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COMING HOME TO NATURE THROUGH THE BODY:

AN INTUITIVE INQUIRY INTO EXPERIENCES OF GRIEF, WEEPING AND OTHER DEEP EMOTIONS IN RESPONSE TO NATURE

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Coming Home to Nature Through the Body: An Intuitive Inquiry Into Experiences of Grief, Weeping or Other Deep Emotions in Response to Nature

by

Jay P. Dufrechou

This dissertation explored experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature. The method was intuitive inquiry, a form of psychological hermeneutics requiring interpretation through the subjectivity of the researcher. The study began with the personal experiences of the researcher, then broadened to include the narratives of 40 other people from 17 of the United States and 4 other countries. Ages ranged from early 20s into retirement years; 1 participant was Native American, the others were European-American or European. Emphasis was placed on developing embodied descriptions of experience, conveying how it felt to have the experience through concrete details of sensation and emotion. The edited stories of participants were grouped thematically as follows: (a) ecological grief; (b) healing; (c) feelings of insignificance, fear, or aloneness; (d) sustenance; (e) longing for deep sensory connection with nature; (f) experiences of God; (g) awareness of brokenness or loss of source; and (h) a return to experience of self as part of nature. Results included the interpretations of the researcher presented as discussion. The primary interpretation was that the experiences represent moments in a transformational process capable of restoring equilibrium in an individual's life and, more broadly, in the culture. Secondary interpretations were that (a) the body has the capacity to mediate psycho-spiritual healing

or transformation; (b) humans experience healing or sustenance, felt as unconditional love, when in sensory contact with nature; (c) grief for humanity's failure to live in harmony with nature can initiate or mediate a transformational process; and (d) deep connection with nature can be felt as spiritual experience. The researcher concluded that this process tends to repair the split between mind and body, experienced by many, and the split between humanity and nature, prevalent in industrialized civilization.

Acknowledgments

When a middle-aged person such as myself, without a fortune in the bank, seeks higher education and writes a dissertation, there is an enormous cost to be borne by someone. In this case, it was my wife, Margaret Ann Geick Dufrechou. As I have told her, I appreciate it, and I will use what I have learned to better our lives, the lives of our children, and, I hope, the community at large. As for my children, Max, Audrey, and Tess, they put up with some absence of their father; but in real life, when I am finished with this project and start breathing down their necks even more, they are liable to advise, "Go write another one." Since this is the culmination of my education—and let us hope this is finally enough—I must also thank my parents, who always believed in education and paid for the early parts. I am lucky now to have my father, Raymond Dufrechou, live near me, and we have picked up where we left off many years ago. My mother, Audrey Ladner Dufrechou, is onto other things now; but every day I appreciate more the many smart, kind, and wonderful things of her that are part of me and the culture of my family.

Though I accept full blame for its shortcomings, there is an important way in which this dissertation is a joint project between me and Rosemarie Anderson, at least in the sense that she has been my teacher and friend in it from the very beginning. Something I like very much is that she understands this and knows that I am grateful. I have told William Braud that a large part of the reason the fates took me to the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP) was to allow me to sit in his office those many times and contemplate our joint esoteric interests. William has provided valuable advice and support not only for this project, but also more generally for my transpersonal

undertaking in this life. Peter Raynolds, my third committee member, was generous enough to join this project, though he came to ITP just as I was having to make myself scarce. Peter assisted greatly through many fine, specific, concrete pieces of advice that I have incorporated into the dissertation. I also wish to thank Kevin Krycka, my outside reader, who gave valuable time to review the project of a stranger and also made useful, specific suggestions that have become part of the project.

I would also like to thank Mike McCarter, Judge of the Workers' Compensation Court for the State of Montana, my employer and friend. Not only did Mike never question the time I took off to work on this project, which allowed this project finally to conclude, but he contributed to this dissertation in a way that is less obvious, but more important. Mike is one of the finest, natural writers and thinkers I have met; working with him has improved my writing and thinking. While there are plenty of poorly-written sentences in this project, and while it certainly could be much shorter, it could also be a lot worse but for some practice in writing and brevity I have had in the last two years.

It seems somewhat strange to thank my participants because they *are* this project. You are here. As stated in the text, I believe the main contribution of this dissertation is the publication of many fine writings of mature and generous people. Kudos to each of you. I have learned from you, and what you have taught me is this dissertation. More than anything, I appreciate your goodwill and generosity—your willingness to share moments in your lives gives me hope for the future.

Benediction

So I have no words of thanks, I have tears. All my thanks, my tears–full to the brimming with the love, fear, anger, sadness, joy, and pain, and with gratitude for all of my life, and the lives of those who made it all possible, from beginning to end–fall to the ground. Those seemingly insignificant drops of water then sink into the soil, disappearing from sight, rejoining Nature, that which made it all possible.

– Ryan

[I]n one of the most beautiful and serene places I have ever known, surrounded by mountains and dense vegetation, there lies hidden an absolutely still lake. Its waters reflect, like the most perfect mirror, everything that comes there to rest. The world becomes a waking dream since everything has its perfect double: swans, rocks, trees. Sitting near its bank, my soul is also reflected in the lake. Gratitude rises from the greatest depth. I feel as though I am hand-in-hand with life, that it has given to me, and I have given to it. That my thirst for mysteries has been quenched and that I have brushed harmonies without equal. That I have known the deep pain and all the subtleties of the emotions, from the most hurtful to the most exquisite. That I had the necessary courage to live several lives in one, and the fatigue of having already repeated several lives. That I had the privilege of having met wise men and loving Teachers and an internal motor that rarely let me rest. That life hurts me through its intensity, for the children without a home, the grandparents who are hungry, the men and women who go through life suffocated by senseless resentment and violence born in suffering. That life dazzles me with its beauty and unlimited wisdom. I no longer remember how many images passed through the mirror of the lake of my soul. I only remember the uncontainable cry that flowed from within me, a mix of pain, gratitude, and purification. I felt as though that was a beautiful place in which to die, to leave the body where the body belonged. These were not tears of shame nor pain for me, I have shed many of those already in my life. They were tears of a grateful farewell for all I had received, a recounting.

– Ana Ines Avruj, translated by Vicki Capestany

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Prologue

When my wife was pregnant with our son Max, we took a Lamaze class. The teacher was an obstetrics nurse, a thin woman with short gray hair and a kind but no-nonsense manner. To a roomful of couples having their first child, she explained calmly and expertly the birthing process, mixing science with soothing words and the beginnings of the rah-rah coaching that went with the territory. We practiced the breathing, learned the stages of labor, heard more or less what to expect. There were various decisions the women may need to make during labor—C-sections or not, epidural or not, drugs or not. There were statistics about this, advice about that, answers to scores of questions. Eventually, a woman sitting near us leaned over and remarked, "I don't know what's the big deal. Women have been having babies for *hundreds* of years."

As we looked at each other, we all laughed, for we realized there was something hilariously absurd, but revealing, in her comment. Women have been having babies for *hundreds of years*. That would take it back to, what, at least the 1500s or so?

I begin with this story because it is about perspective and time. From the perspective of a meeting room in a hospital in 1986, surrounded by Americans of more or less the same generation, all sharing scores of experiences, assumptions, and expectations, our conception of who "we" were went back a few hundred years. What was now normal was to give birth in a hospital surrounded by highly educated people and expensive equipment designed to ensure the safety and health of mother and child. Sure, we all knew that some women bucked the system and had their children at home. We knew that in our mothers' generation, many women still gave birth at home, and in our

grandmothers' generation, home birth was a matter of course. We could even readily imagine a few hundred years beyond that, those *hundreds of years* in which women had been having children. My own mind went back to my imagined maternal ancestors in France, struggling with childbirth in their village cottages as far back as, what, even 1200?

What was more difficult was to imagine as far back as "women having babies" actually goes, to readily feel that we have been on this planet, having children and living lives, *way* back beyond history and culture as we know them. Anthropologists talk about the emergence of the human species around five million years ago (Encarta, "Human Evolution," 2001). Is it possible to feel connection with the individual beings in all of that ancestry—all our mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and cousins? What were their lives like? How were they living? *Where* were they living? In what ways did they experience themselves, their surroundings? Going back even further, is it possible to feel connection with our even earlier non-human ancestors? *They* too were having babies and some of those babies had babies who had babies who had babies . . . who became us.

As you read this dissertation, which involves the experience of nature, keep in mind the idea of perspective. The primary contribution of this project involves the stories told by contemporary people of experiences they have had in response to nature. Keep in mind the context of their viewpoints and of my viewpoint as researcher. Notice how these viewpoints are grounded in current common perspectives, shaped by present culture, *and* how these experiences point toward sensibilities which are perhaps not bound so precisely by the parameters of 21st century life.

Begin to notice, even now, how use of the word nature carries a perspective. I would bet that you experience the word nature, at least to some extent, as embodying something which is not you, which is out there, perhaps to be cherished and visited and even "gotten back to." Fundamentally, this dissertation is about whether we can remember—or rather experience—a different perspective. Even this early on, I will suggest this different perspective involves remembering who we are and where we belong.

Chapter 1: Introduction

If human history is conceived broadly, the primary arc has been our move from the wilds of nature into the structures of civilization. Bands of post-primate humans gave rise to tribes of hunter-gatherers, followed by herders and agriculturists. City-states formed in the Near East; and soon enough world history was being shaped by emperors and kings and popes who vied for power and centered themselves, for the most part, in cities. In the West, feudalism gave way to capitalism and monarchies to democracies. Within the last two centuries, industrialization transformed human life. Millions moved into cities, began working for companies, and found themselves surrounded by machines, both at home and at work. Within the last century, in the West, automobiles and television moved to the center of daily life. Human labor was eased by countless other machines, from dishwashers and adding machines to contemporary computers and cell phones.

With all these changes, the contemporary experience of being human in an industrialized country is worlds away from our origins (Glendinning, 1994). In developed countries, many people now spend most of their time surrounded by human-made things and images. While we once gathered, hunted, or toiled the land for food and clothing, food now comes from grocery stores, clothing from the mall, and cars from the auto mall. Although we once lived in the open, sleeping and weathering harsh weather in shelters we built with our own hands, most of our lives are now spent within buildings we did not construct. Inside those buildings, our attention goes to work and play mediated by technology and consumer culture. Where most societies were once rural, with towns and

cities constituting hubs or gathering places, entire lives are now lived without leaving an urban or suburban environment. Even if we do take our bodies out into the woods, the images and habits of civilization often dominate our experience, keeping us ensconced in an increasingly homogeneous human culture.

Within industrialized culture, nature is increasingly a concept or image, something on television or in magazines, experienced as a thought in the head (Mander, 1977, 1991). Less and less is nature experienced deeply through our sensations and emotions (Abram, 1996). In the civilized world we have created, which gives us so much, it is difficult to slow down enough to experience the subtleties of the natural world. Nature rarely has our attention long enough to really sink into our bodies. Even when we venture into nature, I suspect that many of us are primarily experiencing *vacation* or *time alone* or *scenery*, an idea-driven experience lacking complete sensory grounding. The vibrations of a natural world have been replaced by the vibrations of civilization and, increasingly, technology and consumption-driven media. These vibrations of culture and technology seem more and more pressing, leaving many people with little space to stop and think, much less feel (Abram, 1996; Glendinning, 1994).

And still, nature is in our blood. Polls show that most Americans do want to preserve the environment, despite concerns about energy and the economy (League of Conservation Voters Education Fund, 2001). I would argue this is not because we have been persuaded by one political argument over another but because we know from personal experience that strip malls and housing developments have replaced the fields on the edge of town. In our guts, we are not sure we like the feel of where that is headed.

Many of us try to bring nature into our lives through our pets, our gardens, and our vacations. The most driven city-dwellers are often those venturing around the globe on eco-tours. For many people, there will never be a substitute for a walk in the woods or a run on the beach, particularly when times are tough. In our imaginations, particularly as documented by literature and films, nature continues usually to represent peace, wholeness, and health.

While we continue to love nature, it slips away from us, almost surely to our detriment. Some argue that the many addictions present in our culture (alcohol, drugs, food, sex, work) are related to our lack of embeddedness in the natural world (Glenndinning, 1994). In this view, our addictions may represent an unconscious replacement for the sensory experience of participating in the natural world. Viewed from the opposite angle, if we participated in the rhythms of nature, which are for the most party steady and slow, we might not be rushing headlong into lifestyles destructive of those rhythms and ourselves. While the present war with terrorists is not over nature, there are ways to understand at least part of the underlying conflicts between Americans and others as flowing from our consumption and need for economic expansion. In the long view, a return to lifestyles within natural eco-systems might literally be our salvation.

At this point in human history, this dissertation explores what happens when some people connect deeply with nature. I have investigated experiences of grief, weeping, or other deep emotions in response to nature. For purposes of this study, *grief* is understood as "keen mental [and/or visceral] suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp

sorrow; painful regret" (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 1993, modified to include "and/or visceral"). *Weeping* is understood as "expressing grief, sorrow, or any overwhelming emotion by shedding tears" (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 1993). The inclusion of tears from "any overwhelming emotion" is significant because this project holds that tears may express a large range of human emotions, including joy, gratitude, and awe. The phrase *or other deep emotions* is understood to include feelings that interrupt the ordinary flow of consciousness and strike the individual as numinous, awesome, overwhelming, or extremely meaningful.

While this range of experiences at first seems broad, this study will show the cohesion, or at least relationship, of such experiences in response to nature. Most important, grief, weeping, and other deep emotions are experiences of the body. Although my definition of *grief* includes mental as well as visceral suffering, the mental aspect of grief is understood to emerge more from the body's experience of loss than from a rational thought process. As experiences of the body, grief, weeping, and other deep emotions may also be characterized as closer to *prepersonal experience*, that is, closer to experience occurring prior to thoughts about what is observed (Levin, 1988; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). As sensory and emotional experience, the range of experiences under study are bound together as the body's reaction to deep connection with nature, at least as experienced by some people in contemporary Western culture.

Grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature are also connected in that they may be understood as healing experiences, capable of restoring wholeness and balance. Within the 20th century, mainstream academic psychology devoted little

attention to experience of the body. Nevertheless, there is solid and growing evidence that the ability to deeply experience sensations and emotions, including grief and weeping, is associated with psychological, physical, and spiritual health (Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, & Oberlander, 1968; Murphy, Donovan, & Taylor, 1997).

The experiences under study are also connected in that they tend to be felt as deeply meaningful or spiritual. Many such experiences easily fall within the definitions of *transpersonal experience* or *exceptional human experience*, terms used in contemporary transpersonal research. Within this study, I will use the phrase *transpersonal experience* to suggest "experiences in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, *psyche*, and cosmos" (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). Most instances of grief, weeping, or other deep emotions in response to nature are transpersonal almost by definition because they involve deeply experienced connection with nature, which is ordinarily considered beyond the personal ego.

Many such experiences are also felt to be *spiritual*, by which I mean numinous, suggestive of connection with a higher power or God, or simply deeply profound in a way that takes the individual outside the ordinary experience of self. The term *exceptional human experience (EHE)* holds similar connotations, often encompassing mystical or ecstatic experiences, though an EHE is more technically described as an anomalous occurrence (that is, something considered questionable or impossible in mainstream Western consciousness) that individuals find to connect them to a source of transformation and knowledge (White, 1994, 1998). Experiences of grief, weeping, or

other deep emotions in response to nature, as will be seen, are often experienced as connecting the person to a source of healing or creativity felt to be beyond the individual.

The approach through which I have investigated grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature is intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000), a form of research including both objective and subjective ways of knowing. Intuitive inquiry falls under the broader category of hermeneutics (Anderson, 2000), which means that it recognizes the subjectivity of all knowledge, including the ways in which all understanding is grounded in culture and individual point of view (Packer & Addison, 1989a). Intuitive inquiry begins with the researcher's own understanding of a topic. In contrast to some qualitative methods (e.g., phenomenology [Giorgi, 1975; Moustakas, 1994]), intuitive inquiry does not require the researcher to set aside personal viewpoint, but encourages expansion of viewpoint through study and reflection.

In some cases, such as the present dissertation, intuitive inquiry begins with an experience the researcher knows personally and desires to more fully understand (Anderson, 2000). Following reflection on initial understandings, intuitive inquiry requires study of the experience or understandings of others, typically involving immersion in published literature and gathering of information from research participants. The researcher's initial understandings are then revised through cycles of reflection and articulation (Anderson, 1998, 2000). As a form of hermeneutics, intuitive inquiry does not pretend to define an absolute objective reality, but offers ways to understand the subject under study. Consistent with this approach, this dissertation does not make claims about universal aspects of human psychology, but simply describes and interprets

experiences reported by some people living at the opening of the 21st century. Accordingly, this dissertation does no more than offer a glimpse into subjective human experience and suggests ways to understand that experience.

This dissertation is in many ways my own subjective story, but it is more than that. The primary accomplishment of this study was the collection and analysis of 40 descriptions of grief, weeping, or other deep emotions in response to nature from research participants. Participants were located through a networking process, with the primary criterion for participation being their description of experiences that resonated with me and contributed to my understanding of the topic. I make no claims about random sampling or generalization from this group to any particular broader populations. The group is in fact fairly diverse in terms of current residence, age, and gender, although we are all representatives of the growing cohort of educated people in industrialized, Western countries who share an interest in consciousness studies and ecology.

What I like best about this project is that participants wrote their own descriptions of experience. This was in response to questions I posed. The initial question, through which I solicited participants, was "have you ever wept or felt grief when feeling deeply connected with nature?" I expanded this question to include "other deep emotions" after several potential participants described experiences valuable to the study but not involving tears or the concept of *grief* as understood by the participant. Through a dialogue process with participants, usually accomplished through email, I asked questions to expand or clarify their descriptions. From the beginning, I encouraged *embodied* descriptions of experience (Anderson, in press), that is, writings steeped in concrete

details of sensation and emotion and suggesting the experience *from the inside out*. This was consistent with encouragement from intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2000, in press) to use embodied writing in psychology and with the more general directive of psychological hermeneutics (Anderson, 2000; Dilthey, 1883/1988; Packer & Addison, 1989a) to place psychology within the context of lived human experience.

In most cases, the stories were edited by me to some degree, given considerations of length, focus, organization, and language usage as related to the topic and purpose of this dissertation. Revisions were shared with participants and corrections welcomed. Though I sought to make the stories accessible and readable through the editing process, a primary goal was preservation of the individual voice and embodied experience of the participant (Anderson, 2001). All participant-contributors have given permission for publication of their writing in this dissertation.

The stories are presented in eight sections, titled as follows: ecological grief; healing; feelings of insignificance, fear, or aloneness; sustenance; longing for deep sensory connection or harmony with nature; experience of God through deep sensory connection with nature; awareness of brokenness or loss of source; and return. Most of the descriptions of experience could have been placed in at least two or three of these categories. Use of the categories was not meant to define, but simply to facilitate reading and analysis. Although most stories are readily understood as demonstrating some aspect of grief, weeping, or other deep emotions in response to nature, some are more subtle in their relationship to the topic, illustrating a counterpoint or aspect of the range of human

processes that does not overtly involve grief, weeping, or extreme emotion, but represents a piece of a related whole.

These stories became the texts for expanded study in the intuitive inquiry method. Discernment and analysis began from the moment I read a story and continued through the stages of discussing the experience with participants, editing, and working with the stories as a unified text. After reading each story several times, I drafted the category headings and placed stories in the category groups. Next I worked on brief statements of theme, meaning, or ways of understanding. I used these to assist my growing understanding of the topic. These statements were eventually fleshed out in the Discussion Chapter, which contains the *interpretive lenses* required by intuitive inquiry.

What follows is a dissertation in four additional chapters. Chapter 2, the literature review, discusses theoretical writings and prior empirical research relevant to the topic. The literature review is organized into the following sections: theoretical foundations for the study; the role of the body in psycho-spiritual healing and transformation; human disconnection and connection with nature; grief: the body's recognition of loss; and weeping, crying, and tears. Chapter 3 articulates the research method for the dissertation, explaining intuitive inquiry in more depth and specifying the procedures used for gathering and analyzing the descriptions of experience.

Chapter 4 contains the results of the project in two sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter provides the stories themselves, organized by section in accordance with the categories noted above. Each section is introduced by me as a means to facilitate the reading. The individual stories are preceded by a brief description of the participant-

author, written by the participant or by me based on information provided to me. Although pseudonyms are used in some cases, and factual details sometimes changed or omitted to preserve privacy, the descriptions provide readers with a glimpse into the human beings behind the experiences. The second sub-chapter consists of a personal composite story written by me. This is essentially my own story, fictionalized slightly, but informed by the understandings I gained through study of participants' stories. The personal composite story is designed to illustrate one way in which the range of experiences under study all manifest within the life of one individual.

The dissertation concludes with Chapter 5, a discussion of the subject matter. In that chapter, I have attempted to articulate my understandings of the topic after extended study. The primary interpretation offered is that experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature are moments in a process of psycho-spiritual transformation capable of restoring equilibrium not only in the life of the individual, but also in the culture in which such experiences occur. As will be explained in Chapter 5, I consider this process one of embodiment, both within the individual's own physical self, and within the physicality of the earth. Within this overarching interpretation, Chapter 5 attempts to weave the results of the dissertation together with the literature noted in Chapter 2. The Discussion chapter concludes with reflections on the research method as it worked in this project, including acknowledgment of the limits and shortcomings of this project, and ideas for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Within intuitive inquiry, the literature review represents one aspect of the attempt to understand the topic. Some of the literature reviewed in this chapter shaped my approach to the topic before the topic itself even crossed my mind. Most important were the ideas of the phenomenologists (e.g., Gadamer, 1976; Heidegger, 1926/1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1964), particularly as explained by David Abram (1996) and David Levin (1988). This allowed me to consider grief, weeping, and other emotions of the body as important manifestations of not-entirely-civilized experience, particularly important in relationship to nature. Also guiding me was the work I had done in transpersonal psychology on the body's role in psycho-spiritual healing or transformation, including study of various forms of meditation, yoga, focusing (Gendlin, 1981, 1996) and body-centered therapies. Taken together, these learnings pre-formed my understanding that experiences of *grief, weeping, or other deep emotions* in response to nature may have something important to say about personal and even cultural healing.

As I began to focus on the topic in more disciplined ways, I concluded that the most relevant literature involved three subject areas: experience of the body and its sensations and emotions; experience of nature; and spiritual, transformative or transpersonal experiences. All three areas converged to some extent in the conception of embodiment, an increasingly popular way of understanding conscious presence in one's physical form and movement, which typically results in the experience of increased connection with nature. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty (1962), S. Kay Toombs (1993) describes embodiment as including *being-in-the-world* ("an embodied consciousness

which engages and is engaged in the surrounding world"), *body-intentionality* ("directedness towards [attentiveness to] the world"), *primary meaning* (recognizing the primacy of "physiognomic perception," an understanding of the world first through "the experiences of sense perception and bodily action," that is, a "'knowing' through the body" that "'precedes essentially all thematization, categorization and predication,' (Zaner, 1964, p. 188)"), *contextual organization* (experiencing perception and action as through interrelated parts of a whole body), *body image* (identification with the body as "an integrated system of coordinated body movements which are distributed spontaneously among the various body segments," that is, not beholding "the relations between the parts of my body as a spectator"), and *gestural display* (understanding the actions of others through one's own body) (Toombs, 1993, pp. 53-57).

With such preliminary understandings, I began to gather literature from the three subject areas of body, nature, and weeping, paying most attention to studies which simultaneously involved two or all three of these general areas and/or drew upon the perspective of embodiment. Once I felt some conceptual footing in the topic, I turned to more intentional searching for relevant empirical studies. While there are no studies identical to the present dissertation, there are several relevant empirical projects involving meaningful or transformative experiences of connection with nature (e.g., DeMares & Krycka, 1998; Ruffing, 1997; Snyder, 1989). These provided a glimpse into the territory, but more significant in understanding my particular topic were studies of grief and/or weeping (or crying), which for the most part have come from psychologists working within the mainstream American academic tradition. While these are highlights of my

research process as it occurred, all of the theoretical writings and empirical studies described in the following chapter have contributed to the understandings offered in this dissertation.

The following chapter is organized into five sections. The first discusses literature supporting a study of this kind within academic psychology and transpersonal psychology in particular. In the second section, I describe theories and research involving the role of the body (i.e., sensations, emotions, a sense of embodiment) in psycho-spiritual healing and transformation. The third section notes theoretical writings concerning humanity's relationship with nature and empirical research into human experience in nature. Literature on grief is addressed in the fourth section, with the final section describing that on weeping, crying, and tears.

Theoretical Foundations for the Study

Psychology as the Study of Human Experience: Radical Empiricism, Hermeneutics, and Contemporary Transpersonal Methods

Approximately 100 years ago, William James (1912/1996) proposed "radical empiricism" as the epistemology for psychological inquiry. He defined empiricism as stressing "the part, the element, the individual, and treat[ing] the whole as a collection" (p. 41). This was the opposite of rationalism, which he considered to emphasize "universals and tends to make wholes prior to parts in the order of logic as well as that of being" (p. 41). James viewed empiricism as radical if it was based on direct experience and only on direct experience (p. 42). He advocated experience as the basis for study because "[t]he active sense of living we all enjoy, before reflection shatters our instinctive

world for us, is self-luminous and suggests no paradoxes" (p. 92). Experience itself was considered "perfectly fluent" in its "immediacy" (p. 92). Breadth of inquiry was provided not by abstraction, but by synergy of the parts studied as a whole. Radical empiricism was thus "essentially a mosaic philosophy" (pp. 41-42).

James advocated pragmatism as a grounding for radical empiricism. He believed claims of truth should be measured by their practical explanatory impact, stating that the "pragmatic method starts from the postulate that there is no difference of truth that doesn't make a difference of fact somewhere" (p. 159). Truth was not the neatest or tidiest twist among abstractions, but derived from the explanatory potential of the claim in the context of real life. Thus, James advocated that any discussion should "hinge as soon as possible upon some practical or particular issue" (pp. 159-160).

More recently, researchers in the developing transpersonal tradition have proposed a similar basis for contemporary psychological research, particularly for topics with transpersonal components. In *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences: Honoring Human Experience*, William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson (1998) recognized that transpersonal research often begins with description of particular human experience, taking experience as it presents itself to awareness. Making a similar distinction as James, Braud and Anderson noted that one "aim of research is the discovery of general principles or universal laws that provide the possibility of explanation, prediction, and control," but an "equally valid aim is the full description, understanding, and appreciation of individual cases or instances" (p. 13).

Expanding on this concept, Anderson (1998) observed that the individual and personal, when discovered and expressed through research, may become universal: "It is as if speaking our personal truths—however unique and passionate that may feel—transcends our sense of separateness and brings us suddenly, even joyfully together—at least for an instant" (p. 75). Accordingly, intuitive inquiry, the method proposed by Anderson and used in this project, recognizes "the importance of particularity (especially the researcher's voice and the participant's voice) in communicating the unique and yet potentially universal nature of the experiences studied" (Anderson & Braud, 1998, p.30).

Intuitive inquiry falls within the broader ambit of hermeneutics (Anderson, 2000), making some discussion of hermeneutics appropriate. The word hermeneutics derives from the Greek god Hermes, the messenger between the gods and mortals in ancient Greek mythology. A complex and many-faceted tradition, with roots in theology (interpretation of sacred texts) and philosophy (investigation of how we know or understand), hermeneutics may be considered interpretive inquiry, focusing on the go-between (Hermes) or frame of reference which allows the knower to understand the subject. Some philosophers within the hermeneutical tradition, most notably Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1883/1988), posited that it is never possible to extricate understanding from historical context. Hermeneutics thus pays attention to that which is used (conceptually, psychologically) to understand or change understanding. As with James's pragmatism, context is critical.

One of the leading voices on the subject of context is still Wilhelm Dilthey (1883/1988), who warned over a century ago that the "human sciences" (Geisteswissenschaften) must be grounded in the context of history and culture. Considering all inquiry into historico-social reality to constitute human science, Dilthey argued that human science is "defined by the relation of a knowing subject and its historical horizon to a specific group of facts likewise limited in its range by a fixed horizon" (p. 327). Because any inquiry in human science takes place "only from some point of view," human science necessarily involves "a chaos of relativities" (p. 327). With this viewpoint, Dilthey was among the first to observe that "*[s]ubjectivity is the modern way of viewing things*" (p. 327, emphasis in original).

Application of Dilthey's ideas requires the researcher to embody "a historical consciousness" when explaining parts of the historical-social system (p. 327). Any explanations offered by the researcher must be examined in relation to the historical-social context, a proposition consistent with James's insistence that truth claims be tested in relation to lived experience. In Dilthey's system, all understandings offered by the researcher become questions within the social-historical context which probe "ever more deeply, and [cause] links between various questions [to] emerge which make it possible to generalize problems" (p. 327). In this view, generalizations are not abstractions reasoned from data, but questions or suggestions increasingly refined through application to context, offered as a means to understand aspects of human experience.

While Dilthey encouraged observation of historical-social context, Gadamer (1976) argued that the perspective of anyone attempting to understand a subject is not

separable from historical context. Gadamer developed a conception of understanding premised upon the knower's current participation in history. He wrote,

> Actually, the historian even the one who treats history as a "critical science," is so little separated from the ongoing traditions (for example, those of his nation) that he is really *himself engaged in* contributing to the growth and development of the national state. He is one of the "nation's" historians; he belongs to the nation. And for the epoch of national states, one must say: the more he may have reflected on his hermeneutical conditionedness, the more national he knows himself to be. (p. 28)

For Gadamer, understanding would necessarily remain a mediation between past and present. In Gadamer's view, a researcher simply offers a translation of past meanings into present situation.

Within contemporary psychology, hermeneutics is recognized as an appropriate theoretical basis for psychological inquiry (Anderson, 2000; Packer & Addison, 1989a). To some extent, this proceeds from contemporary understanding that researchers, as humans, are always subjectively involved with the process of creating understanding. Given this recognition, failure to embrace the researcher's subjective frame of reference may represent failure to make conscious the very foundations of what is occurring in research. Echoing points made by James (1912/1996), Dilthey (1883/1988), and Gadamer (1976), contemporary advocates of hermeneutical methods in psychology argue that rationalist methodologies tend to pull experience out of context. While this may be necessary to yield abstractions, particularly those with claims of universality, removal from context tends to detract from useful understanding of the topic. Packer and Addison (1989a) wrote that the "central criticism of rationalism has been that when human action

(including speech) is abstracted from its context it is, unfortunately, not cleaned up but distorted" (p. 18).

These ideas authorize the present dissertation in several respects. This dissertation is a study of subjectively held experience and makes no claim of universality. While I hold the goal of presenting stories and interpretations that may feel in some ways universal to readers, I do not claim to have abstracted particular truths applicable to humanity en masse or even to any subset of people. I have attempted to ground this presentation in present social and historical context. While I encourage a broad perspective on human history, I have tried to place this study within the context of real lives occurring in time and place. To a large degree, the validity of this study will turn upon whether the understandings offered are credible to the reader in the context of present history (Packer & Addison, 1989b). If I have succeeded in clarifying appropriate questions in these times and in raising the next questions, I believe I will have followed the direction of hermeneutical inquiry in psychology.

The above theories authorize me to take ownership of this study as a subjective study, which I interpret to allow me to personalize the dissertation with my own observations and recollections, to ground it in the context of my own life. I believe this is not only permissible, but necessary if I am to convey what I would like to convey to readers. According to Dilthey, if human science breaks from the illusion that it may describe an objective human reality in the fashion natural science seeks to describe the physical world, then human science may speak from an experiential standpoint capable of more appropriate expression of certain hidden truths. Dilthey wrote,

> For in this matter the scientist is like the artist: the artist's style–as the expression of a power of experiencing and seeing personalities, periods, and trends in just such a way and of receiving precisely those impressions of feelings about reality–is always one-sided when compared with unfathomable reality; but that style makes it possible to experience, see, and describe in a new way. It is always the case that a specific kind of movement in the soul brings to light certain aspects of the reality of objects and opens up possibilities for gaining impressions of them. (p. 326)

Transpersonal Research: Through the Body and in Relationship to Nature

There are philosophical foundations for understanding this study as research through the body and in relationship to nature. The place to begin is with the philosophy of phenomenology. Like radical empiricism, emerging transpersonal methodologies, and, to some extent, hermeneutics, phenomenology focuses upon direct experience. Edmund Husserl (1936/1970) is considered the founder of phenomenology. Husserl invented the term *lebenswelt* (*life-world* in English) to connote the world of immediately lived experience, as lived by the individual, prior to all thoughts and conceptualizations. Reacting against the objectification of phenomena prevalent in Western thinking, Husserl was the first to argue that conceptualization separates understanding from lived experience, making his work important in both phenomenology and hermeneutics. Husserl was a hermeneuticist in his insistence that perspective must be examined and a phenomenologist in his desire to investigate lived, rather than conceptual, experience.

In his seminal work *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger (1926/1962) built upon concepts articulated by Husserl. Heidegger argued that humans have an experiential existence in time, a beingness, which he referenced as *dasein* (there-being in English). He described *dasein* as having its own understanding and movement, which situates and

propels beingness in the world. Heidegger called *dasein* a *thrown projection* because it is situated in understandings inherited from culture, through which it projects itself into the future. Although Heidegger believed individuals could not free themselves from their situation in historical context, from their own *facticity*, he sought to recover the experience lying beneath the dominant conceptual categories of culture. Along with the other phenomenologists, Heidegger's work promotes the effort to approximate understandings which are *pre-conceptual*, that is, closer to beingness and less formed by pre-existing conceptual categories.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964) is known for articulating the primacy of the body in preconceptual experience. Merleau-Ponty understood the body as the source of preconceptual experience. In other words, it is the body which exists in the *lebenswelt* and is thrown forward as *dasein*. Merleau-Ponty wrote,

> For contemporary psychology and psychopathology the body is no longer merely *an object in the world*, under the purview of a separated spirit. It is on the side of the subject; it is our *point of view on the world*, the place where the spirit takes on a certain physical and historical situation. As Descartes once said profoundly, the soul is not merely in the body like a pilot in his ship; it is wholly intermingled with the body. The body, in turn, is wholly animated, and all its functions contribute to the perception of objects – an activity long considered by philosophy to be pure knowledge. (p. 4-5)

Merleau-Ponty described the human act of perception as the body's lived experience in the *lebenswelt*. He considered perception to involve reciprocity with surroundings, an ongoing exchange between the body and environment. David Abram (1996), a contemporary eco-philosopher, explained this concept in the context of the human draw to the *natural* environment. Abram used the term *participation* to describe

the event of perception viewed through the phenomenological lens. Perception is participation because it "always involves, at its most intimate level, the experience of active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives" (p. 57). In Abram's view, when humans consciously experience the active interplay of sensation and natural environment, "we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations borne by countless other bodies" (p. 65). In this way, the "recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded" (p. 65).

Similar understandings form the basis of the "corporeal schema" articulated by David Levin (1988). Levin proposed the body as the hermeneutic, that is, the frame of reference, for the study of transpersonal experience. Like Abram, Levin agreed with Merleau-Ponty that our bodies live in a realm of preconceptual experience. This is the world of perception, sensation, and emotion, as these body-level phenomena take place prior to categorization through conceptual thought. Levin believes forces of socialization within Western industrialized society have caused most people to lose access to the realm of body-level phenomena. Translating Levin's conceptions into colloquial speech, he is suggesting that most people now live in a *head realm*, separated from sensations and emotions. This *head realm* is governed by ingrained habits of personality and culture, which hinder more direct, full, conscious experience of sensation and emotion.

Echoing the phenomenologists, Levin argued that learned concepts take possession of inchoate experience and bring that experience within pre-existing,

comfortable categories. Unfortunately, this means that contemporary, industrialized humans often miss things we could learn from our bodies' contact with our environment. Put bluntly, our consciousness typically experiences a version of what we have been socialized to experience. In Levin's view, one of the primary ingrained expectations is that of separation. This includes the experience of separation from our bodies and from our environments, which explains why most contemporary civilized people do not experience themselves either as their bodies or as nature. Levin wrote,

> Shortly before his death, Lame Deer, a sage among his tribe the Lakotas, voiced his observation that the people of the modern world seem to have forgotten "the secret knowledge of their bodies, their senses, their dreams" (Lame Deer, 1972, p. 157). This forgetting is related to the domination of a logic of binary, mutually exclusive oppositions, polarizations of experience that have deeply pathologized the nature and character of our experience: inner/outer, public/private, personal/non-personal, self/word, subject/object, me/you, mind/body, matter/spirit, animal/human beings, nature/culture, human world/thing world, living/dead. Our forgetting is also related to the domination of a paradigm of knowledge, truth and reality which has favored the advancement of science and technology at the expense of lived experience. (p. 282)

Although Levin believes most of us reside, most of the time, in a realm dominated by cultural concepts, he argued there continues to exist, within our bodies, a landscape of prepersonal experience. From within this landscape, our bodies still have access to ongoing perceptions, sensations, and emotions. Our bodies are thus usually silent witnesses to an internal landscape of sensation and emotion that is less dominated by the learned experience of separation. In this way, the experience of the body is by its nature transpersonal: Within this bodily landscape, we tend to experience connection with things beyond the typically experienced container of self. To name this realm, Levin borrowed

the term *prepersonal subject* from Merleau-Ponty. Like the phenomenologists, Levin emphasized that the prepersonal subject is not a static, congealed construct of personality, but a way of experiencing the world, "an experience of life into which everything else is embraced, everything gathered, gathered into a whole" (p. 285). In this way, the prepersonal subject is always in relationship with the world through sensations, emotions, and perceptions, which tends to create an experience of integration with other, including environment.

