

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR:

Christine Elizabeth Welch

TITLE OF INTEGRATIVE STUDY:

COULD I HAVE THIS DANCE?

DEGREE:

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 2012

Permission is hereby granted to St. Stephen's College to reproduce single copies of this integrative study and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the integrative study, and except as herein before provided, neither the integrative study nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatsoever without the author's prior written permission.

Signature

Copyright © 2012 by Christine Welch
All rights reserved

ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

COULD I HAVE THIS DANCE?

by

Christine Elizabeth Welch

An Integrative Study submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Edmonton, Alberta
Convocation: November 5, 2012

This integrative study is dedicated to my mother, father and brother

“In death you continue to touch my life”

∞

FAITHFUL LOVER

The moon came to me last night
With a sweet question.
She said,
“The sun has been my faithful lover
For millions of years.
Whenever I offer my body to him
Brilliant light pours from his heart.
Thousands then notice my happiness
And delight in pointing
Toward my beauty.
Hafiz,
Is it true that our destiny
Is to turn into Light
Itself?”
And I replied,
Dear moon,
Now that your love is maturing,
We need to sit together
Close like this more often
So I might instruct you
How to become
Who you
Are!

—Hafiz

ABSTRACT

This integrative study is based on heuristic self-inquiry. Through storytelling I explore the significance of the journey to know God as one of spiritual awakening and reflect on what is understood about God at various stages in the journey.

Chapter One sets the stage for the integrative study. I share experiences that provide background to the story and explore the questions at the heart of my writing.

Chapter Two begins with a personal life review. The focus of the chapter is to provide a life span and literature review, recording the understandings about God that surfaced at various stages in my journey. I record mystical experiences, draw upon insights from journal entries throughout the years, from papers written at various phases of my journey, from conversations with Colin, my spiritual teacher, and from books on spirituality in both Western and Eastern traditions.

In Chapter Three authors Diarmuid O'Murchu and Gretta Vosper are interviewed. They are invited to share their journeys of faith. Each interview is recorded and open ended in nature. The commonalities and differences within each person's story are identified.

Chapter Four identifies common patterns that emerged from the personal life review, the interviews with the authors and the literature review. Insights gleaned from the integrative study are synthesized within this chapter and a summation is given.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this integrative study has been one of a divine dance with many partners along the way, to whom I want to express my deepest gratitude.

To Rick for his support during the early stages of my writing, for his encouragement to accept its invitation to the dance.

To Michael, for his words of wisdom and gentle reminder to seek the “simple within the complex.”

To Clair and Joyce for dancing with me through the process. For your wisdom and guidance along the way. And for the unique way you model the divine dance as a team.

To Donald, Fran and Margaret for the commitment and gifts you bring to your teaching and for the personal conversations that offered inspiration.

To authors, Diarmuid and Gretta, who accompanied me on the journey, for your insights and wisdom.

To family and friends for your words of support that would remind me to stay on the path.

To my parents, Bill and Norma, who were a guiding light on my journey.

To Juliette, for your gifts of creative expression, and for your willingness to share these pieces of art in 1999 prior to the birth of this integrative study.

To Stacey, editor and friend, for endless hours of partnering with me to bring my writing to its final stages. For your attention to detail and sense of humour along the way.

To my sister Kathy for your words of encouragement that would often come at the right time.

To Colin, spiritual teacher and friend, for your love, support and wisdom that continues to grace my life.

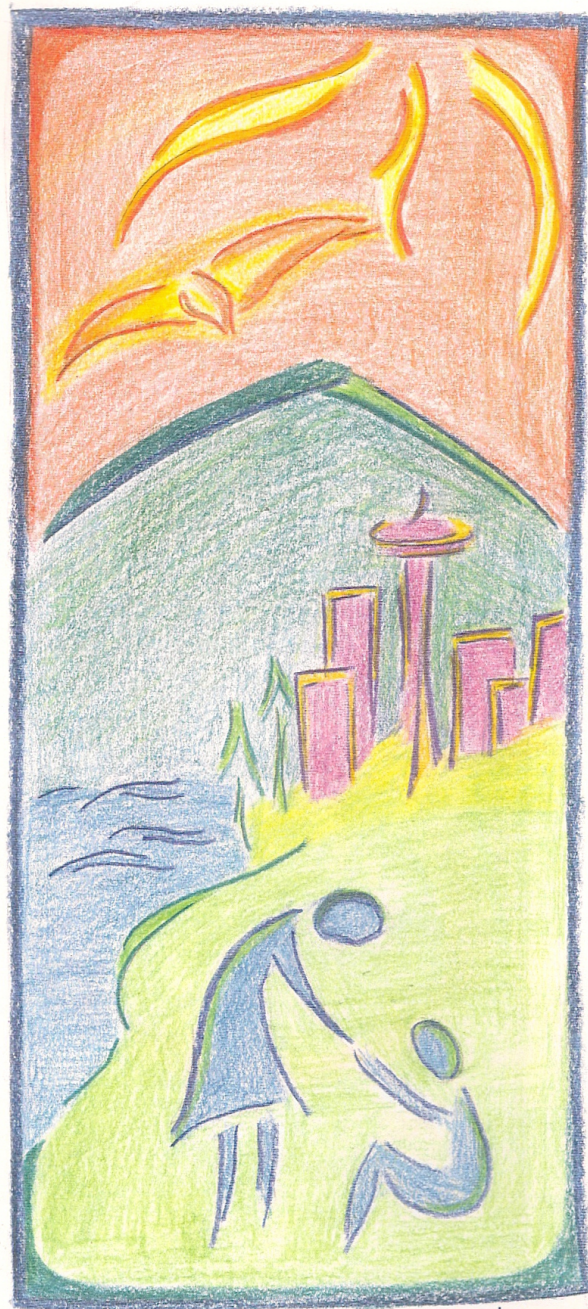
And to Ron, my beloved, your presence of love in my life has been an unending gift.

Christine

CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction	2
Setting The Stage: An Invitation To Dance	2
Behind the scenes	2
Setting the stage	3
The experience	4
The Purpose Behind Telling The Story	5
A memory comes to mind	5
An earlier memory surfaces	7
Questions about God	8
The invitation	10
An internal search	11
A Life Review Through Storytelling	12
Notes for Chapter One	14
Chapter Two: Life Review Through Storytelling	16
From Childhood to 1992	16
Family and faith background	16
First spiritual experience	18
Marriage	18
Church life	20
Children	20
College	22
A veil of darkness lifted	23
Call to ministry	24
A shift in understanding	25
The gift of thanks giving	26
1992–1995	27
Drifting apart	27
A search for meaning	28
The right book, the right time	29
A dark night of the soul	30
CAPPE training	31
The dance of intimacy	33
1995–2000	35
Catholic seminary	35
Conference on ecumenism	36
The second semester	37
A feeling of coming home	38

The final semester	40
Non-believers alike	41
A journey inward	42
St. Stephen's College	44
Seeds of hope	49
2001–2007	49
A place of dried bones	49
A time of self-discovery	50
Stages of spiritual development	52
A decline in health	54
A return to work	58
A return to studies	59
Is it conformation or confirmation?	61
More questions	66
Live divided no more	67
No God	69
Understanding kundalini	69
A common thread	71
The voice of the beloved	73
Notes for Chapter Two	76
Chapter Three: The Invitation	83
An ethical dilemma	83
Common patterns	84
Notes for Chapter Three	93
Chapter Four: The Dance	96
Common patterns	96
Know thyself	98
Falling away of belief	104
Dying to self	105
Spiritual awakening	107
The dance . . . in closing	116
Notes for Chapter Four	120
Bibliography	123



CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Setting The Stage: An Invitation To Dance

Behind the scenes

As I begin a feeling of anxiety wells up within. A memory from my childhood rushes to mind. I am about twelve years old and standing in a large gymnasium at Johnson Memorial School in Sarnia, Ontario where I have lived most of my early life. I am gathered with other young people my age for a square dance. The girls are on one side of the gymnasium, the boys on the other. The music is playing and I am standing with my back to the gymnasium wall waiting to be asked to dance. A torrent of tears flows as this memory surfaces.

The scene changes. A second memory floods in. This time I am in my mid forties. At St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, a small group of faculty members are interviewing me for the Master of Theological Studies program. I am asked: "If we told you we were radical in the way we view theology as a college, what would you say?" I intuitively know my answer to the question will determine whether the application to enter the program is successful or not, but fear soon washes away excitement as I doubt my place in this program. In reliving these memories it is as if I am looking down on a stage watching a live performance unfold. I know at the heart of my anxiety is fear.

Fear is no stranger. We have met many times over the past ten years of study. Like dust it has settled—a thick blanket on the path marking each footstep along the way. Yet the fear I am experiencing is not founded in truth.

I am like the young girl waiting to be asked to dance. I feel ill-equipped to accept the invitation. Life has danced me into places and experiences to where I am today. A romance as a young girl led to marriage at sixteen. A job as a mom and playschool teacher opened a door to college. The death of a father and brother and a painful divorce awakened a desire to leave my career and lead me to the Master's program at St. Stephen's.

I have come to understand at a deeper level this journey was not of my choosing. I am reminded of the image captured by Omar Khayyám:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.¹

The anxiety when I began writing subsides. A peace settles over me. It is as if the script was written and the journey unfolded as it would.

Setting the stage

It was early in the afternoon. At the Mandala class² in the library of the college Rick Laplante, director of the Master of Psychology and Spirituality program, had been invited to be the guest speaker for the afternoon. Although unable to recall the content of his lecture, I remember being struck by his gentle presence. Following his presentation, I wondered about changing my studies from theology to spirituality and made an appointment to meet him.

Entering Rick's office I was set at ease by his warm welcome. It became apparent a change in program was not the direction I should take. There was a shift that took place—an opening in our conversation. I told Rick of an experience a year earlier, which

seemed of spiritual significance at the time.

The experience

A year after marrying my second husband, we travelled to La Ronge, Saskatchewan. He was to be a contractor for a dental clinic, a two-month project. La Ronge was a First Nations community surrounded by beautiful lakes and forests. The people were friendly and their approach to daily living, laid back.

Life slowed down and so did we. On Sundays, instead of going to church, we would go for “cathedral walks” in the woods outside town. This sacred time for us seemed to awaken within a desire for deeper contemplation.

One day in a bathtub full of bubbles, I found myself reflecting on times I experienced God’s presence in my life. As memories surfaced, it was as if the story unfolded before me. I was filled with a sense of gratitude. These words entered my mind, “Why don’t you write a book?”

Taken by surprise I asked, “What would I call this book?” “*Could I Have This Dance?*” came the reply and the words to the song³ by Anne Murray:

Could I have this dance for the rest of my life?
Would you be my partner every night?
When we are together it feels so right,
Could I have this dance for the rest of my life?

Feeling overwhelmed with emotion, I thought, “That’s just what this journey with God has been, a love story.”

...

Rick leaned back in his chair and listened. There was a sacredness about the telling of the story. “You’ve no idea how many times students have told me experiences similar

to yours,” he said.⁴ I felt deep gratitude for Rick’s encouragement to tell the story of the experience and to listen to its invitation to dance.

The Purpose Behind Telling The Story

I have always been captivated by love stories and romance. Not the Harlequin-type romance, but stories where two people meet and fall deeply in love. There is something about the way love touches, transforms, and deepens one’s understanding of others that is a wonder and mystery to me.

What is it about the memory of that day in the bathtub that continues to sweep me away like a newfound lover? What does falling in love have to do with the journey to know God? I don’t know the answers to these questions—at least not in a way I am able to clearly articulate. I have an intuitive sense my love story, so to speak, is not unlike the stories of others—the experience of God, like falling in love, is universal.

Deep within is a desire to understand—not at head level but at heart level—what the journey to God is about. I am curious how the process of self-discovery and its connection to belief in God and how experiences from time of birth onward, including culture and family of origin, impact belief. Believing all journeys are of spiritual significance, I want to write in a way that can awaken an understanding about God not limited to, or bound by, dogma and doctrine.

A memory comes to mind

It was early Sunday morning. We had camped just north of the Redwoods in California where we had scattered my father’s ashes the week before. Near the end of his life, my father—who claimed to be an atheist—had said if there was a God, and he

wasn't certain there was, God lived in the Redwoods. Knowing his ashes were going to be scattered there seemed to bring him peace.

It had been two months since two family members had died, my father from cancer and my brother from AIDS. Although a difficult time for our family, there had been several gifts along the way. Travelling with my fiancé and mother to scatter my father's ashes in the Redwoods was one of those gifts.

As we prepared to pack up camp and make our way home I felt an urgency to go to church. I argued with this impulse as neither my fiancé nor mother were churchgoers, and we had planned to leave early that morning. The thought pressed heavy and I drove off looking for a church.

I slipped into the back pew of the small white church in the village. The minister was warm and friendly. During his message he brought a quilt, made by his wife, to the front of the church. He first spoke to the children. Pointing to each square, he told the story behind the quilt. I remember the sincerity of his message as he told the children how unique and special they were. Like the quilt, the world would not be complete nor as beautiful without them.

As the children left for Sunday school, the minister broadened his message. He continued to talk about God's love for all people. Pointing to the quilt once again, he noted how each person was an important member of the Body of Christ. It was refreshing to hear the inclusive way in which he spoke about God's love.

In closing he said, "There is one thing I feel sad about—atheists and homosexuals will never know what it will be like to be members of the Body of Christ." My heart sank.

Immediately, I knew why I felt prompted to go to church. I wrote the minister a letter and told him about the journey with my brother and father. Through their dying I had become aware that atheists and homosexuals were as much a part of the quilt as I was. With the death of my brother and father, I could no longer view God in the same way nor reconcile the experience of God with church doctrines and belief.

It was a dark night of the soul experience. No place felt like home, spiritually. I came close to resigning from the ministry.

An earlier memory surfaces

Two years prior, while working in the hospital one afternoon, I had a sudden intuition my career was going to change and become more spiritual in nature. This made little sense. I had been working in Edmonton as a Child Life Specialist in Pediatrics for over ten years and enjoyed my work. Serving also as a lay minister in a local faith community, I found my ministry in the congregation fulfilling. What could be more spiritual than the work I am doing? I prayed if my work were to change I would have a clear indication about the rightness of the move. I was separated from my first husband at the time and needed the income.

When I received the call my father and brother were dying, I took a leave and travelled to Ontario moving into the palliative care centre to stay with my father. My brother was transferred from Toronto to the same centre in the room across the hall. As we journeyed through this difficult time as a family, it felt like we had participated in a divine dance—each person equal partners in the dance. Sometimes we danced this sacred dance together, sometimes alone. In their dying my father and brother experienced

reconciliation, which provided healing for the whole family. My father rediscovered a belief in God. My brother, who was gay, died with dignity. As I met with the pastoral care worker who supported us as a family through this difficult part of our journey, I was inspired by the role she played and recalled the moment two years earlier when I had a sense my own work was going to change.

After scattering my father's ashes, I left my work at the hospital. I entered the CAPPE* program and started theological studies at a Catholic seminary. As a woman in ministry from a different faith, I came face to face with prejudice, or that is how I interpreted it. While sitting in the chapel at the college wondering if I should leave the college, a question occurred, "Have you ever been exclusive in your ministry with others?" I was taken aback. A second question followed, "Have you ever spoke about God to people who did not have the same belief you did?"

Suddenly, I realized the exclusion I was feeling at the college was the same exclusion others experienced when I spoke to those who did not share my belief about God. I knew the journey at the college was one I was to take.

Two years later I was accepted into the MTS program at St. Stephen's College, where I could openly explore the deeper questions of faith with which I had been struggling.

Questions about God

As far back as I remember I have wondered about God. As a child, the questions were simple. Who was God? Did he live in the sky? Why did God bless some people and

* CAPPE, The Canadian Association for Pastoral Practice and Education, is now CASC, The Canadian Association for Spiritual Care

not others? Was God's love limited to those who believed in him? I was certain with enough faith in God the answers would arise.

I carried this latter belief about God into adult life. Based on an understanding that God was a separate entity from me and from the universe, it supported dualistic thinking and promoted a patriarchal and hierarchal way of viewing the world and myself.

Following the death of my father and brother, there was a "falling away" of this concept of God. This led to an understanding about God more in harmony with the experiences of the Divine, encountered at various times in my journey.

At first the change in thinking felt chaotic, but over time it was actually freeing. Many of the questions I was struggling with had been there all along. I just hadn't recognized them; or if I had, I hadn't acknowledged them.

I was curious about what brought about these changes in thinking. Is there a necessary sequence to the process, and if so, what is it? How much of our understanding about God is shaped by self-discovery, culture, religious beliefs, and myriad life experiences?

I was even more curious about the Divine essence itself. Is an inner awareness of the Divine in all people—religious or not—present at birth? Is it woven within the fabric of our lives? Is there a way to speak of the Divine that is universal?

From those initial questions emerged other questions: Can the journey to know God be described in a way to assist spiritual seekers across all cultures and faiths? To what extent is the journey to know God synonymous with the process of spiritual awakening? Is there a necessary sequence to the process, and if so, what is it? Is there a common language regarding this process?

The invitation

It had been eight years from the time of the experience in the bathtub in La Ronge Saskatchewan—and when pen was put to paper. There was something about the experience that would not let me go. It fueled a passion to search for the answer to the questions about the journey to know God that I had been asking. *Could I Have This Dance?* felt like an invitation to look within for the answers, with no clear understanding as to how the process would unfold.

An unexpected trip had come up for Colin (my spiritual teacher) and myself to travel to an event. During this week I drafted the outline for the proposal. There was a sacredness about the time together. As we sat over wine during our evening meals and shared in deep discussion, it felt like communion and the breaking of bread. In reflection, I wondered if this is what Jesus and his disciples experienced together as he would meet with his beloved friends and they would speak of what was most pressing on their hearts.

The week together provided an opportunity for the questions to be explored. Colin pressed for me to look more deeply into the underlying issues directing my writing. At times it felt like I was looking for a needle in a haystack. Other times an excitement would surface suggesting there was something deep within that needed to be discovered. There was uncertainty of what I was looking to find. Under the rubble of the many questions emerged the following question at the heart of this integrative study. What is spiritual awakening in the journey to know God?

Looking back on the experience, I am reminded of the time when I was a young girl and had gathered rocks and piled them high on my dresser. On the walk the day before, each rock was unique and had a significant beauty all its own. Not one could be

discarded. The next morning while awakening, my eyes captured the beauty of a newly emerged butterfly from a cocoon that had been attached to a rock and gone unnoticed; its wings still moist.

An internal search

There was a sense I needed to come to a place of understanding the process of spiritual awakening in my own journey and then explore this phenomenon in the lives of others. Humanistic psychologist Clark Moustakas speaks of “self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery” in the process of heuristic inquiry. As he states, the “question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning and inspiration. . . . [The] primary task is to recognize whatever exists in consciousness as a fundamental awareness, to receive and accept it, and then dwell on its nature and possible meanings.”⁵

Moustakas’ description of an “internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience” gave voice to the process the integrative study would take, one that was “heuristic” in nature.⁶ When he spoke about the “cousin word of heuristics” as *eureka* and told the story of Archimedes’ “aha” moment while taking a bath, I was reminded of the experience in LaRonge that had prompted my writing.

As Moustakas describes, “the heuristic process requires a return to self, a recognition of self-awareness, and a valuing of one’s own experience. . . . In such an odyssey, I know little of the territory through which I must travel. But one thing is certain, the mystery summons me. . . .”⁷

Contemplating the question in light of the passion for this study, the words by Joyce Madsen from her recent article “Polishing A Presentation” speak to me: “You have

to share the experiences that feed your soul. If you don't have passion in your heart you can't feel the passion in another. When we speak from the heart others listen.”⁸ The topic is key. “The topic you choose must be one that you are passionate about. . . . Odds are, if [you] are asking the question so are others. . . . Reveal the times you experienced God—that will open the door for others.”⁹

A Life Review Through Storytelling

The filing cabinet was cleaned; old files discarded. The dark panelling removed and new dry wall hung. Walls freshly painted bright white. Acrylic paintings replaced old pictures on the wall. A plush new carpet was laid.

Although unplanned, the renovation of the office had set the stage; it had provided a clean, uplifting, and orderly environment in which I could begin writing. Symbolically, the dismantling of the old made way for the new.

As books were set on the shelf in the order read, each phase of the journey to know God had, in some way, lead to the next. Yet, as I briefly scan the journals, there was indication this journey may not have unfolded as I had initially thought.

In reading a passage by James Fowler in his book *Stages of Faith*, I am struck by its message—and, like the renovation, its timing. “I want to invite you to look with me at some of the many facets of this complex, mysterious phenomenon. It will have to be a personal book—personal for me as writer, personal for you as reader. . . . I will share experiences of my own and of others that gives us windows into the nature and workings of faith.”

He continues, “You will be invited as a partner in the communication experience,

to reflect on your own life and experiences. You will be addressed in ways which call you to look deeply into the patterns of trust and commitment that shape and sustain your life. You will be invited to relive your own pilgrimage in faith.”¹⁰

Fowler’s invitation gave voice to what I hoped the life review through storytelling would accomplish: an opportunity to describe the intimate dance of the Divine in a way that speaks of the journey to know God as universal.

...

In the next chapter the pilgrimage will begin. The focus of the chapter will be on providing a “life span” and “literature” review, recording the understandings about God that surfaced at various stages in the journey. Like cleaning through the filing cabinet this will require sorting through reams of research material—journals, books, theological papers, conversations with mentors, recorded experiences of a mystical nature—deciding what to keep and what to discard.

