion are the works of Fowler (1981), Maslow (1968) and Baumgartner (2001). Each of these theorists refer to the development of spiritual understanding as integral to the growth of the whole person. Fowler has developed a model of faith stages that reflect the earlier work of Maslow. Though Maslow does not specifically speak about spirituality, his work may be seen as moving towards spiritual maturity. Baumgartner has taken an integrative approach that situates spirituality as an important aspect of human development. Baumgartner (2001) provides us with an overview of a number of integration oriented developmental theorists who discuss spirituality as an aspect of developmental growth. She tells us that for, "Tisdell (1999) spirituality is connection to history, to others, and to moral responsibility (p. 89). Moreover, Tisdell notes the inextricable tie between culture and spirituality. All are interconnected and, maintains

Tisdell, all are important for adult learning.” (p.7). Baumgartner goes on to make the case for spirituality as being an important aspect of development that can be incorporated into the view of an individual life span and will provide rich and essential meaning to the work to be done with that person. This approach acknowledges the sense that, “Spirituality is often equated with connection to others and to something larger than oneself.” (p.8), and also acknowledges that this is a mature premise on which to base work with adults. She believes that those who use an integrated approach to working with adults will bring mind/ body/ spirit realms into their work.

Tying the above noted works to the theological realm, I will look at the works of Paul Jones’ (1989) *Theological Worlds* for input in integrating the theological with the other disciplinary perspectives. Other works that span theological considerations and psychological growth come from DeHoff (1998), who suggests that there is a distinction between the processes of spiritual growth and psychological development, and Schlauch (1995) who discusses the tools of metaphor and narrative as bases for being with people in a pastoral context, and guiding them to understand their own theological stance and language. This will ultimately lead to a clearer picture of the individual’s spiritual needs and open avenues for further exploration.

In her dissertation *Straight From the Heart: “A Healing Journey”*, Pettinger (2006) gives an in depth overview of the process of using heuristic study in the understanding of self as a case study. She relies on the work of Moustakas and Sela- Smith to guide her in framing the six steps that are necessary in carrying through this process. Pettinger leans towards Sela- Smith’s self- inquiry approach as the basis of her own study. The steps of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative

synthesis (pp. 23- 24) will be applied to the subject matter and explored as an in depth way of knowing the experience represented in my personal writing. Pettinger also addresses the ethical considerations of working with your own story and the possible impact of that on bystanders (family members). (pp 43- 46).

Finally, due to a lack of sample in some time frames that are the focus of this inquiry, some consideration must be given to the process of undertaking this study and how it relates to established practices in this area. I will look at the ways in which other social scientists have done research on historical/ biographical writing to ensure that I am meeting the standard expected by academic rigor. To this end, I will use the examples of historical study that have a sociological perspective, where the author shows that a dearth of writing is a story unto itself. Hansen (1999) argues that, “one person’s partially documented life story can serve as a kind of prismatic tool...” (p. 353). This lends to the discussion that there is something to be gleaned about the subject matter owing to the absence of record, and that this can be an entry point into the understanding of that period of time.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY and SAMPLE

HOW TO HARVEST MY OWN WORK?

Methods

I selected writing samples, using a method described by sociological studies that interpret biography as a means of studying culture and social context. (Apitzsch, Siouti, I. 2007. Hansen, 1999). The focus of these sociological studies is to show that qualitative assessment of biographical writings must be understood in the context of the whole- that is, they must acknowledge periods where there is no ‘product’ and to analyze and discuss the meaning of that situation. This is pertinent information as I am aware that there is a period in my own life, over the last four decades, wherein my writing is missing. The sample represents, to the greatest extent possible, the tone of my personal writing that spans the past four decades.

Apitzsch and Siouti, 2007) describe the biographical study as having three distinct stages: textual analysis, structural description of the thematic segments that have been exposed through the textual analysis, and in the case of biographical sociological studies, the single cases are then compared to generate theories regarding the social construction that is dominating the biography of the individuals.

This is loosely comparable to the phenomenological process of explicating the units of meaning generated by individuals during interviews or in their narration. The purpose of

referencing the sociological perspective is to give a frame to the importance of the social construction of story and meaning.

The integrative use of two comparable methods from different disciplines gives my own writing a broader, and deeper reference point. At other times I have looked at the development of my personal worldview and the ways in which the social construction of the community in which I was raised contributed to my insight and growth. In this writing, I am looking at the meanings that I attribute to my personal writing. This takes into account the social milieu in which I was raised as well as the meanings I created for myself arising from that context.

I analyzed the content of the writing to ascertain which images, metaphors, and archetypes represent the experience of spiritual questioning at the time they were written. This entailed a dual process of identifying language that is culturally indicative of spiritual questing, and illuminating the particular context in which the pieces were written. This part of the study employed phenomenological techniques such as those used by Reinders (1992). Further, a procedural frame provided by Hycner (1999) and described by Groenwald (2004) gave me a definitive way to conduct the explication of data. This process is described in greater detail in Chapter Five, and the results of this application are found in Appendix B.

Using the model of heuristic process followed by Pettinger (2006), as defined by Moustakas (1990) and elaborated by Sela- Smith (2002), I followed the six stages of heuristic inquiry to address the research question by proposing theoretical and philosophical perspectives that provide the ‘best fit’ for this process. The phases of:

engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis are the framework for this self- inquiry which, it is hoped, will then offer a structure for working with people in spiritual quandary. I will expand on this process as I discuss each of these stages in depth. It is of note, however, that I have treated these phases as non-linear; sometimes two, or more occurring concurrently, and sometimes cycling through them before moving on. As suggested by Pettinger (2006), I have added a final dimension of validation. Validation consists of a concluding self- reflection that holds relevant insight into the practicability of using this type of analytic approach with individuals struggling with life issues. That is, the generalization of the integration of these particular theoretical perspectives into a usable format will be the validation I seek.

Each of these stages will be further discussed as the process reaches that particular stage. For example, the beginning stages of engagement and immersion were addressed in the introduction, where they were mentioned as part of the background of this study. The relevance of using that framework will then be evident as it provides the structure for organizing this self- study. The phenomenological perspective is the evidentiary based study of internal, in- the- moment experience, and the heuristic parameters organize the experience into “wholes” that come from an internal knowing, or a “tacit dimension”. (Sela- Smith, p. 62).

The specific methods I used to guide the analytic process are derived from historical sociology and phenomenology. The phenomenological process is readily accessed through a variety of psychological sources, and still, difficult to define in terms of artistic endeavour. That is, it relies on the narrative of the artist to explicate the lived experience

of that production. It is a decidedly qualitative process that, while generalizable to a community of like-minded individuals, is intensely personal. For this reason, I have used Hycner's (1999) steps, as set out by Groenwald (2004) to give the process some definable parameters. The steps are:

- 1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.
- 2) Delineating units of meaning.
- 3) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.
- 4) Summarising each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it.
- 5) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

(p. 17)

For the purposes here, the first three steps are of interest and give me my form. The last two, while not specifically relevant are adaptable into the general framework of Sela-Smith's (2002) work.

The historical sociology aspects that I sought out were due to the problematic gap(s) I found in my own writing that were problematic. I have referred to my personal writing that spans four decades as the source of data for this project, and found that there is a missing of about ten years. The need to find a way to treat that gap led me to research in the area of historical sociology/ biography.

Historians, biographers and sociologists have negotiated gaps in information and data for as long as they have investigated the lives and times of historical figures. There is a truism that 'history is written by the conquerors'. We are often at the mercy of written history to understand the context of particular lives and events. Biographers feel that gaps in writing and information are an important part of the story: "If you are writing about a

person AND their works, then there is no filling in of gaps as that IS the story.”(Ronald, personal communication, October 29, 2009).

Sociologists have dealt with methodological considerations for this type of dilemma. Adopting a qualitative stance to this problem, they have systematized processes for the analysis of biographical narrative interviews. Apitzsch and Siouti (2007) say that this treatment of biographical data is an interdisciplinary approach that is applicable to many aspects of the social sciences (p. 5-6). The methodology they report is based on Schutze (1983) and consists of textual and structural analyses of single case studies and then comparative analysis of these single cases. The methodology I have used focuses on the textual aspect of my writing. The questions I asked myself in a dialogue to ascertain the phenomena that I was seeing in words, and hearing in tone and voice were focused on the images that presented on the page. An example of the kind of questions I entertained are in Appendix C. This forum is not intended to look at the structural phenomena of my writing, except to the extent that it underscores the pertinent sociological tenets that incubated the questions and experiences that were necessarily expressed in secretive writing.

After surveying the writing samples, I identified themes that were expressed in the majority of samples and then, the language that denoted those themes. The themes ranged in subject from experiences of ‘alone- ness’ to explicitly religious or spiritual/ divine ‘speak’. The language used was then arranged in a table form showing the major themes that those words/ phrases denote. (Appendix B) This format gives the reader an easily accessible understanding of the ways in which the language I used reflects spiritual

schemas and archetypal as well as mythological ideas. The visual representation provided in Appendix B provides clear data and explication of the phenomena found in my personal writing.

On the surface this gives a definitive answer to the question: Is there evidence of spiritual questioning in my writing that spans four decades? However, the real work, the incubation of ideas and new ‘wholes’ comes in the discussion of the images expressed throughout the writing samples and the personal and cultural mythology in which they were born. This is as Sela- Smith (2002) says, a time to step back and allow the connections to present themselves. She says that this is a time when new data are no longer generated: “Incubation is the period when additional input is stopped because living with the question has provided all the information that the unconscious processing part of self needs to sort through, consider, review, and reorganize new ways of thinking, being, seeing, and understanding, to create meaning and form an answer to the question.” (p. 67). She believes that this period begins unplanned. In my case it was a conscious shift to understanding the classic world culture that supported and inspired the images and language I have used to express my unique style of seeking. This section of my work takes the form of a comparative analysis of my experience as indicated through my writing and the myths and biblical stories that informed my development of world view.

Sample

The sample of writing work came from my own archives of poetry, narrative and journals. The sometimes perceived requirement to pick a random sample may be superseded by the availability of writing during particular periods of my life.

Sociological inquiry tells us that the dearth of material gives us as much information about the biography of the person at whom we are looking and their context in time, as an abundance of material can provide (Hansen, 1999). For this reason, the lack in writing samples for specific times of my life will be treated in a different manner (as is befitting a heuristic inquiry), and the sample will be chosen as representing the available writings.

The gap in writing sample will be treated as a biographical/ sociological phenomenon in the discussion/ explication part of this work.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETHICAL ISSUES: A SELF- INQUIRY PROCESS TO RESOLVE ETHICAL DILEMNA

Ethical Issues

This study is a review of my own work, and as such, at the superficial level will not cross the boundaries of ethical research. However, I have not lived my life in a vacuum. Due to this fact, each and every time I have publicly engaged in ‘telling my story’, I have put others at ‘risk’. My story entails abuse and recovery from the coping mechanisms I used to deal with that abuse. I do not intend to cause harm and, in fact, I would like to offer alternatives in healing. I do feel some small element of ethical quandary as I engage in my using voice to demystify the issues of childhood sexual abuse, eating disorder and the use of dissociative disorder among other things, as this may have some impact on the members of my family of origin. The focus of this work is not to engage with the incidents of that story. However there may be some discussion of those things as a point of context. They play an integral part in my spiritual development, and therefore, must be part of this presentation.

The ethical issues of doing research that may be called into play in this study are: Minimizing harm and assurance that the benefits outweigh harm, and; privacy and confidentiality. I will discuss each of these briefly.

The Canadian Art Therapy Association standards of practice do not specifically address the issues under discussion here, with the exception of confidentiality. To that end, this

self- inquiry does not break the rules of confidentiality that apply to the client- therapist exchange governed by that association (CATA Standards of Practice, p. 3).

I sought out other ethical guidelines to inform my self- inquiry on this issue of ethical conduct. Athabasca University has an on- line student research handbook that subscribes to Tri- Council Policy Statement to provide guiding ethical principles in conducting research with human populations. Following are the principles that are delineated as providing an ethical framework for doing research:

- respect for human dignity
- respect for free and informed consent
- respect for vulnerable persons
- respect for privacy and confidentiality
- respect for justice and inclusiveness
- achieving an appropriate balance between potential harms and benefits
- minimizing harm and maximizing benefit

[Policy for Research Involving Humans](#)

I will minimize the impact or feelings of discomfort on the members of my family of origin by not naming the perpetrators of childhood abuse. I am aware that the people involved in those incidents have long since died, and I am unaware of the whereabouts of any of their families. There could still be an extrapolation made that may suggest the identity of these people, and would draw attention to my family members, but I will endeavour to minimize that impact. I have made every attempt to be open and honest with my immediate family about the issues present in my narrative. I do not anticipate crossing into territory that would cause undue harm. In the past eight to ten years, I have published articles, engaged in public speaking and have created a radio piece for CBC radio, before undertaking these endeavours, I had a facilitated meeting with my mother (still alive and living in Winnipeg, MB) to give her the opportunity to hear this from me

first and have the chance to ask questions. In so doing, I believe that I have safeguarded and minimized any discomfort she might feel.

Further, I believe that by openly discussing the nature of, and hurdles to, my spiritual growth, I stand in a position to be able to offer a glimpse at a healing path to others.

Given that the impact of using my personal writing is likely to cause minimal, if any, discomfort to others, I feel that potential benefits far outweigh any damage that could occur.

Expectations to confidentiality and privacy overlap with the previous discussion. There are no issues of confidentiality to be considered and I will try to safeguard the privacy of my family members by avoiding identifying features.

I engaged in a mini version of the six stages of self- inquiry, outlined by Sela- Smith (2002) and discussed in earlier parts of this writing, to discern if I had any discomfort relating to my decision that this undertaking is ethically sound.

I consider the time of this piece of self- inquiry, about the ethics of this research, to be an incubation period for the larger study, as the pieces settle around me while I look at the core values that inform my personal ethics. This is a moment in time when the passion, curiosity and information about my spiritual growth are present, and held with gentleness, as they inform the ways in which I understand my own ethical decision making.

Initial engagement- The initial engagement in this process took the form of a long period of body- felt discomfort. This began several years ago as I prepared to disclose publicly through writing, interviews and public speaking, the nature of my struggle with eating

disorders and other coping mechanisms, and my identification of the source of my struggles. I felt a driving need to address the discomfort I felt in my body when I considered the issue, and questions about my personal ethics as they related to potentially causing harm to my family began to take shape.