Levin's conception of prepersonal subject is different from the concept of prepersonal articulated by Ken Wilber (1980, 1995, 1998). Wilber identified an undifferentiated state of human consciousness existing, for example, during infancy and in the experience of some premodern peoples. This stage of consciousness is "prepersonal" in that it exists prior to the development of a coherent, differentiated personality or ego that is deemed, by Wilber, a prerequisite to the experience of forms of consciousness he argues are more advanced. Levin, and this dissertation, use the term prepersonal subject to indicate a manner of experience incorporating sensations and emotions of the body, not dominated by social or personality-driven conceptions that may suppress or at least muffle sensory and emotional experience. This is not disagreement with Wilber's observation that coherence or maturation of personality is necessary for experience of some states of consciousness, but simply a different angle of observation into human experience.

From the perspective of this dissertation, most people within industrialized civilizations have developed a differentiated personality structure, which unfortunately

brings with it ways of experiencing the world suppressive of intimate contact with nature. As Wilber (1998) recently clarified, his primary concern has been that transpersonal psychologists not confuse an *unconscious* prepersonal experience of immersion in a undifferentiated whole with a *conscious* experience of unity with that whole experienced *from* the starting point of a differentiated ego. This dissertation assumes that perspective and seeks to investigate one way in which people living within industrialized cultures begin to experience intimate contact with nature through sensation and emotion, which may in fact feel like a return to an earlier way of experiencing, but which nonetheless remains experience from the perspective of individuals with developed ego structure.

In Levin's conception, the subject matter of transpersonal psychology is the mapping of such forms of experience—in his terms, the recovery of the prepersonal subject, that is, the ability to experience sensations and emotions of the body without undue shaping by existing categories of experience. In Levin's model, this mapping will focus upon human potential for transformation and healing through integration with environment. Levin views the prepersonal subject as not only experientially oriented toward other, but also the source of transformative experience. In other words, Levin's notion is not simply that the prepersonal subject is transpersonal, but that the prepersonal subject possesses a tendency toward the transpersonal which brings the personality on a transformational, healing process. Levin's "corporeal schema" for transpersonal studies is offered because "the psychology of the transpersonal dimension originates in, and from, a prepersonal structuration of our experience [which] constellates, in a process of self-

development, as the fulfillment of a structural potential already schematized and carried by the experiential body" (p. 283).

Not surprisingly, Levin recognized the significance of nature in this process. Levin views transpersonal development as tending to involve "experiences of integration into the [natural] elements or strong identification with them" (p. 301). He posited an "elemental body-self" that was originally integrated into "the elements" through a "bodily belonging to the earth" (p. 301, 302). Movement away from this elemental self, occurring in widespread fashion through Western culture, has thus been movement away from the experience of nature:

> At a prepersonal level of experiencing, we have some understanding—a certain bodily felt sense—of our elemental nature, our elemental composition. But, in the *common* sense of our personal life, governed as it is by the socially constructed ego, this identification with the elements is imperceptibly suppressed, split off. Since the ego-body (the body shaped by the ego in conformity with the body-image required by its social group) has been reproduced within the medium of culture, its experience of itself, and of other human bodies, is far removed from the laws of the elements. (p. 303)

As Levin noted, "this remoteness can eventuate in psychopathology, and in a multitude of equally perplexing psychosomatic disorders" (p. 303). Drawing upon the work of Arnold Mindell (1982/1989), he argued that a rigid and frightened personality becomes split off from nature (p. 303). This experiential split from our interrelationship with "the elements" is considered the root cause of much suffering in our times:

> To the extent that cases of psychopathology and psychosomatic disorders call for an understanding that recognizes, concealed within their symptomatology, a painful dissociation from the elements, and more specifically, from a bodily felt sense of elementary belongingness, to that extent it may be argued that the peculiarities of our social construction of

> culture are responsible for the production and reproduction of such suffering and affliction. (p. 303)

Levin's corporeal schema thus provides an important framework for understanding the subject of this dissertation, particularly when the dissertation is understood as transpersonal research. Because grief, weeping, and other deep emotions are experiences of the body, the study of those experiences is inquiry into the prepersonal subject, which Levin holds is the source of transpersonal experience. In Levin's corporeal schema, looking through the lens of body experience is the appropriate hermeneutic for transpersonal psychology because the body is situated as the prepersonal subject. Where Levin has articulated a way of understanding the body as situated toward experiencing itself as nature, and its split from nature as the source of much contemporary suffering, he offers a compelling theoretical justification for the present study. In his terms, experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature may offer a specific way to understand this split and its healing. Description and analysis of these experiences is thus one form of the "mapping" Levin argues should take place within the field.

The study of human relationship to nature as transpersonal psychology is also advocated by Warwick Fox (1995), author of *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology.* Writing within the discipline of ecological philosophy, Fox proposed a cross-pollination between transpersonal psychology and deep ecology, a field discussed in more depth later in this chapter. Borrowing the term *transpersonal* from transpersonal psychology, Fox argued the transpersonal viewpoint is appropriate within deep ecology because that discipline

involves "a psychologically based approach to the question of our relationship with the rest of nature" (p. 195). Within transpersonal psychology, an ecological viewpoint is useful for recognizing the situation of humans in environment.

Fox advocated both a "psychologizing" of deep ecology and an "ecologizing" of transpersonal psychology. The psychologizing of deep ecology would require more conscious concern with an individual's "*opening* to ecological awareness; with realizing one's ecological, wider, or bigger Self" (p. 198). Toward this end, deep ecology would attempt to conceptualize, and then study, the experience of self as inclusive of the natural world. From the other direction, the ecologizing of transpersonal psychology would broaden the locus of study from the human individual to the matrix of relationship itself in a natural context, a stance which Fox views as less anthropomorphic. In many ways, this study responds to Fox's call for examination of the individual in the context of relationship to the natural world.

The Role of the Body in Psycho-Spiritual Healing and Transformation

During most of the 20th century, academic psychology focused on understanding behavior through objective, rational analysis. While mainstream academic psychology offered little insight into human experience during these years, and even less into experience of the body, the psycho-analytical and therapeutic communities gave rise to scholarship which frames the present research.

Nearly a century ago, Sigmund Freud (1940/1989) understood the instinctual drives of the body as the source of psychological activity and experience. Freud is well known for his articulation of three sources of psychological experience: the *id*, the *ego*,

and the *superego*. The *id* was conceived as bodily experience. Freud defined the *id* as containing "everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is laid down in the constitution" (p. 14). Freud's understanding of the *id* as unconscious may have contributed to our culture's denial of the body and its sensations and emotions as a source of lived experience. Nevertheless, Freudian psychology is premised on the primacy of the body's instinctual drives in shaping experience. The grandfather of 20th century psychology wrote that the *id*, "this oldest portion of the psychical apparatus, remains the most important throughout life" (p. 14, fn. 2).

While Freud advocated becoming conscious of some instinctual drives, it took later psychologists to understand the primacy of accessing bodily experience in healing psychological wounds. Wilhelm Reich (1933, 1960), a student of Freud, eventually a renegade in the psycho-analytic community, was an early pioneer of somatic psychology. Reich believed neuroses arise from disembodiment caused by European culture. Reichian therapy taught clients to access experience of the body, particularly the instinct toward orgasm. Reich believed therapy (and human growth generally) involved breaking through a "character armor" which arose during an individual's life. He argued that children are raised to repress sensations and emotions not sanctioned by the civilized community, resulting in chronic or permanent muscular contraction. While this suppression may serve the individual's adaption to the community, the blocked instinctual energy intensifies through life, tending eventually to manifest in chronic pain, emotional problems, or psychosomatic disease. Reichian therapy, still practiced today, assists the individual in

cracking through character armor and living out the underlying libidinal instincts of the body.

During the 1950s and 1960s, gestalt theorists (Perls, 1969a, 1969b; Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951) articulated similar concepts. Perls, Hefferline and Goodman (1951) wrote,

> Almost all persons in our society have lost the proprioception of large areas of their body. The loss was not accidental. It was, when it occurred, the only means of suppressing intolerable conflict. The issues which were then at stake, if now gradually reintroduced into awareness, can be worked through on a basis which actually resolves and puts an end to the conflict. Then what was lost—one's power to manipulate himself and his environment in various constructive ways, to enjoy feelings and satisfactions now beyond the bounds of awareness—can be restored through remobilizing what are now "missing" parts of the organism. (p. 100)

Like the phenomenologists, gestalt therapists believed that experiencing the sensations and drives of the body, and hence remembering prior repressions, takes place within the context of environment. This led gestalt therapists to understand the healing process as involving a return to experiencing oneself as present within an environment. The term *body-awareness* was used to signify the experience of being present in an environment through the senses and emotions of the body. The gestalt therapists viewed "experimenting in body-awareness" as "the means of curing all psychosomatic ailments" (p. 101). Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) wrote,

> To reacquire the full feeling of actuality is an experience of tremendous impact, moving to the core. In the clinical situation patients have cried out, "Suddenly I feel like jumping in the air!" and "I'm walking, really walking" and "I feel so peculiar—the world is there, *really* there!" (p.48)

In more contemporary parlance, the gestalt therapists would likely reference the experience of embodiment (Toombs, 1993) as heralding recovery.

Moshe Feldenkrais (1977) articulated similar understandings, though his emphasis was on movement. Feldenkrais observed that individuals settle into ways of experiencing which become ingrained in the body. To change unhealthy functioning, he taught specific movements of specific body parts. In explaining his system, Feldenkrais wrote that "change in the motor basis within any single integration pattern will break up the cohesion of the whole and thereby leave thought and feeling without anchorage in the patterns of their established routines" (p. 39). This permits "changes in thinking and feeling, for the muscular part through which thinking and feeling reach our awareness has changed and no longer expresses the patterns previously familiar to us" (p. 39). Like the gestalt therapists, Feldenkrais understood human health to involve conscious experience of the body's interaction with environment. "When awareness succeeds in being at one with feeling, senses, movement, and thought," Feldenkrais believed human potential would carry itself forward, with the individual learning "that his small world and the great world around are but one and that in this unity he is no longer alone" (p. 54).

Eugene Gendlin (1962, 1964, 1981, 1996) was another pioneer in exploring the body as means for psychological healing. Drawing in part upon ideas articulated in phenomenology, Gendlin argued that *felt experience* of the body becomes accessible through conscious attention. He wrote,

> At any moment we can individually and privately direct our attention inward, and when we do that, there it is. Of course, we have this or that specific idea, wish, emotion, perception, word, or thought, but we *always*

> have concrete feeling, an inward sensing whose nature is broader. It is a concrete mass in the sense that it is "there" for us. It is not at all vague in its being there. It may be vague only in that we may not know what it is. (1981, p. 11)

Based on this understanding, Gendlin (1981, 1996) developed a process known as *focusing*, defined as the ability to silently attend, without interruption, to the pre-verbal and pre-conceptual bodily-felt referents of experience. Ann Weiser Cornell (1996), an advocate of focusing, posited that the "results of listening to your body are insight, physical release, and positive life change. You understand yourself better, you feel better, *and* you act in ways that are more likely to create the life you want" (p. 3).

Arnold Mindell (1985, 1987, 1998) developed *process oriented psychology* from his observation that attending to information from the body promotes psycho-spiritual healing and growth. Central to Mindell's theory is the concept of the *dreambody*, a series of "sentient, generally unrecognizable sensations that eventually manifest in dream images, body experiences and symptoms" (1998, p. 12). The dreambody bridges the "gap between our measurable, physical bodies and the immeasurable experiences of the so-called mind" (p. 12). *Process work* encourages "the potential significance of body sensations with a specific technique: focused amplification of body experience as it unfolds in our fantasy, body-feeling, movement, relationship signals, and action in the world" (p. 12).

Mindell understands that manifestation of the dreambody can yield unity of mind and body within the context of environment. The pioneer of a process known as worldwork, a form of group healing, he considers transformation to take place within

ever-expanding circles of community. Mindell (1985) explained that "our body problems are also problems of the world around us, we suffer in the way the whole world suffers. Our illness is a dream, it's a symptom of the incongruity of the world we live in" (p. 76). With this recognition, healing becomes "a very comprehensive task, and the term itself can be substituted for integrating symptoms, integrating dreams and integrating the projections and problems of the world around you" (p. 78).

Drawing upon years of experience as therapists, Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks (1993) articulated their practice of body-centered therapy. Their understandings echoed those of prior theorists:

> Early in life human beings develop a split between feeling and thinking, which can also be thought of as a split between body and mind. Messages from the body (such as what we are feeling and what we want) become ignored or denied by the mind. There are powerful reasons why we mentally tune out these messages: for approval, for control, and even for survival. But ignoring or denying messages from the body does not make them go away; it simply makes them come out crooked. They are expressed through too-tightly held parts of the body, through pain, through distortions in the breathing mechanism, through gestures and other movements, as well as through the more commonly acknowledged vehicles of dreams, fantasy, and communication patterns. They are expressed most painfully in actions that do not work and that bring more pain to ourselves and to others. Relationships suffer, becoming entanglements of lost souls wearing masks rather than dances of whole beings celebrating each other. (p. 6)

To remedy this problem, the Hendricks advocate techniques which in many respects parallel the description of embodiment given by Toombs (1993). They teach clients *presencing* (allowing attention to fully rest on something, without judgment), *magnification* (expanding consciousness into an experience of the body), *breathing* (creating spaciousness around the experience), *moving* (allowing pressing emotions to

manifest), *communication* (expressing what emerges in experience), *grounding* (connecting inner experience to a sense of physicality in the world), and *manifesting* (turning dreams and desires into reality).

Implicit within the conceptions of some somatic psychologists is the view that the body is a source of truth somehow pristine and uncomplicated by neuroses and habits of personality and culture. Braud (1998) pointed out the importance of remembering that the body tends not to react in pure response to present conditions, as would some sort of truth barometer, but to respond from its framework as conditioned by prior learning. As Braud noted,

> All instances of conditioning, learning, habit, and memory contain strong elements of untruth. In all these cases, our bodies are not being entirely truthful to present conditions. They are being true, however, to the more general context in which the learning took place. They are being true to their *histories*. (p. 217)

With this observation in mind, it is important to clarify that the body tends to manifest a "reality" of the individual's experience, often a reality not yet conscious, but not necessarily an objective reality. There may even be situations where the individual apprehends intellectually the truth of a situation (e.g., that a dog walking toward it is not dangerous), but the viscera produce an unjustified reaction, albeit one revealing of some emotional or historical truth of the individual (e.g., an attack by a dog as a child, which the individual never fully worked through). Given this understanding, the thrust of the somatic psychologists can be articulated as follows: Directing consciousness to repeated manifestations of the body's reality focuses attention on both immediate reactions of importance in the environment ("truth") and on skewed reactions ("neuroses"). The

psychological work is thus not only to remain "present" with bodily observed truth, but to work through those aspects of neuroses to which attention is directed, eventually moving into more and more responses *not* mediated by skewing personal history.

While the above-noted authors drew upon their own observations in conducting therapy, they did not, with the exception of Gendlin, conduct empirical research projects. Numerous others have undertaken empirical studies investigating some aspect of the relationship between body experience and psychological, psycho-somatic, or psycho-spiritual healing and some form of body experience. There is a large and ever-growing body of literature on the relationship between meditation and various conceptions of health. While there are many forms of meditation, it is common meditation experience to begin to experience previously hidden sensations, emotions, and body presence. The meditation studies are far too numerous to discuss in any depth, but, considered generally, suggest that meditation increases the experience of peace and self-awareness (e.g., Delamonte, 1984; Jabocs & Lubar, 1989), raises perceptual and cognitive abilities (e.g., Deikman, 1966; Jedrczak, Tooney, & Clements, 1986), and increases empathy, creativity and self-actualization (e.g., Alexander, Rainforth & Gelderloos, 1991; Cowger & Torrance, 1982; Lesh, 1970). Positive physical correlates are also suggested, most notably improved cardio-vascular functioning (Murphy, Donovan, & Taylor, 1997).

Seymour Fisher and Sidney Cleveland (1968) were among the first to conduct quantitative studies involving conceptions of body experience. Fisher and Cleveland articulated a concept of "body-image boundary dimension" turning upon how individuals

experience their body in relationship to the world. They found this concept to correlate significantly with numerous aspects of behavior health. They explained,

> The body image boundary dimension has shown itself to have a powerful potential for predicting a wide range of behaviors. It has permitted prediction of such diverse phenomena as psychological adjustment to poliomyelitis, modes of interaction of members of small groups, and patterns of physiological reactivity. It is difficult to find other psychological constructs in the literature which have an equivalent range of meaningful application. (p. 345)

Other researchers have investigated the relationship between health and body-awareness in the context of studying therapy techniques. Landmark research was conducted by Eugene Gendlin, whose conception of focusing was noted above, and colleagues (Gendlin, 1969; Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, & Oberlander, 1968). While a professor at the University of Chicago, Gendlin commenced investigation into why psychotherapy was more successful for some people than for others. The researchers studied hundreds of tapes of therapy sessions, following the entire course of therapies with several different therapists. After a course of therapy with a particular client concluded, the researchers asked both client and therapist whether the therapy had been successful. Clients also completed psychological assessments designed to look for positive change. Where there was agreement on success from the client, the therapist, and the assessment results, the therapy was considered successful for purposes of the investigation.

Based on detailed examination of the tape recordings, Gendlin and his colleagues, to their surprise, found no significant differences in the techniques and behavior of the therapists in the two groups. From examining the dialogue of clients in each group,

however, the researchers made the discovery which formed the basis for Gendlin's subsequent work. As summarized by Ann Weiser Cornell (1996),

> What they heard was this: at some point in the session, the successful clients would *slow down* their talk, become *less articulate*, and begin to *grope for words* to describe something that they were feeling at the moment. If you listened to the tapes, you would hear something like this: "Hmmm. How would I describe this? It's right *here*. It's uh . . . it's . . . it's not exactly anger . . . hmmm." Often the clients would mention that they experienced feelings in their bodies, saying things like, "It's right here in my chest," or "I have this funny feeling in my stomach." (pp. 4-5)

Gendlin concluded that successful clients had learned to access awareness of their bodies during therapy. In contrast, the unsuccessful clients tended to stay "up in their heads," that is, not to consciously experience sensations or emotions of the body. Based on this observation, Gendlin developed the "focusing" technique discussed above. Subsequent researchers have used the concept of focusing to investigate the impact of learning to access body experience in various contexts. For instance, Kevin Krycka (1997) interviewed four men with AIDS after they learned focusing. Using a phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 1975), Krycka reported the possibility of positive change in those diagnosed with AIDS, described by one person as recovery of the will, following conscious attention to experience of the body.

Other than the work of Gendlin and colleagues, quantitative studies attempting to correlate constructs of psychological health and some form of body awareness have met with only limited success. For instance, Donald Kramer (1978) investigated the relationship between psychological health and the gestalt therapy concept of body awareness, defined as "the ability to maintain immediate and vivid contact with one's

ongoing bodily experiencing and sensations" (p. iv). Kramer designed, and administered to research participants, an assessment that quantified body awareness on five different dimensions: silence, depth of awareness, interruption of contact, vividness, and degree of involvement. Participants' scores on these scales were correlated with scores on the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), considered a measure of psychological health. Although Kramer's hypothesized relationship between body awareness and psychological health received only partial validation, he was able to conclude that psychologically healthy patients were better able to maintain body awareness over the course of a reporting task, to verbalize body sensations in a specific and concrete way, and to do these things more consistently.

In another quantitative study, Dean Paul Lesser (1984) investigated whether awareness of subtle body processes developed through hatha yoga promotes psychological health more significantly than developing running awareness or participating in a personal growth group. Using the POI, the Multidimensional-Multiattributional Causality Scale (a measure of personality dimensions), and the Wellness Inventory (a self-report measure of health), Lesser assessed participants prior to and following an 8-week course in either hatha yoga, running awareness, or personal growth. Only one correlation among many was statistically significant. Concluding that chance predicted at least one significant result, Lesser acknowledged the study did not permit differentiation among the various groups in terms of health.

There are many explanations for the failure of the Kramer and Lesser studies to confirm their research hypotheses that leave open the possibility that body awareness

associates with positive psychological health. The concepts of body awareness proposed by the researchers may have been particularly difficult to quantify and measure. The particular quantitative measures used by the researchers may not have turned upon the precise components of body-awareness that correlate with psychological or physical health. It is possible that an increase in body-awareness indicates a person has begun a process of psycho-somatic healing, but does not mean all individuals who have begun the process are deemed "healthy" under the scales used. Similarly, it is possible that embarking on a course of transformation involving body awareness temporarily takes an individual into stages *not* deemed healthy on the various scales, though the end result of transformation may be increased health. Because these possibilities are difficult to sort, at least in the early stages of research in this field, qualitative studies may prove a more fruitful beginning.

Some researchers, for the most part doctoral candidates, have used qualitative methodologies to study aspects or correlates of body awareness. Jill Green (1994) investigated the relationship between body awareness practices and the creative process. After training participants in body awareness and movement, she asked whether they experienced an increase in creativity. Based on interviews, observation, and document analysis, Green concluded that participants experienced body awareness as facilitating creativity. She found observed creativity to involve transformative potential outside the dictates of mainstream culture, positing "a changing self . . . tied to inner authority and resist[ing] technologies of normalization and dominant meaning systems" (p. 233). She

also found this changing self to suggest the breakdown of dualistic experience, with participants identifying their somatic process as creative movement in the world.

Christine Caldwell (1993) used qualitative methods to research the role of body awareness in recovery from addictions. Drawing on the work of Mindell, Perls, and the Hendricks, Caldwell developed a model of recovery involving increased sensation and body experience. Like other somatic psychologists, Caldwell began with the premise that individuals shut down sensations, feelings, and needs of the body in reaction to environmental demands. In her view, the "essential act of addiction is making the statement, 'this is too much, so I am leaving my body now'" (p. 40). Caldwell posited that withdrawal from the body creates a need later filled by grasping addiction to something, in this culture often a chemical substance or repetitive and damaging behavior.

Based on interviews with people in recovery, Caldwell concluded that body awareness was an important "recovery tool." Resensitization of the body led to a cycle of healing from addictive behavior. Caldwell identified four stages of recovery through body awareness, again similar to the aspects of embodiment identified by Toombs (1993). These included *awareness* (relearning "awakeness" and sensation), *owning* (sensing the natural limits of body and processes, containing energy, allowing sensation to develop into emotion), *acceptance in the body* ("breathing into whatever feelings emerge, allowing our bodies to completely move what they feel, and practicing a non-judgmental, loving attitude towards the emerging dance"), and *action* ("relating to the world in the same awake, responsible, accepting way that we relate to ourselves") (p. 68-73).

Like other somatic psychologists, Caldwell recognized that resensitization of the body leads to renewed connection with the external world. The experience she described is transpersonal. Quoting Sam Keen (1983), she wrote that leaving addiction invites into awareness a new sense of relationship with all: "I leave aside the security of the fix and begin the adventure of falling in love with the multiplicity of the self and the world" (p. 140). Caldwell's conception of the relationship between body and psycho-spiritual-somatic health offers a bridge into the following discussion of eco-psychology and deep ecology. In their cultural critiques, some eco-psychologists conceive of contemporary social problems as a form of addiction, pointing not only to prevalent disconnection from body experience, but widespread dissociation from the sensory experience of nature.

Human Disconnection and Connection with Nature

Within the last few decades, three complementary fields of study have emerged to blend ecology with other disciplines. Eco-philosophy, eco-psychology, and deep ecology address the predicament shared by many within industrial societies. As noted previously, eco-philosopher David Abram (1996) framed ways to understand the body's relationship with nature. He described the potentially dangerous situation existing because our culture has disconnected from body-based, lived experience of natural surroundings. "Humans are tuned for relationship," he wrote. "The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears, and nostrils—all are gates where our bodies receive the nourishment of otherness" (p. ix). Because many people participate "almost exclusively with other humans and with our own human-made technologies," there exists "a precarious situation, given our age-old reciprocity with the many-voiced landscape" (p. ix). "Without the oxygenating breath of

our forests, without the clutch of gravity and the tumbled magic of river rapids, we have no distance from our technologies, no way of assessing their limitations, no way to keep ourselves from turning into them" (p. ix).

Chellis Glendinning (1994), an eco-psychologist, shares Abram's concern. She wrote,

> You and I are not people who live in communion with the Earth, and yet we are people who evolved over the course of millions of years—through savannah, jungle and woodland—to live in communion with it. We exist instead dislocated from our roots by the psychological, philosophical, and technological constructions of our civilization, and this alienation leads us to our suffering: massive suffering for each and every one of us, and mass suffering throughout our society.
>
> As individuals, we express this suffering in our personal lives, in our relationships with ourselves and each other, by the numbing and abuse of dysfunctional behaviors. . . . As a society, we express our suffering in our relationship with the Earth by the numbing and abuse we enact through ecological destruction. . . . It is well past time for us to come home, to return to the matrix from which we came, to recover what we have lost, to remember again the wisdom and balance of the natural world. (p. ix-x)

Glendinning understands contemporary Western society as an addictive process. She described *techno-addiction* as the tendency within technological societies to live in a state of "out-of-control, often aimless, compulsion to fill the lost sense of belonging, integrity, and communion" with the myriad of available stimulants, ranging from recognized addictive substances (alcohol, food, narcotics) to more generalized addictive behaviors such as consumption or control. Glendinning used the term techno-addiction also to describe the mechanistic paradigm under which most Westerners have lived for several generations. In this paradigm, the natural world is considered a machine with component parts, subject to manipulation and control by humans, rather than an organic

whole in which human life participates. Glendinning understands recovery from techno-addiction as requiring return to the experience of flesh and nature.

Writing from the perspective of a mental health professional, Glendinning recognized the place of grief in "recovery from Western civilization." She addressed not only grief in response to environmental destruction, but a more intimate form of grief surrounding recognition of lost, personal embeddedness in nature. Glendinning related a story told by Carole Roberts, a 45-year-old educator who had recently returned to urban life from the jungle of Costa Rica:

> After a few weeks [in the jungle] I noticed that something was happening to me. I was feeling more at home in this place *because* of the way it required me to be alert and present. One morning, sitting on the porch and listening to the chattering of birds and animals, I found myself speaking with a parrot in calls back and forth. It was so natural, at first I didn't know I was doing it. It was as if I was becoming dispersed into the environment, like a hallucinogenic drug experience in which there is a reduction of ego so you can feel a direct experience of other. . . .When I returned to my urban existence in San Francisco, I was rushing across a college quadrangle in a hurry to some meeting or other. Suddenly, I noticed that everything here was laid out–manicured lawn, little hedges on one side, flowers in boxes–and I *burst into tears!* I had this sudden, overwhelming flash of loss and longing. Here the presence of life was reduced and controlled in a way that felt unacceptable. I felt, and still feel, deprived. (p. 4-5)

Glendinning considers "earthgrief" to be part of the process of recovery, just as grief may be part of the healing of any trauma. What is recovered, in her view, is not merely relationship to nature, but relationship to oneself, particularly one's own body, as well as relationship to community. She wrote, "To open our hearts to the sad history of humanity and the devastated state of the Earth is the next step in our reclamation of our

bodies, the body of our human community, and the body of the Earth" (p. 160). She continued,

> Feeling the pain and knowing its source brings us to a crucial turning point. Freud was convinced that catharsis was necessary for healing to take place. Trauma-recovery specialists refer to this phase of the process as "abreactions." To homeopathic practitioners, it is the "healing crisis," which literally alters the chemistry of our cellular makeup. In the popular parlance, this turning point is seen as the clearing of negative patterns so that life-affirming patterns may arise. As formidable as the task may seem, to feel our pain is to come alive. It is to discharge the dysfunctional orbit of pain that currently defines our lives, to touch once again the elliptical whole of the Earth. (p. 170)

Joanna Macy (1983, 1991), a scholar of both Buddhism and general systems theory, articulated a similar process of recovery. Macy described "despair work" as a necessary component of both individual and social healing in contemporary times. Macy believes many people are aware of planetary distress, including a dim sense of threat to personal safety and health, but are not readily able to access these feelings. She wrote,

> The first step in despair work is to disabuse ourselves of the notion that grief for our world is morbid. To experience anguish and anxiety in the face of the perils that threaten us is a healthy reaction. Far from being crazy, this pain is a testimony to the unity of all life, the deep interconnection that relates us to all things. (1983, p. 21)

Macy believes movement into feelings of grief and despair allows a process of recovery that is simultaneously individual and ecological. Like others, she envisions a transpersonal process. In her view, "healing the split in the psyche that cuts us off from the material world" involves dismantling the experience of ego-self as separate from all else (p. 77). This allows what Macy calls a "greening of the self," a new experience of self as part of a planetary ecology.

Though without an emphasis on experiencing grief, Michael J. Cohen (1997), an educator, has also developed programs for reconnecting with nature. Like Abram (1996) and others, he is optimistic that humans remain oriented toward nature. He wrote,

> From early on, the authorities in industrial society shape us to live physically and mentally separated from nature and its balance. Our nature-estranged way of life is not the only way to think and live. It is the way that has happened to us. Thankfully, we are given the freedom to chose to become closer to the intelligence, beauty and peace found in nature. When given the opportunity, that's what most of us do. (p. 17)

Howard Clinebell (1996), author of *Ecotherapy, Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth*, has written about similar issues from the perspective of a pastoral counselor. Clinebell posited a "dynamic interrelationship" between "the well-being of persons, the well-being of the earth, [and] an earth-grounded understanding of human personality" (p. xvi). Clinebell observed that some people presently grieve for "the increasingly threatened future of the natural world" (p. 207). He noted that "[a]mong earth-loving people, grief is an often-hidden component of the reality-based feelings triggered by the day-to-day evidence of our deteriorating environment. Sensitive people often feel such ecological losses very personally" (p. 206). Like Macy, Clinebell recognized that "[p]roviding opportunities for people to do their 'ecogrief work' is important in today's ecological crisis. . . . What is important is healing those dimensions of grief that produce denial and action-paralysis" (p. 207).

Clinebell recognized another relationship between grief and nature: Personal grief having nothing to do with environmental issues may emerge when an individual feels held by the natural world. In his practice as a pastoral psycho-therapist, Clinebell has

observed that "spiritual awakening and healing frequently results from encouraging encounters with loved places in nature" (p. 109). Grief is sometimes a part of this transformative process. Clinebell related the story of a man he encountered in a substance abuse program, "a self-described program failure, having returned repeatedly to addictive drinking after completing several rounds of treatment" (p. 109). Clinebell wrote,

> The man mentioned the death of his father and was about to pass over this huge loss quickly, when he said he had cried just once. After his father's funeral, he was camping with his current girlfriend near a rushing creek with a tiny island of granite boulders. He told of being able to cry as he sat alone on one of the rocks, surrounding by rushing water. When asked how that felt, he said, "It was so good to just let go." (pp. 109-110)

The understandings of eco-psychologists find more broad articulation in the deep ecology movement. George Sessions (1995) explained that deep ecology "emerged more or less spontaneously and informally as a philosophical and scientific social/political movement during the so-called Ecological Revolution of the 1960s" (p. ix). The term deep ecology was first used by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (1995) to distinguish deep from shallow ecology. Naess viewed "shallow ecology" as characterized by anthropocentric, technocratic environmentalism primarily concerned with pollution, resource deprivation and preservation of the health of affluent peoples. In contrast, deep ecology is claimed to emerge from an ecocentric perspective which examines the philosophical, psychological, social, and political structures underlying contemporary environmental degradation. As described by Sessions (1995), the main concern of deep ecology has been to foster "a major paradigm shift—a shift in perception, values, and

lifestyles—as a basis for redirecting the ecologically destructive path of modern industrial growth societies" (p. ix).

Some deep ecologists, among them Warwick Fox (1995) have recognized the need for deep ecology to consider the experience of the individual. Heeding Fox's call to psychologize deep ecology, deep ecology has begun to articulate understandings of human experience, making many of the same observations as eco-psychologists and, to some degree, phenomenologists. Sessions (1995) described the internal conflict between the human "need for the wild" and the "total domestication of humans by the urban/industrial/technological project of modernity" (p. 5). Paul Shepard (1995) explained the conflict between the "biological reality" that people are *in* the world and the increasing social-political-psychological reality that most people do not consciously experience "interconnectedness as a general principle of life" (p. 131).

In Shepard's view, the task of deep ecology is to convey "a sense of our place in a universal vascular system without depriving us of our self-esteem and confidence" (p. 133). He believes this necessarily involves remembering our physical sensibilities in relationship to nature, "something better known to twelfth century Europeans or Paleolithic hunters than to ourselves" (p. 133). He wrote,

> If nature is not a prison and earth a shoddy way station, we must find the faith and force to affirm its metabolism as our own–or rather, our own as part of it. To do so means nothing less than a shift in our whole frame of reference and our attitude toward life itself, a wider perception of the landscape as a creative, harmonious being where relationships of things are as real as the things. Without losing our sense of a greater human destiny and without intellectual surrender, we must affirm that the world is a being, a part of our own bodies. (pp. 133-134)

Turning to the study of people who have experienced connection with nature, there is a growing body of both qualitative and quantitative research. Joan Snyder (1989) conducted an heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) into the experience of really feeling connected with nature. Like intuitive inquiry, heuristic research draws upon the experience of the researcher, using connection with coresearchers to deepen and elucidate that experience. Snyder solicited 15 women for extensive interviews on their experience of nature. She focused in particular on psychological qualities of coresearchers and meanings ascribed to connection with nature. Snyder's results include her own story as well as the input from participants.

Snyder's personal history of the topic began with her realization that she felt most "real" when in connection with nature. In making conscious this experience, she arrived at the following:

> At first, I experienced connection to nature in the natural world, in the trees, plants, rocks, animals, clouds, sky, ocean and in the lakes, hills and mountains. Then came a feeling of being connected with nature in a fuller, deeper sense. My experience put me in touch with the energy of nature, with creation itself, a sense of tie to the universe, and, ultimately, to the Goddess/God that permeates spiritual life. Faced with such realness I have but one answer–yes, yes, I am tied to this awesome totality. I must take my place as a responsible counterpart of this creative force of nature. I begin to spin in rhythm and harmony with all, loved and loving. There is meaning here, purpose here, and work to do. I am committed to remain open, to stay connected, and to learn from nature. (pp. 1-2)

Snyder reported four themes developed through her work with coresearchers: "The perception of nature as sacred and/or as a spiritual inspiration; a sense of oneness and unity with nature; need fulfillment through nature; and a desire to reciprocate for the gifts given by nature" (p. 110). Of particular relevance to the present dissertation is the

coreseachers' perception of nature as "sacred and/or spiritual inspiration." Snyder explained,

> They speak of awe or wonder; they speak of God; they feel as if they are in a church; they experience ego-transcendence; they experience energy from nature; they experience a sense of presence through words, touch, or sensation from nature; they experience the power of nature; they feel that they are healed by nature; they sense that nature blesses them; and they speak specifically of the spiritual or soul dimensions of experience in nature. (p. 110)

Also important is the coresearchers' sense of "oneness and unity with nature," about which Snyder wrote, "They feel a part of nature and the universe; they feel that they are made of the same substance; they experience nature as a friend; they feel that they belong; and they feel that they are at a reunion or are at home" (p. 110).

Though Snyder did not focus her investigation on body experience, several of her "exemplary portraits" of coresearchers describe the importance of sensations and emotions. One of the coresearchers, Kira, lived "in a neighborhood with older trees, in abundance, visible through the many windows in her apartment on the second floor" (p. 106). Kira found her dwelling to mirror "the images and feelings that are alive in her body. She continues to feel a warmth in her body. She exclaims, 'It keeps happening,' and she touches her solar plexus" (p. 106). Another portrait quotes the coresearcher as stating, "My senses are filled, I am constantly nurtured by the lavishness and variety of this earth of ours, Mother Earth. This goes on and on as I see, hear, smell, feel and taste what the earth and universe offers" (p. 100). Another coresearcher stated, "There are times when I experience a spinning energy within my center which feels connected to the unceasing energy of the universe" (p. 101). Snyder's description of her own experience included,

"My senses are nudged and awakened when I am immersed in nature. In diverse ways I am stimulated and fed, literally, physically and spiritually" (p. 142).

Snyder's study does not address the experience of grief or weeping in response to nature, nor do her portraits describe such experiences. One of her themes, however, is relevant to an understanding of grief in response to nature. Snyder suggested that humans experience "need fulfillment through nature." She elaborated,

> The coresearchers experience need fulfillment as follows: They use a variety of words such as happy, relaxed, at peace, centered, and balanced which indicate need fulfillment; they experience bodily and emotional fulfillment; they are aware that the senses are stimulated; there is increased self-esteem; they go to nature for the solution of problems or the reduction of stress; there is an eagerness to be outdoors; and the feel nurtured by nature. (p. 111)

Whereas Snyder's coresearchers have found connection with nature to fill certain needs, it may be suggested that the absence of connection with nature might leave some people with unfulfilled, and perhaps unconscious, needs in relation to the natural world. Deprivation of this need might represent a loss, and recognition of that loss could be experienced by some people as grief.

Another study important to the present inquiry was conducted by Janet Ruffing (1997), a sister of Mercy and Associate Professor of Spirituality and Spiritual Direction. Ruffing investigated nature in contemporary Christian mystical experience, focusing upon Christian kataphatic mysticism. Within the Christian mystical tradition, prayer that is kataphatic (literally meaning, down into or according to speech) is understood in opposition to prayer that is apophatic (literally meaning away from speech) (McLeod, 1986). Kataphatic prayer employs thoughts and images, while apophatic prayer "seeks to

reach beyond conscious awareness—beyond thoughts and images—and arrive at the depth of one's being, there to await the coming of the Lord" (p. 43). A relationship with spirit or God mediated by thoughts or imagery of nature could, then, constitute kataphatic prayer. As described by Ruffing, the kataphatic mysticism studied in her project united three characteristics, "a sense of oneness or communion with nature, reasoning to the Creator from an element in nature, and a sense of the presence of God in nature" (p. 44).