Notes for Chapter One

-
1. Omar Khayyám, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, trans. Edward FitzGerald [1859; repr. Edinburgh: London: T.N. Foulis, 1905; The Internet Archive <http://www.archive.org/details/rubaiyatfitzgera00omar>], LI; To place this insight, the Persian astronomer-poet Khayyám lived from 1048–1131 CE.
 2. *Spiritual Practice of Drawing Mandala*, course at St. Stephen's College, April 2001.
 3. Anne Murray, “Could I Have This Dance,” 1980 single written by Wayland Holyfield and Bob House, included in 1980 film *Urban Cowboy* and in album *Anne Murray's Greatest Hits* released November 1980.
 4. Pers. conversation with Rick Laplante, April 2001.
 5. Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications* [Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990], 11.
 6. Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, 9.
 7. Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research*, 1.
 8. Joyce Madsen, “Polishing a Presentation,” *Congregational News*, February 2009, 3.
 9. Joyce Madsen, “Polishing a Presentation,” 3.
 10. James Fowler, *Stages Of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* [1981; repr., Harperone, 1995], xii.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

—T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”
(the last of his Four Quartets)

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE REVIEW THROUGH STORYTELLING

From Childhood to 1992

From childhood to 1992 marked the first phase in my journey. It was a period, prior to reading spiritual books and attending theological school, when experiences of a spiritual nature played a pivotal role in my understanding of God. Early childhood memories are few. To provide some background I will depend on stories from family members with written permission for each of these stories to be shared.

As the story unfolds, I will share the experiences of spiritual significance at the time and the insights that surfaced with each experience.

Family and faith background

The eldest of five children, I was born in Timmins, Ontario on February 24, 1950. We had a strict upbringing. Dad was the head of the household and a strong authority figure; while Mom was a quiet and supportive presence within the home. Later in life, I realized Mom had been the strength behind the family—the glue that held the family together.

My parents were good providers and positive role models. Love of family came first; caring for those in need came second. They were not churchgoers themselves, but didn't stand in the way of their children attending. Later in life, I realized their negative feelings toward church and God had early beginnings in their own childhoods.

My father had been orphaned on a doorstep in Toronto as an infant. He was raised by loving foster parents who wanted to adopt him. Because the case around Dad's

abandonment was not resolved, he was not placed up for adoption.¹ His foster mother died when he was twelve years old. Given the law a child be raised by a two parent family, he was removed from the home. After a series of unsuccessful moves into foster care he was admitted to Reform School. Later in his life he spoke of the ill treatment in his foster care. Many of the families were Christian and “didn’t live what they preached.”² Dad joined the army at the age of sixteen and trained as a sniper. Although he never spoke of his life in the army, there was a sense he felt remorse for his actions. He often commented on the uselessness of war. He suffered throughout his life with manic depression, nightmares and vascular headaches.

Raised in Toronto in the Great Depression, Mom was the eldest of two children. Her parents were “loving” and “hard working.” She didn’t remember either attending church. She felt the reason for this was “they worked hard during the week and needed to sleep in on the weekend.”³ Mom recalled “being locked outside the door on a Sunday morning and sent off to church, while [her] mother returned to bed.” She seemed to have been able to reframe this story, as I remember this being a difficult memory for her when she told it several years ago. When I asked Mom what gave her life meaning as a young woman, she said: “My love for your father . . . family was what was important to your dad and I . . . I also loved nature—so did your dad . . . he used to love hunting and fishing.”⁴

According to Mom I was “the only one of five children who wanted to attend church.” I don’t remember much about church as a child, only that I really enjoyed going and would attend any faith community within walking distance. As a teen I was active in the youth group and enjoyed the Friday night gatherings with youth my own age.⁵

First spiritual experience

I was thirteen when I had my first spiritual experience. Having attended Confirmation Classes at a local Anglican Church, I was walking home from the last class, weeping as Dad had refused to give his consent. I remember coming to a familiar place on the road and being completely enveloped by a feeling of love I immediately knew was God. A flood gate had opened; time stood still. Although there were no audible words, I heard “He will change his mind.” Moved by the experience, I looked up and promised God I would be a missionary.

When I returned home my father asked to speak with me. His comments were brief and firm. He agreed to give his consent, but stated his opinion I was too young to make such a decision.

Looking back on the experience, I understood God then to be a separate entity. My theology was simple: God lived in the sky and in all churches. He loved me and all people. God was male and had the authority, similar to a judge. The love I felt did not carry the sense that God was one I needed to fear or please; there was a sense of peace and oneness.

Marriage

At sixteen, I married a young man very active in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (which would later become the Community of Christ Church in 2001). It was a difficult time in my journey. I was pregnant and lost the baby soon after we were married; I believed I had failed God. Dad was very disappointed. He became distant and withdrew his love, while Mom supported quietly in the background. Once we settled in after the wedding the relationship with my father was restored.

Marriage seemed to be a fit in so many ways. My husband was a gentle man whose love was unconditional. His family were churchgoing people and were supportive of our relationship—and I welcomed being in a family who was active in church.

During the early sixties in the life of the church, I remember the tension between faith traditions. Each church claimed to be the right one and ministers preached openly their preferred view from the pulpit. Although I enjoyed attending church I found this attitude repulsive. My husband's family hoped I would join. Resistant to the idea, I didn't see any purpose in joining another church and being baptized again, for I had already committed my life to God at my Confirmation. I asked for guidance with this decision and began to pray about it. Firm in my prayer, it went something like this: "If this is the church that I am to join, let there be a clear sign."

One Sunday as I sat on my own in church I was surrounded by the feeling I had come to know as God. I felt as if lifted off the pew. An inner sense I was to join the church accompanied the words, "All your questions will be answered. You will understand why in time." I remember thinking, as my husband and his family congratulated me on my decision, that joining the church had nothing to do with knowing God. A God who chose sides and supported one faith group over another made no sense.

Several years later, a woman deaconess in an Anglican church spoke at a World's Day of Prayer about changes that had taken place in her faith community. I recollected the experience I had that day on my own in the church. Although difficult to articulate, I had the sense of no separation between the Anglican Church and the church I attended: God was in both, and I was where I needed to be at that time in my journey.

Church life

My husband and I became very active in church life as a couple. He received a call to the ministry and we served together as a team both locally and regionally. It was a source of joy in our lives. In my early twenties, I seemed to have a heightened awareness of the presence of God. I had an inner knowing of things ahead of time—people I needed to contact, places I would eventually live. Such insights were often accompanied by a feeling of love and serenity.

One day working around the house I had a feeling I was to write three letters, one to my father and two to friends of the family. The pen flowed as I wrote about the love of God and my love for each of them. There was peace as I wrote. When I went to mail the letters these words came to mind, “You can give the letters to them when you see them.” I put the letters in my pocket and left for work.

Later that day I was in a serious car accident. As I lay in the hospital recovering, each of the men I had written visited me separately and I was able to give them the letters. Because the men did not attend church, and two were alcoholics, I thought God must be using me to share about his love.

Children

Prior to the accident my husband and I had applied for adoption. During my recovery we received a call about adopting a little girl. The circumstances around our daughter’s adoption caused us to wonder if there wasn’t a hand involved guiding her to our home. She had been in the adoption agency at our first visit. We lived outside the city where she was born and close to the hospital where she would need to make frequent

trips to the doctor. My husband, an ambulance driver, was comfortable with her medical history, and I was still off work recuperating from the accident. Although a small detail, our daughter arrived with a note from her foster mother saying she didn't like tomatoes, the only food my husband wouldn't eat. Her presence in our home and family brought immediate joy.

A year later I became pregnant with our second child. Because of a lengthy time on birth control pills I had become infertile. After several years of trying to become pregnant and many trips to the gynecologist, we had applied for adoption. When the pregnancy test came back positive, it contradicted another test that indicated I should not have been able to get pregnant.

When I held our son at the front of the church during his blessing there was a spirit of peace. The words "He has work to do" surfaced. At the time I thought this meant a call to the ministry. At this point in my writing I attend a Motocross event where my son is a participant. I prepare for bed the first night and ponder my decision to include this memory in the integrative study. He has not received a call to ministry and so I question its validity.

The next morning, while waiting for the first event to begin, a young woman who works with my son comes to me and says, "I want to tell you something about your son while he is not here. He is a person who is loved by everyone . . . whether he is at the track or at work. He is a man of fine character." The concern to include the story in my writing lifts.

College

When our children were young we had an opportunity to move west to Edmonton. After the move a door opened to attend college. I was hesitant returning to school, as I had found learning difficult and left school shortly after starting grade eleven. I found college uplifting and enjoyed having the opportunity to learn. The courses were experiential in nature. It seemed easy to integrate the learning with the “hands on” experience of working with children. What seemed to be important at the time was the feeling I was exactly where God wanted me. In an article for the church magazine *Restoration Witness*, I shared the following stories.

Following my younger child’s enrollment in school, I prayed more earnestly about God’s plans for my life. At the first college interview we were asked to meet at a day care centre. I arrived early so that I could spend some time in preparation. I went to what I thought was an empty room and walked in prayer, oblivious to my surroundings. When I turned there stood a child with outstretched arms. I never saw the child before, and yet as I stooped to pick her up I felt God’s Spirit penetrate my innermost being.⁶

One of my assignments was to give a presentation on the development of a child. On the day of the presentations, as I trembled through the reports that preceded mine, the Spirit spoke to my heart, “What about the spiritual development?” The text covered only the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development of the child. I knew that if I included the spiritual, presenting something not in the text, I would be suggesting that God needed to be a part of a child’s life to insure wholeness. With a sense of inadequacy I said, “Ok Lord, if you want me to share this I will, but I need your help.” No sooner had the prayer left my lips than a picture entered my mind: a bag full of marbles with a

drawstring pulled through the top. I immediately understood the bag as a symbol of the development of the child. The marbles were diamonds and represented the children: the drawstring, their spiritual development. I emphasized that the drawstring did not take away from the vital purpose of the bag or the preciousness of the marbles. While there were those who did not see things as I did, we could still communicate our support and common concerns. I marvelled at God's wisdom.⁷

I remember thinking afterwards, your value as a person did not depend upon your belief about God.

A veil of darkness lifted

One day during my second year of college, I was in the kitchen preparing for the Christmas holidays when a feeling of darkness surrounded me. My brother's name came to mind. As I prayed for him the darkness lifted. This happened several times over the day. The last time, a palpable feeling of death accompanied the experience. I prayed that if he was in trouble, he would call.

My brother had been estranged from the family for several years. As far as we knew he was dealing drugs and lived somewhere in Toronto. Although he and I were close, it had been two years since I had heard from him. That evening he called around ten o'clock, his voice hardly recognizable. With no explanation he said he needed to leave right away and come to Edmonton.

He arrived four days later. After a period of rest, he told the story of a drug deal gone bad, of wandering the streets not knowing where to turn, and of hearing the words "Call Chris." I thought his life had been spared as the result of intercessory prayer. My

understanding of the experience was linear in nature. My brother asked for help. God heard his plea, told me to pray—and I responded. I wondered about the people who prayed to God and were not helped. Left with more questions than answers, I pushed the questions into the back of my mind.

Call to ministry

In 1984 the governing body of the RDLS Church voted to accept women in the ministry. It was a very difficult phase in the life of the church. There was upheaval within the World church regarding the decision. Families and congregations were divided and many people left the faith. Soon after, I was driving on my way home from work. Insights surfaced from a place outside my understanding, followed by the words “You will preach about these insights in a sermon one day.” My immediate response: “Not me, I am happy to continue to support the church in the way I do now.”

Later that week the pastor made a visit to our home. He told me I had a call to the ministry of Priest and asked if I would accept the call. He had had an inner knowing of my call for some time, confirmed by other members of the ministry. (In the faith tradition, calls come through the pastor. Before the ordination takes place, a discernment process involves both the candidate who has received the call and the local congregation where the candidate will serve. The call is then voted upon by the congregation.)

At the time I believed the pastor’s visit to be a confirmation of the rightness of the call. I also remembered the promise to God as a youth and believed my call was in response to my desire to serve.

A shift in understanding

I was serving as a lay minister and working as a Child Life Specialist in a hospital where I had been hired after graduation. My daughter had taken ill and was admitted to the ward where I worked. Although her surgery was routine I decided to stay overnight and sleep in a cot at her bedside. As I prepared for bed the name of a family I had been working with that day came to mind. Their daughter was in the final stages of her life. The family's name came a second and third time, each time with a sense of urgency. I left to visit the family.

When I arrived on the unit a First Nations grandmother was crying in the hall. I was surprised to see her as she and her grandson were to leave early in the morning for the Yukon. Weeping, she approached me. She told me she was awaiting a call from the priest. Her grandson's fever had returned; she had left a message asking the priest to come and pray over him. I assured her the priest would come as soon as he could and continued down the hall to see the other family. Arriving in their room, I found the mom sitting quietly by the child as she wept. I became aware it was not this family I was to visit and excused myself.

I returned to where the grandmother was crying and bathing her grandson. His condition worsened and blisters began to form on his body because of the fever. The priest had not called; but she knew if a priest anointed her grandson he would be well. I realized why I was to visit. I shared with her I was an ordained priest in my tradition; although I was not able to anoint I could offer prayer. She said: "There is but one God and I prayed that a priest would come." I offered what seemed an ordinary prayer, spent a few moments with the family, and left the room deeply moved.

The next morning I went on the ward to see the family. The grandmother was smiling and pushing her grandson in the hall. The fever broke following the prayer; they were going home. “The doctors don’t understand it,” she said, “you and I know what happened, don’t we?” As I stooped to talk to the grandson, I had an immediate knowing “It was not my prayer that made him whole, but the faith of the grandmother.”

The experience confirmed what I had at some level understood—there is no separation between one faith and another. My prayer was unnecessary for the child’s healing: there was no need for intercession between the grandmother and God. This shift in understanding created spiritual unrest. I remember feeling alone in this understanding about God.

The gift of thanks giving

Cleaning house after Christmas, wondering what the New Year would bring, the following crossed my mind, “You will have a very difficult year.” The power behind these words caught me off guard and I sat down on a nearby chair. I remember asking, “How will I get through the year?” The answer followed, “Be thankful in all things.”

Within three months I felt like my world had fallen apart. My eldest brother was diagnosed with AIDS and my father with cancer. My younger brother who had moved from Toronto was charged with first degree murder. In the midst of the chaos I received a call from Dad. He asked if I had sent the children to school. There was fear in his voice. The RCMP had called to tell him my brother had agreed to testify against the drug dealer and there was a rumour the drug dealer would retaliate. I remembered the egg yoke dripping down my kitchen window that morning and felt gripped by fear. As I prayed

these words came to mind, “You can send your children to school they will be safe.”

Struggling, I offered words of thanksgiving. With each passing month gifts of grace became evident in ways I hadn’t imagined. My father and eldest brother, estranged from each other for many years, reconnected. My youngest brother, wrongfully charged with murder, spent eight months in jail and overcame his drug addiction before being acquitted.

At the end of the year I was thankful for so many things: the inner knowing ahead of time, the guidance to offer thanks, and the simple miracles that took place every day. The experience left me wondering about the connection between giving thanks and the miracles that happened.

Psalms 139 took on new meaning: “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for the darkness is as light to you.”⁸ A deeper awareness grew that God was in both the light and darkness of our lives. Nothing we could do would ever separate us from the love of God.

1992–1995

Drifting apart

As I stood watching my husband shave in the bathroom one morning, it was as if I stood on shore watching a sail boat drift away from the shoreline. I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach; the love I once had for him was no longer there. The reality of the distance between us became clear a year earlier. We had travelled to Hawaii to celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary; and as we spent time together, it felt as if we were

strangers.

What seemed to add to the pain was not being able to name when the falling away of my love for him began—and not knowing how to have those feelings return. There had been changes in our life I thought might have attributed to this feeling of estrangement. Our children had grown up and left the nest. As a couple our involvement together in church life and other activities had dwindled. Theologically speaking we appeared to be worlds apart. We struggled in our relationship to find common ground.

A search for meaning

Everything that held meaning was falling away. I was depressed and prayed God would somehow renew the love we once knew as a couple. Where was God? My prayers seemed to fall on deaf ears. I was drawn to reading spiritual books. If a writer's passage resonated with me I would underline and date the entry. Occasionally I would make notations to God somewhere on the page as if writing God a letter.

The first books I read, *The Helper*⁹ and *Light in My Darkest Night*¹⁰ by Catherine Marshall, felt like lifelines. She spoke candidly about her struggle to find God amidst life's challenges. Her courage to speak openly about her search for an elusive God offered hope. Her words "take from me lukewarmness. Give me Your own holy passion"¹¹ expressed my disconnection from God. I believed the distance I felt from God must somehow be connected to a lack of faith and a form of sin, and that finding God might also restore the relationship with my husband. A commonly spoken cliché of the day, "If you feel distant from God guess who's moved?" gave voice to what I believed true.

In the next book, *Discover the Power Within You*, I was struck by Eric Butterworth's frequent references to the divine presence of God within each person. One of many places I underlined included this Hindu legend: "Brahma, the chief god, decided to take [the divinity] away from men and hide it where they would never again find it . . . deep down in man himself".¹² Beside these words I wrote, "Lord, help me discover the divinity that is hid within me".¹³

In the preface, when he wrote about Christianity and his belief about Christ, I underlined the passage boldly and wrote "Right on!" beside it:¹⁴ "I have often speculated on what Jesus would have done if he had been seated around the table with a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Moslem, and a Shintoist—discussing Ultimate Truth. . . . I think he would have stressed the basic unity within the diversity of religions. . . ." ¹⁵

When did I first understand this? It was not something I remember being taught and it was not a theology of our church. Was it something I already understood and the writer was confirming? I wonder.

The right book, the right time

There remained a longing to find the right book to alleviate my emptiness and despair. When I needed a book the right one came along. I believed God was somehow in that experience as the author would often share insights I needed to hear. I would experience brief moments where the despair would lift and peace would follow.

One afternoon when my daughter returned from the mall she mentioned a book I might want to read but couldn't remember the title. Her comment spurred me on to make a trip to the bookstore the next day. In the midst of the bookstore, I looked around to be

sure I was alone and fell to my knees and prayed, “God please help me find a book.” I raised my eyes and there above me was the book by Marianne Williamson, *A Return To Love*.¹⁶

Later that afternoon my daughter entered the room where I was reading and said with surprise, “Mom, that is the book.” A feeling of hope accompanied the experience. On the inside of the cover I wrote these words: “Dear Lord, I dedicate the reading of this book to you. I know that this book was your idea. I thank you for those things that I will learn from this book that will carry me from where I am now—to where you want me to be.”¹⁷

Marianne’s willingness to speak frankly about her struggle with self-acceptance beckoned me to look inward to the places in my journey where I knew fear: “Love is what we were born with. Fear is what we learn.”¹⁸ I boldly underlined these words that summed up her message: “The spiritual journey is the relinquishment or unlearning of fear and the acceptance of love back into our hearts. . . . It’s a ‘world beyond’ that we secretly long for. An ancient memory of this love haunts all of us all the time, and beckons us to return.”¹⁹ I read the book three times. Each time it felt like an invitation to reconnect with the love within I was searching for, as if I was being drawn home.

A dark night of the soul

In January 1993 my first husband and I looked into purchasing a condominium. I had a warm feeling about a location I passed by each day on the way to work. Having had similar experiences with previous moves, this was not unusual. Trusting my insight, he sent me off to look for an apartment in that area.

Walking into one of the first apartments, there was a rightness about it. I was especially excited as I hoped the new move might give my husband and I a fresh start. When he looked at the apartment, it did nothing for him; this caught me by surprise. Nine months later I was viewing the same apartment with the real-estate agent—this time on my own. With the turn of the apartment door knob I was filled with the same peace as the first time I entered the apartment.

The real-estate agent told me the sale of the apartment had fallen through three times since my husband and I first looked at it. Amidst the grief, there was gratitude. Like a child receiving eagerly awaited approval from a parent, I felt somewhat relieved. I was the one who had left the home and felt the weight of guilt for having left a marriage. Was this a sign that God knew my struggle with this decision? On the heels of relief there was anger. Why had God not answered my prayers to save our marriage? Did God know of our separation before we did? I wonder. With more questions about God than answers, I felt confused and disillusioned. It was a very painful time: the theological framework from my past no longer provided an appropriate lens through which to speak of the experience of God.

CAPPE training

In the fall I entered CAPPE training. I was in a class with three men. The supervisor was gentle, yet firm. He was skilled and knew when to challenge our thinking. The experience pushed me both personally and theologically. The greatest challenge was finding my voice in what appeared to be a male-dominated environment. I soon realized the challenge would be more about coming to understand the different lenses through

which men and women view life. Something remained unresolved for me around male authority. The class provided a safe environment to address both issues.

During class I read *Why The Green Nigger?* by Elizabeth Dodson Gray. I was struck by the perfect timing. She writes, “When we are responding to *differences* (whether man and woman, or man and whale . . . or man and God), our perceptions are dominated and distorted by the hierarchical paradigm. . . . So intimately is it a part of how we perceive that we seem never to assess differences as just that—different.”²⁰ She describes the impact hierarchical thinking has on our understanding of ourselves, the cosmos and God. “We have always set immediately to work ranking ourselves against the Other. If that Other is God, He is above—superior. If that Other is female (and I am male), she is below me—inferior.”²¹

One of the books we studied as a group was *Theological Worlds* by W. Paul Jones. The author’s research shed light on the impact culture and life experience had on one’s interpretation of theology. His insights offered a broader perspective on theology than I had heard before. “What is new is the discovery of theological Worlds as *pluralistic*. . . . Each theological World, emerging as dialectic between the self and a particular cultural, is ‘relative to the speaker who gives [it] voice and the cultural milieu out of which he or she comes’²².”²³ When I read Jones’s description of World One it was as if I had “come home.” I was surprised and relieved to find that this theme, among others, was common among inhabitants of this theological world.²⁴ Being able to find the language that spoke of what I was experiencing brought comfort.

Although I did not always fully understand it, the experience of God had been the unexpected breaking forth of the holy: a “tearing of the veil,” as the author described it,

“whereby a different dimension of reality is opened.”²⁵ At times it felt like I was “an alien”²⁶ in the world alone in the way I understood God. Although I resonated with much of what Jones had to say, his description of this event as being “mediated through One who functions as Revealer”²⁷ was not my experience. The God event just seemed to happen. It hadn’t come as the result of any mediator, like Jesus. Was there a way to describe a theological world that could be inclusive—that could speak of the experience of those who did not believe in God? I wondered.