Immersion- The first two phases of Sela- Smith's (2006) heuristic self- inquiry go together for me, like peanut butter and jelly. Once they are on the bread- it is very difficult to separate them into their, once unique, structure. Now they have come together in a way that embellishes each. Alternatively, perhaps, in my own process living the question comes before the question is actually articulated. In either case, the question: "Do my personal ethics allow me to disclose information about myself that may inadvertently cause another pain?" moved from belly to chest, and back again, in both waking and non- conscious moments.

Incubation- The 'letting go' of the question in this process occurred naturally as I moved through my life since initially becoming public with the content of my story. Indeed, as Sela- Smith (2002) suggests (p. 67) I was reorganizing the question but, in my case, within constantly changing parameters. The time period that I speak of here has been replete with new growth, an opening of my scope of vision as it concerns matters of spiritual and, consequently, ethical judgements.

Illumination- Sela- Smith(2002) says: "Illumination is that moment when there is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of wholes and clustered wholes that form into themes inherent in the question." (p.67). The organic understanding that became clear to me as I considered, and 'incubated' the question of my personal ethical stance as it

pertains to my self- study, was that I trust my instincts as far as the ethic of non- harming goes. This is an important aspect of my daily existence and as such, it became crystal clear that I can trust my ‘gut’ response to this question of ethics.

Explication- In this case the deeper layers of understanding the tacit knowledge that I can trust myself to act in ways of non- harming, continue to emerge. This is an ethic that will continually be tested and more deeply understood throughout my life.

Creative synthesis- New ways of including the core ethic of non- harming and the guiding principles of “achieving an appropriate balance between potential harms and benefits.”, and, “minimizing harm and maximizing benefits.” Policy for Research Involving Humans are the ongoing contribution of the gift of this process to my life.

I chose to apply the six stages outlined by Sela- Smith (2002) to this issue as well as the larger focus of study, with the intention of becoming deeply, intuitively familiar with the manner in which it occurs. I was pleased to see that it was a decidedly phenomenological exploration for me. I teased out information about how I was progressing in the decision making by paying attention to what I noticed in my present moment experience.

Consequently, I discerned that I was indeed satisfied with the result that my writing and disclosure would do minimum harm (if any) to others, and provide maximum benefit.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL LOOK AT MY WRITING:

UNDERSTANDING PRESENT MOMENT EXPERIENCE OF THE SPIRITUAL- BETWEEN THE LINES

Incubation is not a period of putting something aside, or putting action on hold to do something else. Incubation is the period when additional input is stopped because living with the question has provided all the information that the unconscious processing part of self needs to sort through, consider, review, and reorganize new ways of thinking, being, seeing, and understanding, to create meaning and form an answer to the question.

(Sela- Smith, 2002. p. 67).

Through the process of sifting through the layers of tacit knowing to which Sela- Smith (2002) refers (p. 59), the language that is true to my feelings, rather than alienating me from those feelings, has dropped onto these pages, pulling together the images and stories, the themes and threads that have guided my writing and which present the phenomena of my spiritual health and dis- ease. Reorganization of what I have already known brought forth a clear picture of where my sense of spiritual language was born. Therefore, the experience, or phenomena of the experience, are readily identifiable. My incubation period in this self- inquiry has allowed the stories and images, and myths that have informed my spiritual language to resurface, sometimes bringing new story lines along with them. The places that tacit knowledge had previously formed into incomplete ‘wholes’ that were grown out of misunderstood information (Sela- Smith, 2002. p. 60), are also more easily recognized at this time.

When I consider the question of language that indicates spiritual questioning- phenomena that are evidentiary pieces of experience, my mind stretches to include many pieces of literature that I have encountered throughout my lifetime. They rush together in a whirling dervish of colour and imagery. I have a picture of the many heroines of folklore, and favourite passages from myths and wisdom literature swirling through the narrow end of a funnel as they are released from the vacuum of my internal experience to the pages of my written testament.

From Jacob's daughter Dinah, as she is portrayed in Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, through the Wild Woman archetypes of Pinkola Estes, and into the imagery of the Bhagavad Gita I have been impacted by the mythology of cultural lore. Each is a thread painted with the compassion of the gods and goddesses themselves, from which I have woven a cloak of understanding.

I know the cloth wasn't always soft, and the garment didn't always fit. I have gone through many fittings and discarded many earlier patterns to create a personal mythology that draws sustenance and strength from the stories of 'making sense' across cultures and centuries. I have been able to look at the myths and legends from a perspective that includes a post- modern sensibility superimposed over a basic feminist skeleton. This has given me the freedom to fall in love with the romance, the sweetness and the utter horror of these stories all over again. I am able to be entranced by stories of the Hebrew bible in a way that has eluded me since I was a young girl. If this was all I had gained from engaging in a spiritual journey, it would have been sweet enough. However, taking the time to tease out the strands of illumination has been truly enriching, gifting me with

many layers of understanding and inviting new possibilities for expansion of this learning into true wisdom.

This piece of my work, looking at the many myths that have informed my spiritual language has given me an appreciation for the integrative processes that I have employed over these last four decades. I have worked and re- worked images and myth. I have bent them, at times, and crushed them down so they would fit into a sentence of my creation, as Sela- Smith (2002) says, “Personal myths let us see and experience what we have already decided is our view of the world.” (p. 60). Thus, I portrayed these icons of the past as pure evil, venting my anger at a system I couldn’t grasp in epithets and darkness. My stories were spun to match my internal experience- they were the phenomena of the fear and anger I felt. There have been years (possibly decades) at a stretch, when I used the images against themselves. I held the myths up as proof that the teachings were lies and hateful, instead of allowing the experience of story- telling to enter my soul. All the language of the stories I have held in my being since childhood appear in my writing. They are sometimes not recognizable because of the above mentioned transformations that I performed on them- turning them into tales of monsters and demons. Here, I will talk about some of the myths, legends, heroes and heroines that have left the greatest impression on my spiritual language, and then I will look at my writing to identify which pieces, if any, bear the evidence of that stamp.

I was raised in a traditional Jewish home, and educated in the Jewish Parochial school in Winnipeg. We were taught bilingually: half day Hebrew and half day English. Our Hebrew education was heavily infused with Orthodox Judaism, although as we grew

older we were exposed to colloquial, spoken Hebrew. My first forays into spiritual language were not really that at all. They were lessons in Hebrew bible, and a thinly disguised indoctrination into a way of viewing the world from an exclusive and simultaneously horrible vantage point. The awe that I was told I should feel at the ‘word of god’ was a sense of scary out- of- control. My felt sense as I remember the few flashes of ‘normal’ childhood that I can grasp on this subject, is one of fear: trembling at the belief that if god was truly omniscient, and HE meted out punishment for sins as lowly as eating an apple, he would surely strike me dead for my evil- doing. From an early age, as a result of the beliefs instilled in me by perpetrators of abuse, I believed myself to be filled with ugly sin, a cesspool of pestilence in which I expected to drown like the Egyptians that I was taught to hate.

While it is not my intention to engage in my ‘story’ of abuse here, I also cannot completely gloss over it. There are two factors that come out of that, that are important to keep in mind. In my very young five, six... ten year old mind, I fused the horror I felt with my ideas of my religious community, with religion itself and anything spiritual.

Also, if I return to Sela- Smith (2002) and her retelling of a Chinese saying:

Yu bang xiang zhen, yu weng de li., Yi ri zao she yao, shi nian pa jin sheng (Once bitten twice shy. Once bitten by a snake, a thousand times frightened by a rope) (Si Tu Tan, 1988, p. 292), is an ancient Chinese saying that reflects an aspect of tacit knowledge. The tacit dimension of personal knowledge is that internal place where experience, feeling, and meaning join together to form both a picture of the world and a way to navigate that world.

(p. 59- 60)

I have spent the past decade prying the fused elements apart to disentangle the ropes and threads that formed snakes in my internal experience. It has only been with deep, intentional travel to my own innermost places, and now with the aid of this very clear process, that I have been able to open up the snake and allow its bitter toxins to be washed away. I am left, still, with a bad taste in my mouth at times, but that's much more comfortable than seeing a snake on every temple step. And I do gloss over here: without going into deep psychological and emotional analyses- I am missing periods of my life due to the above named events. That, in part explains some of the missing pieces of writing. Intentional, or not, there have been some elements of my life that I chose not to record or remember. They all became snakes. These are the biographical/ sociological factors that were mentioned earlier in this writing that required that I look at the whole of the experience and understand the reasons for both the angry phenomena and the gaps in writing. Other aspects of social embeddedness are explained below.

The tale of Sodom and Gomorrah filled me with horror as I understood in a subconscious manner, the underlying nature of the sins of those people. Again I assumed that my own life was every bit as horrible. The patriarchal undertones of that tale eluded me until I was much older, and could fathom the inequity that was expressed in the story. My earlier interpretation came from the teaching that sins of the flesh would meet harsh punishment. It didn't occur to me that the sins that were visited upon innocents were as horrible, if not more so than those alluded to in the bible.

Behold now, I have two daughters that have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes; only unto these men do nothing; forasmuch as they are come under the shadow of my roof

(Genesis, 19, 8)

הַגָּה-נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-גִדְעוּ אִישׁ--אוֹצִיָּאָה-נָא אֶתְהוֹן אֵלַיְכֶם, וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן
כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינַיְכֶם; רַק לְאִנְשֵׁים הָאֵל, אֶל-תַּעֲשׂוּ דְבָר, כִּי-עַל-כֵּן בָּאוּ, בְּצַל קִרְתִּי.

Growth has led me to the image of Dinah as, in Pinkola Estes (1995) language, the Dirty Goddess; in touch with her inner needs and nurturing strengths., her very visceral nature and the rhythms of the sensual self (p. 362) Diamant's (1997) picture of Dinah as a wise woman and consummate midwife explains how I remained connected to her story even as a young and very angry mother.

The language that I gleaned from these initial encounters with religious icons that, in my mind, were cemented eternally with the idea of spirituality, evolved into an angry rant against the perpetrators of abuse against vulnerable persons. For me, this was a personal experience and I internalized the words and the teachings as hurtful.

This appears in various spots in my personal writing. The first place I encounter it is in a poem that is the earliest writing in my possession. In *Through A Dirty Window* (Appendix A. 1), reference to the ancients and the cesspools are early attempts to understand the hurt I felt. In *Sodom and Gomorrah* (Appendix A, 10), the bitterness I felt towards the patriarchy represented in the Hebrew bible is fully ripe, and my drive to triumph over the image of women as chattel is very much in the forefront.

There are images from the Hebrew bible, stories of love and truth, that have nurtured me from my first encounter with them. However I may interpret the patriarchal tones of, even the greatest of love stories, and understand, now, the meaning of betrayal, the *Song of Songs* has always filled me with hope. My name, Yona, means dove in Hebrew. I have taken on that persona of emissary of peace from my earliest remembrances- even before I stopped remembering. Before I encountered the passage below, my very first memory of

this resonance comes from a very small girl who learned that Noah sent forth a dove, Yona, from the ark to see if there was land nearby. The dove returned with the olive branch- symbol of hope and peace.

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

(Song of Songs. 2, 14)

יוֹנָתִי בְּחַגְגֵי הַסֵּלַע, בְּסִתְרֵי הַמְדְּרָגָה, הִרְאִינִי אֶת-מְרִאֲיָךְ, הַשְּׂמִיעֵנִי אֶת-קוֹלְךְ: כִּי-קוֹלְךְ
עָרֵב, וּמְרִאֲיָךְ נְאוּהָ.

Other images that entered into my spiritual realm as a confused and double- edged sword, came from a larger cultural context. I revisit the words and music of Fiddler on the Roof on a regular basis. The themes and images therein can bring tears to my eyes almost immediately, as I sort through the both/ and of the sweetness and the bitterness, the innocence and the evil. My relationship with the truth of the characters portrayed in those lines, and also with the lies that I hear sometimes when I listen to the songs, is still evolving. But what is constant and cannot be argued, is that the imagery of that work has influenced my own.

During my years as a younger woman, I turned to matriarchs in the guise of midwives and tales of gods and goddesses of fertility to fulfill my need for universal connection. I eschewed the women whose tales of strength and suffering were hidden behind the brutality that leaped out at me from every page of the bible of my forefathers. I attached an immature label , that was mired in anger and hatred, to my inner experience of those matriarchs and turned to other tales that revolved around me in my circle of young, nursing mothers. These tales held me through my initial child- bearing years, and I lived those myths rather than writing them during that time. This, is another piece of my ‘story’

that explains the gap in personal writing during that era. Instead of writing about my experiences, I was attempting to live the mother/ goddess life. Had I written more during that time period, my writing may have been peppered with references to the goddesses of fertility and childbirth: the Greek goddess Gaia, and, more likely, The Indian goddess Arundhati (Jennings, 2003. P. 128).

This is a place to refer to the sociological approach to qualitative study, and to look briefly at the sociological factors that may have contributed to the fact that I do not have writing in my possession that dates to the period in my life when I married, had children and was immersed in mothering. Hansen (1999) discusses the use of a prism as a metaphor in studying historical biography as it helps to understand the many layers of living that are simultaneously occurring in an individual's life:

This prism perspective is valuable to historical sociology for three reasons. First, the biography as prism alerts the historical sociologist to aspects of the period otherwise hidden. It prompts one to articulate questions about taken-for-granted phenomena. Second, the prism metaphor illuminates a life as a point of entry that then connects to larger social and economic processes. Starting with the specific, the local and particular, the researcher is able to make connections outward to examine the social embeddedness of this one life. And third, the prism perspective illustrates how connections come together in one life.

(p. 355)

In reflecting on how there came to be missing pages of my life, I understand (as mentioned earlier) that there were personal, communal and societal movements happening that were all contributory and came together in my own story. On the personal level, I was immersed in motherhood. That, by itself, might explain the lack of time and energy to pick up pen, but as a young energetic mother, it doesn't tell the whole story. In terms of social embeddedness, I was living in a new, and small community. I attached

myself to a group of young, like- minded, breast feeding mothers, whose lives and energy went into the rearing of children in the most natural ways we were able. This segues to the societal experience of the time and place. In a very political sense the way in which my friends and I approached mothering was not accepted. We pulled back from the medical machine that told us we should have babies in the hospital, give them the newest foods and inoculate them with mercury. This sociological glimpse at my life underscores the places where my energies were directed. With that in mind, I am quite sure still, that I did indeed write during that period. I can only assume that the fact that my husband and I moved our young family three times during the years between 1983 and 1987 is a large contributor to lost writings.