To investigate her topic, Ruffing interviewed 24 people, ranging in age from 35 to 70, almost all Roman Catholics or Episcopalians. She located participants through spiritual directors practicing on the east and west coasts of the United States. All of Ruffing's participants had "committed themselves to responding to their often life-long experience of God for at least five years, including regular prayer, which was primarily kataphatic" (p. 54).

In the interviews, Ruffing asked participants to describe their development in spiritual practice for at least the past 5 years. Ruffing followed up with questions that were "probative in nature, designed to cover a certain range of material and extension" (p. 54). She discovered that virtually all of her participants "were alone in nature as a regular feature of their Christian religious experience" (p. 42). In general, the "utter sacramentality of the natural world deepened their sense of themselves in the universe, in the human community, and in a larger faith community" (p. 42). "[E]xperiences of God in nature occurred both universally and frequently among the participants" (p. 42). For most of the participants, the experience of God through nature was an experience of "oneness with their earthly home; a oneness with the elements of which we are fashioned; [and] a

perception that human reality is made from the same material elements and processes of the earth itself; all of which emerge from the Creator Spirit" (p. 44).

Ruffing identified eight specific characteristics of Christian kataphatic nature mysticism as follows:

> 1. The experiences are wholeness-making, regardless of whether or not the Divine presence was sensed or named explicitly;
>
> 2. Sensual engagement was a marked feature;
>
> 3. A connection between nature and the human community was common;
>
> 4. Minimal events in nature often sufficed to evoke profound experience;
>
> 5. Experiences were often ongoing; sacred landscapes unfolded further in subsequent images;
>
> 6. The Divine Presence was disclosed in and through creation itself;
>
> 7. A sense of mutuality was common;
>
> 8. An explicit ecological awareness varied among the interviewees. (p. 44)

In discussing her findings, Ruffing has illustrated the role of the body in the experience of many of her participants. In describing the experiences as "wholeness-making," Ruffing noted that "most people described a process of reconnection with themselves physically, spiritually, and emotionally" (p. 44). Her finding of marked "sensual engagement" was illustrated with several examples, including the following:

> People talked about hearing bird songs, smelling the air and the flowers, hearing the sound of the sea and the wind, tasting fruit, feeling the earth beneath their feet or the texture of bark and leaves. They walked, they swam, they worked the earth, they collected some treasure from the day and brought it home. (p. 45)

Some experiences described by Ruffing include weeping. One participant discussed a pilgrimage to Israel, in which he was largely unmoved by the shrines, but had the following experience:

> About six o'clock in the morning, I was on the roof, alone, facing Yeshiva University, and the sun was coming up. And I went right down to my knees. It was such a powerful . . . You talk about tears, I mean I was sobbing. It was sunrise. It was God. (p. 48)

Another participant wept even when describing one of her experiences in nature. Ruffing quoted,

> It was rather chilly; the wind blows off the river up that street. And I stopped because the trees there had just the smallest, freshest, greenest buds and I stood there and . . . I just said, ah . . . And I began to pray. (tears while speaking). (p. 47)

Ruffing, who wrote within the Christian tradition, does not describe the experience of her participants as transpersonal experience. Nevertheless, many of the experiences uncovered by her study would meet the definition of transpersonal experience. Ruffing's third characteristic of Christian kataphatic experience was "connection between nature and human community." Her discussion of this characteristic, including her quotes from participants, suggests the transpersonal nature of at least some of the experiences. Ruffing wrote,

> One person poignantly described the joy he felt when his world expanded to include the goodness of people other than his parents as well as the goodness he experienced in nature and in animals. Others simply experienced the earth world, the human world, and the divine presence as a total seamless unity. One participant told the story: " . . . And all nature was caught up with it because the trees that had looked so dormant just a week ago were blossoming. And I could see flowers opening up. This tremendous mystery that I saw this morning was that it's never quite an 'alone' experience." (p. 46)

The very essence of the experiences under investigation, kataphatic mysticism, could be described as transpersonal given the composite elements of a sense of oneness with nature and the experienced presence of God.

Equally compelling stories were revealed through research conducted by Ryan DeMares and Kevin Krycka (1998). DeMares and Krycka investigated peak experiences (Maslow, 1970) triggered by encounters with wild animals, primarily cetaceans (whales and dolphins). Using a phenomenological method (Giorgi, 1975), the researchers interviewed 6 people ranging in age from 35 to 55, then analyzed interview transcripts to discern the underlying structure of the experiences. The authors concluded that "connecting with another being, and ultimately, being fully connected within oneself, is the underlying desire of the cetacean-triggered peak experience" (p. 169).

Five feelings were found intrinsic to the experience of connection with a cetacean: harmony, aliveness, connectedness, intention, and reciprocity of process. These feelings were understood to "provide the human with validation and a benchmark against which personal growth can be measured" (p. 169). The essential experience was found to include the "sense of aliveness in the process of experiencing awe, elation, deep joy, or unconditional love, all of which are basic to reconnecting with the inner being" (p. 169). These feelings in turn were believed to "facilitate a return to wholeness" (p. 170).

Although Demares and Krycka did not focus on grief or weeping, some stories of participants included tears. The following experience in particular suggests the relationship between healing and tears in a nature encounter:

Judy's experience of harmony was unique among the subjects' experiences because it came at a time of overt disharmony in her relationship with a family member. Selection of the whale-watching outing as the backdrop for their family talk "just seemed like the right thing to do":

> . . . as we first went out, we encountered . . . a mother and adolescent son named Slick and Mike [who began] breaching in tandem off the bow of the boat. . . . And [my son] and I were both in tears, and we felt very much that these whales were responding to our process.

Judy's experience may have been the most profound of all, touching as it did on unconditional love:

> And it didn't take but a couple of seconds before I started to have a feeling that I've never had before at this level. It was love, exponentially enhanced to a point that I can't describe. . . . I just stood there and realized that tears were falling off my chin. . . . My blouse was wet. The feelings [about connecting and love] were so powerful and so filling. (p. 175)

In a study blending qualitative and quantitative methods, Samantha Dowdall (1998) investigated the relationship among nature-related exceptional human experiences, spirituality, well-being, and ecological actions and attitudes. Dowdell's work was inspired by James Swan's (1992) observation that people who "experienced early positive encounters with nature, usually in the presence of loved adults, and later experienced 'transcendental' moments in nature as adults, are those most likely to engage in, and remain committed to, protecting the environment" (p. 299).

Dowdall worked with a group of 126 people who had reported one or more nature-related exceptional human experiences. She asked participants to complete quantitative assessments, then conducted follow-up interviews with six people to more fully explore experiences and reported outcomes. Analysis of Dowdall's quantitative data

revealed statistically significant correlations among the measures of ecologically supportive actions, positive environmental attitudes, exceptional and mystical/unitive experiences occurring in natural contexts, spirituality, and well-being. Separate multiple regression analysis indicated that both ecological attitudes and actions could be predicted from a combined consideration of the five psychological and psychospiritual variables measured in her assessments. In particular, Dowdall found that greater degrees of positive ecological action were especially strongly related to a greater density of exceptional and mystical/unitive experiences occurring in the context of nature, as well as to greater psychological well-being, reflected in reduced stress and increased positive attitudes toward life.

In the qualitative component of her dissertation, Dowdall explored, among other things, the type and quality of particular nature-based exceptional experiences. Conducting a content analysis, she reported the following percentage occurrences of specific subthemes in interviews:

Subtheme	*Percentage*
Connectedness	67
Unitive	48
Spiritual	40
Noetic	27
"Quiet" connection with nature	25
Heightened senses/body sensations (not explained by ordinary circumstances)	20
Ecstasy	20
Transcendence	15
Connection with divine presence	14
Synchronicity	8
Time distortion	5
Vision	3

Out-of-body	2
Past life memory	2

(p. 156)

Dowdall's quantitative and qualitative results support the present investigation in several respects. The correlations between measures of exceptional nature experiences, spirituality, and well-being support one of the understandings under investigation: the health-promoting aspect of experiencing connection with nature. One-fifth of her qualitative participants mentioned heightened senses or body sensations in connection with nature. Because these participants viewed these heightened sensations as "not explained by ordinary circumstances," it appears they were conveying exceptional or mystical experiences, not simply heightened body awareness in nature. Nonetheless, Dowdall's study points toward the need for further elucidation of the lived experience of deep sensory connection with nature. Investigation of the experience of *grief, weeping, or other deep emotions* in response to nature looks at one aspect of such experience.

Grief: The Body's Recognition of Loss

Within academic psychology, grief has most often been investigated in the context of loss of a loved one. Some of the stories of grief told in this project involve loss of a beloved, but most do not. When compared to the loss of a child, significant other, relative or friend, most of the forms of grief studied in this project are trivial. Concern over the environment, longing for nature, and even longing for the experience of God or spirit cannot be compared to the devastation following death of a loved individual. With that acknowledgment, it remains useful to consider the psychological literature on grief. Although forms of grief vary in intensity, there are patterns and understandings of grief

that are applicable to most of the experiences gathered for this project. The following section reviews that literature, with particular focus on grief as an experience of the body and as a regenerative and creative process.

The psychoanalytic and object relations theorists have produced extensive writings on the subject of grief and loss. These traditions have several teachings regarding grief relevant to this project. Most basically, the experience of grief may be considered the gradual dissociation from the pain of loss. Freud (1915/1961c, 1917/1961a) described grief as the process of gradual withdrawal of energy that ties a bereaved individual to the lost object (e.g., a deceased individual). Most theorists and researchers in all schools of psychology continue to view grief as a process of accommodation to loss. Freud (1917/1961a) recognized that grief, or mourning, may be experienced with respect to ideas or experiences, though he believed this was a substitute for grief experienced around loss of a person. He defined mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (p. 243).

From object relations theory comes the idea that all grief is superimposed over a template of experienced loss of the mother as external or internalized object. Melanie Klein (1935, 1940) traced the experience of grief back to infancy, noting that "the absence of the mother arouses in the child anxiety lest it should be handed over to bad objects, external or internalized, either because of her death or because of her return in the guise of a 'bad' mother" (1935, p. 266). Later experiences of grief were viewed in terms of this template. Klein posited that healthy individuals learned in infancy to internalize

other "objects" to facilitate adaptation to loss. Throughout life, experiences of loss are handled by the individual in accordance with the original learned process. While it is not necessary for this project to adopt the rigorous assumptions of object relations, it is very useful to consider that any experience of grief may be multi-layered, reactivating or reverberating within experiences of loss other than those consciously addressed by the individual.

Returning to Freud, the father of psychoanalysis made two additional points relevant to this project. In early writings, Freud (1895/1966) posited a connection between melancholia and mourning. He believed the connection to involve grief for the loss of libido, which may loosely be defined as energy of life-force (Freud, 1940/1989). Freud (1895/1966) wrote, "The affect corresponding to melancholia is that or mourning–that is, longing for something lost. Thus in melancholia it must be a question of loss–a loss in *instinctual* life" (p. 200). Through this observation, Freud made the connection between experiences of overt grief (mourning) and more diffuse experiences of melancholy, which today we might colloquially reference as depression or the blues. In his view, both involve a reaction to loss in instinctual experience, which is easily argued to correspond to experience of the body. This observation is particularly important to the experiences described in this project, which range from rather tumultuous expressions of grief to the occasional experience of melancholy.

In a different context, Freud (1916/1961b) recorded his own experience of melancholy during a summer walk with a friend, taken during the second year of World War I, when thoughts of death were common. He observed,

> What spoilt their enjoyment of beauty must have been a revolt in their minds against mourning. The idea that all this beauty was transient was giving these two sensitive minds a foretaste of mourning over its decease; and, since the mind instinctively recoils from anything that is painful, they felt their enjoyment of beauty interfered with by thoughts of its transience. (p. 306)

In recalling his own experience of grief in response to nature, Freud concluded that the beauty of nature brought forth his emotions, but it is easily argued that his reactions flowed from heightened sensations of the body, experienced as response to beauty. Freud's understanding of the experience was that knowledge of transience, that is, inevitable death, produced the sensations of mourning. While this understanding may have been overly reductive, i.e., the experience may have been determined by more than only the knowledge of death, Freud's understanding is usefully remembered when considering the stories gathered for this project.

Turning to more recent theorists, writers within the helping professions have articulated stages or processes of grief. In the field of nursing, many have understood grief through Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's (1969) well-known model of psychological stages following awareness of impending death (Jacobs, 1993). Kubler-Ross (1969) recognized stages of denial/isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Kubler-Ross's model is usefully considered in the context of grief work recognized by Macy (1983) and Glenndinning (1994). People awakening to grief over environmental destruction, the lost possibility of their own immersion in nature, seem to move through similar stages of denial, anger, depression, and acceptance. Because several of the stories gathered for this

dissertation reference anger, Kubler-Ross's model is useful in offering a means to consider anger a stage in adaptation to grief.

Through a synthesis of other theorists, Mark Edwards (1997) recently identified "shared aims" in assisting others through the process of grief. These include

> (a) recognizing and accepting the reality of the loss at all levels; (b) working through the pain of grief and identifying and expressing important latent feelings and thoughts; (c) readjusting and reawakening to the reality of a world where new roles, skills, and social behaviors need to be learned and adopted; (d) reinvesting emotional energy and opening oneself to the possibility of developing new relationships with cherished others; (e) integrating the grief experience in ways which are adaptive, healthy and of value to the bereaved person. (p. 442)

While tailored to the experience of loss of a beloved, the stages identified by Edwards are useful in the context of other forms of grief. Although most of the stories presented in this project give a snapshot into an individual's life at one particular stage, it is useful to remember that stage is part of a life, possibly including an ongoing process of transformation of the individual.

Several researchers have tried to distinguish different forms of grief, usually in contrast to a conception of "normal" grief. Normal grief is typically considered as "the ability to grieve openly, to 'resolve' the loss and to move towards resuming the routine activities of daily living with regard to work, social interactions and relationships" (Middleton, Moylan, Raphael, Burnett, & Marinek, 1993, p. 459). Normal grief has been contrasted to grief which is "exaggerated," "inhibited," "anticipatory," "complicated," "distorted," "morbid," "chronic," "truncated," "unresolved," "neurotic," "delayed," and so forth (Averill, 1968; Jacobs, 1993; Middleton, Moylan, Raphael, Burnett, & Marinek,

1993). From these conceptions, and from the stages of grief recognized in the helping professions, comes the important understanding that individuals may become stuck in the grieving process, with deleterious impact on healthy functioning. A corollary of this observation is the experience that grief can be a healthy process when involving transformation within the individual's psychology.

Within the last two decades, researchers have begun to study grief as a "lived experience" (Carter, 1989; Solari-Twadell, Bunkers, Wang, & Snyder, 1995). One such study produced the "pinwheel" model of bereavement. Designed to assist nurses in "being with" those in the grieving process, the pinwheel model examined what follows "the initiating wind" of loss. At the center of the pinwheel is the "contextual theme of personal history," considered essential to understanding the individual lived experience. Other themes of grief are viewed at the edges of the metaphoric pinwheel. These include *being stopped* ("the interruption of one's life following a loss"), *pain and hurting* ("characterized by a cluster of very intense, painful emotions"), *missing* ("awareness of all that has been lost," including yearning for a loved one's presence, experiencing a vacuum, and recognizing loss of one's dreams), *holding* ("the desire to preserve all, particularly that which was good, from the loved one's existence"), *seeking* (a search for help, leading to "finding comfort and meaning"), and *valuing* (the loss is cherished) (Solari-Twadell et al., 1995, p. 324).

The pinwheel model recognized that "embracing the experience of loss" is part of "the process of rejoining life" (p. 325). The authors wrote that "[w]hat is virtually at stake is the achievement of a new balance in one's orientation to reality" (Solari-Twadell et al.,

1995, p. 324). They believe this new balance requires surrender, typically based on a leap of faith that healing will come, coupled with the courage to let go. The authors noted, "As surrender occurs, an individual begins to reach out to others, thus rejoining life. Reaching out involves the understanding that she or he enlists forces that will contribute to wholeness, healing, and restoration of the whole person" (p. 324). Like other models, the pinwheel model recognized grief as a process that can lead to restored health if experienced and not avoided.

A discussion of grief as a bodily process, with connection to spiritual experience, was recently authored by Mark Edwards (1997). In "Being present: Experiential connections between Zen Buddhist practices and the grieving process," Edwards drew upon his own experience in Zen Buddhist practice and his personal interactions with clients in a grief-support service. Consistent with his experiences in Buddhist practice, Edwards understands grief as a bodily process. He noted that "[i]n grief we immediately encounter the pain of the loss of someone's or something's physical presence. This loss is often felt as a direct bodily fact that is known prior to any rational consideration" (p. 446). Edwards explained Zen practice and philosophy as including respect for the body and its sensations, "not simply [as] a noticing of bodily aspects of experience, but rather an integration of the world of sensations and perceptions into a consciousness that is embodied and physically present" (p. 446). From this perspective, Edwards posited that "both Zen meditation and the experience of grief are embodied processes which bring us forcefully into contact with physical reality, a reality that is known directly and immediately within the body" (pp. 446-447).

Edwards wrote poignantly of his relationship with one client in particular, which heightened his awareness of the somatic nature of grief. This client "experienced her grief in a deeply physical way. The grief was felt as a distinct and powerful sensation of pain in her chest" (p. 445). Edwards's experience with this client caused him to draw the following parallel to his own experience in meditation:

> The somatic aspect of grief, and the bodily focus of Zen practice, seemed to initiate similar body-centered processes. During intensive meditation practice it is not unusual to be aware of powerful emotions experienced in the body. There is one experience, in particular, that has been described as, 'the body filling with compassion' [fn. omitted]. In this experience there is an embodied understanding and acceptance of loss and of the fragile and transient nature of life. This experience of embodying one's emotional life seemed to have strong parallels with the physical nature of the grief experience. (p. 445)

According to Edwards, grief and spiritual experience, at least one form of spiritual experience, share the common denominator of bodily experience. He observed both as transformative processes in which the individual is brought forcefully through sensations and emotions into contact with the experiential world. This understanding supports the current project's focus on grief, weeping, or other deep emotions as transformative experiences of the body in relation to nature, experiences which are frequently understood as spiritual.

The final conception of grief to be mentioned comes from the work of Ina Milloff (1997), who considered *Loss at the Heart of Our Being: Core Issues in Separation-Individuation and the Process of Becoming*. Milloff began with the understanding that loss pervades human experience, which renders the task of dealing with unresolved grief lifelong and crucial. Drawing upon object-relations theory, Milloff articulated a concept

of "core loss," which she defined as "loss of access to an immediacy of experience or *being*, free from psychological constructs" (p. 5). To illustrate this concept, she described one theorist, Thomas Ewans (1987), as arguing that "the advent of language (the function of which he sees at work earlier in development than commonly thought, well before the child can actually speak) . . . interrupts the infant's world of unmediated Presence" (Millof, 1997, pp. 83-83).

Milloff described a state of being she believes is inevitably lost, at least initially, in the human condition:

> I like to refer to it as a holding presence which allows us simply to *be*. By this I mean *being* that is not based on conditional reactions, on defenses, on early object relations, on losses from the past and failed mourning–but instead is based on one's responses to the present moment, with all the awareness, involvement, and spontaneous experience of affect that is naturally associated with the present moment. The internal holding presence, as I see it, allows for the tolerance and acceptance of increasing levels of reality and that which is increasingly known (on an ego level) can then serve as stepping stones toward more and more access to the unknown/unknowable realm of *being*. The process of individuation in my view is actually an ever-present, perhaps never ending process of becoming. The holding presence helps to facilitate the separation-individuation process on an ego level and makes the experience of *being* and spiritual development possible. (pp. 91-92)

Like others in the object relations tradition, Milloff argued that mourning for any loss specific to an individual is "multiply layered" on the experience of earlier losses. Milloff's contribution is the argument that all human losses are layered upon the "ultimate loss"of this state of being. In her view, the process of mourning any loss represents an invitation "to perceive increasing levels of reality, a process which, when successfully undertaken, leads us toward acceptance or restoration of this core aspect

within ourselves" (p. 115). Recalling the observation of Edwards (1997) that spiritual experience, at least in one form, involves return to an unmediated sense of physical presence in the world, the process described by Milloff can be viewed as a transformative, spiritual process. If the context of human evolutionary and historical heritage is added, i.e., our emergence from an embeddedness within nature, Milloff's analysis supports an understanding of the present investigation itself as multilayered, including the following: loss of experiencing oneself in a holding, sustaining presence of being; loss of experiencing oneself embedded within nature; and loss of experiencing transcendence or spiritual connection through experienced presence of being and/or embeddedness in nature.

Weeping, Crying, and Tears

If nothing else, the literature on weeping, crying, and tears suggests these "events" have many causes and meanings. This is consistent with common experience, which tells us that tears may coincide with emotional or physical experiences ranging from deep grief to exhilaration, from intense pain to joyous hilarity. Because this dissertation focuses on experiences of the body in response to nature, the entire range of weeping, crying, and tears is within its purview. The literature review will therefore survey the psychological literature on weeping, crying, and tears without excluding any forms of tears. Breadth in examination of "weeping events" seems necessary in any event, because many instances of weeping, crying, or tears are likely multiply layered or determined, with changes in the nature of the tears possible even during a single crying event.

Before turning to the literature, some discussion of the words *weeping*, *crying*, and *tears* is appropriate. Providing definitions is difficult, given the interchangeable use of the words by many researchers, as well as frequent synonymous use in common speech. Some researchers use the words interchangeably (particularly, weeping and crying) (e.g., Foxe, 1941) even within a body of writing, while others (e.g., Loegren, 1996; Williams & Morris, 1996) chose one word to use consistently (i.e., crying or weeping), but use the word in a sense in which other researchers use the alternative word. The synonymous use of the words is also reflected in dictionary definitions. In the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition, the definition of "weep" includes "shed tears; cry" (1993, p. 2155). The definition of "cry" includes "to weep; shed tears, with or without sound" (p. 484). The definition of "tear," in turn, includes "in tears, weeping" (p. 1949).

If the words *were* completely synonymous, that is, entirely interchangeable, my discussion of their usage would go no further. Further discussion is necessary because much of the literature, as well as common experience, suggests differences in meanings of the words, even if the meanings are overlapping and no distinction always holds true. Before turning to the substance of the literature, I will thus articulate my understanding of the important distinctions in nuance and typical application of the words. This draws upon definitions and distinctions made in the psychological literature, definitions in the Random House Unabridged dictionary, and my own experience with using the terms. With that said, I will note that the stories gathered for this dissertation were written by participants, without instruction from me to use the terms in any particular sense.

Nevertheless, I believe consideration of the different usages of the words is helpful in understanding the stories, as many speakers often follow, perhaps unconsciously, the distinctions noted below.

"Weeping" may be defined as an emotional event, occurring when strong feelings manifest through the body. As such, weeping is the body's manifestation of significant emotions, which often, though not always, involve grief, that is, awareness of loss. Labott and Martin (1987) defined "weeping" as "an emotional response characterized by tears, vocalizations, and irregular respiration" (p. 159). Sadoff (1966) described "weeping" as "the shedding of tears from an emotional stimulus." While weeping is often associated with grief and loss, the term is broad enough to encompass the full range of strong human emotions. This is conveyed by the first dictionary entry for *weep*, "to express grief, sorrow, or any overpowering emotion by shedding tears; shed tears; cry: *to weep for joy, to weep with rage*" (p. 2155).

The term "weeping" often refers to a process that restores emotional equilibrium. This does not necessarily distinguish "weeping" from "crying," which is also often understood as cathartic (see discussion below). Loefgren (1966) defined "weeping" as "an emotional act that has the appearance of an affect discharge" (p. 375). Heilbrunn (1955) asserted, "Whenever stimili of grief, disappointment, anger, or 'overwhelming' joy exceed the tolerance of the organism, the ensuing state of tension is alleviated by a release of energy from various organ systems which abolishes the tension" (p. 245). While "weeping" may include sobbing and alterations in breathing, the word "weeping" tends to be used, more than the term "crying," when referencing a quieter process. An episode of

"weeping" may quietly bring forth into the body an emotional state that has been in the background of daily events, or has risen to the surface over time. In this usage, the act of "weeping" typically leads to a resolution of sorts, even if not a final resolution of the underlying emotions. In words which summarize this understanding, Sadoff (1966) quoted Ovid: "It is a relief to weep; grief is satisfied and carried off by tears" (p. 493).

Quoting Darwin, several researchers have asserted that "weeping," as opposed to crying, whimpering, or moaning, is uniquely human, having "been acquired since the period when man branched off from the common progenitor of the genus Homo and of the nonweeping anthropomorphic apes" (Sadoff, 1966, p. 491; see also, Collins, 1931, Darwin, 1873). "Weeping" is also typically considered a "later developed" trait in the individual's life. While some behavior in children would readily be described as "weeping," the term is typically applied to an adult emotional process. Perhaps more precisely, if the process is a mature process, the term "weeping" tends to be used. In particular, if the process has deeply spiritual connotations, the word "weep" tends to be used, at least in contrast to "cry." For instance, as discussed further below, Anderson (1996) described characteristics of "sacred weeping."

While the word "crying" undoubtedly overlaps "weeping" in many contexts, "crying" more readily includes vocalizations and responses to non-emotional stimuli. Sadoff (1966) asserted that "[i]t is seen from the study of languages and primitive thinking that crying is a general reaction that consists of two basic components–vocalization and weeping" (p. 490). "Vocalization includes calling, shouting, screaming, groaning, whining, wailing, bawling and moaning . . . " (p. 490).

The common presence of vocalization in "crying" is suggested by the first definition of "cry" in the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, "to utter inarticulate sounds, esp. of lamentation, grief or suffering, usually with tears"(p. 484). Consistent with the typical presence of a vocal element, "crying" is more readily applied to the behavior of infants and children (e.g. Petoe, 1946).

"Crying" also more readily describes a response to *just-inflicted* injury (physical or emotional), as well as to more fleeting forms of sadness, anger or other emotions. For example, if one received a physical injury or bad news, the immediate physical response may tend to be described as crying. In the same example, a deeper emotional response setting in after one realizes the long term effects or significance of the problem (i.e., an emotional reaction to the awareness of loss), would likely be described as weeping. As another example, one tends to *weep* for the human condition, but to *cry* at a movie or in response to minor pain. The human condition is more intractable, while the effects of the movie and the pain are usually expected to dissipate. Physiologically, crying includes tears and altered breathing like weeping, but may suggest behavior that is more high-pitched, louder, or more demonstrative than typically expected with "weeping." If sobbing is present, it may be expected to be more vigorous in "crying" than in "weeping," though weeping may also be strong. Just as weeping can be vigorous, crying can also be silent, as indicated by one of the dictionary definitions for "cry": "to weep; shed tears, without or without sound" (Random House, p. 484).

The terms *in tears* or *tearfulness* are often used as alternative words to describe the process of either weeping or crying. This interchangeability is reflected in the

dictionary definitions. In the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition, the definition of "weep' includes "shed tears" (1993, p. 2155). In turn, the definition of "tear" includes "in tears, weeping" (p. 1949). If the presence of "tears" is the hallmark of the events at issue, then a continuum of experience may be posited which does not turn upon usage of "crying" or "weeping." Williams and Morris (1996) noted that some research (e.g. Labott & Martin, 1988; Martin & Labott, 1991) has been conducted through use of an assumed process continuum, based upon

> what are essentially simple distinctions between *close-to-tears, tears,* and *tears plus sobbing*, albeit usually with intermediate steps so that, for example, the stage of *tears* (without sobbing) may be divided into *watery eyes* (or *tears-in-eyes*) and *flowing tears*, and so forth. (p. 480)

Williams and Morris (1996) were skeptical that episodes of crying or weeping are sufficiently alike that these distinctions capture the most essential differences. To discern these differences, the weeper's own words may be necessary, which returns us to the problem of word usage.

While both "crying" and "weeping" are understood to include tears, the words "tears" or "tearfulness" tend to be used if certain connotations of "crying" or "weeping" are to be avoided. Some writers seem more comfortable with using "tears" to describe an emotional response *not* involving grief (e.g., Braud, in press). For instance, many people may more readily speak of "wonder-tears" (Braud, in press), "tears of joy," or "tears of awe," though some people will describe "weeping with joy" or "crying with relief." Perhaps more important, the word *tears* is likely to suggest a more quiet, less demonstrative physical response, even more quiet than "weeping." People tend to say, "a

tear rolled down her cheek" or "his eyes filled up with tears." This is contrasted in particular with *to cry*, which, as noted, can suggest a sharp or vocal physical response, in the sense of *outcry*.

Turning to the substance of the literature, much work has addressed whether crying or weeping is cathartic and hence health-promoting. Though the word "crying" is typically preferred, most of this literature does not draw distinction between crying and weeping. Breuer and Freud (1895/1955) posed a model of catharsis, still influential in the field (e.g., Labott & Teleha, 1996; Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951). The catharsis model posits that crying results in reduced tension and increased adaption to circumstances. Patricia Tomasso (1992) described how the cathartic process occurs:

> [C]rying is widely viewed as cathartic, i.e., as a way in which an unpleasant inner state is discharged or expunged from the organism. In terms of the cryer's subjective experience, the cathartic model of crying goes like this: Before crying, a person feels overwrought, in a heightened state of distress. As the person cries, she has the sensation, and gives the appearance, of ridding herself of something. Afterwards, the person feels calmer, relieved; she has "gotten it all out." The unpleasant inner state has been discharged or diminished by crying behavior. (p. 10)

Consistent with the cathartic model, some researchers suggest that crying facilitates physical health, assisting recovery from various types of physical illness (Foxe, 1941). For instance, evidence has been presented that crying or weeping is associated with termination of asthma or urticaria (Alexander, 1950) and occurs more often in healthy people than in those suffering from ulcers or colitis (Crepeau, 1980). Even researchers questioning the actual effect of crying recognize that, subjectively, crying is almost universally experienced as having good effect (Borgquist, 1906). "Quiet tears" in

particular have been claimed to provide a "consoling effect . . . as comforting and soothing as the soft flow of the tears" (Heilbrun, 1954, p. 245).

Gestalt theorists have devoted considerable attention to "crying," although they do not appear to distinguish between "crying" and "weeping." Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman wrote that "crying is a regulating reaction of the organism" (Perls et al., 1951). "Even when the objective situation cannot be changed, as in loss of a loved one, the organism can restore equilibrium through the regulating reactions of crying and mourning – if only these are allowed" (Cosgrove, 1973, p. 10).

From within the gestalt model, Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) described not only the therapeutic effects of crying, but also the repression used by most people against crying. Gestalt theory holds crying as a genuine need of the body in response to loss, but believes the body's response is frequently repressed through learned social responses. "[S]ociety has admonished that 'big boys do not cry' and consequently this creates a need to refrain from crying. The human organism has unwittingly become an expert in not crying" (Cosgrove, 1973). Gestalt theory maintains that resolution must involve both sides of this conflict, occurring "when the sadness is totally released by sufficient crying and when the aggression against crying is redirected outward to those environmental forces which originally prevented crying" (p. 9).

Joseph Weiss (1952) argued that weeping may involve the release of tension, and may often respond to loss, but may actually occur, at least on occasion, as a signal that repression against grief has been lifted. Weiss wrote,

> Certain individuals cry at the happy ending of a movie rather than, as one would expect, at the sad situation that preceded it. Such people, for instance, are not moved to tears when the lovers separate, but save their tears until the time when they are happily reunited. The grief and impulse to cry are repressed until the situation no longer merits this reaction. Then, at the happy ending, there is no longer any need for the grief to be repressed. When the inhibition is lifted the energy that is used to maintain it is unnecessary, and may be discharged, causing pleasure and allowing for the expression of grief. (p. 338)

Somewhat similarly, others have understood weeping to signal change in cognitive schema and resolution of conflict, or, put another way, to indicate acceptance of a stressful event (e.g., Efran & Spangler, 1979).

Some theorists have argued that crying or weeping serves purposes other than catharsis. Drawing upon research of infant behavior, some theorists suggest that the infantile "scream of rage" discharges tension into the environment, perhaps as a means to control others (e.g., Petoe, 1946). Implicit in this conception is the understanding that crying, as child behavior, typically leads to reaction from the caregiver directed toward needs of the child. Some theorists have posited that adult crying or weeping can also have a help-seeking purpose or component, that is, to elicit social support (e.g., Cornelius, 1981). Borgquist (1906) wrote that the "cry is a physical sign, writ large, of the insufficiency of the organism and primarily an appeal for help from without" (p. 165). At least one theorist has traced this function back to animal herd life, citing the tears of the wolf as a signal to the pack that the animal is tired and needs rest or assistance (Reynolds, 1924).

Some researchers have viewed crying or weeping, at least in some instances, as regressive or pathological behavior. Although recognizing that "crying occurs under

many different mental and physical conditions," Borgquist (1906) argued that "its essential element, psychologically, proves to be a feeling of helplessness in the infant shading into a feeling of hopelessness and surrender of effort in the typical adult cry" (p. 202). He contended that crying "is essentially a breakdown of the nature of a cessation of adaption to environmental conditions" (p. 202). Though not making claims about all crying, Greenacre (1945) and Lacombe (1958) have described "pathological weeping." Loefgren (1966) explained this term as describing "situations where weeping is outside the grasp of the observer's empathy or sympathy and appears to be ego-alien or nearly so to the weeping person himself" (p. 377). Within some psychoanalytic schools, pathological weeping is understood as regressive or immature behavior (e.g., Greenacre, 1945).

Dark, McGrath and Ron (1996) have discussed both pathological crying and laughing as characterized by abnormality of proportion or stimulus. Though these researchers were primarily concerned with pathological crying or laughing as related to brain disease, it is assumed in diagnostic and therapeutic psychology that weeping can be evidence of the emotionality associated with various psychological diagnoses, such as major depression (American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manuel of Mental Disorders, 1994). For instance, Billings, Cronkite, and Moos (1983) have described weeping as a maladaptive coping strategy of depressed individuals. While it seems beyond dispute that crying may sometimes be maladaptive, even these researchers do not contend it is always unhealthy.

For present purposes, it is more useful simply to acknowledge the many different forms, causes, and meanings that have been associated with weeping, crying, and tears. Although Darwin (1873) discussed crying primarily as a physiological act, his writings distinguished between two types of crying: weeping in relation to suffering, grief and dejection; and that due to love and tender feeling. Since Darwin, numerous other theorists and researchers have discussed different forms–or associated meanings–of weeping or crying.

Alvin Borgquist (1906) authored a comprehensive discussion of crying, based upon written responses to a questionnaire, ethnological material, physiological data, and a literature review. Among other things, the questionnaire asked for description of the special acts, thoughts, experiences or scenes, and internal or external conditions that caused crying. Responses mentioned 307 occasions, which Borgquist considered to cover the range of all of the recognized emotions. Distilling these reports, he offered "three types of crying situation sufficiently marked for preliminary classification": (a) grief or sadness; (b) "a more or less deliberate, largely vocal, cry, best represented in crying of anger and less perfectly by the crying in fear and pain"; and (c) "the cry in joy, including such forms as cries of gratitude, of tender emotion, of feelings of admiration and for the sublime" (p. 152-153). Borgquist's classifications continue to be recognized by many researchers as describing the three basic emotional conditions that produce crying.

Almost every researcher and theorist studying crying offers his or her version of categories of weeping. For instance, Loefgren (1966) identified (a) frustrating encounters with persons or things; (b) bodily injury and pain; (c) object loss; (d) shame and

humiliation; (e) pity (and self-pity); (f) 'just moods,' 'happy endings,' weddings, joy, rage, etc.; (g) in the face of danger of various kinds, accompanied by a subjective experience of fear; and (h) pathological weeping (p. 377). Bindra (1972) distinguished weeping for elation, dejection, and anguish, with the latter broad enough to include sickness, fatigue, anxiety, frustration, anger, humiliation, fear, and rejection (p. 282).

Van Heukelem (1979) stated that crying may respond to any of the various losses which fit a grief model, but also to physical pain, fear, anger, or penitence. Her grief model included not only death of a beloved, but loss of material possessions (owned or expected), loss of a bodily part or function, loss of dreams or expectations, and loss of self-esteem (through shame, embarrassment, helplessness, or inability to control oneself). Williams and Morris (1996) aptly summarized as follows their review of literature describing occasions of crying or weeping:

> There is a strong resemblance between the lists produced despite differences in procedure and the amount of detail reported. Broadly speaking, the death of close friends or relatives and other events of separation, loss or disruption of personal relationships predominate in reports of crying, but there are also many episodes of tearfulness involving sympathy for friends and empathy with people seen in movies or TV. Crying also occurs for more positive-seeming events such as for happiness, weddings, religious experience and aesthetic reactions. (p. 480)

There is mild controversy in the literature over whether people "crying for joy" are in fact crying for some other reason. Although Borgquist (1906) identified "the cry in joy" as one of his three preliminary classifications, he argued that all crying, including crying for joy, involves a sense of helplessness or hopelessness. He believed tears of joy also contain "the element of hopelessness through association with other elements, and

the mind goes back to the time before it was emancipated from the strain or the, for the time, irremediable loss" (p. 165). Similarly, Flescher (1955) suggested that crying during a pleasant experience occurs because the crier is comparing the joyful moment to a previous period of personal deprivation, with the memory of deprivation causing the tears. While also viewing tears of joy as meaning something other than joy, Dorn (1967) had a different explanation. He argued that crying at "happy occasions"—for instance, a wedding—are prompted by the individual's assessment of his or her life, leading to contact, perhaps unconscious, with unfulfilled wishes.