The dance of intimacy

I had fallen in love with a man I met at the running track. We had long discussions about God often ending in heated arguments. I could not believe anyone so intelligent, loving and compassionate could be an atheist—it made no sense. When he asked me why we couldn’t marry, I told him my first responsibility was to God and my ministry. Somehow a minister and atheist marrying did not seem to fit my beliefs about marriage.

Our love grew and the subject of marriage surfaced again. This time my heart and head were in conflict. My heart said, “This is too good to be true,” while my head argued, “But what if it fails?” I told him I would talk to my buddy upstairs about it and let him know when I knew the answer. (Although I used the phrase “my buddy upstairs,” when referring to God, God no longer was an entity who lived in a place called heaven). Two months later as we walked hand in hand, I knew if we married everything would be fine; I could hardly contain my excitement and quickly asked a passerby to take our photograph in front of the building where we stood. Following the photograph I looked into his eyes and said, “Yes, I will marry you.” I will never forget the look on his face

when he said, “Oh shit—what made you say that?” I reminded him of my comment a year earlier, “That when I knew, he would know.”

At the time of our engagement I believed we had been brought together so he would come to know God. Soon after we married this thinking was challenged. I had noticed a dead plant in the centre of his kitchen table. Now married and sharing the same home, I thought we should throw the plant out and replace it with a new one. He quietly pointed to a small piece of green on the side of the plant and said, “Chris, you never throw anything out that still has life in it.” Then I saw I would be the one to learn things about God I had not known before.

Marriage to him has been a gift in so many ways. He lives his life as one who understands selfless and unconditional love. He brings me coffee in bed each morning, packs my lunch every day as I prepare for work, walks me to a warmed car and waves goodbye as I drive out of the driveway—morning rituals that grace my day.

When I attended church, he accompanied me each week despite the fact it held no meaning for him. Though respectful of the belief I had in God as well as the beliefs of others, he could articulate why the concept of God makes little sense to him. He recounted attending church as a young child and knowing early in his life what was being taught about God did not resonate with what he believed to be true. He was well read, particularly in the area of Egyptology, and spoke of places in the Egyptian Book of the Dead where the legend of Osiris closely resembled Jesus’ birth and death and where portions of the Psalms may have originated. He spoke honestly about the places in history where religion had divided humanity and where Christianity had failed.

In many ways he gave voice to what I had inwardly been feeling and answered

questions I had long been asking. Our marriage provided a safe place for me to express doubts. This “coming out” experience left me on shifting sands; although I didn’t speak openly about this to anyone, my theological world was crumbling.

In my journal I noticed a shift in my writing. In many entries I had moved from talking to God, to talking about God. In August 1995 I wrote these words in my journal: “I want more than just a blenderized theology. I am not satisfied with believing just what others might believe to fit the church or Christian view. If he is God of all, I want to understand his work with all—not just some.”²⁸

1995–2000

Catholic seminary

Drawn to enter Theological Studies, I mentioned this desire to my husband who suggested I talk with two priests who taught at Newman College, a local seminary. He had renovated their manse and was struck by their openness and down to earth character. One of the priests was the dean at the college. I made an appointment and arrived early to walk in the halls as part of the discerning process. As I walked and prayed I felt a sense of peace. When I met with the priest he was warm and welcoming. He spoke about the college’s commitment to provide an ecumenical learning environment. Students of all faiths had the opportunity to attend daily worship and participate in communion alongside their studies. The blend of worship and study appealed to me. There was a synchronicity in how it all came together and I enrolled.

After a month of studies an assembly was called. The dean announced that all students were welcome to attend the daily worship services, but only Catholics could

partake in the Eucharist. Though gentle in his deliberations, he could not cushion the impact of the message. Like many students I felt angry. But beyond anger, I felt disappointed and, in some ways, betrayed. Had I misread what I thought was direction from God?

An opportunity arose to speak with the priest of my disappointment. When I told him I had considered leaving the program, he too started weeping. He told of a recent change within the seminary leadership and of his request to be the one to break the news hoping to soften the way the message would be shared. When he spoke of his struggle whether to leave and his decision to stay, I knew I needed to do the same.

Conference on ecumenism

In the spring of 1996 I attended a week-long theological conference in Halifax on “Ecumenism.” Students gathered from seventeen faith communities across Canada. Each day students from a different cluster of faith groups would facilitate the morning worship service. A perfect environment, perhaps, to learn about “unity within diversity.” Although we acknowledged the unity we shared in Christ, we grappled with what Dulles described as “the dilemma posed by the theological necessity of oneness and the factual givenness of division.”²⁹ We agreed *unity in diversity* was a concept we struggled with even in our communities of faith. As Christians we needed to discover what it meant to be the universal “Body of Christ” in the world. We acknowledged *oneness* did not mean *sameness*; we also agreed that if we focused on our differences the *solidarity* found in unity would be diminished and divisions would remain between us.³⁰

The conference seemed positive at first, but as the week progressed our discussions

broke down. As each group openly expressed their theological viewpoints, the sense of unity was soon lost. In the final hours of the conference a group of us were discussing what we felt was the most valuable experience of the week and why. We all agreed the morning worship services had been the highlight of the conference. The Spirit blessed our unity, bridged our differences that existed theologically and revealed the love which God had for us all and reminded us of our unity in Christ.³¹

Inspired by Paul, I imagined a variation of 1 Corinthians for today: “For in one spirit we are all baptized into one body—Jew and Greek, Catholic or Baptist, United Church or Community of Christ, Mennonite or Anglican Lutheran or Methodist, believer or non-believer, gay or straight—and we are all made to drink of the same Spirit.”³²

The second semester

I enrolled in a course called *Christianity and World Religions*. The teacher was a Catholic priest who had spent a year in an Ashram in India. He believed, for unity to occur in the world, the West needed a deeper understanding of Eastern traditions. As a class we attended ten different worship services, a mixture of both Western and Eastern traditions. We discussed the commonalities among all traditions, acknowledged the differences, and wrote personal reflections. The learning experience was rich.

The priest introduced the class to a variety of authors including Jiddu Krishnamurti. Although I didn't grasp all of what he had to say in his book *Think on These Things*, he was the first author I stumbled across who described the root of separation within religion: “The Christians have beliefs and so are divided both from those of other beliefs and among themselves; The Hindus are everlastingly full of enmity because they believe

themselves to be brahmans or non-brahmans, this or that. So belief brings enmity, division, destruction, and that is obviously not religion.”³³ Addressing the question I had been asking “Then what is religion?” Krishnamurti observes, “When the mind is swept clean of image, of ritual, of belief, of symbol, of all words, *mantrams* and repetitions, and of all fear, then what you see will be the real, the timeless, the everlasting, which may be called God.”³⁴

I read a second book by Krishnamurti entitled *You Are The World*. I was drawn to the words “know thyself” and the invitation to examine places in my thinking where there was conflict. Beside the author’s reminder “it is silence that brings about order, not thought”³⁵ I wrote, “Could it be?” followed by the scripture with which I was familiar, “Be still and know that I am God.”³⁶ Somehow the words took on a deeper meaning.

A feeling of coming home

On spring break we made a trip to the northern part of Vancouver Island before heading south to Victoria, where we planned to move one day. As we entered the Comox Valley I felt I had come home. A peacefulness lingered throughout the day as we shopped in the local stores and sat together over coffee. There were moments I didn’t want to move my head in case the feeling might leave.

That evening as I lay awake in the back of our van I prayed: God this feels so right, but where will I work? On the way out of town the next morning we travelled by the hospital. My husband suggested we stop and ask if a chaplaincy position was available; reluctantly, I agreed. My chances for work at a Catholic hospital I believed would be slim given my Protestant background. Within ten minutes of entering the hospital I met with

Sister Catherine who asked the purpose of my visit. I told her of my passion to work in End-of-Life Care and of my other desire to enter full-time studies at St. Stephen's College. At the close of our time together she offered prayer. She couldn't tell me what to do, but said I should "return home and prepare." As we embraced we wept. I left the hospital knowing I would submit my application to St. Stephen's College and eventually move to the Valley.

In early April I met with one of the program directors at St. Stephen's College to discuss my readiness for the Masters in Theological Studies program following the completion of two years at Newman.* Her gentleness and encouragement put me at ease. I wrote in my journal, "the visit gave me hope—something to strive for."³⁷

Within the same entry I recorded a story from Anthony de Mello's book *One Minute Wisdom*; it spoke to the intensity of my desire to serve: "Each day the disciple would ask the same question: 'How shall I find God?' And each day he would get the same mysterious answer: 'Through desire.' 'But I desire God with all my heart, don't I? Then why have I not found him?'"³⁸ I responded with these comments: "As I read the Master's comment about the desire one should have to seek God, I realized that I want to serve with that intensity—not because I need to fulfill who I am, but rather because I would like to fulfill God's plans for me. Go with me in this endeavour Lord."³⁹

God remained a separate entity in my writing, but I notice a shift recorded in a previous entry. As I read De Mello's book, I realize "Enlightenment is not something I can make happen—it simply happens and I bask in its warmth. Presence is where one looks for enlightenment? Interesting thought. I know that I am seldom present and most

* Newman College was a seminary college outside of St. Albert near Edmonton.

often somewhere else in my thoughts. As I read his writings I realize the need I have for solitude and looking within.”⁴⁰

Through the summer and into the fall, I wrote about a belief system that no longer fit. “De Mello says we might need to give up our beliefs about God and not be bound to our convictions but be willing to see God and Christ in a new way. I felt initially, without a clear outline about what I believed, I must be lost. Maybe I am closer to being found than what I was when I was sure about what I believed.”⁴¹

One journal entry in October addressed to God gets to the heart of my struggle: “The life of Jesus is not in question, it is the concept of His way being the only way to come to you—that is the dilemma that I am experiencing. If you love all people and they are the results of your creation, what about those, whose lives emanate the way of the Christ but who follow other ways, like the way of the Buddha?”⁴²

The final semester

Completing the final semester at Newman, I was becoming aware of the deep chasm between *religion* and *spirituality*. Reading through the final paper from a class on *The Theology of John*, I recognized a boldness in my writing I had not noticed before. A series of personal experiences lead to questions regarding the Holy Spirit.⁴³

One such experience took place during a visit to a Buddhist temple. As I sat on a mat sharing lunch with fellow students, a man of the Buddhist faith who sat on my right reached out and gently placed his hand on my arm. He said, “Isn’t it wonderful that God could love us so much to bring us all here together?” It wasn’t what he said that was profound but the Spirit which accompanied what he said—we both sat in tears. The

experience made me keenly aware “divine moments” are not only available to Christians, that Spirit works in the lives of people, believers and non-believers, alike.⁴⁴

Non-believers alike

During a course at Newman entitled *The Spiritual Life*, I had a practicum in a group home for residents with end stage HIV. In my role as support worker, I assisted with bathing, meal preparation, light housework and provided a listening ear when needed. Many residents had been abandoned by church communities and families, a response I found difficult to understand. My brother had experienced prejudice during his journey with AIDS; and so the opportunity to support people this way felt like a gift. It was—but not in the way I expected.

Jane (pseudonym), a resident in her early forties, was one of my many teachers during the practicum. She was difficult to like. She was crude, thoughtless of other residents and self-focused. She wasn't afraid to speak her mind and she didn't care what other people thought about her.

One day while I was dusting the basement Jane yelled, “You know—I know God!” Not being sure I heard her correctly I asked her what she said. She gave the same answer, this time even louder. The conviction in her words brought me to the chair next to her. Trying to use my best listening skills—but in the back of my mind questioning what I would hear—I asked if she could tell her story about God. She shared an experience she had as a young woman.

Jane was raised in a home by parents who were very committed to the Catholic faith and she had attended church regularly as a child. When she was a teen she was

drawn to the streets and turned to drugs and then prostitution to feed her addiction. Late one evening as she walked alone under the 109th Street Bridge in Edmonton wondering if anyone really loved her, she heard a voice say, “Jane, I will always love you.” Afraid, she looked around to see where the voice came from. The message came two more times. With it came a sense of love that she remembered feeling as a child and that she knew was God.

Through Jane’s story I awoke to a new understanding of God. I had believed that the love of God was available to people who believed in or who reached out to God. Perhaps she had sensed a hidden prejudice I didn’t know was there. In the final weeks of her life Jane began singing old hymns she had forgotten. She kept her prayer beads by her bedside. Her personality did not change; she continued to be challenging. What changed was my ability to be with her; the judgement fell away.

A journey inward

In the fall of 1996 I started reading a book entitled *Cathedrals of The Spirit* by T.C. McLuhan. The author’s creative way of using photography and sacred texts from Eastern and Western traditions provided multiple lenses through which the Divine could be understood.⁴⁵ As recorded in my journals, I felt drawn on an inward journey. The sense that God was so awesome and that his divine power was expressed through all that exists was deeply moving and inspiring—it was almost like viewing the Divine in the third dimension, taking your spectacles off and viewing God with a magnifying glass.⁴⁶

In one passage of *Cathedrals of The Spirit*, Henry David Thoreau⁴⁷ suggested that in order to know yourself you need to be willing to go into the darkness, the swampy part

of one's soul and enter that place as if it were holy ground, in other words, understand these places without judgement.⁴⁸

I pondered this concept of no judgement and realized just how difficult the exercise could be. Often judgement stood in the way of my spiritual growth and inward feeling of peace. It was difficult for love of self to fully emerge and survive in the confounds of negativity. Intellectualizing the process of spiritual wholeness was not enough; I wanted God's help to integrate this understanding into the fabric of my life.⁴⁹

The next book *Living Buddha, Living Christ* provided a bridge between Eastern and Western theology. Thich Nhat Hanh's description of the parallels between the teachings of Jesus and the Buddha seemed to breathe new understanding into Jesus' life and ministry. It was as if I had met Jesus for the first time. His message now seemed relevant and universal: God was no longer out of reach. "If the wave does not have to die to become water, then we do not have to die to enter the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is available here and now."⁵⁰

Thich Nhat Hanh asks, "In the Gospel of Matthew, the Kingdom of God is described as the mustard seed. . . . What is the seed? Where is the soil? What is it if not our own consciousness? We hear repeatedly that God is within us. To me, it means that God is within our consciousness."⁵¹ I underlined the author's insights about the Kingdom of God and wrote "Yes!"⁵² beside them.

He spoke about God as "the ground of all being"—a reality "beyond words or concepts" found within each person.⁵³ The author's writings resonated with what I understood, in part, about God but was still seeking language to describe: "The way to God is truth, and it can be found in all traditions. If God is the God of all cultures and all

of life we must be willing to look beyond our particular tradition to see God in all. How often we get stuck in words and concepts thus missing the opportunity to encounter reality. What is reality?”⁵⁴ Further on in the book Thich Nhat Hanh says “reality is what it is and cannot be described”⁵⁵ to which I commented, “good point!”⁵⁶ I was beginning to see God as a reality not separate from me.

The reading of the next book by Anthony De Mello entitled *Awareness* seemed to come at the appropriate time. His writings offered insights around the importance of being aware of your thoughts as part of the journey to know God and prompted several journal entries. “The deep discovery of who I am (self) is not an easy journey; the process exposes my pride—my selfishness and causes me to come face to face with the question Who am I?—in such a way I cannot escape answering the question. The process of self discovery has stripped me naked of all the titles (mother, daughter, wife, minister) and caused me to evaluate before God, just who I am. Not in a way that I feel at all judged, but rather in a way which has been freeing.”⁵⁷

“I realize I can easily lose the peace within when people and things around me are not in harmony. I seem to quickly lose focus and the good Spirit no longer finds its resting place within. I realize that one must taste ‘the bitter to know the sweet’ so I will not dwell on this awareness just observe it. Oh God, I do believe that I am slowly becoming more aware of who I am and who you are, but only a particle of my awareness is clear”.⁵⁸

St. Stephen's College

In my first years of study I was introduced to authors such as Marcus Borg, John

Crossan, Christopher Levan, Pamela Dickey Young and Richard Rohr, writing about the historical Jesus. At the close of one of my papers, I wrote: “In my journey to rediscover not only who Jesus was for me personally, but the role he played in humanity’s relationship with God, I came to realize that the one dimensional understanding I had of Jesus was heavily influenced by the same system Jesus radically opposed. Viewing his life through the lens of *antiquity* has been a challenging but rewarding one; for it has moved me to a place outside the system where I have been able to reconsider Jesus’ life and ministry with a different perspective.”⁵⁹

What did I mean by the one dimensional understanding of Jesus? What system influenced my thinking? What did I mean by being moved outside the system? What caused this shift to take place? I wonder if seeing Jesus in this new light has changed how I understand God?

In *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, Borg’s openness about his struggles with his belief in God helped to normalize my own grief, particularly his remark about coming to a place in his faith journey where he felt like a “closet atheist.”⁶⁰ Beside these words I wrote, “I too had similar thoughts.”⁶¹ Borg stated that for him “problems began not with Jesus, but with God.”⁶² God was “‘out there’ . . . far away and removed from the world.”⁶³ I recorded in response: “My experience was somewhat reversed. God was always more the focus—someone I could relate to personally. Later in life, I had a collision between the church’s view of God and my experience of God.”⁶⁴

For Borg “gradually it became obvious . . . that God—the sacred, the holy, the numinous—was ‘real’. God was no longer a concept or an article of belief, but had become an element of experience.”⁶⁵ I responded, “The experience of God is common to

all who have come to know the divine presence of love. Many atheists, although they may not believe in God, connect with the spirit of life.”⁶⁶

In *Jesus’ Plan For A New World*, Richard Rohr makes a point that the “absolute and ultimate God-centeredness, [the] demand for the True Sacred, is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching.”⁶⁷ I respond with this comment: “The demand and respect for the True Sacred seems to be apparent even in the non-religious. How can we begin with this seed and point to its source?”⁶⁸ What I hoped to discover was a description of God that was inclusive.

In the book *God Hates Religion*, author Christopher Levan states that “unbelief is an essential step on the journey to lasting belief.”⁶⁹ These words brought comfort. I responded with “God, thank you for my moments of unbelief.”⁷⁰

In a paper on the “Quest for the Historical Jesus” for the course *Introduction to Church History*, I discover Jesus as having an intimate relationship with the Spirit. Both in his public and private ministry he was a person “to whom the Spirit was an experiential reality.”⁷¹ For Jesus—the Spirit, the Sacred, the Divine, the source of all love—was God. In a world where individualism has coloured, and at times distorted our perception of reality, Jesus speaks of a Kingdom in which the Spirit reveals to us who God is.⁷²

In her book *Christ In A Post-Christian World: How can we believe in Christ when those around us believe differently—or not at all?* Pamela Dickey Young addresses the place of personal experience in the journey of faith. Young was the first theologian I had encountered—outside of Schleiermacher—who acknowledged the significance of personal experience and feelings in one’s understanding of God⁷³ in contrast with conventional wisdom.

In “Theological Reflection On God,” my paper for a course in the fall of 1998, I shared how my journey in life has been one of various life experiences that have both strengthened and, at times, challenged my belief in God. As I struggled during these experiences to connect with the God I knew as a child I reconsidered my early understanding of God as judge and lawgiver and sought a deeper awareness of God as Divine Presence. This awareness of God as Divine Presence challenged my image of God as a ‘supernatural being’ and broadened my perception of the presence of God’s creative Power and Spirit in *all* of creation. My understanding of God in the past had always affirmed God’s love for everyone; the on-going presence of God seemed limited only to those who had made a decision to live a righteous life, expressed a belief in God—and then followed with a commitment of their lives to Jesus through baptism.⁷⁴

In my journal I write that it has been through personal experience I have come to know God. The theory often taught me *about* God—but the experience truly recalled the nature of God. It was my desire that I might become even more attuned to listening to the Spirit in her many different forms/voices—to be open, as I believe Jesus was, to looking for the experience of God even through nature.⁷⁵ Addressing God, I say, “I do thirst for you—I do long to know all there is to know about you; I long to experience you in all life’s experiences.”⁷⁶

In June 1999 we moved to the Comox Valley. The timing was perfect. I had just completed my training in pastoral practice through CAPPE and a chaplaincy position had come open at the hospital. One week after our arrival I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My treatment was scheduled to begin the day of the interview. Questions plagued my mind. Had I not listened? Was I going to die before realizing my dream? Where was God

in all of this?

One evening during treatment feeling unwell and discouraged, I looked out the window and saw a raccoon sitting on the freezer on our back porch. As I leaned forward to look more closely, he too leaned forward. With his nose to the window he stared into my eyes. His gaze felt eternal. I felt a peace wash over me.

A book by Maria Harris, *The Dance of The Spirit*, offered comfort over the following months. Like a compass, it kept me on course. As my body slowed down I learned to be still. In the quietude I became aware, in a way I had not been before, of the importance of nurturing Self. Harris spoke of this as learning “to cultivate Presence” in one’s life.⁷⁷ It was as if the illness had become a teacher.⁷⁸

The question where was God in this part of the journey slowly disappeared. Words by the author aptly described what I understood, at some level: “We must be willing to live in the midst of paradox. For we can only know [God] by letting go of knowing and by putting aside our reason, our thinking. . . . We must wait . . . allowing things to reveal themselves to us, and seek by allowing ourselves to be sought.”⁷⁹

I was drawn to Harris’s comments on transformation. Using the image of the dance she illustrated transformation as a step in the journey “where we recognize the past is alive in the present.”⁸⁰ This was an *ah ha* moment. I had previously understood transformation not as remembering the past, but forgetting it and moving on to the present.⁸¹

What is the connection between caring for Self and knowing God? Why would I have glimpses of understanding that would quickly slip away? What does it mean to seek by allowing oneself to be sought? I wondered.

