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ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

SOIL AND SOUL: RECLAIMING THE GARDEN AS SACRED SPACE

By

Barbara Lynn Ganske

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

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I dedicate this to my mom, who gave me the gift of gardening,
and to my husband, who encouraged my questions and exploration.

ABSTRACT

Horticultural therapy, or gardening as therapy, has been used in a wide variety of situations. It is common wisdom that spending time in a garden is good for the soul. Concepts like *healing garden*, *prayer garden*, *meditation garden*, *spiritual garden*, *Zen garden* all speak to the experience of well-being that can occur when in that space. However, the spiritual aspects of gardening as therapy have not been widely addressed in the academic literature. This thesis project sought to answer the question: *How is the garden experienced as a spiritually healing place?* Through a literature search, definitions for spirituality, healing, soul and sacred space were determined. Using the phenomenological methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, which specifies a small, homogeneous sample, the author interviewed four sisters who were life-long gardeners to discover what meaning they gave to their gardens. Eight super-ordinate themes emerged that reflected the participant's experiences in the garden and the meaning they attributed to those experiences. From these themes, four aspects became apparent relating to the spirituality of the women. They all talked about experiencing the presence of God in their lives, they have a deep connection to the soil, they have never lost their wonder of the created world, and they see God as part of, and manifest in, the natural world. In addition, it became apparent that their mother was very influential in modelling a connection to the garden. The thesis project concluded that, in order to address the spiritual aspects of horticultural therapy, it is important that the leaders of a horticultural therapy program model a passion for gardening, express awe and wonder for the created world, and understand the importance of physical connection to the soil.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Throughout Judeo-Christian tradition and scripture, the garden has been a powerful archetypal symbol for a sacred space, a place in which to encounter God. Early in the Hebrew Scriptures we find the story of the Garden of Eden, where God placed Adam to till the soil and keep the trees and plants. Adam and his partner Eve were told that they could eat anything in the garden except from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve was tempted by the serpent to eat the fruit of this tree and gave some to Adam. Their eyes were then opened and they knew they had disobeyed God. God thus banished Adam and Eve from the garden. (Genesis 2-3, paraphrased)

The Christian Scriptures end with the writer of Revelation telling us that, in the New Jerusalem, God will live among mortals and the river of the water of life will flow down the center of the street. On either side of the river will grow the tree of life “with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore.” (Revelation 22:1-3a)

God is present in both the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem. God is also present in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus went to pray on the night he was betrayed. However, Jesus’ disciples did not sense God’s presence and they slept through Jesus’ prayers and turmoil.

So it is with us today. In our fast-paced, urban society, few people have contact with a garden and so many have lost sense of what the garden can be—a connection to the sacred, to God, to the divine that is present in the natural world.

Yet, it seems to be common wisdom that spending time in a garden is good for the soul. Concepts like *healing garden*, *prayer garden*, *meditation garden*, *spiritual garden*, *Zen garden* all speak to the experience of well-being that can occur when in that space. What is it about the garden space that so readily brings forth a sense of the holy? How do we encounter the divine in that space?

I am a life-long gardener. I learned how to garden from my mother as I helped her plant, weed, and harvest the huge garden on our farm. For most of my life I had taken for granted what the garden was—a necessary part of providing food for my family. In the past few years, however, my garden has come to mean more than a source of sustenance, or perhaps I have come to realize that sustenance is not only that of nourishment for my body, but also nourishment for my soul. When I am in my garden, time loses its chronicity, thoughts and worries evaporate, and I am immersed in the mundane task of the day, whether tilling, planting, weeding, pruning, or harvesting. Until recently I had never considered why or how this feeling of well-being came about in my garden.

I came to St. Stephen's College to study spirituality, to learn and understand how people heal, and how they understand God in that process. My twenty-plus years of practicing pharmacy taught me that pharmaceutical science could cure an infection with antibiotics, but it could not heal people of what ailed them most—depression, anxiety, insomnia, and chronic pain. I suspected that there was more to healing than providing a

means for people to cope with their conditions—that healing involved the whole person: physical, emotional and spiritual. When I retired from the practice of pharmacy, I carried with me the question of how people truly heal and pondered how I could learn more about this. A chance conversation with someone who was studying at St. Stephen’s led me to check out the programs there, and I was inexplicably drawn to the Masters in Theological Studies in Spirituality program. I did not even understand what spirituality was at that point. Something inside me resonated with what I read about St. Stephen’s and I thought that perhaps this would be a place where I could pursue my questions about healing and God.

For my practicum, I wanted to find a placement that would allow me to observe healing therapy with a spiritual component. Through what I can only explain as divine intervention, I stumbled upon an addiction recovery program for women that was close to where I live and that used gardening as part of the therapy. The program director welcomed me warmly and decided that I could be in charge of the gardening program for the summer. The evangelical Christian organization running the program thought that gardening would be healing therapy for the women but had not articulated how or why it could heal. I was told by one staff member that in the first year of the gardening program many of the women did not enjoy the garden and considered it only “dirty work.” If I was going to facilitate gardening as healing therapy, I needed to figure out how and why.

It came to me as I planted my own garden that spring. I already knew that I felt closer to God in that space. To me, God was manifest in the miracle of growth from a tiny seed, in the butterflies and bees that pollinated the plants and in the birds that sang from the surrounding trees. All of a sudden one day, as I crouched down to mound the

dirt around a newly planted seedling, I realized that my connection was to the *earth* more than to the plants. I felt a calmness and spiritual connection when my hands were in the soil. This is what was ultimately healing for me. I knew then that my garden was more than a place of growth and production; it was a sacred place for me, a place where I felt a divine presence in a palpable way and a connectedness with creation.

My mission then became to create opportunities for the women in my group to experience healing and a sense of the sacred in the garden. To a great extent, I succeeded. The garden was wonderful, despite the never-ending weeding required in the previously neglected space. The women talked about the joy of harvesting what they had planted, of eating fresh food that they had picked themselves. They enjoyed the serenity of solitary weeding as a time to think and to slow their pace but also they spoke of the value of communal work with other women. These were all healing experiences, to be sure. But what I was waiting to hear was never expressed. *No one said that they felt the presence of God in the garden.* This was extremely puzzling to me as the addiction recovery program was centered on the premise that healing would come for the women when they took Jesus to be their personal saviour. Talk of God was omnipresent to the women.

This omission gnawed at me for two years. Had the women not felt any sense of the Divine, of a Creator God, in our garden? Could I have done or said things differently to help create the possibility for an encounter with God in the garden? In fact, while we were weeding together one day, and they were asking about my thesis topic, I explained the energy connection that I felt to the soil. One of the women immediately said “I feel

that, too!” but even she, in our final debriefing, did not mention finding God in the garden.

I suspected that part of the problem is language. This program was run by an evangelical Christian organization that used exclusively patriarchal language and images for God. From the research I conducted after the completion of the gardening program, I concluded that the language of “God in charge of the universe” and “King on the throne” learned by the women in their 12-step workbook, was not adequate to speak about our experiences in the garden.¹

I therefore came to my thesis work with many unanswered questions:

- What is ‘healing’ and how does spirituality relate to it?
- What makes a space or place sacred?
- How do people experience God?
- How does language and metaphor influence how people understand and experience God?
- How can gardening be used as healing therapy?

Ultimately, I wanted insight into the spiritual aspect of an individual’s experience in the garden and how this might be healing for them. This is what I did not understand from the women’s comments at the end of my practicum. I could not answer the question—*How is God present in this garden?*—even though I sensed that their experience in the garden was healing for them.

I distilled my queries down to one question that guided my thesis work: ***How is the garden experienced as a spiritually healing place?*** Many of my suppositions are in

¹Barb Ganske, “Twelve Steps to the Garden: Searching for Connections between God of the Twelve-Steps and God in the Garden” [Mini-project submitted in partial fulfillment of Master’s in Theological Studies, St. Stephen’s College, May 2012].

plain view in this question. I believe that there is a spiritual component to healing and I believe that healing can occur in the garden. More basic to my questions, I believe in the existence of a force that I call God and that healing involves experiencing the presence of that force.

Through my thesis research, I endeavored to understand what it means *to heal*, and what the term *spirituality* encompasses. I looked for explanations of how the presence of God is experienced as healing. From a search of academic research articles and writings on spirituality, healing, and gardening therapy I defined my terms, learned about the stages of growth in faith, probed the idea of sacred space and researched the area of horticultural therapy. At this point, when I thought I was ready to begin my interviews, I realized that I still did not understand one fundamental, but complex, concept. I could not explain my use of the word *soul* in my title, *Soil and Soul: Reclaiming the Garden as Sacred Space*. It would take four more months of research before I could adequately understand what *soul* meant for me. Through that process, I gained a whole new perspective on the interrelatedness of all creation and the divinity inherent therein. Finally, I felt ready to begin my interviews.

The participants for my research were four sisters who are life-long gardeners. From them I hoped to learn of others' experiences of gardening, especially why one would continue to garden long past the time when it was a necessary part of feeding a family. I wondered if my experience of connectedness would be echoed in what these four women would tell me about why they garden. I hoped to be able to uncover what constitutes the archetypal image of the garden as a healing space, as a place of encounter with God.

For this portion of my research, I chose a phenomenological methodology called *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA). IPA is concerned with how people understand and make meaning from their experiences. I became acquainted with IPA through a research article used in my literature review, where the methodology impressed me with its thoroughness and how the conclusions were reached. IPA is a well laid-out methodology that provided clear guidance for each step of my research, yet was always suggestive, not prescriptive, in method and process. Although originating in the field of psychology, it proved to transfer well to my study of spirituality. In particular, the suggested method of analysing the participants' interviews provided me with excellent guidance. Throughout that analysis, a sticky note on the front of the IPA text reminded me that my task was to understand how my *participants attempt to make sense of their experience*. My task was to interpret their understandings and find similarities and differences between the participants, not to draw my own conclusions of what their experiences meant. This is referred to in IPA research as the *double hermeneutic*—"the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them."²

There was also a heuristic aspect to my research. I brought questions based on my own experience to this project. I sought answers not to a theoretical question, but to questions brought about by my own wonderings. I sought to understand my experience as well as that of my participants. In the end, I experienced a measure of healing through this project.

² Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research* [Los Angeles: Sage, 2009], 3.

Ethics considerations for my research centered on the issues of confidentiality and anonymity for my participants. All four participants willingly signed a consent form which assured them that I would respect their need for anonymity. Confidentiality was extended to my thesis supervisor, who was given copies of the interview transcripts in order to aid me in my analysis. Because all my participants were adults, there were no issues of cognition or lack of understanding of what the process of interview, analysis and write-up entailed.

My thesis will follow a generally accepted outline for graduate theses. The chapters are as follows:

Chapter One – Introduction

Chapter Two – Literature Review

- Spirituality and Healing
- Stages of Faith
- Sacred Space
- Horticultural Therapy
- My Own Understandings
- Soil and Soul—Finding the Connections

Chapter Three – Methodology

- Introduction
- Data Collection
- Transcription
- Analysis
- Discussion
- Validations
- Ethics

Chapter Four – Discussion

- Super-ordinate Themes

Chapter Five – Conclusion

- Synthesis of Themes
- Garden as Sacred Space
- Spirituality of the Garden
- Garden and Soul
- Garden as Eden
- Recommendations for Horticultural Therapy
- Final Thoughts

The metaphor of the Garden of Eden returned at several points during my thesis research, most importantly during my quest for an understanding of ‘soul’. The question seemed to be whether or not we could return to Eden. One author stated that we could only return to Eden with knowing or consciousness. There could be no more innocence. When I was almost at the conclusion of writing this thesis, I came across a beautiful way to understand Eden. Author Barry Lopez writes:

But Eden, we should be at pains to point out, is not a place. Eden is a conversation. It is the conversation of the human with the Divine. And it is the reverberations of that conversation that create a sense of place. It is not a thing, Eden, but a pattern of relationships, made visible in conversation. To live in Eden is to live in the midst of good relations, of just relations scrupulously attended to, imaginatively maintained through time. Altogether we call this beauty.³

This thesis, then, is the story of four women’s conversations with me in their homes and with the Divine in their gardens. It is the story of what they experienced in their gardens and how they understand their experiences. It is also the story of how they understand God, based on their religious upbringing but also based on what they discovered in their gardens. Finally, this thesis is the story of how I came to understand

³Barry Lopez, “Eden is a Conversation,” in *Hope Beneath Our Feet: Restoring Our Place in the Natural World*, ed. Martin Keogh [Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2010], 210.

my own conversation with the Divine in my garden and of the healing that I experience in that place.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The questions that drove my search of the literature included definitions for *healing* and *spirituality*, what makes sacred space, and what has been published in the area of gardening as therapy. Most of the literature was accessed by searching the EBSCO database, although the information on sacred space came from a research paper that I wrote for a course on pilgrimage. In addition, James Fowler's *Stages of Faith* was a pivotal source for my understanding of spiritual growth.

As is often the case, what I discovered through the literature review left me asking more, and deeper, questions. I realized that I had taken for granted understandings that made up my own spirituality. Reconciling my suppositions with my experiences in the garden required me to look beyond journal articles and research. I needed to find the language of theology to redefine my own spirituality, to put into words what I increasingly had come to know as I pondered the healing power of the garden. In the work of Thomas Berry and, to a lesser extent, Matthew Fox, I found the concepts and language to express what I had begun to know in my bones. When I reached the point where I thought I had completed the literature review, I realized that I still did not understand one concept in particular—the word *soul*, which Berry and Fox used in their writings, and which I had used in my title. To come to an understanding of this took months of reading, and it is this search for the meaning of the word ‘soul’ which ends my literature review.

Spirituality and Healing

What does it mean *to heal*? The word is often used in a casual way to describe getting better and, thus, may be equated with the medical term *to cure*. However, Gockel notes that healing does not necessarily include a cure from what ails us. She writes that “it is possible for one’s body to be dying and yet to experience increased peace, connection, and transcendence through that experience. In this way, the term *healing* reaches beyond the meaning of coping to allow for the possibility of transformation as well as adaptation.”¹ According to Tuck, healing comes from within the person and involves “redefining one’s physical, social, psychological, and spiritual self.”² She asserts that spirituality is essential for healing. Thus if one is to understand what is involved in healing, one first needs to understand the concept of spirituality.

Spirituality is frequently equated with religion, or understood to be a part of religion, but these two terms must be differentiated. According to Knox, et al., religion is properly understood as “an organizing system of faith, worship, rituals, and tradition.”³ Post and Wade make a distinction between what it means to be *religious* and what it means to be *spiritual*. To be religious is to affirm the theological doctrine or dogma of an institutional or organized religion; whereas spirituality is understood as “a connection to

¹Annemarie Gockel, “Spirituality and the Process of Healing: A Narrative Study,” *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 19 [2009]: 219.

²Inez Tuck, “Development of a Spirituality Intervention to Promote Healing,” *Journal of Theory Construction and Testing* 8, no. 2 [Fall, 2004]: 67.

³Sarah Knox et al., “Addressing Religion and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: Client’s Perspectives,” *Psychotherapy Research* 15, no. 3 [July, 2005]: 287.

the transcendent which for some is disconnected from organized religion.”⁴ Dyson, Cobb and Forman write that “one of the major hindrances in defining spirituality is its relationship with religion” and point out that although spirituality can be expressed through religion for some people, for others, religion can inhibit the expression of the individual’s spirituality. They go so far as to say that where one’s individual spirituality does not align with their religion, “religious belief systems can have negative effects on the health of an individual’s beliefs and expectations.”⁵ However, they conclude that, because of the impact of the Judeo-Christian tradition on western society, it is “probably unrealistic to separate religion and spirituality entirely.”⁶

In a literature review of the meaning of spirituality, Dyson et al. found that “a more liberated and less restrictive view of ‘God’ is emerging within the literature” and that “whatever a person takes to be the highest value in life can be regarded as his ‘God’.” They describe this ‘highest value’ as providing “a force which activates the individual or is an essential principle influencing him/her,”⁷ and conclude that spirituality is a quest to find meaning in life.

An understanding of spirituality as meaning-making is echoed throughout the literature on spirituality. Tuck defines spirituality as “the search for the discovery of truth, meaning, and a purpose in life.” She understands it as “an integrative energy and a

⁴Brian C. Post and Nathaniel G. Wade, “Religion and Spirituality in Psychotherapy: A Practice-Friendly Review of Research.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology: In Session* 65, no. 2 [2009]: 132.

⁵Jane Dyson, Mark Cobb, and Dawn Forman, “The Meaning of Spirituality: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 26 [1997]: 1184.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid, 1185.

universal human phenomenon.”⁸ Dyson et al. describe three components to spirituality—“a connectedness to God, one’s neighbour and to one’s inner self” which is manifest as a harmony with self and others and a sense of relatedness to God.⁹ Tuck removes the reference to God in her definition and replaces it with an understanding of spirituality as “intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal connectedness,” or a relationship with “self, others and a ‘higher power’.” She suggests additional terms that may be used to understand this ‘higher power’, such as “the unseen, God, power greater than the self and ordinary resources, Transcendent God/an Ultimate Reality, or whatever an individual values as supreme” and concludes her research with this definition of spirituality: “The essence of an individual, expressed in the outward manifestations of thoughts, feelings and behaviors that allows meaning making, peace, hope and connectedness with self, others, nature and God or higher power.”¹⁰

Tanyi also sought to clarify the meaning of spirituality, as it pertains to the nursing profession, but found that a definitive meaning is not possible due to the subjective nature of the concept. Proposed definitions of spirituality include elements of “transcendence, unfolding mystery, connectedness, meaning and purpose in life, higher power, and relationships.”¹¹ She also emphasized the sense of connectedness to self,

⁸Tuck, 67.

⁹Dyson, et al., 1186.

¹⁰Tuck, 69.

¹¹Ruth A. Tanyi, “Towards Clarification of the Meaning of Spirituality,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 39, no. 5 [2002]: 502.

others and a “supreme purpose or meaning, a higher power”¹² and concluded with the suggestion that spirituality is

a personal search for meaning and purpose in life, which may or may not be related to religion. It entails connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal being. This connection brings faith, hope, peace, and empowerment. The results are joy, forgiveness of oneself and others, awareness and acceptance of hardship and mortality, a heightened sense of physical and emotional well-being, and the ability to transcend beyond the infirmities of existence.¹³

All these definitions have common themes of spirituality as *meaning-making* and as an *individual’s understanding and relationship to self, others and whatever is of highest value in their life*. This ultimate value is described in many ways, including God, higher power, supreme power or purpose.

As spirituality is unique to each individual, people exhibit differing levels of spiritual well-being. Dyson et al. write that “spiritual well-being results in enhancement of one’s inner resources” and that “inner strength is a result of spiritual well-being.”¹⁴ Tanyi describes spiritual well-being as enabling “self-awareness, heightened consciousness, and providing the strength to transcend the usual self.”¹⁵ She concludes from her research that benefits of a healthy spirituality include “a restored sense of well-being and recovery from psychological conditions, such as sexual abuse, substance abuse, and homelessness.”¹⁶

¹²Ibid, 504.

¹³Ibid, 506.