Braud (in press) authored a particularly eloquent, and embodied, description of "tears of wonder-joy." His descriptions strongly suggest that tears of joy are experienced differently from tears of sadness. Braud defined wonder-joy tears as "not tears of pain or sadness or sorrow" but rather tears "accompanied by positive affect–by feelings of wonder, joy, gratitude, yearning, poignancy, intensity, love, and compassion" (p. 2). The physical sensations and emotions encompassing a wonder-joy experience were described as follows:

> Tears quickly fill my eyes. My skin erupts in gooseflesh, hairs standing on end. Something literally takes my breath away; I gasp, involuntarily. Chills run up and down my spine. I feel a tingling around my eyes, my head, and the back of my neck. The tone of the experience is positive. Toward the end of the experience, or afterwards, there may be some sadness. In the midst of the experience, I feel love and compassion. My heart goes out to what I am witnessing. I feel gratitude. I feel a yearning, a poignancy, an intensity. Around me, and between me and the provoking event, there is what I can only describe as a thickness, as though the air somehow has a greater density. The experience comes upon me – unexpected, spontaneous. I feel "possessed" – my body and feelings captivated and enraptured in the experience. (p. 3)

While it is always possible to argue tears of joy represent relief from misery, there is some evidence that tears of joy are different in kind. Labott and Martin (1987) developed an assessment called the Weeping Frequency Scale, a true-false, self-report measure of an individual's tendency to weep in various situations. In testing the validity of their measure, the researcher conducted a factor analysis using responses to the survey. They reported that "[t]wo factors underlie the scale, one associated with crying to sad events, one with crying to happy events" (p. 160). Although there is likely overlapping of happy and sad emotions in many different episodes of crying, as even Braud's (1999) descriptions suggest, Labbot and Martin's factor analysis suggested that weeping for grief and weeping for joy are in some sense fundamentally different events.

Perhaps due to the many variations in experiences of weeping or crying, quantitative research into weeping, crying, or tearfulness has not always been successful. Often, researchers' assumptions have not been entirely validated or conclusions are offered that do not ring true. Cosgrove (1973), who claimed to be the first to conduct experimental research into crying, devised a procedure through which participants were induced to relax, then asked to "recall a situation of the past or imagine one which is likely to make you cry" (p. 19). Deeper crying was induced by suggestions of the researcher, such as, "Your father has gone and left you alone. He will never be back. Feel yourself wanting him, needing him" (p. 20). Having already administered personality and anxiety inventories prior to the "crying procedure," Cosgrove measured respiration rate and "staircase" or staccato breathing during crying. She then gave additional assessments.

Assessing correlations between the assessments and level of staccato breathing while crying, Cosgrove posited a relationship between neuroticism and crying. From this, she argued that "crying does not appear to be the free-flowing spontaneous activity of organismic regulators, but rather, the behavior of people who inhibit their breathing and presumably inhibit directing their energy into satisfying behavior" (p. ii). Although Cosgrove's conclusions could be questioned on numerous grounds, most problematic is her failure to account for various sub-sets within heavier and light criers. While her "heavier criers" registered as more neurotic on various scales, it is possible that more neurotic criers were more in need of crying as catharsis, which does not permit the conclusion that all crying is neurotic and not a healthy regulatory mechanism. Indeed, Cosgrove's experimental procedure highlights the reasons qualitative investigation of crying is preferable to lay more groundwork for understanding different forms of crying.

Susan Labott and colleagues (Labott & Martin, 1987; Labott & Teleha, 1996) conducted a series of research projects into weeping. Consistent with the longstanding question whether weeping is cathartic, a major thrust of their research has been to examine whether weeping modulates negative mood or, speaking more broadly, is healthy. Labott and Martin (1987) investigated whether weeping (and humor-coping) moderated the relationship between negative life events and mood disturbance. Groups of undergraduate volunteers took a series of assessments measuring tendency to weep, mood, and occurrence of negative life events. Although the researchers hypothesized that high weepers would tend to more catharsis and hence less negative mood affect, "weeping in response to negative events was associated with increased rather than

decreased mood disturbance" (p. 161). When an assessment measuring coping by humor was added to the equation, the researchers discovered that humor-coping exerted a moderating effect on mood in all their sub-groups except that of high-crying males, but high degrees of weeping continued to correlate to high degrees of mood disturbance and negative life events. If applied simplistically to the catharsis question, this would suggest that weeping increases, rather than decreases, negative arousal.

More recently, Labott and Teleha (1996) asked participants to view a sad videotape, instructing one group to express, and another group to inhibit, crying. From measures of skin conductance, the researchers concluded that participants suppressing tears had greater arousal than those who wept. While this suggests weeping may be cathartic (if catharsis is equated with lower arousal), other correlations indicated that mood became more negative from before to after viewing for both suppressors and inhibitors of emotion. This militates against a conclusion that weeping decreases negative arousal. In addition, another measure suggested that stress increased in relationship to whether crying or inhibition went against the grain of the particular participant's tendencies. This would suggest that an increase in negative experience was associated with the act of suppression, which makes it difficult to assess whether weeping decreases negative experience. While intriguing, these findings paint a complex portrait, making it difficult to reach conclusions about catharsis in the experimental setting. Again, this suggests more work with the different forms of crying in different people is necessary.

While reaching conclusions about catharsis through quantitative studies may be difficult, researchers have reached interesting conclusions when attempting to

differentiate the frequency of different types of crying between the genders and national groups. Williams and Morris (1996) gave questionnaires to volunteer participants (both students and faculty) at a university in Great Britain (Sussex) and in Israel (Tel Aviv). They sought to investigate different parameters of crying (frequency, intensity, duration), self-control of crying, the social context in which crying occurs, the situations and emotional states likely to evoke crying, and sex differences. They concluded that all individuals studied (age range 20 to 42) were more likely to cry alone than with others and were least likely to cry with people they did not know well. Women cried more frequently, for longer, and with greater intensity than men. Residents of Great Britain cried more than Israelis. Most interestingly, the researchers concluded that the gender difference "was especially marked for situations involving criticism from others, anger, or problems with work, where men were particularly unlikely to cry, and least for those situations Darwin described as involving tender feelings" (p. 479). The study considered this pattern to be "related to differences documented elsewhere in which men tend to more active and confrontational styles of behavior" (p. 479).

Turning to qualitative investigations, Maryann Lee McGlenn (1990), who studied with Susan Labott, interviewed eight adults (both women and men) regarding "significant weeping events" in their lives. Following a grounded theory methodology, informed by phenomenological and sociological traditions, McGlenn sought to "develop (rather than verify) a substantive (versus formal) theory of weeping" (p. 29). Analysis of interviews led to articulation of 18 themes characteristic of all or almost all weeping events described. McGlenn's characteristics basically describe a cathartic model, as follows:

> The weeping involves a change in or loss of a significant relationship with self or other, an informant who perceives self as emotionally expressive, and a period of stressfulness and possibly earlier trauma. There is a perceptual trigger for the weeping which shatters a facade of "everydayness." The weeping itself is experienced as an altered state of consciousness, including an awareness of time, loss of control, the intensity of the weeping, and varying cognitive contents. Although the person's attention is turned inward during the weeping, a supportive or critical Other often plays an important role in facilitating or interfering with the experience. After the weeping there is a process of emotional distancing and at least partial sense of relief or finishedness. Finally, informants come to some understanding of the weeping and place a particular meaning on their tears. (p. v.)

Though more narrowly conceived than McGlenn's study, Patricia Tomasso (1992) conducted a similar qualitative investigation. Tomasso investigated "efficacious crying" (her term), defined as "a form of crying which is done willingly by persons who value its effectiveness in helping them to feel better" (p. iv). While intending to interview participants who cried in this fashion, Tomasso acknowledged that her solicitation narrowed the group even more specifically to women who "typically cry about themselves" (p. iv, 57). Though limited to this one form of crying, Tomasso's study provides a useful description of that experience. As she summarized, there is typically a period preceding the crying in which the individual feels bombarded by negative, self-referential thoughts and feelings. While crying, the person experiences acting benevolently towards herself through use of soothing thoughts, images, and behaviors. She is typically aware of herself as both the soother and the soothed. After crying, the individual feels restored and reintegrated through what Tomasso calls a combination of "adaptive regression" and "self-soothing" (p. 35, 53). Tomasso described "efficacious

crying" as "both an ego and superego function in the service of restoring emotional equilibrium" (p. 53).

Turning to the spiritual aspects of weeping, Van Heukelem (1979) reviewed Christian scripture to provide guidance to pastors, nurses, and others in therapeutic communities when supporting "those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Van Heukelem began with the observation that some in contemporary Christian communities assume that a Christian must be joyous as a display of association with Christ. She viewed this as a misunderstanding, unfortunate when it encourages "emotional dishonesty and the wearing of masks among God's people" (Van Heukelem, 1979, p. 86). With reference to both the Old and New Testaments, Van Heukelem developed several categories of weeping in Christian scripture. These included *grief* ("[c]rying at times of bereavement and loss . . ."), *penitence* ("[t]ears of sorrow over sin . . . "), *distress* (" . . . suffering or physical distress . . . "), *compassion* ("concern over impending judgment and compassion for others . . . "), *God's response to crying* (instances in the Bible in which God notices and cares about the tears of an individual) (pp. 86-87).

Although presented simply as statements of biblical authority, the categories developed by Van Heukelem suggested ways to understand the actual experience of weeping, at least in some instances, as spiritual. Examples of *grief* noted by Van Heukelem include tears in response to separation from others, such as Jesus on the cross, who have connected humanity to spirit or God. Such tears could be understood, at least in part, as expressing grief over separation from an experience of holiness–over loss of connection to spiritual source. *Penitence* is described with examples that suggest

contrition for one's own complicity in separation from spirit or for denial of the callings of God. Quoting Scott (1966), Van Heukelem notes that "tears of penitence" are "the cry of a mature Christian, of one who sees the continuing corruption of his fallen nature [and] mourns over it . . . '" (p. 87). While examples of *distress* noted by Van Heukelem are more readily understood historically than psychologically, it takes little imagination to understand the spiritual distress felt by some when realizing the "fallen" aspect of person or society. Similarly, *compassion* is easily understood as an experience beyond oneself (a transpersonal experience) which feels imbued with spirit.

Most interesting of Van Heukelem's categories is *God's response to crying*. She wrote,

> There are a number of instances when it is specifically stated that God notices and cares about the tears of an individual. When Hezekiah wept bitterly over his "mortal illness," God said, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you." He promised the people in Jerusalem, through Isaiah, to be gracious at the sound of their cry. David felt that God heard his weeping. In fact, he thought his tears were of such value to God that they might be put in a bottle, and recorded in God's book. Penitent tears were specifically commented upon in a positive way. God's compassion over the causes of weeping is ultimately seen in the act of redemption. If the Holy Spirit can be grieved, is it possible that God the father wept when His only Son died? (p. 87)

Understood psychologically, Van Heukelem's explanation suggests that weeping of a certain type is experienced as connection with, communion with, even redemption by God. More precisely, this form of weeping can involve the experience of being heard, seen or appreciated by God. Interestingly enough, penitence in particular, a state or emotion which implicates grief, is singled out as most likely to receive the appreciation of God, which, psychologically speaking, may experienced as appreciation *by* God. There is

also the suggestion that the form of tears which invoke *God's response* are somehow "of record." This suggests the experience to be one that feels different from other experiences, somehow more permanent.

Other ways to understand a form of spiritual weeping are offered by Rosemarie Anderson (1997). Anderson defined "transformative and sacred" weeping as "the 'spilling over of tears' which is intense, spontaneous and seeming involuntary, that is not caused by obvious immediate stimuli or set of conditions known to the weeper" (p. 167). She contrasted this form of tears, physiologically, from other types of crying in that "transformative weeping evidences little reddening of the eyes or contortions of the facial muscles and is accompanied by feelings of physiological and psychological well-being," noting also that "[t]o the weeper, it seems a gift" (p. 167). Anderson based her understandings on "a phenomenological content analysis of historical and contemporary writings on 'mystical tears,' in English, often in translation, *and* a phenomenological analysis of three contemporary in-depth interviews" (p. 168).

From analysis of these sources and informed with personal, heuristic methods (Moustakas, 1990), Anderson developed "nine commonly shared and non-overlapping characteristics describing spontaneous and involuntary weeping" (p. 168). These characteristics are

> 1. Relinquishing of superficial concerns and aspects of self, of "breaking through the facade."
>
> 2. A sense of the "re-integration of lost aspects of self."
>
> 3. Being in relationship with the impulse of life throughout the universe or of "touching reality" beyond one's ordinary awareness.

> 4. Holding together the seeming (sometimes bittersweet) polarities of human existence, for example, life and death, joy and despair.
>
> 5. An apprehension of "the tragic dimension of human existence" seen as universal rather than uniquely personal.
>
> 6. Changes in body awareness to include a felt sense of the integration of body, mind, and spirit.
>
> 7. Changes in visual perception, e.g., a sense of seeing things in their essence or seeing with more than the physical eyes themselves.
>
> 8. A sense of being startled, awakened, and triggered into an expanded awareness of reality.
>
> 9. Inward sense of freedom, or pure consciousness from which all activities begin. (p. 168-171).

Anderson's "transformational and sacred weeping" by definition differs from the weeping studied in this project in that it is "seemingly involuntary, that is, not caused by obvious stimuli or set of conditions known to the weeper" (p. 167). The present project, in contrast, solicited descriptions of weeping that felt responsive to nature. Nevertheless, most, if not all, of Anderson's characteristics will find reverberation in the stories gathered for this project.

At this point, Anderson's characteristic of "changed body awareness" is most notable as it supports my understanding of the present subject matter as including, at least at one level, the convergence of experiences of body and spirit. In illustration of this category, Anderson quoted from the following Christian literature:

> Tears are to the mind the border, as it were, between the bodily and the spiritual state, between the state of being subject to passions [emotions] and that of purity . . . (Isaac the Syrian, quoted in Ross, 1987a, p. 4).

> The goal of ascetic practice is the integration of the whole man and his "deification", that is, his introduction, by grace, into the life of God. The gift of tears has long been taken as an indication that this process is underway. . . . The matter of tears has a profound bearing on the unity of these levels [spiritual, cardial (all-embracing, emotive, and sensory), and somatic] as it affects man's nature, and also on the interaction of the various levels within the human person. Indeed tears–empirical no more than reflexively secreted response to a variety of stimuli–are seen as a divine gift, revealing the intrinsic link and kinship between the intellect and the body (Chryssavgis, 1985, p. 37-38). (pp. 170)

Reference to weeping experienced as the "intrinsic link and kinship between intellect and the body" points to the core of this project.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The method used in this dissertation, intuitive inquiry, has been introduced in prior chapters. In the first section of Chapter 2, intuitive inquiry, and this particular dissertation, were situated within hermeneutics, phenomenology, and transpersonal studies. This chapter discusses intuitive inquiry in more depth, then explains how this study was envisioned and accomplished. The discussion includes the manner in which participants were solicited, how I worked with participants and their stories, and my particular methods of analyzing, organizing and presenting the information contained in the results chapter.

Intuitive Inquiry

Intuitive inquiry was envisioned by my teacher and dissertation chair, Rosemarie Anderson (1998, 2000, in press). As she explained, "intuitive inquiry seeks to provide an approach to research that systematically incorporates both objective and subjective knowledge through a step-by-step interpretive process—cycles of interpretation that shape the ongoing inquiry" (2000, p. 32). A contemporary example of hermeneutics, intuitive inquiry moves through the researcher's own perspective in seeking understanding of a topic. Anderson (2000) articulated the procedure as follows:

> At the outset of the research endeavor, the intuitive researcher initially identifies her or his values and assumptions through active and connected engagement with the experience studied and then uses these values and assumptions as hermeneutical lenses to explore and analyze similar experiences in others. This is called the hermeneutical circle. Rather than bracketing the researcher's values and assumptions (as in established phenomenological approaches to research), the intuitive researcher employers her or his values and assumptions as lenses to begin the interpretive cycles of analyses. Identifying and articulating those

> interpretive lenses is an important aspect of the *forward arc* of the hermeneutical circle and requires an exacting self-inquiry into the researcher's experience and an understanding of the phenomenon studied. In what is known as the *return arc* of the hermeneutical circle, the researcher's initial hermeneutical lenses are modified, expanded, and honed through successive comparisons with the relayed experience of others. Specific themes and interpretations develop through modification, amplification, and discrimination. (p. 32)

Intuitive inquiry invites an honesty in the research process. "The hermeneutical perspective, from which intuitive inquiry originates, assumes that we are continually influencing our environments anyway and therefore interpreting our experiences regardless of how objective we may appear to be" (Anderson, 2000, p. 34). "Rather than discarding and bracketing our experience as researchers, intuitive inquiry consciously and adroitly positions the researcher and his or her experience at the core of the research endeavor" (p. 34). In contrast to other methods that seek to distance the researcher from his or her personal perspective, "intuitive inquiry openly invites the researcher to structure the research method, procedures, setting and context to maximize (rather than minimize) the very gateway through which the researcher understands or is inspired by the experience studied" (p. 34).

In addition to beginning with the researcher's personal perspective, intuitive inquiry makes explicit the spiraling process that underlies most research—a spiraling between the researcher's frame of understanding and change in that understanding through contact with review of existing literature and the experience of others (i.e., data gathered). Anderson envisioned "at least three iterative cycles (or spirals) of interpretation, the simplest version of the method approximating a full hermeneutical

analysis" (Anderson, 2000, p. 35). The first cycle, which Anderson termed the *claim of the text*, involves choice of the topic. "In intuitive inquiry, rather than choosing a focused topic in the conventional way, a researcher begins by selecting a text that repeatedly attracts or claims her or his attention and relates to his or her area of interest in a general or nonspecific way" (p. 35). Construing the concept of *text* broadly, Anderson recognized that a research topic may arise from the researcher's personal experience, "as in the case of Heuristic Research (Moustakas, 1990) which uses the researcher's unique personal experience as the impetus and focal point of what might otherwise be called a hermeneutical process" (Anderson, 2000, p. 36).

Anderson recommended methods for engaging the selected text daily and recording both objective and subjective impressions. "Thoughts, ideas, daydreams, conversations, impressions, visions, intuitions, etc., occurring during sessions (and at other times as pertinent) are recorded in a non-invasive manner . . . " (2000, p. 36). Attention is given to manifestation of intuition as "visual (inclusive of dream imagery and visual imagination), auditory (inclusive of most thoughts), proprioceptive (a felt sense), or kinesthetic (involving internal or external movements or shifts)" (p. 36, referencing Mindell [1982]). The intuitive process is carried forward gently but meticulously, with the researcher recording her or his observations as they come forward. Intuitive observations may begin to coalesce into various themes or categories, eventually finding a more rational or linguistic organization. Ongoing readings, teachings, or experiences of any kind may reflect upon and be reflected by continuing subjective experience.

In the framework of intuitive inquiry, the second cycle, termed *developing the interpretive lenses*, begins when the researcher "re-engages the research topic through a different text (or set of texts) to identify the structure and accompanying values the researcher brings to the topic" (Anderson, 2000, p. 36). The texts used at this stage might include literature discussing the topic, for instance, peer reviewed psychological literature, or published examples of relevant experiences (pp. 36-37). As Anderson noted, the "researcher's initial structure and accompanying values become the preliminary lenses of interpretation, requisite for engaging with the text of others and interpreting their understanding of the topic" (p. 36). While the preliminary lenses "will invariably be changed, refined, and amplified" as the study progresses, they form the initial subjective entry point into the topic (p. 36). This process is similar to the bracketing recommended by phenomenological researchers in that it clarifies the researcher's perspective, seeking to minimize the ways in which perspective will *unconsciously* shape research results. Anderson cautioned, "The researcher must be extremely clear about her or his preliminary lenses, so that all conscious and unconscious preconceptions are brought to light" (p. 36).

The third cycle of intuitive inquiry, which corresponds to the data-gathering stage of the dissertation process, involves *engaging the claims of others* (Anderson, 2000, p. 37). Anderson explained,

> In this phase, the researcher collects original textual data bearing on the topic. Typically, this data take the form of interviews from participants who meet specific criteria (or alternate texts which meet specific criteria). First, the researcher identifies the target population (or target texts) and creates procedures for recruiting a sample of participants (or texts) from that defined population (or textual material or corpus). Second, the researcher defines selection criteria that will retain participants who (or

> texts which) will speak directly and articulately to the research topic and that will reject participants who (or texts which) will detract from a clear understanding of the topic. Third, utilizing the hermeneutical lenses developed above, the researcher analyzes the new texts as a means for modifying, redefining, reorganizing, and expanding his or her understanding of the research topic. That final step (or penultimate step if a resonance panel is further employed) allows the circle of understanding to expand beyond the researcher's projections (in the positive sense) by spiraling in the experience of others. (Anderson, 2000, p. 37)

Several of my colleagues at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology have recently used intuitive inquiry, or aspects of intuitive inquiry, in their dissertations. Cortney Phelon (2001) researched the healing presence of the psychotherapist through intuitive inquiry, studying multi-disciplinary writings concerning presence, developing interpretations, and discussing her interpretations with advanced psychotherapists. The dissertation of Becky Coleman (1999) on *Women, Weight & Embodiment: The Experiences of Women Improving their Relationship with Body through Issues with Weight* used intuitive inquiry, while aspects of intuitive inquiry informed research conducted by Brian Heery (2000), Kelly Sue Lynch (2000), and Laura Riordan (2000).

Sympathetic Resonance, Ontogeny, and Embodied Writing

Before turning to the history of this project's iterative cycles, I will note three other recommendations of intuitive inquiry which have been important in this study. The first is *sympathetic resonance*, the principle that research findings can communicate directly, perhaps intuitively, to readers if fashioned appropriately. Anderson explained,

> If someone plucks a string on a cello on one side of a room, a string of a cello on the opposite side will begin to vibrate, too. Striking a tuning fork will vibrate another some distance away . . . The principle of sympathetic resonance introduces resonance as a validation procedure for the researcher's particular intuitive insights and syntheses. The principle

> suggests that research can function more like poetry in its capacity for immediate apprehension and recognition of an experience spoken by another . . . (Anderson, 1998, p. 73)

Anderson suggested the use of a resonance panel in some circumstances as a means of validation, a method of determining whether the researcher's conclusions ring true for others. This involves presenting research findings to a group of people and noting whether the findings are "immediately apprehended and recognized or reacted to with dissonance or neutrality (e.g., an arising yawn)" (Anderson, 1998). Use of a resonance panel may be built into a research design, typically at the later stage of the research. As Anderson noteed, ascertaining resonance or dissonance to a researcher's insight analyses within particular social subgroups has been "emphasized repeatedly by feminist researchers and epistemologists (e.g., Fonow & Cook, 1991; Nielsen, 1990; Reinharz, 1992a; Shepherd, 1993)" (Anderson, 1998). Whereas a formal resonance panel or strangers to the project was not used in this dissertation, research participants provided their reactions to my initial interpretations, employing the principle of sympathetic resonance to a degree. More generally, the notion of resonance is found within the project's goal of assisting readers in recognizing or relating to the experiences through use of writing rich in sensory and emotional detail.

A second recommendation of intuitive inquiry important in this study involves choosing research methods which approximate the ontogeny of the researcher's experience of the topic. As Anderson explained, "*[o]ntogency*, derived from Greek word *einai*, meaning 'to be,' and from *genes* meaning 'born,' signifies a course of development" (Anderson, 2000, p. 34). Anderson noted that successful methodologies

often employ the researcher's "own experiences with the phenomenon under investigation to set the context and procedures for data gathering" (Anderson, 2000, p. 34). In the present study, my experience of *grief in response to nature* was interrelated with my experience of embodiment, being able to experience the sensations, emotions, and movements of my body in relationship to surroundings. My research design has attempted to parallel this experience by asking research participants to describe concrete, embodied details in their writings. As explained below, I also asked some research participants to listen to an audiotape recorded for them individually, a guided imagery exercise designed to facilitate re-experiencing and deepening of relevant moments described by the participant.

The third recommendation of intuitive inquiry followed in this project is the most important. Anderson has described a manner of reporting research results termed *embodied writing*, a process which seeks to encourage sympathetic resonance in the reader. Anderson (in press) explained,

> Embodied writing speaks from the perspective of the body, entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world. In relaying human experience from the inside out and attuned to nuance and detail, it acknowledges human life as embedded in and of the world in which we live. Embodied writing is itself an act of embodiment, seeking to depict experience from the point of view of the lived body, *Lieb* rather than *Koerper* in Edmund Husserl's (1952) sense. In acknowledging that writing is an intentional act of communication, embodied writing invites readers to encounter narrative accounts of others' experiences for themselves and from within their own bodies. The writing is intended and its effectiveness depends on its capacity to engender a quality of sympathetic resonance between the text and the body of the readers which allows readers to more fully experience the phenomena described. The readers' perceptual and visceral senses are invited to come alive to the words and images as though the experience were their own, rather the way we might read fine

> poetry or prose. In evoking the inner and outer senses, embodied writing seeks to let the body speak. (pp. 1-2)

As Anderson (in press) detailed, her conception of embodied writing developed in part through a seminar she conducted at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology between 1996 and 2001, entitled Spirituality and the Body. It was through my own participation in the seminar (during academic years 1997-98 and 1998-99) that this dissertation arose. As Anderson recalled,

> What became very clear during the first year of the seminar was the need or desire on our part to talk about the body in a new way. Most of what we read, even when reading reports on bodily experiences, felt disembodied and heady to most of us. . . . Over the next four years, we explored alternative styles to present research findings as well as our own unique experiences, especially those which had profound impact on us. Out of this process, embodied writing developed slowly innovation by innovation, insight by insight. (pp. 2-3)

Anderson described several features which emerged as hallmarks of embodied writing. The first is "[t]rue to life, vivid depictions intended to invite sympathetic resonance in the readers or audience" (p. 3). Anderson considers intending to allow sympathetic resonance the most distinctive feature of embodied writing. In this way, reduction of the experience is avoided. Anderson explained,

> In retaining the whole and unbroken nature of the experience without any reductive or reflective analysis, embodied writing is distinguished from phenomenological (e.g., Colaizzi,1973; Giorgi, 1970; Valle, 1998; van Kaam, 1966; von Eckartsberg, 1996) and hermeneutical phenomenological (e.g., von Manen, 1990) descriptions of experience. In particular, embodied writing does not assume that there is any essential nature of the experience to be found or reported, in the sense that von Manen (1990) uses the term essential nature, referring back to Martin Heidegger (1962). There may be an essential nature to the experience, but embodied writing does not assume so. (p. 3)

Anderson continued, the "experience of one person is sufficient to itself, worthy of itself, particularly if he or she says it's so. It is real or valid enough for him or her" (p. 3). Anderson considers this a form of validity, "The writing 'rings a bell' for the reader" (p. 3).

A second hallmark of embodied writing is that it is "inclusive of internal and external data" (p. 3). This means that embodied descriptions "include both internal (imaginal, perceptual, kinesthetic, and visceral data usually known only by the experiencer) and external sources (sometimes observable to others, but not always, such as sensori-motor reactions and context) of information" (p. 3). As a form of scientific writing, embodied writing may thus be distinguished from most writing within "positivistic science, and specifically of behaviorism," which assumes validity only in that which may be described by an outside observer (p. 3). Indeed, the third aspect of embodied writing identified by Anderson involves the way in which it is fundamentally interpretive or hermeneutical, that is, "written specifically from the inside out" (p. 4). Anderson explained that embodied writing "drops the external witnessing perspective customary for conventional, 'objective' science," allowing the body to speak "for itself through the vehicle of words" (p. 4). Because no objective, external world is necessarily posited, what can be known is creative, possibly ever-changing.

Fourth, Anderson noted that embodied writing is "richly concrete and specific, descriptive of all sensory modalities, and often slowed down to capture nuance" (p. 4). Embodied writing often includes "synaesthetic descriptions, that is, [writing] inclusive of more than one of the five conventional senses" (p. 4). Fifth, embodied writing is "attuned

to the living body," meaning it is "situated in an animate world within and without" (p. 4; see also Merleau-Ponty [1964]). Sixth, it contains "narratives embedded in experience, often first-person narratives" (p. 4). "Embodied writing is based on personal experience even if a writer or researcher is summarizing the collective experience of many. If the writer is speaking of his or her own experience, the first person is used for referential accuracy" (p. 4). Seventh, "[p]oetic images, literary style, and cadence serve embodied descriptions and not the other way around. Embodied writing values vivid accounts of lived experience over literary artfulness" (p. 4).

Anderson noted that embodied writing draws upon and manifests the individuality of the writer. She explained,

> Writers gain voice, particular voice. Far from making everyone sound alike by employing a particular style of writing, embodied writing seems to bring forth the particular or unique qualities of the writer. There may be "as many styles as there are embodied authors," as David Michael Levin put it in a letter to me (May 22, 1998). (p. 3)

In this sense, embodied writing assists discovery of the sort of personal truth which is capable of becoming universal through resonance. As previously noted, Anderson (1998) has observed that "speaking our personal truths—however unique and passionate that may feel—transcends our sense of separatedness and brings us suddenly, even joyfully together—at least for an instant" (p. 75).

While new to the discipline of psychology, analogous principles have always been recognized in the field of creative writing. When discussing sympathetic resonance generally, Anderson (2000, in press) suggested that the methods of intuitive inquiry may approach the borders of understanding that seem more like poetry than empirical science

within the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Teachers of poetry and fiction have long urged their students to use concrete and sensory detail to bring readers into the experience of the story, that is, to create resonance. For instance, in their introduction to *The Short Story*, Stone, Packer and Hoopes (1976) noted that a successful story "requires the reader's utmost attention, a focusing of the mind on each detail . . . depend[ing] on concreteness, on sensual impression . . . " (p. 5). The same authors recommended *showing* the reader what is meant to be conveyed through specific, concrete detail and example, rather than *telling* the reader *about* an experience. Another teacher of writing, Josip Novakovich (1995) argued the particular importance of *showing* the internal experience of characters. He advised, "Dramatize, show, demonstrate strong feelings; *mentioning* strong feelings only cheapens them" (p. 179).

Anderson's suggestion that validity within psychology may come through sympathetic resonance is supported by the observation of writers of fiction. Creative writers have long established "validity" of their work through resonance between reader and text. Validity in this sense involves not only identification with the text but the reader's acceptance that the text conveys some measure of human truth. In his *Fiction Writer's Workshop*, Novakovich (1995) advised the writer to use concrete, sensory description as the means to establish this form of validity:

> Description should be a basic skill, your way of showing and seeing. You need vivid detail, not only to give life to your story, but to supply proofs. The more outlandish your plot, the more you must ground it in realistic detail to provide verisimilitude, similarity to truth. Gabriel Garcia Marquez claims that in a journalistic article one false piece of information is enough to invalidate the article, and in a piece of fiction one striking and true detail may be enough to lend credibility to the entire story. In *A Very*

> *Old Man With Enormous Wings*, he describes an angel who lands on a beach. Why should we accept his fantasy? Because the details bring the celestial down to earth:
>
> > There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth . . . His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked, were forever tangled in the mud.
>
> And later:
>
> > He was lying down in the corner drying his open wings in the sunlight among the fruit peels and breakfast leftovers that the early risers had thrown him . . . The back side of his wings was strewn with parasites.
>
> How can we doubt parasites on his wings? The realistic description makes the fantasy acceptable, gives it credence. (p. 177)

Establishing validity through embodied writing seems particularly important for psychologists studying transpersonal or exceptional human experiences. Charles Tart (1986), among others, has described the difficulty many people have in accepting, much less experiencing, that which is beyond the confines of "consensus reality," which he defines as the set of experiences deemed normal in mainstream culture. The acceptance of the reality of transpersonal experience may well depend upon conveying the experience through embodied writing. If sufficient sensory and emotional detail about transpersonal experience is given, and such detail is grounded in the shared experience of human embodiment, validation through resonance may result. Analytical discussion of meditation experience, for instance, may make valuable contribution to the transpersonal field, but may leave many readers unmoved and unconvinced. On the other hand, embodied descriptions of experience, which strike sufficient sensory and emotional chords with individuals otherwise foreign to the experience, may foster deeper

awakenings to the subject matter. For as Novakovich suggested, an angel becomes credible through concrete detail.

Cycle One: The Claim of the Text

Consistent with intuitive inquiry, this project arose not from an intellectual decision that an area of the psychological literature could be expanded in a particular direction with a particular study, but from an experience which had a claim upon me. This dissertation contains numerous references to my own experiences in the topic field, which have all been very important in shaping the present contour and direction of my life. One experience in particular has loomed large in my conception of this dissertation, probably because I wrote about it for Rosemarie Anderson's Seminar on Spirituality and the Body (Anderson, in press). Because I wrote about the experience and shared my writing, I spent much time thinking about that particular occurrence. The experience then became a focal point for my conception of the project, as well as for discussions about my topic in the Spirituality and the Body seminar and in later studies with Anderson. This particular experience is included within the composite story in Chapter Four. For purposes of this present discussion, it suffices to describe the experience as one of deep felt connection with rain during meditation, which caused me to realize there were ways of experiencing connection with the physical world previously unknown to me. I wept very strongly during the experience and felt a range of emotions, including a great sense of longing. I was comfortable then, and remain comfortable, with use of the word grief to describe some of the emotions, but grief was not the whole story.

There were several reasons this experience had sufficient claim on me to become a dissertation topic. Perhaps most important, the experience spread very thoroughly into my entire life. As described in some depth in the composite story, I was drawn to nature and often felt deep longing in response to nature. Tears and mild weeping became relatively common in response to a sense of connection with nature, at least initially. The more I sought contact with nature, the deeper and more compelling the experiences seemed to become. At the same time, I found the effort to understand and study the experiences in an intellectual sense intriguing. Most compelling was my intuitive sense that I did not understand these experiences fully and that better understanding would be important. Put most simply, I wanted to know more about the various components of the experiences and the reasons they were occurring in my life. I was interested in them intellectually and at the same time they had a very profound claim on my body.

Looking back, I can identify five aspects of the experiences which most interested me. First, following these experiences seemed very necessary for my personal growth and health. As I began this project in earnest, I had just turned 40 years old and was in the process of considering what I wanted for the second half of my life. These experiences seemed central to that process. As it turned out, the transformational energy behind these experiences, and thus behind this dissertation, contributed to the move of my family from suburban San Jose, California, to a home near Helena, Montana. That move has transformed my life in many ways, which contributes to the understandings offered in this study. This process is described in the composite description.

Second, as I first delved into experiences of grief in response to nature, I realized my own experiences involved a jumble of related emotions, yearnings, causes, and meanings. Both the weeping and grief seemed over-determined, as though they had several sources and meanings all at once. While I had various notions about what produced these experiences and what they meant, major aspects remained obscure and undifferentiated. Some aspects of the experiences seemed ineffable in the sense that language or rational understanding could not fully capture or describe the essence of the experience. But other aspects seemed simply not yet understood. Differentiation and understanding, to the extent possible, seemed both important and interesting.

Third, while these experiences were personal, they also seemed global. I don't mean global in the sense that everyone has them, or could have them, or should have them, but global in the sense that these experiences seemed to implicate the ways in which Western civilization, and perhaps all human civilization, seemed to be moving. At the time this all started, my family was living in what could be one of the most urban-suburbanized locations on earth. San Jose is part of Silicon Valley, the hub of humanity's latest quantum technological leap, computerization. While I did not work in the computer industry, I was surrounded by the local by-products of its success: ever-increasing concrete, traffic, noise, hurry, and greed. There were parks and swatches of nature, not to mention the glorious California weather, but escaping the confines of Silicon Valley was not easy and could take hours, time which few of us had. Tears and a bursting heart when I looked at a flower obviously had something to do with hurtling along in a way of life that suppressed the experience of nature. While my reaction to the urban/suburban sprawl

was my own, and probably extreme, Silicon Valley may well offer a glimpse into where many communities are headed, not only in the United States, but also in many other countries. If my experience of grief in response to nature was in part a reaction to this trend, then investigation of these experiences might be relevant to our times.

Fourth, while these experiences had their socio-economic-political angle, they were primarily my own personal, cherished exceptional human experiences. As touched upon previously, Rhea White (1994, 1998) defines exceptional human experiences (EHEs) as anomalous experiences which "seem to catalyze a process that eventually can lead to the realization of the person's higher human potential" (White, 1998, p. 129). These experiences carried a transcendent and mystical sense for me: Though they were built of physical sensations, I felt drawn into a sphere beyond the physical world which seemed to possess infinite compassion, knowledge, and potential for healing. While grief was a component in these experiences, they were extraordinarily energizing and full of excitement, bliss, and awe. The experiences were spiritual in the sense that I felt in contact with something beyond the material world. They were also transpersonal (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993) in the sense that I experienced myself as coexistant with the world around me. These aspects of the experiences provided the strong energy fueling my need to both "go with" and understand the experiences.

Fifth, the experiences, while spiritual, were experiences of the body. Weeping, grief, and the deep emotional reactions I was having to nature were experiences of my viscera, not merely of my thought process. Through my studies in transpersonal psychology, including both experiential and analytical work, I was already convinced that

the body played, or at least could play, an enormous role in psychological healing and spiritual experience, and particularly in spiritual experience that involved psychological healing. In my own psychological-spiritual work, it was my body which brought me forward and taught me. Intellectual understandings could be significant, but understandings which were felt or resonant in my body seemed to represent more *real* knowledge (see Anderson, in press).

Moreover, studying experiences of grief in response to nature seemed to fall within the growing attention to "the body" within psychology and within transpersonal psychology in particular. This seemed to further the important goal of healing the conceptual and experiential "split" between body, mind, and spirit in Western culture. It also seemed capable of offering insights useful in the development of a more functional spiritual and religious basis in the west. Because of my concern for these times, a concern heightened with the events of September 11, 2001, the spiritual-religious angle of the topic struck me as profound.