Seeds of hope

One day walking in the park I met a lady and her dog. My spirits were low. She told me of her work as the Bereavement Coordinator for Hospice and of her plans to retire in a few month's time. She had planted a seed of hope. I was too unwell at the time to acknowledge it, but the seed was there nevertheless. She visited several times during my recovery and eventually encouraged me to apply for the position. I did and was hired. The interview was held at the hospital in the office across the hall from where Sister Catherine and I had prayed five years earlier.

With the growing awareness everything in life was somehow connected, I wondered about the connection to my dream. Was it my dream or God's dream that I work in end-of-life care? Could they somehow be one and the same?

I attended a Healing Touch course following treatment. At the close of the workshop I was introduced to the husband of one of the practitioners. As I shook his hand, I knew he would be involved in my life in a significant way. Colin would later become my spiritual teacher.

2001–2007

A place of dried bones

In my journal I recorded feelings of flatness, a sense of emptiness, a seeming lack of purpose. Disconnected from the spiritual person I had taken myself for, I began to wonder "who am I?" At the same time I had serious questions concerning what I believed God to be. Once in a while I seemed to glimpse God's presence, but for the most part the sense of the Spirit with which I was familiar was gone and sorely missed.⁸²

We had just passed through Easter. I noticed Easter, with its emphasis upon death and rebirth, bore a striking resemblance to my own situation. I wanted resurrection. Something had died in me. I might have blamed it on the illness except for the fact I had felt this way for some time now. I wanted to move from what Ezekiel calls “a place of dried bones.”⁸³

In the summer I read a book by Scott Peck entitled *In Search of Stones*. He told of a pilgrimage he made with his wife through Wales, Scotland and the Lake District; and insights gained on his journey. I was surprised to discover how closely his story described my experience. For a period in mid-life, he was depressed. He shares, “It felt like I was dying. Not physically dying—that would have been welcomed. It felt more like being in the Garden on the eve of my crucifixion.” He was “frightened and tearful” and “not as certain of many things as [he] used to be.”⁸⁴

What provided insight was his description of what it was like “when it lifted.” He said, “Before my joy had been a product of external events. . . . Now my joy, while hardly constant, was purely internal and unrelated to circumstances.”⁸⁵ I had equated flatness and depression with an absence of God; and glimpses of happiness with signs of God’s presence.

A time of self-discovery

Following a medical leave from school due to memory loss in January 2002, I enrolled in a course on the *Spiritual Practice of Drawing Mandala*. A stirring in my soul prompted my return to studies and yet I felt uncertain about my readiness.

Prior to taking the course I had a strong feeling I was to paint—the thought would

frequently come out of nowhere. I read *Art As Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination* and was struck by the author's observation: "Whenever illness is associated with loss of soul, the arts emerge spontaneously as remedies, soul medicine."⁸⁶

The opportunity to engage in art during course work was a gift I had not anticipated. I kept a journal close at hand and recorded insights as I drew. In one drawing the image of a fetus emerged, as if something within needed to be birthed. The image became an invitation to let go of self-judgment and need for control.⁸⁷

In a healing hands exercise—where we were to draw hands within the circle—I drew my hands well inside the lines. The boundary represented the separation I experienced, at times, between myself, others—and God. I felt I was becoming too self absorbed during the exercise. These words by Madeline McMurray helped to shed light on what I was experiencing. "This inner artist dances along the continuum between self absorption and unity consciousness. Every life event contains both perspectives."⁸⁸

Several questions arose from this portion of writing. I spoke of having thoughts come out of nowhere. Where is nowhere? What is the connection between, what felt like, a loss of soul and the insights that emerged as the result of the art work? What does dying to self mean? What does it mean to journey along a continuum between self-absorption and unity consciousness?

I was given *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* by a friend. Henry Nouwen's openness sharing his inward journey of self acceptance spoke to my experience. "A little criticism makes me angry, and a little rejection makes me depressed. A little praise raises my spirits, and a little success excites me. It takes very little to raise me up or thrust me down. Often I am like a small boat on the ocean, completely at the

mercy of its waves.”⁸⁹

Beside the author’s passage above, I wrote, it was “as if I wrote this.”⁹⁰ His story through the eyes of the prodigal son and the elder brother awoke an awareness of how judgment and lack of self-worth created a natural distance between myself, others and God. Metaphorically speaking, this understanding became the bridge that spanned the chasm in my thinking. I was able to see more clearly the connection between my thinking and understanding about God: the feeling of separation from God was an illusion.

Stages of spiritual development

In November 2002 I started to read *How to Know God: The Soul’s Journey Into The Mystery of Mysteries* by Deepak Chopra. His description of the stages of faith development demonstrated the journey to know God is one that evolves. Chopra expressed so well my desire: “Like a child growing up, we have to *evolve toward a more complete vision, until the day arrives when we see the whole as God does.*”⁹¹

Re-reading my journal and what I had underlined over six months, it surprised me to find represented each of the seven stages of spiritual development. I identified with some stages to a greater or lesser degree than others.

“The God of stage one”⁹² no longer resonated with my understanding of God; however, I recognized places in my journey where I still clung to fears that I knew as a child.⁹³ Reading Stage Three, I was struck by Chopra’s words: “The mind is full of a kind of knowing that could speak to us about everything, yet has not words.”⁹⁴ The scripture, “Be still and know that I am” had often come to mind. Did this mean I should be less active and block all thoughts of God? I wondered. The idea that the mind knew what

there were no words for, brought a different perspective.⁹⁵

Moved by Chopra's description of the role of intuition in knowing God, as explained in Stage Four, I became aware that understanding God was both a rational and intuitive process; there was no separation between the two. I began to see how the separation I felt from God was tied to my inability to acknowledge my true self.⁹⁶

A discussion with a friend shed further light on the part that intuition plays. He likened knowing a decision was the right one to taking a hike into an unknown area, getting lost and needing a compass to find one's way home. In his way of knowing he would trust his compass (reality) not trust what his mind might be telling him. To be sure that his decision was the right one he would carry a second compass and place it beside the other—once again to confirm he had made the right decision.⁹⁷

Although he and I came from a different place of knowing, the compass I followed was often my intuition. Sometimes there was no rational understanding regarding why I felt the need to go in a different direction—only that I felt an inner compass telling me I needed to take a different path. The second compass I used to lie down beside the first was what came when I asked for confirmation: it often came without the asking. Often there were two or three compasses that appeared in the form of a person's comment, or a reading in a book.⁹⁸

When I read Stage Seven my eyes fell on the words “the field of awareness is our true home . . . this shared home is the light spoken of by the mystics.”⁹⁹ An overwhelming feeling of presence surrounded me as the words lifted off the page: *home, mystics*. It was as if I was drawn to the words. I knew I was to study the history of the mystics. I felt a peace, a warmth that began in the inside and travelled to the ends of my hands and feet.¹⁰⁰

Other aspects of this stage of development resonated. I was reminded of the experience with my brother, who had been living in Toronto and contacted me when he was in trouble. I had been wondering for sometime about prayer; and questioning an earlier belief that God was a separate entity I prayed to and received answers from. The answer came when I read of the “cosmic awareness” of which we are all a part that connects us to each other and the light that is our shared reality.¹⁰¹

Questions arise. Why did I doubt the idea of God as a separate entity, as someone or something I prayed to, and yet still write to God in my journal? Is the journey to know God as linear as Chopra suggests?

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, writing about grief, identified five stages people go through in the healing process.¹⁰² Although her work opened the door for people to speak about their journeys through grief, the process was later discovered to be not as linear as once thought.¹⁰³ Could this be the case with Chopra’s findings? I wonder.

A decline in health

I began to notice losing sensation in my limbs. I was struggling with left-sided weakness fatigue, and intense heat at the core of my body, which felt out of control.¹⁰⁴ During an early morning walk I experienced paralysis in my legs and was admitted to hospital. After many tests there was no apparent sign of disease. Two months into the hospitalization I was admitted to the psych ward with a diagnosis of *conversion disorder*—a condition where a patient displays neurological symptoms such as numbness and paralysis with no neurological explanation to be found. The theory is the symptoms are due to the patient’s psychological response to stress.¹⁰⁵

I was struggling with the diagnosis. I felt angry and at times dismissed by doctors and nursing staff. It was a particularly difficult time for my husband, as well, as he felt pressed by the medical community to come with possible reasons for, what was being described as a mental disorder. This created a strain on our relationship at times and I felt alone.

I believed more was happening on a physical level than the doctors were able to discover. There were experiences of a spiritual nature which brought me comfort and hope during moments of despair. Late one evening I awoke to bright lights and these words, “You will be very sick. You will fully recover.” Early in the admission a yoga friend visited from out of town. After leaving the hospital room she returned. She told me that she thought I was having a *kundalini awakening* and described many of the symptoms¹⁰⁶ I was experiencing.

This quiet spell in the hospital gave my body the rest it needed. With the help of two books *Gardening The Soul* by Sister Stanislaus Kennedy and *Simple Abundance* by Sarah Ban Breathnach, I found peace by writing in my journal daily. The writers’ reflections opened up the possibility of connection between my physical and psychological well-being. I recorded in my journal: “These words by Sister Kennedy speak to me, especially this morning. ‘We adults . . . can become so frightened of failure that we are paralyzed, unable to create anything for fear of looking foolish. One way for adults to shake off that adult concern with success and to recapture their childhood joy in creation is to become involved in painting or drawing or an art form.’”¹⁰⁷ During the previous year I had been given the message to paint. Could it be that the God “within” was aware of what I needed to be well? As I journeyed through a period of paralysis, I

wondered what fear is still locked in my mind that needs to be exposed.

Three months into the hospitalization I was discharged on large doses of antidepressants. I was still unwell and using a walker. Tremors in my limbs would happen spontaneously. The medication made me feel worse and increased the tremors. I had an inner sense to discontinue it, so I did.

As I lay one evening listening to music by Anne Murray, these words of the song spoke to my heart, "There will be an answer, let it be, let it be." A week later a couple visited and asked if I would consider going to a local naturopath. They offered to pay the fee. Although grateful for their generosity, I felt too unwell to accept. I prayed for direction and an answer came. The next week I met a friend who owned a local health store. She said she had planned to tell me about a local naturopath who was giving a talk that evening. This was the doctor I had prayed about.

As I sat through his lecture I felt hope as he acknowledged the impact of immune deficiency on the body and expressed his belief in a holistic approach to medicine. I went under his care. Tests were sent away to a clinic that specialized in molecular disorders. Three months later I was diagnosed with an amino acid deficiency and placed on large doses of amino acids. Within two weeks the coordination in my legs began to return and I started on the road to recovery.

I met frequently with a psychologist who was a Reiki Master, and with Colin, the spiritual teacher, who I had been introduced to six years earlier. During therapy vivid memories of sexual abuse as a child surfaced. Revisiting past memories was both painful and freeing, as if an unblocking of all that had been kept within. The counselling provided opportunities to address the unresolved grief and loss accompanying the experience. It

also helped provide skills that bridged the gap of communication that had developed between my husband and I. There was healing on all levels—physical, psychological and spiritual.

I had an inner sense to neither meditate nor read anything of a spiritual nature. I believed what I needed to understand of the kundalini process would come in time. Although I was not able to confide with family or friends about the experience, deep down I knew there was a sacredness about it.

In February 2004 events started to happen on a paranormal level I did not understand. Late one evening I awoke to a stream of light that shot up my spine and out through my head. We had a small bird, at the time, who was perched on my shoulder. His body waned with the experience. I was moved to the floor where I found myself in a yogic position. It was as if I was looking down on the experience.

I started to experience this spontaneous movement that continues to this day, a swirling movement around the base of the spine accompanied by a feeling of peace. I would awake in the night in a birthing position as if in hard labour. There was no pain, just discomfort and pressure in the abdominal area that often lasted two hours.

Spiritually I felt empty. Not that God had abandoned me—rather, old beliefs about God were falling away. On one hand I felt fearful and on the other, freer. I could no longer go back to the way I thought before. I noticed “things had changed. I used to eagerly look forward every day to sitting down with pen in hand and journaling my thoughts. I struggled just to read anything at all that was of a spiritual nature.”¹⁰⁸ Who I had thought myself to be—the “I”—was slipping away. I wondered, at times, if I was going insane. I sought quiet and solitude, and went for frequent walks with Colin.

Somehow I trusted there was a purpose for what I was experiencing. Being stripped of all I thought I was, or had been in the past, left me with the discovery I was not my body, my job etcetera, for when those were removed I felt lost, empty. I prayed that in time the flatness would pass.¹⁰⁹

A return to work

Due to poor health I had been unable to travel to the faith community in Victoria I served in. I decided to attend the United Church in Comox, a church well respected for its inclusivity and work in social justice. I hoped once I recovered to be of service in the church community.

In June 2005 a position came open for a Lay Designated Minister. The church had grown to 250 parishioners. They needed a second minister to develop a Pastoral Care Program, an area I had training in. It seemed serendipitous, yet working full time in a church was not what I would have chosen for employment. The statement at the bottom of the application noted, “Applicant needs to be a member of the United Church,” and I remembered an experience several weeks earlier. I had been sitting in the congregation when the minister announced a service for new members. Visitors interested in joining the church were invited to meet with her the following week.

I wanted to be a part of the faith community, yet joining another church was not really what I had in mind. I decided to attend the meeting and listen to what was being said. The minister and members of the council were friendly and open. During the discussion I asked if joining the church would require I renounce my membership in the church in which I was ordained. They agreed that it would not. I left the meeting with the

plan to discern what I would do. By the time I got to the front door of the church my concerns had lifted. I returned to tell them of my decision to join.

I applied for the position and, following a lengthy interview process, was hired. Anxious before the interviews, I wondered what I would say if I were asked my theology. I did not have one, not one I could articulate within the traditional Christian framework. They never asked, and for that I was grateful.

A return to studies

Employment with the church gave me the opportunity to return to studies. Two years earlier I attended a course on the *Introduction To Hebrew Scriptures*. Because of my health I had taken a medical leave. Educational leave provided the time needed to complete the final paper.

The paper “For Such A Time As This” was based on the story found in Esther 4:1–17. Captivated by Esther’s courage, I admired her ability to speak the truth sparing the lives of the Jewish people. Her truth awakened the king to what he needed to do. As I reflected on Esther’s awakening process and the meaning of the passage in light of my own journey, my thoughts were immediately transported in time to the classroom at St. Stephen’s where two years earlier anger surfaced as I sat through some of the classes. “What purpose, on earth, does this type of study have to do with real life—and where the hell does one’s understanding of God come in all of this?”¹¹⁰ I wrote, exasperated.

It wasn’t until I had time to reflect on my journey that I realized the frustration I had been experiencing in many aspects of my life was due to the ongoing health issues which had left me wondering, “Where is God in all of this?” As I journeyed to a place of

healing, I was reminded how the feeling of frustration would often shift to hope when I recalled the words “for such a time as this.”¹¹¹ They spoke across time and space—and reawakened within, the presence of God which I had been searching for.¹¹²

When I wrote the final paper the anger fell away: a deep appreciation for learning lingered. Curiosity emerged as to the importance of Biblical Studies in the journey to know God. It was an aspect of my writing for the integrative study I hadn’t considered until I read the teacher’s feedback on the paper.¹¹³

I wondered about his comment regarding our tradition’s attempt to suggest the journey to God is a simple one. Would he be willing to dialogue with me about it? I asked. He agreed and shared this story:

“I started off in biblical scholarship with a fairly simple vision for knowing a God of love. My encounter with the scripture (which I thought I had a good handle on before I began my academic studies) confronted me not so much with a consistently loving God, but a gauntlet of humans who had both virtuous and very violent and degrading moments.

“The problem for me was that all of these behaviours are found and, to some extent (see I’m even being overly careful here!) recommended in the Bible, in the name of God. This struggle became particularly pronounced when I began working with the biblical text detail.

“Repeated attempts on my part to make the tradition conform to the simplicity and straight-forwardness that I prefer, simply didn’t fly. As time went on, our insistence that the simple message that “God is love” lies behind the content of our sacred texts began to seem fairly hollow to me.

“The most I could make of things was to recognize that the tradition hands me a

knotted mass of string and leaves me to untangle it in some way that respects tradition and my capacity to make critical judgments. (Pardon the metaphor, but its the best I can do) I have never been able to make that job simple.

“For me, the complexity of the tradition hands on the responsibility to be straightforward in describing what I think is there and not to perpetuate the illusion that it is simpler than it is. I don’t need to introduce complexity when things are actually simple; there is enough complexity to go around already when we are dealing with Hebrew Scripture.”¹¹⁴

I appreciated the teacher sharing from both a personal and professional perspective: what the class offered was a safe learning environment where one could sit quietly and “unravel the knotted ball of yarn” without the sense you needed to do it in a particular way. I agreed the study of any topic, like religion, was very complex. What often seemed to make the process more complex (and less valuable) was the insistence another look through one lens of understanding *only*, rather than inviting the student to consider all possibilities. Through past experience I had learned that when encouraged to do this, what appeared complex became, in a mysterious sort of way, more simple, or clear.¹¹⁵

Is it conformation or confirmation?

Prior to working with the United Church, I had been seeking new language to voice what I had come to understand about the journey to know God. Church life provided the stage where this discovery could take place, as I describe in the final paper¹¹⁶ for the course *Science and Religion in Dialogue*.

It was early Sunday morning in February. The teacher for the Youth class asked me

to join them. She had spoken with an uncertain hesitancy in her voice, as she explained the youth had some questions they would like to ask about the letter they had received from the minister inviting them to attend the Exploration of Faith classes.

One student spoke up, “What happens if you don’t believe all that stuff like the story of Adam and Eve.” Another student quietly added, “is this Conformation or Confirmation? I was intrigued with how these questions identified some of the challenges facing the Church, addressing many of the same issues being raised in the dialogue between science and religion.

In pondering this further I wondered, “How is it possible that two questions, asked in very different settings, speak to some of the same issues—and what is the common denominator? An aha moment came as I realized the missing piece of the equation—the common denominator—is the significance of personal experience within the process of spiritual exploration.¹¹⁷

The learning, which unfolded in writing the paper, shed light on the nature of personal experience or inner knowing in the journey to know God. Personal experience had often been the way I had come to know God. This understanding, or sense of inner knowing, would often fly in the face of what I had been taught or what I thought I should believe. This had been a source of confusion and disillusionment. Within the context of Christian faith one is taught that there are two ways of knowing God: what is revealed about God through scripture; and what we know about God through reason. What is seldom acknowledged is the third way of knowing—an inner knowing or revelation that comes from a place beyond reason.¹¹⁸

Like Esther, the students in the Youth class had found the courage to speak the

truth. At the heart of this truth was an inner knowing that the prescribed way of thinking and believing as taught by the Church, no longer resonated with what they inwardly knew to be true. This deep *inner knowing* is what Tillich calls a “dimension of depth”—a place where “the voice of ultimate concern” can be heard.¹¹⁹ Through the questions these youth asked, and the ensuing dialogue between the youth and minister, I was able to see the difference between *truth* and *belief*. Conflict can arise when they are understood to mean the same thing.¹²⁰

In his book *Understanding: The Simplicity of Life*, Colin Mallard drew a clear distinction between the two. “There’s a definition of truth found in science and philosophy which states that truth is self-evident. . . . Truth is not something learned; it is not abstract and something that must be believed; it is simply a fact”¹²¹; while belief, on the other hand, is not always grounded in truth, it can be ego-centered in nature, and carry with it “doubt, not knowing, uncertainty.”¹²²

Writing the paper I had been an observer on the dance floor watching the dance unfold, yet simultaneously I was a participant. The questions the youth asked, the dialogue between the youth and the minister, the timing of the Confirmation Classes in relation to the course, my questions during the process of inquiry, the reading of specific books offering the insights needed. Each played a role as partners on the dance floor inviting the learning that emerged.

Synchronicity took on new meaning, as I thought about the timing of the Confirmation classes and my desire to find new language more appropriate to describe the journey. I was surprised by the insights that emerged out of nowhere. One morning as I awoke, the word *relativity* came to mind; I understood a deep connection between the

questions asked by the youth and spiritual seekers, like Tillich, and those asked by scientists like Newton, Galileo and Einstein. During this experience I recalled Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity, as described by Diarmuid O'Murchu, where Einstein "claimed that time and space are not two entities, but that together they form a space-time continuum. . . . Things can be understood only *relative* . . . to each other, not independent of, not isolated from, each other as absolute values."¹²³

This understanding sheds further light on Tillich's "dimension of depth" where "all the dimensions are interconnected, even when things are happening across distances."¹²⁴ The idea that everything is "impregnated with depth"¹²⁵ and there is an "essential oneness of all things"¹²⁶ challenged my understanding of reality.

While walking with a friend he used a metaphor from an Eastern tradition I found helpful. He spoke of a large room filled with hanging mirrors, which are positioned at different angles. A burst of light takes place and suddenly light fills the ball, illuminated by the relationship of mirrors to each other.¹²⁷

The understanding that everything is interdependent, needing everything else to realize its full potential, became more clear as I reflected on times of conflict. Amid appearance of *chaos* I had a sense everything was unfolding as it should, and there was no right or wrong within the situation. I experienced a calm, reminded that "all dualisms are constructs of the human mind . . . and do not necessarily reflect reality."¹²⁸ Given the angst I was feeling at the time, this experience took me completely by surprise.