¹⁴Dyson et al., 1184.

¹⁵Tanyi, 502.

¹⁶Ibid, 504.

Does this mean that a healthy spirituality is a necessary part of healing? As noted earlier, Tuck asserts that it is. Gockel also explored the relationship between spirituality and healing in a narrative study of twelve participants with mental and/or physical health problems who were or had been in professional counselling. They were asked to describe how they drew on spirituality to help them through their health problems. Gockel found that language was a limiting factor in the stories told by the participants as they struggled to describe their “ineffable” experiences that transcended “binary boundaries such as inside/outside, divine/human, or transcendent/ immanent.”¹⁷ She began her study defining spirituality as the “vivid, vital and personal, lived experience of the divine and one’s relationship to it” but found it necessary to change her language from *divine* to *sacred* to “better represent participants’ diverse beliefs about their relationship to the spiritual reality that they recognize.”¹⁸

From a comparison of common themes in the participants’ narratives, Gockel concluded that healing occurs in a seven-step process which she described as:

1. Openness to making significant changes in dealing with problems
2. Shifting to a spiritual perspective
3. Going within to seek understanding and direction through spiritual practices
4. Connecting with the sacred, both as awareness of self and a greater sense of connectedness to all of life
5. Undoing patterns
 - a. watching the pattern
 - b. entering the felt experience of the pattern
 - c. acceptance and surrender
 - d. making a choice and committing to change
6. Setting healing intentions
7. Following inner guidance to transform experiences of mental and physical illness into experiences of healing

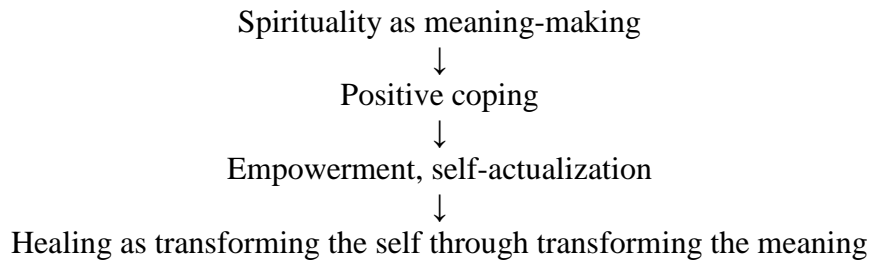
¹⁷Gockel, 221.

¹⁸Ibid.

Healing began for her participants as they revised how they understood themselves and how they connected to the sacred. Gockel writes that

by the end of their process of healing, participants completed the shift begun when they started to connect with the sacred within and moved from simply connecting with the sacred to centering their lives in this connection. Thus by the time they reached the final step of following their inner guidance, it is to this spiritual partnership that they turned for their primary direction in healing, and for knowledge of the world around them.¹⁹

Summarizing Gockel's conclusions, the relationship of spirituality and healing may be illustrated as:



Gockel's study is very informative in regards to the relationship of spirituality and healing. Her understanding of spirituality as meaning-making concurs with that of Dyson, Tuck and Tanyi. Her participants' stories illustrate healing as ultimately being a spiritual experience.

She concludes with the suggestion that further research is needed into the relationship between spirituality and healing and identifies the role of qualitative research "in identifying the diverse contexts within which spiritual coping strategies are created and given meaning to fully uncover the processes underlying spirituality and its relationship to mental and physical health."²⁰ This suggestion is very inspiring to me as it

¹⁹Ibid, 226.

²⁰Ibid, 227.

gives credence to my interest in gardening as a healing therapy and as a place of encounter with the sacred.

Stages of Faith

A different way of looking at spirituality is described in James Fowler's seminal book on the different stages of spiritual development, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Published in 1981, Fowler's language is somewhat different from what we would use today. He chooses the word *faith* and writes that it is "the ways we go about making and maintaining meaning in life"²¹ and maintains that faith is deeper and more personal than religion. Drawing on the work of theologians Paul Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr and comparative religionist Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Fowler poetically defines faith as:

People's evolved and evolving ways
of experiencing self, others and world
(as they construct them)

as related to and affected by the
ultimate conditions of existence
(as they construct them)

and of shaping their lives' purposes and meanings,
trusts and loyalties, in light of the
character of being, value and power
determining the ultimate conditions
of existence (as grasped in their
operative images—conscious and
unconscious—of them).²²

²¹James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* [New York: HarperCollins, 1981], xii.

²²Ibid, 92-93.

Fowler's definition of 'faith' as meaning-making and as how people understand their relationship to self, others and the ultimate conditions of existence echoes the definitions of spirituality proposed by Tuck, Dyson et al., and Tanyi. Therefore, when referring to Fowler, I will use his choice of the word 'faith' to mean the same as the word 'spirituality' as used by the previous sources.

Fowler's great contribution to the study of spirituality is his categorization of the stages, growth or development of faith. In a very brief synopsis, these stages can be described as:

1. Intuitive-Projective Faith

The realm of most three to seven year olds, Stage 1 faith is characterized by imaginative thinking and relative fluidity of thought patterns. Stage 1 thinkers have not yet developed self-reflection, although they are self-aware, in an egocentric way. This allows them to use their imagination to come to non-logical conclusions and understandings of the stories told them and of the actions of those by whom they are influenced. Although powerfully influenced by the significant adults in their lives, they fuse fantasy, fact and feeling to reach their conclusions and so can form distorted and crippling images if subjected to negative or destructive situations. Progression to Stage 2 occurs as the child develops concrete operational thinking.

2. Mythic-Literal Faith

By age ten, children become increasingly capable of sorting out what is real from what is fantasy. This is the stage of concrete operational thinking and the beginning of logic by the child to assess what they know. Stories take on great significance as a way

for the child to gain experience and understanding of life. However, Stage 2 thinkers are not yet able to step back from and reflect on the meaning of stories.

God is often depicted by Stage 2 thinkers in very concrete, anthropomorphic terms such as ‘an old man with a white beard who lives up in the clouds’. Justice is often understood in terms of fairness and reciprocity (‘an eye for an eye’). Evolution to Stage 3 faith comes about when one must deal with contradictions in stories that require more reflection of meaning; for example, the literal interpretation of the creation story of Genesis versus evolutionary theory.

3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith

Stage 3 faith usually develops during puberty, when one begins to be able to reflect upon one’s thinking, forming hypotheses or multiple possible scenarios (formal, operational thinking). There is also increased self-awareness and the self-consciousness so typical of teenagers. In this stage, the ability to appreciate other’s perspectives leads to a different image of God—a God of “inexhaustible depths and as being capable of knowing personally those mysterious depths of self and others we know that we ourselves will never know.”²³ This sense of a God who knows one personally is very important for the adolescent searching for personal identity and sense of self.

An important determinant of Stage 3 faith is locus of authority. Adolescence brings with it contact with increasing numbers of significant adults—at school, through sports, leisure activities, work, church—who have authority over the teen. This leads the adolescent to develop the sense that authority is located external to them.

²³Ibid, 153.

One defining characteristic of Stage 3 faith is what Fowler calls *tacit understanding*, or unexamined beliefs (one does not know how one knows.) As Fowler writes, “a person in Stage 3 is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system, *as a system*, the object of reflection.”²⁴

A third characteristic of Stage 3 faith is the meaning attached to symbols. Fowler writes that “meaning and symbol are bound up together” and that “symbols of the sacred—their own and others—are related to in ways which honor them as inseparably connected to the sacred. Therefore, worthy symbols are themselves sacred.”²⁵ This is seen, for example, in churches where unused consecrated communion wine is returned to the earth by pouring it on the soil instead of down the drain.

Fowler notes that Stage 3 faith characterizes much of Western religious institutions and writes that “in many ways religious institutions ‘work best’ if they are people with a majority of committed folk best described as Stage 3.”²⁶

When a person of Stage 3 faith is faced with a situation where they must critically examine their values and beliefs, they begin the transformation to Stage 4, where one’s value system becomes *explicit*. However, many people resist or do not seem capable of taking conscious responsibility for their beliefs, abdicating that responsibility to the external source of authority which typifies Stages 3, thereby not progressing in their spiritual maturity.

²⁴Ibid, 162.

²⁵Ibid, 163.

²⁶Ibid, 164.

4. Individuative-Reflective Faith

The shift from Stage 3 to Stage 4 faith can be a disorienting and frightening time as one loses the moorings of one's conventional faith. Fowler writes that what determines the success of this shift will be the "character and quality of the ideologically composed groups bidding for one's joining."²⁷ The primary determinant of a Stage 4 faith is the shift from an external to an internal locus of authority, what Fowler calls the emergence of an "executive ego."

Fowler found that sometimes a person could complete half of the shift, for example, broadening one's worldview through travel or education, but fail to shift to an internal locus of authority, thereby failing to complete the move to Stage 4. It appears that one can find equilibrium in a transitional place between Stages 3 and 4.

A Stage 4 faith questions the symbols that were considered sacred in Stage 3, asking "But what does it *mean*?" Although this can lead to the loss of a symbol's power, it may also deepen the meaning as it becomes explicit and detached from the symbol itself. As Fowler notes, "comparisons of meanings become more easily possible, though a certain tendency to reductionism and the 'flattening' of meanings is difficult to avoid."²⁸

A natural time of spiritual maturation from Stage 3 to Stage 4 is early adulthood. If this shift occurs later, in one's thirties or forties, the transition may be protracted in length and cause great upheaval in one's life. The logical neatness of Stage 4 may not be maintained long-term if deeper energies, paradoxes or symbols insist on arising from the unconscious. This heralds the shift to the mature spirituality of Stage 5.

²⁷ Ibid, 178.

²⁸Ibid, 181.

5. Conjunctive Faith

Fowler begins his section on Conjunctive Faith by expressing his frustration at not being able to describe it. It is, he says, a “faith-knowing” that moves beyond Stage 4’s ‘either-or’ to a way of seeing many sides of an issue. Fowler writes “conjunctive faith suspects that things are organically related to each other; it attends to the pattern of interrelatedness in things.”²⁹ He describes this interrelatedness as *dialogical knowing*:

The known is invited to speak its own word in its own language. In dialogical knowing the multiplex structure of the world is invited to disclose itself. In a mutual ‘speaking’ and ‘hearing’, knower and known converse in an I-Thou relationship. The knower seeks to accommodate her or his knowing to the structure of that which is being known before imposing her or his own categories upon it.³⁰

There is a willingness to accept and celebrate the wisdom in how things are without a need to modify or dominate them; in essence, a trust in the rightness of the relationship.

Another shift that occurs from Stage 4 to Stage 5 is going beyond the boundaries and rationalities one composed in Stage 4. Whereas in Stage 4 one developed an ‘executive ego’ and became aware of the conscious self, in Stage 5 one becomes aware that the conscious ego is not in charge and thereby one experiences the depth of unconscious influences on our actions.

A pivotal awareness that develops in Stage 5 is an awareness that ‘truth’ is more than ideologies or rationalities. As Fowler writes, “the person of Stage 5 makes her or his own *experience* of truth the principle by which other claims to truth are tested (italics mine).”³¹ Balanced with this, though, Fowler notes that there is a respect for other’s

²⁹Ibid, 185.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid, 187.

experiences and perspectives and the understanding that ‘the real and the true’ will be found in the co-mingling of these experiences.

A final aspect of Stage 5 faith that is important to note is its understanding of symbols. Whereas Stage 4 demythologized symbols in an attempt to extract their meanings, Stage 5 understands the power behind the symbol. Paul Ricoeur’s term for this type of understanding is *second naïveté*. Fowler explains this as when one “discerns the powerful residues of meaning that escape our strategies of reductive interpretation. With its attention to the organic and interconnected character of things Stage 5 distrusts the separation of symbols and symbolized, sensing that when we neutralize the initiative of the symbolic, we make a pale idol of any meaning we honor.”³² Because of the depth of introspection and critical understanding of one’s self and one’s actions that is required to form a Stage 5 faith, this stage is unusual before mid-life.

A danger of Stage 5 is the possibility of complacency or the development of cynicism because of one’s understanding of competing claims for truth. That rare individual who understands the paradox of differing truths, yet is galvanized to strive for justice moves into the ultimate realm of Universalizing Faith.

6. Universalizing Faith

Fowler writes that “heedless of the threats to self, to primary groups, and to the institutional arrangements of the present order that are involved, Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, *activist incarnation*—a making real and tangible—of the imperatives of absolute love and justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions.”³³ He also describes this type of faith as “transcendent moral and religious actuality,” “universalizing

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid, 200.

compassion” and “enlarged visions of universal community.” Needless to say, it is the rare individual who develops faith to this level and Fowler notes that such persons often become martyrs for their vision. He also believes that individuals do not set out to acquire Stage 6 faith but rather are “drawn into those patterns of commitment and leadership by the providence of God and the exigencies of history”³⁴ and suggests Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa as examples of Universalizing Faith. None of these were perfect persons, but all shared a passion for justice and inclusiveness far beyond that of most people.

It is important to note that Fowler concluded that “normal persons can reach a long lasting or even a lifetime equilibration at any stage from 2 on.”³⁵ The question that then arose for me is: *Can healing occur in individuals of any faith stage?* When I compared Gockel’s seven steps of healing to Fowler’s stages of faith, I suspected that one needs the maturity of a Stage 5 faith, with its inner knowing and inner authority, sense of interrelatedness, and awareness of the sacred, in order to truly heal. If this were so, I wondered about the relationship between the conventional faith, or spirituality, that I suspected my participants held, and their spirituality in the garden. Is the God of their religion the God of their garden? Can the garden be a healing place even for someone with a less mature spirituality? I pondered these questions as I prepared to interview my participants.

³⁴Ibid, 202.

³⁵Ibid 107.

Sacred Space

What makes a space or place sacred? Is it an inherent quality of the space or is it perception? These questions are of interest to people as diverse as theologians, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, architects and neuroscientists. Philip and John North, noting the archetypal character of sacred space, write that “the idea that certain areas of space are sacred and, correspondingly, that other areas are worldly, is not of course a Christian invention but goes back as far into history and pre-history as we can reach by evidence or inference.”³⁶ Veilleux, writing about the Hebrew tradition, asserts that “nothing is sacred in itself, but everything can be ‘sacralised.’ In the myth of creation in the Book of Genesis, God gives everything to man as a caretaker, and therefore everything is profane. Man, however, can sacralise anything by using it to express his reverence for God.”³⁷ In the early Christian era, Augustine wrote that God is *ubique praesens et ubique totus* (everywhere present and everywhere whole) indicating that all of creation is sacred (City of God, Book 1, Chapter 29). John of the Cross wrote in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (III, chapter 39.2) that the best place for devotion is simply the place where one is least distracted from the way that one must travel to God. David N. Bell sums up the question of what is sacred space when he writes that “we do not possess a meter which can measure levels of sanctity and . . . holiness is ultimately in the eye—or mind—of the beholder.”³⁸

³⁶Philip North and John North, ed., *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven* [London: Continuum, 2007]: 5.

³⁷Armand Veilleux, “What Makes a Monastery a Sacred Place?” in *Loci Sacri: Understanding Sacred Places*, ed. T. Coomans et al. [Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2012]: 29-30.

³⁸David N. Bell, “Spirituality and Scholarship: Sacred Acts and Sacred Spaces,” in *Loci Sacri: Understanding Sacred Places*, ed. T. Coomans et al. [Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2012]: 27.

Mircea Eliade wrote extensively about the idea of sacred and profane space. He characterized two understandings of space; a rational, scientific view of space as *homogenous*, where one space does not differ qualitatively from the next, and a *non-homogeneous* understanding of space, where some spaces are considered sacred or special. This understanding extends beyond those who hold religious beliefs, according to Eliade, because even the non-religious tend to characterize some spaces as special.³⁹ The debate regarding the concept of sacred space is summarized by Brie, et al., “As current formulations of what constitutes the sacred become dislodged from tradition-specific religious and theological conceptualizations, inevitably more fluid, amorphous and less easy-to-define understandings arise. . . . There really is no commonly agreed understanding of what constitutes sacred space any longer.”⁴⁰

Considering that my quest was for an understanding of how to create a sacred space for healing, this statement was almost enough to make me throw up my hands in defeat. How could I create a sacred space for others if the concept resides in the mind of the beholder? Yet, I held onto the understanding that, as human beings, we have an inborn seeking for ‘something greater’ than ourselves. Ann Morisy supports this view when she writes:

. . . part of our human identity is to sense the holy rather than be limited to the mundane. Every one of us has a deep capacity to know and respond to a sense of the holy: this is what Thomas Aquinas refers to as *adaequatio*.⁴¹ We have to be confident that people, despite superficial evidence to the contrary,

³⁹Jean Dalby Clift and Wallace B. Clift, *The Archetype of Pilgrimage: Outer Action with Inner Meaning* [New York: Paulist Press, 1996]: 14, 16.

⁴⁰ Steve Brie, Jenny Dagers and David Torevell, ed., *Sacred Space: Interdisciplinary Perspectives within Contemporary Contexts* [Newcastle upon Tyne, NE: Cambridge Scholars, 2009]: 14.

⁴¹ cf. *Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus* —truth is the correspondence of a thing to the intellect.

have an inner capacity that is adequate to perception of the presence of God, and there is mounting evidence that this is indeed the case.⁴²

Neo-pagans refer to this as ‘thin places’ where, as Boss writes, “the veil between heaven and earth is slightly pulled aside, so that the pilgrim gains a little glimpse of the Other World, the Heavenly Realm.”⁴³

Chelsea Wald reports on a workshop held in Columbus, Indiana where architects, neuroscientists and faith practitioners “took the first steps in exploring why the brain processes some spaces as sacred and others as mundane.”⁴⁴ Although there was difficulty coming to a common definition of terms such as ‘sacred’ and ‘awe’, there was agreement among these diverse practitioners that humans distinguish between differing spaces by how they ‘feel’. Radiologist Andrew Newberg and psychiatrist Eugene d’Aquili, working at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, discovered that people become disoriented in awe-producing spaces because activity in the parietal lobe of the brain somehow becomes blocked. This finding did not perturb televangelist Robert Schuller, the keynote speaker at the workshop, who asserted that “neuroscience—like great architecture—is just another window to the divine.”⁴⁵

⁴² Ann Morisy, “Seven Cairns in the Creation of Sacred Space in the City,” in *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven*, ed. Philip North and John North [London: Continuum, 2007]: 121.

⁴³ Sarah Jane Boss, “Jerusalem, Dwelling of the Lord: Marian Pilgrimage and its Destination,” in *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven*, ed. Philip North and John North [London: Continuum, 2007]: 142.

⁴⁴Chelsea Wald, “Spaces of Worship,” *Science & Spirit* 15, no. 6 [November, 2004]: 18.

⁴⁵Ibid.

My science background and twenty-plus years of pharmacy practice has left me with an acute sense of awe at the workings of the human nervous system. To imagine God as present in the function of neuropeptides is not a stretch for me and, in fact, solidifies my understanding of a sacred energy that infuses all creation. My inherently rational way of looking at things can still allow for the concept of sacred space, a space where the presence of the divine is especially sensed, whether that is called a thin place, liminal or numinous.