With no ‘data’ available, I rely on my memories and articulations. During that period of my life I was, indeed, trying to emulate the goddesses and mothers of mythic proportion, and that too, showed up in my writing as I resumed a more regular practice.

Then, I met the ‘women who run with the wolves’. Pinkola Estes’ (1995) tales of women who honour their connection to the earth, to the rhythms of nature, and the glimpse of these women in their mythical largeness lubricated my metaphorical tongue with images of the soul. I have been deeply moved by knowing: “When a woman is cut away from her basic source, she is sanitized, and her instincts and natural life cycles are lost, subsumed by the culture, or by the intellect or the ego- one’s own or those belonging to others.”

(Pinkola Estes, 1995, p. 8)

This meeting came hand in hand with my encountering Anita Johnston’s (1996) *Eating in the Light of the Moon*. Johnston’s story- telling and mythologizing the psyche of women

with eating disorders, truly changed my life. Her metaphorical language crept into my own writing as an answer to questions that I didn't know I was asking. Johnston's determination that women who struggle with eating disorders are disconnected from the natural cyclical rhythms of life and turn to food as a metaphor for the nourishment they seek in nature (p. 6) echoed Pinkola Estes assertion that women are cut off from their natural rhythms, and, once again, gave me permission to explore the archetypes powerful women.

Very recently, I received a gift from my mother- a package of cards called *Walking the Motherpath* (Rose, 1987). These cards are used in workshops facilitated by their creator Carol Rose, and depict the women of the bible as archetypes of feminine qualities. She bases her development of this approach on "...biblical, midrashic, kabbalistic material, along with personal insight." (personal communication, February 4, 2010). Rose says that the purpose of these cards is: "to make the matriarchs of the Old Testament accessible as models for growth and transformation." It seems that this has arrived in my life as an invitation to return to the stories of my youth and invite them into my consciousness in a new way.

The first card that I turned up as I opened the pack? Dinah, whose named trait is vulnerability. I ponder whether this archetype has been part of the shadows of my Self for my whole life.

Interwoven into these images of goddesses and wild, powerful women have been the appearance of wisdom texts, other than those I was raised to revere. The Bhagavad Gita has profoundly influenced my balance and thinking. A translation by Stephen Mitchell

(2000)has provided me with images that fill my body language, both conscious and unconscious:

The whole universe, all things
animate or inanimate,
are gathered here- look!- enfolded
inside my infinite body.

(p. 133)

Spiritual themes are universally seen as those that drive humanity to seek larger answers: feelings of lost, disconnected or alone, wonder at the ways people interact. VanKatwyk (2003) opens the concept of spirituality in terms of spiritual care. He refers to other theologians in defining spirituality as being represented in the metaphor of, "a soul yearning for its home base..." (p. 30). The variety of ways that this is expressed is the stuff of many theological writings. VanKatwyk delineates three main perspectives that encompass the multiplicity of core spiritual questions that arise for people seeking answers to large questions. He talks about the perspectives of: "the grace of god...in a non- religious spirituality through the experience of grateful surprise." and "growth of the self...highlighted in the world of psychology"; and suggests that, "resilience of the human spirit spans a broad interdisciplinary spectrum in the work dog social sciences." (p. 31). He sees these as being the over- arching themes that people address in soul searching. These correspond to the ways that I have interpreted my own spiritual language as being reflected in my writing. Now, I will turn to the phenomena that exist as evidence of spiritual questioning in my writing, because, as Appendix B indicates, and as I discuss here, I have seen through this inquiry, that spiritual questioning is woven throughout my writing- even when least expected.

Metaphor is the language of phenomenology. Poetic phrase is a glimpse into the internal life of an individual – what it is like. Language that captures the internal experience of a person allows us to ignore the experience outside of present moment and attend to the consciousness as it is described. Van Manen (1997) tells us that,

“Therefore, poets and painters are born phenomenologists. Or rather, we are all born phenomenologists; the poets and painters among us, however, understand very well their task of sharing, by means of word and image, their insights with others — an artfulness that is also laboriously practised by the professional phenomenologist.”

(p. 41).

Groenwald (2004), defines a procedure for “explicating data” (p. 17). He uses this term to avoid the misunderstandings that arise in using the term ‘analysis’ as this is an inappropriate way to view phenomena- as though they could be broken down into atomic- like units. Groenwald identified five steps to explicating data (that he says is a simplified version of Hycner (1999)): (1)bracketing and phenomenological reduction, (2)delineating units of meaning, (3)clustering of units of meaning to form themes, (4)summarising, validating, and possibly modifying material, (5)extracting general and unique themes from subject material and creating a composite summary. (p. 17).

Similar to my engagement with the process of heuristic self- inquiry as outlined by Sela-Smith (2002), I found it necessary to shape this system to fit my needs. I have used it as a guide, a way to step into the language that I used in my writing, and feel the essence of the experiences it relates. It has provided me with a way to think about the phenomena that are my lived moments as I poured my life into words on a page.

In my work, bracketing is neither completely possible nor essentially necessary. I cannot bracket myself from imposing my presuppositions as they are all mine, but I can put

myself at a distance and relive my experience as I wrote the words. I am aware too, that surprises have occurred as I read my own words, and presuppositions that I thought I held, were blown apart. So while the idea of bracketing seems a bit difficult, I have been truly able to read the poems as though they came from another. I am also more able to identify the phenomenological instances- the language that is indicative of the experience of the spiritual in that moment. Similarly, delineating units of meaning is an easier task, as I know the meaning of the language tacitly. Indeed, as I read the writings as one body, the organic meanings of the work became accessible for me, a true incubation period. Clustering units of meaning to form themes will be the remainder of the work. Steps four and five as outlined by Groenwald (2004) will be worked into the stages of study parallel to Sela- Smith's (2002) formulation.

I have read my own poems and other writings many times over the years. I do come to this body of work with a slightly altered perspective and the question that I have put forth changes the lilt of the rhythms. In selecting samples and reading them as a body of 'data'. I was able to get a 'gestalt' of the thing, as is suggested by Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999) in Groenwald (2004). It feels as though it has all been contained in a giant bubble, ready to burst forth to enlighten the shadowy questions that live within. In rereading my writing several times, I could hear the changing voice and see the threads that held it all together more clearly. A deep surprise was the prayerfulness and belief running through it all, in changing tones and in many new voices. The whole of this work is a forty year prayer- that I didn't expect to hear.

Groenwald (2004) refers to meaning units when explicating data culled from qualitative interviews. These are the words, as well as the non- verbal cues that indicate the presence of phenomena of interest. I prefer to think of these as flags or markers that draw attention to the phenomena in question. I pored over my writing and found that the markers that were common to the gestalt of the body of work were of four basic categories: stranger to self/ existentialism, sin/ ugliness, nature and awe. Looking at the selection of poems and one narrative in Appendix A, I can see that there was also a basic rhythm that runs through the selected works. There is a build up in the anger, fear and sense of being lost interspersed with pieces that express awe and love of the natural world. Running through them there is an undercurrent of sin and the ugliness I felt within. My latter work focuses on a sense of spiritual awe. The words, language or markers that reflect these themes can be delineated and appear in Appendix B.

As said earlier, the words, markers or units of meaning are, for me, most easily recognized and understood in the context of meaning or themes. It became apparent that the words used to describe a range of spiritual experiences were present throughout with differing intensities and foci. I later looked at the possible interpretations and integration of these findings.

I organized the language that had spiritual meaning, for me, into four main themes: existentialism, sin, nature and awe. The themes and images come from the myths and stories that have been part of my spiritual education, and contain many facets of spiritual life. These four main headings could be further sub- divided into myriad tributaries: existentialism- feelings of loss, separateness, responsibility, meaning of life, isolation,

and emotion; sin- self- loathing, sense of inner ugliness, hatefulness, feeling damaged; nature- inspiration, beauty, purity; awe- prayerfulness, seeking, biblical reference. Within the four headings I included language that contributed to my sense of questioning the spiritual realm about the ‘big’ wonderments- the why’s and how’s of my existence.

In arranging the words in this systematic way I notice that there is an almost equal distribution amongst the four categories. Natural phenomena seem to be on the lower end of reference pool in my writing. However, in ways that are more subtle, the natural world appears as a backdrop. That setting, too, has spiritual significance for me, and is thus part of the overall question of spiritual seeking.

In Chapter One, I defined spiritual growth as ‘the development of awareness of a spiritual entity or consciousness. This will be expressed as an ability to reflect in a meaningful way through the artistic elements, and further, to create objects (primarily metaphor) that are phenomenological evidence of the growing awareness of one’s Self in a greater context.’ I defined spiritual questioning as ‘the understanding of the impetus for spiritual growth as spiritual questioning. This will be identified through metaphor that depicts my experience of spiritual questioning. Images and language that are indicative of this will include archetypes and reference to specific culturally accepted ideas of spirituality.’ It is important to revisit this briefly, to refresh my memory about what I am looking at. I was still unconvinced that spiritual questioning was present in the writing I produced when I was in my thirties and forties. When I reread my own definitions, I see that there is room within them to include the angry cries, the ‘prayer of the nonbeliever’, and the ode to the beauty of nature.

A brief summary of the data that are reported in Appendix B includes a personal look at the images I see that represent seeking and growth over a lifetime. I only saw the attempt to make sense of the hurt and abandonment I felt as a very young woman, travelling to Israel for the first time, when I read the poems and journal entries I have from that time. I have others in Hebrew as well as ‘Through a Dirty Window’ (Appendix A, 1). I read those too. They all speak to my wish even at that tender age, to simplify my feelings of hurt. There is a sense of yearning for an UNCHANGED (1) view of the ancient hills, even as, paradoxically, there is a drive to clean out the cesspools.

‘Spring Thoughts’ (Appendix A, 2) speaks clearly to the spiritual quandary of separation. In this case it is disconnection from the earth that metaphorically speaks to the sense of separation. This work also refers to the upcoming burn that will occur naturally in the summer months. This is reflective of my connection to the rhythms of nature as a young mother; the cycles of birth, life, death and rebirth.

There is a rhythm in my writing too, of questioning, praise of the beauty of the natural world and prayerfulness. This occurred even in the years when I was clearly angry: at my past, at my religious community and at, what I would refer to then as, god. The next four poems follow that rhythm and repeat the imagery and themes already discussed here. Each poem has a unique twist on those facets: ‘We can’t live our dreams, we live our lives’ (Appendix A, 3 Dec/ 89); ‘...and I believe, however briefly, that I have discovered the will of the gods.’ (Appendix A, 4 Dec/ 90); ‘For your image warms my soul’ (Appendix A, 5 Dec/ 90); ‘a great void spills over’ (Appendix A, 6 April/ 91).

In June, 1991, I wrote 'Indigo Dreams' (Appendix A, 7). From the day I wrote it, I felt that it was a departure from my usual images. It felt more like a dance than a song:

'Faceless forms come to life
Their dancing lines Weave themselves from my pen,
Their steps flow freely in black.'
Still, the references to being at a distance from myself, and watching the dancers of my life are thematically in synchronicity with the greater whole of asking questions of the cosmos.

How could I have thought the 'Prayer of the Nonbeliever' (8) was anything but asking for guidance from a source in which I proclaimed I didn't believe. In fact, I was unsure of what I believed as reflected in the lines: 'I am a nonbeliever But I know that you exist.'
This piece, in particular, has taken me by storm. The paradox of 'Release me from the torture You have chosen as my fate.' and 'Tell me you are sorry That I may accept you now.' brings a sting to my eyes. I have never felt the yearning in those words as strongly as when I read them as part of a whole. 'Prayer of the Nonbeliever' may be the poem that epitomizes the answer to my question: 'Is there evidence of spiritual questioning in my personal writing that spans four decades?' Each line of this piece is thick with the imagery of spiritual questioning. It is also clear to me, as both the writer and researcher, that the source is deep pain that I fused with the spiritual imagery and myths of my youth. This spiritual imagery included Judaic teaching of god as supreme judge, as well as images of 'the wandering Jew', and emphasis on the 'mitzvah' (commandment or Jewish law) of giving: 'Say that you are hungry I'll feed you of my bread.' I have previously read this poem as proof that I did not believe in anything beyond the understanding of human experience. That 'proof' kept me stuck in the image of god as a supernatural

being. It is definitely evidence of spiritual questioning, and of a still immature concept of divinity.

The next ten to fifteen years, as represented by the next three poems, feature language that is softer- at times. Poems 9 and 11 (appendix A) are pure and simply seeking. They are the language of longing for integration- body, mind AND spirit. It is hard to read ‘Sodom and Gomorrah’ (10) as anything but an accusatory, angry rant at the god of the Jews. It does, however, herald a shift in the shape of my spiritual questioning. In that poem, I start to take more responsibility for portraying my strength through the images of the archetypes. This is a recent shift, and I know the power that publicly sharing these poems has had for me.

North End girl (13) is still full of the angry language of my youth, and also full of imagery that represents my connectedness to the community, culture and mythology that has been the focus of my vehement tirades. In this narrative I was able to articulate my memory of the shabby, incestuous and insulated life that was my internal experience. It recalls, ‘...the creations my mother sewed for me, that usually itched at my skin, in places I wasn’t allowed to scratch’. This is an unusually well- crafted phrase that epitomizes my sense of being ‘rubbed the wrong way’ and feeling powerless to do anything about it. The language is laden with sarcasm and contempt for the small- mindedness that was my perception of that community as I matured. This in contrast to the fairy tale I had constructed about my early years. The flashes of true memory of events are recorded as brutality, “roughly started pushing me around”. The rest is a wash of faded colours and dreaminess, “Warmed by the sun, I walked along with my jacket tied around my waist.”

It is interesting to re-read this piece with the lens of spiritual questioning attached to the camera of phenomenology. I have, to this day, a bitter-sweet relationship with the musical production “Fiddler on the Roof”. I find myself yearning for the simplicity of the faith portrayed in Tevye’s character yet feeling contempt for him for being so insular. Having written this in just the past five years, it is a particularly poignant snapshot of the push-pull process I have felt as I have looked for ways to make peace with the ‘what’ of who I am.