An Advaita friend shared her understanding of insights that I later found in Ramesh Balsekar's book, *The Final Truth*: "As the Gestalt theory of perception says, we are not aware of an object or figure or event (any phenomenon) except in relation to a contrasting

background. However stark may be the contrast between the star and its background of darkness, the one cannot be perceived in the absence of the other.”¹²⁹

Through the understanding that emerged I was reminded of the significance of “reclaiming” personal experience within the journey.¹³⁰ I realized that it was not so much a *re-claiming* as a *re-awakening* to what was already present within. As O’Murchu explained, with this awakening process comes a shift in thinking from the Newtonian deterministic way of “understanding how life unfolds in the universe” to a quantum way of thinking, where “the consciousness we possess as human beings . . . needs to be freshly understood as an integral dimension of the ‘intelligence’ that permeates all life in the universe.”¹³¹ While pondering how paradigm shifts take place I sensed that other than being open to change, the unfolding of Divine Mystery just happens. As O’Murchu explains, “it is more a case of we being danced rather than we controlling our movements and moods.”¹³²

Are the questions asked by the youth evidence of a spiritual awakening within the world? Tillich cites Isaiah “Behold, I am doing a new thing, even now it is springing into light. Do you perceive it?”¹³³ and observes, “It is hidden in the profound mystery which veils every creation, birth as well as rebirth. It springs to light—which is to say that it comes out of the darkness of that mystery.”¹³⁴

What are the signs of the old passing away and something new emerging? Tillich says, “Suddenly we notice within us! The new which is sought and longed for comes to us in the moment in which we lose hope of every finding it. That is the first thing we must say about the new: it appears when and where it chooses. We cannot force it, and we cannot calculate it. Readiness is the only condition for it.”¹³⁵

More questions

In my copy of *When Science Meets Religion*, I had written questions throughout the book beside comments by the author Ian Barbour. In a passage under the heading “Conflict” the writer says: “Biblical literalists believe that the theory of evolution conflicts with religious faith. Atheistic scientists claim that scientific evidence for evolution is incompatible with any form of theism. The two groups agree in asserting that a person cannot believe in both God and evolution, though they disagree as to which they will accept.”¹³⁶

Beside the passage I had asked, “Could the basis of conflict be each one’s perception of God? What if God is evolution and evolution God, given the journey to know God is an unfolding process from unconsciousness to consciousness.”¹³⁷

Under the heading “Integration” the author states his intent to introduce the dialogue held between religion and science within Western and Eastern traditions. He states further, “Authors from Eastern traditions might try to merge diverse viewpoints and to seek common ground among them.”¹³⁸ In response I write in the margins: “We often speak in terms of Western versus Eastern ways of thinking. I am beginning to realize that Ultimate Reality is not dualistic in nature. Is there another way of exploring *common ground*? Is the West and East thing only a different perspective of the same reality?”¹³⁹

Discussing separate domains in comparing religion and science, Barbour draws on Langdon Gilkey's distinction: “Science asks objective ‘how’ questions. Religion asks personal ‘why’ questions about meaning and purpose and about our ultimate origin and destiny.”¹⁴⁰ This observation raised for me these questions: “What if the journey to know

God is one that leads us to the discovery that God is not a separate someone/something? Would this understanding affect how we see Science and Religion? Is there a need to see them separate, but rather a different perspective of the same Reality?¹⁴¹

Addressing differing languages and functions of science and religion, Barbour notes, “The distinctive functions of *religious language*, according to the linguistic analysts, are to recommend a way of life, to elicit a set of attitudes, and to encourage allegiance to particular moral principles.”¹⁴² He says, “Some scholars have studied diverse cultures and concluded that religious traditions are *ways of life* that are primarily practical and normative. . . . Other scholars claim that religion’s primary aim is the transformation of the person.”¹⁴³

In response I write: “If one explored the common thread of Mystery that moves beyond a way of life, or a set of ethical norms, would this remove the divisions that exist? What if the transformation of the person is the journey to know God that is innate within all of humanity?”¹⁴⁴

Live divided no more

In November 2006 I enrolled in *Leadership in Change*. The course was timely. I enjoyed my work in Pastoral Care but found other aspects of church life difficult. Like other paths in my journey, I knew it was one I needed to be on. I believed the source of my struggle came from working within a hierarchal setting where belief in God was defined by a set of doctrines, where rules and protocol often came ahead of relationship, and where the congregation viewed the role of minister as the person with a special connection to God.

Through coursework and the writings of Parker Palmer I was challenged to look *within* for the reasons behind the struggle, as I described in the final paper entitled “Putting a New Face On Leadership: Leading From The Heart.” It felt like I had been invited into a dance, of sorts, to look into the eyes of the real partner with whom I was in this dance. Reading *The Courage To Teach* by Palmer awakened the understanding that “the entanglements I experienced in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life.”¹⁴⁵

Awakened through writing the paper to the places in my journey where I lived out of darkness instead of the light of who I was, I became aware it was not about hating the one and loving the other. It was about embracing the two as part of the whole of who I was. I suddenly became aware what had been happening all along was perfect, even if it did not appear that way. There was nothing to be fixed. There was nothing *to do*; I just needed *to be*. As Gandhi said: “Be the change you want to see. . .” With this understanding came peace.¹⁴⁶

I remembered when I was eleven years old being captivated by the beauty of rocks and spending hours collecting them. One day I found a rather peculiar looking rock with a glob like configuration on the side of it. I was fascinated by its unusual shape and brought it home and added it to the collection on my dresser. The next morning I awoke and there on my dresser was a beautiful Monarch butterfly. I stared at it in amazement as I watched it taking its first steps across the dresser—its wings still moist and tiny legs unsteady. A transformation had taken place before my eyes.¹⁴⁷

No God

Although I do not know when it happened, a belief in God disappeared. I still believed in the Mystery pervading all life, but no longer believed in a God who created this Mystery. The desire to pray also left. There was no one to pray to. I describe the experience in one of my last journal entries: “I know I can’t go back to the way I used to think about God or life. But what is back anyway? Did I feel any less interested in spiritual things?—no! It seems that going back means going back to what I thought or knew for certain. Nothing seems certain now. Where do I go from here?”¹⁴⁸

Understanding kundalini

In the spring of 2007 I saw an acupuncturist for energy-related symptoms. She was familiar with *kundalini*, described in the literature as “a latent spiritual energy in the human body,”¹⁴⁹ and discussed it openly. I had not experienced such openness before from medical professionals. She introduced me to the writings of authors like Bonnie Greenwell, a clinical psychologist who worked with people who had undergone kundalini experiences,¹⁵⁰ and gave the name of a local physician who comfortable with both Western and Eastern medicine.

From 2007 to 2010 I read every book I could find on the subject of kundalini awakening. The information affirmed my experience and gave context to the grief accompanying the loss of what had seemed normal. I felt I had been given a lifeline.

In her book *Farther Shores* Yvonne Kason describes, in depth, symptoms I had experienced: “Sensations of energy, heat, and/or light that rise up the spine or rush up through the body towards the head. . . . the sensation of being engulfed in an

overwhelming brilliant bright white light.”¹⁵¹ . . . “abdominal contractions or spasms, or spontaneous pumping of the diaphragm,” “arching or jerking of the back,” “a vibration and tremor in the arms.”¹⁵²

David Lukoff, a licensed clinical psychologist who had undergone an awakening, explains the confusion that can lead to a misdiagnosis: “Kundalini awakening can resemble many disorders, medical as well as psychiatric. The symptoms can mimic conversion disorders. . . . The emotional reaction to the awakening of kundalini can be confused with the disorders involving anxiety, depression, aggression, and organic syndromes. While in some cases it resembles a psychotic episode, medication can further complicate the process.”¹⁵³

Charles Whitfield, who has written several books on spiritual awakening, uses the terms spiritual awakening and kundalini awakening interchangeably. He sheds light on both the awakening and recovery process. “[S]piritual awakening [can be] stimulated by a near-death experience, bottoming out from an illness, or the like. . . . The actual trigger for the awakening could cause what we call ‘retraumatization’ . . . commonly from our childhood, that . . . brings back the past experiences we may have suppressed or repressed.”¹⁵⁴

Whitfield cites Lee Sannelle, the author of *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence?* who identifies feelings of isolation that often accompanies the experience. “There are many undergoing this process who at times feel quite insane. When they behave well and keep silent they may avoid being called schizophrenic, or being hospitalized, or sedated. Nevertheless their isolation and sense of separation from others may cause them such suffering.”¹⁵⁵

Gopi Krishna's book *Kundalini For A New Age* provided scientific background that shed light on what happens at a biological, as well as the psychological level: "The awakening of the kundalini does not only mean the activation of the dormant force in the body, but also an altered activity of the entire nervous system and the opening of a normally silent centre in the brain."¹⁵⁶ He explains, "With the arousal of the Kundalini, [the] unit or circle or pool of awareness, consciousness, or mind starts to expand. . . . [T]he individual ego, with its small periphery of awareness, always perceptive of its close link with the body, begins to grow wider . . . and the idea of the body dimmer. . . . It seems as if the body has melted away or receded to a distance, where it is almost lost to one's perception."¹⁵⁷

Bruce Greyson, a Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences who has done extensive research on near-death experience, speaks of kundalini within the broader context of human evolution: "In Eastern spiritual traditions, the biological mechanism of both individual enlightenment and evolution of the species toward higher consciousness is called kundalini, a potential force that, once awakened, can produced a variety of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual effects. The ancient yogic texts describe a life energy present in all living beings."¹⁵⁸ He adds, "Because Western medicine does not acknowledge the Eastern concept of kundalini . . . symptoms of Kundalini arousal are often diagnosed as physical or psychological problems that fit within Western allopathic diagnostic categories."¹⁵⁹

A common thread

In September 2007 I enrolled in *The Way of The Mystic*. When I saw the listing of

the course in the curriculum, I remembered the experience two years earlier where I had a desire to study the mystics. From class, I was reminded how challenging it was to find a definition for mysticism that resonated with all people—and how one’s understanding of the word could vary depending on one’s philosophical or theological background or approach to the subject.¹⁶⁰

Evelyn Underhill, one of the first authors I read who shed light on the role of direct experience in knowing God, gave definitions that were more descriptive than prescriptive. “Mysticism, according to its historical and psychological definitions, is the direct intuition or experience of God; and a mystic is a person who has, to a greater or less degree, such a direct experience—one whose religion and life are centered, not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on that which the person regards as first hand personal knowledge.”¹⁶¹

I had my one foot in one world, theologically speaking, and my other foot in another world; and had not found the language to speak of this world, as yet. My hope was to discover a new way to give voice to what was within. I wondered, “Is it possible to write about this experience in such a way that it hooks one heart to another?”¹⁶² It was this question that provided the direction for my final paper “Blessed Be The Tie That Binds.” I wondered, How can I find a new way to speak of the “common ground” that binds us together as humanity? This question had pressed on my mind. In preparing to write the paper it became clear I needed to discover the thread woven through the history of my own journey, where I had experienced the mystical—and then write about it.

In her book *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, Sue Monk Kidd¹⁶³ spoke of this process as reconnecting with the thread that has been tugging us along this journey—the

thread of our inner wisdom and intuition that she, after Joseph Campbell, refers to as the “Ariadne thread.”¹⁶⁴ I had a growing awareness of how one story seemed to be connected to the next. In many ways it seemed, not that I was living my life, but rather life was living me. In drawing the paper to a close, I shared the following story.

The voice of the beloved

Colin was a psychologist with a background in Eastern and Western philosophy. Our paths crossed many times since we met at the Healing Touch workshop and eventually he became my spiritual teacher, or guru in Eastern language. When we met, his words, although gentle and caring, were not always easy to hear. I was challenged to re-visit old belief systems that no longer held meaning. This self examination sent me on an inward journey that confronted my dualistic thinking about right and wrong and good and bad.

The lens through which I viewed myself and the world was inextricably tied to old ways of thinking. During one of our walks I spoke of the chaos I was experiencing, like I had one foot in one world and a second foot in another. He asked what I saw when I looked up into the sky at night, reminding me of the order that existed even in chaos; this prompted an immediate shift in thinking. His wisdom and guidance normalized what I was experiencing and reminded me of what I already knew.

In an email correspondence Colin wrote about the nature of our relationship. “The meeting with the teacher/guru is without a doubt one of the greatest mysteries of life, . . . what some mystics speak of as the ‘still point’ about which a huge re-orientation takes place, pulling together the thread of all previous experiences into the profoundest of

understanding.” He explained, “It is where the veil of confusion and ignorance is pulled back to reveal what we have always known, a place where all questions come to a final halt. . . . This is not to say that for every mystic there is always a physical spiritual teacher present but in certain cases it is what happens.”¹⁶⁵

In wondering what profound understanding had emerged during our discussions, this thought surfaced, “when *truth* is heard, it is the voice of the beloved speaking.” I was reminded of John the Baptist, “the voice crying in the wilderness.”¹⁶⁶ In what had felt, many times, like a wilderness experience, the voice of the beloved had been that of the spiritual teacher. Colin spoke in a way that brought understanding and I was filled with love and gratitude. Then came an ah ha moment. The voice of the beloved heard in various forms throughout my journey *is* the common thread woven, metaphorically, within each mystical experience. It is the *tie* that binds us together as humanity.

I came to the end of the thread, so to speak, where the thoughts stopped flowing. This really was only the beginning—there was so much more within to share, but the language was not yet available. In correspondence Colin explained: “Perhaps over time the mind will relax enough, feel more comfortable with the experiences and insights that shook the very foundation of its beliefs. Then, perhaps the language will emerge, having first been formulated in the heart and slowly unnoticed understood in the mind.”¹⁶⁷

As if in answer, my eyes fall upon these words by Rumi. “I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Parsi, nor Moslem. I am not East or West, nor of the land, nor of the sea: I am not of Nature’s workshop, nor of the circling heavens. . . . My place is Placelessness, my trace is Tracelessness; ‘Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved, I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one.”¹⁶⁸ These

words spoke to my heart, of what I, in part, had only begun to understand.

...

The pilgrimage completed, I hoped to discover a common thread woven within the fabric of the human story. Exploring the process of spiritual awakening, I was curious about what we might understand of God at the depth of who we are as human beings and of the indicators of that knowing in our journey from childhood onwards.

Preparing for the next phase of my writing, I met with my supervisors. I planned to interview nine authors from various faith and non-faith traditions who had been influential in my understanding about God at various stages of the journey.

Personalized letters were written to each of the authors inviting them to participate “in a recorded interview using SKYPE”. I described the form the interview would take: “an invitation to tell their story within the context of the journey to know God”. I stated “my hope was to explore ways in which our story reflects the mystery of God and to find new language that spoke of that mystery”.

A draft of the Chapter One was included, to provide an overview of the integrative study. As the authors shared their stories questions would “naturally emerge” during the conversation. I would transcribe their interviews and look for shifts in their understanding about God, identifying “common patterns” in their journey.¹⁶⁹

Notes for Chapter Two

1. Norma Dawkins (mother), phone interview by author, July 19, 2009.
2. Bill Dawkins (father), as recalled by mother in phone interview by author, July 19, 2009.
3. Norma Dawkins, phone interview by author, July 19, 2009.
4. Norma Dawkins, phone interview by author, July 19, 2009.
5. Norma Dawkins, phone interview by author, July 19, 2009.
6. Christine Welch, "Where Can I Serve?" *Restoration Witness*. March/April 1986, 16.
7. Welch, "Where Can I Serve?" 16–20.
8. Psalms 139:11–12.
9. Catherine Marshall, *The Helper* [1978; repr., New York: Avon Books, 1979].
10. Catherine Marshall, *Light in My Darkest Night* [1989; repr., New York: Avon Books, 1990].
11. Catherine Marshall, *The Helper*, 46; Pers. underlining in *The Helper*, September 1992.
12. Eric Butterworth, *Discover The Power Within You: A Guide to the Unexplored Depths Within* [1968; repr., San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992], xv.
13. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Discover The Power Within You*, October 14, 1992.
14. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Discover The Power Within You*, October 14, 1992.
15. Butterworth, *Discover The Power Within You*, viii–ix.
16. Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"* [HarperCollins, 1992].
17. Pers. marginalia in copy of *A Return to Love*, October 1992.
18. Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*, xix; Pers. underlining in copy of *A Return to Love*, September 1992.
19. Williamson, *A Return to Love*, xix; Pers. underlining in *A Return to Love*, September 1992.
20. Elizabeth Dodson Gray, *Why the Green Nigger?: Re-mything Genesis* [Wellesley, Mass.: Roundtable Press, 1979], 19; Pers. underlining in copy of *Why the Green Nigger?* September 1993.
21. Dodson Gray, *Why the Green Nigger?* 19.
22. Sheila D. Collins, *A Different Heaven and Earth* [Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974], 34–35.
23. W. Paul Jones, *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief* [Nashville: Abingdon Publications, 1989], 16.
24. Jones, *Theological Worlds*, 187.
25. Jones, *Theological Worlds*, 187.
26. Jones, *Theological Worlds*, 187.
27. Jones, *Theological Worlds*, 187.
28. Pers. journal, August 1995; Quotations from my personal journal may be edited for this integrative study for readability without notation for minor changes and omissions.

-
29. Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church* [1978; repr., Doubleday, 1987], 132.
 30. Christine Welch, A Universal Perspective [paper for course, *St. Paul: Life and Letters*, Newman College, submitted March 1996].
 31. Welch, A Universal Perspective.
 32. Welch, A Universal Perspective.
 33. Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Think On These Things*, ed. D. Rajagopal. [1964; repr., HarperPerennial, 1989], 33.
 34. Krishnamurti, *Think On These Things*, 33; Pers. underlining in copy of *Think On These Things*, February 1996.
 35. Jiddu Krishnamurti, *You Are the World: An Authentic Report of Talks and Discussions in American Universities* [1972; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1989], 107.
 36. Pers. marginalia in copy of *You Are the World*.
 37. Pers. journal, April 16, 1996.
 38. Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom* [repr., Image, 1988], 43.
 39. Pers. journal, April 16, 1996.
 40. Pers. journal, April 13, 1996.
 41. Pers. journal, June 11, 1996.
 42. Pers. journal, October 17, 1996.
 43. Christine Welch, The Influence of John's Teaching on My Understanding of the Spirit [paper for course, *The Theology of John*, Newman College, submitted October 1996].
 44. Welch, The Influence of John's Teaching on My Understanding of the Spirit.
 45. T.C. McLuhan, *Cathedrals of the Spirit: The Message of Sacred Places*, 1st ed. [HarperCollins Canada, 1996].
 46. Pers. journal, October 22, 1996.
 47. Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," *The Natural History Essays* [Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1980], 116, quoted in McLuhan, *Cathedrals of the Spirit*, 62.
 48. Pers. journal, November 29, 1996.
 49. Pers. journal, November 29, 1996.
 50. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* [Riverhead Books, 1995], 154.
 51. Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* 155.
 52. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, December 25, 1996.
 53. Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 144.
 54. Pers. journal, December 25, 1996.
 55. Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 148.
 56. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, December 25, 1996.
 57. Pers. journal, March 24, 1997.

-
58. Pers. journal, October 14, 1997.
59. Christine Welch, Jesus and the Patron-Client System [paper for course, *Introduction to Christian Scripture*, St. Stephen's College, submitted March 2000]
60. Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* [1994; repr., San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995], 13.
61. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time*, December 1997.
62. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time*, 6.
63. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time*, 6.
64. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time*, December 1997.
65. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time*, 15.
66. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time*, December 1997.
67. Richard Rohr and John Bookser Feister, *Jesus' Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount* [Saint Anthony Messenger Press, 1996], 10.
68. Pers. marginalia in copy of *Jesus' Plan for a New World*.
69. Christopher Levan, *God Hates Religion: How the Gospels Condemn False Religious Practice* [Etobicoke, Ontario: The United Church Publishing House, 1995], 18.
70. Pers. marginalia in copy of *God Hates Religion*.
71. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time*, 32.
72. Christine Welch, Quest for the Historical Jesus [paper for course, *Introduction to Church History*, St. Stephen's College, submitted April 1998].
73. Pamela Dickey Young, *Christ in a Post-Christian World: How Can We Believe in Jesus Christ When Those Around Us Believe Differently—Or Not At All?* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], 49.
74. Christine Welch, Theological Reflection On God [paper for course, *Pastoral Theology*, St. Stephen's College. Submitted December 1998].
75. Pers. journal, January 30, 1999.
76. Pers. journal, January 31, 1999.
77. Maria Harris, *Dance of the Spirit: the Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality* [New York: Bantam Books, 1989], 95.
78. Pers. journal, February 2000.
79. Harris, *Dance of the Spirit*, 95.
80. Harris, *Dance of the Spirit*, 181.
81. Pers. journal, March 5, 2000.
82. Pers. journal, April 26, 2001.
83. Ezekiel 37:2; Pers. journal, April 27, 2001.
84. M. Scott Peck, *In Search of Stones: A Pilgrimage Of Faith, Reason and Discovery* [New York: Hyperion, 1995], 100–101; Pers. journal, July 26, 2001.
85. Peck, *In Search of Stones*, 100; Pers. journal, August 29, 2001.

-
86. Shaun McNiff, *Art as Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination* [Boston: Shambhala, 1992], 1; Pre-course assignment for *Spiritual Practice of Drawing Mandala*, January 29, 2002.
87. Christine Welch, *The Spiritual Practice of Drawing the Mandala* [paper for course, *Spiritual Practice of Drawing Mandala*, St. Stephen's College, submitted April 2, 2002].
88. Madeline McMurray, *Illuminations and The Healing Image: Finding and Learning from the Inner Artist for Psychic Growth* [California: Winbow Press, 1988], 25; Pers. journal, April 1, 2002.
89. Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* [1992; repr., New York: Image, 1994], 42.
90. Pers. marginalia in copy of *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, August 2002.
91. Deepak Chopra, *How to Know God: The Soul's Journey into the Mystery of Mysteries* [New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000], 51; italics added.
92. Chopra, *How to Know God*, 58.
93. Pers. journal, November 27, 2002.
94. Chopra, *How to Know God*, 98.
95. Pers. journal, January 20, 2003.
96. Chopra, *How to Know God*, 101; Pers. journal, March 18, 2003.
97. Pers. journal, March 18, 2003.
98. Pers. journal, March 18, 2003.
99. Chopra, *How to Know God*, 243.
100. Pers. journal, May 31, 2003.
101. Pers. journal, May 31, 2003.
102. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* [Routledge, 1969].
103. Karen Martin and Sandra Elder, "Pathways through Grief: A Model of the Process," *Personal Care in an Impersonal World: A Multidimensional Look At Bereavement*, ed. John D. Morgan [Baywood Pub. Co., 1993].
104. Pers. journal, September 17, 2003.
105. Wikipedia, "Conversion disorder," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conversion_disorder [accessed March 30, 2012].
106. See section "Understanding kundalini" further in Chapter Two of this integrative study.
107. Sister Stanislaus Kennedy, *Gardening The Soul* [London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., 2001], page for November 7; Pers. journal, November 7, 2003.
108. Pers. journal, August 24, 2004.
109. Pers. journal, September 23, 2004.
110. Christine Welch, For Such A Time As This [paper for course, *Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures*, St. Stephen's College, submitted September 2005].
111. Esther 4:16.
112. Welch, For Such A Time As This.
113. Pers. comm. from author to teacher, August 2005.
114. Pers. comm. from Michael Cheney, teacher of *Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures*, August 2005.