Morisy reaches the same conclusion. Writing on “Risking the Possibility of being Overwhelmed” by sacred space, she says:

To reduce religious experience to brain metabolism does not undermine the reality and impact of religious experience. The facts are that people across all cultures make sense of such experiences in terms of (their) God, or a sense of being at one with the world—an oceanic experience. Furthermore, the experience has survival value because, almost without exception, the experience brings renewed energy and heightened morale and, most significant, the experience opens the person to the needs and fragility of others. . . . It is clear that religious experience is good for people and good for society.⁴⁶

Other writers concur with Morisy. Medieval Studies professor Terryl Kinder writes that “there is probably no definition of the sacred with which everyone would agree, although places that inspire particular awe or protection—or are charged with the memory of an event linked to a belief—would encompass many.”⁴⁷ The editors of *Loci Sacri* posit three essential conditions for something to be considered sacred:

⁴⁶Morisy, 123.

⁴⁷Terryl N. Kinder, “What Makes a Site Sacred? Transforming ‘Place’ to ‘Sacred Space’,” in *Loci Sacri: Understanding Sacred Places*, ed. T. Coomans et al. [Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2012]: 207.

1. Set apart
2. Symbols that energize through representing something else
3. Situated outside normal time and space.⁴⁸

It appears that my experience in the garden fit the criteria for sacred space. It is set apart from my usual daily activities of workplace and housekeeping, the soil and the plants allow for a sense of connectedness to the divine and it is definitely a place where I lose a sense of time as *chronos*, or chronological; rather, time becomes *kairos*, or indeterminate, in that space. I wondered— would my participants sense the space in the same way that I do?

In order to understand how to facilitate the possibility for others to have a healing experience in the garden, though, I first needed to learn about gardening as horticultural therapy and what has been written about this form of therapy.

Horticultural Therapy

A literature search of ‘horticultural therapy’ and ‘gardening therapy’ returns a wide variety of therapy situations employing gardening as therapy. Studies have been done using gardening for homeless women,⁴⁹ adult offenders on probation,⁵⁰ young

⁴⁸T. Coomans, et al, *Loci Sacri: Understanding Sacred Places* [Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2012]: 7.

⁴⁹Cathy A. Pierce and Linda M. Seals, “The Importance of Community Gardening for Homeless Women: A Pilot Study,” *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 27 [2006]: 21-26.

⁵⁰Bill Hale, Gary Marlowe, Richard H. Mattson, Jimmy Don Nicholson and C. A. Dempsey, “A Horticultural Therapy Probation Program: Community Supervised Offenders,” *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 16 [2005]: 39-49.

offenders,^{51 52} people with psychiatric disabilities,^{53 54} and people with physical disabilities.⁵⁵ In most of the studies that I accessed, however, healing and spirituality were not measured or discussed. Much of the literature is concerned with measuring psychological markers such as self-esteem,^{56 57} self-efficacy,^{58 59} well-being,^{60 61 62} relationship building,^{63 64 65} or measuring increases in physical abilities.⁶⁶ In two studies

⁵¹Carol Cammack, Tina M. Waliczek, and Jayne M. Zajicek, "The Green Brigade: The Psychological Effects of a Community-based Horticultural Program on the Self-development Characteristics of Juvenile Offenders," *Hort Technology* 12 no. 1 [January-March 2002]: 82-86.

⁵²Mark H. Sandal, "Therapeutic Gardening in a Long-Term Detention Setting," *Journal for Juvenile Justice Services* 19 no. 1&2 [2004]: 123-131.

⁵³Mary S. Myers, "Empowerment and Community Building Through A Gardening Project," *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 22, no. 2 [September 1998]: 181.

⁵⁴Marianne Thorsen Gonzalez, Terry Hartig, Grete Grindal Patil, Egil W. Martinsen and Marit Kirkevold, "Therapeutic Horticulture in Clinical Depression: A Prospective Study of Active Components," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 66 no. 9, 2002-2013.

⁵⁵Ingrid Söderback, Marianne Söderström, and Elisabeth Schäländer, "Horticultural Therapy: The 'Healing Garden' and Gardening in Rehabilitation Measures at Danderyd Hospital Rehabilitation Clinic, Sweden," *Pediatric Rehabilitation* 7, no. 4 [2004]: 245-260.

⁵⁶Hale, 41.

⁵⁷Cammack, 82.

⁵⁸Myers, 181.

⁵⁹Pierce, 21.

⁶⁰Gonzalez.

⁶¹ Söderback, 245.

⁶²Sahlin, 10.

⁶³Cammack, 82.

⁶⁴Sandal, 123.

⁶⁵Myers, 181.

⁶⁶ Söderback, 245.

that used the word *healing*, it was set off by quotation marks with no definition of the word or reason for the word to be set apart.^{67 68}

I only found two studies that looked at the spiritual aspect of gardening. Spiritual dimensions of well-being are acknowledged in a study by Fetherman et al. on the meaning and effects of horticultural therapy.⁶⁹ This study interviewed registered horticultural therapists in order to ascertain how they understood their long-term care clients' interactions with plants and also how the therapists described the effects of horticultural therapy on their clients' health and well-being. Because of the age and disabilities of the clients, the therapists focused on engaging the client in the moment, with changes in physical, mental/cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual areas seen as a side benefit. Therapists did notice engagement of physical, mental, social and emotional senses in the clients as they potted plants, visited and worked with others, and reminisced about childhood and life experiences in gardening. However, the authors write that "the dimension of spirituality was difficult to assess in all observations. No words or expressions were used during the sessions equating to thoughts or feelings of spirituality" and concluded that "more exploration of the effect on clients' spiritual dimension is needed."⁷⁰ They wrote that goals of horticultural therapy "should include social interaction, sense of purpose/connectedness, healthy expression of feelings, self-esteem/motivation and personal causation,"⁷¹ seemingly not understanding that sense of

⁶⁷Myers, 181.

⁶⁸ Söderback, 245.

⁶⁹Debra L. Fetherman, et al., "An Exploration of the Meaning and Effects of Horticultural Therapy on Human Health and Well-being," *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 16 [June 2005]: 6-18.

⁷⁰Ibid, 13.

purpose, connectedness, self-esteem and personal causation are all aspects of spirituality. In their “Implications for Practice,” the authors recommend that horticultural therapy be offered on an individual basis as well as in a group as “personal reflection concerning a spiritual connection with nature, earth and God may be more within reach for individuals if interaction is not limited to group interaction” and conclude that “spiritual well-being and expressing one’s connection to the universe are essential as individuals search for meaning in life, as well as at the end of life.”⁷²

One study that looked specifically at the spirituality of gardening is that by Unruh and Hutchinson.⁷³ Their aim was to “examine the meaning of gardens and gardening across different life experiences using hermeneutic phenomenology to focus on the lived experience of leisure gardening.”⁷⁴ I found this study extremely interesting as it is very similar to what I proposed for my own thesis work. This was also the only article I found on horticultural therapy that focused on the spirituality of gardening, and Unruh and Hutchinson show a thorough understanding of spirituality through the language with which they express their themes. Their paper is the only one to define spirituality: “transcendence, connectedness, meaning and purpose in life, integrating aspects of the self or a search for the sacred.” They also note that spirituality can be expressed in sacred terms such as “belief in God, spiritual being, higher power, a reality greater than the self”

⁷¹Ibid, 14.

⁷²Ibid, 15.

⁷³Anita Unruh and Susan Hutchinson, “Embedded Spirituality: Gardening in Daily Life and Stressful Life Experiences,” *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* 25 [2011]: 567-574.

⁷⁴Ibid, 567.

or in secular terms like “connectedness, integrating aspect of the person, meaning and purpose in life.”⁷⁵

Unruh and Hutchinson used a constant comparison method of analysis to construct themes that emerged from the interviews with their participants. Eight key dimensions were found: social relationships, enjoyment in gardening, emotional expression, cognitive challenge, physical challenge, restorativeness, spirituality, and gardening stresses/resources. From the spiritual dimension, they extracted five themes relating to spirituality: connectedness, expression of inner being, garden as a spiritual place and gardening as a spiritual activity, gardening as spiritual journey and stewardship.⁷⁶ Their comment that “spiritual meaning that is not explicitly associated with religious practices is often associated with leisure activity”⁷⁷ led me to wonder if it is the leisure activity or the space where the activity occurs that is, in effect, healing. Although they note that “gardeners who write about their enjoyment in gardening often comment about feeling connected with nature and experiencing something outside themselves in the garden,”⁷⁸ their conclusions focus on the leisure activity of gardening, not on the space where it occurs. They conclude their study thus: “At the heart of meaning-focused coping is the spiritual essence of self. More research related to spirituality and leisure in meaning-focused coping is needed to identify strategies for health promotion and chronic disease management.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid, 569.

⁷⁷Ibid, 567.

⁷⁸Ibid, 567.

⁷⁹Ibid, 573-574.

Only the study by Unruh and Hutchinson specifically looks at the relationship between gardening therapy and spirituality. As noted above, their conclusions center more on the ‘leisure activity’ of gardening than the garden as a spiritual place, even though one of the themes they extracted from their participant interviews was that of “garden as a spiritual place and gardening as spiritual activity.”⁸⁰

My interest in how the garden is perceived as a spiritual place and how people use language and metaphor to describe that experience of sacred space is perhaps somewhat unique. To my knowledge, it has not been described in the literature. Perhaps my thesis research will, in a small way, add to the body of knowledge regarding the importance of sacred space for healing.

My Own Understandings

It was also necessary before I began my research to articulate and clarify my own theology in regards to spirituality, healing and the experience of the sacred. This came together for me as a result of the literature review and from my own lived experience. Certain themes from the literature review resonated with me—they reflect or explain what I have found to be true in my own life.

I understand spirituality as distinct from religion. It is an integral component of the human condition and each individual has a spirituality that determines how they make meaning in their life. It is how we understand and connect with our inner self, with others and with whatever is the ultimate power in our lives. I agree with Tuck that a healthy spirituality is necessary for well-being. I also understand that healing is

⁸⁰Ibid, 569.

necessary for body, mind and spirit and ultimately allows for an integration of mind and body to spirit, leading to *wholeness*.

Healing requires a sense of connectedness to whatever someone experiences as their ‘highest value’, a concept that I describe as God, but am equally at ease calling higher power, organizing principle, ultimate mystery, or mind of the universe. I have experienced and come to understand this power, God, as an energy that flows through me and through all of creation, an energy that connects me to the whole of creation.

There are times and there are places where this sense of connectedness is more palpable, times and places of awe and mystery. These times and places are thus sacred and it is then and there that I begin to heal. The garden is one such place for me.

My lived theology is echoed and then enlarged by my reading of other theologians. In the work of Thomas Berry, his mentor Teilhard de Chardin, and in Matthew Fox’s writing on Creation Spirituality, I have found theology and spirituality that mirror and deepen what I know. Thomas Berry, cultural historian and eco-theologian, is widely known as ‘the Father of Environmentalism’⁸¹ and his seminal 1988 book *The Dream of the Earth* describes “his spiritual vision of the human in relation to the earth and the cosmos.”⁸² Berry gives me a new creation story, a cosmology that began 14 billion years ago, that encompasses one trillion galaxies, and with 200 billion stars. On one planet, around one star, life has evolved to include the human species in which a new evolutionary innovation emerges, namely, self reflective consciousness. In

⁸¹ Ervin Lazlo and Allan Combs, eds. *Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism* [Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011].

⁸² Allan Combs, “The University of the Earth: An Introduction to Thomas Berry,” in *Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism* [Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011]: 1.

the human species, the universe has become conscious of itself. Many of Berry's ideas originated from his mentor, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a Jesuit priest, geologist, and paleontologist. Teilhard's ideas and writings in regards to evolution and cosmology were far ahead of their time and the Catholic Church refused him permission to publish his writings during his lifetime. It is in these posthumously published writings that we find the seed of Thomas Berry's thoughts and the language with which he expresses them. As D. O'Murchù notes, Teilhard "regarded cosmic creation as the primary revelation of God for all of us."⁸³ Berry incorporated this insight into the first of his "Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process": "*The universe, the solar system, and the planet Earth, in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence, constitute for the human community the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being.*"⁸⁴ That 'ultimate mystery', for me, is the God that I experience through the miracle of abundant growth from tiny seeds in my garden. What Teilhard and Berry have added to my experience is an understanding of the miracle of creation taken to a universal and cosmic level. They have also given me permission to understand the natural world as the primary scripture to experience God and thus have relieved me of much tension built up for me around the dominant images in the Bible of God as 'father' and 'in charge of the universe'.

Berry often uses the word 'communion' to describe the interconnectedness of all creation. As Geneen Marie Haugen writes, "he *experienced* the universe as a communion, as a sacred process in which he participated. In other words, a communion

⁸³ Diarmuid O'Murchù, "Teilhard: A Mystical Survivor!" *Ecotheology* 10.1 [2005]: 101-102.

⁸⁴ <http://www.astepback.com/12principles.html> accessed March 30, 2013.

of subjects was not just an idea, an abstract concept, removed from his felt-sense of the particulars of everyday life. There is no communion without participation.”⁸⁵ I love the idea of the universe as participatory communion. The sacramental image is profound and takes me back to my roots of Lutheran sacramental practice. Haugen is so right that communion is a lived experience. Thinking of the interconnectedness of creation as communion gets me out of my thinking head and into my feeling and experiencing body. I suspect that Berry also received this image from Teilhard, as Teilhard had written, “There is a communion with God, and a communion with the earth, and a communion with God through the earth”⁸⁶ during his time as a stretcher-bearer during WWI. In Berry’s last book, *Evening Thoughts*, he writes, “as we recover our awareness of the universe as a communion of subjects, a new interior experience awakens within the human. The barriers disappear. An enlargement of soul takes place.”⁸⁷

Matthew Fox also writes of the effect on the soul in understanding the universe as communion. “Our souls are too small—there lies the price we have paid for the human-centeredness of our civilization. How do we enlarge our souls? Cosmology is the corrective to this myopic world view and the experience of awe is divinity’s way of getting through to us yet another time.”⁸⁸ Although I find how Fox articulates creation spirituality as the way out of our ecological mess somewhat idealistic, compared to

⁸⁵Geneen Marie Haugen, “Thomas Berry and the Evocation of Participatory Consciousness,” in *Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism*, ed. Ervin Laszlo and Allan Combs [Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011]: 35.

⁸⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, “The Cosmic Life,” *Writings in Time of War*, [Yew York: Harper, 1968]. <http://teillarddechardin.org/index.php/biography> accessed March 30, 2013.

⁸⁷ Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker [San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006]: 18.

⁸⁸Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth* [San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991], 149.

Berry's more pragmatic view of the future of the earth and humankind, Fox does add some important ideas to my theology. His Four Paths of Creation Spirituality⁸⁹ begin with the *Via Positiva*, which he describes as "the awe, wonder and mystery of nature and of all beings, each of whom is a 'word of God', a 'mirror of God that glistens and glitters', as Hildegard of Bingen put it,"⁹⁰ echoing what was described in the literature review as the 'awe' of sacred space. Both Fox and Berry give me larger ways to understand God. God is no longer the anthropomorphic 'king on the throne of heaven'. As Fox writes, "creation spirituality empowers us for an ecological era, a time when we cease looking *up* for divinity and start looking *around*."⁹¹

The theme of 'looking around' for divinity is echoed in the work of feminist theologian Sallie McFague. McFague has developed an ecological theology based on a model of "the universe as God's body."⁹² Claiming that the Western Christian tradition has stressed the *transcendence* of God—"that Waterloo of Christian theology, which has pushed God out of the world and into another space"⁹³—she suggests that the model of *the universe as the body of God* leads to an of understanding God as "the source, power, and goal—the spirit—that enlivens (and loves) the entire process and its material

⁸⁹Fox names four paths of the spiritual journey—The *Via Positiva*, *Via Negativa*, *Via Creativa*, and the *Via Transformativa*—in contrast to the traditional three paths of purgation, illumination and union. He asserts that these three paths are inadequate to describe the spiritual journey as they "leave our delight and pleasure, creativity and justice; their goal is not compassion but contemplation and the turning away from the earth and all that relations us to it." [Fox, 17].

⁹⁰Ibid, 18.

⁹¹Ibid, 41.

⁹²Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993], 20.

⁹³Ibid.

forms.”⁹⁴ God as embodied in all of creation opens up the possibility of experiencing the presence of God in the natural world. The advantage of this model, according to McFague is that ‘it allows us to think of God as immanent in our world while retaining, indeed, magnifying God’s transcendence. The model of the universe as God’s body unites immanence and transcendence.”⁹⁵ McFague coined the terms *immanent transcendence* or *transcendent immanence* to describe this way of understanding God. This is a radical departure from the dogmatic understanding of the immanence of God as embodied only in Jesus. She writes that Jesus of Nazareth is paradigmatic for God as ‘embodied’ but notes that, if we understand the universe as God’s body, then God is present “in and through all bodies, the bodies of the sun and moon, trees and rivers, animals, and people,”⁹⁶ an understanding that theologians refer to as *panentheism*. McFague writes that “to contemplate what we know of the universe, from the extraordinary ordinariness of a butterfly’s wing to the ordinary extraordinariness of the Milky Way, is beyond all our capacities of imagination: the longer we reflect on either of these phenomena, the more filled with wonder we become.”⁹⁷ She stresses that “there is no way to divine transcendence except immanently.”⁹⁸ This concept of *immanent transcendence* puts theological language around my experience of connectedness with the divine in my garden.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid, 133.

⁹⁷Ibid, 154.

⁹⁸Ibid, 155.

McFague also acknowledges what science has discovered regarding the beginnings of the universe, what she terms “the common creation story,”⁹⁹ echoing what I have learned from Thomas Berry. She asserts that if we understand everything in the universe coming from a common origin, we will begin to see the interconnectedness of all creation and that this will “help us to think of unity and diversity in a new way.”¹⁰⁰ McFague concludes her book with a discussion of the ethics that the model of the universe as God’s body brings forth—a change in consciousness that calls us to live in solidarity with the oppressed, whether that is the poor, or the marginalized in society, or the endangered species of plants and animals.

Matthew Fox also links compassion and justice to the interconnectedness that is emphasized in cosmology. “Compassion is the working out of our interconnectedness; it is the praxis of interconnectedness.”¹⁰¹ I have found this to be true in my own life. As I began my own healing, I realized that other people were much more *like* me than *different* from me. I then felt a connection to others that I had not sensed before. From that sense of connection, compassion began to flow and, from that, the desire for justice. It has been my experience that, until I could begin to heal my own woundedness, the wounds of others seemed insignificant and inconsequential. My theology all comes together on this point. In order to heal, we need to connect with ourselves, with others and with God. Through this connection, this *communion*, comes healing and through healing comes compassion for others, and from this comes hope for the healing of the Earth. This is my lived experience, not disembodied thought.

⁹⁹Ibid, 38.

¹⁰⁰Ibid, 39.

¹⁰¹Fox, 36.

My theology echoes the themes that Unruh and Hutchinson found in their research: connectedness, expression of inner being, garden as a spiritual place and gardening as a spiritual activity, and gardening as spiritual journey and stewardship. From my reading of Berry, Teilhard, Fox, and McFague, I gained an expanded vision and concept of divinity and the interconnectedness of the universe.