Each ‘The Process’(12), ‘On Being With the Dead and Dying’ (14) and ‘The Mists of Avalon’(15), all written since my fiftieth birthday, contain language that represents yet another shift in the realm of spiritual questioning. There is a sense of humour, ‘ha. Metaphor swirls around The bowl, as I flush it away.’ and a maturing approach to acceptance ‘Devoid of prana, You have given me the gift of the deepest wisdom.’ infused into these pieces that give me a sense of satisfaction. They satisfy my need to question, seek and grow, and, simultaneously, take the responsibility for finding.

It is clear to me, even as of this writing, that I was more successful at bracketing my pre-suppositions about what I would find in these poems than I suspected I could be. It was as I read them as a single body, and understood the gestalt of them, that I fully grasped the meaning of and the answer to my question. The language that has come from my engagement with the spiritual realm throughout a lifetime, has informed the images that I created as a vehicle for spiritual questioning and deep longing.

This was a time of true illumination, as Sela-Smith (2002) describes it,

This phase may allow for integration of dissociated aspects of the self by providing insight into the meanings that were attached to the internal experience of the past. These meanings, even if they are the products of incomplete or inaccurate information, formed the basis on which tacit knowledge and, therefore, the experience of life was built.

(p.67)

By looking at the gestalt of this body of writing that I have produced across time it is easier to see and grasp how the tacit knowledge of the ‘wholes’ that were my working definitions of religious/ spiritual language was based on misinterpretations. Following from this, it is also easy to understand how I would have mistaken these writings as evidence that I truly did not believe in anything beyond that which is scientifically demonstrable. Through the tools of engagement, immersion and illumination, it becomes a gentle method to try on the words in an alternate manner, as though I were going through my closet and trying on older clothes in different combinations, coming up with new ways to wear my old clothes in a comfortable fit. This is my current experience of these past writings and perhaps the best definition of what Sela- Smith (2002) calls explication, “Like a new person coming into one’s living space, everything within that space will shift as it relates to the change that has taken place.” (p. 68). They are made more whole by pairing them with newer, deeper ways of claiming them. Rather than discard old favourites, I patch them and give them new life. I bring them to the front of my wardrobe with fresh colour and profound respect.

CHAPTER SIX

CREATIVE SYNTHESIS: A COLLAGE OF IDEAS

I spoke earlier about adapting Sela- Smith's (2002) process for heuristic self- inquiry so that it was a fit for me as far as the manner in which I engage in learning. Similarly, I talked about my need to do that with other models as well, in particular Groenewald's (2004) systematized approach to phenomenological research. I would like to return to looking at the way the self- inquiry has unfolded for me so I can highlight the connections I have made at each stage. This also sets the groundwork for looking ahead and pulling together the pieces of this study into an informative whole that can be lived beyond the pages of this work.

The processes of incubation, illumination and explication (referring to Sela- Smith's (2002) stage of self- inquiry, not Groenewald's (2004) system for looking at phenomena), continue to unfold, refold and then unfold in a new way again. I considered that I was incubating the research question, my resources and the arrangement of the stories in my consciousness as I looked at the myths and images that have impacted my own writing. This information was, as Sela- Smith (2004) suggests, not from new sources, but the foci that they held bubbled to the surface in surprising ways, as discussed earlier.

When I allowed the mythologies that I have held as sacred (even those that I professed to loathe from my childhood) to support my own writing, letting it rest as if in the hands of a nurturing mother, true illumination did take place. This was discussed in depth in the last chapter. I expect that this illumination phase may be a part of my writing practice for the rest of my life; that as I deepen my connection to my sources and resources, and I

trust that I can continue to explore through my own writing, ever deeper layers of understanding about the intertwining of my writing and spiritual path will come to light.

Explication, in Sela- Smith's (2002) terminology, is the organic, deep knowing of the new information such that it impacts the way we feel in our lives. She talks about the creation of 'wholes'(p. 61), and explication might be described as a time that new wholes have been formed by bringing together "new evaluations, thoughts, feelings, behaviors..." (p. 61). This might also be a time when misinformation that has been held as tacit knowledge can be discarded and new, updated information can help the inner and outer experience be more in balance, as the researcher adapts to living through these new understandings. I have already described my experience of this stage, as I worked through the self- inquiry and found that my appreciation for the mythological mothers of the Hebrew testament are a deeply seated part of me. This explication became apparent as a result of the process with which I have been engaged; the earlier stages of initial engagement, immersion, incubation and illumination have naturally culminated in my being able to enter my own writing and discover a connection within, rooted in tacit knowledge that is perhaps even older than my lifetime. In this way, I also created a new whole that discarded, or at least reconfigured, old information that did not allow me to listen softly to the myths of the mothers that had been whispered in my ear through the ages.

I am not a linear thinker- as I already stated, so I feel quite sure that I will continue to enter this experience at deeper and deeper levels. In my usual fashion, I will skip some

steps and then go back to fill them in. I will do two or more at once, but I will keep journeying to my source.

Sela- Smith (2002) describes heuristics as a way of researching beyond the accepted norms, and a way to be open to all possibilities that explain or provide insight for the focus of inquiry. She says, “ ‘What works’ becomes the focus, and anything that makes sense can be tested. This trial and- error process, this discovery of what works, is the heuristic.”(p. 58). To that end, I now want to integrate the experience into the many facets of my life as a mother, teacher and aspiring therapist in a continued process of explication. In this way, I will truly have the opportunity to live this experience more fully. I will look at the disparate theoretical stances that have informed the way that I approached this question, and endeavour to bring them together in an integrated whole, thus addressing Sela- Smith’s (2002) creative synthesis stage of self- inquiry and creating a learning opportunity to see “what works”.

Writing as a tool of healing in the discipline of psychology has grown since Pennebaker’s (1990) initial studies in the arena of writing, disclosure and health. His original focus on expressive writing as a means of relieving both physiological and psychological symptoms has been well documented and has become a mainstay of Health Psychology. Smyth and Pennebaker’s (2008) survey of their own work allows that there is much more study needed in order to fully understand the parameters that make Expressive Writing valuable. A 2006 meta- analysis by Frattaroli found that disclosure of difficult events had a positive effect on health outcomes. She found that the mode of disclosure (written, typed or oral) was unimportant for the overall effect to be seen. This is an avenue of

research yet to be more fully investigated, however, the importance here is the disclosing aspect. Others who view Expressive Writing as described by Pennebaker to be only part of the equation, have looked with greater focus at the practice of writing and healing with a wider lens.

Mentioned earlier, there have been a number of researchers, teachers and therapists who have made the healing effects of writing their professional focus (Moskowitz, 1998; Mitchell, 2001; Hunt and Sampson, 1998). More recent literature has expanded on the process of creative writing as providing healing effects. Nicholls (2009) emphasizes writing as a step into a creative process that goes beyond simple disclosure. She refers to expressive writing as an entry into the broader world of developmental writing,

“...expressive writing might be seen as enabling participants to

begin connecting with felt experience (emotions, traumatic memories, etc.).” (p. 173).

She asserts that there are other aspects of creative developmental writing that go beyond the original purpose of expressive writing as described by Pennebaker (1990). Nicholls believes that developmental writing can reach a wider range of people by providing a more comprehensive experience,

1. Providing a ‘holding space’.
2. Providing opportunities to engage in an ongoing process.
3. Facilitating a felt, bodily approach to the writing.
4. Enabling people to be read and to become readers of their own and others’ work.

(Nicholls, 2009. p. 174)

This speaks to the entire experience of engaging in creative writing as a tool for healing and growth. This will be discussed further from the perspective of Expressive Arts theory. Here, the focus is on the healing qualities of expressive writing and the more

qualitative effect of being heard. Nicholls (2009) says: “Models of developmental creative writing suggest that opportunities to read work in a supportive group setting or to receive feedback on writing (by e-mail, telephone or face-to-face discussion) provide important benefits, including new insights into experiences written about (see Sampson, 1998 for examples).” (p. 176). This is an echo of reports by other authors. In *The Rape Poems* Mitchell (2001) documents the transformational healing that Frances Driscoll underwent through the process of writing, publishing and publicly sharing her writing about traumatic events. I have previously written about my own experience of a similar process: “By sharing and re- writing my work with peers and professionals, I integrated the previously secret code into a sense of whole- ness that I expressed through writing. (Bolton, 2005)” (McGinnis, 2010. Forthcoming)

Carla Willig (2009) describes her experience with writing as a way to make meaning of her diagnosis with cancer. “I was well aware that thinking and writing alone were not enough to keep me going, and that understanding and validation from a (trusted and supportive) other were also needed.” (p. 186). This is an emerging theme in current writing about the use of creative (and expressive) writing for developmental purposes.

My experience in writing, reflecting, publishing, sharing, reflecting again... with my own poems and narratives has been a series of mini self- inquiries over the years. This writing is the formalized and expanded version of a manner in which I have been with my personal writing for many years. The focused question also changes the shape of the exercise for me. However, I am not a stranger to the need for inner reflection, connection with the “I- who- feels” (Sela- Smith, 2002), and integration of newly configured

information. In 2009, I submitted a piece, titled *Giving Perspective*, for publication in the upcoming sequel to *Writing Works* (Bolton, Fields, Thompson, eds. 2006). This sequel is forthcoming (Writers' Routes Bolton, Fields, Thompson, eds. 2010). It is the encapsulated version of this process, formulated into an exercise that has potential for helping others who feel stuck in their writing or in their lives. It deals with the theoretical underpinnings of creative developmental writing with a wider scope than the lens through which I examined my writing in this study. I have already mentioned, above, the importance of 'being heard'. For me, it has been an essential ingredient for moving my poem-making from a place to hide secret disclosures (largely ineffective in producing healing effects) to well crafted work, the production of which came as a result of the elements (holding space, ongoing...) discussed by Nicholls (2009) above. The overall engagement of reflection on what I have written as a comparative exercise in self-inquiry (where am I now, where was I then) has also had a great deal of power for me: "In 'stuck' times I have pored over the piles of poems and thumbed through old journals. Reading phrases from the past as evidence that a theme has run through my healing process and was apparent in my writing. Most often, I have been able to say to myself: I may not be in a great place now, but at least I'm not back there." (McGinnis, 2010) My writing pieces have always stood as phenomenological evidence for me of my state at the time of writing. Like other aspects of this process, I was 'doing it right' without the benefit of academic understanding. I have the opportunity to reflect, once again, this time with a greater understanding of theory and research about this process. I see that the ideas of expressive writing and creative developmental writing would have predicted, in part, some of the positive results I have experienced from writing and then sharing the fruit of

my creativity. Specifically, as Nicholls (2009), has said (and quoted above) the process of creative writing in its entirety, has given me opportunity to grow developmentally on a number of continuums. For example, as seen here, writing and then sharing and reflecting has put me in touch with the qualities of spiritual development that I might not have seen otherwise. Further, as Pennebaker (1986, 1990, 1995, 2008) suggests, expressive writing about traumatic events has indeed, led to major, life- changing health improvements. In writing about childhood sexual abuse I have been able to overcome the debilitating effects of eating disorder and the physical deterioration that accompanies that. I would note, that I refer back to Nicholls (2009) and others to underline the importance, for me, of sharing and voicing that writing in my healing.

There are many parallels between the foundations of expressive arts therapy and the other theoretical perspectives that I have investigated to determine the ‘best fit’ in terms of understanding the process that I have described here. The concept of chaos theory, as described by McNiff (1999), the focus on the phenomenological, discussed by Malchiodi and the spiritual phenomena related to art- making to which Allen (1995) refers, are some of the threads that tie the theoretical stance of expressive arts into the whole of this study. I referred in Chapter Two to some of the arts based perspectives that have informed the manner in which I have held this topic in regard to that philosophy. They are also the ways that I approach my work with others as I gain more experience in the field of expressive arts therapy. Here I will focus on the specifics of how these theoretical threads run through this exercise.

As in our current cultural experience, the literature of the expressive arts eschews the word 'spiritual'. There is an unwritten reference to that domain that is called by different names. "As an essential manifestation of truth, art has the capacity to give meaning and direction to human existence." (Levine, S. 1999. p. 29). This would seem like the very definition of spirituality, yet the word does not enter into his philosophical discussion. Knill (1999) refers to a psychic diet that nourishes the soul- again, words that imply a nod to the spiritual realm, but does not spell it out. However, Allen (1995) wrote a book entitled *Art is a Way of Knowing: A guide to Self- Knowledge and Spiritual Fulfillment Through Creativity*. It is one of the few direct references to art- making as spiritually significant. At the same time, ideas abound that direct us to the connection expressive arts establishes between the core human experience and the external world (Levine, E. 2003). This is a bit confusing and demands that I look to my own experience as the participant/ researcher to illumine what has transpired for me, that is phenomenologically evident in my creativity. In the last chapter, I highlighted the language that signifies the phenomena of spiritual questioning in my writing. I was able to be specific about what the use of language has meant for me. In a process similar to Reinders (1992) of collecting the reflective narratives of the artists that participated in her study of the phenomenology of artistic creativity, I was able to discern within myself, both in dialogue and in reflective writing, the meanings of my creations. In dialoguing with myself about the meanings of the language I used, I am able to be specific about the myths and images that informed my own creations. The phenomenological approach to witnessing another's work is central to the school of expressive arts. In her discussion of children's art, Malchiodi, stresses the importance of viewing their creativity from this perspective, "What is

important about a phenomenological approach to looking at children's drawings is its emphasis on and openness to a variety of meanings, the context in which they were created, and the maker's way of viewing the world" (p. 35). This statement pulls together the value of this approach to working, the expressive arts, as it pertains to the focus of my study. It addresses the heuristic aspect that lies at the base of the theoretical stance, and also zeroes in on the qualities of personal context and the creator's own experience.

These ideas build on, but don't get lost in, the ideas of Pennebaker(1990) and others about the healing properties of writing. Expressive arts are not bound by the constraints of the research psychology paradigm. The heuristic model is so well suited as so much of this approach to working with others is predicated by the notion that in trusting the process, the appropriate path will emerge. While speaking of the work in following the intuition of being with another Knill (1999) says, "...These and similar suggestions should always serve the emergence of the work and may bring the process to the point where patient and therapist are touched, surprised and moved by the 'quite rightness' of the unexpected. " (p. 48).