-
115. Pers. comm. from author to teacher, August 2005.
 116. Christine Welch, Is it Confirmation or Conformation? A Journey of Exploration and Integration [paper for course, *Science and Religion in Dialogue*, St. Stephen's College, submitted May 2006].
 117. Welch, Is it Confirmation or Conformation?
 118. Welch, Is it Confirmation or Conformation?
 119. Paul Tillich, "Invocation: The Lost Dimension in Religion," *The Essential Tillich: An Anthology of the Writings of Paul Tillich*. ed. F. Forrester Church, 1st ed. [Chicago, Ill: University Of Chicago Press, 1999], 2–3.
 120. Welch, Is it Confirmation or Conformation?
 121. Colin D. Mallard, *Understanding: The Simplicity of Life* [Courtenay, BC: Advaita Gems Publishing, 2010], 34.
 122. Colin D. Mallard, *Understanding*, 36.
 123. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics* [1997; repr., New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000], 26; emphasis in original; Welch, Is it Confirmation or Conformation?
 124. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story* [New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2002], 82.
 125. O'Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith*, 193.
 126. O'Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith*, 194.
 127. Pers. comm. with C. Mallard, June 26, 2006.
 128. O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology*, 65.
 129. Ramesh S. Balsekar, *Final Truth: A Guide to Ultimate Understanding* [Los Angeles: Advaita Press, 1989], 95.
 130. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality: A New Spiritual Framework for Today's World* [1997; repr., New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000], 105.
 131. O'Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality*, 98–99.
 132. O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology*, 55.
 133. Isaiah 43:18-19.
 134. Tillich, *The Essential Tillich*, 278.
 135. Tillich, *The Essential Tillich*, 278.
 136. Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000], 2.
 137. Pers. marginalia in copy of *When Science Meets Religion*, June 2006.
 138. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 6.
 139. Pers. marginalia in copy of *When Science Meets Religion*, June 2006.
 140. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 18.
 141. Pers. marginalia in copy of *When Science Meets Religion*, June 2006.
 142. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 20.
 143. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 20.
 144. Pers. marginalia in copy of *When Science Meets Religion*, June 2006.

-
145. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998], 2.
146. Christine Welch, Putting a New Face On Leadership: Leading From The Heart [paper for course, *Leadership in Change*, St. Stephen's College, submitted December 2006].
147. Welch, Putting a New Face On Leadership.
148. Pers. journal, July 22, 2006.
149. Yvonne Kason, *Farther Shores: Exploring How Near-Death, Kundalini and Mystical Experiences can Transform Ordinary Lives* [1994, repr., A Phyllis Bruce Book, Harper Collins, 2000], 23.
150. Bonnie L. Greenwell, *Energies of Transformation: A Guide to the Kundalini Process* [Shakti River Press, 1995].
151. Kason, *Farther Shores*, 50.
152. Kason, *Farther Shores*, 180.
153. David Lukoff, "Kundalini Awakening," *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening* [Sounds True, 2009], 134.
154. Charles L. Whitfield, "Spiritual Energy: Perspectives from a Map of the Psyche and the Kundalini Recovery Process," *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening* [Sounds True, 2009], 167.
155. Lee Sannella, *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence?* [Atrium Pub Group, 1976], 60, quoted in Whitfield, "Spiritual Energy: Perspectives from a Map of the Psyche and the Kundalini Recovery Process," *Kundalini Rising*, 166.
156. Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini for the New Age: Selected Writings of Gopi Krishna* [Bantam Books, 1988], 122.
157. Krishna, *Kundalini For A New Age*, 122.
158. Bruce Greyson, "Near-Death Experiences and the Physio-Kundalini Syndrome," *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening* [Sounds True, 2009], 174)
159. Greyson, "Near-Death Experiences and the Physio-Kundalini Syndrome," 176.
160. Pers. course journal, September 24, 2007.
161. Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church* [New York: Schocken, 1964], 9; Pers. course journal for *The Way of the Mystic*, September 24, 2007.
162. Pers. course journal for *The Way of the Mystic*, September 24, 2007.
163. Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance Of The Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* [1996; repr., HarperCollins, 2002], 120.
164. Joseph Campbell, with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers [New York: Doubleday, 1988], 150, quoted in Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance Of The Dissident Daughter*, 120; Christine Welch, Blessed Be The Tie That Binds [paper for course, *The Way of The Mystic*, St. Stephen's College, submitted December 2007].
165. Pers. comm. from C. Mallard, November 12, 2007.
166. Mark 1:3.
167. Pers. comm. from C. Mallard, December 4, 2007.
168. Jalal al-din Rumi, from *The Divan*, quoted in Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism And Resistance* [Fortress Press, 2001], 65–66.
169. Clair Woodbury and Joyce Madsen (supervisors), comments at meeting July 2011.



CHAPTER THREE

THE INVITATION

Diarmuid O’Murchu and Gretta Vosper responded to the invitation to be interviewed. Gretta initially questioned the appropriateness of participating in the project, given the word “God” was not commonly used in her vocabulary. In response I stated I would like to have the opportunity to hear her story and to write about it, as I believed her story¹ was not so unlike the journey of others. Gretta accepted the invitation and a date was later set for December 15, 2011.²

In his response, Diarmuid requested that we focus on the “present and the future” rather than the impoverished childhood long left behind. Being curious about early childhood intuitions, I asked Diarmuid if he would be open to questions about his past if there might have been a connection to his current understanding about God. He didn’t answer the question, but remained open to be interviewed.³

Each interview was taped and approximately one hour in length. Diarmuid and Gretta provided verbal and written consent for their stories to be shared. Due to busy schedules they had been unable to read the material that I had sent prior to the interview. As we spoke, any uneasiness soon fell away. Diarmuid and Gretta were easy to talk to. They were vulnerable during their storytelling, yet clear about where they stood in their beliefs. There was a flow in the interview process, a respect between the interviewer and interviewee that felt natural.

An ethical dilemma

There was an element of uncertainty as I prepared for the interviews. How would I

conduct an interview, within the context of the journey to know God, not touch on an aspect of a person's past, and not use the word God? Two authors out of nine had responded to the invitation to participate in the interviews. How would I gather adequate information with the limited cross section of people's stories to draw upon?

In retrospect, I realized what I experienced as an ethical dilemma was not real⁴—it was *personal*, in nature. I had entered this part of the research with a set idea of how it should unfold: the *me* in it was concerned with the outcome. This was not unfamiliar territory; I had been in similar places many times throughout my writing.

Curiosity replaced uncertainty. The question about whether to extend the search for other interviewees fell away. There was a shift in awareness. The participants had been invited to share their stories: I was the guest at their table, not the other way around. Or were we all guests at the same table? Interesting thought.

Common patterns

The interviews were complete; the stories told. Like waves lapping on the shoreline common patterns emerged. It was as if Wisdom spoke, leaving footprints in the sand. Awareness, intuition, dualistic thinking, falling away of beliefs, chaos, self-discovery, experiences of a mystical nature, shifts in thinking seemed inextricably woven within the fabric of the human story.

How does one describe the common thread in what appears to be a tangled skein and write about it in a way that is helpful for all seekers? Gopi Krishna offers these insights: "We are face to face with a colossal problem when we try to knit together the infinitely scattered threads of religion. . . . There is such a vast store of literature, said to

be emanated in part from God, and there are different points of view that it appears impossible to untie the tangled skein.”⁵

In humanity’s attempt down through the ages to describe the divine mystery in life, Diarmuid observes, “we have been projecting onto God a particularly inherited understanding of the word ‘person’ which is essentially the understanding of person in ancient credal times. Everybody experiences a sense of mystery. They put the word God on that mystery because of their inherited traditions.”⁶ All our attempts, as Gopi Krishna noted, “owe their origin to this irrepressible mystical tendency in human beings—the persistent idea at the back of the mind that there is a common factor behind all this variety of phenomena, a common source from which all is flowing out.”⁷

What appears to be a tangled skein is an illusion. It has the appearance of a confused mass, only because we look at it through a veil dimly. Like looking through a kaleidoscope, one discovers what seems separate in appearance is in its whole form a spectrum of beauty.

There is a story about a gathering of blind men asked to describe an elephant. The one who reaches out for the tail said it was a rope; the one who touches the leg says, “no no, it is a tree.” Each man describes the elephant from his own perspective, but cannot capture the whole of reality. To name the “elephant” is to describe what is true and what is not, from a place of understanding. The interviewees do this in telling their stories.

Diarmuid’s and Gretta’s stories are set within a different culture and faith background. Diarmuid was born in Ireland and raised in a Catholic community where children were taught a “very frightening negative image of God—very judgmental and harsh.”⁸ Gretta was born in Canada within a Protestant community. Attending Sunday

school as a young child, she remembers being introduced to “a new curriculum” and a “less traditional belief about God,” where the “stories of Jesus were being taught as stories, the same as all other stories that we were being exposed to as children in all different areas of our lives.”⁹ Gretta “didn’t have much to do with the church” in teen years; while Diarmuid, although questioning the teachings of the church, remained active.¹⁰

There are many similarities in their stories. Diarmuid and Gretta are both writers, leaders in their communities of faith and passionate about issues related to human justice. They are *critics* and at the same time *lovers* of the faith. They speak frankly about the church’s role in addressing the tougher questions people are asking and in the healing of divisions that exist within our world. Both agree the image of a deity in the sky no longer fits most people’s beliefs about God.

Diarmuid names the challenge facing the church as a “growing unease with the word God that has to do with the patriarchal connotations, the kind of investment of power, the kind of baggage attached in terms of conventional religion. Naming it” he says, “is helpful to people trying to make a better sense of the journey they are on.”¹¹

So what can be done to create empathy and compassion in the world? Gretta offers these insights: “I think that spiritual communities, churches, mosques, synagogues, all of these groups that have pulled together can do it well. They have the tools; they have the experience; they have the stories to create that kind of meaning within community. This is our task in the future—creating new stories and helping people live themselves into narratives that are transformational, not just for themselves, but for the world.”¹²

Diarmuid names the importance of exploring ways to seek common ground among

world religions saying, “We need to think more about being bridge builders and to work more with commonalities rather than differences. We need to find the sacred places, the kind of niches where people can have the time and space and the support to tell the stories that need to be told, to do the discerning that needs to be done and to have spiritual accompaniment.”¹³

Diarmuid and Gretta speak candidly about their faith journey and challenges along the way. There was a connection in both their stories between coming to know themselves and questioning their traditional beliefs about God. Both mention a growing awareness that came with a falling away of old beliefs, more into mid-life. Diarmuid explains: “what preoccupied my personhood wasn’t so much about God, as it was trying to make sense of my own vocation.”¹⁴ Gretta admitted, from adolescence onwards “there was always this sort of looking for something that made a little more sense.”¹⁵

With a falling away of old beliefs Diarmuid speaks of a questioning of the “meaning of religious life.”¹⁶ Gretta describes a “spiritual crisis” as a leader, losing “ability” and “willingness” to continue to frame beliefs as they had been taught.¹⁷ Diarmuid speaks of “a time of chaos, a letting go, transcending, moving beyond cherished beliefs,” and of “gradually realizing that to question and to doubt was actually a healthy thing.” Expanding further, “the more deeply we discern the meaning of the chaos, what we begin to discover deep down is order and purpose.”¹⁸

Underlying the chaos in their journeys is an awareness of what Diarmuid describes as “something that is more wholesome and more benign” as “groundedness in the land and in nature.”¹⁹ Gretta speaks of a “deep sense of connection with what undergirds life” clarifying, “Albert Schweitzer talks about the urge toward life that every living being has.

It is that urge toward life I connect and resonate with—this intense longing for life.”²⁰

In telling their stories they both speak of places where intuition and synchronicity had been present in their journeys. The reading of the right book, or meeting the right person at the right time. Gretta tells of coming out of university “not really having much to do with church” and “suddenly having the understanding to go into the ministry, which made absolutely no sense.”²¹ Diarmuid speaks of thinking about “leaving a position in religious life” and then knowing to stay.²²

During the interviews I ask if there were “specific shifts in thinking, ah ha moments” where they realized that what they understood, at a deeper level, to be true did not resonate with the world around them.²³ Diarmuid tells about “reading the works of Ladislaus Boros, a Jesuit priest in Germany” and being struck by the understanding, “that within our humanity is a core of sacredness.” He further adds, “I had internalized a very strong sense of original sin, a fundamental unworthiness, a fundamental not-good-ness. Now for the first time I was hearing someone talk about a fundamental goodness within the human personality.”²⁴ There was a “deepening in theology” that seemed to happen, over time. “I came across a book by Teilhard de Chardin. Boros was talking about the sacredness within humanity; de Chardin was talking about the sacredness within evolution and creation. . . . Another important landmark with science and cosmology was Fritjof Capra’s *The Turning Point*. Creation and spirituality became very central to my pursuit.”²⁵

Gretta speaks about the influence of working with a minister, during theological training, who was passionate about ministry: “Although I was still in this academic mindset, I came to realize the gifts I had could allow me to be in ministry. If I had not had

that year I think I may never have gone into the ministry. I began to see that the work I felt compelled to do could be done within a congregational context.”²⁶

Gretta shared another story about co-facilitating workshops with a ministry colleague (over a two year period) on “core values and core beliefs” for twenty three congregations, including the congregations they were individually serving in. They were surprised to learn that, unless individuals in a congregation had been exposed to contemporary scholarship in a significant way, “their understanding of theology was elementary. When you die you go to heaven; Jesus saved us from our sins. But nobody could really articulate what that was, or why.”²⁷ Gretta shared that both her and her colleague were “baffled about this” because they had been trained in liberal institutions, teaching contemporary scholarship in their congregations for years.²⁸

When preparing to speak at a service one Sunday, Gretta said that she had an epiphany: “From the Call to Worship, to the Prayer of Approach, the readings, the hymns—everything was steeped in archaic theological constructs I did not believe anymore—or I thought we didn’t believe anymore. Despite the fact my sermons were always grounded in contemporary scholarship I was really spending four-fifths of them deconstructing the lectionary reading for the week, explaining the socio-political, economic, historical context and then explaining why the reading had no bearing on the situation we were now in. If it had a very small thread of connection, I would pull on the thread. Why was I doing this? And why was I still choosing hymns and still positing God as a theistic being with the Power to act in our lives. It was like ‘oh my goodness!’”²⁹

Although the specific details of Diarmuid’s and Gretta’s stories offered valuable insights, lingering questions remained. How do I write about the journey to know God in

a way that is meaningful for *all* seekers? What about people for whom God holds no meaning? As I sat with my husband over coffee, I spoke to him about my frustration with how to proceed, stating, “it feels like I am at the end of a knotted rope.” After listening to my rambling he said pointedly, “What *is* the common thread within their stories?” His question seemed to take my mind to a different place. I realized what was common in the participants’ stories was a *knowing*, as children, of a divine essence in life—which some might name God—without ties to a religious doctrine or dogma.

Diarmuid tells of walking the hills in Ireland as a young child and having “a natural love of nature growing up” and “a sense of being at one with something,” although there was never “any explicit religious connections made with it.”³⁰ Gretta recalls being “on a swing at grandmother’s cottage” and realizing then, at ten or twelve years old, a different world was around them. “It is like space is textured and so there is something between us and everything else which links us to everything. It is a profound sense of being, and being *with* everything.” There were other times when similar experiences would “just happen.” Not wanting to label the experience as mystical, Gretta “never thought of it as a supernatural kind of God-experience”: there was “no resonance felt between the experience and something coming from some other realm.”³¹

As I shared their stories with my husband (who refers to himself as an atheist) he nodded and said, “Like what happens when you see a sunset over the mountains, or hold your grandchild for the first time.”³²

There was a sense of *déjà vu* as I remembered the conversation with Gretta. I had been explaining the purpose of the interview and of the need for a new language that would describe “whatever this mystical God experience is.” I admitted I did not “know

what it was yet” and apologized for “rambling.” Gretta said my comments actually helped to clarify the purpose of the interview, and responded “Ah . . . looking for this common thread that sort of runs through these experiences, whether had by someone like Christopher Hitchens (he would never call them anything spiritual) or had by someone who is in a constant connection with some kind of ecstatic expression of faith. Is there a commonality, and if there is, what is it?”³³

The answer became clear. What is common to all human beings, believer and non-believer alike, is that who we think ourselves to be is not the content of our stories. As Diarmuid says, “The words *atheist* and *agnostic* are just labels we put on ourselves. Whatever labels we put on ourselves we can’t get away from the fact that we all search for meaning.” The search for meaning is “pursued within a certain inherent consistency that at some stage people encounter, what other writers call, a sense of transcendence, a sense of being moved beyond the here and now to something more. They may never use the word God for that something more. They may not even use the word *holy mystery* or whatever, but there is something more.”³⁴

. . .

In the next chapter I will explore the common patterns that emerge within the context of the journey to know God from the perspective of an awakening process. What follows will be insights gleaned from a literature review, conversations with Colin, and interviews with Diarmuid and Gretta.

As I begin the final phase of my writing, words from an email by my former instructor give voice to how I want to proceed: “For me, the complexity of the tradition hands on the responsibility to be straightforward in describing what I think is there and

not to perpetuate the illusion that it is simpler than it is. I don't need to introduce complexity when things are actually simple; there is enough complexity to go around already."³⁵

During the interview process, everything that had been discussed, including answers to questions that were at the heart of the integrative study, arose in the conversations with Diarmuid and Gretta. In addressing the issues facing the church today, they provided insights as to how understanding the journey to know God in a different light would be beneficial for spiritual seekers and for the church community, as well. There was a sense that if I described what was discussed in the interviews and wove into the story insights they had offered, the whole story would be told. Everything was there in its whole form, all I needed to do was to trust the process.

Notes for Chapter Three

-
1. Pers. comm. from Gretta Vosper, May 12, 2009.
 2. Pers. comm. from Gretta Vosper, May 12, 2009.
 3. Pers. comm. from Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 23, 2011.
 4. Wikipedia, “Ethical dilemma,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethical_dilemma [accessed March 30, 2012]. Ethical dilemmas “can be refuted in various ways, for example by showing that the claimed ethical dilemma is only apparent and does not really exist (thus is not a paradox logically).”
 5. Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini for the New Age: Selected Writings of Gopi Krishna* [Bantam Books, 1988], 33.
 6. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 7. Krishna, *Kundalini for the New Age*, 194.
 8. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 9. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 10. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 11. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 12. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 13. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 14. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 15. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 16. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 17. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 18. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 19. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 20. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 21. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 22. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 23. Thesis author, interview question, August 31, 2011.
 24. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 25. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 26. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 27. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 28. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 29. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 30. Interview with Diarmuid O’Murchu, August 31, 2011.

-
31. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 32. Ron Welch (husband), in conversation March 25, 2012.
 33. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 34. Interview with Diarmuid O'Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 35. Pers. comm. from Michael Cheney, teacher of *Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures*, August 2005.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE DANCE

Common patterns

Telling stories seems to be the way we, as human beings, try to make sense of life and the world around us. Whether discussing spiritual matters or some other topics, the mind wants to figure life out. As Gopi Krishna explains, “From the day he is born as a rational being, man was never devoid of the numinous impulse or a mystical feeling that tried to trace this essential unity of objects and phenomena around him. The desire to fathom the mystery of his own being was as much a part of the savage brain as it is the cultured mind of our day.”¹ This understanding points to why the stories created about God are as numerous as peoples and cultures. It also explains the divisions among world religions and the wars that have plagued the earth since time immemorial.

Since everything is *in* God, then our human story as we understand it, including the language we use to describe God, is a part of that story. In her book *Storycatcher* Christina Baldwin shares these insights: “Since consciousness and language first claimed us, human beings have made up sacred stories to explain how something larger than ourselves created us and the world.”²

In a conversation with Colin early in my writing he asked who I was writing for. “It was something I *needed* to do,” I said. “It is almost like I didn’t have a choice.” Although there was truth in my answer, I wanted first to write for myself to come to a deeper understanding about what I believed at different times in my life and why. There had been a curiosity to understand the part of my story where God was a separate entity, a benevolent presence in my life. The *once upon a time* part of the story nurtured what I

thought of as the soul, brought comfort, as well as conflict and doubt. Also present were grief and loss, abandonment and surrender, love and hate, birth and death—everything. I did not wish to cling to past beliefs about God, nor see them as somehow less or more important to me now, but rather to understand them from the context in which they were found as part of a larger story. Ultimately I hoped through my writing to bring some understanding about the journey to know God that might help others, namely seekers from various faith and non-faith traditions who were struggling to find the language to describe their experience.