Cycle Two: Developing the Interpretive Lenses

I have to confess that this entire project, for me, has involved coming to understand what it means to develop interpretive lenses. Even now an understanding of what this means is still finding its way into my body. Initially, I mistakenly considered the development of interpretive lenses as two things: a first-stab at analysis of the topic, that is, a sort of prediction of what would be confirmed by the gathering of data; and a disclosure of perspective and bias in the sense of bracketing in phenomenological research (e.g., Moustakas, 1994). It was not that I had not heard Anderson's explanation

of the process, or that the explanation was in any way lacking, but it was difficult for me to act upon an understanding that subjective research was permissible as a discipline. At the proposal stage, prior to soliciting contributions, I drafted "interpretive lenses" that set out my understandings at the time. The lenses were intended as articulated understandings, ways to look at and find meaning or coherence within the topic.

These initial lenses were in two categories: substantive (relating to understanding grief in response to nature) and procedural (relating to the development of my method). The procedural lenses were intended to set out ways in which I was beginning to understand the method I wished to use in studying the topic, that is, to articulate specific ways in which I thought it would be useful to study the experience of grief in response to nature, to get at the information I was seeking to understand. The substantive lenses related to my incipient understanding of the topic itself. The initial lenses were as follows:

Substantive

1. The experience of grief in response to nature occurs with (is produced by) an experience of sensory connection with a specific, concrete, manifestation of nature (e.g., rain, a tree, a deer).
2. The experience of grief in response to nature is an experience of the body, meaning an experience that begins with physical sensations (such as sensations in the torso and heart area that I would call sensations of loss or longing) and/or physical manifestations (such as weeping).

3. The experience of grief in response to nature involves (produces) heightened connection with one's own physicality, perhaps described as an increased sense of being in one's body.

4. The experience involves feeling, in a way that feels "through" the tangible body, a part of an inter-related web of nature, of belonging to or being nature.

5. At the same time, the experience entails (produces) a cognitive awareness of loss of ongoing sensory connection with the natural world.

6. The experience involves a feeling of relief, as though something suppressed had come to the surface.

7. The experience involves a feeling of release from physiological tension. a feeling common to cathartic weeping.

8. The experience involves a feeling of return or homecoming to a previously lost manner of experiencing the world and/or one's physicality.

9. What had been lost—the physical sense of connection with, or being, nature—feels good and is desired as a more permanent way of experiencing the world.

10. What had been lost—the physical sense of connection with, or being, nature—feels as though it belongs to the individual, as a birthright.

11. The experience involves sensations or feelings of reverence, love, awe, comfort, and being held that are associated with spiritual or religious experience.

12. While the experience begins with physical sensations, and involves a heightened sense of one's physicality, the experience produces insight, that is, new cognitive meaning or understanding regarding one's life in relationship (or lack of relationship) with natural surroundings.

13. Insight into the possibility of life in relationship with nature carries the sense of remembering.

14. When joined with the sensory and emotional experience of grief in response to nature, cognitive understandings of the experience feels restorative of connection between mind, body, and spirit.

15. Cognitive understanding of the experience (e.g., awareness of loss of the feelings of connection, insights into one's past life absent connection or the possibility of increased connection in future life) feels a part of the experience and causes continuation or deepening of the experience of grief in response to nature.

16. With reflection, the experience is capable of producing shifts in understandings of one's place and/or role on earth.

17. With reflection, the experience is capable of producing an ordered sense of relationship to what is beyond oneself (and what is most meaningful through one's own body and through nature, which point toward what might be called an earth-based theology).

18. Among some people, the experience of grief in response to nature compels changes in life circumstances, possibility including manner of being in the world, activities, and physical location of residence.

19. Among some people, the experience produces change in political views regarding the responsibility for people in relationship with nature.

20. Among some people the experience may produce what feels like a deconstruction of previously held understandings, habits, and ways of being.

21. Examination of the experience of grief in response to nature may shed insight into the relationship of sensations, emotions, and thought in the process of human change and psycho-spiritual transformation.

Procedural

1. The experience of grief in response to nature may be understood through resonance with the experience and/or through cognitive interpretations of aspects, components, or meanings of the experience.

2. Understanding of the experience of grief in response to nature is furthered by focusing upon the sensory and emotional (body-based) aspects of the experience.

3. Communication of the experience of grief in response to nature through resonance is furthered by describing the sensory and emotional (body-based) aspects of the experience, that is, through embodied descriptions.

4. Retention of the individual and personal details of descriptions, including the individual voice through which descriptions are given, encourages resonance with and understanding of the experience.

5. Meditation or quiet personal reflection upon the experience serves to enhance understanding of the experience by those having the experience, and may lead to continuation or deepening of the experience.

6. Writing about the experience—particularly in an embodied fashion—serves to enhance understanding of, and/or continuation of, the experience.

While I may not have well understood the process of drafting interpretive lenses, the second phase of intuitive inquiry describes very well an important part in the history of this research. In essence, I struggled to find and frame the personal perspective or perspectives through which I would undertake the study. My process involved not only sifting through my own understandings in relation to the topic, but also reading and writing. The work of David Abram (1996) and David Michael Levin (1988) were particularly important in suggesting a general framework for understanding the experiences. In turn, all of my personal history and my studies, intellectual and experiential, in transpersonal psychology were background to how I understood the works of Abram and Levin. Struggling to write about my "rain" experience, and to put it in the context of scholarship, developed my most general frame of reference for the project.

Researching the literature and writing a first draft of the literature review was a critical part of this stage of the research. Each new idea I encountered in the

literature—particularly the literature concerning grief and weeping, with which I was not initially very familiar—altered or contributed to my initial frames of reference. Reading more about hermeneutics and phenomenology contributed to my understanding of understanding, a process which was sometimes overwhelming in the way it caused the ground of what I was doing to seem amorphous. Drafting the introduction to the proposal and the literature review was entwined with the development of initial understandings. Probably more than other people, I frequently need to reduce something to writing before I can move from general sense or intuitive sense to analytical understandings.

From my present perspective, a more accurate description of my initial interpretive lenses is probably set forth in the several reasons I have noted above for my interest in the topic. These correspond in a loose sense to the areas covered in the literature review, as well as those covered in the Discussion Chapter.

Generally speaking, I understood the experiences under investigation as transformative, complex or over-determined, with social-political ramifications, and as exceptional human experiences capable of fostering health as well as spiritual transformation. I also understood them as offering a glimpse into the ways in which bodily experience is or can be spiritual experience. As I read more and more hermeneutics, I was also simultaneously understanding my understanding as a product of my transpersonal education, and coming to understand my education as taking place within, and produced by, various social realities in turn-of-the-century America. The most salient piece of this social reality, as manifested in me, was the experience of feeling separate from nature and from any possibility of experiencing myself as nature or part of

a natural eco-system. In retrospect, these were the primary ways I was understanding the topic as I moved into the stage of gathering data.

Cycle Three: Engaging the Claim of Others

The Decision to Seek Written Descriptions

The third cycle of intuitive inquiry began with my solicitation of written descriptions of experience. Early on in the project, I decided to ask participants to write descriptions of their own experience, rather than to conduct interviews. I made this decision for several reasons. First, I am interested in creative writing. I like stories. One of my favorite books in the transpersonal/spiritual field is *Being Bodies: Buddhist Women on the Paradox of Embodiment*, a collection of stories edited by Lenore Friedman and Susan Moon (1997). Second, I believed that if people wrote about their own experience, the writing would more likely seem embodied (Anderson, in press). I hoped that writings authored by participants would likely include details of sensation and emotion that come to mind when one actually writes down an experience and that individual writings would hold the participant's own personal voice.

While I knew that writing is more difficult for some than others, and that some people find it easier to convey truth speaking orally, I also knew that the process of writing is a private process, which takes place at one's own pace, and to which one can return again and again as thoughts and memories arise. I thought this might produce deeper stories. I also believed I might find participants who had already written about relevant experiences (e.g., journal entries) and would share those writings with me. My assumption was that such writings would probably have been made at or near the time of

the experience, making it more likely the writings would convey how it felt to have the experience. As it turned out, several writings gathered for this project were begun as journal entries.

I believed from personal experience that the act of writing, particularly about transpersonal or exceptional experiences, had a certain magic and potentiating energy of its own. This has been recognized by others in the fields of psychology and transformation studies. Ira Progoff (1975) developed the *intensive journal* process for assisting psycho-spiritual growth. Through working extensively with people writing about their own lives, Progoff came to believe journaling reveals the connective threads beneath the surface of our lives, "carrying the meaning that has been trying to establish itself in our existence" (p. 11). Progoff found writing particularly important in the development of transpersonal or exceptional experiences:

> Many persons have already had experiences in which they have sensed the presence of an underlying reality in life, a reality which they have recognized as a personal source of meaning and strength. It may have come to them in a brief, spontaneous moment of spiritual exultation, or it may have come as a flash of awareness in the midst of darkness and pain. They came very close then to the deep, unifying contact, but it slipped away from them because they had no means of holding it and sustaining the relationship. Some could not break through because of their inherited overlay of religious doctrines or other intellectual concepts . . . [but journaling provides] an instrument and technique by which persons can discover within themselves the resources they did not know they possessed. (p. 10)

Rhea White (1989, 1994, 1997) recognized the potentiating effect that often results from narrating one's exceptional human experiences. Like many writers in the transpersonal field (e.g., Levin, 1988; Tart, 1986), White believes Western society tends

to socialize out of our lives an awareness of "our oneness with all things," a transpersonal state White calls the *All-Self* (White, 1997, p. 89). She proposed "that exceptional human experiences . . . provide the insight and dynamic to move humans from a lesser to a more consciously evolved state that expands human awareness of the nature of life" (p. 89). Like Progoff, White believes the socializing process of mainstream Western culture makes it difficult for most people to reap the full benefit of exceptional experiences. "If, however, when we have an EHE we treasure the memory of it above all things and try to foster it, make space for it in our lives, make as many efforts as it takes to finally be enlightened by it, and especially, to share it with others, it will become our ally in dispelling dissociation from the All-Self" (p. 90).

In accordance with White's observations, I believed that if participants began writing about their experiences for my project, the experiences themselves might deepen, which could be of value to the participants as well to the project. This seemed particularly important in a project focusing upon experiences of the body. In discussing embodied writing with Rosemarie Anderson, I eventually put this intuition into words, noting my belief that the discipline of embodied writing tends to put the writer in touch with the creativity of the body, which is the creativity of life itself. I believe embodied writing holds the potential to magnify the contents or results of research. It is not simply that embodied writing allows a more effective communication of results that would have existed anyway. Rather, the use of this form of writing has everything to do with what is learned and understood. As in intuitive inquiry generally, the form of research aligns with

the product of research. Particularly regarding transpersonal topics, the research and the experience tend to converge.

A third reason for using writings by participants was that I thought preservation of individual voices would yield the sort of pluralistic mosaic (James, 1912/1996) that may most effectively convey a human experience. Consistent with Anderson's (in press) observations noted above, I believed there was a relationship between personal voice, embodied writing, and resonance in a reader. If participants wrote their own stories in their own words, I believed it more likely that readers would be moved by the description.

Finally, there was a large practical element in my seeking written descriptions. By the time I was able to begin gathering data, I was living in Montana and working full time. Seeking written descriptions made it easier for me to gather participants from a larger geographical radius and to accomplish the work at a manageable pace.

Data-Gathering

When I discussed my dissertation proposal with my dissertation committee members, we shared concern over how best to describe the experience under study when soliciting participants. We discussed definitions of grief and whether, or to what extent, my study actually centered on grief. *Grief* had become the shorthand word by which I thought about the experience, and I believed the experience of loss was important, but I agreed that many people may have experienced something I wanted to study but might not identify their experience as involving grief or loss. We discussed whether to include weeping. I wanted to mention weeping when soliciting participants because I believed that many people having the experiences I wanted to study weep or shed tears during the

experience. Further, I knew that weeping is a concrete, identifiable physical act, the concreteness of which might connect people more readily to my inquiry.

To begin the process of soliciting participants, I drafted a flyer and a letter that I intended would also serve as a consent form (Appendix A). The initial solicitations–in both the flyer and letter–were phrased to seek descriptions of grief, loss, or weeping in response to nature. The first flyer (Appendix B) had the heading, "Have you ever felt really connected with some aspect of nature (a tree, a deer, the rain) and suddenly found yourself weeping, or otherwise feeling grief or loss welling up in your body?" The initial letter had similar phrasing, but explained in more detail the type of descriptions I was seeking. This included a description of embodied writing and several questions I hoped to be answered in any contribution (see Appendix A).

Even prior to my solicitation process, several people had indicated an interest in participating. From personal discussions with me, or by word of mouth from people who had spoken with me, these people understood, more or less, the subject matter of my dissertation. I sent my letter/consent form to several such people. Five of the 40 participants were located through this initial process. Of those, I knew three personally for a few years or more (Dana, Grace, and Rosie Kuhn). I knew Rhea White from Internet communications relating to shared interests. I met Ruth Davis through Rhea White. In addition to communicating with these people, I sent a version of the letter to several authors in related fields and to individuals whose names had been given to me by others as potential participants. Encouragement was received from several people, but no additional participants were found through those leads.

I posted flyers locally on kiosks and bulletin boards where I thought they might be seen by people who might know what I was seeking (e.g., the local organic foods store, the walking mall). I mailed flyers to several friends in California and on the East Coast, asking them to post the flyers in similar places. Because I hoped to have diversity of participants in terms of race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, I included in this group friends who were African-American, Hispanic, gay, and lesbian. I explained to these friends that I hoped to achieve some diversity and asked that they post flyers in places that might be frequented by members of those communities.

Unfortunately, I only received one response from all the posted flyers. This was from a Native American woman living in Helena. This contact led to an interesting acquaintance with this woman and her family, including participation in a truth circle and pipe smoking ceremony, but not to a contribution to the dissertation. In general, I have reached the following conclusions about the lack of response to my flyers: The subject matter was too unusual to generate response through flyers; my explanation was not sufficiently engaging; and the writing task seemingly too time-consuming to lead to engagement by people reading a flyer.

The majority of participants for the project (32 of 40) were found through Internet networking with members of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS). The fact that Internet communications *made* this dissertation is somewhat ironic in that the dissertation is full of my complaints about the ways in which Americans are often sucked into technology. My peace with this irony comes through the observation of David Abram (1996) that the problem is not so much technology, but rests in losing "distance from our

technologies, [in having] no way of assessing their limitations, no way to keep ourselves from turning into them" (p. ix). In something of a reversal of Abram's point, my own respect and love for the Internet often grounds me in reality and prevents me from losing myself into my complaints about contemporary American life. As my ability to gather contributions from around the country, even around the world, illustrates, there are astounding benefits to the advancements in technology.

I turned to the Internet for soliciting participants when I realized I was not receiving sufficient responses through letters and flyers. I recalled that a friend at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Dana Gaynor, had advised me a few years ago as follows, "when you look for participants, try Noetic Sciences." As it turned out, that one piece of advice is responsible for much of the depth and breadth of the contributions to this project. Although I had been familiar with IONS for several years, when I remembered Dana's advice, I learned more about the organization through its Internet site, where IONS describes itself as "at the forefront of research and education in consciousness and human potential" (see, http://www.noetic.org/ions/about/index.asp). I learned that IONS sponsors "learning communities" throughout the United States and Canada and, to a lesser degree, in Europe and South America. Using email addresses published on the IONS website, I spent one Sunday afternoon emailing leaders for approximately 50 learning communities across the United States and in several other nations. I sent a short paragraph introducing myself and describing my project, essentially an abbreviated version of the description in the original letter (Appendix B).

This led to a response almost overwhelming in its generosity and level of interest. I spent many winter evenings preparing packages of flyers and/or letters for use by community leaders in their group meetings. I spent many more winter evenings and weekends responding to email inquiries from IONS members or friends or relatives of IONS members. Some people asked for further explanation. Many others responded with a description of one or more personal experiences, inviting me to use that experience or asking if the experience fit my project.

Some descriptions of experience were not appropriate for inclusion in the project. I thanked these authors and indicated reasons for not including the story in the project. The most common reason for not including a description was that it was not an embodied description of experience, but a sharing of the author's views or thoughts on issues related to my topic. In some few cases, a description was excluded because it seemed predominantly a literary or imaginary endeavor, not likely to carry the verisimilitude of deeply understood experience. As Anderson (in press) notes, literary style may support embodied descriptions of lived experience, but does not in and of itself make embodied writing. If the writing does not ring true in an experiential, lived sense, it is not embodied writing for purposes of psychology.

Approximately 90 percent of the contributions fell within the range of experiences I wanted to study. As had been predicted in my proposal meeting, some of these experiences were not well described through the phrase "grief, loss, or weeping in response to nature." Some experiences involved neither grief, loss, nor weeping. Some experiences involved weeping, but not weeping for reasons of grief or loss. In several

cases, the substance of the communication from a potential participant was to the effect of, "I don't think my experience involved grief or loss, but I think it may be what you are talking about." In almost all of these situations, as I came to understand the experience offered, I found the experience relevant. Indeed, these experiences were often most helpful in clarifying my understanding of what I was really trying to study. Thus, I created a new shorthand description of the experiences under study: *grief, weeping, or other deep emotions in response to nature.*

Because people continued to ask for flyers and/or letters, I revised these to reflect the broader description (Appendix C). Hoping revised flyers might be more successful, I posted these again in the same kinds of places and asked others to do the same. At this stage, my wife gave flyers to people, mostly women, she knows in the Helena area. Two additional non-IONS participants were found among my wife's acquaintances in Helena.

With all participants, our communications from the beginning were personal in that I responded to particular questions and descriptions sent to me. My communications were consistent, however, in describing what I sought. I emphasized embodied descriptions (Anderson, in press), rich in sensory detail, telling the story of the body and emotions as well as the mind. I asked people to convey how it felt to be them during the experiences. I also asked, usually through email, though sometimes through letter, for answers to the following questions:

> 1. What exactly happened? What sensual, emotional, or body-level aspects of the experience capture its essence, especially so as to evoke resonance in a reader. Also, what were you thinking?

2. What was the context of the experience? Was there something that seemed to trigger the experience? Where and when did it occur? What else was going on in your life?

3. What meanings do you give to the experience?

4. How has it impacted your life? What place does it have in your life?

In most cases, the descriptions that became part of my research data were prepared through some level of dialogue between me and the participant. This was true for both IONS and non-IONS participants. Typically, the participant forwarded a description of an experience and I responded with specific questions designed to clarify the description, render it more embodied, or address one or more of the questions noted above. In most cases, there were two rounds of communications before the description seemed complete. In some instances, the initial description did seem complete and I did not ask for supplementation.

Even when I did ask for supplementation, the supplemental response received by participants usually did not completely answer all of my questions about the experience. Usually, I did not make further requests of the participant. This was for a combination of reasons. To begin with, I intuited there was a limit to the number of times I could ask research volunteers to revise or expand upon their writings. (This could be considered a downside of using descriptions from participants: In an interview format, a greater number of follow-up questions may be comfortable before the inquiry seems burdensome.) Perhaps more important, I realized that the individual voice of the participant might best be expressed by allowing the participant to tell as much or as little as felt necessary to respond to my basic inquiry. This means that the contributions are not

consistent in the extent to which they answer all or even most of the questions I posed for the project. While that may be considered a detriment, I believe the descriptions benefit in that they do not, for the most part, read as forced answers to questions, but feel more like stories being told by people having experience.

Given how the process developed, I realized early on that this project would not produce a set of equivalent descriptions of experience. I have admired many qualitative research projects, often those using phenomenological methods of analysis, for the way in which a series of portraits are presented, with all portraits being for the most part consistent in subjects and level of coverage (see, e.g., Snyder, 1989). This dissertation was not destined to be such a project. My justification is that I have tried to produce a mosaic (James, 1912/1996), through which readers can sense the range of experiences under study and the relationships of the various experiences to each other. In this sense, the project can draw analogy to the often-cited story of the many descriptions of an elephant provided by blindfolded people who touched different parts of the animal. Some of my participants may have offered the equivalent of a long flexible trunk, others a stocky leg, others a wet eyelash. The stories do not cover the animal in its entirety, and certainly don't do so with equivalence, but, together, they suggest enough properties of the elephant to convey understanding.

During the dialogue process, I realized that I needed to include a broader range of experiences than I had originally anticipated. As I first conceived this project, I believed that I wanted to distinguish, that is exclude, experiences which are primarily what I am calling *ecological grief* in the completed dissertation. In my mind, there was a difference

between grieving for the plight of the environment and feeling more *personal* grief as the result of deep connection with the environment. I also believed that I wanted to focus primarily on feelings of loss, although I had definitely not committed myself to excluding weeping not identified as involving grief or loss. As I began to read the stories, I realized that many of them resonated deeply with my own initial experience although they did not fit the parameters of what I initially thought I was seeking, as amorphous as that may have been. I learned that some experiences which were at the edge of what I initially envisioned, or even outside the boundaries of my initial conception, were among the most useful in contributing to understanding what I was investigating. From such stories I began to see relationships among a broader range of experiences and these relationships seemed necessary for more complete understanding of the topic.

When I first envisioned the project, I intended to ask some participants to be involved in a second phase of participation, which would require listening to a guided imagery exercise I would prepare. I envisioned the exercise as a means to encourage the participant to deepen her or his own embodied understanding of the experience being described. As I first conceived of this process, I thought I would prepare a single audiotape that would encourage relaxation, suggest deepening of the experience of sensation and emotions, and then ask for further reflection on experiences from an embodied perspective. The project did include a version of this second phase, but it did not unfold exactly as I initially imagined.

During the dialogue process, I offered to send a guided imagery exercise to 9 of the 40 participants. The offer arose in the context of personal communications about the

description sent to me. The Phase 2 offer to approximately one-forth of the participants was in the ballpark of what I had envisioned. When envisioning how to decide whom to ask to participate in Phase 2, I thought I would offer a tape to those people who seemed interested and likely to deepen their experience. Those factors turned out to be very important. The primary reason I did not press many individuals to listen to a guided imagery exercise was my sense that the experience had already been conveyed at an appropriate level of understanding and embodiment, along with an intuition that the individual did not have time or further interest.

Eight people volunteered to receive an audiotape. When I sat down to record the tape, I realized that I wanted to record something personal for each Phase 2 participant. This was because I felt the need to be talking to a single, real individual and because I wanted to ask questions tailored to the particular contribution. I spent much of 2 weekend days writing and recording meditations, followed by several more hours on other occasions.

Each guided imagery exercise followed a general format—beginning with a personal greeting from me to the participant, thanking him or her for participating in my project, and taking the time to listen to the meditation. The guided imagery exercises themselves drew upon a hypnotherapy induction shared by Josie Hadley (1990) in a course she taught at the Palo Alto School of Hypnotherapy. Hadley's induction was altered to focus more extensively and particularly on sensations and emotions. I tried to direct the participant's attention to what Gendlin (1981, 1996) would call a felt-sense. After the induction phase, I asked the participant to focus on one or more of the specific

aspects of the experience she or he had described. I posed questions that I hoped might allow a different, expanded, or deepened understanding of the experience. A sample transcript is attached as Appendix D, but it should be noted that each meditation was unique and followed my intuition (ad lib) in the moment of its making.

Five of the participants receiving guided meditation responded with messages offering additional insights, more complete descriptions, or just the story of what happened during and after the meditation. I considered these to be part of the descriptions of experience offered by the participant. In most cases, these additional materials were incorporated into the contributions appearing in Chapter 4.

The contributions from two participants were received in ways slightly different from the process described above. Laura Huber contacted me by email in response to IONS networking. She indicated that she had recently had experiences she believed were relevant to my dissertation, but the experiences were ongoing and too raw for her to describe in writing. I emailed back, indicating we could wait until the experiences had settled down. I waited approximately 2 weeks, then re-contacted Laura, asking if she were still interested in contributing. She was, but asked if we could talk on the phone.

I had spoken on the phone with approximately 3 participants previously, at their request, to explain the dissertation and what I was seeking. While I had avoided using phone conversations to develop contributions, when I spoke with Laura, it quickly became apparent that she was highly articulate, had valuable experience to contribute, and was, in essence, dictating her story to me. My computer was already on, so I held the phone against my ear and typed as Laura spoke. Sometimes I asked questions, essentially

the questions I would have mailed Laura had she first sent me a written description. What poured out was a stream of Laura's consciousness that records her experience in her words. Later, I edited that stream of consciousness to conform to accepted principles of style and grammar. I sent that text to Laura and she approved it.

The second contribution following an unusual course comes from Ana Ines-Avruj, an Argentine. In response to the email I sent to the IONS community leader in Argentina, I received an inquiry whether I would accept a contribution in Spanish. After responding in the affirmative, I received a lengthy email document in Spanish. I understand very little Spanish, but could discern enough to be intrigued. Through a friend in California, I hired a translator, Vicki Capestany, who produced a beautifully written translation.

During the dialogue process, informed consent was obtained from participants (see Appendix A). Part of the consent process involved my request that participants choose a pseudonym or indicate a preference to use their real name. Most participants elected to use their real names, though several preferred pseudonyms as a means to preserve their privacy. I offered the choice of being identified in this dissertation primarily because the dissertation publishes writings of participants. While I could have insisted on the use of pseudonyms as a condition of accepting contributions, I wanted the writers to have the option of having their work attributed to them. At the same time, I recognized that many people may not want to have their experience published as part of a dissertation if they are personally identified. In retrospect, I have been concerned that allowing a choice between real names and pseudonyms could have been experienced as subtle pressure to use one's real name, or that consent to use a real name may have been

given but later regretted. I have not received any indication from participants to this effect, but note the concern in the event others undertake similar dissertation procedures.

Including myself, the group whose stories are included in Chapter 4 consists of 30 women and 11 men. We live in 17 of the United States (California, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin) and 4 other countries (Argentina, Canada, England, and Switzerland). Although I did not require participants to state their age, their stories and biographical information indicate a range in ages from early 20s into retirement years, although most of us would probably be considered middle-aged.

Working With the Stories

Intuitive inquiry envisions the study of *texts* gathered from others as a means to deepen a researcher's understandings of a topic. All of the descriptions of experience received from participants have contributed to the understandings I offer in this project. Those understandings are presented as interpretive lenses articulated in Chapter 4 and throughout the discussion chapter. Intuitive inquiry also encourages the presentation of research findings in ways that encourage sympathetic resonance, which includes the use of embodied writing. In this dissertation, the stories told by participants are presented as research findings—as a series of windows, standing on their own, into the range of experiences under study. Thus, my work with the contributions from participants was two-fold: first, to organize and present the stories in ways I hope will assist understanding of the topic through reading of the stories; and second, to create interpretive lenses

through my own study of the stories. Consistent with the suggestion of Rhea White (personal communication, August 18, 2001), I consider the first aspect of this work to assist *experiential* understandings of the topic, while the second aspect offers more *analytical* understandings.

My work with stories began the moment I read them. Almost immediately, every story moved me greatly. Many brought tears, even on repeated readings. I tried to notice and record my reactions to the stories. As each new participant became part of the project, I established a folder into which I put all communications between me and that participant, including emails, letters, descriptions of experience, consent, and my own notes to myself about my thoughts and feelings. While I was dialoguing with participants as noted above, I was also working with each participant's written story as a communication to be shared with others. In that regard, I was always considering, at least in part, how the story would read and what part it would play in the whole that I hoped to present.

When the dialoguing process seemed to reach its conclusion, I began to work more intentionally with the stories as a body of work to be offered to readers. Because I had chosen not to save any story in electronic form, my first task was to retype the stories into my computer. I had not saved an electronic version of stories in part because I wanted the experience of typing the stories myself. Typing something, for me, tends to get it more into my body. As I set out to type each story, I reviewed the entire contents of the participant's folder. In most cases, I had an initial description of experience followed by written answers to my questions or follow-up descriptions based on a meditation or

simply further reflection. As I typed each of the stories, I placed myself in the role of editor. While seeking to retain the language and, more important, the voice of the individual participant, I blended the various writings received from each participant into what seemed a cohesive whole. I also wrote notes in bold beneath each typed story, containing my initial thoughts about themes, meanings, and important characteristics of the individual story.

In most cases, I edited the texts somewhat to eliminate redundancy and/or to make changes in word order, grammar, or punctuation that I believed would improve the flow of the writing. In some cases, I decided not to include in the dissertation portions of the writing that did not focus on the essence of the experience under study. My goal was to make the writing more accessible to readers and to establish some basic consistency in style and English usage, while retaining the voice and actual words of the writer. My work with Laura Huber's experience was essentially the same, though I filled in more linguistic blanks with my own words of connection and took more liberties with organization. In Laura's case, and in the case of some other stories, I emailed or mailed the edited version immediately to the author for comment and approval.

My next task involved organization. Because I had read all contributions several times, I knew intuitively that several major themes or aspects of experience were represented. I knew that some experiences would seem entirely different than others, but I firmly believed that if presented as a range of experience the stories would coalesce into a related whole, the mosaic I was seeking. I took a sheet of paper and jotted down preliminary section headings. Then I began sifting through the contributions and

considering them under certain headings. Some contributions were simple to categorize in this fashion; others were more difficult. As I realized that some stories did not fit within any of my initial categories, I invented new categories.

Later, in reflecting upon this process, I wondered if I had not embarked on a reductive process of thematic content analysis or organization, veering from intuitive inquiry's purpose to interpret through the experience of the researcher. That is a tough question for me, but what I have come to believe is that my process of understanding required, at this stage, that I order and organize the stories in accordance with theme or aspect represented. Without that step, I am not sure my understandings or interpretations would have followed.

As the categories developed, I realized that many, if not most, stories fit into more than one category. It also seemed that many stories represented a slice of the individual's experience and that some individuals probably had experienced things in the other categories, or would experience those things, but had just not focused on them at this stage. Although I knew there was something slightly false about categorizing the experiences, I believed this was an appropriate way to offer understandings of the whole—primarily, to facilitate a cohesive and sensible read of the whole. As noted in the introduction to Chapter 4, the categories are not meant as a definition of the experience, but as an organizational means to facilitate understanding.

It is interesting to note that this initial process of thinking about the stories through categorization happened in a sort of rush. I was alone in a log house we had bought along with my father, where he would later live, just up the road from where I live

with my family. It was still cold outside, and I had a fire going. I did not realize I was going to do that work on that day, but once I started looking through the printed stories, it all seemed to flow. The process was analytical, but also very intuitive. I did not consciously reduce each story to essential components and then find themes and categories. Rather, I let the whole mix sift through me and then wrote out headings, scratched some of them out, made up others, and just did it. The whole process of organization seemed to flow easily on its own. This is not to say that the process took only an instant. Rather, it took most of a Saturday and was followed by some rethinking the next day. But once this organizational task was ready to happen, it seemed to just happen.

After I had decided upon categories, I used the cut-and-paste function of my computer program to place the actual writings under the headings. At this point, I gave thought to the order of presenting the various sub-topics (the categories) and to organizing each of the writings within the categories. My instincts told me to begin with the experiences which were closer to what I am calling ecological grief (bodily-felt concern about the environment and humanity's place in the environment) and to move toward experiences which seemed toward the mystical end of the continuum. Within each sub-topic, I tended to put stories which contained elements of another category toward the end of the section closest to the other category. More generally, I arranged the stories in the fashion I thought would make for an interesting and smooth read.

Once this process was completed, I had what I considered a rough beginning of my results chapter. After the interval of a few weeks, on another weekend, I read through

all the stories again, rethinking my organization, and correcting typographical or editorial mistakes in the process. As I did this, I began the process of drafting what I thought, at that time, were "interpretive lenses" appropriate to each sub-topic. At that point, each story was still followed in my draft by my initial thoughts, typed in bold, about themes, meanings and important characteristics. As I read through the draft chapter this time, I realized I wanted to delete these initial thoughts. I read them quickly, but I deleted them. I knew I had a hard copy if I wanted to look at them later, but I needed to have these initial thoughts eliminated.

With those initial reactions deleted, I began a new process of writing down, in handwriting on looseleaf paper, my thoughts about each of the stories in a section. I did not conduct a formal content analysis of the stories, but as I read through them once again, I wrote down what seemed most important to understand about those stories. Because I had the whole of the stories more in my head at that point than previously, many of these observations were made about one group as contrasted to another. It was not that I was trying to distinguish the stories for some final purpose, but that considering the stories in relationship to one another seemed to allow my understanding of what seemed most important regarding each group. I wrote down draft "lenses," thought about them and made revisions, then spiraled through that process again and again for most of an afternoon.

During this process, I ended up moving around a few stories between topical headings and within particular sub-topics. I also created two new categories—the final category of *return* and the category headed *feelings of insignificance, fear, or aloneness.*

Initially, each of these categories contained only one story. I created these single-story categories because, when I came to understand each category *also* in terms of analytically-oriented "lenses," I realized these stories, if highlighted from a certain angle, could be used to illustrate an aspect of the range of experiences that was slightly different from other aspects and seemed very important. Later, I added a second story to each category. One came from a participant who joined the project late, the other from one of the first contributions I had received, which I had set aside as not describing a grief process. Later, when I was reviewing all received material to make sure I had closure with all participants, I realized that this story, though not describing grief, helped illustrate what I was trying to convey through the *feelings of insignificance, fear, or aloneness* section.

Following the draft of "interpretive lenses" in handwriting, I typed these into the results chapter, placing them initially at the end of the section to which they related. The act of typing always leads me to renewed consideration and some alteration of understanding. After this process, in one sitting in an afternoon, followed by some few additions the next morning, I wrote a personal composite description of experience, perhaps better phrased a creative synthesis. I wrote this as my own personal experience. In fact, everything in that composite is absolutely true about my own experience, though the details of some events are slightly fictionalized and some things are out of actual chronological order. Writing the composite description was possible because I had sorted through—and categorized—the stories. That process enabled me to understand relationships and, most important, to understand all of the stories as part of

transpersonally-oriented continuum of healing (also known as *psycho-spiritual development*), which I also considered very "spiritual."

When I first envisioned the project, I did not have in mind writing a composite description of any kind. But in the process of working with the stories, I realized how much of my own life experience fit together in regard to each of the categories, even those aspects I did not initially consider when envisioning this topic. I was able to understand in new and profound ways many of the aspects of my initial experience that previously seemed murky or difficult to piece together. I decided to pull together these understandings in narrative form with a personal composite story. The draft of this story was a subjective and intuitive endeavor, but informed by my analysis of the stories. It allowed me to pull together what I personally felt to be the essence of all the contributions in a lived sense.

During the process, I was writing from my heart and from my experience, but I was also considering the categories of stories, and the relationships I believed I had come to understand. In other words, while it is my story, it was also intended to illustrate the range of experiences under study. As with almost all matters in intuitive inquiry, the personal composite story has undergone several revisions since it was originally written. Even very recently, after working on a near-to-final draft of the dissertation, I had new realizations, which I wanted to incorporate into the story. It also seemed necessary to have some reference to the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, and the response of the United States to the attack.

During the process of making initial revisions to the draft results chapter, I realized that I wanted to include a brief introduction to each participant containing basic biographical data. I thought this would provide context to the stories, increasing the ways in which they come across as lived experience of real people. In some cases, my communications with participants led to me having sufficient biographical data to write short biographies. When I could, I drafted something. I also emailed or wrote to participants to ask them to draft a brief biographical statement. I received something in return from most participants, although some chose to proceed with only a very brief introduction. In the case of people who wanted to use pseudonyms and protect privacy, biographical information was made general only.

After I completed the brief biographies and the composite story, I had a draft results chapter. The day after I finished the composite story, I was leaving for vacation in Canada with my family. I rushed to copy the chapter and mailed it to English-speaking participants for whom I had postal addresses. I included a letter inviting comments on the chapter, including my draft "interpretive lenses," and specifically requested that they review their own story and forward any changes or corrections. I explained that their reactions to the chapter would become part of the dissertation and could provide validity to my conclusions (see Anderson, 1998, 2000, on validity through statements of resonance).

Twenty-seven participants responded to the chapter at least in some respect. Many of the responses included minor corrections to stories or biographical introductions. When I incorporated these into my draft, I took the opportunity to reconsider the

interpretive lenses once again. Some changes were made. At that point, I also drafted general introductions to each sub-section. This was in response to Rhea White's suggestion that I move the "interpretive lenses" *behind* the stories themselves, but introduce each section in a way that guides the reader's attention. I tried not to make these introductions repetitious of the "lenses," though some repetition exists. The purpose of the introductions is to facilitate reading rather than to analyze, though analysis is of course present.

Detailed comments were received from three people. These included suggestions for rethinking some "lenses." Based on these suggestions, I made fairly substantial revisions to the "lenses" for the sections titled "longing for deep sensory connection or harmony with nature" and "feelings of insignificance, fear, or aloneness." As I redrafted the results chapter (another part of the iterative cycles), I made some changes to the "lenses" for all sections, but the changes for sections other than the two just mentioned were relatively minor. Following the comment from one participant that almost all stories involve healing, I considered reorganization that would make that fact more apparent, but upon reflection decided to keep my initial categories. But as will be noted in the Discussion Chapter, I have come to understand all the stories as involving what I consider to be healing (also known as psycho-spiritual growth).

Aside from the suggestions for rethinking noted above, which have been incorporated into the final product, all of the comments received from participants were "validating" of the project and its conclusions. While this may have had more to do with the generosity of spirit of the participants (or their lack of time to respond in more critical

ways), I believe the comments do support the analysis offered in the interpretive lenses. A sampling is as follows: "I am deeply moved by most if not all the contributions and I find your interpretive lenses very insightful and interesting." "I think your synopsis is quite accurate. I agree with your findings and really couldn't add a better description." "What I would say to you about my part is that it seemed right on target." "Healing section right on. Words used made sense." "Interpretive lenses are great, cannot add anything else at this point." "I like the way you have categorized it with the interpretive lenses. The one for healing sounds good to me. A few years ago I went to a Unitarian church service and was chatting with a psychiatrist after the service. He told me he had started taking groups of his patients out camping for weekends away from the city. He said it was more beneficial than hours and hours of talking in his office."