These concepts of the expressive arts have moved me in the direction of personal healing and also towards professional curiosity and training. Other precepts of expressive arts therapy have been impactful on me and include the intermodal approach and, in particular, the chaos theory that underlies the process. These have been important to me on a personal level. Intermodally, I have learned to express ever deepening layers of my soul. Those media that were previously inaccessible to me, because of my own belief that 'I am not a painter', exposing my connectedness to 'the spaces in between' me and my

world. While words have offered respite, hiding places and salve for my hurts, painting, dance, and music have bridged the gap that yawed between my core sense of self and the external world. Rogers (1999) says, “Any art form that comes from an emotional depth provides a process of self- discovery. We express inner feelings by creating outer forms.” (p. 115). This intermodal approach has given me a vehicle and opened space to find true integration of mind/ body/ spirit. This is an essential component of expressive arts, and one that shows up in my own writing “The Process, 2008. (Appendix A, 12). Halprin (1999) is a dancer who has embraced the expressive arts and describes the saliency of that connection: “Ultimately, the embodied life would be one in which the physical body, feelings and mind are being expressed creatively in congruence with each other and with the changing nature of reality.” (p. 136).

Yet, words have been my first defence. I built walls around the ugliness of my experience with poem- making that painted the images in well- crafted metaphor that disguised the events. Poetry, though cognitive in appearance, has the ability to by- pass our cognitive centers. “In addition to accessing emotional centre of the brain more successfully than abstract concepts do, metaphors also take us beyond our cramped vision of the pain by connecting the personal to the universal.” (Lengelle, 2008. p. 4). For me, it has been truly the language of my soul; that which connected my internal experience to some form of the outside world. Fuchs (1999) describes the imaginal space of the poet this way, “Yet the poetic imagination makes belief possible, a belief that life is worth living; that love, beauty and truth, the ‘sovereign utterances’ exist.” (p. 195). She further describes my own experience in the following way,

Poetry as an intervention, a coming between, comforts by its beauty and confronts with its unconditional truth. By speaking the unspeakable it destructures the certainties of everyday life and puts us into an imaginal in-between space in which there is no guarantee, only the hope to find a shelter through the newness and freshness of the poetics of belief.

(p. 207)

All of these ways of knowing my internal experience make sense to me. Unwittingly, I stumbled into a space that I made safe 'enough' with pen and paper. I created imaginal spaces in which I crafted the phenomena of my experience. They were truly unspeakable events. And I was able, even in the briefest of flashes, to speak them in the language of metaphor. Blind to it, I created a belief and hope system through the lines of my poems.

Nicholls' (2009) guidelines for creating an environment that is facilitative is very much a part of the language of the expressive arts. Brederode's (1999) words echo the sentiment in this way, "From the beginning, the intention is to create a safe atmosphere, in which participants can allow themselves to show vulnerability and to express themselves: healing is done only in a sacred space." (p. 153) In the world of expressive arts therapy, the therapist acts as a guide and facilitator, holding the integrity of the work and co-creating an environment that fosters the creative process.

I have experienced Genesis as Chaos theory in its simplest, pre- scientific conceptualization.

בְּרֵאשִׁית, בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ. 1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, הָיְתָה תְהוֹם וְבָהוּ, וְחָשֶׁךְ, עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם; וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם. 2 Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.

ג וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, יְהִי אוֹר; וַיְהִי-אוֹר. 3 And God said: 'Let there be light.' And there was light.
(Genesis 1, 1-3)

In journeying to the seat of my soul, I have embraced this passage as a way to give meaning to the sometimes traumatic and painful events of my life. And so, the weaving of philosophical stance of my chosen way to work with others and the spirituality of my innermost places has shown itself to me as an intricate tapestry of rich colour and graspable texture. In just this past year, I have experienced a growing recognition and profoundly deepening opening for me as I developed a complete relationship with the words:

רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם.

I have come to see the beauty of my creation as it unfolds from my inner turmoil, and I wrote, still more poetry, in June, 2009:

In the time before
The big 'S' self,
I moved sweetly,
Un self- consciously to the
Seat of my soul.
Breath moved the Divine
To me,
Right through me-
A conduit of the One
Light.

Unfettered by the deeds

Of the other,
The weight of history
Held my feet
To the ground.
I was fashioned
In the form of the ancestors:
The mother and the father,
The uncle too.

רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם.

Step with soles
Of those who have walked
The desert sands,
Have marked my path.
The sand sifts and blends-
The ancient and the new.

And this is how I came to understand in an organic, body- felt way the meaning of
McNiff's (2004) treatment of chaos theory,

Physics also informs us the dissolution is a necessary condition of growth. Loss and gain are tied together in every aspect of life. Order must be lost so that it can be regained, and nothing is constant within this formative flux. Chaos theory has revealed that fragmentation leads to new higher levels of organization, which is practically a definition of the creative process.

(p. 213- 214)

Now here was an articulation of spirituality that I could embrace, and a way to understand my personal experience of growth and emerging creative productions from a mired and tumultuous past.

This was also a frame for understanding the spiritual growth that has most assuredly expressed itself on the pages of my mind for decades. In attempting to grapple with defining the concept of spiritual development that is the ‘best fit’ for the process I have described here, I have looked at models for spiritual growth (Fowler, 1981. Poll & Smith, 2003. Beck, 2003. And Gibson, 2004), and also at the traditional psychological developmental theories (Erikson, 1980. Maslow, 1968. Kohlberg, 1963). I have looked at some of the more recent post- modern life span theories such as Baumgartner (2001), as well as the treatment of spirituality in humanistic and existential writings (Schneider, 1993. Hoffman, et al. 2009). These sources all contribute to my understanding of the deep spiritual questioning and development in my life as expressed through my personal writing. I will touch on them briefly, as they pertain to the question here, as a way to formulate an integrated conceptualization of what this process has been for me. In other words, I will try to capture the essence of ‘best fit’.

Maslow (1968) formulated his ‘hierarchy of needs’ as a model of development. It is clear, from the perspective of humanistic psychology, that this is not a linear model as is assumed from the usual pyramidal representation of Maslow’s (1968) model. Rather it is a model that we may re- experience in different ways as we grow older and may have different needs being sought to be fulfilled simultaneously. (Bentley, 2007. p. 92-93) This is actually closer to Baumgartner’s (2001) supposition regarding Perun and Bielby’s

(1980) work. Baumgartner (2001) discusses the integrated approach of Perun and Bielby (1980) as being one that focuses on the need for synchronicity in a range of areas to produce a cohesive and congruent individual. She summarizes their approach as follows,

Perun and Bielby's (1980) proposed integrated model of development suggests that the life course is composed of changes on several levels across time. Changes in each area follow their own timetables. ``Different types of changes include physical changes, changes in the family life cycle such as being married and having children, changes in work roles, and in emotional tasks`` (Perun & Bielby, 1980, p. 102). Stress results when the timetables are asynchronous (Perun & Bielby, 1980).

(p. 7)

Baumgartner goes on to make the case for spirituality as being an important aspect of development that can be incorporated into the view of an individual life span and one which will provide rich and essential meaning to the work to be done with that person. This approach acknowledges the sense that “Spirituality is often equated with connection to others and to something larger than oneself.” (p.8), and that this is a mature premise on which to base work with adults. She believes that those who use an integrated approach to working with adults will bring mind/ body/ spirit realms into their work.

Kohlberg (1963) http://www.raritanval.edu/departments/HumanitiesSocSci/Part-Time/Wolfe/PowerPoint_as_PDF/EdPsych/Social.pdfs), added a dimension of moral development to the understanding of developmental phases. He postulated that moral development occurs in a fixed, stage- like fashion, and that children do not have the cognitive development to have moral reasoning.

Both Fowler (1981) and DeHoff (1998) have drawn comparisons between the development of spiritual/ faith domains and psychological growth. Still, they rely on the

separateness of the processes to show the distinctions between those realms of development. They make their arguments from different stances, but remain fixed on the premise that these are distinct but inseparable processes that interact with other developmental areas of growth.

Fowler (1981) begins to broaden the ideas of structural- developmental theories such as those of Piaget and Kohlberg but then somewhat narrows his scope again. Looking at these premises of understanding that moral reasoning, and emotional component expands the structural- developmental work to give a more comprehensive view of the 'whole', it is difficult for me to understand why he concludes that these are processes of development that are distinct from each other. Fowler (1981) writes,

In both faith- knowing and the kind of moral- knowing which gives rise to choice and action, the constitution or modification of the self is always an issue. In these kinds of constitutive- knowing not only is the "known" being constructed, but there is also a simultaneous extension, modification, or reconstitution of the knower in relation to the known."

(p. 103)

I see a case for a more integrated model of faith development, especially when looking at Fowler's (1981) faith stages in comparison to Erikson's (1980) and Levinson's (1978) developmental theories. (p. 113), and it is clear to me that, at the very least, there is a symbiotic effect of parallel processes.

De Hoff (1998) suggested that the aim of self- actualization and spiritual growth are similar, but different aspects of human development. She suggested that these two dimensions of human development t can create a synergy that affects both aspect of growth (p. 345). This comes closer to my personal experience of psychological and

spiritual maturation. I have long since articulated my experience as a realization that as my body healed from the ravages of decades of eating disorder, my mind moved with it, and that simultaneously, I was able to open myself to the vulnerability of spiritual movement. These were not separate entities for me. They were woven together in such a way that it would have been near impossible for me to discern which came first- a symbiotic process that involved all levels of being.

Poll and Smith (2003) have a different view of spiritual development. They view spiritual growth as being a matter of divine influence and make compelling arguments for the ways that spirituality may be promoted in therapeutic environments. Of importance here, is the manner in which they view Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development. They also take exception with the feeling of spirituality being an 'add-on' in his work. "Thus, rather than being an afterthought as with Fowler's (1981) theory, development through spiritual experiences becomes central in this new model." (p. 139)

Krause (2006) seeks to understand the place of doubt in the well-being of individuals. This may help to situate the angry productions that have been a part of my writing history. He has shown that the experience of religious doubt cause older adult to feel badly about themselves. This effect is mitigated by higher education. Krause offers a number of possible reasons for this, and in his conclusions he says,

Perhaps psychological well-being is not the best (or only) outcome because it may not be the goal of, or the same thing as, experiencing spiritual growth. Perhaps the point of wrestling with doubt is not to be content, satisfied, or happy—instead it may simply be to learn.

(p. 106)

I look at this from the perspective of understanding that doubt/ spiritual questioning may have promoted learning that in turn inspired growth and well- being.

During the course of living with all these theoretical pieces that took up residence in my total waking consciousness, I sought an internal vibration that would give me a clue as to how these come together. I re- tested myself on Jones' (1992) Theological Worlds Inventory. I saw this as a way to ground myself in the theological universal quandaries of normal human existence. Jones' premise is that we have natural tendencies to see life from a perspective, the understanding of which, organizes itself between two poles. He calls these poles *obsessio* and *epiphania*. Jones (1992) suggests that we organize our experiences around a principle that helps us to makes sense of our world. The poles to which he refers are: separation and reunion; conflict and vindication; emptiness and fulfillment; condemnation and forgiveness; suffering and endurance. These pairs are the thematic substance of each World. My results, this time, were similar to the last time I filled out this inventory. I have the strongest affinity for the *obsessio* and *epiphania* of World I, the theme of which is separation and reunion. This was followed in a close second by the theme of World III- emptiness and fulfillment. I became curious about what this lends to the theological/ spiritual inquiry that I had undertaken. Jones (1992) describes the strengths and weaknesses of those who live in each of the theological worlds. I used his descriptions to enhance the experience of heuristic self- inquiry. In that way, I was able to add a layer of depth to my own organic integration of the work I had done. I have gone back into explication, as Sela- Smith (2002) defines it and added it to the process of creative synthesis in yet another way.

In speaking of World I, Jones says, “Persons inhabiting this World are attracted by wholeness and harmony, valuing the inclusiveness of all. The cosmos and nature share this mysterious totality.” (Jones, 1992. p. 17). Initially I fought against embracing Jones’ (1992) assertions about the ways in which we see the world. In fact, when I first encountered this inventory two years ago, I rejected the whole thing as being biased by Christian teachings. I have since found myself in Jones’ (1992) language. His work transcends religious context, as indicated by the stance of World 1 themes in which I have wrapped my life. Although in many years, and in much of my writing, it is difficult to see the invitation, I have stood as Jones (1992) says, “The basic posture of this World is to stand before life as mystery, invited to live as reverent guest.” (p. 17). I recognize that at times I have been most irreverent, and those have been the important times, as I have shown through this writing, wherein I was questioning the tacit knowledge that landed within me, to seek a spiritual path. However, it is also equally evident that I have been enraptured by the mystery of the cosmos and have had a fluid relationship with the rhythms of the world, flowing between the many layers of consciousness in my explorations.

Jones (1992) goes on to discuss the weaknesses or challenges of those living in this World, “Mystic experience can undercut the passion for action... Furthermore, the propensity to see things symbolically can undercut the concreteness of life, with transparency sacrificing the uniqueness of each thing. Individuals in this World tend to feel alone, and as a neglected minority in modern society can be encouraged to adopt an individualistic posture toward life and others.” (p. 17). Re- reading this now, with the process of the present heuristic self- inquiry in my heart and mind, I can embody Jones’

(1992) meaning. His manner of describing the way those who dwell in World I move from the very large expansiveness of the cosmos to the solitariness of alienation from the physical world describes my visceral experience of moving through my life.

I see my affinity for the World III ‘politics’ of emptiness and fulfillment, as walking hand in hand with the major dwelling I constructed in World I. As Jones (1992) says,

Inhabitants of this World tend to have a healthy regard for eros: for vitality, for feelings, for deep sharing, for a lyric love of living. Dualism is opposed, insisting, for example, on integrating right and left brain thinking, and regarding mind and body as whole.

(p. 18).