In a recent conversation with Colin he asked the question again. This time I understood more clearly who the audience might be. The list broadened to include leaders within the church community who felt drawn to explore these deeper conversations about faith with their congregations. As Gretta explained, “We have lost a source of nurture and sustenance and story that has been incredibly important to the evolution of humanity and could be crucial to its continuing evolution.” In addition, “the church is two to three generations behind where it should be. In the United States 20% of the population goes to a religious institution on a regular basis, but 80% believe in God— that is 60% of the people are getting their answers to questions about faith outside of the church.”³

Over coffee my husband told a story entitled *The Bridge Builder* that he learned when he served as a leader within the society of the Freemasons. The message behind the story speaks to the heart of the purpose of my writing.⁴ There was an old man who was on a long journey, one that he had walked alone. One night he came to a place in the journey where there was a “chasm vast and deep and wide.”⁵ Because he had travelled the journey and knew of the difficult places along the way, he decided to build a bridge that

spanned the chasm. When the old man arrived on the other side and was asked by a “fellow pilgrim” why he built the bridge, he replied, “There followed after me today a fair-haired youth. . . . He, too, must cross in the twilight dim; good friend, I am building this bridge for him.”⁶

Following the interviews with Diarmuid and Gretta I realized that, although the details around our journeys were different, there was a common thread within our stories. It was not a *new* thread; it was woven within the fabric of the human story from the beginning of time and can be found in stories within ancient wisdom—a wisdom that was lost with time. “The challenge is to reformulate this wisdom in a way that makes sense for now and for the future.”⁷

What follows is a personal account of the patterns that emerged as I explored the journey to know God from childhood onwards. Woven within my story are insights from Diarmuid and Gretta, conversations with Colin and authors who I encountered on my journey. My hope is, in the telling of the story, the reader will recognize similar patterns in their own journey and find new language that may speak to their experience. As Christina Baldwin suggests, “in the act of telling story we create a world we invite others into.”⁸

Know thyself

In mid-life I had become increasingly aware of a connection between self-enquiry and the journey to know God. Initially, I believed that “knowing thyself” was personal in nature. I thought that in knowing *myself*—places in my life where I saw myself separate from others and God—the *me* would come to know God.

This understanding about the self was deeply embedded in dualistic thinking that the personal self or ego was separate from God—and something that needed to be overcome. Jean Klein explains: “Such fractional thinking is born from the conditioned idea that we are independent entities, ‘selves’, ‘persons’. The notion of being a somebody conditions all other thinking.”⁹ The result: “In taking ourselves for separate entities we have forgotten our home ground and identified ourselves with an idea, a projection of individuality.”¹⁰

Looking back, I was able to see that the personal self had provided the lens through which I understood the journey to know God. As Bernadette Roberts explains, “what we experience of God is frankly ourselves—because it’s our only medium of doing so. The mind, the emotions or feelings, in a word, all our experiences in the interior life are merely our own reactions to ‘that’ which we cannot otherwise know, see, or experience.”¹¹

Through a lengthy journey of spiritual awakening I realized that the self I thought myself to be did not exist; it had been an imposter, an illusory self—the *me*—fashioned out of story influenced by upbringing, culture, and religious teachings. The true self—impersonal consciousness—was all there was; it was what I was at birth and as a small infant, before I knew myself to be Christine.

Yet, there seemed to be a chasm between what I understood intellectually and what I knew within the heart. As Eckhart Tolle describes, “You are not the ego, so when you become aware of the ego in you, it does not mean you know who you are—it means you know who you are not. But it is through knowing who you are not that the greatest obstacle to truly knowing yourself is removed.”¹²

In my writing I spoke of times when *knowing* was present. It would show up in various forms. A rightness about a book to be read, a letter to be written. An insight regarding a direction to take in life, sometimes challenging what seemed rational. An awareness that all of life was connected in a way devoid of words.

I had wondered about the dialogue often going on in the mind and about the rightness one feels when making a right decision. In his book *Explorations Into The Eternal*, Balsekar says, “A mere intellectual understanding . . . is not enough because intellect always has questions. It is only intuition which is directly connected with consciousness that has no questions because it deals with totality and in totality there is no duality of ‘me’ and the ‘other’.”¹³

When reading Deepak Chopra’s description¹⁴ of the role of intuition in knowing God, I noticed a shift in thinking had taken place. I described it as a recognition of the coming together of a rational and intuitive understanding about God. Previously, I viewed intuition as a gift from God, the way God communicated with me or provided guidance in my life. With the falling away of belief about God and the dying to self came the awareness that *knower* and *known* were somehow connected, in a way not recognized in the past.

Gradually, there seemed to be a shift from *personal* to *impersonal* awareness, a recognition that intuition had nothing to do with a personal me or a personal God. What seemed like knowing was *awareness* of what is. Balsekar explains it this way: “all there is is a sort of relationship in which *there* is *know*-ing—the knower and the known being like the poles in a magnetic field, and not two separate opposing things—the knowingness (sentience) provided by Consciousness, the eternal one subject.”¹⁵

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James quotes Walt Whitman: “There is . . . in the make-up of every superior human identity, a wondrous something that realizes without argument, frequently without what is called education . . . an intuition of the absolute balance . . . a soul-sight of that divine clue and unseen thread which holds the whole congeries of things, all history and time, and all events. . . .”¹⁶

In writing my story I describe experiences of a spiritual nature that played a role in what I understood about God. As a child and into my early adult life, I believed these experiences were direct links to God. A way God let me know I was loved and cared for. A way God communicated with me about things I needed to know. I understood the experiences to be *personal* in every way. Concerning the events themselves, they took different forms. Messages. Thoughts. Dreams. Insights. They were often accompanied by an element of surprise: a feeling that they came out of nowhere. Feelings of peace and oneness. A sense that time stood still, that all life was interconnected.

These experiences felt like mixed blessings. At times I questioned why I had them. I was grateful for the insights, but they often challenged the way I understood life and God. I often felt alone; I was not able to talk openly with anyone about them, including members of the religious community. There was an inner sense these experiences were not to be shared—and if they were, I would know. Despite the caution, I did not always adhere to this wisdom.

Their frequency lessened with the onset of mid-life. I wondered if I had fallen out of favour with God and done something wrong. This perception, however, changed with time. Although I don’t know when it happened, a shift took place in my thinking. I became aware the insights did not come from a place or deity separate from me: there is

no “out there” and no God attempting to communicate with me. No longer did the experiences have significance in the way they did before. They seemed *impersonal* in nature. They came and went like strangers passing by, to whom I would tip my hat, so to speak. They made their way to the surface of awareness, sometimes days, weeks, even years later.

Following their interview with spiritual teacher Hameed Ali, Joan Borysenko and Gordon Dveirin describe their understanding of direct experience: “It isn’t a noun. It’s a verb, a happening, a flash that illuminates one’s consciousness—like light and lightning, which are indistinguishable from each other.” They add, “It seems to be different from what most of us experience as intuition. It seems more akin to an experience of *nondual awareness*, in which we’re one with Source, rather than getting messages from a more distant perspective.”¹⁷

Ramesh Balsekar illuminates the nature of these experiences. In *A Net of Jewels*, he states “every experience is an impersonal experience” and that “personal experience loses its impersonality when the mind-intellect accepts this experience as its very own, accepts it or rejects it as good or bad.”¹⁸

My understanding of God had been turned upside down. The word God itself seldom had a place in my vocabulary. I wondered why this had happened. Was it a mental block? How could that which had so much importance in my life no longer have meaning? Were there words to describe the great mystery that seemed to permeate life? What did I need to understand in order for the language to emerge? A myriad of questions bombarded my mind.

I remembered when the metric system came into being and the struggle changing

from the Imperial system to the new one: like a young child clinging to her blanket, I held onto the comfort and familiarity of the Imperial system. Understanding the new method of measurement required leaving the old behind. “Don’t try to convert one to the other,” was the guidance offered by a math instructor. The attachment to what I had known in the past blocked my thinking and kept me from adapting to the new system—a method more effective, universal and less complex.

“Start with what you already know,” were Colin’s words of counsel. What *did* I know about God? I knew that I no longer sought God. Had I found what I had been seeking—or had God found me? There was humour in this thought. All my life I had been seeking, only to find that what I had been looking for was there all along.

There was a sweetness to life difficult to put in words. Not the sweetness of a lump of sugar in a cup of tea, but the sweetness of drinking the tea itself, the aroma and warmth, as well as the enjoyment of sharing a cup with a friend.

As clouds float by I was often swept along with a sense of wonder, as if invited to float with them in a carefree fashion, aware of the wind blowing us gently along. Life stood still. Perhaps the mind stood still. Ramesh Balsekar offers this insight: “Spirit is *not* considered as a separation from nature, but as the direct experience of the totality of nature in its non-conceptual state. . . . Understanding nature thus, becomes not an intellectual exercise, but a direct experience in mental silence.”¹⁹

God was no longer separate from me, as I once thought. The concept of God as “the maker of a world with a certain purpose and meaning”²⁰ had fallen away. In her book *The Experience of No-Self*, Bernadette Roberts describes a similar experience where “nature finally yielded its secret to me in a simple, still moment.” She said, “I saw how it all

worked. God or life was not *in* anything. It was just the reverse; everything was *in* God.”²¹

Ah—including the I! In the moment there was a flash of clarity. The truth in Bernadette Roberts’s words penetrated my thinking: “You can’t separate anything from God, for as soon as you let go of the notion of separateness, everything falls back into the wholeness of God and life. . . . [A]s long as we are caught up in words, definitions, and all that the mind wants to cling to, we can never see how it works.”²²

Falling away of belief

With the falling away of a belief about God, a sense of *not knowing* seemed accompanied by a void, a feeling of emptiness. All frames of reference for life and God, as I had understood them, were lost. I described the experience in my story as *a dark night of the soul*. The state of *not knowing* was not one I was prepared for, quite the contrary. I had wanted *to know* about God—and yet, all thoughts and concepts about God no longer seemed relevant. In the Introduction to the *The Cloud of Unknowing*, William Johnston describes the transition: “For in the beginning it is usual to feel nothing but a kind of darkness about your mind, or as it were, a *cloud of unknowing*. You will seem to know nothing and to feel nothing except a naked intent toward God in the depths of your being. Try as you might, this darkness and this cloud will remain.” He elaborates, “You will feel frustrated, for your mind will be unable to grasp him, and your heart will not relish the delight of his love. But learn to be at home in this darkness. . . . For if, in this life, you hope to see God as he is in himself it must be within this darkness and this cloud.”²³

It was at this time I found conversations with Colin most helpful. “To not know—” he said, “is one of the highest states.” His words offered comfort, yet it was some time before I understood the extent to which these words spoke the truth. It was not that he attempted to change the reality I found myself in, but rather he challenged me to examine closely what I believed. Over time, I was able to see that *all* beliefs about myself and God were concepts, not truth. It felt like a stripping away of all I believed to be true.

These words by Colin Mallard describe the experience: “The water that saved my life was the underlying truth, what in the Hindu tradition is known as the Sat Guru. It is the living truth within each one of us; that which is obscured by the ego’s obsession. The Sat Guru, the Holy Spirit, our Buddha nature, the Tao, all of it is the same. All of it is love; all of it is written in our hearts, all of it is never lost.”²⁴

Bernadette Roberts further describes the experience as a stream to be forded in the journey to find God even after much learning: “you had better get ready to have it all collapse when you discover the highest wisdom is that you know nothing. . . . It seems that ultimately we must go beyond all frames of reference when the Cloud of Unknowing descends, and all thrashing around looking for a life-preserver won’t do a bit of good.”²⁵ In time, I was able to accept *not knowing* as a necessary state of being. The chaos and confusion seemed to dissolve. There was peace.

Dying to self

During walks with Colin there were lengthy discussions about the difference between the *personal* and *impersonal* understanding of God. I found the distinction difficult to grasp; it felt like I had one foot in one world and one foot in the other. Eckhart

Tolle describes the experience: “Some feel that they inhabit a no-man’s-land between two worlds. They are no longer run by the ego, yet the arising awareness has not yet fully integrated into their lives.”²⁶

During what seemed like a dying to self, a melting away of who I believed myself to be, I became aware there were not two worlds, only one—consciousness or impersonal awareness. The sense of having one foot in a second world had been an illusion created by the personal or false self.

Looking back, I was able to see the connection between the concept of a personal self and a personal God. The personal concept of self and the personal concept of God dissolved as the impersonal awareness emerged. As Bernadette Roberts explains, “When there is no personal self, there is no personal God.”²⁷ I realized the emptiness—or the sense of the absence of God—had been the growing absence of the personal self. With the dissolving of the ego, although not complete, came awareness of what was and always had been. As Roberts describes, “after discovering God was everywhere . . . I was compensated a thousandfold for the bewildering loss of a personal God within. It seems I had first to move through the personal and then through the impersonal before I realized God was closer than either, and beyond them both.”²⁸

I was reminded “the notions and the experiences of God as being personally within or impersonally without, are purely relative experiences, pertaining to the self and its particular type of consciousness.”²⁹ As Roberts suggests, “the relativity of our experiences falls away because there is nothing within to respond, nothing to hold onto an experience in order to give it value, meaning, and so on. In this way, experiences lose their relative aspects when there is nothing to which they can be relative.”³⁰

In my writing I had alluded to experiences coming from nowhere. I had asked, “Where was nowhere? As Roberts reminds “God is neither personal or impersonal, neither within or without, but is everywhere in general and *nowhere* in particular. Simply put: God is all that Is—all, of course, but the self.”³¹

Roberts’s description of the journey to *no self* gave voice to what I had experienced. Her writing described the shift from the personal to the impersonal nature of the experiences and described the feeling of flatness that accompanied the dying-to-self process: “This is why, when there is no self, there also seems to be no experiences—no movement, feelings, excitement, or the thousand responses of which the self is capable. From here on all experiences are from non-relative character, meaning the experience is *it*, it is *there*, and there is nothing outside itself.”³²

Spiritual awakening

At the time of my separation and divorce, the question about the existence of God—as I had understood God—started to surface. A crack grew in the foundation of the belief structure until there was a falling away of all belief in God. Like filtered light slowly illuminating a darkened room in early morning, I began to see the connection between knowing Self and knowing God, not as two separate journeys but as one and the same.

In *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle speaks of awakening as a return to the essence of what we were at birth: “The return movement in a person’s life, the weakening or dissolution of form, whether through old age, illness, disability, loss, or some kind of personal tragedy, carries great potential for spiritual awakening—the dis-identification of

consciousness from form.”³³ For people seeking deeper meaning in their lives, “their inner purpose would emerge only as their outer purpose collapsed and the shell of the ego would begin to crack open.”³⁴

During my writing I wondered when the process of awakening began. Looking back, I realized I had been a seeker for as long as I could remember. It was not something that I knowingly chose; it seemed to be woven within the fabric of who I was as a human being. As a young child I had a deep yearning to know God—a yearning that seemed to intensify in mid-life. The nature of the seeking, over time, shifted from a desire to know God to a desire to find the truth about God.

Following the lengthy period of illness the seeking seemed to come to an end. I had questioned what suffering had to do with the journey to know God. As the body and mind slowed down I had little energy to do anything, other than *be*. In the melting away of who I thought I was and what I believed, I glimpsed what I had been seeking. A shift in consciousness had taken place: a recognition there was nothing to find.

I pondered what brought about shifts in thinking at different times during the awakening process. This was a slow quiet process, hardly noticeable. Sometimes an insight would flare, then fade, leaving the feeling that truth had left its footprint in the heart. I questioned when truth about God was first understood, as there seemed to be a recognition it was not something taught. Bernadette Roberts shares: “What is false never lasts; it falls away of its own accord, while what is true remains, because truth does not come and go—it is always there.”³⁵

I came to realize understanding was quite different from learning and discovered that to know God requires letting go of all I had been taught, all I believed. The paradox

was the realization that to know God all beliefs *about* God must dissolve. Belief seemed to fall away by itself: nothing I did brought it about. It took place in its own time—an act of grace, perhaps.

Mallard says, “Understanding has its own time frame, and simply happens when the right conditions prevail. Understanding is something that comes upon us in the most unexpected times. We experience it usually with the exostulation, ‘Of course!’ . . . Fritz Perls referred to these spontaneous occurrences with the German word Gestalt which means to see the whole.”³⁶

In his writings Mallard shares the stories of Archimedes and Einstein.³⁷ Both had been pondering scientific questions for a long time when the insights came spontaneously; for Archimedes the insights came while bathing. When reading Archimedes’ story, I was reminded of the experience in the bathtub in La Ronge, Saskatchewan that prompted my writing.

Initially, I took spiritual awakening as an invitation by God to remove from my life the things that separated me from him. Eventually, there was no *one* to awaken and no God to awaken to. As Mallard explains, “as awakening takes place we are able to observe the shift that happens, a movement from an ego-centered perspective to an impersonal one.”³⁸ He adds further: “Personal consciousness is the identified consciousness, and as such it naturally stands apart from the whole. With this comes the understanding that the only way the human being can ever directly know or be one with God, is for the ego, the identity, the separate sense of consciousness, to fade away.”³⁹

What began as a journey to know God ended in a pilgrimage to know Self, a process of spiritual awakening that I believe to be universal. It is the longing of each

heart to find home. As Evelyn Underhill quotes Josiah Royce: “Finite as we are . . . we seem to be in the woods or in the wide air’s wilderness, in this world of time and of chance, we have still, like the strayed animals or like the migrating birds, our homing instinct. . . . We seek. That is a fact. We seek a city still out of sight.”⁴⁰ In seeking itself, we possess something of Being: to seek home, one must already know where home is. This brings to mind the parable of the prodigal son where the son awakens to his true self only then to be embraced by the beloved.⁴¹

The process is not linear in nature. Eckhart Tolle describes it in this way: “The initiation of the awakening process is an act of grace. You cannot make it happen nor can you prepare yourself for it or accumulate credits towards it. There isn’t a tidy sequence for logical steps that leads to it, although the mind would love that.”⁴² In his book *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation*, Wallace Clift speaks of Jung’s perspective on the human journey in this way, “The question of meaning in life tended to be answered . . . as one moved toward wholeness, along what he called the path of individuation. . . . In speaking of ‘steps’ or ‘stages’ in the path of individuation, it should be made clear that the process is a lifelong one.”⁴³

Like the waves on the shoreline the patterns are often random, some coming slow, others more quickly, some hardly noticeable. Only in the disappearance of one’s footprints and the signs of shifting sands does one often realize its presence. Or it can be sudden like a tsunami and bring in its wake a *dying to self* that often renders one homeless, until rebuilding happens.

During the interview process I was able to see common patterns emerge within the Diarmuid’s and Gretta’s stories similar to my own. As Ken Wilber explains, “We spot

them only by standing back and seeing if there are common patterns. If these common patterns check out in numerous different settings, then we are justified in assuming that various stages are involved.”⁴⁴

Within the literature there are differing points of view regarding the awakening process and the stages related to it. In his book *Integral Psychology*, Wilber has this to say, “One of the major difficulties in coming to terms with a *stage conception* is that most people, even if they are in fact progressing through stages of competence, *rarely experience anything that feels or looks like a stage*. In their own direct experience, ‘stages’ make no sense at all.”⁴⁵ This had been my experience.

Although I knew there had been an internal process going on, it was not until I walked through the life review that I could identify common patterns, and even then I found it difficult to view them as stages. There were two writers, O’Murchu and Mallard, who described the awakening process in a way that was helpful, but each in a different way. O’Murchu’s writings addressed the feelings related to what I had experienced; while Mallard spoke of the specifics of the process related to the ego.