Sallie McFague cautions that theology is not an objective discipline and writes that theologians are “just human beings who have had experiences that they believe connect them with sacred powers, experiences they interpret in the language and categories of the religious communities in which they were raised or subsequently joined.”¹⁰² I must therefore state that my theology comes from my place as a Caucasian middle class woman who was born into the Christian tradition. It is from this place that I reflect theologically on the meaning of the garden as sacred space.

Although, through my reading, I had come to a new consciousness regarding creation and the interconnectedness of all creation, as well as an understanding of how one experiences place as sacred, what I still did not clearly understand was the concept of *soul*. It had seemed to make sense to use *Soil and Soul* in my title, both as a literary device but also because I intuited that soul was involved in gardening and in healing. At this point in my literature review, though, I had to admit that I did not really know what Fox and Berry meant by ‘soul’.

¹⁰²McFague, 67.

Soul and Soil – Finding the Connection

Gaylah Balter begins her book *Gardening with Soul* with this sentence:

“Gardening with soul encourages the discovery of your inner self and also some ways to garden the soil of your own soul.”¹⁰³ She has, in this one sentence, described the essence of what I was trying to distill in this thesis project—the connection of soil to soul and healing. Balter writes what we gardeners know in our bones, that gardening heals us, gives us meditative time to ponder who we are—in essence, to find our soul. As I read her words, I was filled with yearning to discover my inner self. But I was also filled with questions, the questions a scholar and aspiring theologian must ask. How do we begin to know our inner self? What really is this soul of which we nonchalantly speak?

Fowler tackles the question of ‘knowing’ prior to describing the stages of faith in his book. In discussing matters of faith, Fowler insists that one must “widen the scoping of knowing involved and account for the interrelatedness of several different modes of knowing in faith.”¹⁰⁴ He writes that we must “expand the concept of cognition” to include ecstatic and imaginative ways of knowing:

As is becoming generally recognized, the mind employs the more aesthetically oriented right hemisphere of the brain in these kinds of knowing. . . . To move in this direction requires coming to terms with modes of thought that employ images, symbols, and synesthesial fusions of sense and feeling. It means taking account of so-called regressive movements in which the psyche returns to preconceptual, prelinguistic modes and memories, and to primitive sources of energizing energy, bringing them into consciousness with resultant reconstructions of the experience world. To deal adequately with faith and with faith’s dynamic role in the total self-constitutive activity of ego means trying to give theoretical attention to the transformation in consciousness—rapid and dramatic in sudden conversion, more gradual and

¹⁰³Gaylah Balter, *Gardening with Soul: Healing the Earth and Ourselves with Feng Shui and Environmental Awareness* [Fayetteville, AR: Learning Tree, 2003]: 1.

¹⁰⁴Fowler, 98.

incremental in faith growth—which results from the re-cognition of self-others-world in light of knowing the self as constituted by a center of value powerful enough to require or enable recentering one’s ultimate environment.¹⁰⁵

I understand Fowler to mean that one must recognize and take seriously intuitive moments, sensory experiences and other non-cognitive ways of knowing to begin to know one’s inner self. The garden can be one example of a “primitive source of energizing energy.” Many gardeners cannot tell me why they love to spend time in the garden, they just know that they feel good in that space. Fowler indicates that it is necessary to bring those feelings into consciousness in order to begin to know one’s inner self.

Although Fowler’s work on the stages of faith and of different ways of knowing is useful when analyzing participant interviews, he does not discuss the connection between faith (spirituality) and healing, nor does he discuss soul. Conversely, Balter’s book is a non-academic look at gardening as soul-filled and healing. She speaks of earth energies, fairies, angels and feng shui—topics that many academics deem unworthy of serious consideration. However, to her credit, she makes an effort to define ‘soul’. Drawing on the work of spirituality writers Thomas Moore, Gary Zukav, and Anthony Lawlor, she writes that “our emotions, feelings, and spiritual experiences as well as the sacred, divine, and eternal aspects of life are all attributes and manifestations of soul. We extend our understanding of the soul’s qualities to include the idea that it plants the seeds of truth and justice in the world and yearns for wholeness and connection to Nature.”¹⁰⁶ She seems to take seriously those “synesthesial fusions of sense and feeling”, which Fowler

¹⁰⁵Ibid, 104-105.

¹⁰⁶Balter, 2.

describes, and ascribes them to soul. However, her definition still did not make it clear to me what ‘soul’ is. Wanting a clearer definition and to know more about how Nature is connected to soul, I turned back to Thomas Berry, who, as already noted, writes that an enlargement of soul occurs when we understand the universe as communion. What does Berry mean by this? I found his meaning circuitously, after reading the thoughts of others.

Nancy Ryley interviewed Berry (as well as psychotherapist Marion Woodman, her husband Ross Woodman, professor of English literature, and film-maker/journalist Laurens van der Post) for her book *The Forsaken Garden*. Much of this book is concerned with a discussion of the loss of soul in today’s world. Ryley describes loss of soul as “feelings of estrangement from any kind of transcendent values”¹⁰⁷ and writes that

our exit from the mythical Garden of Eden may be interpreted as a splitting off of ourselves from any conscious sense of intimacy with matter, with the physical world. The reality is that our separation from nature has taken us into a connection with a transcendent Father-God that has nothing to do with our roots—either in the natural world, or in our own bodies and souls. For hundreds of years we have been sheltered by the security of that paternal relationship, but today the projection of a creator onto an omnipotent father figure has died for many people.¹⁰⁸

She asserts that the Judeo-Christian understanding of a patriarchal God, transcendent to our natural world, has contributed to Western society’s loss of connection with the created world and consequent loss of soul. What is needed, as Berry also advocates, is a return to the natural world as our primary place of revelation of the divine.

¹⁰⁷Nancy Ryley, *The Forsaken Garden: Four Conversations on the Deep Meaning of Environmental Illness* [Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1998]: 15.

¹⁰⁸Ibid, 9.

Laurens van der Post, who has extensively chronicled the African Bushmen, describes the connection that indigenous people have with the natural world and, by extension, their souls:

Well, the Bushmen have their natural contacts with their souls intact. They have not got the power that we have over our environment—they haven't got *that* sort of power—but they have souls, and the soul has its communication with the consciousness of the human being through our instincts. Our instincts all taken, pulled together, are a vast storehouse of memory of all that life has been and what life means. And the Bushmen have a very close contact with their instincts.¹⁰⁹

It appears that van der Post is relating consciousness via *instinct* to soul. Later in his interview with Ryley, van der Post mentions a conversation that he had with his friend Carl Jung: “I’ve always used the statement that Jung made to me just before he died. He said: “I cannot define for human beings what God is, but what I can say is that my scientific work has proved that the *pattern of God* exists in every human being. And that this pattern has at its disposal the greatest transforming energies of which life is capable.”¹¹⁰ As I read this, I wondered if this *pattern of God* is the same as *instinct* or *soul*. Ryley relates soul as found in primitive peoples to Jungian psychology:

To primitive peoples, ‘loss of soul’ meant not only a loss of containment by one’s group or tribe, it also meant a separation of one’s being from the Great Powers that created and sustained the universe. Consequently, it meant a loss of one’s Self because one’s identity could only be found within that larger context. In Jungian terminology, ‘loss of soul’ means a loss of connection between the ego and its larger container, the realm of the archetypes in the collective unconscious. In other words, it’s a loss of contact with the numinous symbolic forms (Great Powers) both in the psyche and in the universe, which are the Source of our being and which give our lives depth and meaning.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹Ibid, 27.

¹¹⁰Ibid, 40.

¹¹¹Ibid, 19.

It seemed to me that Ryley’s “realm of the archetypes in the collective unconscious” may be the same as van der Post’s “instinct” and Jung’s “pattern of God”—all different ways of describing this thing we call soul.

Geneen Marie Haugen, writing about the need of modern culture to develop a new mode of consciousness, says of primitive cultures “the question is not only how did people without silicon-based technology *know*, but how did they know so deeply—in a way that infused their very manner of being, in a consciousness of participation with ancestors and kin, in an ensouled and animate world?”¹¹² This agrees with what van der Post and Ryley write about indigenous and primitive peoples having soul-filled lives, but Haugen says that today we need a further development in consciousness beyond that of primitive peoples. Calling this development *participatory consciousness*, Haugen describes it as a “heightened, world-reshaping awareness of participation with the visible and invisible; embodied and numinous; past, present, and future beings, relationships, and energies among whom we dwell.”^{113 114} It is a return to the awareness of, and connection to, the whole of creation that was lost by the Age of Reason and Cartesian

¹¹²Geneen Marie Haugen, “Thomas Berry and the Evocation of Participatory Consciousness,” in *Thomas Berry Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism*, ed. Ervin Laszlo and Allan Combs [Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011]: 38-39.

¹¹³Ibid, 33.

¹¹⁴Sallie McFague acknowledges that Native American spirituality has a deep understanding of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all creation [McFague, 20]. Robin Wall Kimmerer, Native American, botanist and ecologist writes eloquently of the indigenous understanding of the interconnection of all creation and points out that indigenous cultures experience all of creation as alive. Describing indigenous languages as having a “grammar of animacy,” she writes that in most “indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* [Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013]: 55.

Kimmerer’s description of indigenous spirituality suggests that indigenous people very much live a participatory consciousness.

duality. Haugen writes that participatory consciousness is more than the consciousness experienced by primitive peoples, however, as they would not have had a distinct sense of self and other, nor would they have understood the continuing evolution of the universe as “unrepeatable developmental movement over immense expanses of time”¹¹⁵—what Berry calls *cosmogensis*.¹¹⁶ Berry writes scathingly about the narrowness of consciousness in our technologically advanced society. Claiming that we have become autistic in regard to our awareness of our connection to the universe, he writes that “even the most primitive tribes have a larger vision of the universe, of our place and functioning within it, a vision that extends to celestial regions of space and to interior depths of the human in a manner far exceeding the parameters of our own world of technological confinement.”¹¹⁷

Putting this all together, I now understood that the knowing required for healing is not the rational reasoning so prized by our Western technological culture, but an intuitive and deeply experienced sense of connection to the whole of creation—what Haugen calls ‘participatory consciousness’, Berry describes as ‘communion of subjects’ and Fowler categorizes as Stage 5 faith. This is what enables one to know one’s inner self. Lack of this deep knowing causes us to lose our soul.

Jungian psychotherapist Marion Woodman believes that the primary route to the soul is through the body. She says that “one of the ways we hear the messages from our

¹¹⁵Lazlo and Coombs, 34.

¹¹⁶ Haugen writes from a North American, Caucasian perspective, which has generally not understood the created world as interconnected. Perhaps what she is really calling for is an understanding of participatory consciousness as experienced by indigenous peoples, but with the additional dimension of cosmogenesis.

¹¹⁷Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* [San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988]: 37.

souls is through a gut response in the body. But most people don't have a gut response anymore, because they are cut off and don't feel the reaction in their cells."¹¹⁸ Woodman has worked extensively with people with addictions who, she says, have lost their souls because they have no connection to a transcendent entity. Explaining this in Jungian terms, she asserts that

what happens in an addiction is that the yearning for that transcendent space comes up. Individuals who have no spiritual god or goddess to identify with in that space put the spiritual projection onto something material like food, alcohol, cocaine, or sex. And they put the same kind of intensity into their binge, or fix, or orgasm—whatever they call their addictive behavior. They spiral into unconsciousness until they pass out. Then there is no consciousness to relate to whatever experience they may have had. The unconscious has forced them into the addiction, which means that the ego no longer has control. No addict is the master of his or her ship; the unconscious has become master. They have a stone god or goddess at the center, and that stone energy eventually manifests in their body. We become what we worship.¹¹⁹

If the route to the soul is through the body, Woodman believes that a walk in nature could be healing to an addict. "If she could take a walk in nature, if she could feel her feet firmly planted on the ground, and if she could experience that grounding, then she might take in the cherishing she seeks in nature. She might feel her soul expanding into the soul of everything around her. She might belong to an ensouled community of birds, plants, animals, people."¹²⁰

This reconnection with soul through the body brings expanded consciousness, according to Woodman. At the end of her interview with Ryley, Woodman sums up her

¹¹⁸Ryley, 71.

¹¹⁹Ibid, 62.

¹²⁰Ibid, 64.

understanding of healing and soul by referring to the Garden of Eden myth. She says there is no way to go back to the original innocence of the Garden:

The return to the Garden is about coming full circle. It's about returning to a place with *knowing*, bringing to it a consciousness that was not there before. It's a new vision of the Garden because *we* have changed. Understanding the meaning of the Garden makes us a part of the whole of life. [William] Blake talks about the child's world of innocence. Then we go out into 'generation', as he calls it, or the world of experience. We live in that world until we return to the Garden, bringing to it our knowledge of experience and consciousness so that we see it as if for the first time. That conscious seeing is the higher innocence, Blake's Jerusalem. Now we can see, and we can hear, and we can smell, and we can touch—with a *totally* different perception.¹²¹

From Marion Woodman, I gained an understanding of addictions that relates to loss of soul. Her explanation made great sense in relation to what the women in the addiction recovery program told me about their lives, as we weeded together in the garden. Woodman also relates the healing of soul to consciousness—a consciousness that soul is present in the natural world around us, a consciousness that she suggests can be experienced in the natural world of a garden. What Marion Woodman does not do, however, is define soul nor explain how the universe is ensouled. For a deeper understanding of soul, and of William Blake, I turned to Woodman's husband, English professor Ross Woodman.

Ross Woodman lectures extensively about the Romantic poets who, he says, wrote as a reaction to the scientific and mechanistic understanding of the world that had been brought about by the Enlightenment and the rise of science. Ross Woodman believes that soul was taken out of the natural world by the 'mind-body' split advocated both by Rene Descartes and Calvinist Protestantism. For the Romantic poets, soul was

¹²¹Ibid, 118.

embodied in the physical world—in imagination, in the sensuality of the body and in nature. As William Blake wrote in 1790, “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of the Soul discern’d by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.” For Blake, the soul was “the awakened body, conscious matter,”¹²² according to Ross Woodman. Again, here is a relationship between soul and consciousness and body. When Ryley asserts that “included in that consciousness is the recognition of the soul in the garden,” Ross Woodman replies:

Absolutely. That’s a genuine act of recognition. But, you know, I can’t just walk into a garden and automatically bring consciousness to it. I can, however, settle down; and if I can quiet my own thinking and my own kinds of intrusive urgencies, I can gradually bring my thoughts into some kind of relationship with it. I’ll gradually begin to speak out of it, and it will begin to hear me. And I’ll be enhanced, and it will be enhanced.¹²³

According to Ross Woodman, William Blake wrote metaphorically, in his epic poem *Jerusalem*, about the need to develop this conscious body, where he describes eighteenth century progress as “dark Satanic Mills” and calls for the building of a new Jerusalem, a new consciousness.¹²⁴

What I got from both Woodmans is the concept of the created world having soul. This was very different from my previous understanding of soul, based on my Lutheran upbringing. I had loosely understood soul as the eternal part of human beings that remained after the physical body died and either went to heaven or hell, depending on how ‘good’ one was during their earthly life. I had never considered that soul existed in entities other than human beings. Now, based on what I had learned, it was not too

¹²²Ibid, 147.

¹²³Ibid, 172.

¹²⁴Ibid, 169.

difficult for me to imagine animals having souls. I have three horses and feel deeply connected to them. There are times in my riding where I feel at one with the horse. Perhaps that is connection at a soul level.

But what about plants? Goethe wrote “A spiritual essence lies behind the material form of a plant,”¹²⁵ which may be fine for a poet to say but did not help this scholar understand how a plant can have a soul. It was Thomas Berry who provided the explanation that satisfied the rationalist part of me. Ryley writes that Berry believed “a society that can believe in the myth of progress at the expense of the natural world is a culture of lost souls” and that the “contemporary loss of soul is fundamentally a loss of ‘reciprocity’ between the human and non-human worlds in which both morality and reverence play a fundamental part.”¹²⁶ I can understand this reciprocity in terms of the acknowledgement that I give my horse as an equal partner in our relationship as I honor the horse’s individual character and autonomy. Berry means more than this, though, when he talks about the non-human world. He describes an ‘ensouled’ universe and answers Ryley’s question—*What is a soul?*—with “The soul is the guiding principle, the self-organizing principle of every living being in the universe. And each soul is part of the self-organizing process of the universe.”¹²⁷ This *guiding principle*, according to Berry, is what tells an acorn how to become an oak tree. In Berry’s later writings he uses the term “genetic coding” to further explain the idea of guiding principle. Depth

¹²⁵Balter, 15.

¹²⁶Ibid, 205.

¹²⁷Ibid, 240.

psychologist Bill Plotkin unpacks Berry's meaning of genetic coding, referring back to a passage in Berry's book *The Great Work*:

We must find our primary source of guidance in the inherent tendencies of our genetic coding. These tendencies are derived from the larger community of the Earth and eventually from the universe itself. In Jungian terms, these tendencies identify with those psychic energy constellations that take shape as the primary archetypal forms deep in the unconscious realms of the human."¹²⁸

Plotkin argues that, in this passage, Berry understands genetic coding in a much broader way than most biologists. He writes, "For Thomas, our 'genetic imperative' is, in essence, the soul's guidance. And clearly for Thomas (as for me), the human soul is an element or dimension or mode of the earth itself and emerges therefrom. The realms of the soul and nature are coextensive."¹²⁹ Plotkin further explains Berry's relationship of genetics to soul by claiming that for Berry "the soul is primary, the gene a means for the soul's embodiment, a means enabled by the soul itself. The gene is an agent of the soul, an agent capacitated by the soul."¹³⁰

This explanation of soul as guiding principle or genetic coding inherent in every living being allowed me to grasp the idea of the soul of a plant in a way that is congruent with my rational way of thinking and science background, yet far surpasses those limitations of understanding. It is a non-religious way of saying that soul is Jung's 'pattern of God', present in every living thing.

¹²⁸Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* [New York: Bell Tower, 1999], 57, as quoted in: Bill Plotkin, "Insurgence-The Key to the Great Work of Our Time," in *Thomas Berry Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism*, ed. Ervin Laszlo and Allan Combs [Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2011]: 58.

¹²⁹Ibid, 59.

¹³⁰Ibid, 61-62.

Perhaps Berry's greatest contribution to my understanding of the relationship between soil and soul was in his articulation of the need for a new creation story, a story that revolves around the current scientific understanding of the universe. Haugen asserts that the "two primary stories that have guided Western people—the biblical and scientific accounts of creation and of evolution—are lacking sufficient complexity and nuance to guide our way into what Thomas calls the Ecozoic Age. Neither story suggests the participation of human beings in the outcome of the story, as if we live in a universe where everything happens *to us*."¹³¹ Berry insists that although humankind had nothing to say about the evolution of the universe up to the present time, in the future humans will be involved in almost everything that happens to the Earth. Humanity must therefore understand its relationship to the entire created world. As Berry explains to Ryley, "the universe is the only self-referent mode of being in the phenomenal order; every other being is universe-referent; that is, every other being takes its identity from within that context. That's why having some sense of the universe is absolutely primary."¹³² He explains further:

The realization that the universe is not meaningless, determined, nor random, but instead has had its own consciousness from the beginning, has brought about a unique transformation of the human mind in our time. Nothing like this has occurred, it seems, since the beginning of human intelligence. I say that the story of the universe, which the penetration of quantum science into the world of sub-atomic physics has revealed, is the greatest moral, religious, and spiritual event to take place for many centuries.¹³³

The concept of the universe having a consciousness and by extension, everything in it also having a level of consciousness, was new to me. It is this consciousness, or guiding

¹³¹Haugen, 37.