There is almost a dreamy quality to the seeking of fulfillment, and the quest for wholeness. I see this as the worldly complement to the search for totality that is the thematic drive in World I. This, however, is countered by the challenge of competitiveness that has been a major hurdle in my life. I can also relate to what Jones (1992) describes as, “a tendency to identify “winners” with personal effort, “losers” with failing to try enough. (p. 18)

In more concrete terms, this lends credence to my assertion that an integrated and inclusive model of understanding is necessary to being with, and seeing ‘whole’ people who feel as though they are in a spiritual vacuum, and need an invitation to explore beyond their current parameters. It is, simply put, my way of seeing and being with the world: to look for the wholeness of each situation and provide the forum for the inclusiveness of all. This is not to suggest that all others will view the subject from this perspective, or even want to try. Rather, it is my contention that the integrated world view adds expansiveness to any theoretical discussion.

I have infused the discussion of the various theoretical psychological views of human development- with foundational understanding of faith and spiritual growth. When we apply a post- modern stance that celebrates both movement towards liberation and calls to action the rebellious undertone of seeking profound personal truth, what becomes clear is that while there is a general trend, the process of human development is best not examined from the stage perspective. At the same time, I see a parallel between the bodies of literature, despite each author's bias, so that they are strikingly similar. In fact, it seems too great to believe anything other than that they are the same process. My experience, borne out by the phenomena of my writing, is that they are processes that are intertwined and reliant on each other. That is, that psychological growth triggers spiritual development and vice versa. My own organic knowledge of this is that they are truly symbiotic- feeding one on the other and offering nurture to each other as growth occurs.

A myriad of developmental literature has been generated to suggest that spiritual development is an integral part of human development. Even when the language given to name the concepts of spirituality has been obscured, there is a growing atmosphere of acceptance of this part of human existence. My sense of this information as I apply it to the internal feelings that I have held and, at times, suppressed, is that, at least for me, it is non- linear and is best explained in post- modern terms that take into account a plethora of realities and truths. While many of these theories explain bits and pieces of my experience, I refer back to McNiff's (2004) metaphor of the creative process as a model of chaos theory. I conjecture that as my cognitive abilities expanded and developed, and as all of the aspects of self matured, from the chaos of anger and resentment that I heaved upon a religious community in which I was raised, I grew a creative, integrated way of

expressing my personal spirituality that approaches grace. My creativity continually generated bits of beauty that gave form to the turmoil within, finally coming together as a collage that as a whole is both beautiful and instructive.

The creative synthesis that comes from this inquiry that I have undertaken is an integration of the bodies of knowledge that I have touched on. It has developed into a workable model for understanding and explaining the presence of phenomena of spiritual questioning in a life that seemed hopeless at times. I have drawn from the threads of psychology, developmental theory, and the expressive arts, and looked at the ways that they, in part, explain those phenomena. Those threads run through my work and come together as a way of knowing this thing of spiritual questioning. It is an invitation to meet those questions with psychological knowledge, spiritual understanding and the openness to welcome creative expressions of the inner turmoil. As my experience exemplifies, out of the chaos, beauty and crystallization may appear.

It is truly not within the scope of this project to create a new developmental theory.

However, true to my affinity for wholeness and cosmic inclusiveness, I do envision one. I imagine an integrated model that is represented by a helix. Orbiting around a central, core Self, composed of pure consciousness, are a myriad of dimensions of development, including psychological, spiritual and physical. These, however, are not exclusive domains. As they spiral, they affect each other in curious and possibly unexpected ways, creating a plethora of unique and individual ways of being.

Thus, the ‘best fit’ of a theoretical perspective that explains the phenomena of the presence of spiritual questioning in my writing is a creative synthesis. To understand this

presence and the growth that it represents, I must pull all of these pieces together and sprinkle them liberally over my words and trust that they have illumined a process that is unique but not exclusive. This process has been my unique and individual way of negotiating the doubts and joys of spiritual questioning and development, however, I do not have a patent on this process. That is, as humans we have the capacity to question, and some will follow a linear timetable of growth, while others, like me, will have growth spurts and then seem to idle a while. The creative process that each of us masters in our own time and manner, is the light illumines, or the catalyst that causes crystallization.

CHAPTER SEVEN

VALIDATION: STEPPING BEYOND THE LINES

“And that means, inescapably, that we will measure our progress toward a truly integral orientation based precisely on our capacity to include, synthesize, and, integrate all twelve of those important approaches.” (Wilber, 1998. p. 44). Wilber was speaking here of psychology’s inability to look beyond narrow conceptualizations of particular bodies of thought to create an integrated understanding of consciousness. A new millennium has brought greater emphasis on inter- disciplinary approaches to study. Still, there remains a territorialism that defies comprehension when we recognize that this inhibits our abilities to support those in difficulty.

The validation of this work comes from within- how will I be able to adjust the way I am in the world to reflect the knowledge I have gained. In what ways have the ‘wholes’ (Sela- Smith, 2002) of my understanding changed to incorporate the new, deeper view I have of the ways my ‘tacit knowledge’ was only partially true. The validation goes beyond my creative synthesis of the bodies of knowledge I have examined to come to the conclusion that, indeed, there was a many layered expression of spiritual questioning present in my personal writing- even as I turned my head the other way.

The validation comes in the way I will carry this work further, and deeper, as I sit in my therapist’s chair next to those who find themselves in difficulty. Will I be able to hear the yearnings of others to connect to something greater than themselves? Even as others push against the stuff that is of the human spirit, will I be ready to invite them into a

conversation that explores their uncertainty (expressed with assuredness)? Will I be able to extend that invitation with openness and generosity, without expectation or judgement?

Beyond my own felt sense of satisfaction as I listen to others' questioning, and hear it openly, I offer my findings to others who work in the helping professions. The ability to articulate my deepened, and profoundly felt, understanding of the pain-filled language of spiritual questioning allows me to extend past the boundaries of my own experience in a way that will, I hope, land in the hands of those who are able to hear and walk with those who need to heal. I am hopeful that psychologists, counsellors, social workers, physicians, and all others who are in a position to be of help to individuals in a spiritual morass will listen. It is my wish that those who act as guides to troubled souls will be able to break free of our culturally-bound imposition of silence regarding things spiritual, and engage in conversation that welcomes the spirit. The true validation of this work depends on the impact it has on those seeking a place to heal.

Language that is used daily in our society tends to confuse the role of religion with the meaning of spirituality. (This was certainly my own internal experience for many years, and one that was validated by popular western culture.) We spin words to represent a particular meaning; meaning that may, or may not, agree with a dictionary definition. This makes it all the more confusing for those in search of, or in need of, a spiritual connection to access the previously mainstream and traditional methods, religion, community, etc. Wherever we turn, whatever literature we turn to, there is a proclamation that uses language that we may find confusing or interpret differently from its original intent. The professions that would seem most open to this discussion are those that truly

engage in exploration of the whole person. I will turn to the premises of existential psychology, pastoral care and counselling and arts therapy to highlight the applicability of my study to the work of the helping professions.

It has been my experience that when we bring the notion of spirituality into our daily life as a topic, it is generally misunderstood and denigrated as rules based on religious thought. Any large, popular bookstore I choose to walk into will tempt my intellect with titles such as: *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, and *In Defense of Atheism: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism & Islam*. These books abound, pulling us in many directions, each proclaiming their version of “right living”, “right relationship” and “correct language”. They all offer world views that compete with each other and confuse the souls of those they aspire to support. They use the language that we ascribe to a religious domain in a way that obscures the issues at hand and creates emotional furor within us, even as they are on the way to creating their own new religion.

The language of religion is being challenged by liberation theologians, and in the mainstream by such notable authors as Bishop Spong and Gretta Vosper. They challenge the teachings of the traditional Christian church that holds the scriptures up to be the ‘word of god’. The intention of these authors is to invite us to see teachings of faith from the perspective of what is relevant from the essence of the wisdom literature, as it pertains to the world, and to our lives, in the here and now.

The religious debate in our time results rather from the exploding new horizons of learning that have reshaped our perceptions of reality, coupled with a new biblical scholarship that previously had not been allowed to escape the academy for that it might erode the confidence of the people who sit in the pews.

(Spong, 2007, p. 13)

The word 'religion' itself, can be defined from several perspectives. General definitions will refer to "...a set of tenets and practices, often centered upon specific supernatural and moral claims about reality, the cosmos, and human nature, and often codified as prayer, ritual, or religious law." (Wikipedia, p.1). This definition is most often an accepted one, the one that most people would conjure when they encounter the word 'religion'. Inherent in that definition is the underlying understanding that people who follow a particular form of religious thought, believe in the supernatural, and that they must conform to prescribed moral behaviour. This is the first premise that people reject when they consider religion as a spiritual guide. (Vosper, p.2).

While people may experience a sense of awe and wonder at what nature has produced (that which Dawkins refers to as Einsteinian religion {p. 15}), many are loathe to refer to this as a religious experience. They are afraid at the unscientific sound of that phrase. We are mandated in this society to adhere to the scientific method, or put another way- to follow the tenets of the god of science.

The words spiritual and religious have been used interchangeably in our society. This too is an important aspect to consider when discussing religion, language and spiritual seeking. The word 'religion' has taken on the connotation of a practice that is rote and mechanistic (Vosper, p. 194). We have ascribed to the spiritual realm an almost romantic sense of personal fulfillment of a quest. Because, in many instances it has been cemented in our public consciousness to the idea of religion, it too seems like an implausible notion.

These are important considerations as I look at the ways that my work may impact people who work in helping professions: psychologists, therapists, pastoral care- givers, social workers, etc. For this to attain a truly integral status, it is important to remember that in our general society, the idea of spirituality is misunderstood. It is a salient aspect of the discussion about how my realizations can make their way into the annals of psychology and therapeutic processes. If we are afraid to even say the words, to even name the feelings of despair at the sensation of being disconnected as the stuff of spiritual yearning, how do we bridge that gap?

Hoffman, et al. (2008) give a comprehensive précis of the meaning of ‘self’ in postmodern psychology. They situate the importance of personal myth in the process of constructing a view of the self that makes sense of the surrounding world, “Myths also have an integrative capacity; they can serve as a point to integrate the experienced self with the socially constructed, interpersonal, and even spiritual aspects of the self in a centered manner.” (p. 156). This is practically a summary of the inner experience I have described throughout this writing. My personal writing has been reflective of the self in its doubt. My personal myth was one of anger and question, and came to integrate a more fully cognisant perspective of self, including a spiritual self, as I allowed myself to enter the realm of big questions. Hoffman, et al. (2008) go on to state,

Existential thought has maintained a tenuous relationship with religion; sometimes collaborative while at other times antagonistic (Hoffman, 2008b). In essence, existentialism is definitively neutral in its stance on religion.

By using the concepts of awe and mystery as the basis for spirituality in existential thought, a broader framework is established for working with a variety of belief systems. However, it is important for existential thought

to engage with the religious and spiritual dimensions in a manner respectful of the client's beliefs.

(p. 165)

It is evident that existential thought is able to be open to the grappling with questions of spirituality, particularly when they are articulated in the language of myth and metaphor. Therapists working within this theoretical framework might benefit from hearing my experience of creating an angry stance with language that was saturated with spiritual questions. The intention is to broaden the way we hear language that seems to be putting a hand up, so that creative ways of inviting exploration can be offered.

Hillman (1983) contradicts himself at times, regarding his stance on spirituality.

However, he is clear on the idea that creativity in image-making is akin to "soul-making".

More specifically, the act of soul-making is imagining, since images are the psyche, its stuff, and its perspective. Crafting images- such as discussed below in regard to therapy- is thus an equivalent to soul-making. This crafting can take place in the concrete modes of the artisan, a work of the hands, and with the morality of hands. And, it can take place in sophisticated elaborations of reflection, religion, relationships, social action, so long as these activities are imagined from the perspective of soul, soul as uppermost concern.

(p. 38)

Hillman recognizes the need to engage creatively with the raw material of the soul as the paint or clay or any other media to be formed into metaphor; a way in which we can articulate our personal myths and see the universal archetypes contained therein.

In *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy*, Froma Walsh (2003) opens by saying, 'At times of crisis and adversity, spiritual beliefs and practices have fostered resilience and

recovery from loss, trauma, and suffering.” (p. 3). This is a social work or systems perspective that adopts the stance that addressing and working with the spiritual beliefs of a group and understanding of how that can change the course of a therapeutic outcome. This addresses an aspect of the therapeutic process that is important to me because of my experience that was expressed as angry and venomous metaphor, “Unchanged- the steeples and the cesspools.” (June, 1976) The system/ religious community in which I was raised is one that could be classified as “sick religion” (Hanna, et al. 2003), and this heightens the passion I feel about bringing a new layer of awareness to the issue of how spirituality may show up in counselling. In a systemic approach, it may be more obvious to address the issue of spirituality if the group or family expresses a belief system or religious affiliation. Even when that is not an over presentation, it could be highly facilitative if the therapist is able to hear any subtle questions of yearning. It is of utmost importance, too, to be able to discern the symptoms of a fused, closed system that might be classified as a “sick religion”.

Barrett (2003), expresses this in no uncertain terms, “ The healing from trauma is a quest for spirituality. This quest reflects a deep need for meaning and value.” (p. 195). She goes on to describe a model that incorporates spirituality consciously into the therapeutic process. It is based on the assertion that, “When someone is abused, whether a child or an adult, by someone who is in a position of power over him or her and to whom he or she is attached, the result is a traumatic interruption on many levels but particularly on the level of spirit.” (p. 196). Again, the experience of trauma being self- suppressed in the guise of hate and anger would be a valuable addition to an already rich body of understanding of the quest for spirituality in the marginalized population.

It should be somewhat clear that welcoming the spiritual is already an established practice in the role of pastoral counsellors. VanKatwyk (2003) provides us with this definition of spiritual care, “Spiritual care is, therefore, primarily a practice of listening and learning to relate to another’s personal sense of his or her special place in the world and the larger universe.” (p. 29). To this end, my experience of pushing against the words that held the pain I had fused in my incomplete, or misrepresented whole, with the idea of spirituality is good practice: Practice at hearing the range of language, the diversity of meaning in the words of spiritual questioning.

Gibson (2004) has devised a model of spiritual maturity that is less comprehensive than Fowler’s (1981) stages of faith, and is geared to evaluate spiritual maturity in an exclusively Christian relationship. These are based on critique of Kohlberg’s (1974) theory of moral development and can be expanded to encompass those outside of the Christian community. It is a tool that is meant to help therapists and those in ministry to assess spiritual development. This may be indicative of openness to the presenting range of spiritual possibilities. Gibson asserts,

Churches must not neglect reaching out to and ministering to individuals at Preconventional and Conventional levels of spiritual maturity, but they must also consciously strive to foster an environment whereby their members can achieve a Postconventional level of development. This means not only speaking to people of heaven and hell, this means not only providing godly examples and models for people to follow, but this also means encouraging disequilibrium through explorative conversations whereby internalization of principles can truly take place.