Other participants did not address the interpretations, but reacted positively to the stories as findings. Three people wrote, "The stories are so validating and I like your presentation of them." "It's more enjoyable reading from 'every-day' people who haven't had any specific psychology training, and have written more from the gut or heart than people who have been more exposed to these things or educated in this area." "I was so moved . . . I read the entire thing . . . crying most of the time. It is the most profound testimony to 'our relationship' with Nature that I have ever read. I feel so happy to hear similar stories, over and over again. And also I learned so much from everyone's insights, including yours. You really have a masterpiece on your hands. . . . And I must admit, when I first heard about your study, I thought to myself . . . how can one possibly analyze the relationship that humans have with Nature? Must it not be felt? After coming from an

academic background myself, dissertations usually left me feeling nothing . . . cold hard facts, analytical discussions. . . . But I am glad to report . . . your dissertation is the first that made me FEEL something. The real treasure in your study is the collection of voices speaking from first hand experience . . . more a part of a family of kindred spirits. . . . I believe there are a lot more souls out there needing that validation."

Drafting the Discussion Chapter

I began drafting Chapter 5, the Discussion section, after completing the above work. As it turned out, writing that chapter finally led me to my most full interpretation of the stories *through my own understandings*, which had all along been the object of intuitive inquiry and hermeneutics. The organization of the Discussion Chapter, in many respects, parallels the organization of the Literature Review and the several lenses through which I have always approached this topic. Particularly after discussing my initial draft with my dissertation chair, Rosemarie Anderson, I came to believe that the true interpretive lenses offered by this dissertation are embedded in that chapter. At that point, I realized that many statements I had written as "interpretive lenses" when working with the stories were more in the form of content analysis, more appropriate for other research approaches. More important, after re-reading the Discussion Chapter, I came to believe that the observations contained in these post-data-gathering draft "interpretive lenses" were all contained within the Discussion Chapter, but stated more fully and within the context of my own life and understandings. Thus, in revision, the "lenses" drafted while working with the stories have been omitted. In replacement, the Discussion Chapter

contains summaries of my interpretations and understandings highlighted as such, but must be considered, in its entirety, my series of hermeneutical understandings.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter contains the contributions from participants and a composite story. The contributions from participants are grouped into eight sections: ecological grief; healing; feelings of insignificance, fear, or aloneness; sustenance; longing for deep sensory connection or harmony with nature; experience of God through deep sensory connection with nature; awareness of brokenness or loss of source; and return. While I have organized the stories in this fashion in order to assist entry into the topic, the stories are overlapping and, in most cases, could be placed within several different sections. The groupings are not meant to define individual stories. I would prefer that after an initial reading of the stories, each story be considered a unique viewpoint which, taken together with all the other viewpoints, blends into a full experience of the entire dissertation topic. Even in the initial reading, I would invite you to form your own view—your own hermeneutical stance—toward the stories.

Each of the sections begins with a short introduction suggesting themes to notice and relationships to consider. While the intuitive inquiry methodology does not require such thematic analysis, I believe that in this particular dissertation, the groupings and introductions assist an experiential reading of the stories. There is also a brief description of each participant as an introduction to each story. These descriptions were created relatively late in the project, after I realized that even a small amount of information about the writers would provide context to frame their experience.

Following the contributions from participants is a composite description of the experience under study. Essentially, this is a slightly fictionalized version of my own

story around the topic, as understood following this research. The composite story is not intended as the distillation of an essential experience of grief in response to nature (e.g., Moustakas, 1994), but continues this project's attempt to offer an experiential understanding of the topic. It demonstrates how, at least in my particular life, the range of experiences under study blend together into one process of growth that I consider healing, transformative, transpersonal, and spiritual.

The Stories

Ecological Grief

The first group of stories contain descriptions of grief triggered by awareness of humanity's lack of respect for nature. I will call this ecological grief. Through studying the stories, and considering the topic, I have come to understand "ecological grief" as a healing, transformative process. I believe these stories describe experiences that are part of the same continuum of human experience shown in later stories, but I begin here, as these stories seem to involve, at least in part, grief *about* nature. As will be seen, though, the grief is much more complex and is felt as personally as other forms of nature-related grief described in this project.

Ralph Litwin

Born in 1950, Ralph Litwin grew up in New Jersey and, after high school, spent 8 years attending college and bumming around the country as a carpenter and street musician. He received a Bachelors of Fine Arts from Rhode Island School of Design in (energy efficient) architecture, followed by a law degree from Rutgers–Newark. He's now in New Jersey with a wife, an 18 year-old son headed for jazz studies, a 14 year-old

daughter, and over 18 years in the custom cabinet business. Ralph is the producer and host of an award-winning regional cable television series featuring a wide variety of entertainers and still a performing musician. Samples of his music are available through Amazon.com.

> In the 60s and early 70s, I took psychedelics a few times and tripped in the great outdoors, engendering a very strong feeling of love for Life Force expressed through nature, which I still feel to this day, especially when outdoors. I was very active in the safe energy movement in the mid to late 70s, and worked with Public Interest Research Group in the early 80s while I was in law school. I was and still am well-informed about many irresponsible acts of insensitive profit-motivated exploitation of the environment, and have studied more benign alternatives.
>
> During the early 80s, I made a regular practice of running about an hour a day around a local golf course in the green rolling hills of northwestern New Jersey. Around that time, I had been reading some particularly alarming reports of environmental devastation. One gorgeous, sunny, blue sky day, I was running across the golf course, surrounded by lush green trees waving hypnotically in the breeze. Halfway down an open fairway, the grief hit me suddenly. From out of nowhere I was overwhelmed instantly by strong emotions and wept profusely in sorrow. I wept as a I ran, not only for the environmental and animal devastation, but also for humanity's immense spiritual vacuum, ignorance and stupidity, which allows the devastation to occur. I kept running as I began feeling more and more released from the repressed sorrow by the huge sobs, tears streaming down my face.
>
> A related experience some years later: I had been performing the song *Mother Earth* by Memphis Slim as part of Earth Day activities and other concerts. It contains the refrain, "I don't care how great you are. I don't care what you're worth. When it all comes down, you got to go back to Mother Earth." When I sang the song I was investing the line with a great deal of negative emotion: hatred for all those hard-hearted bastards, the captains of industry, financiers, politicians, and so forth, who justify ecological destruction with self-aggrandizing rationalizations.
>
> Not sensing any relationship between this activity and the tight feelings in my neck and shoulders, I made an appointment for a massage. I hadn't had a massage in quite a long time. When Mary-Rose started to

work on me, I began to cry just a little at first. She asked why I was crying and it came into my mind that all those negative emotions were caught in me, and served no practical purpose. During that massage I had a good hard cry and let go of a lot of that anger. I resolved not to involve myself any further in that kind of negative energy. And now I get massages regularly.

After reading a draft of this chapter, Ralph noted,

I have felt sorrow, despairing, and powerless about my ability to help change occur quickly for betterment of the environment, including a range of strong emotions as well as less intense experiences. As I have become convinced that I create my own emotions, I have chosen more productive feelings and thoughts more consistently.

Rosie Kuhn

Rosie Kuhn just completed her Ph.D. in transpersonal psychology, writing her dissertation, Sailing as a Transformational Experience. She lives in California, where she works with groups, offers spiritual guidance and coaching, and teaches sailing on the San Francisco Bay.

As a sailor and student of transpersonal psychology I am conscious of, and deeply connected with, the natural environment. I cannot help but experience layers of despair and disbelief, dismay and depression, as I reflect upon the striations and variations of cloudless sky with industrial pollution and car emissions. Smog is everywhere.

My heart is often overwhelmed with grief for what the human population has done to our home, our Mother Earth. At times I despair more than others, but I am in a state of despair a great deal of my life due to my sense of responsibility and my own influence in the situation. I feel guilt and shame, humiliation, embarrassment for the lack of conscious action on my part and that of Western "civilization."

A number of years ago, during a retreat at Pajaro Dunes, south of Santa Cruz, California, I felt an overwhelming need to pay the ocean an intentional visit. My heart needed to make an act of contrition in order to express my true feelings for how we as a species continue to devastate the planet.

I felt silly and embarrassed for creating a conversation with the Ocean. I was afraid someone would see me or hear me cry. And, simultaneously I was compelled to be fully present in this confession.

I sobbed and asked forgiveness. The sobbing was bigger than I could hold. It was a request for mercy. Prostrating myself before the illimitable creator, I asked for forgiveness and assistance to reverse the present trend of world destruction.

I was overwhelmed with my sense of inadequacy to change myself or this world to make a difference in healing the planet. This quest came from my soul, from an integral part of my body. My ego struggled with the emotional exposition. It was irrational, trivial, childish behavior to cry and talk with the Ocean, as if she were my mother, as if she would forgive me and compassionately comfort me, even care that I abandoned my ego to be in this moment.

The ocean waves rolled in unmoved by my outpouring. I watched them come in, the eternal rhythm, the eternal motion, undaunted, unmoved by one human's insignificant cry of despair.

The crying began again. I wondered, am I being heard? Is there significance to this existence I am presently embodying. A profound sense of insignificance again enfolded me. The grains of sand I sat upon reminded me that any one of us sentient and non-sentient beings is insignificant, but the collective provides a foundation of substance. This one individual grain of sand is needed in order to form this beach.

I watched the ocean, waiting for the next wave of emotion to move through me. I watched my anger rise as the dauntless sea remained unmoved by my outreaching. I laughed at my arrogance, that I would get a personal response, perhaps like a visitation from the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Ocean was no more likely to acknowledge and console me for my expression of remorse than the man in the moon. Purging my regrets, my mistakes, my grief and guilt would not move the mountains under the sea.

I was moved to consciously express with clarity my own human response to the devastation of the Earth. An act of contrition is only that: "Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee. . ."

I wanted some response, some acknowledgment that I made a difference if for only an instant. I could only sit with my humility, my humiliation, my humanity. That's all there was to do.

Roseann

Roseann grew up in Ohio, married John Seryak in 1973, and together they raised six children. Several years ago, amidst personal spiritual and psychological transformation, Roseann became interested in dance. In 1996, she received a bachelors degree from Kent State in dance performance. She now lives in Wadsworth, Ohio, and teaches dance. A recent convert to Reform Judaism, Roseann is dedicated to the principle of Tikkun Olam, which means "repair the world."

> I have always been deeply touched by nature. It is only in the past few years that I have experienced waves of grief. As my connection with the Earth increases, I feel more physical pain. Sometimes I have urges to find a cave. It seems I want to escape and be protected from invisible vibrations.
>
> Cancun, Mexico. December 1998. It is my 25th wedding anniversary. My husband I have traveled to Cancun to celebrate this marital milestone. I am excited with the opportunity to experience Cancun.
>
> The people are friendly, the air invigorating. Just walking on the beach renews my tired soul. I feel the warmth of the sun as it kisses my skin. As I face the ocean, I feel a pulse. It is strange, somewhat mysterious. It creates discomfort. I fidget. The pulse seems to be coming from the ocean. I am not sure I like it. I push the feeling into a memory box. A twinge of sadness engulfs me. I don't understand. I only remember. Sadness. I push it away, I am on vacation.
>
> We make our plans. The hotel is wonderful. The ocean breeze moves smoothly through the open hallways. I hear a whisper, faint, of something. I stop. I listen. I hear. I feel sad.
>
> Tourist trips seem the easiest way to spend our time here. We sign up for a trip to Tulum. I am eager to view the ruins with my own eyes.
>
> Our tour bus is quite comfortable. The guide is informative. We arrive and enter the park. Once past the souvenir stand it happens. Sadness, again. I feel funny, sort of nauseous, as I do upon entering a funeral home. The guide is speaking but I am not listening to him. I seem

to hear another voice in the background. Where is it? Who is it coming from? What are they saying?

"Pay attention to the guide," I tell myself. It is hot. I move on. Others don't seem to notice what I do. I feel as though I am in a dream.

The tour finally comes to an end. We are given an hour to wander around by ourselves before returning to the bus. I don't know where to go first. I am looking for something, but what? Suddenly, I see a high point. I run up to this point. The view of the ocean is quite stunning. I look and I feel my heart cry out to the ocean. "What happened here?" I hear an answer, like an echo, "Tu sabes." Tu sabes? What does that mean? "You know, you know." I cry. What do I know? I cry.

December, 2000. Grand Bahama Island. John and I are taking a few days rest from the winter blues of Ohio and enjoying the warmth of the Bahamas. Shortly after checking into the hotel we decide to tour the island. We rent a car. The road seems to carry an uneasy stillness, like something from the Twilight Zone. Tree after tree of something not quite right. I cannot put my finger on it, but it is not pleasant. I smell death and I don't know why.

We find a restaurant at the end of the island. The beach front is deserted. I have never seen so much empty beach. But it isn't really empty. It is cluttered with trash. Broken bottles, tires, oil cans, plastic containers, pop cans, and shoes cover this beach, like a bad case of acne. No people around, only their trash.

I start to ache all over. Why? Why is this happening? My grief begins to swell in my body. I look out to the ocean. I pray . . . why? An answer comes back, "Save me. I am dying." I must be crazy, overly sentimental. I walk, feeling downtrodden, beaten. "My beach is so dirty." I start to gather the trash. John watches as I make my little pile. "Clean it up. Clean it up." I do my best. It is not enough.

I leave a note in a bottle right in the middle of the trash pile. Will someone read it? I write notes on stones. Will they be read? Not sure.

"Clean me. Love me. Protect me." It is the ocean that speaks. "Tu sabes . . . you know . . . what to do."

Back to Ohio, return to work. Ocean songs still with me. I shall dance it. Extinction is its title. Cello music with waves in the background.

Slow, heavy, emptying, full stage to empty stage. Ocean Song. I write a poem.

The ocean dies a lonely death
Who will sing her song?

Not I said the fisherman who
Emptied her of her fish

Not I said the oil crew who
Spilled their toxin

Not I said the vacationer who
Took no heed to protect

Not I said the Navy who
Bombarded her with their noise

Who then will sing her song?
Who will tell the world she is dying?

A small child, looking for shells,
Hears grandmother ocean's cries.

She sees grandmother ocean's life
Trickling out, being poisoned from within.

Unable to save her, she watches in silence.
She takes it all in. She listens to the words
Of the song.

– Roseann

I am that child. I hear grandmother ocean crying. Is she taking her last breaths? I don't know. I only weep, and feel the poison from within. As she dies, it seems that I too am dying. My body is wracked from pain. My joints are stiff and my muscles tight. Doctors cannot find a reason. All medical tests come back normal.

Home in Ohio I walk out to the yard. "Please stop," she says. "Stop the noise, stop your fighting, stop your building, stop pouring concrete on my skin. I can't breathe." It is Mother Earth this time speaking to me. My body aches. I sit down. I too have trouble breathing. Asthma. I understand her and I cry. "I am sorry my mother. I don't know how to stop it. Forgive

me. Forgive us." I sit quietly for awhile and I thank her for my life. "Thank you, Mother Earth. I am here."

After reading the draft results chapter, Roseann responded by describing a recent experience:

> A group of ladies, mostly strangers to each other, gathered at a house which has a labyrinth in the back yard. We gathered to pray for the healing of the crisis that has recently attacked our country [referring to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001]. The labyrinth is simply a grass path. We walked the path during the evening hours in pouring rain. My body sometimes cries to be exposed to the elements full force. For example, I have urges to lie in snow, roll in mud, submerge myself under a waterfall. I usually restrain these urges. But last night I allowed the pouring rain to fall on my head uncovered. I walked this path of grass and what has happened is a new surge of energy and connection. With that comes grief and sorrow, yet I am not overwhelmed. I feel like I am sighing, groaning, with Mother Earth. I share this with you as an afterthought to your dissertation. We who feel the pain must pay attention to the solution. It is there as well. We come equipped to handle the problem. We must use our skills well to find solutions. I just needed to share that.

Terry Taylor

Terry Taylor is a retired emergency room nurse. She lives in the mountains of North Carolina with her husband, three dogs, four pot bellied pigs, and two mallard ducks. Terry belongs to a Unitarian Fellowship and to the Institute of Noetic Science (IONS). She emailed me immediately after receiving information from her IONS community leader about my project.

> I don't believe this! I was sitting in the woods today with my friends . . . the trees, and other animals and plants, and cried over the paint can in the stream. I ache from head to toe at the repercussions of acid rain, noise pollution, litter bugs, and my little piece of earth that is in harm's way. I feel so connected with nature that I often merge with it. You know what I mean?

I do transcendental meditation. I think it helps me realize we are all one . . . we are all in god and god is in us, god being divine energy, highest awareness, cosmic consciousness, or whatever you like to call it. The greeting, *Namaste*, means the place in me honors the place in you where we are one. I say that to everything in nature. No words but I commune and connect in the silence.

When I was about 10 years old, I was sitting by a stream and watching a friend of mine, an adult banded water snake. I knew all the snakes and their favorite sitting rocks. A boy in the neighborhood sneaked up on us and, with a huge limb, smashed the snake. I had projected myself on the rock and felt as though I had been sitting beside the snake, or was him somehow, and the blow made my almost faint. I felt very nauseated, in a type of physical shock. I was more than just upset he had been killed. I felt as though I couldn't breathe.

In the woods I have a knowing that a tree is in trouble and I will look around and there will be a huge limb leaning, crushing, a smaller tree or weighing down its branches, and I will remove it and I feel the appreciation of the tree. I bend down all the time after a rain and move earthworms that are trapped on the pavement, close to drying out, and I put them back in the grass, and I know of their gratitude. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, BECAUSE THEY ARE YOU, we are all spiritually one.

Raymond Voet

Raymond Voet, 70, describes himself as a retired "dishwasher" (he worked in metallurgical chemistry for thirty years), a "listener" (he acquired a degree in psychology), and a "troublemaker" (he wants people to think and that is usually trouble). Ray's work in psychology focuses on gifted adults and children, the development of consciousness, and the biochemical and biophysical aspects of deviation from the "cultural norm." Ray lives in the Twin Cities of Minnesota.

I am the son of a Kansas farmer. My father cared about the soil and worked to improve it by appropriate fertilizing, crop rotation, terracing fields, and building dams in gullies and other appropriate places. I learned from my father, and also from my mother. She had just an 8th grade

education, but spent her life learning, observing, and teaching about our communion with Mother Earth.

I have driven to Kansas, through Minnesota, Iowa, and Nebraska, and observed the farms and environment along the way. I have cried during drought years when I saw that the grass in the highway ditches had been harvested for livestock feed. It hurts me to see the land in pain, a pain that I am aware of. There is loss of topsoil from erosion. In Iowa and Wisconsin, where the ground water has been contaminated with excess nitrogen, i.e., nitrates, deep wells are needed. People have become separated from the land, the soil. We get our food from the Co-op or the grocery store and we are not aware of sources. There is a great movement towards "organic foods" by people who worry about contaminates and health, but who do not know anything about agriculture and the biosphere. The soils are depleted, Cu, Zn, Mg, Mn, Co, and so on, and we think because something looks good or bad, it is healthy.

People are ignorant of our connection to the land and believe what is promulgated by "authorities" who often have hidden agendas, mostly financial or fear mongering. Perhaps I am wrong, but I fear, and I cry.

Emily Squires

Emily Squires lives primarily in New York City, but has a home in the country where she and her husband spend long periods of time. She is an Emmy Award-winning writer and director of Sesame Street. *Emily has always felt very connected with Nature. As a child, she spent many summer hours in the woods near her family's house in Virginia. Emily and her husband have recently written a book called,* Spiritual Places In and Around New York City.

I do have many experiences of crying with nature as you put it. It is often of a global nature when I see what we are doing to our planet. But I think you might be interested in a very personal sadness I feel every Christmas.

At Christmastime in New York, as everywhere else, millions of evergreen trees are shipped into the city. We see huge open trucks with trees smashed down on top of one another and lashed to the sides with

ropes. Outside every deli and 24-hour store, stands are erected where the trees are laid out for sale. People actually sleep in their cars and trucks so they can tend their wares 24 hours a day.

When I walk past these tree stands, I can almost hear a high-pitched scree emanating from the group of near-lifeless beings leaning helplessly against one another. I think of how they were just alive and well in a place where they belonged, even if it was a Christmas tree farm. I can imagine their being summarily hacked down, slung atop one another and transported to this dirty, noisy, cement world, the life oozing out of them. Yes, I cry as I pass them by. Sometimes I touch them trying to offer solace, but they are too far gone to hear me.

Recently I bought a house in the country. It's on 37 acres and the people who owned it before me planted way too many evergreens, too close together to have room to grow. So, last Christmas, I invited a family to come out with me and cut two trees down for Christmas, thinning out the herd at the same time.

I explained to the trees that they were too close together and this was going to help them. I also tried to explain how we silly human beings yearned for a connection with Nature in the deep of winter and that was why we brought trees indoors. But, as Richard cut my tree down, I felt this real pain in my chest. It was as if they had believed me when I told them I would never hurt the land, never use pesticides, never intrude on Nature as I had found it here. And here I was cutting one of them down. I was devastated.

I have finally come to the conclusion that I can no longer cut a tree down for Christmas. It is like the sacrifice of a living being. Think of all the beings we could save, all the trees left alive, if we didn't have this silly ritual of cutting down trees at Christmas.

Just last night I went to a screening of "The Secret Life of Plants." After the film, 20 people, all of us just having come through a major snow storm, talked about our connection to the plant world. As a child in Virginia, I did not exactly talk with the plants, but I definitely felt more secure and happy in nature than anywhere else. Over the years we have all seen what's happening to the Earth. I belong to at least 15 environmental and animal rights organizations. And I eat organic food and care about farm animals and on and on.

New York City is a dirty, noisy, cement world, but we have all chosen to live here, those of us who do. We stuff our apartments with plants and animals to make it feel more like country. That does make the air fresher and we have green life near us. Counting them, I have 20 plants and trees in my two-bedroom apartment and I'm not particularly unusual. There are places to go here that offer respite—my husband and I described some of them in our book. Are we crazy to live here? It's more of a love-hate thing, really. My husband and I hate all the negatives, but can't live without the action, the brio, the pace. I guess you could call it a drug. We have a beautiful house in the country and stay there for long periods of time, especially in the summer. But the thought of not being umbilically connected with NYC is unthinkable.

I feel my connection to Nature mostly in my heart. Seeing a little blade of grass pushing its way mightily up through a crack in the sidewalk overwhelms me. Such energy, such determination, regardless of where its lot has been cast. Last night at the film, I was astounded to find that others feel the way I do—exactly the same way. I could call it a deep respect and closeness. We honor nature and how it gives to us constantly, never asking for anything in return.

Crying in response to nature is painful for me. It happens often and naturally. When it does, it takes a lot out of me.

Marilyn Armstrong

Marilyn Armstrong lives in St. Petersburg, Florida, where she publishes a newspaper for the downtown area.

I don't cry at all for some reason and it's the weirdest thing because there have been times when I have felt like I wanted to cry my eyes out and nothing comes. The last time I really cried, and I mean sobbed, was when I saw *Thorn Birds* on T.V. I cried every night of the four-part series. I remember thinking how wonderful it felt to let it all out. I rented the video years later so I could cry again. I don't know if this is a defect or a blessing. I have never cried at a funeral or over a death of a family member or dear friend. The tears will not come. I have written probably ten eulogies for family and friends, usually in the form of rhyme, and read them at the service as I'd read the newspaper, devoid of emotion.

BUT . . . I have an incredible sense of grief for nature and animals. I cannot or will not read anything, watch anything or be involved in

anything that involves abuse to animals or nature. I have a hard time pulling weeds in my garden as I think of them as a life form. I don't kill bugs and don't use poisons on nature or animals. When I water my trees I speak to them, I touch them, I encourage them to flourish. No, I do not have green thumb. On the contrary, I usually over water and over feed my plants and have no luck with them at all. That's why I've stuck to the trees as I feel they have a guardian that protects them from people like me.

Years ago, I read a book called *Here are Your Answers* by Flower A. Newhouse. A chapter on Tree Devas described spirits that charge the auras of trees. These are older and wiser devic intelligences who will respond to humans who take a spiritual reverence to nature. After I read this, I found a tree I loved on my property and began to hug it regularly and talk to it. I would sit under it and lean against its trunk to meld with its energy. I have to admit I felt silly at first, but I never forgot the feeling of connectedness to that tree Deva and my new found appreciation of it as a living being.

I don't actually cry over things in nature or about animals. Avoidance of the issue is how I handle it, I guess. I am appalled by any type of abuse to animals and although I don't get quite as upset over nature, it does make me angry and very sad when people cut down 100-year-old trees to build a pool or an addition to a house. I will not own a Christmas tree either as I don't approve of cutting down trees for people to decorate for two weeks and watch them slowly die before their eyes. I own a beautiful seven foot fake one. It doesn't matter to me that they are grown for that reason either. I think its sad.

I felt compelled to write to you as I hadn't thought about this strange connection I have with trees for a long time. I haven't been out of the house and away from the computer long enough to smell the roses in anyone's garden. Today I will venture out and reconnect with the wonderful fruit and flowering trees in my yard due to this memory.

Ruth B. Davis

Ruth B. Davis has a masters degree in psychiatric nursing and over 20 years experience in the nursing field. Several years ago, while mourning a series of losses in her life, Ruth left her job as a hospice nurse and retreated to the sanctuary of her home in central Maine. She began to rediscover her roots in the surrounding nature – finding the

first wildflowers of spring, listening to a robin sing at twilight, looking up into the clear sky to watch the Big Dipper and Cassiopeia appear. During this time, Ruth began to have vivid and deeply moving dreams.

> I remember a startling dream which just came out of the blue. I dreamed I was offered the opportunity to be part of a crew of a half-dozen people who were leaving Earth to colonize a distant galaxy. Our once-beautiful planet was a blackened, smoldering, uninhabitable ruin. Human greed, ignorance, and disrespect had destroyed the Earth and the planet was not able to recover. There were no animals, trees, or plants. The skies were lifeless, the oceans empty and full of waste. As I considered this offer to start a new life, an offer made to only a few people, I thought about how it would be to live without animals, or flowers, or birds, to never hear the peepers in spring or feel soft grass under my feet. How could I never see a baby animal again? Or never hear the wind rustle through the trees on a soft summer night? Without a moon to shine across still waters or the sun to turn the evening sky into a thrilling display of color – what would be my inspiration and meaning for living? Even though I knew these things were gone from the Earth, I realized I could never, ever, live without them. I replied aloud: "I will stay here, and die with them."
>
> I did not remember this dream upon awakening, but it returned to me that afternoon when I was walking in the woods. Initially, my memory was pure cognition. I was bewildered. Why, I wondered, would I have such a strange and powerful dream about Earth being destroyed and me being offered a chance to colonize a distant planet? I had not been ruminating about planetary destruction and entertained no fantasies about being one of a "chosen few" to populate other galaxies.
>
> I next remembered the feelings I had in the dream, and reexperienced terrible grief and sadness, which still return when I remember the dream. I felt utter desolation at realizing that what I loved more than anything else—the natural world and its creatures—had been annihilated and there was nothing I could do to bring them back. I felt grieved beyond my capacity to endure it. I felt fully the consequences of human greed and ignorance. I felt as though I were carrying the feelings of a living population of non-humans which could not speak for itself. Hopeless grief was a very heavy feeling in my chest. I then felt my grief whip into a pure, unadulterated fury at the way this innocent race of beings had been wiped out by a race that I happened to have been born into. We should have been using our sophistication to protect these more vulnerable

beings! Instead, we thought we could do as we pleased because living creatures could not speak "our" language. I was deeply ashamed and furious.

As I recall my outrage and grief in this dream, there is nothing about it I find surprising or unusual. It was not news to me that I would react so strongly in a dream or another situation where creatures were harmed. I was born with an extremely strong love for animals and all nature. It was part of my lifeblood.

In retrospect, I also understand that the dream occurred in the context of my being comforted by the natural world upon my retreat to the woods. I was still deeply bereaved from the death of my mother a few years earlier, which had been followed by additional losses: the sale of my old and beloved family home, the end of my relationship with my fiancé, the death of my three-year-old border collie from cancer, separation and divorce among my siblings, deaths of old family friends and close neighbors. All my education and experience in the mental health field could not assuage my emotional and spiritual suffering. My religious upbringing as a Protestant Baptist could not answer the extremely specific and compelling questions I had about life after death, nor tell me how to navigate through the challenges presented by my overwhelming recent losses. It was nature that helped me begin to heal from my losses.

Three years later, I understand that my dream has impacted my life in several ways. First, it has helped me to fully acknowledge the reverence and love that I have for animals. The Marines talk about mountains you would die for. My dream showed me my mountain. In reconnecting with my dream, I realized that I was being asked to take a deeper look at my love for animals and to accept this love within my life. I had been reluctant to do this because of the pain and helplessness I inevitably felt when animals were harmed. I have learned to stay with these feelings, however, and have noticed a transformation. When I re-enter that pain in my dream, it SPRINGS, becoming what feels like an incandescent blue laser and I become this laser as it leaps out of my eyes and the center of my chest. I have no words which adequately describe the intensity of this light, which is simultaneously blazing and icy. I can only describe it in terms of these qualities: "It cuts to the chase." "It is capable of self-launch on an instant's notice." "Woe to those who get in the way." "One blow from it is like a sledgehammer to a block of ice." "It scorches a straight-arrow path to the heart of things." "It's as soft as it is sharp." "It has a mission and will not stop halfway." Since I have learned to stay with these feelings, I feel the grief transformed into a laser-love. Love has power in my grief now.

The second effect of my dream was to cause me to ask myself a question: "Now that I know what I am willing to die for, what am I going to do about it?" I decided to develop my ability to communicate with animals psychically. This was a way to offer something concrete in response to what I had always felt was the terrible incommunicability of animal suffering. I have had several amazing experiences with animals throughout my life, but had never chosen to consciously develop an ability to communicate. Now, I have a life which encompasses what most people would think are two separate worlds. I am a supervisor in a community mental health center in central Maine and I am actively involved in the development of my psychic identity. One is as much a reality to me as the other. I realized that I did not have to forsake my life in order to live my love for animals. I just had to change some things about it.

The third impact of my dream involves the other things I have changed. These are very specific attitudes and behaviors. I will list them:

1. I look at each day as an opportunity to facilitate a connection between humans and animals. This includes myself. There are two things on my office door. One is my nameplate. The other is a sign which reads: "Teach respect for the earth and all living creatures." People know where I am coming from.

2. I keep my bird feeders full.

3. I stop no matter where I am to assist a dog that appears lost and I enlist others to help (police, canine control, shelter).

4. I cut the handles on my plastic grocery bags so that when discarded, a bird will not become entangled in the plastic.

5. Same type of thing for canned goods. I squash the cans before I discard them.

6. I don't date men who hunt or fish.

7. I am considering eliminating meat from my diet. Several of my coworkers are vegetarian and they are helping me with this decision.

8. The first thing I do when I come home is take my dog, Kaytie, for a walk. Usually it's the last thing I want to do at that particular moment because I am tired. But my dream has made me more aware of my responsibility to my pets.

9. At work I require that all social workers on my team fill out a crisis plan with their clients who own pets. This helps assure the pet's care if the client is hospitalized psychiatrically or at a respite unit.

As the result of going back into my own painful feelings toward animal suffering, I have found that the animals themselves are there to guide and assist me. I had been suspecting this for awhile because of some very touching animal experiences. Then, around 6 months after my dream, I obeyed a sudden and unusual inner prompting to go into a bookstore I was driving by. A well-known intuitive was giving psychic readings there, which I did not know until I walked in. I signed up for the next reading, which is even more unusual as I did not then know anything about this person. She looked up as I walked in, and said to me, "You are surrounded by guardian spirits and they are animals who are grateful to you."

James R. Hipkins (White Turtle)

James R. Hipkins was born in Toledo, Ohio, of Native American heritage (Naraganset). After graduating from Ohio Wesleyan University, Jim obtained a Masters in Divinity from Boston University School of Theology. For the next 38 years, he worked as an ordained United Methodist Pastor, which took him to Borneo and China, among other places. Now retired, Jim has returned to Ohio, where he writes. He recently published a book titled 2000-Armor of the Lie, *which focuses on violence in America.*

I am one who has great attachment to the earth. I come from Native American background. This will color what I have to say. I cannot imagine *not* crying over the earth. It is that which sustains me and all life. No matter what is done to her, she continues to sustain and maintain life within Creation.

When I had open heart surgery about 9 years ago, as I first became conscious, I sensed my weakness. I couldn't move a finger or my head. I could barely open my eyes. I thought to myself I haven't got enough strength for anything. In my woods where I lived at the time there was a spot where I went to be aware of my earth-mother and the presence of life itself. I closed my eyes and said I must tap into the Creative Power at the heart of all life. Then in a moment I was transported to that spot in my woods. I was floating over the ground, saying let the Creative Power flow

in and through me. I could feel the energy surging through my body at that moment. I woke the next morning and ate breakfast.

I have sat in the woods and tried to determine my direction of purpose. I had walked one path untold times. Every time, I meditated on who I was and what my life really signified. After about 8 or 9 years traveling that path, one day 2 years ago I was walking slowly meditating when all of a sudden there was a white turtle shell on the path. It spoke to lostness and gave a specificity to my personhood. I am White Turtle. I have striven to understand the meaning of my name ever since. Truly I find that every rock and stick, leaf and tree, will speak if only I listen.

I have had many other such types of experiences in the woods. It has brought me to a perception of the interconnectedness of all life-creation. There is harmony and rhythm that pervades all. I do believe that consciousness is the ultimate reality. For in the quiet of the woods, I become aware of a host of others whose consciousness reaches out to communicate with me through the breezes, stars, birds. This I believe is never lost but continues to enrich life in every dimension. Though I walk alone I never feel lonely. When I think of woods, I think of meaning, purpose, fellowship, relationships, power.

JoyBeth

JoyBeth lives in Maine, where she works as a metaphysical counselor-educator and Healing Arts practitioner. JoyBeth has degrees in social work, sociology, and psychology, and is now working on her Doctor of Ministry in Creation Spirituality. JoyBeth directed me to her website at www.soulintegrators.com, where the following story is published.

I sat on the mountain behind our home and cried. As the tears kept streaming down my cheeks, I kept on saying over and over, "I'm so sorry. Human beings are so unaware. I'm so sorry. Human beings are so numb. I'm so sorry. Human beings are so greedy. They just don't get it!"

I had just discovered that a particular area of the mountainous woods that lay for miles behind where I lived had been clearcut. This time it was in an area that I had thought impossible for the woodcutters to get

to, where some very unique beings resided and who would now no longer be able to stay there.

For 26 years I had very consciously and systematically opened up and developed my Soul's abilities which have allowed me to communicate with the metaphysical and multidimensional worlds that flow in and around us all each and every moment. As a result, I have been actively working with The Elementals, or Nature Spirits, who reside on the granite mountains and live in the dense mossy evergreen and hardwood forests of Maine. The fairies and elves who live directly behind us are my special buddies and I realized that some were now displaced.

The next day I hiked in the area of the recent clearcut and sure enough, the particular Elves who had needed and tended to the big tree beings and unusual rock formations were no longer there. I wailed some more and after I had let out my grief, I was able to tune into something that I had not seen before: what I call "Cleaner-Up Fairies." I was amazed at the level of energy vibrating from these beings who go into an Earth area "to clean up destructive energies and to move the Earth energies well on their way into healing." What was remarkable to me was the fact that these nature spirits were not angry, or even sad. They were *busy* and very happy doing what they could to be of service.

It was true that the humans had unwittingly displaced Nature Spirits from the place they had both been giving and receiving from. It was true that humans had played power and greed games of trying to cut down older trees in places that it was impossible to remove their tree bodies or bones from, and so the trees just lay, dead, on the Earth. It was true that the humans had killed many types of living plants with their big machines plowing through the mountains and forests. However, the nature spirits weren't hung up on nor judgmental of those actions at all.

They were focused on cleaning and healing the area and on working with me in increasing my compassionate awareness of the role I play in helping other humans open their perceived awareness of the Earth's Elementals and our human interdependence on the work they do in growing and healing the Earth. To transform the pressing Earth destruction we humans have sped up and intensified, we need to work with the Earth's Elemental's special knowledge of nature and life. We have to learn to directly communicate with them and work on keeping and establishing areas where they can both light up and delight, or receive and give, the energies they especially provide in the circle of life . . .

Healing

The following stories illustrate the healing potential of nature. Relief or release through connection with nature is an experience shared by each writer. Some authors describe feelings of serenity or unconditional love within nature which allow the surfacing of grief, permitting healing of personal losses or hardships. Others describe feelings of acceptance, comradery, or deep connection with the natural world which help them endure painful situations. For some, this is transpersonal experience, with healing involving a feeling of oneself as part of a natural whole.

Jeanette

Jeanette lives in Helena, Montana. As a licensed clinical social worker and psychotherapist, she works with adolescent girls in a group home. She also leads women's creative writing workshops.