¹³²Ryley, 241.

¹³³Ibid, 241-242.

principle, or *soul* that infuses the acorn with its oak tree-ness. It is this consciousness, or instinct, that guides the birds back to my garden each spring. It is this consciousness that allows for the inter-relatedness of all of creation, that “communion of subjects not a collection of objects,” of which Berry writes. It is this consciousness, this soul, which is missing in our post-modern Western world. When we lose our connection to, or consciousness of, the created world and our place in it, we lose our soul, with the resultant addictions, numbness and loss of meaning that plagues our world today. Berry asserts that we need a new attitude toward Earth, a new spirituality that recognizes the “numinous qualities of Earth.” This spirituality “is a mode of being in which, not only the divine and the human commune with each other, but in which humans discover themselves in the universe and the universe discovers itself in humans.”¹³⁴ *Soil*, in my title *Soil and Soul*, is a metaphor for the created world, so that to connect with the soil is to regain our soul.

Berry insists that a new creation story must encompass what quantum physics and cosmology have taught us about the universe. The story of the Garden of Eden is no longer adequate. As Marion Woodman says, we cannot go back to the garden as a place of innocence, we can only go back with consciousness, a *knowing* that includes what science has contributed regarding the origins of life. Berry calls for a new universe story, a story that includes all creation stories but that transcends the religious differences:

There is a need for the religious traditions, on their part, to appreciate that the primary sacred community is the universe itself, and that every other community becomes sacred by participation in this primary community. The story of the universe is the new sacred story. The Genesis story, however valid in its basic teaching, is no longer adequate for our spiritual needs. We

¹³⁴Thomas Berry, “The Spirituality of Earth,” *Catholic New Times* [Jun 7, 2010]:1. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCOhost [accessed March 14, 2013].

cannot renew the world through the Genesis story; at the same time, we cannot renew the world without including the Genesis story and all those creation stories that have nourished the various segments of the human community through the centuries. These belong to the great story, the sacred story, as we presently know this sacred community.¹³⁵

Berry argues that, through the story of the evolving universe and the intelligence or consciousness inherent in it, we can rediscover the wonder and awe of the primitive peoples regarding the natural world. This will allow us to regain our own consciousness and a sense of the communion we share as a part of the created world. Through this consciousness and communion we can regain our souls and begin our healing—and the healing of the Earth. Although we cannot return to the innocence of the Garden of Eden, we can turn to the garden as a place of encounter with the numinous or sacred, as a place of communion with the created world, as a place of rediscovering our soul.

As I brought this new understanding of healing through communion with an ensouled universe to my thesis work, I had a nagging question in the back of my mind. *Can healing occur in the garden without cognitive knowing?* I agreed with Berry's assertions that the divine is not transcendent to the natural world, that redemption from the world is not humanity's goal, and that humanity is not transcendent to, nor rules over, the natural world. I had come to these conclusions through my own seeking and Berry had validated them. However, I found God in the garden before I read Berry, before I began my thesis work, even before I recognized that it was the sense of sacred that drew me to my garden. I had no consciousness about what happened in that space, all I knew is that I felt good when I spent time there. I believe that a measure of healing occurred in my garden without cognitive knowing.

¹³⁵Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* [San Francisco: Sierra Club, 2006]: 57.

I began my interviews with four life-long gardeners with great curiosity as to their knowing. What was their spirituality? How did they understand God? How did they explain their connection to their gardens? What was the soul—the consciousness, the knowing—that my participants brought to their gardens? Was it a reflection of their faith, as Fowler describes it? Was the God of their religion the God of their garden? What would my participants say of their own experiences?

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

My introduction to hermeneutic phenomenology came through some of the articles I read for the literature review on horticultural therapy. I was impressed with the methodology; both the thoroughness with which the analysis was done and how the themes emerged. In particular, the work of Unruh and Hutchinson resonated with me in that its aim is “*to examine the meaning of gardens and gardening across different life experiences using hermeneutic phenomenology to focus on the lived experience of leisure gardening.*”¹ This is very similar to what I hoped to explore. Sahlin et al., in a study that looked at horticultural therapy for individuals suffering from severe stress disorder, identified their hermeneutic phenomenological method as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and wrote that this method was chosen because its aim is “to describe in great detail how individuals experience and give meaning to objects, events, and phenomena in their everyday life. In IPA the researcher’s background and experiences are important aspects of the attempt to understand, reflect on and make sense of what the informant is trying to describe regarding his/her experiences.”² As I wished to explore the meaning that my participants ascribe to their gardens, and because my own experience is integral to my research, IPA seemed like an appropriate methodology for my work.

¹ Unruh and Hutchinson, 567.

² Eva Sahlin et al., “How Do Participants in Nature-Based therapy Experience and Evaluate Their Rehabilitation?” *Journal of Therapeutic Horticulture* 22, no. 1 [January 2012]: 12.

IPA is a fairly new research methodology, originating in the United Kingdom in the work of Jonathan A. Smith. It has primarily been used in the field of psychology but its rapid growth in popularity has led to its use in other human, social and health science disciplines. IPA is *phenomenological* in that it is concerned with the meaning that individuals make of their experiences. Smith, Flowers and Larkin concur with Heidegger that “phenomenological inquiry is from the outset an interpretative process”³ and that “in IPA research, our attempts to understand other people’s relationship to the world are necessarily *interpretative*, and will focus upon their attempts to make *meanings* out of their activities and to the things happening to them.”⁴ Smith calls this “the double hermeneutic,” as the researcher strives to understand and interpret how the individual understands their own experience.⁵ IPA is also *idiographic* as it is concerned with individual experience. Good IPA shows a detailed and dense analysis of participant experience, requiring that analysis be thorough and systematic. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin write, IPA “is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context. As a consequence, IPA utilizes small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated samples.”⁶

My desire to interview four particular individuals for my research fulfills IPA’s idiographic requirement. IPA utilizes a small sample size (Smith recommends 3 to 6

³Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 32.

⁴Ibid, 21.

⁵Jonathan A. Smith, “Evaluating the Contribution of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis,” *Health Psychology Review* 5, no. 1 [March 2011]: 10.

⁶Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 29.

participants for a Master's level study) and looks for a homogeneous sample in order to examine in depth the experience of each individual, looking for both convergence and divergence in detail. The individuals I interviewed are four sisters, in their 70s and early 80s, who are life-long gardeners. Before I interviewed them, I understood them all to hold fairly conventional Christian views, which I suspected to be somewhat similar to the theology of the organization which operated the gardening program of my practicum. This was important to me, as I wanted to explore the language used by my participants to express the meaning of their gardens in order to determine whether or not it was similar to the language they used to talk about their religion. It would be important to know, when designing a program of gardening therapy, if one must take into account the participants' religious understanding or if the garden experiences can be separated from such a particular religious understanding.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin note that most "human and health science researchers are not usually concerned with examining their own experiences but rather with attending to the experiences of others."⁷ This is not true of my thesis research, as it is totally driven by my own experience and desire for understanding. In this way, my research also holds a heuristic aspect. Moustakas explains heuristic inquiry as "a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with

⁷Ibid, 33.

virtually every question that matters there is also a social—and perhaps universal—significance.”⁸ This speaks well to my own situation.

Heuristic research has much in common with IPA. Both return again and again to the data, to “widely and deeply explore the phenomenon” in order to achieve “a valid depiction of the experience being investigated.”⁹ They also both return to the participants to verify the comprehensiveness and accuracy of what was derived from the interview. However, Moustakas says that heuristics does not interpret the participant’s experience.

As he writes,

the life experience of the heuristic researcher and the research participants is not a text to be read or interpreted, but a comprehensive story that is portrayed in vivid, alive, accurate, and meaningful language. . . . The depiction is complete in itself. Interpretation not only adds nothing to heuristic knowledge but removes the aliveness and vitality from the nature, roots, meanings, and essences of experience.¹⁰

I am inclined to agree with Smith, and Heidegger, that all experience is interpreted, so decided that I would follow the IPA methodology on this point. In essence, then, my question was driven by heuristics; my methodology was IPA; and my conclusions, although reached by interpretative analysis, also sought to increase my own understanding.

The *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* text is a useful guide for a beginning researcher such as me. The information and suggestions for how to carry out the research are clear and detailed but are suggestive rather than definitive, allowing me the flexibility to carry out my research and capture the information that I sought. As

⁸Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994], 17.

⁹Ibid, 18.

¹⁰Ibid, 19.

stated earlier, my desire to interview four participants fit well within IPA criteria. My question—*How is the garden experienced as a spiritually healing place?*—was deliberately worded so as to capture the IPA emphasis on how individuals make meaning of their experiences.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin write about the need for the researcher to be aware of their own preconceptions prior to and during research. With the traditional concept of *bracketing* in phenomenological research, the researcher strives, at the beginning, to “set aside their preconceptions and assumptions and approach their studies with new, or fresh, eyes in order to grasp the uniqueness of the particular phenomenon.”¹¹ However, IPA asserts that, as one spends time with the data and reflects on its meaning, one may gradually become aware of one’s preconceptions that were not apparent from the start. Smith, Flowers and Larkin stress “the importance of the positive process of engaging with the participant more than the process of bracketing prior concerns, in the sense that the skilful attention to the former inevitably facilitates the latter.”¹² This requires the researcher to be skilled in interviewing, in order to ask questions that solicit deep and rich conversation, and then to practice reflexivity in the analysis of the data. In my research, I planned to fulfill these requirements by crafting open-ended questions to encourage conversation in the interviews and by keeping a reflexive research journal throughout this project.

The questions that my thesis supervisor and I settled on to guide the interviews are listed In Table 1.

¹¹Lynn Butler-Kisber, *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Informed Perspectives* [Los Angeles: Sage, 2010], 51.

¹²Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 35.

Table 1. Interview Questions

1. What are your earliest gardening memories?
2. What is the purpose and focus of your garden?
3. Have you ever thought about or wondered why gardening is so important to you, or is it something that you kind of take for granted?
4. How has the meaning of your garden shifted over time?
5. Why do you continue to garden?
6. Tell me how you feel when in your garden.
7. What do you think about in the garden?
8. What do you learn about yourself as you work in the garden? Do you work through things in the garden?
9. What does it mean to you when you can no longer work in the garden?
10. Why do you plant flowers?
11. Do you talk to your plants?
12. What makes a good gardener?

Data Collection

Data collection centered on individual sixty-minute recorded interviews with the participants, held in the participants' homes during July, 2013. This gave me the opportunity to tour their yards and gardens and take photographs, thus providing me with a source of triangulation for the interview data. I also asked the participants if they had any photos of past gardens that were especially meaningful to them. All interviews were recorded on an MP3 recorder and later downloaded onto my computer.

I arranged to do one interview per week and managed to finish the transcription of each interview before the next one was scheduled. This allowed me build on the previous interviews so that, by the fourth one, I felt my questions flowed easily. As certain themes began to consistently emerge in each interview, I could probe deeper into the participant's understanding and meaning attributed to them. It is obvious to me now that interviewing is an acquired skill and that I definitely improved over the course of four interviews. Even with my limited skills, all of the interviews provided good data for my research.

Transcription

IPA requires that a full transcript be made of interviews, including all non-verbal utterances, pauses and hesitations. I made these transcriptions myself. MP3 technology allowed for easy download of the interviews in a MP3 file onto my computer. Using the media buttons on my keyboard, I could play and replay the interviews while transcribing the conversations. The time to transcribe an interview became shorter as I improved my ability to access the media buttons while typing, but each interview still required between seven to ten hours to transcribe. I completed all four transcriptions by the second week of August, 2013.

As the participants told their stories, they often hesitated in the middle of a thought. These hesitations are represented in my transcripts by an ellipsis (. . .). Although, in academic writing, an ellipsis is used in quotations to signify the omission of some text, this is not the case in my transcriptions of the interviews. When quoting the participants in the Analysis and Discussion sections, I do not omit anything that they said

in a particular unit of text. I thought it was important to note where they paused to gather their thoughts, and the ellipsis signifies these moments.

The transcripts were made with the interviewer's questions written in *italics* and the participant's answers in regular text, to enable the reader to have a better sense of the flow of conversation, rather than always interrupting the conversation with notations of **Interviewer:** and **[Name]:** in the transcript.

Analysis

The chapter on data analysis in *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* is long and detailed and gave me good guidelines to follow in analysing my data. Again, IPA is not definitive in process, but points to a focus of analysis on how the participants make sense of their experience. In summary, IPA requires that the researcher become deeply familiar with the transcripts, and then begin to look for meaning and understanding of each participant's experience. Only once these are uncovered does the identification of convergence and divergence between participant data begin.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin suggest beginning the process of analysis with a slow and deep reading of the transcripts, starting with the interview that the researcher found to be the most complex. In my research, one interview stood out in this regard, as the participant told me at length about some mystical experiences she had had as a child and I did not know what to make of these. I read her transcript several times, making note of what in particular she said that made an impression on me. I wrote my questions and comments in the margins. After three readings, themes started to emerge and I was able to group her intriguing comments into thirteen themes.

The subsequent transcripts were easier to work through. It quickly became evident that certain themes were repeated in each interview. Perhaps this is not surprising because of the homogeneity of the participants. However, each interview was also distinctive in the emphases that the participants placed on their stories. When I had completed analysing all four transcripts for themes, I had a list of thirty-two themes. Some were particular to a single interview, but many were common among all four interviews. A challenge in assigning themes was to honor the participant's language and not impose my own language in my interpretation of their experiences. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin write, "IPA is avowedly interpretative, and the interpretation may well move away from the original text of the participant. What is important is that the interpretation was inspired by, and arose from attending to the participant's words, rather than being imported from outside."¹³ The thirty-two themes I identified are faithful to the participants' language.

The next step in analysis was to create a smaller number of super-ordinate themes that encompassed most or all of the themes from the individual interviews. I tried to understand how the participants created meaning from their experiences, following the guidance of Smith, Flowers and Larkin, who write that interpreting the participant's experiences involves "looking at the language that they use, thinking about the context of their concerns (their lived world), and identifying more abstract concepts which can help you to make sense of the patterns of meaning in their account."¹⁴ I managed to distill the emergent themes down to eight super-ordinate themes and these then became the basis for my analysis and discussion. Again, the eight super-ordinate themes are faithful to the

¹³ Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 90.

¹⁴ Ibid, 83.

language of my participants. Once the super-ordinate themes were identified, I began the process of looking for convergence and divergence in my participants' experiences. As I had anticipated, there was much convergence among their experiences, although each participant had a unique emphasis on certain themes. Ultimately, I was able to create a synthesis of four concepts that formed the conclusions of my research. Creating these four abstract concepts reflected the *interpretative* aspect of IPA research.

The process of determining the super-ordinate themes and the concluding synthesis took a few weeks to complete, as I was busy in my own garden. However, the time that I spent doing all the tasks required to prepare for winter gave me much time to ponder the significance of my participant's experiences and also to note the similarities between their own experiences and mine in the garden. Again, the heuristic aspect of my research became evident as I found myself enjoying my work even more than usual. My participants' insights profoundly affected me and made me conscious of my own experience in a way that I had never had been before.

IPA stresses that the researcher needs supervision or collaboration to test the plausibility of the interpretation.¹⁵ I fulfilled this requirement by meeting with my supervisor once I had created my super-ordinate themes and synthesis to discuss my findings. She validated and approved of my analysis. Then I began writing up the results of my research.

¹⁵Ibid, 80.

Discussion

Once I had the themes and synthesis determined, the writing seemed to flow quite easily. The greatest challenge was to find a balance between a discursive reiteration of the participants' stories and my interpretation of what they meant. I used many direct quotations from the transcripts in my analysis and discussion, in order that the participant's actual voice is heard. This is a crucial aspect of IPA, and Smith, Flowers and Larkin stress that "the results section of an IPA write-up is much more substantial, and much more discursive, than the results section of a typical quantitative report. A large proportion is constituted by transcript extracts whilst the remainder is your detailed analytic interpretations of the text."¹⁶ I had their warning in my head as I began writing: "There is also a tendency among novice qualitative researchers for the first draft to be pretty descriptive and to have a lot of quotes from participants but not much analysis from the researcher."¹⁷ I trusted that because I had taken much time to process the interviews in my mind and note the connections and insights that had come to me while I was working in my own garden, I had achieved what Smith, Larkin and Flowers constantly refer to as a "good enough" analysis. Even so, once I had completed the first draft of the Discussion and the Conclusion, I re-read and edited those chapters for days, often finding more insights and interpretation whilst trying to go to sleep after a long night spent at my computer. There were many times when I forced myself out of bed in the middle of the night to write down a new insight that had just come to me!

¹⁶Ibid, 109.

¹⁷Ibid, 110.

Throughout my thesis project, I kept the following validations in mind and used them to guide my work.

Validations

Smith, Flowers and Larkin present very clear parameters for assessing validity in IPA, drawing on the work of Lucy Yardley.¹⁸ Yardley proposes four principles to guide and assess the quality of qualitative research. These are articulated for IPA research in *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* and are summarized as follows:

1. Sensitivity to Context

This refers to the researcher's need to pay close attention to the IPA principles of idiography and the particular. Since IPA methodology specifies a small, homogeneous sample, it must be ensured that participants are selected who can speak to the experience being explored. Very importantly, sensitivity must be exercised in the interview, both to put the participants at ease and to collect data that will be meaningful in analysis. Smith, Flowers and Larkin stress that "the strongest context which a good piece of IPA research will be sensitive to is the data. Because such care is taken with the collecting of data from participants and with grounding analytic claims in the data obtained, a strong IPA study will thereby be demonstrating a sensitivity to the raw material being worked with."¹⁹ They also specify that quality IPA studies include considerable verbatim extracts from participants, so that their voices are clearly heard in the project. The third

¹⁸L. Yardley, "Demonstrating Validity in Qualitative Psychology," in *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Methods* 2nd ed. ed. J.A. Smith, [London: Sage, 2008]. Yardley's work is synopsised in Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 180-183.

¹⁹Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 180.

way that sensitivity to context is ensured is by an awareness of existing literature as a way to orient the study.

I met these three parameters by the judicious choice of participants with similar backgrounds and experiences, by crafting appropriate interview questions with the help of my thesis supervisor, by ensuring that the participant's voice was maintained throughout analysis and write up, and by doing an in-depth literature research in the areas of spirituality, healing, sacred space, horticultural therapy, the meaning of soul, and of emerging cosmologies and creation-centered theologies.