In his book *Reclaiming Spirituality*, O’Murchu makes reference to Fowler’s works on faith development “aimed at the world of religious belief, related to faith development as it unfolds in the context of formal religion.”⁴⁶ Although O’Murchu claims Fowler’s research to be “immensely significant,” he believes it to be “limited” in terms of application, when it comes to addressing “spiritual emergence” within the world. O’Murchu says there are “no clearly delineated stages, but there are common experiences” among all spiritual seekers. The beginning of the search is marked by an “awakening stage which can be triggered by a whole range of events or experiences,

usually related to questions or lack of meaning. . . . [C]ommon experiences suggest that there is no conscious or spiritual awareness at this stage.”⁴⁷

A “stage of confusion” often follows, which may even attend the spiritual seeker prior to the awakening stage. This can be a time where anger at “oneself, the religious culture or God” is prevalent. “If the confusion persists,” O’Murchu says, “it may become deeply disturbing and even disorienting in daily life. . . . [W]hat is most bewildering for the contemporary spiritual seeker is the cultural vacuum that often leaves spiritual explorers feeling misunderstood, disillusioned and vulnerable.”⁴⁸

The “last stage” is often marked by a “maturing depth and conviction, not based on secure answers, but on questions that continue to unravel the enfolding and unfolding mystery,” a time of “no going back” where “the person may not go to church or talk about God.” This final stage, he says, is a “stage of coming home to oneself as a spiritual being, sometimes requiring a prolonged struggle to ground one’s convictions in a concrete and practical way”—a stage often revisited at different times during this phase of the journey. He speaks of the “several dimensions” that can accompany this time in one’s journey including feelings of “inner peace” and a desire for “involvement in cultural and social improvements.”⁴⁹

In his book *Understanding: The Simplicity of Life*, Mallard describes a simple yet direct understanding of spiritual awakening that I found helpful further on in the journey. He begins with “a Zen statement that says: At first rivers and mountains are real, then rivers and mountains are not real, and finally rivers and mountains are both real and unreal.”⁵⁰ Although at a glance this statement seemed cryptic, when I sat and pondered its deeper meaning the Zen statement described the three stages of spiritual awakening I had

encountered.⁵¹

As Mallard explains, “When the spiritual seeker begins his journey he, like most of us, takes the world to be real. . . . As the spiritual seeker reaches the second stage of the process, his belief in the reality of things is undermined. . . . It might come as a result of illness, mystical experience. . . .”⁵² Following what Mallard calls *endarkenment*, “the questioning goes deeper. . . . Things that he’s taken for granted have dissolved.” When does the final stage of awakening come? “The questions drive the understanding deeper until at last he understands that although life is an illusion, a grand one, it is still as real as it gets. Rivers and mountains are both real and unreal.”⁵³

In her article “Kundalini: Unfolding the Human Design,” Penny Kelly speaks of the awakening as “an unfolding [of] the hidden pattern or potential within each of us. That pattern contains the design of the God-self. In the West, it has long been known as the pattern of the Christ within us. In the East it may be called developing Buddha mind. In other places it may be called something else. But whatever you call it. It is a call to move past death and step into life.”⁵⁴ She says further, “Jesus got there. . . . He then tried to teach it to the people of this time and place. After his death, churches organized to continue his teachings, but they quickly lost the thread of truth. The truth is that deep inside each human being is a river of Life.”⁵⁵

Bonnie Greenwell describes it this way: “Awakening can be clear and true, and is always real, even when it lasts for only a moment. But relaxing into the living of it can take many years of seeing through and abandoning our old patterns and concepts and structures, which will arise often or occasionally, following the realization of Self.”⁵⁶

I realized what was happening on a personal level seemed to reflect what was

taking place in the world. As Diarmuid explains, “More and more people are claiming the adult in themselves and looking for a different language, but are also intuitively beginning to conjure up a different sense of what that word God is all about. More of us are growing into the understanding of this great mystery at the *transpersonal level*, using this word in the basic Jungian sense.”⁵⁷

Diarmuid speaks of a “kind of deeper intuitive wisdom emerging within the world and within the church.” On one hand, there are “spirals that are happening, a return to something quite ancient.” On the other hand, there is “the reclaiming of what is most deep and most sacred in what we have not heard—as distinct from all the superficialities that we have heard.” He speaks of it as a “new mysticism” for our time. “It is not about getting rid of what we have inherited, but it is about revisiting it, at a whole new deeper level that goes beyond Canon Law, that goes beyond Ecclesiastical regulations—that goes beyond hierarchies and structures.”⁵⁸

Is it possible the decline of numbers attending church and the loss of story (our traditional stories) are signs of what the participant refers to as “spirit awakening”? Regarding the future of the church, Diarmuid speaks of the possible order underlying the chaos. “As the old model of church collapses, there is a whole new sense of community of faith being born that the people are yearning for.”⁵⁹

When thinking of new language to speak of the journey to know God that can be understood cross culturally, I realized how difficult it is to find words to describe the indescribable that are not heavily laden with dualistic thinking from our past. Gretta speaks of the changes that have taken place within their faith community when members of the congregation realized their Statement of Faith no longer reflected what they

believed. The process was a lengthy one, Gretta says “we decided we would write about how we wanted to live based on the sort of acts of the early Christian communities. It is the most profound piece of work that the congregation undertook. You can do beautiful things with ordinary language.”⁶⁰

Ordinary language has an ability to create a sense of unity within a community and is descriptive, not prescriptive in nature. As Mallard explains, “description fosters understanding: it brings spontaneous changes in behaviour and does not expand the ego.”⁶¹ One sounds like a command, the other an invitation. One invites compassion; the other creates an environment where there is hostility. As Diarmuid states, “one of the remnants of dualistic inheritance is that we love pitching things at each other. We are forever thinking in binary terms.”⁶²

Mallard gives further examples of the importance of using descriptive language. “Christ is reported to have said, ‘Love your enemies, do good to those who spitefully use you. . ..’ This sounds very much like a command to do something, a prescription for behaviour. A prescription is an appeal for action, an appeal to the ego. All spiritual disciplines are prescriptions.”⁶³

“A description,” Mallard says, “is quite different. If we take Christ’s statement and turn it into a description, which I think is a correct way to take it, it would read as follows: ‘when you love your enemies, when you do good to those who spitefully use you. . ..’”⁶⁴ This understanding breathes new life into a present day belief that in God’s eyes, so to speak, there are no enemies. I wonder if we understood our story in a different way, using language that is not divisive, and realized the division that appears between ourselves and others is an illusion, would this hasten our efforts towards achieving world

peace?

“Long before spoken language became a feature of life (probably about a hundred thousand years ago),” writes O’Murchu, “a highly elaborate, symbolic form of communication existed among people. Long before religion was ever taught, preached, or codified in sacred texts, it was lived and celebrated in ritual play and dance.”⁶⁵

The dance . . . in closing

Looking back over my writing, there is a sense of life unfolding in a way that suggests everything was in place before the journey began. The connection of one event to another, leading to a detailed account of awakening, that seems uncanny. The endless reams of journals with dates and times that recorded the journey from beginning to end. Experiences of a spiritual nature that provided a deeper layer of insight into what I had come to understand about God. Partners who danced with me through the process. The artwork that graces each chapter of this writing that was drawn over ten years earlier. There is a flow to the dance that feels eternal.

A description of the nature of “the dance” brings to mind a CAPPE conference in Edmonton I attended in January 2002 entitled *Earth and Sky: Horizons of Possibilities* where Diarmuid O’Murchu spoke to a group of spiritual care providers on several themes relating to “emerging spirituality” within our world.⁶⁶ He addressed this theme with a specific focus of understanding spirituality within the context of the whole of creation. During the presentation he drew a large circle on the board, splattered it with dots and said this was a new model of care for spirituality. The whole model of understanding the nature of who we are had been turned on its end.

Spirituality, he said, is often equated with religion. O’Murchu challenged us to see the nature of spirituality is not about what we do, but understanding the whole of who we are as an intricate part of creation. There is no place where spirit is not. Spirit (God, Consciousness) is that which flows through all life. It is in everything. It is life itself.

A shift to new ways of seeing requires a letting go, or falling away of old beliefs about God/spirit/self. It requires seeing the whole of everything. There comes an awareness of how dualistic thinking impedes this understanding. Gopi Krishna names the source of the confusion that lies within traditional teachings: “we have failed to study religion as a whole, from the earliest vestiges to present lofty ideals of the prophets and sages, in all religions, taken as one composite whole, that we have not been able to discover the law of nature underlying all their infinitely varied manifestations and the religious impulse from prehistoric times to the present.”⁶⁷

I had been angry for some time at what seemed like the church’s unwillingness to “get with the program” and bring to light a deeper understanding of God to the people in the pews. As my writing unfolded I began to realize the journey to know God and the journey to know self were not two separate journeys, but one. The two were inextricably tied together—and that finding new ways of speaking about that journey was not an easy task.

What was at the heart of the experience in La Ronge, Saskatchewan that prompted the writing of this integrative study? In retrospect, there was an intuitive sense that in telling my journey, it could bring understanding to the journey to know God that could be helpful to others, whether people viewed themselves as religious or not.

In their book *Transpersonal Research Methods for Social Sciences: Honoring*

Human Experience, Braud and Anderson speak of the “personal as being universal.”⁶⁸

They have this to say, “comprehensive understanding of experience seeks to speak

directly to the inmost self of another. It is as if speaking our personal truths . . .

transcends our sense of separateness.”⁶⁹ “It is as if we are being individually spoken to—

from one person’s individual knowing to someone else’s knowing of the experience.”⁷⁰

Looking back, there are no clear answers to what transpired in the bathtub that day.

What I do know is that each time I am captured by that memory, I am once again swept

away in the arms of the beloved—grateful for the invitation to dance.

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

—Pantajali

Notes for Chapter Four

1. Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini for the New Age: Selected Writings of Gopi Krishna* [Bantam Books, 1988], 195.
2. Christina Baldwin, *Storycatcher: The Power Of Story to Change Our Lives* [Navato, California: New World Library, 2005], 193.
3. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
4. Ron Welch (husband), in conversation March 30, 2012.
5. Elbert Bede, *3-5-7 Minute Talks on Freemasonry* [New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply, 1945], 79.
6. Bede, *3-5-7 Minute Talks on Freemasonry*, 79.
7. Interview with Diarmuid O'Murchu, August 31, 2011.
8. Baldwin, *Storycatcher*, 7.
9. Jean Klein, *Who Am I? The Sacred Quest*, ed. Emma Edwards [Element Books Ltd., 1988], 49.
10. Klein, *Who Am I? The Sacred Quest*, 50.
11. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 74.
12. Tolle, *A New Earth*, 189.
13. Ramesh S. Balsekar, *Explorations into the Eternal: Forays from the Teaching of Nisargadatta Maharaj* [1987; repr., Durham, North Carolina: The Acorn Press, 1996], 141.
14. Deepak Chopra, *How to Know God: The Soul's Journey into the Mystery of Mysteries* [New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000], 101–105.
15. Balsekar, *Explorations into the Eternal*, 147.
16. Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days & Collect* [Philadelphia, 1882], 174, quoted in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* [1902; repr. Liguori, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1991], 304; emphasis in James.
17. Joan Borysenko and Gordon Dveirin, *Your Soul's Compass: What Is Spiritual Guidance?* 1st ed. [Hay House, 2007], 19; italic emphasis in original.
18. Ramesh S. Balsekar, *A Net of Jewels*, ed. Gary Starbuck [Redondo Beach, California: Advaita Press, 1996], page for December 18.
19. Ramesh S. Balsekar, *Final Truth: A Guide to Ultimate Understanding* [Los Angeles: Advaita Press, 1989], 89.
20. Balsekar, *Final Truth*, 89.
21. Bernadette Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey* [Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1982], 27.
22. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 28.
23. William Johnston, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling* [1973. Reissue. Image, 1995] 40–41; italic emphasis in original.
24. Mallard, *Understanding*, 184–185.
25. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 108–109.

-
26. Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose* [Simon & Schuster, 2005], 262.
27. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 24.
28. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 30.
29. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 31.
30. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 38.
31. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 31; italic emphasis added.
32. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 38; italic emphasis in original.
33. Tolle, *A New Earth*, 284.
34. Tolle, *A New Earth*, 285.
35. Roberts, *The Experience of No-Self*, 38.
36. Mallard, *Understanding*, 30–31.
37. Mallard, *Understanding*, 30–31.
38. Mallard, *Understanding*, 224.
39. Mallard, *Understanding*, 76.
40. Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual* [Gifford Lectures. 2 vols. London, 1900], vol. i. p. 181, quoted in Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Human Consciousness* [1911, repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/underhill/mysticism.pdf> released June 1, 2005], 27.
41. Pers. journal, September 27, 2007.
42. Tolle, *A New Earth*, 259.
43. Wallace B. Clift, *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation* [1982, repr., New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986], 24–25.
44. Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* [Boston: Shambhala, 2000], 133.
45. Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 132; emphasis in original.
46. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality: A New Spiritual Framework for Today's World* [1997; repr., New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000], 10.
47. O'Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality*, 10.
48. O'Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality*, 11.
49. O'Murchu, *Reclaiming Spirituality*, 11–12.
50. Mallard, *Understanding*, 168.
51. Mallard, *Understanding*, 168.
52. Mallard, *Understanding*, 169.
53. Mallard, *Understanding*, 169–170.
54. Penny Kelly, "Kundalini: Unfolding the Human Design," *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening* [Sounds True, 2009], 43.

-
55. Penny Kelly, "Kundalini: Unfolding the Human Design," 44.
 56. Bonnie L. Greenwell, "Kundalini: The Role of Life-Force Energy in Self-Realization," *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening* [Sounds True, 2009], 36.
 57. Interview with Diarmuid O'Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 58. Interview with Diarmuid O'Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 59. Interview with Diarmuid O'Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 60. Interview with Gretta Vosper, December 15, 2011.
 61. Mallard, *Understanding*, 33.
 62. Interview with Diarmuid O'Murchu, August 31, 2011.
 63. Mallard, *Understanding*, 33.
 64. Mallard, *Understanding*, 33.
 65. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics* [1997; repr., New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000], 41.
 66. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Earth and Sky: Horizons of Possibilities*, talk on "emerging spirituality" at CAPPE conference in Edmonton, January 2002 .
 67. Krishna, *Kundalini for the New Age*, 31.
 68. Rosemarie Anderson and William Braud, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience* [SAGE, 1998], 75.
 69. Anderson and Braud, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 75.
 70. Anderson and Braud, *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 76.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Rosemarie, and William Braud. *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Baldwin, Christina. *Storycatcher: The Power Of Story to Change Our Lives*. Navato, California: New World Library, 2005.
- Balsekar, Ramesh S. *Explorations into the Eternal: Forays from the Teaching of Nisargadatta Maharaj*. 1987. Reprint. Durham, North Carolina: The Acorn Press, 1996.
- Balsekar, Ramesh S. *Final Truth: A Guide to Ultimate Understanding*. Los Angeles: Advaita Press, 1989.
- Balsekar, Ramesh S. *A Net of Jewels*. Edited by Gary Starbuck. Redondo Beach, California: Advaita Press, 1996.
- Balsekar, Ramesh S. *Who Cares?! The Unique Teaching of Ramesh S. Balsekar*. Edited by Blayne Bardo. Bombay: Zen Publications, 1999.
- Bede, Elbert. *3-5-7 Minute Talks on Freemasonry*. New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply, 1945.
- Barbour, Ian G. *When Science Meets Religion*. 1st ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000.
- Borysenko, Joan, and Gordon Dveirin. *Your Soul's Compass: What Is Spiritual Guidance?* 1st ed. Hay House, 2007.
- Butterworth, Eric. *Discover The Power Within You: A Guide to the Unexplored Depths Within*. 1968. Reprint. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Borg, Marcus J. *Meeting Jesus Again For The First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith*. 1994. Reprint. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Breathnach, Sarah Ban. *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort of Joy*. New York: Warner Books, 1995.
- Campbell, Joseph with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. Edited by Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- Chopra, Deepak. *How to Know God: The Soul's Journey into the Mystery of Mysteries*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.
- Clift, Wallace B. *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation*. 1982. Reprint. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986.
- Collins, Sheila D. *A Different Heaven and Earth*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974.
- Dickey Young, Pamela. *Christ in a Post-Christian World: How Can We Believe in Jesus Christ When Those Around Us Believe Differently—Or Not At All?* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church*. 1978. Doubleday, 1987.
- Fowler, James. *Stages Of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. 1981. Harperone, 1995.
- Gray, Elizabeth Dodson. *Why the Green Nigger?: Re-mything Genesis*. Wellesley, Mass.: Roundtable Press, 1979.
- Greenwell, Bonnie L. *Energies of Transformation: A Guide to the Kundalini Process*. Shakti River Press, 1995.

- Greenwell, Bonnie L. "Kundalini: The Role of Life-Force Energy in Self-Realization." *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening*. Sounds True, 2009.
- Greyson, Bruce. "Near-Death Experiences and the Physio-Kundalini Syndrome." *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening*. Sounds True, 2009.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. Riverhead Books, 1995.
- Harris, Maria. *Dance of the Spirit: the Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality*. New York: Bantam Books, 1989.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. 1902. Liguori, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1991.
- Johnston, William, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing and The Book of Privy Counseling*. 1973. Reissue. Image, 1995.
- Jones, W. Paul. *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief*. Nashville: Abingdon Publications, 1989.
- Kason, Yvonne. *Farther Shores: Exploring How Near-Death, Kundalini and Mystical Experiences can Transform Ordinary Lives*. 1994. Reprint. A Phyllis Bruce Book, Harper Collins, 2000.
- Kelly, Penny. *The Evolving Human: A True Story of Awakened Kundalini*. 1997. Lawton, MI: Lily Hill Publishing. 2005.
- Kelly, Penny. "Kundalini: Unfolding the Human Design." *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening*. Sounds True, 2009.
- Kennedy, Sr Stanislaus. *Gardening The Soul*. London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., 2001.
- Khalsa, Gurmukh Kaur Andrew Newberg, Sivananda Rhada, Ken Wilber, John Selby et al. *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening*. Sounds True, 2009.
- Khayyám, Omar. *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. Translated into English verse by Edward FitzGerald. 1859. Reprint. Edinburgh: London: T.N. Foulis, 1905. The Internet Archive. <http://www.archive.org/details/rubaiyatfitzgera00omar>.
- Klein, Jean. *Who Am I? The Sacred Quest*. Edited by Emma Edwards. Element Books Ltd., 1988.
- Krishna, Gopi. *Kundalini for the New Age: Selected Writings of Gopi Krishna*. Bantam Books, 1988.
- Krishna, Gopi. *Living with Kundalini; The Autobiography of Gopi Krishna*. Edited by Leslie Shepard. Boston: Shambhala, 1993.
- Krishnamurti, Jiddu. *Think On These Things*. Edited by D. Rajagopal. 1964. Reprint. HarperPerennial, 1989.
- Krishnamurti, Jiddu. *You Are the World: An Authentic Report of Talks and Discussions in American Universities*. 1972. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
- Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. Routledge, 1969.
- Levan, Christopher. *God Hates Religion: How the Gospels Condemn False Religious Practice*. Etobicoke, Ontario: The United Church Publishing House, 1995.
- Lukoff, David. "Kundalini Awakening." *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening*. Sounds True, 2009.
- McLuhan, T.C. *Cathedrals of the Spirit: The Message of Sacred Places*. 1st ed. HarperCollins Canada, 1996.
- McMurray, Madeline. *Illuminations and The Healing Image: Finding and Learning from the Inner Artist for Psychic Growth*. California: Winbow Press, 1988.

- McNiff, Shaun. *Art as Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination*. Boston: Shambhala, 1992.
- Madsen, Joyce. "Polishing a Presentation." *Congregational News*, February 2009.
<http://www.congregationallife.com/news15/polishing.htm>.
- Mallard, Colin D. *Understanding: The Simplicity of Life*. Courtenay, BC: Advaita Gems Publishing, 2010.
- Marshall, Catherine. *The Helper*. 1978. Reprint. New York: Avon Books, 1979.
- Marshall, Catherine. *Light in My Darkest Night*. 1989. Reprint. New York: Avon Books, 1990.
- Martin, Karen and Sandra Elder. "Pathways through Grief: A Model of the Process," *Personal Care in an Impersonal World: A Multidimensional Look At Bereavement*. Edited by John D. Morgan. Baywood Pub. Co., 1993.
- Mello, Anthony De. *One Minute Wisdom*. Reprint. Image, 1988.
- Mello, Anthony De. *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality*. Image, 1990.
- Monk Kidd, Sue. *The Dance Of The Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine*. 1996. Reprint. HarperCollins, 2002.
- Moustakas, Clark. *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990.
- Murray, Anne. "Could I Have This Dance." 1980 single written by Wayland Holyfield and Bob House, included in 1980 film *Urban Cowboy* and in album *Anne Murray's Greatest Hits* released November 1980.
- Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. 1992. Reprint. New York: Image, 1994.
- O'Murchu, Diarmuid. *Reclaiming Spirituality: A New Spiritual Framework for Today's World*. 1997. Reprint. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.
- O'Murchu, Diarmuid. *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics*. 1997. Reprint. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.
- O'Murchu, Diarmuid. *Evolutionary Faith: Rediscovering God in Our Great Story*. New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2002.
- Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Peck, M. Scott. *In Search of Stones: A Pilgrimage Of Faith, Reason and Discovery*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.
- Roberts, Bernadette. *The Experience of No-Self: A Contemplative Journey*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1982.
- Rohr, Richard, and John Bookser Feister. *Jesus' Plan for a New World: The Sermon on the Mount*. Saint Anthony Messenger Press, 1996.
- Royce, Josiah. *The World and the Individual*. Gifford Lectures. 2 vols. London, 1900.
- Soelle, Dorothee. *The Silent Cry: Mysticism And Resistance*. Fortress Press, 2004.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Essential Tillich: An Anthology of the Writings of Paul Tillich*. Edited by F. Forrester Church. 1st ed. Chicago, Ill: University Of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. Simon & Schuster, 2005.
- Sannella, Lee. *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence?* Atrium Pub Group, 1976.

- Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in Nature and Development of Human Consciousness*. 1911. Reprint. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/underhill/mysticism.pdf> released June 1, 2005.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *Practical Mysticism*. 1914. Project Gutenberg <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/21774> released June 8, 2007.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *The Mystics of the Church*. [New York: Schocken, 1964.
- Vosper, Gretta. *With Or Without God: Why The Way We Live Is More Important Than What We Believe*. 1st ed. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2008.
- Welch, Christine. "Where Can I Serve?" *Restoration Witness*. March/April 1986.
- Welch, Christine. A Universal Perspective. Paper for course, *St. Paul: Life and Letters*. Newman College. Submitted March 1996.
- Welch, Christine. The Influence of John's Teaching on My Understanding of the Spirit. Paper for course, *The Theology of John*. Newman College. Submitted October 1996.
- Welch, Christine. Meeting Jesus in Scripture. Paper for course, *Who is Jesus*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted December 1997.
- Welch, Christine. Quest for the Historical Jesus. Paper for course, *Introduction to Church History*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted April 1998.
- Welch, Christine. Theological Reflection On God. Paper for course, *Pastoral Theology*, St. Stephen's College. Submitted December 1998.
- Welch, Christine. Jesus and the Patron-Client System. Paper for course, *Introduction to Christian Scripture*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted March 2000.
- Welch, Christine. *The Spiritual Practice of Drawing the Mandala*. Paper for course, *Spiritual Practice of Drawing Mandala*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted April 2, 2002.
- Welch, Christine. For Such A Time As This. Paper for course, *Introduction to Hebrew Scriptures*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted September 2005.
- Welch, Christine. Is it Confirmation or Conformation? A Journey of Exploration and Integration. Paper for course, *Science and Religion in Dialogue*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted May 2006.
- Welch, Christine. Putting a New Face On Leadership: Leading From The Heart. Paper for course, *Leadership in Change*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted December 2006.
- Welch, Christine. Blessed Be The Tie That Binds. Paper for course, *The Way of The Mystic*. St. Stephen's College. Submitted December 2007.
- Wells, H.G. *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*. New York: Doubleday, 1931.
- Whitfield, Charles L. "Spiritual Energy: Perspectives from a Map of the Psyche and the Kundalini Recovery Process." *Kundalini Rising: Exploring the Energy of Awakening*. Sounds True, 2009.
- Whitman, Walt. *Specimen Days & Collect*. Philadelphia, 1882.
- Wilber, Ken. *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*. Boston: Shambhala, 2000.
- Williamson, Marianne. *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles."* HarperCollins, 1992.