> There is a small trail that cuts along the side of a mountain and leads up into a forest thick with pines and firs. The trail head is about a mile from my home. Regularly I walk there with my dog. I have walked this trail at all times of the day and early evening, and have walked it in every season. Mostly I like to walk there after a new snowfall.
>
> Windy days there are special. I stop in my tracks and take in the whrr of sound that encircles me. I often contemplate the sound of the wind. Millions of air molecules rushing past tree trunks, branches and needles. Especially in early morning hours I am likely to see a deer. I like to be still so that the deer and I can watch each other for a long time. I only have to walk a short distance before the trail curves and I can no longer see the city. Before me is an outstretch of seeming wilderness. Mountains, trees and sky are all that I can see.
>
> Several times I have gone there to seek refuge and solace. When I am sad, afraid or at a loss for what to do, plodding my feet on the raw earth helps me to hold on or to figure out a next step. Throughout several years of a difficult marriage when I felt so lonely within that relationship, I

would find myself on this trail letting the expanse of green trees and blue sky wash through me. I walk for awhile and then the tears come. This is a good place to cry. I often let out big heavy sobs and let them keep coming until I feel spent and finished. The crying lasts for several minutes. I am usually unprepared and end up blowing my nose and drying my tears on my mittens or the sleeve of my sweatshirt. There is a good sitting place right next to the trail under a particular tree. I have named this tree, The Solitude Tree. Sometimes I will sit under The Solitude Tree and have a good cry. I touch the tree and when all the tears feel washed through, I often bow to my surroundings in nature with gratefulness to the plants, animals and rocks for their magnitude, resilience and beauty.

I think what allows me to touch my sadness so deeply is that within this environment, I feel unconditionally loved and accepted; I feel that I belong. On this trail, in these woods, in these mountains I also feel a deep sense of all-knowing. Somehow I realize that I am of this same immense mystery as the trees, the rocks, the grasses, the flying ones and the four-leggeds. It is deeply satisfying. After a good cry in the woods, I may feel restored—ready to move on. Other times I feel exhausted and realize that what I need to do is rest. Either way, I feel sustained and held.

Light Snow

Just beyond my home
I take in
the vista, green dappled
stony undulation waving
motionless
against my breath,
nostrils moisten
in cold air,
a soul bath

with a light dusting of
light snow

the mountain
dons a
lace shawl,
revealing tracks
spun of
four-legged
meandering

and habit.

Breaking Trail

First human to break
this trail, this day.
Fresh snow reveals
a small creature was here . . .
a skunk, a raccoon maybe.
I head toward the solitude tree
and on the crest
I stop to look back at the city.
Not one sign of human movement
save a lone truck on Highway 12.

Inside this quiet illusion
hands are xeroxing, faxing,
coffee filters are pushed into plastic cones
everywhere
students raise pens and books reluctantly.
An entire city sleeps alive,
below me,
while I
break trail in fresh snow.

– Jeannette

Janet

Janet lives in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she is coordinator of the Spiritual Emergence Service, a Canadian organization offering referrals to therapists with experience in spiritual emergence. Janet had a spontaneous kundalini awakening in 1996, leading to her emergence as a spiritual healer and Reiki master. Though Janet loves the beauty of Vancouver's rain forest country, she remembers fondly her years in the Okanagan Valley, near warm lakes and superb beaches, where she did not have to

wear shoes. Janet believes the following two peak experiences pointed toward her spiritual path.

> When I was 12, my brother and I voluntarily joined the United Church, which is similar to the Episcopal Church in the United States. My brother was 2 years older than me and believed in God. I listened to the minister and decided I didn't believe what he was saying but if there was a God he probably wouldn't care if I joined. I wanted to go to the girls' group with my school pals. It was then that I decided the Golden Rule was good enough for me. Only in more recent years have I learned that the Golden Rule is one definition of karma.
>
> It was the summer between grades 7 and 8 and I was allowed to attend a United Church camp in Cultus Lake, British Columbia. My father was a mentally abusive misogynist and there were long periods when the only time I was allowed out other than for school was to attend church activities. Life at home was difficult. Being at camp for two weeks with other kids and kind and caring leaders was for me a welcome break.
>
> It was evening vesper service just as the sun was setting. We were gathered on the shore of the lake. I was a little apart from the others, leaning against a tree trunk. It was a warm evening. The water of the lake was lapping very gently against the small rocks and pebbles of the shoreline. There were small ripples in the lake.
>
> Suddenly I was overcome with the beauty and tears came to my eyes. There was illumination, as if the lake and sky were brilliantly lit up. Behind me was the soft voice of the leader, talking or reading something. I felt quite overwhelmed by the combination of the illumination and the comradery of the girls and the leaders. The feeling of goodwill and connection was extraordinary.
>
> While I felt connection to the others, there was something more. It was knowing that this is how it can be and should be. Affirmation that I was right all along, that it was my home that was out of sync. I still thought of myself as an atheist but now there was something I would describe as a higher power giving me that experience to show me there is unity and harmony.
>
> Meditating on this experience now brings up the feeling of relief. I believe it was relief that, yes, there are others who feel as I do—there was relief to be with such a good group, to have my own kind of thinking

validated. There was a sense of helping others, of offering support, and the tremendous feeling of love.

On another occasion, years later, I was visiting my aunts in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Moose Jaw is on the Canadian prairies and the landscape is very flat. I am an early riser and my aunts were not. I would joke that by the time they were ready to start their day, which usually involved me driving them around, I was ready for my afternoon nap. I was in my 20s.

One morning they were playing Scrabble so I went for a walk out north of town. I came to a field of oats. When my brother and I were kids and my maternal grandfather had a farm, we would play hide and seek in the oat fields. The oats grew shorter or we got taller and eventually this was no longer possible.

I looked around, didn't see anyone, made a mental apology to the farmer, and walked into the field of oats. I stopped in the middle and looked around. There was so much space, so much sky–the prairie horizon was so far away. I felt very small in the middle of all that space. Suddenly it seemed everything was put into perspective: my small part in this universe and that I was part of everything. There was not the bright illumination of the Cultus Lake experience, but more of an inner illumination, an overwhelming feeling of peace and happiness. I just stood there with tears streaming down my face. It was so beautiful.

When I remember this episode, it is the sense of perspective that most stands out, being this very tiny part of an amazingly beautiful whole.

I was not a young person who cried. There seemed no point in moaning because there was nothing I could do about my situation until I could get to work and earn enough to get away from home. Now sometimes during healing experiences tears come to my eyes because the pure healing love is so amazingly beautiful, the feel of it coming in.

Math Lessons from Two Aunties

I waited for them. They played
Scrabble and I knew they would
dawdle powdering and rouging
parchment works of art.

I lost patience, slipped away

strolling north of town to the highway
cutting through their centimetre
of vastness, the tilled
and fallowed half-sections
on either side bracketing this part
of my borrowed fraction.

I pulled a piece of Durham brightness
rolling it between my palms
creating golden droplets

while staring at a quarter of oats
stretched straight and tall
but not as high as when we played
our tumbling, trampling hide-and-seek

and Catch Me If You Can Find Me games
with the exuberance of summertime
freedom bestowed on small evacuees
from city cement school grounds.

Edgily I entered that field
of former fantasy
hoping for the farmer's forgiveness
then I was centred in acres
of nurturing, growth in space:
of sky, of land, of mind,
in stillness.

Knowing now, I returned to
my dear Scrabblers, my rosy-cheeked
sages who had always known.
Still they teach me.

– Janet

Nancy Russell

After a wonderful life including marriage, rearing three children, and a career as a political consultant, fundraiser and events organizer, a sudden life change threw Nancy Russell into chaos, challenges, and transformation. Once a soccer mom, normal, Nancy

is now a certified Usui Reiki Master and Master-Instructor of Integrated Energy Therapy. She lives in Yardley, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where she has a full-time energy practice and teaches Reiki, IET and other related classes. Energy work allows Nancy to express her contagious joy and happiness.

> While always a fairly spiritual person, I had a massive acceleration a few years ago. My husband of 28 years came home from a business trip, collapsed and died of a heart attack in our family room. This happened despite the fact that he was an airline pilot who seemed to be in excellent health and passed medical checks easily. In one moment, my whole world changed. I was dealing with my own grief, three children all grieving and needing differently, financial changes and other immediate demands, and it was combined with the loss of my lover and best friend. It seemed almost surreal. I was no longer a wife. I was a single parent. I was overwhelmed and in physical pain–literal pain with heavy pressure in the heart area. I had never known the term "heartache" was meant to be so real and so physical.
>
> As I entered what I now call survival mode, one of the first things I noticed was that I could stare at a flower and feel a release. The house was filled with flowers and the doorbell rang constantly bringing more. As I think back on that time, it is ever so clear to me that amazing relief occurred as I STARED at and then visually merged with a flower. The pang and sharpness would ease in my chest. It would melt away momentarily and I would briefly feel relief and release. Once I realized this new ability, I would literally take breaks and mentally climb in. I was being helped by merging with this beautiful piece of nature.
>
> As time went on I found other supports. Water in the bath or at the river close to our home was also helpful, soothing and restoring. Just setting eyes on the river would help immensely during times of stress. It would relax me. However, these realizations came later. In the original shock and numbness, it was a yellow lily which provided the all-important bridge to connect my spirit to nature. I found solace and comfort there.
>
> In the years that followed I greatly expanded the ability. I also used meditation in many other forms. I enjoyed an ever increasing awareness for the possibilities provided by a spring day, the crunch of autumn leaves, the music and smells of the woods, the silence of a winter evening—and not to forget the purring of a cat, the love in eyes of the dog. Ah . . .. these

> experiences all balance and restore me, letting me find the whole being who is still inside. That piece of soul which occasionally feels battered about by the experience of life, alone and separate, can be reclaimed by an embrace in the wonder of the universe. It reminds me that we are all connected, we are all one.
>
> My initial flower experience was definitely fourth chakra (heart) related. I now realize and have nurtured the fact that I am clairsentient . . . I feel energy. To me the experience was tangible as a release/rebalance/small step toward healing–also a step for me to move towards my soul's destiny to facilitate the healing of others. I believe and teach that the interaction with nature is a potential tool to assist us as we navigate the seas of turmoil in our life. We can learn and even practice the power our focus can provide. That awareness allows us to select our choices in a heightened way, to become empowered. In that blessed oneness with nature we can experience the silence of our own magnificence.

Peter Kessler

Peter Kessler was born in Switzerland in 1934. He worked for large companies in international human resource management for 22 years, then, in 1985, began his own business as an outplacement and career development consultant. Peter speaks German, English, French, and Spanish and is interested in international outreach and bridge-building. He now lives in Jona, Switzerland, but travels frequently. During the second half of 2001, he celebrated a sabbatical on the West Coast of the United States, including Hawaii.

> In 1980, my wife died of breast cancer. She was ill for 3 years, a trying time for both her and me, and certainly for our two girls. She died like a saint and an incredibly wise woman. During her last few days in this world she had virtually one visitor after the other coming to her bed. She could hardly speak any more, just whisper words full of wisdom. When I depart from this world myself one day, I sure hope it is in the same fashion.

I do remember that in those times of grief and sorrow I often went to my beloved forest, one day here, another day to another wood nearby or farther away. Strolling over the fields and then entering the quiet and deserted forest with hardly anybody around always felt, and still feels today, like coming home. Home to a partly known, partly unknown place that was and is always welcoming. I could smell the perfume of the spring or summer forest, would hear the birds singing and chanting for their place in the universe. And here were my trees, small some, bigger others with me having a special liking for the huge ones. I could not—I cannot—hug them all around, they are too tall and voluminous. But I must hug them, as they are my friends. They hear my words and I feel their skin and bark. I am at home. They are too.

Crying or grieving when feeling close to nature: yes in my lonely and not so lonely moments I did go to my friends in the woods, the trees, hugged them at times, talked to them and just felt them. I am not sure whether I was able, or better said, allowed myself, to cry then. Sure I felt the emotions of loss, but I could still feel great peace when embracing the small or not so small trees (and certainly wishing I had the giant trees of California here for partnering).

I have just returned to my office after a long stroll in the nearby forest. Ten years ago I moved from the area of Lucerne, where my heart was at home, where Dorita had lived and died. Now I live in another place, Jona, and I am married again. My heart is here with Verena and still my heart is also in Lucerne. Or, it is in the woods of Lucerne, or Jona, or any other place with all these feelings, sentiments, sensations. Smelling today the moss, touching it lightly, taking in the sun rays as they came through the trees, listening to the birds saying goodbye to the winter: that is great living. It is like honey for the soul and peace for the busy mind. And it is empowering. A few moments of sadness might have woven in today, might have been stronger then. I do not recall very specifically how that grief process was nurtured by nature many years back. I only know that the trees were my trusted buddies, ready to hear any mourning, taking in any tears and strongly supporting life with their own type of wisdom. And so it is today.

I have been working as an outplacement consultant for 15 years now. With executives, managers, directors, in short: with people who were badly hurt, losing their lives almost. In the future, we will tap much more often into that resource called NATURE–its trees, its mountains, its wilderness with snow, rain, sun and everything else to heal wounded souls.

Maybe healing of the world will go a bit with it. Nature is one of the great presents I get when I am present, whether being high or in the blues.

Walter

Walter, an astrologer, lives in Austin, Texas.

I had a crying experience in the summer of 1988. I was living over 30 years in southern California (San Diego). All that time I didn't really like being there because of the desert-like conditions everywhere. When I finally got sick (very, very weak . . . no pain, lonely and depressed), I decided to drive up Highway 5 to Oregon. Because of my physical weakness I could only drive for about 2 hours before taking a rest. When I arrived north of the Bay Area, the luscious greens, streams, and rivers had a SHINE or BRILLIANCE to them which I had never noticed before. In fact, this special shine was so beautiful that I could not resist crying, which I did at a couple of hours length, repeatedly.

I want you to know that I am not the crying type. At that time I was definitely in a low point emotionally and all those emotional states (sadness, longing, awe at beauty) applied to me.

Julie Longhill

Julie Longhill is a painter, singer-song-writer, and writer, with a master's degree in Anthropology. Since 1987, she has been making her living as an artist in Cleveland, Ohio. Singing, painting, and poetry have been Julie's way of finding her true inner voice. In 1996, when visual 3-D paintings and spiritual songs came to her, Julie realized they were meant to be shared with others for healing. Some of Julie's offerings can be found at www.geocities.com/julielonghill.

I have had many emotional experiences in nature as I spend at least 2 hours in the park every day (Cleveland Metroparks, which is 20 miles long and 2 miles wide of nature). I have painted in the park for years, and recently started singing there with guitar. Many of my inspirations come while in Nature. One experience in particular I will share.

I took a walk one spring day when I was feeling quite down about myself and the world. My relationships weighed heavy on my mind, and I couldn't shake this funk. As I walked, I began to cry. I was very aware of NATURE all around me . . . the trees, the sky, the birds . . . the air! Crying felt good and rejuvenating. I felt as if NATURE were nurturing me and holding me in its arms. The further I walked, the more serene I became, and the tears turned into humming. I started humming a tune . . . it started with the line LIKE A BLACK CROW IN A BLUE SKY. . . . IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN THAT, LIKE A RAINBOW AND A BUTTERFLY, IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN THAT!

This song came from a time that day when I was lying in the grass looking up at the sky and a beautiful crow flew overhead. It was SO black . . . and the sky was SO blue . . . it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. And I was transformed in that moment. I realized that NATURE is the biggest healer, if only we embrace it. The song goes like this:

I WAS FEELIN' KINDA LOW
I WAS FEELIN' KINDA LONELY
TALKIN' TO MYSELF
ABOUT THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY

I WAS WALKIN' KINDA SLOW
I WAS WALKIN' KINDA LONELY
SINGIN' TO MYSELF
TRYIN' TO MAKE EVERYTHING OKAY

I WAS LYIN' IN THE GRASS
I WAS LYIN' IN THE MEADOW
REMINDIN' MYSELF OF THE BEAUTY OF
THE DAY . . .

LIKE A BLACK CROW IN A BLUE SKY
IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN
THAT
LIKE A RAINBOW AND A BUTTERFLY
IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN
THAT CHORUS

LIKE A WARM BREEZE IN THE
SPRINGTIME

IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN
THAT
LIKE BARE FEET IN THE SUMMER TIME
IT DOESN'T GET MUCH BETTER THAN
THAT

LIKE A BLACK CROW IN THE BLUE SKY

After receiving Julie's contribution, I sent her several questions, along with a guided meditation. She wrote back the following:

> Nature has most definitely been a part of my healing, from child abuse in particular. I was always attracted to nature, and spent much time in the woods growing up. It was my favorite place to be. I loved to climb trees and just sit there and watch. I also love animals. I guess my love for Nature re-emerged as an adult and especially when I started recovery. I sought it out, purposely. When I moved to Cleveland in 1987, I remember finding the Metroparks. Then I found an apartment which was close to the parks so I could walk. I stated therapy in 1990 and about the same time, I started painting outdoors. Painting was very meditative and I became one with the trees, the water, the flowers. Unknown to me, this was another kind of therapy, Nature's therapy. I felt safe there, and calm, and inspired. I truly felt LOVED . . . and I loved Nature back.
>
> What forms have my healing taken? Therapy (individual and group), dreamwork, creativity (drawing, poetry, dancing, singing, drumming), massage and body work, recently yoga, meditation, and of course, walking in Nature. All of these things help me stay in my body, help me feel my body, help me express myself. All this work enhances my focus and concentration and allows me to be in the NOW. I was disconnected with myself before this healing—I was numb, not in my body, my body had been traumatized. I can gladly say now . . . I AM RECONNECTED. And Nature has played a huge role.
>
> I feel that the healing presence of nature does allow the tears to flow. And my relationship with Nature does have a visceral feeling, a body feeling, as opposed to mind, although it is hard to separate. My body does take me out there when I need to be out there.

When I am in Nature, I feel CONNECTED to something BIGGER. My body feels the wind, feels the birds, feels the trees. The silence and beauty allow the space for me to feel my emotions. When I am in Nature, I am not judged, or dismissed, or shamed for feeling.

I recently took a walk when I was really angry. Nature helped this emotion too. I felt safe to kick the snow and rant and rave at the sky. The truth is, humans are not as good at witnessing pain and emotions in others and just allowing it to be.

When the river overflows its banks and rushes with great fury, I FEEL that energy too. I felt the energy of the high winds yesterday—it felt invigorating, rejuvenating. My body feels it. It is cleansing.

Along with Nature helping me heal my emotional wounds, I have also grieved for Nature. When our lake here was bull-dozed and the habitat for the birds destroyed, I felt sad, very sad—and angry that their homes were destroyed. I felt empathy, as if my home had been destroyed.

Last fall, I was approached by eight deer. They crossed the river and walked right up to me (which they never do). It seemed as if they were telling me something. Turns out, soon after, I found out hunters were starting to shoot deer in the Metroparks (something that was never done before).

Listening to the meditation, I went back to the time when the deer approached me. I remember the deer being mostly female with some fawns. They approached me with confidence as if they were on a mission. Their fur was a light beige. But their eyes are what I remember most. Dark brown, almost black, imploring me somehow . . . there was great sadness in their eyes and fear; fear of us. Their eyes were asking me WHY?

As I continued to listen to the meditation, I felt tears well up in my eyes and a great sadness came over me. I felt so sad for the gentle deer for they had nowhere to escape. They already had such a small area to roam. I felt their "pinned in" feeling. Deer radiate innocence, fragility, gracefulness, and beauty to me. And they are so unable to protect themselves, like I was unable to protect myself as a child. Maybe this is why I can understand their plight. I cried for about an hour afterwards, thinking about all animals in captivity and

treated cruelly by humans. I have always loved animals and have always "felt" their feelings. However, I did not always tell people as they usually didn't believe me. This experience was very cleansing for me.

Linda Carroll Hasler

Linda Carroll Hasler moved from Memphis, Tennessee, to Forrest City, Arkansas, during 2000. She continues to act as community leader for the Memphis Noetic Sciences Group, known as the Noetic Explorers. She is also on the Stewardship Council for IONS internationally.

I have had the experience of crying while enveloped in and by Nature. There were different reasons for it at different times. Sometimes I was distraught over a problem or some unreasonable action by someone who was hurting himself and others, including me, someone who had caused others a lot, lot of grief. Nature at that time seemed to embrace me, to comfort me, allow me. After all, it was all around and it was both alive and also, non-threatening, not even moving really. It's like a giant bed. At home, we need our beds to cry in, to cover us up, to hide away, for comfort, so we can be protected by the sheets and blankets, the softness underneath. Nature provides all that on a grand scale, and because it's so big, it is as if God and the Great Ones on the other side are there, are on our side.

On the other hand, I've cried in Nature because its magnificence, beauty, perfection, moved me so much. It contains complexity and simplicity at the same time. I've often thought, and said, I want to die outdoors. I'll be so much more comforted and assured. Put me under a tree in the sunshine or under the night sky. Or even in a rain, cover my head and body, but get me outside. With a tad of reverence, Nature can produce feelings of awe that wipe away petty thoughts and worries. Nature sweetly offers sounds that are not too loud, cheerful usually, and reassuring.

In western Canada, I have marveled at loons which take up residence singly in trees about a mile apart from each other, then play "call and answer" with each other as the evening sets in. Their sounds are perfect for hypnotizing or entraining all who can hear, animal or man alike, to bring us into the same harmony. "Day's over, relax

together, let us get quiet, sleep and dream now." Other animals do it in different areas, the same task in a different way. The wind, as a breeze or gale, is part of the experience, since here is movement, always movement, refreshing the air we breathe, bringing in new oxygen. One never fears out there that the air is too stale, that the lighting is bad for the eyes. We can trust that Nature's giving us what is just right.

There was a time when I had anxiety attacks. During my first one, when something terrible was happening to me physically and mentally, I rocked for awhile indoors, then went outside and lay on the grass spread-eagled. It felt RIGHT. After awhile, the attack subsided. A few years later, several hours after giving blood I found myself weakening rapidly while attending a rock concert. I left the concert hall and intuitively did the same thing. I laid down on the ground outside spread-eagled. A policeman asked if I was all right. I could only wiggle a finger. He may have thought I was drunk or drugged, but I was not. I needed something the earth could give me, and I knew it instinctively.

When I'm in Nature, I feel secure, at home, because I feel how many living things are all around me. Small in nature, most of them, nevertheless, they are LIFE coursing through them. Therefore, we are related, we are the same, I am not alone. I am surrounded by LIFE and intuitively feel that all is right with the world. These living things aren't complaining about their lot in life, they are accepting of what and who they are. It just is. GOD is there in all that life and I am safe because of it. Quite unlike indoors, where things don't seem so alive.

Now, there have been times when I was trying to sleep in a tent outside and bugs were making noises, or the moon was coming into the tent, or it was raining, or I was on a slant. Those times were not good. I have gotten up, gone inside, and been thankful there was an inside to go to. So I'm not Thoreau. What I feel is the necessity to balance the comfortable indoor life with the exciting, wild outdoors—to be earthy, to head out and know not exactly where. To shovel manure and hay, to smell pines, these are the smells of Nature, far more seductive than perfume. When the sun, the wind, the rain are allowed to get to things, the nature of things changes. The microbes come in and change smelling things to sweet, bacteria are eaten by microbes needing that bacteria, things break down.

Last year, I removed a just-killed medium sized dog from the edge of the highway, pulling it down a grassy slope out of the line of sight of cars. A few days later, I pulled my car over to where I thought the dog would be and looked at what was happening. Tiny animals were finding their way in, through the holes natural to the dog . . . mouth, nose, eye sockets. A week after that, I visited the dog again. This time, his skin was still over his ribs, but it was breaking up, the fur had fallen out of much of it, the carcass was bereft of insides now. This was impressive. This is Nature, too. And what is so scary about that? Actually, it is less scary than putting human remains underground in tightly fitted boxes. I imagine that opening one of those after two to four weeks would cause a ghastly smell. I feel strongly about changing the way we bury or dispose of bodies. Perhaps into the ocean? Not being an oceanographer or biologist, I don't know if the ocean-going animals would profit from this assault? If so, I'm for it.

I think I'm going astray, but this has opened up other feelings about Nature. I've had a bad feeling about garbage dumps, which go deep underground. No sunlight. A college professor had his class in Arizona or New Mexico dig down into a 40 year-old landfill. They found nothing had changed much. They could still read the newspapers. We have to remember that Nature is on the move. Therefore, all of Nature, including us, changes with whatever has moved us. So we're just moving through life, ever-changing, and change is not bad, just scary sometimes.

Christine Dudoit

Christine Dudoit was born in Montreal to French parents. She has taught French and Spanish at the secondary school level for several years and is now working on a university degree, hoping to focus on spiritually-oriented psychology. The following story involves the death of Christine's husband in 1995, when their daughters were 8, 10, and 13.

As far back as I can remember in my childhood, I have had a very strong bonding relationship with nature. The attraction and need to be within the trees, oceans and mountains was so intense. I could not make sense of it. It was only much later in life that I grew

to understand and recognize the meaning of the magnetic forces that were drawing me to the depths of the wilderness. My mother had endless stories of how I, at the age of 2, would uncontrollably remove my shoes when we were in the countryside before running desperately wild into the forest. It seemed the only thing she could do to protect me from getting lost in the forest was to tie me to tent pegs!

Although I have had many thrilling experiences throughout my youth and adolescence, there were two events in my adult life that have made a remarkable impression on me. In the summer of 1995, but a few months before the death of my husband, we had gone to a remote, northern region of Quebec on a convalescence trip. For months I had been praying, begging the Creator and forces of the universe to give him health and save him from death. As we were quietly sitting on the rickety balcony of a rented cottage, appreciating and admiring the panoramic splendor before us, the sky very suddenly, in a matter of seconds, bombarded us with such gushing winds and rain, we were nearly swept off our feet. Rather than running to the safety of the indoors, in silence we looked at one another and immediately began ripping all our clothes off as we madly dashed through the forest. Together, holding hands we embraced trees, gathered fallen leaves and threw them up at the sky, waiting for the rain to drop them back onto our bare bodies. Arms together, we formed a circle and started to dance, throwing our heads backwards, opening our mouths to the earth's soothing showers.

I remember talking to the rain and to the sky, telling them how I longed for Liam to be free. The illness had become all encompassing, destroying his spirit and rapidly killing what once was his *joie de vivre*. This time I hoped for resolution. It was unfair for my selfish needs to take over his. Of course we did have three daughters, so who on earth would be mad enough to say it was all right for him to die? But something happened. Because that day had been particularly hot and hazy, vapors were lifting from the earth below our feet. It was as though a light cloud had risen out of nowhere and was now magically surrounding us in our dance. I felt as though I had been taken into another space, like in a trance . . . floating or flying I'm not sure which. The trees looked like they too were participating in this fete! Everything around me felt as though it was *within* me. Even the air, fresh and crisp was filling my lungs with a sense of purity, giving me peace and serenity.

In an instant I understood that Liam's presence was beyond his physical self and I felt reassured, like a voice or energy was comforting me from the heavens. Everything was going to be all right, because even if he did die, we would always be together. I cried and I wept, then the tears turned into laughter because at that very moment I understood and felt it was my freedom that I needed to search for, not HIS! He stared into my eyes and filled my heart with his love. It was as though he had understood the connection I had just made with the powers above. He pulled my arm drawing me nearer and we began racing towards the water. In our silent mutual agreement, we dove into the lake, splashing the waters around us to celebrate our unity and my liberation. And the circles in the water were like the circles of our dance representing the felicity of our eternal love.

Six months later, the heavens took him. I never knew how I would cope when I understood he had passed onto the other world. Needless to say, it wasn't only myself that I had to deal with. How could I possibly tell my beloved daughters that one day everything would be all right? Such a cliched statement, yet used by so many who were around us at the time. I will always remember thinking, "No! It will not be all right." We all loved him and he was gone, never to return.

For an entire year, every night without exception I would sit at the bedside of my daughters, holding them close onto my bosom, stroking their hair and caressing their faces, the faces of purity and gentleness as shown at the age of innocence. Together we would share our tears of sorrow, our tears of despair and our tears of rage. When darkness came, we would clutch onto each other ever so tightly, just in case any of us would in an instant disappear, as he had.

A little more than a year passed and the summer months were approaching. I felt a need to escape. I thought I could use some time on my own to find the peace and serenity I so desperately pursued. I was exhausted. It seemed as though I had lived years of having been perpetually spun around. No more sense of direction, nothing but a sensation of utter imbalance.

June, 1997, marked 18 months. They say it is the first of everything that is the most difficult. So we had crossed the threshold, surely our spirits had undergone some semblance of healing. Perhaps now was a good time to go away on my own. Whenever I get these

drives of urgent need for relief, it is implicit that the only place able to bring me peace is the nearly unreachable wilderness.

It had been 1 year since I had walked through the Alps. This time I decided to embark on a trekking journey to the Rocky Mountains. I flew to Calgary to meet up with the rest of the team. After a day's preparation including the study of our route through the various mountain passes, we were dropped off by a helicopter in the middle of no man's land. From that very instant I knew that I had gotten myself into a serious project. The walk through the Alps had only been a series of day trips, no gear to carry. How would I ever manage to climb to these peaks, up to 3,000 meters altitude with nearly 20 kilograms on my back? I certainly had no clue, but somehow it didn't seem to matter.

The first day we took it easy, traveling a short distance in order to become adjusted to the altitude. I remember watching the stars that night as we were drinking tea by the fire. The sky was completely filled with the constellations, there wasn't a single bare spot. Then there was the moon. She too, like the stars, offered us the gift of her most brilliant light. Yet beyond the magnificence of this heavenly sight, I could sense what appeared to be an unfamiliar, perhaps even eerie reverberation. I could not quite make sense of it, though it unquestionably was an extremely powerful enchanting force. In no time, I felt its spirit travel through my body and the blood flowed hurriedly through my veins, gushing towards my heart and allowing its beat to increase to a velocity beyond recognition. It was as though the moon too had been waiting years in desperation for this very precise moment. I had by now embodied this very unknown energy and it lived in every living cell that made up my physical constitution. I closed my eyes, only for a moment, just to savor its exhilarating qualities. The moon, she as I called her, was I and I was She, and in that space in time we were one.

Filled with peace, I opened my heart to free the love that consumed me. I sent it into the universe, first to Liam, then to the stars and the sky and the imposing mountain chain around me. Soothing voices came from within, familiar, but from a very faint and distant place in memory. They told me that I would find the strength to climb my mountain, and that once I would start, I would never again in this life be able to stop. And they were right, and so I went to sleep, carrying Her within me, confidant that Her energy would support and guide me through the journey.

So the next day was our first real day of climbing. We were to reach a peak close to 3,000 meters high. We walked in silence buried in our own thoughts as we followed each other's path in order to secure a safer step. I could hardly wait to make it to the top. As I walked kilometer after kilometer through the heat of the blazing summer sun, my body grew weaker. The altitude and blinding rays brought on alarming dizzy spells. But I did not want to stop. I just had to go on because this was a mission that had been imperative for me to accomplish, for how many years now? Finally, a stream, a torrent, appeared in front of me. I suppose we all must have needed its refreshing waters as the entire group was bent over by its ridges, drinking their thirst away.

We carried on for a few more hours, until finally we had reached our destination. What spectacular and amazing panorama lay before our eyes! A 360 degree peripheral view of nothing but miles and miles of snow covered mountain tops. I stood there in awe, not knowing how to react as I had been deeply struck by this incredible beauty. Again my body felt limp, this time not from tiredness but rather from overwhelming feelings I was experiencing. Tears started running down my cheeks. She was right—I did make it! But it was still too beautiful to be true.

As I looked into the distance, I spoke to the sun, the mountains and the sky. I even shared my feelings with the air that flowed to and fro as it was frantically circling the mountains to softly come and embrace my body. I asked them all to set me free, begging them to allow me to breathe without having to live the constant reminder that he would not return. I knew he was part of me and would always be so. But could he live with me without my feeling heavy and burdened? How? And then I remembered some of his own words, shortly before he died, "Christine, let the wind blow in all the directions it wishes to take you. Allow it to help you fly, to let go and to set yourself free."

Yes! Of course that was it! I had never understood the full implications of his words until that day as I stood on that mountain peak. I immediately turned to the rest of the group, asking them to forgive me as I had something crucial I needed to do. I stepped up a few more meters to find an even higher point. Arms open and legs widely spread, I stood facing the valley before me. I closed my eyes, took a deep inhalation and let out a scream that soared and echoed for miles and miles into the distance. The moment felt as though it had

been an eternity, just as my voice felt as though it would reach places far, far away, places unknown to mankind. When I opened my eyes again, I sensed I had been enveloped by the powers of nature's wonders. They all lived in me, as I lived in them, the same way I had breathed the moon the night before. Though this time they were all in unison, the sun, the moon, the mountains.

I turned to the group and looked at them as the tears kept on rolling down my cheeks. And I laughed, and laughed even harder. And they laughed and our voices echoed together, thanking the earth mother for her blessings. And I thanked her as I continued to cry of happiness for allowing me to hear her sacred messages.

I knew I could not simply regard the height of 3,000 meters I had climbed as the summit of my expedition. That day I understood I had only begun making a huge leap, climbing the echelons to the spiritual freedom, that level of pure bliss and self elation that one wishes she can reach one day.

Well, if I am ever going to make it there, at least now I understand where the path begins.

When she first wrote to me, Christine was living in England, where she had moved in 1998. While we were corresponding, she took a trip to the south of France. She then wrote to me as follows:

I suspected the recounting of these events would cause a certain degree of inner turbulence, though I had not envisaged it would reach the parameters that it did. Oddly enough, the haunting feelings weren't at all connected to mourning, but rather they were impressing the importance, be it the vital need, to be fully integrated within nature. It had been almost 5 years since I last set foot onto the French Mediterranean coast. The sunshine, the deep blue waters, the Alps and beauty of Provence's countryside all brought on the realization that it made no sense to remain in England.

Feelings of Insignificance, Fear, or Aloneness

While the following two stories are not primarily descriptions of insignificance, fear, or aloneness in nature, they contain elements raising that aspect of human contact with nature. Both authors ordinarily feel great joy and aliveness in nature, but include in their stories reference to a time in nature involving feelings of loneliness and fear, even despair. While neither writer describes grief per se, the emotions described may lie near grief in the hearts of some people. These emotions likely hold transformative potential in their own sense, as grief itself seems to hold.

Gayle Abbott

Gayle Abbott grew up in Texas and now lives in Hobbs, New Mexico. She is a licensed counselor and has worked in the clinical mental health field. Two years ago, she changed directions and now directs a federally funded program designed to help first-generation college students achieve their academic goals. Gayle has a masters degree in Applied Research Psychology and plans to begin a doctoral program in Educational Development.

> From the mountains to the ocean (sounds like a stanza from "God bless America") my own experiences with nature have included times when I felt connected and content, as well as lost and insignificant.
>
> One recurring experience where I have felt a deep sense of peace has been on a very long ski lift climbing high above a ski slope on a day with no crowds. Instead of anticipating the downhill run when the lift reaches the end of the line, I often use the time to be still, quiet and listen to the distant sounds of snow falling off pine tree branches and sometimes branches falling under the weight of snow. The air always smells very crisp and clean, and I seldom look down because looking up offers warmth on my face as the lift climbs above

treetops and closer to sunshine. These sensations are a combination of happiness, energy, and gratitude to be alive and well. I often end up singing by the time I reach the top! Although I've never timed it, the experience probably lasts about 20 minutes unless the lift stops for some reason, a situation that I usually welcome. I give no particular meaning to this experience. I just know that I look forward to it, because if I give in to the sensations, the experience will leave me with a sense of peace and well-being for hours to come.

While the ski slope experience elicits feelings of happiness, another comes to mind that brings relaxation and clarity. Growing up in Texas, living in the country, and raising a few horses are probably reasons that I feel most comfortable and relaxed on horseback. When I ride I am very tuned in to the rhythm of the horse's gait, and in giving in to that rhythm, it's almost as if the rider and horse become one. The land is flat and I can see for miles but I am not usually concerned with where I am going, only that I am relaxed and content. I notice that I am very appreciative of the colors of the earth when I am riding, how the blue sky meets the red clay of the ground, and how the various shades of green on the small, sparsely populated trees add interest to the landscape. I am also appreciative and respectful of the anima—(especially since I have been thrown a few times). If I have stress, it melts away. If I have things on my mind or decisions to make, riding seems to bring clarity. My heart and body feel lighter; there is a feeling of freedom, and once again, I often end up singing when I ride. Perhaps the experience of just getting away from a hectic work schedule and slowing down the pace of life once in a while helps to bring a keener sense of awareness, not only of myself, but also of simple pleasures. I wish I could do this more often.

The ocean brings totally different sensations which are more spiritual. Looking out over the ocean, I feel more connected with God on some level, by comparison, I suppose. As I watch the waves rise and fall, there is a sense of awe in the ocean's power, which is to be respected and feared, its playfulness, which is to be enjoyed, and its calmness, which can gently rock and comfort us. There is always a stirring in my heart and the realization that I have no more control over many of the events in my life than I have over the ocean. Thankfully, God is in control. Like its Creator, the ocean is life-giving, life-sustaining—and mysterious. The meaning I place on this experience is one of acceptance. While striving to learn as many lessons from life as possible, I accept the fact that there are many

> aspects of life and nature that we will never know, and this is all right.
>
> At night, looking out, or being on the ocean can bring altogether different emotions, as I feel that I could easily become lost, very much alone and insignificant in its vastness. The emotion of fear is present as my heart quickens and chills spread over my body. At night, I am only comforted by the ocean from a distance, as the rhythm of the waves induces a peaceful sleep.
>
> The vastness of the night sky can also produce feelings of insignificance and loss. I sometimes cry for people who have passed on, simply because I miss them. The heavens appear to be so far away that I often feel somewhat disconnected and alone, but sad emotions usually give way to hope—and faith.

After reading my first draft of interpretive lenses, Gayle suggested that nature may allow her on occasion to return to how she felt in more carefree times. Feelings of fear may emerge in response to nature on occasions when she coped with some of the difficulties many of us face in adult life. She wrote,

> The horseback riding and the peacefulness of surrounding nature when one is riding up the mountain on a ski lift produce light-hearted feelings because they represent activities of simpler and happier times. I don't think feelings of fear were associated with earlier times, but arose because I was trying to cope with some traumatic events in my life and longed to regress into the peace and happiness which I always experienced in the nature activities that I described.