(p. 303)

I feel it would be important for those using Gibson's model to be reminded that an individual may have highly developed sense of moral reasoning and STILL be angry at the universe. My learning from this project would say that it is good to recognize each person's developmental level, so that we can reach people where they are, and also, that where they are isn't necessarily immediately obvious from the outside. Further, it is worth noting, as per the above discussion, that many people within our larger community are unimpressed by the idea of 'Christian Therapy'. With our belief in the sacredness of neutrality, many people reject the possibility that these findings may have validity beyond a set population. It is important, therefore to present Gibson's work in an environment that is open and welcoming and does, as he suggests, provide opportunity for true exploration.

Poll and Smith (2003) discuss the development of a spiritual identity. They identify the stages as pre-awareness, awakening, recognition and integration. (p. 136). They do not recognize the possibility of negative spiritual experiences that potentially way- lay our development in this realm, as was my experience evidenced in my earlier writing. They do, however, suggest that further work should be done to understand the experiences of changing and growing spiritual identity, "Narrative approaches may be particularly useful for exploring how individuals experience the processes and changes in their spiritual identities." (p. 140).

VanKatwyk (2003) describes the story- telling and myth- making aspects of our experience as highly important.

We are shaped by the marker events of our lives, some developmental, others unexpected, sometimes catastrophic, events. To honor the sacred in a person's life is to attend to these family the personal stories. These are the sacred scriptures found in diaries, saved letters, special objects, and photo albums recording significant times and places in one's personal and family history.

(p. 15)

To think of my poems as sacred texts seems blasphemous to me. Yet, the tone VanKatwyk uses here brings the sacred into the every day. To think of my writing this way injects hope that it will be read as meaningful to the way in which we can sit with the sacred metaphors that others bring us. To understand that personal stories hold each person's unique brand of questioning is the point here. We must also be aware that these are distinctive expressions of each person's inimitable experience. As such, the language may take many different forms- some recognizable as holding spiritual content and some that seems to be much the opposite. It is in our openness to whatever shape each individual's query comes that we can welcome the questions and guide the exploration.

It is my belief, and is reflected in the way that I work with others, that the creative process facilitates all of the ways that different bodies of professionals can work with the questions of the spirit. While few around us name the spiritual as that in our culture, the expressive arts can take us beyond ordinary language, into the realm of the imaginal- the body- felt sense of the here and now. The idea of heuristic self- study, guided by the form of delving through the arts appeals to me as a therapeutic model. It is a natural fit: expression of our inner- most, sometimes pre- verbal tacit knowledge via the conduit of the body- generated creativity.

The marriage of expressive arts theory and counselling of any ilk promises to be a long and fruitful relationship. This is not a new idea. However, welcoming spiritual questioning, in whatever guise it arrives, changes the flavour to one far more complex that has the promise of yielding an intoxicating pot of soup. I appreciate the way that Allen (1995) speaks of the deep soul healing properties of art, "...This sort of professionalism robs art of one of its most potent properties, the ability to dissolve boundaries and reveal our interconnectedness with one another, as well as reveal the dignity of our uniqueness." (p. xvi).

"The liminal state is characterized by an acceptance of pain and suffering...In this vulnerable state, the individual is capable of receiving wisdom, a "deep knowledge" that comes from an awareness of one's limitations." (Levine, S. 1992, p. 50). Expressive arts provides the container- a safe and nurturing environment, to explore the vulnerable edges of the liminal state. This is a place that our deepest fears and greatest desires about the interconnectedness of all things can be expressed and deeply explored. It is in this way that this process supports the work of other

professionals who are able to invite the spiritual realm into their work places. They have the capacity to support the re- integrative process of weaving the disenfranchised aspects of an individual's parts through the creation of imaginative representations, metaphors for the felt but unseen. As Levine (1992) tells us, "These metaphors or archetypes are multivocal; they bring together body and spirit in a felt and imagined unity." (p. 50).

As I learn to recognize the hidden language of spirituality, and the questioning that has the potential to inspire true expansiveness, I have a deep and ardent wish that this model

will grow itself bigger. As stated earlier, this is not the place to propose new theories or models, only to reiterate that there is enormous potential in working in an interdisciplinary collaborative and intermodal manner. There is possibility for a method that can be the sub- structure that supports any vision of healing and development. It requires only that we truly hear those in difficulty and provide the sacred space to open up the questions with gentle creativity.

“And so there is our agenda: Let us take the last step and also reintroduce the eye of contemplation, which, as a scientific and repeatable methodology, discloses soul and spirit.” (Wilber, 1993. P. 64).

CHAPTER EIGHT

REFLECTIONS: HOW I PRAY

I pray with my eyes open.

Or sometimes closed.

I do not invoke a god whom I beseech. I do not pray to a god at all. I listen, I speak, I laugh and I cry- those are my prayers. My experience of the profound is the answer to my prayers. It is the reminder that there is a realm much bigger than our human understanding, and it includes our humanness.

I have travelled these pages with joy, my energy and vitality growing even as my body aches from the effort of sitting hour on end to type my words. My passion and ardour have expanded with the delight of surprise. This has been a journey to the profound for me. One on which I have embarked willingly. This path has led me to a resting place. I believe it is 'home': the place to which I will return each time I follow another trail into the unknown. Because, this undertaking has opened up many new, possible roads- each one promising a satisfying meal for the senses and greater depth of knowledge and feeling.

This body of work is the culmination of delving into the depths of my soul, but it is not the end. It is, rather, the stepping off point into a new way of being with, and traveling through the next chapters. It is truly 'nice' that I have enjoyed this part so much- it hasn't all been easy. In the past year I have written many poems while in the midst of turmoil.

At times it felt, very much like I was standing on my head at the bottom of the ocean.

In June, 2009, I wrote:
I meet the edges of the universe
With my heart mind.
At the intersection of profound
And banal.
The moment that explodes
Into the next,
And the next.
Inhale the fragrance of humanity
Dancing the song divine.
Exhale on the wave-
Oceans of the living rhythms.

Pulsing. Expanding the space,
Erasing the borders
Between thee and me.

Helix in constant motion-
Eternal energy
You breathe me-
Whole. And a part
Of the whole.

I step into the wholeness of
What you are,
Through the door
That is the wholeness of me.

As I started this project, I had an idea of what I might find. In the best way that I was able, I ‘bracketed’ that idea. I put it aside so that I could approach the body of my personal writing with a Zen mind- open and allowing newness to prevail. I was unsure that I would be successful at the bracketing part. I didn’t have faith that I could come to this with strict a phenomenological scientific approach. This is, after all, MY self, and MY writing.

I anticipated that the phenomena would be there that indicate that I had been lost in the ‘dark night of the soul’, even though I hadn’t read it like that before. Having looked at my writing previously, through a different lens, I knew that there was a great deal of angry expression. I hadn’t looked at it from a developmental spiritual perspective, or from a spiritual one at all. I imagined that I would find the language I used expressive of spirituality, but wasn’t sure of the form it would take.

As I wandered through the stages of initial engagement, and immersion (Sela- Smith, 2002), I allowed the question to come to me, and also found the frame that could carry this work forward. This was not only a mental exercise. This was a process of connecting my body- mind, and allowing my spiritual being to be the conduit that allowed each to speak.

I have reiterated over and over in this writing that I am not a linear thinker. The next three phases of Sela- Smith’s (2002) model, though, seem to be cyclical for me. The periods of incubation, illumination, and explication seemed to unfold on various levels at different times. I would let go of the immersion to go ‘do my life’ and find that some piece had crystallized for me, and more than that- I could put it into a larger context. This

sequence was repetitive until I found I was actually integrating the ideas, theories and language into a new 'whole' that made sense of my old ways of being in a new world. This process would come as a sudden flash of cognition that held a quote or idea from an author, a quote that had pertinent information for me on the way I could look at the language of my writing as spiritual questioning. This would be followed by an increased awareness that my inner and outer lives were more congruent and had expanded to include a greater range of possibilities.

A solid example of this was when I tripped over the Motherpath (Rose, 1987). I had been considering the ways in which the myths of my youth had infiltrated their way into my language and even, my life. I left this alone to go clean my kitchen and found the cards under a pile of papers. Having pulled the card of Dinah first, from the deck, I suddenly saw the ways in which she had held me and my "dirty goddess" (Pinkola Estes, 1993. pp. 362- 364). And the tacit knowledge of my former self, as an angry and subservient woman, melted into the fullness of mother- a new whole that smoothed the edges of pain and distrust into soft, ripe love.

And here I will end. With another poem; one that I wrote as I pulled myself along that Motherpath (Rose, 1987), feeling each pebble along the way- with the 'souls of my feet'.

February 7/10

Wearing my Mothers' Sandals

I am wearing their genes.

They look faded and torn,

And don't fit very well- I'm smaller than they were.

But when I pull them on

I know they are mine.

Breath; and I can smell the eucalyptus,

The ocean the sand.

Step; and I feel the weight shift as if I am

wearing their sandals, walking the desert length-

Looking for home.

I have yearned,

It seems for eons,

To don their robes, and bathe in their scented oils.

My heart has ached, my body torn

waiting to feel their touch.

Now, I find, I am their touch,

Their heart and soul

Their myth.

My journey has taken me through wasteland

And pain born of their wombs.
I have wandered to the depths of Self
And found them there,
Within.
All the time
I find. I am their touch,
Their heart and soul
Their myth.

I am wearing my mothers' sandals,
Their genes fit me well enough, except at the knees.
I will walk in them until they fray at the seams
And I wear through the souls of my feet.

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Appendices

Appendix A: writing samples- selected by date. I selected writings from as many different eras of my adulthood as was feasible due to availability.

Appendix B: table showing themes that some of the language in my writing represents.

Appendix C: sample of questions I asked myself in dialogue with my writing samples.

Appendix A: Writing Samples

June, 1976

-1-

Through a Dirty Window

The sun bleached hills of the ancients

Spread across distant time.

Unchanged by crystal white stone.

Unchanged - the harlots and the lovers.

Unchanged - the wind through the trees and open windows.

Unchanged - the steeples and the cesspools.

UNCHANGED.

July 1/76: "I'm a stranger to myself. I don't understand the way I think anymore,"

July 13/ 76:

My mind is turning,

Fast, Fast, Fast-

Then, slow again.

I hear every sound,

And my imagination amplifies it.

And every emotion?

My head could burst with fullness.

April 14/ 86

-2-

Spring Thoughts

Spring.

Through the long, solemn winter's

Freeze, we've been separated

From our earth,

Wrapped by the many layers of our lives.

Minds open,

And thoughts, freeze dried like coffee by the long, cold night,

Thaw into pools of fantasy.

Tentative beams of sun warmth

Pierce the layers of ice.

Still, a thin band of crystal

Remains.

Protection from a flood.

Slowly, with cocoon- like intensity,

We unfold, building to the scorch of oncoming July.

The world is flat!

There is no texture in the things I see and feel.

The colours are sharper; but sometimes fade to black and white.

Although the skies are clearer, the water's calmer, the black ripples are deeper.

Dreams of a still forest disrupted by wakefulness and

The full realization that dreams end abruptly,

Sometimes violently.

We can't live our dreams, we live our lives.

I fade in and out of my life.

One day I'll fade out too far. My substance will be gone,

No restoration possible.

I am an appendage

Attached to the periphery of the lives that surround me.

Appendages can be severed.

We can live without them.

The good feelings

The few good moments

Feel so contrived;

-3- (cont)

At the end of the script,

The moment ends.

Too much work being less sad.

Violent pictures crowd my mind. Blood runs to obliterate them.

Sometimes the sun shines.

Sometimes Christmas lights sparkle.

Sometimes the fire burns brightly.

December/ 90

-4-

The snow sparkles

In the pale sun of early winter.

Muted neutrals are the domain of the prairies.

Each colour vivid and robust, painted with a palette of snow-subdued colours.

Still clinging to life of the summer past,

Bales of hay give the snow a gold hue,

And the pale blue sky looks as though it has been washed and dried many times

To give a faded effect.

I fill my lungs with the scent of life -

Each breath holds the earth and the stars

And leaves me gasping for more.

I drive along the road

And I am in awe of these feelings of peacefulness.

Some days are like that. When I least expect it life fills me, or I am filled with the world,
and I believe, however briefly, that I have discovered the will of the gods.

Harmony prevails.

December 26/ 90

-5-

Let me hold you in my eyes,
For your image warms my soul.
I am in need of warming spirit,
As my core is growing cold.

Let me draw a breath with you,
I'm sure your air is pure.
I want desperately to feel,
For my hands are growing numb.

Haunting pictures hold me
In a frozen, bitter wasteland.
I need to thaw my wandering gaze
For I fear an endless winter.

April 29/ 91

-6-

Memory

I'm assaulted with visual acuity,
Piercing pictures that skewer my brain.
Raped! By the brutality of memories,
My mind lays naked
To the blows of emptiness.

A great void spills over
Blackening all,
That I might not see-
The tender babe
In brutal hands.

June 10/91

-7-

Indigo Dreams

Indigo dreams

Fill my sleepless nights,

Inky sketches are etched

Into my mind.

The blue-black approach

Of a thunderstorm

Blots out all other images,

Faceless forms come to life

Their dancing lines

Weave themselves from my pen,

Their steps flow freely in blue.

I watch from a distance,

As the dancers zigzag their way

Across my brow,

Leaving the faintest trace of blueness

On the inside of my eyes.

April/ 94

-8-

Prayer of the Nonbeliever

*Release from the torture
You have chosen as my fate.
Redeem me from my sins
Too heavy to be borne.
Reveal yourself to me
I am waiting to be found.
Reach me with your arms
That stretch the world around.*

*I am a nonbeliever
But I know that you exist.
I am without religion
But I know right and wrong.
I am ever- changing
Looking for a face.
I have forever wandered
Searching for some place.
Tell me you are sorry
That I may accept you now.*

-8- (cont)

*Show me that you're lonely
And I'll take you in my hand.
Say that you are hungry
I'll feed you of my bread.
I am a nonbeliever
And I long to feel you near.*

Feb. 16/02

-9-

The sun

Dries the tears

From my skin-

Imprints of my life.