2. Commitment and Rigor

Commitment is evidenced by the sensitivity of the researcher to the participant during the interview process and by the care with which the analysis is carried out. Rigor is also achieved by a quality in-depth interview and by thorough and systematic analysis. Most importantly, the analysis must be interpretative, not just descriptive, in order to uncover the *meaning* of the experience for the participants. Smith, Flowers and Larkin write that, for a study with four participants, emerging themes must be illustrated by extracts from each participant. All eight of my super-ordinate themes were evidenced by each of my participants.

3. Transparency and Coherence

Transparency refers to the clarity with which the research is described in the thesis write-up. All steps in the research must be clearly described, including how participants were selected, the interview process, and how analysis was done. A coherent IPA study will evidence both phenomenological and hermeneutic sensibilities.

When I began to study my transcripts, I kept a sticky note on the cover of *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* that read “participants attempts to make sense of their experience, pg 79.” This book was always on my desk, and the note was my reminder of what I needed to keep utmost in mind as I analysed the transcripts—*the sisters’* attempts to make sense of their experiences.

4. Impact and Importance

Finally, is the study interesting, important or useful?

Since there is a strong heuristic component to my research, I found it very interesting!

As noted in the literature review, there is a need for more research into the spiritual aspects of gardening as therapy. Perhaps this thesis will add to that body of work. Gardening therapy would have more impact for women in addiction recovery if the supervisors understood *how* gardening can be healing and could put into place ways to facilitate that. Truly, that is the whole impetus behind this thesis research. I was so impacted by the work with the women in the addiction recovery program that I could see myself doing that work in the future, but with more understanding and skill.

Ethics

All ethical considerations for my thesis project were guided by *St. Stephen’s College Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. At the core of these principles is respect for human dignity. This respect was ensured in my research by obtaining free and informed consent from participants as set out in Article 2.4. (See Appendix 1.)

Smith, Flowers and Larkin note, in their section on Ethical Practice, that the usual assurance in ethical guidelines of confidentiality is not truly attainable as that would mean no one other than the researcher could see the raw data. This is not the case in a student thesis as the thesis supervisor has access to the transcripts of interviews. Anonymity must be assured however, and I achieved this by the use of pseudonyms. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to review and approve all excerpts from interviews that were included in the analysis and discussion.

In the interest of accuracy, Smith, Flowers and Larkin also emphasize that the right to withdraw at any time cannot be assured as “it is impossible for participants to withdraw once publication has occurred. It is in our interest to be accurate about such offers. A time-limited right to withdraw (up to one month after the interview), combined with opportunities to review the transcript for accuracy (and sometimes to withdraw any particular comments which the participant does not want to appear in the public domain), can be a more honest strategy.”²⁰ I included a statement of right to withdraw (up to the time the data analysis is completed) and the right to approve comments included in the analysis and discussion in the consent letter.

It is in my nature to carefully follow instructions and guidelines. The *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* text provided comprehensive instructions and suggestions for research, analysis, and writing. I believe that I have faithfully and carefully followed the IPA principles in this thesis project.

²⁰Ibid, 54.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

Smith, Flowers and Larkin suggest beginning analysis of the interviews by reading and re-reading the transcripts to become intimately familiar with them and then making notes of anything that one finds interesting. As I did this, themes slowly emerged from the transcripts; some common to all four interviews, some particular to one. In total, I identified thirty-two themes from the four interviews. These are listed, in no particular order, in Table 2.

Table 2. Emergent Themes

Flowers	Garden as Therapy (Incentive)
Connection to/Stewardship of Soil	Legacy/Inheritance
Garden as Nurture/Caretaker	Garden as God's World/Creation
Stealing Vegetables, Hiding & Eating	Garden as Women's Domain
Modelling	Love of Nature
Garden as Work	Special Mission
Potatoes	Garden as Place of Beauty
Garden as Food	Garden as Creative
Spruce Trees	Color as Symbol
Order/Structure	Hope
Images/Understanding of God	Garden as Place to Ponder
Garden as Escape/Release of Tension	Good Gardener
Gardening as Trial & Error	God's Plan for Us
Daughters	Experience/Presence of God
Garden as Place to Learn about Self	Thankful
Garden as Pride	Perseverance

Condensing these emergent themes into a smaller number of super-ordinate themes required me to evaluate the participants' stories and language and determine what was common to all, what was distinctive to some and then to decide how to best group the themes together. As the super-ordinate themes became apparent, an order also emerged. It seemed most logical to begin with the basic experience of gardening as a means of supplying food and the work that was involved in this, and then to explore some of the deeper experiences that the participants related to me. Table 3 is a listing of the super-ordinate themes and the order in which I will discuss them.

Table 3. Super-Ordinate Themes

1. Garden as Food
2. Garden as Work
3. Garden as Nurture
4. Connection to/Stewardship of Soil
5. Garden as Escape/Release of Tension
6. Modelling
7. Garden as God's World/Creation
8. Images/Understanding of God

Throughout the discussion of these themes, I will refer to my participants by pseudonyms. With a nod to the theme of garden, I chose to name them Daisy, Lily, Iris and Rose.

Super-ordinate Themes

1. Garden as Food

At the core of all the participants' stories was the experience of having a garden as a source of food. As Lily, the oldest of the sisters, related, "Well, uh, I am a Depression child so the garden that I remember as a young child was of necessity. There weren't a lot of flowers, but it was huge because we had to, we had no money, so we had to have that for the food that would come from the garden." Daisy, Rose and Iris related stories of picking small carrots and peas from the garden and then having a picnic, hiding in the corn. Hiding from their mother? Daisy remembers that the sisters knew their mother would not approve of picking vegetables before they were ready. Everything from the garden was needed to feed the family through the winter months.

All four sisters related stories of digging potatoes and the memories associated with that. Iris remembers that the family had potato pancakes "every Monday, after washing." Lily has the same memory: "we ate a lot of potatoes when we were growing up, and I like potatoes, I like good potatoes . . . so, sometimes it's a bit of a challenge to grow them, you know." Rose, the youngest, shared that

to this day I love digging potatoes. And because we were a large family, we had a lot of potatoes and I can remember helping Dad with that job. He dug the potatoes and I'd have to hold the sack—just so—so he could pour them, by the five gallon pail of potatoes (giggle) and then bringing them in. It just was a real sense of accomplishment.

Iris also spoke of the accomplishment of growing her own potatoes: "I loved to grow potatoes. And I'd count them when I'd dig them out. (chuckle)" Potatoes were a basic, perhaps *the* basic, food necessary for the survival of a Depression-era farm family. It is easy to imagine becoming tired of eating potatoes all the time, yet these women never

tired of them and, in fact, felt much accomplishment in growing them. They were, and are, deeply connected to this basic food source. Although they all talked about the sense of accomplishment they felt from growing potatoes, it was Daisy who spoke of something deeper. She said that she “didn’t mind picking potatoes when they were digging them . . . Always . . . just to smell the earth, fresh out of the garden.” Here was a connection beyond that of a food source, a connection to the earth, to the soil itself. It was a connection that I would hear again and again.

When the sisters married, they all continued with the tradition of having a garden. Those early gardens were, as Rose describes, “functional (chuckle). You know, for the vegetables you could raise.” Daisy recalled the purpose and focus of her early gardens as “a larder. To have things, fresh vegetables, frozen vegetables, for the winter.” Unique among the four sisters, Daisy also told stories of growing vegetables in her garden to sell. For a number of years, she grew extra cucumbers to sell to her city friends:

Well, it was a form of income. Because what income did you get from the farm? Everything was put back into the farm. I got grocery money, but . . .

So that was one way you could have . . .

Yeah, have my little, my own little . . .

Little bit. Cucumber money.

I remember I sold cucumbers for ten cents a pound.

Daisy also recalled the year that they planted 400 hills of potatoes to sell. Although they were all eventually sold, it was decided that the work involved was more than it was worth! Potatoes for survival were one thing, but the work required for potatoes as income seemed to not be worth the effort.

2. Garden as Work

The theme of work is omnipresent in the women's stories. At some times, it is characterized as "hard work," at other times as "rewarding work." Lily summed this up in talking about their mother:

Mom really did enjoy gardening because that was when she got out, I think, and just made life easier. (Chuckle)

But she worked the whole time.

She worked, she worked, but um, you know how gardening is—it's rewarding work.

Everyone helped out on the farm, and the sisters learned early that all must do their part, as Daisy related when asked if she liked helping her mother in the garden: "It wasn't my favorite past time. I preferred doing chores and cleaning barns and stuff like that to weeding in the garden. It had to be done and when there were peas ready . . . and there were lots of peas to shell, which I didn't mind."

Iris suffered from back pain for many years as an adult so it is perhaps not surprising that she, of all the sisters, talks the most about "hard" work. Talking about her strawberries, she noted that it became difficult to bend over to work in them: "Strawberries, sometimes, my back went. Just . . . cut back." As they got older, the work became too much for her and her husband and they made the decision to sell their farm and move into town. "And, um, the grass got too much, you know, I'd sit on the lawnmower until I needed to fill it up with gas and then I couldn't walk. Get off, I'd have such pain, I couldn't walk. So, it just got too much for both of us." Iris was the only sister not to continue her gardening once she moved off the farm. During my visits to

their homes, the other sisters proudly showed me their flowers and both Lily and Rose had substantial vegetable gardens as well. When I drove up to Iris's home, however, I immediately knew something was different. There were no flower beds in the front yard, only red shale rock, ceramic garden ornaments and two pots of petunias. This was in sharp contrast to the pictures she later showed me of her yard on the farm. Her yard had perhaps been the most extensive of all the sisters, with large areas of perfectly cut lawn and the most incredible blue spruce trees. When I asked her what it had been like for her to realize that she couldn't continue gardening as she once had, she was nonchalant in her answer: "Ah, you just realize that if you can't, you can't. You accept it. You know."

Rose has also been plagued with health issues as she is the one sister who inherited the rheumatoid arthritis that had affected their mother. However, this has not kept her from gardening. If anything, it has solidified her resolve to continue working in her garden, although at a different pace than she could at one time. She is also the sister who used the word 'work' the least in her interview. She described her mother as working hard in the strawberry patch and her husband's job of making her a garden spot in a forest as "a lot of work" but she never characterized what she did as work. Perhaps it never seemed such to her. She follows the advice of her rheumatologist who told her to keep active, and she said:

There was never any thought of just giving up. Um, it's part of who I am. That I want to be outside and enjoy God's creation. Um . . . it, it's also, you feel . . . useful because you are still able to do things. I think one of the processes of the, or one of the results of the aging process, is that you get to the place where you can't do the things you once did, and that can be depressing. But, you can still do them if you go at a slower pace. And, and learn to listen to what your body is telling you. If my body says, "I'm tired," I go and have a nap. And, uh . . . um, my husband certainly supports me in, in being active and being outside. And I can't say that I've ever battled depression because there's always

something to do, and when you, some days when I'd go outside, and I'd be so stiff, I'd find that after a couple of hours, you'd forget about it. And, and it disappears. It's, um, it's funny how that works.

It was in describing their spruce trees that the theme of work was the most obvious. All the sisters had planted spruce trees on their farms. Daisy had a double row of spruce trees that became a windbreak on the north side of her garden. She talked about the work involved in keeping the earth cultivated around the growing trees:

I remember the weeds getting so big in the stand of trees that we planted there.

The spruce trees.

Nobody would . . . I couldn't cultivate . . . and the kids wouldn't come help me pull 'em. You had to pull 'em by hand and get them out of there before you could cultivate.

She remembers joking that if she died, she wanted to be buried among those spruce trees because that would have been what killed her!

Lily talked about moving to her husband's farm when she got married and that there were no spruce trees there, only "bush." In our initial phone conversation, she told me that, of all her gardening, she was the most proud of the spruce trees she planted. I was really amazed at her determination to have spruce trees:

. . . alongside the lane that was a solid poplar bush, just wild. And, ah, I got this from Rose . . . Rose is somebody who has probably planted more trees than anyone I know, of women, anyways. And we would go out and dig in the spring in the ditches and then I planted them in amongst the trees there. And they did so well and so I kept doing this. My husband encouraged me and because they were growing up in the midst of the poplars . . . And when they got quite big, he, being very handy with falling trees, he cut all those poplars out of there . . . so there were stumps left yet, but they rotted after awhile. That was a solid spruce bush, and when you drive on the yard now that's all it is, it's just spruce. And there was not one spruce tree on the farm. There's quite a few now. And that's, I hope, sort of a legacy.

She talked about how hard it was to dig the holes for the spruce trees among the tree roots and the need to do it in the spring “before the grass and everything started to grow and there was lots of moisture and the ground was soft enough to dig in. So . . . It’s lots of work, though.”

Iris had her own spruce trees stories to add to those already expressed by Daisy and Lily:

And I planted trees. No trees around that place, only that, that . . . bush. . . And he got that all out and I planted spruce trees all over in there and then he took down the poplars. I didn’t like the leaves. So much work. . . . These little spruce trees kept growing, higher and higher. . . . So we planted them, on the west side, north side and south side. And then, um, when we owned land further south, a half a mile south, and we went out west, to Rose’s there, and got more trees and that’s surrounded by trees now. That’s really nice there now! The neighbor’s acreage, there . . . So I planted probably a couple thousand spruce trees. (chuckle)

Iris had the same experience as Daisy with weeds in her spruce trees. “Yeah, it’s just really hard work, to . . . sometimes it was too wet, and the weeds got that high (gestures about three feet) and you had to pull them out by hand and then, couldn’t use tractor cultivator, I had to do it by hand and that was a quarter mile long, four rows of trees.”

The mystery of the sisters’ love of spruce trees was solved when Iris told me that, when she was a child and the family moved to their new farm, “I helped Mom plant the, ah, spruce trees along the lane. . . . Yeah, I guess that was my first love of spruce trees. (chuckle)” It seems that the sisters got their love of spruce trees from their mother. It was also interesting that the only thing Iris had planted at her house in town were six spruce trees in the back yard that she had brought with her from the farm.

Rose did not need to plant spruce trees until she and her husband moved from their farm to their retirement acreage as their farm had been nestled in native spruce forest. However, she followed her sisters in planting trees on the acreage:

So are you saying that you planted three hundred trees around here?

(chuckle) Oh well, I'm sure we planted . . . lots!

Do you have favorites?

Well, definitely the spruce tree.

Why do you think spruce?

(pause) Year round beauty. You know, it never changes. Um . . . my mother liked spruce trees.

It is in the stories of the planting and care of spruce trees that I most clearly see that the hard work of planting and caring for trees was never done begrudgingly, but rather with a sense of love—a love that had been transmitted from their mother to each daughter. Work appears to be a very subjective concept when comparing the sisters' language. It could be hard work, necessary work, rewarding work, or healing work, depending on the mind set and health of the sisters.

3. Garden as Nurture

Three of the sisters compared growing plants to taking care of a baby or raising a child. Daisy said that she liked “to start things from small, like, rather than buy them ready-made” because “I like to watch them grow and progress. It's just like a life, it changes every day.” Iris liked being in the garden because “you are working with nature, and you feel . . . closer to God, I guess. It's like being a mother, um, when you plant something small, or seed, you nurture this little thing, just like, uh, a baby.” When asked

What makes a good gardener? Rose answered at length about what was required to start plants:

Nurturing the plants. I guess, with having the greenhouse, one of the things I enjoy is I start the seeds downstairs under lights and then move to the greenhouse and some of them are so small, you can hardly, you just take the envelope and spread it over the dirt. That's lobelia. And then to see them emerge out of the soil, and then you, you take good care of them. You don't overwater or you don't let them get cold and, you know, it's just like looking after a baby. (chuckle) And, um . . . and then as they, as they grow, you have to harden them off, you have to expose them to the elements so that they'll be strong, when you set them out. . . . You have to be able to understand the growing process of the little plant.

I was very taken by this image of caring for a plant as one would care for a baby. It suggests a tenderness and connection that is very deep and primal. The plant is not just another object but, as Iris suggests, a part of nature and a connection to God.

4. Connection to/Stewardship of Soil

The sisters all understood the need to care for the soil in order to grow a successful garden. Iris was very particular about how her soil was enriched, not allowing her husband to help. "No, even digging in manure, my husband says 'Why do you do that? I could bring it in with the tractor'. I says, No. I want to turn it over and then make sure it's in there right. And not more here and more there, and stuff." There was more than just doing it "right," though, for Iris. At the conclusion of our interview, when I asked if there was anything else she wanted to add, she paused, then sighed and said:

Well, I think everybody should have a garden at some time in their life.

And why is that?

Just to, uh, get back to the ground, to the earth.

No more explanation than that, but as a fellow gardener, I understood what she meant.

Rose mused that she had never been blessed with good black dirt but had always gardened in grey wooded soil. However, she enriched the soil and “it became a good garden, yeah. At that time, with having the cattle, we added manure to the soil and enriched it. Yes, I had lots of good gardens out there.” She connected their upbringing with the sisters’ connection to the soil. As another part of her answer to *What makes a good gardener?* she said “an understanding of the soil, and I think that’s part of our heritage . . . Um, so I do think it is part of our tradition, to, to have that connection with the soil. Um, it’s not just a piece of dirt. . . . It’s a living organism.”

Lily explained her own connection to the soil almost embarrassingly: “Well . . . my hands always look terrible! I can’t get the dirt out. But I still like the feel of transplanting without gloves! Of the earth! And . . . pressing it down. I try, now, to wear gloves . . . (chuckle).” Her description of the feel of the earth echoes my own discovery of connection to the soil.

Daisy was unique in her sense of connection to the soil in that she drew on her religious background for an understanding of stewardship. When asked if she had ever thought about why her garden had been important to her, she answered “Well, we were put on this earth to look after it. And that’s just a bonus when you plant a garden and you harvest things . . . mind you, it’s a lot of hard work . . .” When I asked further about the idea of being put on earth to look after it, she replied:

Isn’t that what it says in the Bible?

Yeah, it does.

. . . stewards of the land.

I suspect that the sisters' connection to the soil was mediated by a combination of their religious upbringing and the traditions of the family but mostly by their own experience of connecting to the soil while on their hands and knees. Daisy put this beautifully at the very beginning of our interview: "There's kind of a reverence to working in the soil and growing things. (tears come to her eyes)" Her use of the word "reverence" surely suggests her experience of the garden as a sacred space.

5. Garden as Escape/Release of Tension

All the sisters talked about the garden as a place to get away. When asked how she felt when she was in her garden, Daisy replied "Relaxed, at peace. (pause) And it's almost like a . . . you can worship . . . things as they grow. *So, what do you think you are worshipping, at that point?* Just that there is somebody that is giving me rain. (tears come to her eyes)" Again, Daisy's language suggests she experiences the garden as sacred space. Rose also talked about the peace that she feels when in her garden:

You talk about that peace. You also talk about peace in your garden.

(small chuckle)

Is that a place that you do feel especially close to God?

Yes. Yeah. Especially in the mornings, when you go out first thing in the morning, and you know that old song 'I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses'. And um, yeah . . .

Iris talked about going into the garden in the evenings, after a hard day of farm work:

And, uh, it was a release of tension and pressure and stuff. It was so much work, 'cause we started with nothing (tears come to her eyes) and, um, no hired man and had to be out there, then having babies and all that. It was good to escape, sort of an escape sometimes. And, to build up the place and sort of leave your mark, I guess!

It was very interesting that Rose used the same phrase “release of tension” to describe her memories of her mother going out to the garden. There is a fifth sister in this family, Violet, who is the youngest and is severely handicapped. Rose remembers the difficulties in looking after Violet when she was a baby:

I guess one thing Mom taught me would be perseverance. You know, like, she had a difficult life.

Uh, humm.

Looking after a handicapped child all the time. At the time, I couldn't understand it, but in the evening, once Violet was in bed, she would go outside and work in the flowerbeds and . . . not so much in the garden, but mostly in the flowers in the evening. And, uh, we always had evening scented stocks and, you know, this beautiful fragrance from them.

Yeah . . . yeah. So you said you didn't understand it at the time, how do you understand it now? What she did?

Oh, that was her release of the tension that she probably felt during the day, tending for her family of eight. It was a huge job. And, uh, she could just relax and go outside and, um, find . . . a measure of peace. The evening is such a beautiful time, it's usually quiet and uh . . .

Lily echoes Rose's memories of their mother escaping to her garden:

Mom really did enjoy gardening because that was when she got out, I think, and just made life easier. (Chuckle)

But she worked the whole time.

She worked, she worked, but um, you know how gardening is, it's rewarding work. Yeah. So, um, I think just to get out of the house. Especially, once Violet was born. You know, the care when she cried so much . . .

Right.

Until I was able to, uh, help look after her, that she could spend more time outside. Then it became, you know, that she could garden way more.

It is very telling that both Daisy and Iris had tears come to their eyes as they talked about the peace they felt in their gardens. I got the sense that they were remembering how difficult their lives had been, and how the garden was one place that they could go to escape for awhile. I also suspect that they learned this escape from their mother's example. Rose said that she thought about her mother when she was in her own garden: "I think about Mom and um, how she struggled and found peace and contentment out, outside in the garden." Just as the sisters' love of spruce trees appears to have come from their mother, perhaps also their experience of the garden as a place of peace.

6. Modelling

The influence of the sisters' mother has already been noted in regards to their love of spruce trees and their experience of the garden as a place of escape and of peace. Another aspect of gardening that was strongly influenced by their mother is the sisters' love of order. They all talked about having order or structure in their garden. Lily said that their mother was "orderly, like, we got that from her" and admitted that she liked order as well. She also laughingly referred to Daisy's need for order: "Oh, she's worse than me. (laugh) You know, you don't necessarily have to plant flowers in a straight line. EXACTLY. (laugh)" Daisy's love of order and structure is evident throughout her interview, from her desire to keep the dirt around her spruce trees cultivated ("It just looked so nice from the road, when the rows were nice and straight and black and . . .") to how she planned her flowerbeds:

So, what determines if something fits? Like, when you do your flowers in your flowerbed, how do you figure out what fits?

According to height. Start low and go higher. That's how we started that one. Smaller, and then got bigger towards the middle.

When we looked at Iris's pictures, it was obvious that her garden on the farm had structure. The flowers were planted in perfect rows, rows of white petunias alternating with red petunias. When I asked her where her love of order came from, she replied that she got it from both her mother and her father. She joked, "You know, I got a whammy from both sides! (laugh)"

Rose was somewhat different than her sisters in that she called herself a "casual gardener." It was not obvious to me what she meant by this because her yard very much reflected a sense of order and planning. There were shelterbelt trees planted to both the north and the south of the yard, beautiful specimen trees throughout the lawn and a well-cared-for garden. When I asked what she meant by "casual gardener" she replied:

Well, I don't sit down and make a plan on paper that I'm going to do this, this and this. My yard has evolved over the years since we've been here, which is about 16 years, and, um, I would have to say I'm not a perfectionist, that I don't mind if there's a weed here and there and also if a plant seeds itself, it can grow where it wants to grow.

Allowing a weed to grow may be her idea of a "casual gardener," but her yard and garden reflected anything but a casual gardener! It was beautiful and carefully tended, and I wondered whether it always looked this good, or whether an extra effort had been put in for my visit.

When asked what her mother had taught her, Rose thought for a moment and then replied, "I guess . . . That there's a season to plant and a season to look after it. And a season to harvest." This also reflects a sense of order, the natural order of the seasons.

There was an element of pride in all the sisters as they described their gardens and showed me pictures. That pride was also inherited from their mother who, as Lily related, proudly showed her garden to all visitors. Rose remembers that their father also “proudly showed visitors her flowers and berries.” Daisy spoke of what makes a good gardener: “Oh, they have to take, have to have some pride and not have a bunch of weeds and things like that . . . make it look good. Appealing to the eye, to the beholder. That’s me. (chuckle)” admitting that she also needed to be proud of her garden.

The question of *What makes a good gardener?* came about because Lily had mentioned, in our initial phone conversation, that her mother’s sisters were all good gardeners. When I asked her more about this, she paused, as if fondly remembering, and then said: “(softly) Yeah. (reverts to normal voice) Well . . . they all had this love of flowers . . . and gardening.” She remembered visits to her grandfather’s farm (her mother’s father) where “they had a swing, and she (one of her mother’s sisters) had flowers. And I guess that was my first experience seeing how, um, what you can do with flowers, in those days.”

Daisy’s memories of her grandfather’s farm were very similar. “They knew all their flowers and all their vegetables and what would grow and what wouldn’t grow and . . . Grampa had fruit trees, and there were some fruit trees that we dare not touch. Like those big purple plums, unless they were on the ground.” Iris echoed her sister’s sentiments, claiming that “Just the love of flowers, I guess!” is what made her aunts good gardeners.

Rose said that her love of fruit trees came from a memory of her grandfather’s orchard. “I do remember he had an orchard and it was always a dream to have an orchard.

And maybe this is why I gravitate towards having fruit trees and berries and things. But I remember walking through and, and seeing this one tree—it must have been a plum—that was in bloom. It was just beautiful.”

Strong memories of their mother in the garden and of their grandfather’s orchard demonstrate modelling that seemed to have a profound influence on the sisters’ own love of gardening. As Rose noted, their connection to the soil was their inheritance and a tradition that they all continued. She had written a few things down before my visit that she wanted me to know. One line especially speaks to this: “When others tell us to quit gardening, my answer is: Why? Gardening is in our genes and heritage from Grampa and, um, carry on as long as we can.”

All four sisters had daughters of their own. Some have carried on the gardening tradition and some have not. The oldest daughters of Daisy and Lily are both avid gardeners and both women expressed pride in their daughters’ efforts and in the continuation of the tradition.

7. Garden as God’s World/Creation

It has already been noted that the sisters feel a connection to God when in their gardens. This was an area that I especially wanted to explore as a key to understanding the transcendent aspect of healing and the potential of using the garden as a healing space. Rose spoke of this beautifully:

Um . . . I . . . have an appreciation for nature, beauty that is around us.
Um, things in the garden tell me about God. Um . . .

How, how does that garden experience shape your understanding of God? What do you know about God from the garden?

(pause) God is . . . all wise, God of order in that the seasons rotate. Um . . . God likes variety. And I think there's so many things that he has put in the world that, that are good and that we can enjoy. That are pure.

When I asked Rose if she ever had an experience where she felt especially the presence of God, she replied: "Uh huh. (pause, then smile) Watching that hummingbird this afternoon sitting on that lily. And he was just sitting there so perfectly, I wish I could have taken a picture." For Rose, God was manifest in the hummingbird and the lily.

Lily told me a story that illustrated her experience of finding God in the garden:

Um, (pause) is there anything about your garden experience that shapes your understanding of what God is?

(soft smile and pause) Oh, yeah . . . I think . . . I could . . . well, just the amount of all the different plants that . . . insects and birds, and you know, the creation is just so mind boggling. But I had such a, I would say, an uplifting experience one day. You know, for many years, I have loved working at the cemetery and, uh, now I go out there every week on my way out to the farm. But I would go there first thing in the morning, there was dew on the grass and I looked down and I saw something that was, like, covered with, you know, like dew and it . . . was a gorgeous butterfly. I had never really seen a butterfly . . . it was dead but I picked it up and held it in my hand, you know, and turned it over and it was like gold, whatever, the tips were like turquoise . . . little turquoise tips, so I took it, I picked it up and brought it home. (chuckle) It was just such a simple thing, but just the beauty of it . . . it's, uh, hard to . . . explain really, but . . .

All the sisters talked about the beauty found in their gardens, especially with the flowers. Iris said that flowers made her happy. When I asked why she thought flowers made people happy, she made the connection of God's creation and the beauty of flowers:

Why do you think flowers make people happy?

I don't know. Just the coloring, and . . . God's creation, I guess!

Yeah . . . yeah, that's really . . .

Beautify our lives . . .

So you see God in the flowers.

Yeah.

For Daisy, flowers seemed to have a personality. When she showed me her flowerbed, she stated that she like to plant pansies because “they smile at you.” Rose said that each color of her many lilies had their own personality: “I look at the red lily and, to me, that’s a very strong plant, a very strong colour. And, I look into the face of the orange ones and, and with the markings on the petals, they are unique. And, the yellow ones, um, they’re so bright! The early yellow ones are so bright. Ah, and the white ones, to me, are kind of a symbol of peace.” In the beauty of the flowers, in the gold and turquoise color of the butterfly, in the hummingbird perched on the lily—these were all things that the sisters experienced as the wonder of God’s creation. As Iris put it: “It’s just, ah . . . ach, it’s just such a wonder. Creation, you know. All of that.” Sixty years of gardening have not diminished the awe and wonder that the sisters find in God’s creation.

8. Images/Understanding of God

Where did these sisters acquire their understanding of God? They were raised in a conventional Protestant household, where Sunday attendance at church was expected. They heard about God in church from a very early age, but they also *experienced* God early on. Lily’s understanding of God is illustrated by a story she told from when she was very young:

I remember . . . when we, . . . it's not very nice, when we lived on our first farm, and there were trees around the house, but if you had to go to the outhouse, you had to go across the yard, in the dark, and you had no flashlights, or stuff like that, and I distinctly remember just looking up at the stars and knowing God is there and he's looking after me! It was just something I've always known! You know. And I guess that is probably the spirit we have within . . . you know . . . that you get . . . but, uh, yah, I think I wasn't more than five, six years old when I had that feeling. So . . . (tears come to her eyes)

The emotion that Lily showed as she related her story made me think that her realization that God was looking after her was a pivotal moment in her spiritual life. Daisy echoed Lily's understanding of a God that is "up there" that looks out for her. When I asked Daisy how she understood the word 'God', she replied: "Somebody looking after me, up there. 'Cause I've had some close calls, and come through them okay, unscathed." Rose made explicit mention of learning about God from scripture:

Where do we learn about God? Yes, we can learn about God in the garden, but . . . there isn't the reliance on learning what's in scripture. Like, we grew up with that. And it's hard to imagine people not sensing, from an early age, that there is a God who cares for you and who's loving and kind. Um . . .

Do you think you learned that more from scripture or more from experience?

As I grew older it was from scripture. Um . . . as a child, you know, um, I went to DVBS, which was where we learned, we memorized a lot of verses, and to this day I can remember them. So there was that background of, of scripture.

Iris was very eager to tell me about some experiences that she had as a young child, starting to talk even before I had set up the recorder. I asked her to hold her thought until I could record her stories, and came back to the stories partway through the interview:

Before we started the recording, you told me that you have had two encounters in your life with angels and I said "Can you hold that until

we start recording, 'cause I want to know about that.' Tell me about that.

Well, the first one was, maybe I was four or five. I was sleeping with Lily and for, I don't know how long before then, we had these big windows, like with four panes . . . And, um, the folks were out doing chores and I'd look at that window, and it was all covered with this being. It, to me, it looked like a great big rabbit. And this was in winter time. And the light was just, the sun was just starting to come up. And, when I think of it, it . . . and then, I was scared. I didn't say anything to anybody. And one day it was there, and I said to Lily, "Did you see it?" and she said "What?" "In the window." She said, "There's nothing there." That's the last time I saw it. But it was an angel, with the wings. It covered the whole window, you know, and that was huge.

Do you remember any pictures of angels, or anything that you would have had contact with before that?

Probably in church, maybe at Christmas time, or something like that. But I thought it was a great . . . you know, somebody to do us harm. But we had this, this, uh, pot bellied stove there, and going strong. He was watching out for us kids. And lot of children see angels.

Her other story was a long and very well-remembered story of picking up a stranger with the horse and buggy on her way to school when she was a young teenager. She said that they talked about the Old Testament and he asked her if she believed in Jesus. She let him off right at the school house gate and he said he was going to the nearest town, but didn't seem to know where that was. She asked the boys who had been walking ahead of her on the way to school who the old man was, and they said that they never saw anyone, that there was no one walking on the road. She did not know what to make of the experience at that time as she said "I didn't realize, you know, that he was an angel, at that time." When I asked her why she thought that she got to see the old man, she paused and replied: "Ach, I don't know. I guess I've got a special mission. (little chuckle) Ah, . . . uh, He's helped me all my life. . . . (tears come to her eyes)" Like her sister Lily, Iris

was very emotional relating her story of experiencing a divine presence. Both of her stories of encounters with an angel speak of a God that looks out for and helps her.

Rose also had a story about God looking after her. Her story took place when she was a young adult:

I think of, of the day of my dad's funeral and I had a lot of churnings going on and, and difficulties in the service itself. And I, I just prayed, you know, that "Okay, just take it all away and give me a sense of peace." And it just flooded over me like that and, um, yeah, um . . . I, I think the peace that we have within would be the answer. That we know God took, took care of it.

All the sisters' stories reflect an understanding of a personal God that takes care of, looks out for, and helps. This God is "up there," indicative of an understanding of God in heaven. This is a God that they learned about from scripture, a God that is in contrast to the God that they experienced in their garden—the creator God manifest in an exquisite butterfly, in a hummingbird, in smiling pansies and beautiful lilies.

The idea of having a "special mission" intrigued me and I asked Iris what she meant by this. She explained it as "(sigh) I guess . . . just feeling for people. And . . . now I can't, uh, I can't help people, physically, but I phone people . . . that need help." I asked her what she thought influenced her as far as her desire to help people and she replied, "I think it was just my gift, that God gave me. I can't explain it otherwise." Her understanding of a special mission from God is to be a friend, to help others.

Both Daisy and Rose brought up the idea of "God's plan" in their interviews. Daisy mentioned "a plan" when she remembered what it was like when she came home from a holiday to find out that the farm was for sale:

That was tough. But things work out. I think there is a plan for all of us.

Do you?

I do...

And how do you understand that? A plan? Unfolding, or being mapped out?

Well, we are not in control, somebody else is. And, uh, he doesn't give you more than you can handle.

What about, ah, the choices that we make and how that affects the plan?

Sometime you don't make the right choice, but whatever, you try to make the best of it, what happens.

Does that affect the plan?

It does, I suppose.

She leaned on an understanding of a personal God that had a direction for her life and that "doesn't give you more than you can handle." This was not a well developed theology as she did not know how our personal choices affect the plan but, nonetheless, was an understanding that comforted her in the hard times of her life.

Rose's understanding of God's plan for her was, like Iris's, quite simple:

How do you understand that plan for your own life?

(long pause) I think I've been blessed, with being a wife and a mother. And I want to . . . be there for my kids as much as possible. Life isn't always easy for our young people today. And, um, they face a lot of challenges and I want to be there for them. Um . . . raising a family was, was, was a great experience.

For these three women, God's plan for them was understood as simply living the lives that they had lived, being a wife and mother, being a friend, trusting that God would not give you more than you could handle.

Perhaps the most difficult question for the women to answer was when I asked them how they understood the word 'God'. As already noted, Daisy drew on an

understanding of God “up there” looking after her, but expanded on that to talk about God as creator:

How do you understand that word, God?

Somebody looking after me, up there. ‘cause I’ve had some close calls, and come through them okay, unscathed.

Have you had experiences in your life where you have felt the presence of God?

Well, we probably all do.

Anything that really sticks in your mind? As a time when you felt especially close to this idea of God?

I usually can’t . . . I really love going to the mountains because I just marvel at what they are and how they were put there. . . . Well, just everything. Even the human body.

Hmmm.

How well it is made. Somebody made it.

Yeah.

For us. Designed it. It wasn’t just the Big Bang Theory. (chuckle)

Iris’s answer to the question of *What would you tell your grandchildren if they asked you “Who is God?”* also spoke of God as creator, but her Bible timeline is at odds with that of scientists:

(pause) Well, I would tell them about creation, that he’s the spirit, . . . and, like they say, excuse me, that the Earth was just so many years old, and that, well, God had lots of time and why can’t he make some things old . . . looking, even if they aren’t?

Uh, huh.

And, I disagree with the scientists when they say all that oil is from old vegetation and stuff, he put it there because he knew we would use it someday!

For Rose, the concept of God also encompasses God as creator but also shows a more abstract understanding of God as love:

(Pause) I'd say God is the creator of the universe. The giver of life. God is love. Uh, God is . . . although we can't see him, we can know about him from what he has made. Um . . . (pause) I'd tell him that God isn't responsible for the bad things that we may have to deal with. (pause) Um, that he has a plan for each of our lives.

Lily's answer to my question was the shortest: "So . . . I guess I . . . somehow . . . I can't feature how God is, what he looks like, you know, just that he's everywhere . . . all seeing and all . . ." All four sisters describe God in anthropomorphic terms, using the male pronoun and giving God attributes such as having lots of time, taking care of them, and being all seeing. These attributes are reflective of their religious background and their *knowledge* of God. This is in sharp contrast to their *experience* of God in the garden, where God is manifest as beauty of flowers, a hummingbird on a lily, and an exquisite butterfly. Perhaps the most unusual description of God came from Iris, who talked about working on the farm: "After you, you bale all day, or two days and you look back and you see the nice pile over there, and the nice bales, especially the second cutting 'cause it's like a picture, and the sun is going down and, my goodness, God did this all! (tears come to her eyes) So, it's, it's good." For her, God is manifest not only in the created world (the sun going down) but also in the fruits of her labor (the perfect stack of bales). Her tears also demonstrate the depth of her experience of God in that memory.

Two of the sisters had to face the prospect of having to give up their beloved gardening. For Iris, that happened when she moved off the farm. She had said, at the very beginning of her interview, that she loved nature. I wondered how she connected with nature now that she could no longer garden:

The whole time that you farmed, um, you were immersed in nature and, you know, when you talked about that beautiful row of bales, when they were so straight, and you could see God in that, and your garden, as well. My question, the one that I have now, is—how do you connect with nature, now? That you don't garden or you don't, um, farm anymore?

Well, I . . .

Or, do you need to?

I just look out and I see the trees weaving right now . . .

Uh, huh.

And a few flowers blooming. And, uh, oh the clouds. My husband calls me the Weather Predictor because I've got the information about clouds. And weather.

So for you, it's still all around you, in that way.

Yeah . . . It's just, ah . . . ach, it's just such a wonder. Creation, you know. All of that.

So, you didn't lose that wonder. . .

No.

. . . when you retired and gave up your day to day working in that nature.