Burning their memory

Of pain into each pore,

Each cell of my being.

The night drifts over me.

Etching new lines

Across my brow. Each one a story

I relive, as I grasp for the light of dawn.

Day comes in an explosion.

Sun. Morning sun.

Returns the kiss

Upon my lips.

Each moment a journey

That carries me closer to the fading light.

Every ray fuels the fire

That keeps the dark away.

April 2/05

-10-

Sodom and Gomorrah

Daughter of Sodom

Consort to Gomorrah

I walk through my life wanting to look back.

I've been told - never to look back.

And I live in fear

Of what is there behind me.

Should I tremble at what is there?

Or should I quake at the thought of

'He who tells me'?

Is this god who rules my destiny

Powerful unto this day?

Or shapes my fate by reason of his foulness of past deeds.

The only salt that will encase me

Is from the tears I shed each day,

As I walk away never turning.

I become less afraid with each step on the road

And turn

And shatter the pillars of salt with telling

Dec 6/ 07

-11-

My Self- on the page

*To experience light is to know the dark.
To feel harmony is to fight the turbulent waters
Of our lives.
So, to know connection,
Must I first know the despairing depths of loneliness?*

*I capture the memories of my journey,
Not in photographs,
Or even in the words on this page.
But in the lines etched on my soul
I am branded.*

*I wear the tatters of my life
Like a threadbare coat.
It cannot cover me all at once -
Either my elbows stick out
Or the piece of skin below my left ankle.*

*I seek to weave the disparate aspects of my SELF.
To mend the holes.
Time pokes through
Here and there, where the fabric is pulled thin.
And I find the parts incompatible.*

July 10/08

-12-

The Process

The Body

The tears are recycled,

Water the deeds of past lives.

Breath fills all the nooks and crannies

Prying the story from each cell.

The words fall on the floor,

Flung from the body,

Shaken loose by the practice.

They lie at my feet

As I stand in the strength I want to live.

Each orifice, each biological function

Contributes to the stockpile,

Forming themselves into phrases

As they mutate at my feet.

The Mind

Shhh.

No place for you here.

-12- (cont)

*We are meant to be still,
And you invade me with thoughts mundane
And fantastic.*

*Mind's eye brings understanding.
A tribute to all who came before-
Ideas frothed into a cosmic soup,
That I swim through at my core.*

The Spirit

*We are here.
We are with you.
We love you.
Listen to us.
Are you listening yet?
Are you listening when you clench your jaw,
And set it against the world?
Do you see when we fill you with awe
Great and terrible-
And then allow grace to bow*

At your feet?

Damn- do I even have a choice?

The Poem

Toilet- receptacle

For all of the shit in my life.

Ha. Metaphor swirls around

The bowl, as I flush it away.

Awareness settles in

At the most mundane moments.

Washing floors, cleaning toilets

Driving kids.

The words filter the experience,

Sharpen the images,

And poetry is born.

Words are my life's blood,

They course through my veins.

They carry oxygenated ideas

To my brain.

My life is poetry,

From the awe-ful

-12- (cont)

To the bliss.

The words support my body,

My body supports my mind,

And spirit carries us all.

North End Girl

“If I were a rich man,

Ah beedle, beedle, beedle, beedle, beedle, beedle bum.

All day long I’d

Beedle, beedle bum,

If I were a wealthy man...”

Strains of Tevye’s song from *Fiddler on the Roof* shook the nooks and crannies of our house, and I knew dad was feeling good. I never knew what would have set him off at other times, but I knew that all was well when his baritone voice rolled through the house and even right out onto the lawn. This was a song that he was connected to, somewhere deep within his unconscious memory bank, as though the music took him back to the Eastern Polish neighborhood where he was born.

I never learned very much about life there, only that my dad and his brother were born in the same house. And that my dad was born in Poland, while Uncle Ben, born one year earlier was born in Russia. They arrived poor, lowly Jewish refugees sometime around 1927, and emigrated to Winnipeg where my *zaida*, a learned man, became a kosher butcher until he died early in 1957. I was named for him, as is the Jewish tradition. Happily, my mother refused to call me Yenta, which in that same tradition is the feminized version of Yankel – my grandfather’s name.

Picture *Fiddler on the Roof* peppered with the demands and conveniences of the mid-twentieth century and you will envision the community that burgeoned in North End Winnipeg. The conversations and gossiping I overheard, playing beneath my mother’s skirts, as a small child, echoed the scenes even before they were written. I heard young women described as “brazen hussies,” as if this were all one needed to know to affix a judgment to the one in question. I grasped snippets of conversation from the safety I created, a little world in which I fashioned teacups out of the silver paper from cigarette packs and chewing gum wrappers.

Growing up in North End Winnipeg in the sixties, I was blissfully unaware of the differences between “us” and the *goyim*. I went to Hebrew school, synagogue on the High Holidays and the

occasional Saturday service, usually for a Bar Mitzvah. There was an insular sense of community.

I kept that innocent sense of who I was in the world as far as my attachment to things Jewish went. I knew that it was good to be Jewish. We really did learn that we were the chosen people. God chose us above all others. Until the day that I meandered home from school, a spring day in 1967. Warmed by the sun, I walked along with my jacket tied around my waist. I lazily reached up to where there were lilacs growing over a fence. Wearing my school uniform tunic, with the royal blue Star of David crest proudly emblazoned on my chest, I passed a group of kids from another school. The boy in the group, who was roughly the same age as me, roughly started pushing me around. It was the first time I'd heard "dirty Jew". It made no sense to me. I couldn't understand who he was, what he wanted, or what I should do. I had no sense of the situation, and was sure he made some kind of huge mistake. His sister and her friend got tired of his play before too long, and told him to stop. Still, I was frozen in place by my confusion.

Even before that, my experience was determined within the incestuous, tightly bound community that was divided down the middle, like the *mehizza* separating the men from the women in our synagogue. As I grew I became aware of an invisible line that cut through the Salter Bridge. The North End being a ghetto of sorts for the less well-heeled of my brethren, the working-class slobs who heralded from the Trotskyite contingent of immigrant families. These were the families that came from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe. We drove cars bought at the second hand lot, and wore clothes passed down from one brother to another. I harboured a secret longing to live on the other side of the Salter Bridge, the South End, where my rich cousins lived. I wanted to wear their clothes, the newest fashions, and not be saddled with the creations my mother sewed for me, that usually itched at my skin in places I wasn't allowed to scratch. When we went to their homes for a family event, I envied their Barbie collections and pink fluffy bedclothes. Though I didn't really understand about the "line," I knew that it was wrong of me to covet these things. Sometimes I heard my parents fight about my mother's family, my father being angry at the show-off-y way they lived. And "Wasn't this good enough for her?" I don't remember how she responded. She probably placated him, trying to soothe his insecurities, as she always did.

The tension strained at the lanyards that kept me bound to the community. From within I felt struggle and shame at the peasant-like way I perceived our family's existence. I was embarrassed by my perception of North End, and its ties to the socialist movements and apparent lack of financial success. From the outside I felt judged. "Dirty Jew" would slap at my memory, and I began to feel the need to be un-Jewish.

I am reminded of the scene in "Fiddler" when it falls on Tevye to smooth the way for his daughter's marriage to a tailor - below the station of a girl so well raised, as I recall the day my husband, a *goy*, and I came to say we were getting married.

My *Baba* sat at our kitchen table. She was lumpy and grey. She sat and chewed at an imaginary object, as if this would ease some unspoken hunger. At times her bearing was regal which was incongruous with her shabby appearance. I had been told throughout my life that she had been a great beauty when she was young. I could never quite see it, but I guess it accounted for her sometimes prima donna act. She sat and listened. She didn't speak much English, but her insistent interruptions belied the fact that she understood very well. Each time my father was heading towards losing his temper, my *Baba* interrupted with a deceptively quiet voice. I understood her Jewish well enough to hear: "*Burach*, SHUT UP and give them your blessing."

Decades later, I saw and understood the threads that constituted the themes of my early years and how they wove themselves together into a cage that I sought to break free of. I came to understand how the patriarchal system, defined by religious piety, was the hiding place for evil. I came to view the cultural milieu that was my inheritance, as a demonic guard fraught with cutting edges and biting teeth. I lost the feel for even the appearance of warmth conveyed in the romance of "Fiddler." I blamed my pain and confusion on the ethnicity of my existence.

I remember all this now as I try to find my way on my spiritual journey; one that acknowledges the cultural scars that I bear, and is accepting of the strong lessons I learned.

October 8/09

-14-

On Being With the Dead and Dying

Or

Whispers to my Son in the Night

Ode to the love, my small child -

And to the pain- joy, laughter and grief

That your spark has endowed.

Your body breathed only

The essence of artificial life-

Man-made air forced through your tiny lungs

With masks and tubes.

רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם.

Breath of the divine

Grazed over the top of your head.

It met my lips,

As I memorized the feeling of your downy head

With my kiss.

I gave your cold, small body,
Purpling and bluish,
To the tender hearts of my young children.
Their hands reached out for you,
Cold against cold,
Souls aching in unison,
We chanted our pain.

Birthed into love,
Buried with love.
Your transitory encounter with this life -
The definition of pure love.

And still,
Your brief appearance on this plane,
Intersecting our lives,
And forever changing our experience of this worldly existence;
Brings purpose to our lives.
I have held, in my own hands,
The ephemeral-
The fleeting moment when life is given
And then, is gone.

-14- (cont)

One heart beating its fluttery rhythm,

Devoid of prana,

You have given me the gift of the deepest wisdom.

*The Hebrew text above translates as: And the spirit of god blew across the face of the water.

September 19/09

-15-

The Mists of Avalon

Tears veiled
By the mythic mists of Avalon,
Profess my love.
Like the lady of the sword
I offer salvation,
Solace in the deepest sanctuary of my heart.

I am touched by love.
I am shaped of love.
I inhale and exhale
On the breath of love.

I await my love.

I walk among the tombstones of those long departed
In search of the name.
I read the names and dates,
And wonder where you are.

-15- (cont)

The ground is hard and unrelenting.

As I long for the lake,

The sword of magical power

To cut a swath through this world

For my love.

Let us walk together into that foggy place.

In metaphor it stands

As the dwelling place of our union.

We are without solid ground,

Ethereal and fleeting.

I add to the vapours

With weeping for your being.

In the mists of Avalon

I am goddess-

Queen of my soul.

Curtain of haze opens wide enough to see

The starkness of the landscape of your soul.

I inflict pain even as I offer love.

The salve that soothes is also the cut-

There is no other cure.

You are my love

Appendix B: Table of Spiritual Themes

	Existentialism	Sin/ Ugliness	Nature	Awe
1	Unchanged	Cesspools	Sun bleached hills	steeple
	ancients		Wind through the trees	
	I'm a stranger to myself	My head could burst with fullness		
2	Separated from our earth		Winter's freeze	
			Beams of sun warmth pierce the layers of ice	Protection from a flood
3	We can't live our dreams, we live our lives	The world is flat	Dreams of a still forest	
	I fade in and out of my life	Appendages can be severed		Sometimes the fire burns brightly
4 (full of images of nature)			The snow sparkles in the pale sun of early winter	
	When I least expect it, life fills me		Muted neutrals	Each breath holds the earth and the stars
				I believe, however briefly, that I have discovered the will of the gods
5		My core is growing cold		Your image warms my soul
				I'm sure your air is pure
	I want desperately to feel	My hands are growing numb		

	I fear an endless winter			
6		Piercing pictures that skewer my brain		
	My mind lays naked to the blows of emptiness	raped		
	A great void	A great void		A great void
7		Fill my sleepless nights	The blue- black approach of a thunder cloud	
		Inky sketches		
	I watch from a distance			
8		Release me from the torture you have chosen as my fate		
		Redeem me from my sins		
				Reveal yourself to me
				Reach me with your arms
				I know that you exist
	I have forever wandered searching for a place	I am a non-believer		
9		Dries the tears from my skin- imprints of my life		

		Burning their memory		
		The night drifts over me etching new lines		Sun, morning sun, returns the kiss upon my lips
				Every ray fuels the fire that keeps the dark away
10		Daughter of Sodom, consort to Gomorrah		
		I live in fear		
		Is this god who rules my destiny powerful unto this day		
		Or shapes my fate by reason of his foulness of past deeds		
	Shatter the pillars of salt with telling			
11	Light/ dark			
	Harmony/ turbulence			

	Connection/ despair	Lines etched on my soul		
		I am branded		
		Tatters of my life, like a threadbare coat		
	I find the parts incompatible			
12				Breath fills all the nooks and crannies
	As I stand in the strength I want to live		Each biological function contributes	
				You invade me with thoughts mundane and fantastic
				Frothed into a cosmic soup
				We are here... and allow grace to bow at your feet
		Toilet- receptacle for all the shit in my life		
	Awareness.. at the most mundane			

	moments			
	Poetry is born	Words are my life's blood		Are you listening yet?
	My life is poetry			From the awe- ful to the bliss
13		Somewhere deep within his unconscious memory bank		
		affix judgement		
	The safety I created		Warmed by the sun	
			I reached up to where the lilacs were growing over the fence	
		Dirty Jew		
	Frozen in place by confusion			
		Incestuous, tightly bound community		
		I felt the struggle a shame		
		I blamed my pain and confusion on the ethnicity of		

		my existence		
14	On being with the dead and dying			
				וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם.
				Breath of the divine
	I gave your cold body	Cold against cold aching in unison		
	Your transitory encounter with this life			The definition of pure love
	Brings purpose to our lives			
	I have held... the ephemeral			
	You have given me the gift of the deepest wisdom			
15	Profess my love			Solace in the deepest sanctuary of my

				heart
	I am touched by love...			
		The starkness of the landscape of your soul		
		I inflict pain		
		The salve that soothes is also the cut		
		There is no other cure		
				You are my love

Appendix C: Images of spiritual questioning

- Direct biblical reference (particularly irreverent or seemingly sacrilegious.)
- Images of aloneness or separation
- Images of nature- spiritual inspiration
- Images of pain- psychic and physical (metaphor for psychic)
- Images of meaning- making : big picture questions
- Images of reverence