No.

Okay.

And, even with little children, now. You sort of . . . see how important every child is, no matter what colour. You know we're all made in God's image.

Yeah . . . Yeah.

You know how wonderful that is. You know, every child that, even, uh, identical twins, every one has a different thumbprint.

Yeah.

And, how many billions of people are there?

Yes, exactly.

Yeah.

Wow . . .

It's a wonder.

Daisy is also at a point in her life where she is facing the prospect of not being able to continue garden. When I asked her what she will miss the most she answered: "I guess I'll have to come to that. I mean, I can still see what is happening around me." Like Iris, Daisy can see creation and the natural world all around her.

Throughout the interviews, the sisters used words like "mystery" and "wonder" to describe the created world. If anything, that mystery and wonder have only intensified for them as they have gotten older and been able to reflect on their life experiences. As Iris and Daisy have already discovered, they can still experience God by observing and understanding the complexity of creation, even though they can no longer get down in the soil to seed and tend the plants.

There is perhaps a ninth super-ordinate theme that could be extracted from the interviews, that of 'Garden as Place to Learn about Self'. In my list of questions was *What do you learn about yourself as you work in the garden?* I thought this was an important question from a therapy viewpoint. However, when analysing the interviews, I realized that I had neglected to ask that question in two of the interviews. For the two sisters who did answer the question, their answers came only after a long pause. Evidently, this was something that they had not thought about, had not considered. Daisy said that she was thankful "for growing up years being exposed to all this. You know,

you grow with it. Spiritually, yet . . . whatever.” I understood this to mean that she grew in her understanding and experience of God through her time in the garden. Rose talked about realizing that “I don’t mind hard work. I . . . (pause, mutters question under her breath) You, you can overcome a lot of odds . . . through inner strength. . . . I am determined. That’s one thing I know. Um . . . I . . . have an appreciation for nature, beauty that is around us.”

All of the sisters described times in their gardening experiences where they tried something and it didn’t work. They talked about learning from trial and error. This speaks to their perseverance, their refusal to give up, their adventurousness. These things I would put under the topic of ‘Things Learned about Self’, except that they did not consciously make that connection. For this reason, and because I did not ask the question to all four participants, I decided not to include ‘Garden as Place to Learn about Self’ as one of the super-ordinate themes. However, the eight themes that I did extract from the interviews gave me much information to ponder and to consider how it could be utilized in gardening therapy.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Synthesis of Themes

In reflecting on the eight super-ordinate themes that emerged from the four interviews, there are four aspects that stood out for me as being vitally important with respect to how the sisters understand their connection to the garden and to God.

1. **They all talked about experiencing the presence of God in their lives.** God is understood as being a personal God— God looks out for them, has a plan for their lives, and does not give them more than they can handle. I suspect that their understanding of this comes from their religious background. However, the intensity of their emotions in relating the stories of how they experienced the presence of God demonstrates a ‘synesthesis’ knowing, a term used by Fowler in his discussion of the development of faith, or spirituality.¹ One cannot explain Iris’ mystical experiences in a rational manner, but the depth of those experiences cannot be discounted. The fact that she could remember them so clearly sixty and seventy years later demonstrates how pivotal they were in her spiritual life. The sensory experiences that the sisters talked about in regards to their time spent in the garden are also important to how they came to understand God—the peace, the release of tension, the reverence of that space, the feel of the soil as they planted, the smell of the earth and the wonder of creation as they watched the plants grow.

2. **They all have a deep connection to the soil.** Rose put it so beautifully, “It’s not just a piece of dirt, it’s a living organism.” Although an understanding of the soil is

¹See Chapter 2, page 43-44.

surely part of their heritage, as Rose suggests, their connection goes deeper than an intellectual understanding of what is required of soil in order to grow something. Again, there appears to be a synesthesial connection, a connection forged through the labor of tilling, planting, nurturing, and harvesting. For Lily, there was a need to feel the soil with her bare hands as she planted. For Daisy, the connection was mediated by the smell of the earth as she dug potatoes. This mirrors what I have experienced in my own garden, and understand as an ‘energy’ connection with the soil. Although the sisters do not use that language, I suspect that their experience may be similar to my own.

3. **They have never lost their wonder of the created world.** The sisters use the word “wonder” over and over in their interviews in describing how they understand the created world. This is very much the *Via Positiva* of which Matthew Fox speaks as the first path to God. Even when they can no longer work in the garden, they can still see nature and the wonder of creation all around them.

4. **They see God as part of, and manifest in, the natural world.** Even though their language is that of an anthropomorphic, patriarchal, transcendent God, a God “up there,” their *experience* is that of a God present in the created world around them. As Rose put it, the garden tells them about God. In the turning of the seasons, in the beauty of flowers, the exquisiteness of a butterfly, of the interconnection of the hummingbird on the lily, in the perfection of a stack of second-cut hay bales, they see God to be manifest. This manifestation of God in the natural world reflects McFague’s concept of ‘immanent transcendence.’ The transcendent God of their religious understanding is experienced as an immanent God in the garden.

Garden as Sacred Space

It is in these four aspects that the garden is experienced as a sacred space for the sisters. Their experience of the garden fulfills the criteria of sacred space, namely a space set apart, a space where symbols energize, a space situated outside normal time and space. The garden was where they went to “escape,” it offered a “release of tension,” it was a place where, for Iris, she went after a hard day’s work on the farm. These features of the natural world surely energize—the hummingbird, the butterfly, the flowers all tell the women about God. The sisters sense a connection to the hummingbird, the butterfly and the flowers so that they become more than a symbol; the relationship is that of a “communion of subjects,” to use Thomas Berry’s language. Even the lowly potatoes have a deep connection for them. They connect potatoes back to their growing-up years and I suggest that potatoes would be the equivalent of manna for the sisters, the basic food for survival. Lastly, although no one said that they lost track of time in the garden (which I know is true for me!), the peace that they found there suggests a sanctuary apart from the rest of their day.

Spirituality of the Garden

How does the garden space influence their spirituality? For Dyson, spirituality is experienced as connectedness to God, to others and to one’s inner self. Tanyi talks about transcendence, mystery, connectedness, and meaning and purpose in life. There can be no doubt that the sisters experience a connectedness to God through their gardens. They spoke at length about the mystery and wonder of how God created and provided what was needed in order for the garden to flourish. Their lived experiences of the presence of

God speak of a sense of 'immanent transcendence,' even if they would not use that language to describe their experiences.

Their connection to others may be less obvious, but no less profound. The sisters talked about their "inheritance," the "tradition" of gardening that came from their mother, their aunts and their grandfather. They were connected to those previous generations through their gardens, and perhaps knowing they were carrying on those traditions grounded them and helped to secure their sense of place in the world.

No one really talked about their 'inner self' in the interviews. Perhaps that concept and language are not familiar to these women. The two sisters who were asked what they learned about themselves from the garden had difficulty articulating an answer. However, all four sisters demonstrated a sense of knowing who they are as they talked about gardening through trial and error, their perseverance, not being afraid of work, their love of order and pride in a job well done. Rose spoke of learning to listen to what her body was telling her and adjusting her pace in the garden to accommodate her rheumatoid arthritis. A deep sense of inner knowing was demonstrated by Daisy and Iris who, when faced with the prospect of giving up gardening, accepted it and realized that they could still experience nature around them by observation. As Iris says, "Ah, you just realize that if you can't, you can't. You accept it. You know."

A sense of purpose was articulated by Rose when she talked about gardening with her rheumatoid arthritis: "So there was never any thought of just giving up. Um, it's part of who I am. That I want to be outside and enjoy God's creation. Um . . . it, it's also, you feel . . . useful because you are still able to do things." On a more elementary level,

the task of raising a garden for food is a basic purpose, and one that the sisters took very seriously in their early married years.

Their meaning-making is very much related to their understanding and experience of God. Daisy spoke of “someone else” being in control and not giving her more than she could handle. Both she and Rose talked about “God’s plan” for them. Iris understood her mystical experiences as God’s “special mission” for her. For Lily, the knowledge that God was “up there” looking out for her gave her the courage to cross the dark yard at night to go to the outhouse when she was only five or six.

According to Dyson, that inner strength is a result of spiritual well-being. All four sisters exhibited a strong sense of inner strength as they persevered through whatever challenges confronted them throughout their lives. As Daisy relates, “I’ve had some close calls, and come through them okay, unscathed.” They had a great model for this in their mother, who showed great inner strength in dealing with the difficulties of raising a handicapped child and taking care of a large family. Their obvious inner strength is therefore indicative of their spiritual well-being.

The study done by Unruh and Hutchinson focused on the “leisure activity” of gardening and they concluded that more research is needed related to spirituality and leisure in meaning-focused coping. My research disregards the concept of leisure in relation to gardening and focuses on the meaning-making that gardening engenders in my participants. For certain, the work that was exhibited by the four sisters in their gardens could hardly be termed “leisure activity”! The garden was experienced by them as a place of peace, a place of escape from the other pressures of their lives, a place of wonder

about the created world, a place of connection to God and to the soil. There can be no doubt that all of these things contributed to their spiritual well-being.

Garden and Soul

One thing that was not mentioned by any of the sisters was the word ‘soul’. However, a sense of soul was apparent in everything they told me. In Gaylah Balter’s language, their “emotions, feelings, and spiritual experiences as well as the sacred, divine, and eternal aspects of life are all attributes and manifestations of soul.”² Their emotions were evident in their tears as they told of their experiences of the presence of God. The feeling of peace they experienced in their garden and their characterising of that space as sacred all speak to a depth of soul. Thomas Berry prefers to speak of “genetic coding” or “guiding principle” to explain soul. Perhaps the inheritance and traditions of the family that gave the sisters their love of gardening is their genetic coding, another way that they manifest soul.

Nancy Ryley suggests that a loss of soul occurs when one is estranged from transcendent values. The sisters’ stories and experience of God demonstrates a great sense of transcendence (and immanence), and soul, in their lives. As noted in the literature review, Ryley also asserts that an understanding of a patriarchal God, transcendent to our natural world, has contributed to Western society’s loss of connection with the created world and consequent loss of soul. From what I have learned from my participants, perhaps the loss of connection with the natural world is not inevitable. Even though their God is patriarchal and transcendent, the sisters each relate experiences which suggest they connect with and experience that God in the natural world. It seems to me

²See Chapter Two, page 44.

that their understanding of God as creator allows this connection in the garden. These four sisters have each demonstrated experiences of the natural world as a primary place of encounter with the divine.

What the four sisters have not demonstrated to me is the *consciousness* of an ensouled universe, or an understanding of what science has contributed to understanding the origins of life, of which both Thomas Berry and Geneen Marie Haugen speak. The nagging questions I started with, that of wondering if healing can occur without this consciousness and without a mature Stage Five spirituality, come back to me now. I asked these questions in the literature review: *Can healing occur in individuals of any faith stage? Can the garden be a healing place even for someone with a less mature spirituality?* I think I can now answer those questions. My original assumption, based on Gockel's seven steps of healing, was that one would need the maturity of a Stage Five faith with its inner knowing and inner authority, sense of interrelatedness, and awareness of the sacred, in order to truly heal. Looking at Fowler's stages of faith, I would characterize the four sisters as best fitting Stage Three spirituality. This is exhibited by their sense of a God who knows one personally, a locus of authority that rests outside of themselves (God is in control) and the presence of unexamined beliefs, as seen by Daisy's uncertainty as to how our personal choices affect God's "plan." Iris seems to show aspects of a Stage Two faith, with her deep disagreement with scientists over the age of the Earth and how oil got deposited underground. Yet, I have no doubt that the garden was and is a healing place for the sisters. This is a very important realization for me in regards to gardening as therapy. From this, I conclude that, even with a patriarchal, anthropomorphic understanding of God, with unexamined beliefs, without a sense of

what Geneen Haugen calls “participatory consciousness,” the garden can be a sacred space, a healing space.

Garden as Eden

Marion Woodman talks about returning to Eden “with knowing.” These four sisters turned to their gardens throughout their whole lives, knowing that they would find peace and release of tension from their daily struggles, knowing that their labors would either be fruitful or else they would try again, knowing that something wonder-filled happened in that space. Their gardens became Eden when, as Barry Lopez suggests, they had a conversation with the Divine there. The conversation happened as they felt the soil with their hands, as they nurtured tiny plants, as they pulled weeds that were too big to cultivate.

Their conversation with the Divine was not experienced in rational ways of knowing but rather in “modes of thought that employ images, symbols, and synesthiesal fusions of sense and feeling” of which Fowler writes. The garden becomes Eden because of the experiences the sisters had there and because of the experiences that they had watched their mother have in her garden. Lopez writes that the conversation with the Divine creates a sense of place which, when lived in the midst of good relations, is called beauty. The four sisters live in the midst of beauty in their gardens, their Eden, but also in the larger natural world. They take Eden with them, even when they can no longer bend to dig in the soil.

Recommendations for Horticultural Therapy

With everything I have learned from the four sisters and my analysis of their interviews, I can now propose some guidelines that may be useful in designing a gardening therapy program that takes into account the spiritual aspect of gardening. Principles that may be applied to a program of gardening therapy include:

1. Modelling

The influence of the sisters' mother was monumental in their love of gardening and how they understood its meaning. Looking back at my own experience of leading the gardening for the addiction recovery program, I suspect that my own passion for gardening also served as a model for the women. That is why no one found gardening to be "dirty work" the summer that I was involved. The importance of modelling in horticultural therapy was not mentioned in any of the literature I accessed. I now believe that the leader of a horticultural therapy program must model a passion for gardening, which is transmitted to the participants, in order for a program to be truly successful. Perhaps this seems obvious but, nonetheless, I have not seen it documented in the literature.

2. Wonder of Creation

Awe, wonder and mystery all are aspects of a transcendent, healing experience. My participants have never lost their wonder of the created world. This is another aspect of gardening therapy that must be stressed for a successful program. I remember one day during my practicum when we were all weeding in the garden. Two young women became transfixed by a tiny, bright red spider crawling in the dirt and they stopped weeding to watch the spider. I could have taken that opportunity to emphasize the

wonder of this tiny creature and its place in the created world, instead of being inwardly frustrated that the women had interrupted their weeding! I simply did not understand the opportunity for healing in making a connection with a spider.

3. The Physical Act of Connection to the Soil

The synesthesis knowing that the sisters developed through their contact with the soil connected them to the earth in a very primal way. To my credit, I did explain my own sense of an energy connection to my gardening group and was pleased when one woman exclaimed that she felt that same connection when she came to the garden. I do believe that all the women in the addiction recovery gardening program felt a connection to some extent as we planted, weeded and harvested. I remember watching one young woman, on her hands and knees, carefully and almost tenderly, mounding the dirt with her hands after she had put the seeds in the ground, even though I had showed her how to use the rake to efficiently close the row. She must have felt that same connection to the soil. This is another aspect of gardening therapy that is deeply spiritual and could be brought to the *consciousness* of participants by an articulate leader.

If I were given the opportunity to lead another gardening therapy program, I am now confident that I would bring a much greater awareness of what components are necessary for a truly healing experience. For my practicum, I brought my own genetic coding, my soul, to the program. This enabled me to have a successful experience, even though I did not consciously know what I was doing most of the time. I now understand what Teilhard wrote: “There is a communion with God, and a communion with the earth,

and a communion with God through the earth.”³ I would now bring that understanding in a conscious way to a therapy program.

The three guidelines articulated above help me to answer my thesis question: *How is the garden experienced as a spiritually healing place?* In order to be a healing place, the garden must be perceived or experienced as a sacred place, a place where a divine or sacred presence is experienced, or manifest. This manifestation is firstly through the wonder of creation, through the miracle of putting a seed in the ground and watching it grow. A connection needs to be made between this miracle and a transcendent, energizing force, perhaps called God, perhaps called Creator, perhaps called something else. There also needs to be a sense of connection to the earth itself.

The miracle of the garden is that healing can occur there without cognitive knowing, as I discovered for myself, but it can also become a place of ‘dirty work’ if approached in a way that does not invite the possibility of a sacred presence or a sense of wonder. Awareness of the wonder of creation and a connection to the earth can be discovered on one’s own, but is perhaps better modelled by someone who has had these experiences and invites reflection on them.

Final Thoughts

In my own life, I took what happened in the garden for granted for most of my gardening years. The garden had always been a place of food supply for me but I also had always enjoyed the time I spent there. It was not until I began to ponder why I enjoyed gardening so much that I became conscious of the connections I experienced, both to a Creator God and to the soil itself. The reading that was required for this thesis

³ See Chapter Two, page 38.

project has given me a much broader understanding of the need for connection with the natural world, the world of my garden, not only for my own healing, but for the healing of the Earth. I have come away from this project with a new sense of participatory consciousness and a resolve to do my part to help heal the Earth.

Fall has always been my favorite season. There is something about making preparations for winter, the urgency, the knowledge that snow has been known to fall, and stay, in October that invigorates me. I take out my garden, do canning and pickling, dig potatoes and carrots. I secure a supply of hay for my horses for the winter. I spread the manure that I have daily collected from the horses, piled and composted, on my garden and then till it into the soil. Mysterious and wondrous things happen in that soil during the cold winter months and, come spring, that composted manure will have become beautiful, loamy soil.

The fall of 2013 was no exception. As I worked outside in my garden and yard, I thought about my participants' stories and pondered their meaning. Although I had given myself permission to take a break from active work on my thesis, I had the stories constantly in my head as I went about my work. Connections came to me as I brushed dirt off my newly dug potatoes, as I sat on my tractor and harrowed my pastures. This was a time of integration, a time when four women's stories melded with my own. I began to realize the gift they had given me in bringing to consciousness the reasons for my own love of the garden, the animals and the natural world. The connection to the soil that I had realized in the spring of 2011, as I prepared to teach a group of women the mechanics of gardening, had grown to become a far-ranging understanding of my connection to the created world and the interconnectedness of all creation. My curiosity

had driven me on from the questions raised during my practicum experience. Through undertaking this thesis project, I found the means to understand this phenomenon of how the garden can be a healing place. The writings of Thomas Berry were monumental in aiding my understanding, but it was in listening to my participants' stories and then pondering their meaning that Berry's words were given life. There has been great healing for me during this thesis journey.

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Appendix One

Consent Form

I agree to participate in a research study of: *How is the garden experienced as a spiritually healing place?* I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing the thesis requirement for a Masters in Theological Studies degree

I agree to give a tour of my gardens and yard to the researcher, followed by a one-hour interview in my residence, at a mutually agreed upon time in July 2013. I grant permission to the tape-recording or video-recording of the interview.

I understand that my anonymity will be assured, that I will have the opportunity to review and approve all excerpts from interviews that will be included in the analysis and discussion, and that any reference to me will be via a pseudonym.

I understand that all interview transcripts will be confidential, with access only by the researcher and her thesis supervisor, Rev. Nancy Steeves (780-xxx-xxxx).

I understand that once the final thesis has been accepted and approved, all interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

I understand that I have the option of withdrawing from this research project at any time up to the completion of the data analysis by the researcher and that any data compiled from interviews with me will immediately be destroyed.

Research Participant

Researcher

Date

Date