John Bullaro

John Bullaro lives in southern California. He is Emeritus Professor at California State University, Northridge, Recreation Administration, and currently a lecturer in Recreation Administration at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. He is also the Professional Development Officer for the San Luis Obispo

County Search and Rescue Team. John's teaching and writing interests have focused on environmental education and wilderness ethics. He is married to his soul mate, with whom he shares a life of adventure, travel, and growth. A portion of the following story was first published in the December, 1997, issue of Exceptional Human Experience, *a journal edited by Rhea White (see Bullaro [1997]).*

> In my middle adult years I began examining in earnest how my life was turning out. I discovered that my life reflected ideas I "bought" from other people and institutions: books, friends, parents, and advertising slogans. My unexpressed ideas or dreams about how I wanted to live didn't seem to fit with the world around me; so they remained just that, dreams about a could-be-life.
>
> In my early adults years I dreamed of living an undefined simple life, doing good service for my fellow humans, and finding a soul mate to share a life with. Above all, I wanted to live in the country, where I could walk in the hills, lay down by a stream when I tired, maybe operate a child's camp where I could teach kids about nature.
>
> In those early adult years, I was consumed with the goal of being accepted into groups I cared little for: churches, service clubs, social clubs, political action committees. I guess I thought that membership in the "right" group meant I was successful. Even my career as an insurance executive was bought by supporting the dreams of a company's mission that I, at best, was indifferent to. The attempt to succeed in a world I found irrational exhausted me in time. By achieving success I surrendered any attempt at personal control over my destiny. Success was built on the ideas of other people, ideas I thought would make me successful in this mystifying world. This lack of control, these compromises, dishonored me. On the outside I looked successful, on the inside I felt lost, hopeless to capture the dreams of my youth. Still, I dreamed of a personal resurrection, a coming back from the dead, so to speak. While I felt totally lost about how to go about achieving this transformation, I realized that change meant taking control, writing my own script. The idea of gaining control of my life sounded good but I lacked resolve, confidence in myself and no idea where to begin. The task seemed overwhelming to me. I did have a starting point, however. The future I saw had

mountains, fresh air, work with meaning, intellectual and spiritual growth, and someone to love.

During August of 1977, I had a profound experience at a workshop at the Esalen Institute, 300 miles north of Los Angeles. The experience involved a strong bond with a workshop group hosted by John Lilly, author of *The Mind of the Dolphin*, leading to a magical, mystical encounter with dolphins through meditating on their sounds. This was followed by an out-of-body experience in which I saw energetic connections and felt a stream of energy connecting everything I saw. I knew I was part of this energy system and it held me aloft. These experiences opened my mind to the idea that other planes of existence, far different from the logical practical world of business, were possible.

It was at this time that I became familiar with the Native American practice of vision questing. I happened to meet a mixed blood Native American/Anglo man who explained to me the dynamics and process of going into an uninhabited area, without books, pencil, and paper, or any other distraction, and sitting with the big questions that were consuming my life. I had the questions: "How do I proceed from where I am, and where can I go to get what I need?"

I thought about the vision quest process for about a month. It was during this time that my 12-year marriage was rapidly disintegrating and the prospect of having my family broken up tore me up emotionally. It became apparent to me that my life's foundation was falling away and it felt like I was about to fall into a deep emotionally dark pit. I needed to find a new direction and new meaning for my life. I knew it was time to try the vision quest.

As a result of the Esalen experience, my job as an insurance executive became untenable. Finally, I resigned as general manager for the New York Life Insurance Company, sold my new car, and separated from my wife. I was now living alone, without wife and children, in a small rented house not far from where my children lived with their mother. My primary mode of transportation was a Honda 350 scrambler motorcycle. For the next 2 months I became very introspective. I talked about spiritual matters with compatible friends, walked along the beach, often with tears streaming down my cheeks, seeking guidance about where to turn for direction in my life. Then I

remembered my visit with the Native American who spoke about the vision quest.

On a sunny, cool fall day I packed my motorcycle bags with water, clothes, and two blankets, matches, a drinking cup, and a broad brimmed hat, and set out from San Fernando Valley for Death Valley, to begin what I expected to be a 3-day vision quest. I envisioned little more than a 3-day holiday to "sort things out." Being an experienced outdoorsperson, I did not expect the emotional experience which awaited me.

I found an isolated spot in the desert, at the foot of what could only be called a large hill. I noticed a ring of rocks from an old campfire, so I made this place my camp. It was late in the afternoon and the shadows grew long. Few plants grew in the area and there was a strong steady breeze blowing, common in the desert. I walked some distance from my camp and secured a load of fire wood from dead and blown Mesquite brush which dotted the area.

As night closed in, I began to experience strong feelings of loneliness. The fire offered warmth but no companionship. Since I had no distraction such as books to read or note paper for recording my thoughts, I sat staring into the fire about my "big" questions. In no time the darkness closed in all around me. In the distance, I heard coyotes yipping as if playing games with each other. I envied them for having a group they belonged to. As night wore on, my sense of isolation from family, friends, and all old life connections became a profound and frightening feeling. I found myself talking to the coyotes, asking them to come and join me. Of course, they didn't.

The night was long and terrifying. I felt as if I were the last person alive on the planet. I managed to get through the night. Around an hour after day break, with my fire once again offering me warmth and some comfort, I saw in the distance a man walking toward me. When he arrived at my camp, he asked if I was ok, if there were anything I needed.

I told him I was here on a vision quest and started to explain what this was. He interrupted me to say he knew what this was about and had himself done a similar thing 4 years earlier when he was an aero-space engineer for the then Lockheed Corporation in Palmdale, California. He then told me how, as a result of his vision quest, he left this war business and became a park ranger, which is

what he was doing at that time. He shared his personal story with me and I was "blown away" by what he had to say. He said he was never happier, he had a new wife who shared this life with him, and he felt fulfilled because he followed his heart.

That first night was long, cold, lonely, and profound in terms of what opened up in me. I never understood how this ranger came to walk by my camp as I never saw a ranger station or house anywhere in the area. When I got home, I even thought I might have imagined the whole interaction with this man (I never learned his name). I concluded he was in fact real and that when I prayed for answers the universe sent me the ranger.

I didn't stay for the recommended 3 days and 2 nights on my vision quest. I found what I was looking for, direction and an idea of where I belonged. As a result of my meeting this ranger in the desert and sharing stories with him, I found my way into recreation and eventually back to graduate school and teaching outdoor recreation studies at a university.

During the nighttime experience at the campfire, I felt estranged from routine life, but at the same time I had the feeling I was a pilgrim on a search for my holy grail. I sensed cold, heat, joy, and fear almost simultaneously.

Sustenance

The next two stories involve recollection of times when the authors felt an "easy intimacy" with a particular place or places in nature. I believe these stories illustrate the sustenance that may be provided by sensory contact with nature. While the word "grief" is too strong to characterize these participants' feelings upon missing their lands, they do describe a nostalgia laced with longing. The sustenance itself, I believe, is a form of healing.

Susan Gray

Susan Gray lives in Helena, Montana. She has a B.S.W. from the University of Montana, Missoula, and is the mother of five. Susan has taught on the northern Cheyenne reservation, the Blackfeet reservation, and with the Inupiaq Eskimos in Barrow, Alaska. Currently, she works with Head Start in Helena.

I was a young woman, married with three small children. As young married women with three small children frequently are, I was tired, a little resentful that I didn't get a day off to do my thing, yet happy at the same time that we were on a family outing and doing something together. I had packed a picnic lunch. My husband packed his fishing gear. He and a friend wanted to go fishing on the Blackfeet Reservation on one of the many pothole ponds on the prairie. The two men were teaching the kids how to bait the hook and how to cast the rod. I was left with nothing to do as I don't fish, so I walked up a gentle prairie swelling to the west to a small lake, looking at the spring flowers blooming underfoot and marveling at how they could survive a "Browning winter." I walked a short way over the crest of the hill so I would be alone and out of sight of the fishing party.

It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, not a cloud in sight. The wind was a breeze and kept the mosquitoes at bay. There wasn't a sign of civilization. No roads to be seen, no barbed wire, jet streams, engine noise from the highway. Just me and the prairie. I sat down to look at the great expanse of wild prairie, never touched by a plow, virtually the same as when the Blackfoot warriors hunted buffalo and Meriwether Lewis trudged north to check out the origin of the Marias River.

I sat there a long while enjoying the silence, the smells of spring, and the aloneness. Guilt, another frequent companion to a young woman with young children, finally forced me up and started me back to the pond to check on the kids. As I reached the crest of the little hill on the return trip, I stopped to watch the scene below. The kids were having fun, my husband and his friend were having fun. My guilt was gone. I stood watching this scene when I was startled by a shadow passing over me. I looked up and saw seven white pelicans gliding over my head, down the hill to the prairie pond. I was in awe. I hadn't seen them coming and didn't hear them. It was as though I

had received a sign that things were all right with my world. That sight remains burned in my memory. It awakened in me an intense interest in nature and an awareness of life that surrounds us all the time.

Another time, I was getting ready to move out of Montana, my home state. I was leaving at age 52 for an adventure with a completely uncertain outcome. I was excited to go, yet found myself feeling sad. I was leaving my adult children, my parents and friends. Yet I mourned most deeply the physical environment I was leaving. I cried over the fact that I wouldn't be able to watch the ancient shorelines appear on the flanks of Mt. Sentinel when the first snow fell in autumn. I felt an emptiness when I thought of not seeing Mr. and Mrs. Water Ousel swim the Rattlesnake looking for morsels to feed their young. Who would watch them and care about them as I did? I would miss seeing the seasonal golding of the native grasses on the southern hillsides.

When I returned for a visit 1 year later, as soon as we crossed the Montana border, I stopped the car, got out, and kissed the ground. I swear the trees were greener, the grass more glorious, the water clearer, the sky bluer.

But maybe that is just a love affair with my home turf.

Another time, my husband and I were driving south along Flathead Lake. It was the time of evening when the sky is light and all other things are black. Our kids were asleep in the back of the station wagon. We had been listening to classical music on the radio and enjoying the evening. I was not thinking about anything in particular when I looked out the window and saw a V of ducks, perfect silhouettes against a silver sky. I instantly felt that when I die I will fly with the ducks and, somehow, know all I need to know. That memory has been a great comfort to me during tough times. It has greatly reduced my fear of death.

Rhea A. White

Rhea A. White lives in Bern, North Carolina, where she recently moved after more than 35 years in the metropolitan New York area. Retired from her librarian career and her duties as Editor of the American Journal of Psychical Research, Rhea is

currently writing her exceptional human experience (EHE) autobiography. The term "exceptional human experience" itself is one of Rhea's many contributions to the field of consciousness studies. In this excerpt from her work in progress, Rhea remembers in 1949 leaving the fields behind her home in central New York state for a life style that involved immersion in college and beyond, including trying to become a championship golfer. In 2000, she wrote,

> I awoke this morning with a bright memory in my mind. I was able, without thinking, to place it in time. I believe it was a beautiful day in 1949–my senior year in high school.
>
> For all intents, I had already "left" the fields, because I could not remain with them and also enter the world of people, which, after all, is what life on Earth is mostly about. I wanted to go. Golf had already given me many "favorite people," male and female, my age or older—and sometimes younger—whose existence delighted me. My aim of becoming a top-notch golfer was deeply entrenched in me by that point. And I was on the brink of graduation from high school and starting college in the fall.
>
> After school on that beautiful day I went up to the fields. I crossed over the fence at the top of the slight rise in the middle of our side, into Peter's Lot, which in my mind stood for the collective unconscious realm, though I was *primarily* unconscious of it at that time. I was more aware of my sense of connection with the wildlife, insects, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, fish and, on that afternoon, the explosion of blossoms everywhere I looked, as if I were up in an apple blossom cloud somewhere, caught up in heaven. I was the blossoms and they were me. The new greenery was sprouting everywhere, matching the new life awakening in me and reaching into the world.
>
> The perfume of the blossoms up close to the trees was almost choking, but at a little distance, as I walked the familiar lanes fashioned by the cows, whose munchings and comings and goings had created country lanes with grass as short as if it had been mown, I noticed that many flowering shrubs and trees had grown since I first

had come there when I was 10 or 11, and it seemed to me that the entire three or four acres were nothing but blossoms.

I could not remember a time when they were so billowy, the breeze but a bare zephyr carrying their scent, the sky such a light blue, but with part of it revealing dark blue depths, the air temperature that of a kiss, the birdsong so varied, issuing forth from countless shrubs and tall tufts of weeds and grass.

For a moment time stopped, and I knew this was farewell, and it seemed that entire beloved piece of Earth was affirming everything I was and sending me off to whatever my future might hold with every gift of nature's beauty possible. I knew it had never been like this before and never would be again—at least for me. I loved it so and ached with the thought of parting at the same time that I was eager to go. I felt very close to God, and to the life that burgeoned here so bounteously for the occasion, though when I came I had no idea in mind that it would be the last time. But shortly after I was met with all that fullness of spring, I knew what was happening, and I was sad in the midst of my gladness. Mostly, I was thankful. So thankful for all that Peter's Lot had given me for so long. It was so special, every bit of its wondrous and varied places: trees, shrubs, rocks, berries, pond, stream, woods. It brought together the best of what I knew, and in some way I didn't try to understand, the best of what was to come. I knew there would be dark, hard times, but on this day of days, they had no place.

It would soon be dinnertime and my father would be home. (More likely than not, we'd go to the club after dinner and hit out balls and maybe play a few holes until darkness descended. I was hungry, and looked forward to dinner, and even more, to the challenge of golf, and the hope that I'd see one or two of the older men golfers who made my heart skip a beat.)

I turned and headed home, crossing over the fence into our lot, leaving the wondrous world behind, but knowing full well that I had been given a precious send off. The entire surroundings, echoing T.S. Eliot, shouted, "Go! Go!"—and what I heard and felt was, "Go! Go forth with our blessing." Because somehow I knew that it would never be like that again, even if I came there in the future, it was a bittersweet leave taking. I still remember it acutely: the beauteous glorious spring of all springs in the fields, and knowing, truly knowing, that it marked both an end and a beginning.

In a personal note to me, sent when I was first envisioning this dissertation, Rhea recalled even earlier memories of the fields, and her feelings upon leaving them for entry into the world of people:

> I remember one of the first things I ever wrote in my journal was an experience of grief, maybe in 10th grade. I grew up on 16 acres of pasture land and woods behind our house. My cousins next door and I did 70 percent of our playing in those fields and woods. I knew every inch. In 8th and 9th grades, I walked our pasture and along the edge of the woods, about 3 miles, every single day of the year. I knew every shrub, every cocoon, every bird's nest. In 10th grade, I started to become friends with a group of girls and boys and began more of a social life. I also became very interested in golf and began playing in local tournaments. This became my consuming interest. But I remember being very sad, and writing in my diary about it. Although I loved golf and the competition, and the good friends I was making at school, I hardly had any time for my beloved fields. I felt I had left a very precious highly prized friend. I felt very badly and cried about it.
>
> Though I had to leave the fields behind, I still went back at times of high excitement or defeat, to my favorite rock, on a gentle rise just before the woods. There I could cry or exult (over golf or school) or just sit still and let the beauty of the fields sink in. I wrote essays and poems about the fields in school, and they were tinged with sadness because I had had to leave them behind. Even when I went there, it was not the same. The easy intimacy was gone. I couldn't stay for hours. I was there for a brief bit and then had to get back to rehearse for the school play or to do homework or play a round of golf with my father. It never came again as it had been.

Longing for Deep Sensory Connection or Harmony With Nature

The following stories continue the theme of healing through connection with nature. These stories are gathered separately because they suggest not only the personally healing potential of nature, but also the powerful longing that emerges in some people as they awaken to sensory contact with nature. I suggest this longing may represent, at least

in part, longing for personal transformation, which nature holds the power to facilitate. As some of these participants articulate, this feels like a coming home, a return—within the body—to what is meant to be. In this spot, the experience of nature and the experience of spirit may begin to merge.

Dana

Dana lives in New Jersey, where she is raising her three children, ages 10, 7, and 4. She has a master's degree in social work from Hunter College in New York and manages a program assisting families with children at risk for reading problems. Dana practices Polarity, a system to facilitate energetic healing.

> Almost 3 years ago, in the summer of 1998, my husband I went to a spa in upstate New York for the weekend. This was only the fourth time my husband and I had spent any time away from our children since our oldest had been born 7 years prior. Getting away at all seemed a huge blessing. We had discovered spas to be a great place to unwind and de-stress in a short amount of time.
>
> This was our first visit to this particular spa. I liked it immediately. Its cluster of white clapboard cottages felt part of a natural setting on many acres of mildly hilly and forested land in contrast to the much more expensive, elite, and overly manicured spa we had visited in prior years. After arriving, we scheduled spa services and toured around the grounds getting our bearings.
>
> I then received a shiatsu session with a very talented practitioner. I had received shiatsu once before, but this experience was quite different. The practitioner was clearly very intuitive. I recall feeling very supported by his body in all of the many stretches. Such contact felt emotionally intimate. It was pleasurable to allow someone into what was, at that time, my very guarded emotional space. I recall feeling a sense of connection to a part of me that felt more open, trusting, and divinely related. The room in which the session occurred had a sky light, and I recall looking up at the sky above thinking how marvelous to be awoken so quickly from the stupor in which I usually spent my life. While the movement he generated in my body, and his

meditative demeanor, created in me a sense of fluid peace, the meridian points he worked seemed to drain away blockages and energize me. I recall feeling sad when the session ended. The sadness was related to losing this trance-like state of well being as well as the connected feeling I had developed quickly to the practitioner.

As I left the building en route to my room, I walked past a lovely, grassy clearing which sloped downward from the surrounding forested area. In the corner of my eye, I saw something and turned to find a young deer no more than 15 yards from me. The deer seemed to have been standing quietly watching me. I startled a bit.

As a child I recall occasionally making eye contact with some of the many squirrels that inhabited our suburban yard. If the animal held the gaze for a few seconds before scurrying away, I felt as though I had won some contest—as though my messages of loving interest in and admiration of them had momentarily overridden instinct and their nervous system. Although my knowledge of Christianity was limited as a child, I was always very admiring of St. Francis and his ability to be accepted lovingly into the animal world. I recall longing for that level of connection with our many pets, with the birds that sang outside of my window, and with any dog or cat that wandered into our yard.

And now there I stood, gazing into the face of a young deer, many years and defensive walls separating me from the barefoot child I had been. In that moment, I again immediately hoped that this quite beautiful wild creature wouldn't dash away. When it continued to calmly look at me with interest and with no fear I began to sob. In the minute I spent in tears, I recognized how far removed I was from who I was supposed to be. I felt how the life I was leading was not what was meant to be. That my life at its essence was one of dis-connection. I felt as though I was on the city side of a vast river tricked into believing the chimera of upper middle class life was reality. I felt sadness and remorse for what felt like thousands of accumulated decisions that I had made to continue to live in this samsara. I felt lost–far away from some rightful home.

During the course of my crying the deer ambled off towards the forested area. As my crying lessened, I tried to take in the beauty and peacefulness of the clearing. It felt as though I could only take it in at a superficial level, that I didn't know how to be still enough, or in my body enough to fully relate to it. I continued to feel sadness and

loss related to this disconnection, this veil of sorts. I then became aware of others nearby, and chose to continue on to my room.

My body immediately felt lighter, as though a release of some sort had occurred. I rather quickly returned, however, to my very disembodied, cognitive self, and do not recall any further bodily sensations. The atmosphere and activities at the spa over the next 2 days supported me in being more present in the moment and less focused on doing and achieving than usual for me at the time. I came to love the organic food and the feeling of health my body held at the end of the weekend. I recall feeling a sense of loss at leaving and sadness in anticipating return to my rather depressed, disembodied, overwhelming, out of synch lifestyle.

I believe my connection with the deer allowed me momentarily to recognize the degree of my disconnection from a truer self and from the world of spirit in which all are one. My sobbing and the grief driving it, felt very much to be myself saying, "Oh, my God, this is reality. This peace. This stillness. This connection." My grief was an acknowledgment of how painful it had been and was for me to be living as I was, instead of how I should be. For many years prior to this experience, I had been unhappy, and aware that I was not living as I needed to be to fulfill my purpose in life. Unfortunately, my deeper recognition of this fact through my connection to the deer only showed me how far I was off my path. It did not provide me with a road map of how to get back.

Before leaving the spa, I purchased a six cassette pack of Jack Kornfield's teachings on "Developing your Buddha Nature." When I listened to the tapes, always in my car, I found them profound, but I do not remember the specifics of how this was so. Mostly likely, being as disembodied as I was, I was captivated by it cognitively. Certainly there was the higher-self part of me recognizing this path as a way back home, which fueled my interest. But after listening twice while driving and never making time for any of the meditations, I gave the set to a friend and forgot most of the teachings.

During the following 2 years, my disconnection and unhappiness deepened. In May of 2000, I was provided the road map with directions back home in the form of a spiritual emergency. For approximately 4 weeks, I received extremely supportive and clear guidance from agents of spirit. With this support, and in response to

what felt like their sense of urgency, I made significant changes in my life. The most pivotal of which at the time was to ask my husband for a separation and likely divorce. Following guidance, during this time I enrolled in a chakra meditation class. One evening, the teacher recommended that we spend 24 hours in silence as an exercise. He acknowledged that he infrequently recommended this exercise in this class, but while he looked at me, he said he was being called to do so. My reaction was to laugh. At that time, my husband and I were still living our pre-separation lives and had not as yet told our children of our intent to separate. Being a mother of three and not speaking for 24 hours seemed an impossibility.

On my drive home from the class, I felt as though I was told how to achieve this quiet day. Return to the spa! Leave early in the evening, get a babysitter to arrive early and stay late. And that is in fact what I arranged. I knew that I would spend much of my day walking through the forested land. I began by walking the length of the clearing, now able to take in the majesty of every smell, every blade of grass, every whistle of the breeze in the leaves. Sensual paradise. No longer any veil.

I came upon a tree which appeared so beautiful and seemed to be calling me to climb into it. I felt childlike and full of wonder. I pulled a leaf toward me and it seemed to hold within it all of the universe—all of the macrocosms above and all of the microcosms below. I felt joyous at being shown such wonders. After some time I continued my walk into the forest, practicing mindfulness. I began by following a path, and eventually left it as the underbrush became less dense. Afer some time of elated meandering, I heard the sound of running water and followed it. I was skipping and hopping happily, looking so forward to connecting with whatever water form lay ahead. Then I saw a form out of the corner of my eye, stopped and realized I was standing about 8 feet from a mature doe. At this point, I could see a drop off to a large stream only several yards away. The sound of the water was strong and beautiful.

The doe and I stood quietly looking at each other for a minute or so. I was smiling on the inside and out. No tears this time. In silence I said hello: "It is so nice to see you under these circumstances. Hooray! How are you! How has your day been?" The doe turned and continued to eat from the underbrush, and after a few minutes of observing her, I continued on delightedly to explore the muddy slope and stream below.

> In the 10 months following this encounter, my life has been filled with many beautiful blessings. Only several months after my spiritual emergency began, I came across a brochure for a Vision Quest program to which I felt very called. I will likely be spending 4 days alone in a Vermont forest this summer and look forward to any further encounters of connection.

Gerry Eitner

Gerry Eitner is a spiritual coach, teacher, consultant, and Reiki Master living in Alexandria, Virginia. She has worked with the United Nations, Congress, the Pentagon, NASA, the Smart Growth urban development model, the Earth Charter, and the United Religions Organization, among others. Gerry recently began teaching practices for "Reconnecting with Nature," which she incorporates into her political and community work. Gerry believes the experience of nature allows a profound deepening, expansion and strengthening of one's inner self. She is the mother of two grown daughters.

> Although I usually don't feel grief in nature, it happened yesterday, and is still going on. I was exploring a potential site for a weekend workshop setting, for a combination of Reiki attunements and Reconnecting with Nature experiences. I was looking at a beautiful old stone mansion called Humblestone, which is being turned into an Inn for the Arts. It's set on 50 acres of nature, apparently sacred Indian land. There is such a feeling of incredible love, heart, depth, beauty, and caring in the place.
>
> When I was leaving, and driving through the adjacent town, I felt a deep longing: sadness, grief, as though longing for a love that was not in place. I cried, driving away. As I remember, the feeling arose from my "gut," somewhere in the solar plexus, and moved up to my throat. I believe this was a feeling of deep longing to connect, to ground and connect the love I have to give from a home in nature. I have often experienced an incredibly deep longing since then, a very deep loneliness. I believe this involved not just longing for

connection to nature itself, but for connection with that place of deep love, beauty, and expression in myself.

During both yesterday's experience and the carry-over experience of today, my sacred experience of nature has been evoking a deeper, tangible expression out of me. In feeling that deep grief, and moving through it, I am able to put into motion two programs that are very dear to my heart. They are so important to me that, in a way, I couldn't seem to go to the next step without feeling this grief—perhaps they had seemed so deep, so meaningful that I didn't feel worthy of connection. In expressing this, I would say that, knowing my background, I didn't feel worthy of connection with God. Both of these programs have a great deal of God/purity/depth in them.

So often, we "paper over" the experience of deep caring–feeling we can't have something, be something, be loved, bring something forward. We protect, just in case. We sidestep the truth of our souls. This experience yesterday absolutely wouldn't permit this. Experiencing this deep grief was like looking in the face of truth, a reflecting surface which just couldn't be denied.

I would best describe these two grief experiences as a deep longing for connection. Perhaps I could say that my body cycles, or vibration, had been out of step with the rhythm of nature and even cursory connection with Humblestone began a connection of my own vibration with that of nature. The grief stage, though, is so visceral that it feels as though a loved one is on the other side of a paper thin shield; and I can't touch them, hold them, tell them I love them, really connect.

Although I haven't had this deep grieving/longing experience in nature very frequently, the experience seems to precede a deep opening in my ability to move things forward. I connect the experience with truth, beauty, nature. The grief seems to push me toward deep actual connection with these things, rather than remaining only longing for something I can't ever have. As a result of these experiences, I am more in contact with Humblestone about holding weekend retreats there.

Since writing the above, Gerry learned that Humblestone has been closed due to financial difficulties and is not available for seminars. Gerry added,

So, the next Reiki/Connecting with Nature class I taught was without an overnight. My actual primary target place originally had been, and now remains, the Airlie Conference Center. It's more expensive, yet has lots of beautiful options. I've now scheduled the next one for there, at the end of this month. Let's hope the scenario starts working, and becomes a monthly event. My dream is to have many groups of people meeting there in this beautiful place, and for me to build a home on this land. Since I don't own the land, and can't even get the money to enter a Ph.D. program I'd like to attend, there's more to move through. Yet I really believe this is to be. A lot of this seems to be about money and sense of value. And in the meantime, I'm living in two and a half rooms in a cement highrise—probably has a lot to do with the longing for a beautiful home in nature, wouldn't you think? I moved here because of the beautiful nature landscaping, and the stream and trees next door, but it's not enough.

During meditation, I held my grief experience in consciousness. The feeling seemed a deep longing for connection, for expression of love, either verbally or in action. For me, the feeling also relates to my need to speak and to be understood at the deepest level. It seems a matter of resonance. I feel as though until getting to the resonance, I could speak for hours and not quite come to the particular tone I sought. I suspect that the beauty of nature relates directly to the ability to speak "from the heart," with nothing else feeling in synch. It's like speaking with a spiritual Indian chief—there's a deep resonance of truth and nothing else will do.

Grace

Grace lives on the California coast with her husband. Her first career, as a computer scientist and research and development director, lasted over 20 years and was unexpectedly terminated by illness. Grace used the illness as an opportunity for psychospiritual growth and began studying her lifelong interests as a doctoral student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. She believes living in an environment surrounded by Nature has contributed significantly to her improving health and personal growth.

Housesitting, Part I

In July, 1997, my partner and I housesat a 500 square-foot cottage one block from the ocean. Though I had lived several years in California, I had never been to the northern coast. As we exited Highway 280 by the Hecheche Reservoir, and began the ascent up the green hills of Highway 92, I was in awe of the simple beauty previously unknown to me, existing a mere hour from my home. It was a sunny afternoon, with light playing through the branches of the eucalyptus and cedar trees planted along the mountainside. I felt that I could breathe for the first time in memory. As my lungs expanded, I felt my body as less cumbersome, as if I were filled with light and air rather than some dense, impermeable material. I felt my throat tighten with unexpressible emotion and a sweet longing for something unnameable. I chose to name it "wanting to move to the coastside."

The house sitting experience was transformational. The weather was exquisite. At night, we were rocked into peaceful sleep by the rhythmic sounds of Mother Ocean and the fog horn. Mornings were crystal clear. Early morning walks with John before he left for work offered little human contact, just the overwhelming majesty of the ocean, lone fishing boats in the bay, and the gulls and pipers about their daily work. When John drove away, for the first time in my adult life I was alone in a place where I wanted to be with the wherewithal to appreciate the experience. I was home, alone, in a cottage filled with the love of our friends, surrounded by cypress trees, open park land, and, of course, the ocean. I felt an amazing sense of peace. The years of striving seemed to leave my body as the contraction of my muscles and heart lessened, replaced by the air from my breath. The Latin for breath is *spiritas*, the Spirit. I felt the Spirit easily accessible in this magical place.

One morning as I walked along the shore, the only other person on the beach pointed toward the ocean and the majesty of a whale, perhaps lost from Anna Nuevo. I had previously paid money to ride in a boat, crowded with people, to see whales, and not spied a one. At the end of this day, I prepared a simple meal and left a note for John, asking him to turn on the pot and bring his lounge chair to the beach for the sunset. This simple pleasure—a ready meal for my loved one, a coming together at the end of the day, a sunset within a few steps of a modest home—touched me at a deep level. I felt full and satisfied, more than I had ever been through more costly or glamorous experiences in my life.

Aftermath

I sat in the office of my spiritual director, looking out the window at the sun on the leaves of trees, watching the incessant Santa Clara Valley traffic whizzing by through the trees. I cried as I told him of my deep longing for contact with God. I said I could only find God by the ocean and described my sadness that I could not live by the sea. I poured out my grief and anger at this unfairness of life. He reminded me that God is everywhere, not just by the ocean.

Housesitting, Part II

Over the Christmas holidays of 1998, we again sat for the cottage by the sea. We were alone, with no family. The weather was very clear and cold, almost an East Coast crispness in the air. One night we walked along the path by the ocean, holding hands through our gloves, our ears protected from the wind. My heart was full, expanding in my chest from the millions of stars, the milky way, the moon, and the goodness of God. At the same time, I experienced a powerful bittersweet longing. As my heart expanded with the greatness of Nature, the size of my longing increased. I felt a great hopelessness that I would never receive my heart's desire. All my life I had desired to live by the ocean, but lacked the necessary fortuity and finances. As we strolled along the path I counted the houses which looked out to the sea: there were 15. I imagined their cost and felt myself grow tighter and smaller as such thoughts ran through my head. I looked into the windows, saw holiday decorations, and perceived happy families, financially secure, surrounded by loved ones and a Universe that was for them beneficent, but not for me. I was *The Little Match Girl* of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, looking in at the happiness of others not available to me. The beauty of the night and companionship of my loved one were entwined by tendrils of longing and hopelessness. I later wrote this poem, from my longing:

So much of the life I have lived I cannot tell you.
We know this now,
And we know these matters are beyond our
control.

But if you look at the full moon, rising behind a lone tree, bare of leaves,

Purple clouds hanging low on the horizon, sky
tinged with dusty pink,
You will know something of me.

If you walk one cold and frosty night,
Your ears covered and your nose touched by the
wind,
Warm gloves you cared enough to put upon your
hands,
With the ocean crashing beside you,
You will know something of me.

Stroke the seashell pink bud of the rosebush I have planted,
Watch the beet tops unfurl in their crooked row I
set,
Lie down under the red fall leaves of the maple I
chose,
And as the leaves fall upon you, one by one,
You will know something of me.

Look with longing at the child at play,
As sunlight sparkles through the park fountain,
Feel her freedom in your body, your Self.
Let your heart dance with her,
And you will know something of me.

Look for me in the first shock of lemon on your tongue,
Dry, dead leaves swirling at your feet in the chill
winter wind,
In the rage of the forest fire under black smoke,
And the mother pulling the covers up around your
shoulders at night,
Then you will know some piece of me.

But even so, through the long tunnels of our lives,
We have been shaped
So that I can never tell you and you can never tell
me
Of the place that has no words,
And yet, through it all, within this all,
You may hope to know some piece of me.

Home in a Safe Harbor

January 1, 2000, we move into a home by the sea, purchased through a set of fortuitous circumstances and with the courage to undertake a massive fixer-upper project. Our house is one of the 15 I counted that Christmas. The day we take possession is beautiful and sunny. Our first act is to open all the windows and breathe. I feel myself expand, as if I could fill the whole room in which I stand, as if my body becomes warm liquid and flows out over the park land and into the sea.

The experiences of living by a state park, with few neighbors and little of civilization's machinery, are numerous enough to fill a book. Gratitude and wonder are now woven throughout my life experiences, no matter what is occurring at the moment. These become the foundation of my life for which I always longed, but had not before found. I realize that, while God is everywhere, for my particular life circumstances, it was necessary for me to live in a place where I could be surrounded by God through Nature.

As I become immersed in the Spirit, I am healed in a way that enables me to carry this piece of God into more challenging areas of my life. This is akin to finding one's center, that still place in meditation to which one can always return. For me, it is my safe harbor. I do not mean safe in the material-world sense, for this house is anything but safe. I mean a safe place of the Spirit, fostered by immersion in Nature, but without the physical challenges, say, of an Outward Bound experience.

An important realization comes to me—I had searched for a place in Nature as a young woman and had given up my dream without even recognizing my loss. My family is second generation American, our ancestors all farmers in their countries of origin. My mother worked incessantly landscaping our large yard. Even now, nearly disabled through age and illness, she maintains a lovely small courtyard. My father and brothers have always kept large vegetable gardens, planting their yards with heritage cuttings and gifts from family members. My own experience recalls a line from "Talking Lives" by Michael Pye: "There was only one place to live, so people forgot what they needed to forget in order to protect their lives." Now, I want to remember what I need to remember in order to reclaim my life, to be of service in this life. Living in Nature supports me in this desire.

I had become smaller than God intended, with the cramped congested cities and quarters in which I lived reflecting my inner life. Now I watch the pelicans dive for fish and feel their lack of worry as my lungs expand. As I lumber along on my biweekly run, I send greetings to the sea otter swimming along the shore. He looks at me with curiosity (how can a human be so slow and clumsy?), keeping pace with me for awhile, then moving ahead. I weep as I see one of his sisters dying on the beach, shot by a salmon fisherman—or when I see a crow tearing the flesh of a dead gull. I am often reminded of the fragility of life. I carry with me an appreciation of what I have been given, both desired and undesired.

At the same time, I have an underlying fear that my new-found peace, symbolized by living in Nature, may somehow be destroyed. I recognize this feeling sometimes when I walk alone on the beach. With no one around, I am overwhelmed by the immensity and power of the ocean. I know how fragile and powerless I am as a mere human. I remember a biblical passage, in which James admonishes those who boast of accomplishments and brag of future plans:

> . . . come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit": whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (James 3:13-15)

Today, I am living and doing this, for it seems to be the will of God. For now, I have found my safe harbor.

Nouveau Beach

February, 2000. It is the middle of a winter ocean storm. The wind is howling, the rain slanting at the house in 45 degree angle. They put on their new polartec jackets, with the town name tastefully embroidered in small letters on the right breast. The jackets are different colors so they will not be too much like Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum. Tea and coffee are heated in the microwave and placed in thermal cups. Polartec pants, gloves with rubber grippers, and slickers with hoods complete the ensemble. They trek off to the beach, rubber-grippered hand holding rubber-grippered hand, the

thermal mugs grasped in their free hands. A pervading sense of courage and adventure abounds, one small incident of man bonding with Nature. They laugh at themselves and wish they had a fireplace that worked. A neighbor's white face presses up against a storm-drenched window. They imagine him saying to his wife somewhat pridefully, "Oh, they're just nouveau beach." Joy fills their hearts and they expand.

It's Okay

I have been mysteriously ill for 6 years. I have found no solutions to my health challenges. A friend's husband has recently died from symptoms similar to mine, and I have begun to feel that I am dying. I can literally feel the life force leaving my body, like water running out of a tub. I am beginning to lose hope that I will recover in this lifetime.

One night there is a City Council meeting we wish to attend, to protest a new hotel and conference center planned for a bluff a few blocks from our home. As the time for leaving nears, I realize with sorrow that I am too ill to venture out, now often the case at night. John says not to worry, he will speak both our interests. After he leaves, I light candles in the bathroom and take a bubble bath. This is a new pastime, one I had scorned before moving to the beach. I don warm flannel pajamas and the Acorn slippers John gave me for Christmas. For a house warming gift, the brother of my heart sent us a special blanket. Woven with a raised cross design, it is from the wool of sheep grown at the Massachusetts Trappist Monastery where my brother makes retreats. I wrap this precious blanket around my aching shoulders and drink a cup of Sweet Dreams tea. I climb, step by step, the spiral staircase to our third story glass room, stopping several times to wheeze and rest. I finally reach the rocking recliner my father bought by the side of the road for 35 dollars, somewhere around 1965. Despite its decrepit state, it is here I sit for my prayer and meditation.

I am transfixed with wonder when I realize the moon has risen above the lone cypress and sand dune in front of our home. It lights up the sky and shines on the ocean. I sit for a spell, rocking in my family's chair, wrapped in my brother's blanket, knowing my partner is out fighting the manly battle to protect our town. The peace of the moon and ocean enters my body and mind, soothing my suffering spirit. After a time, I realize that if it is my path soon to die,

it is okay with me, for I have trust in the rightness and goodness of God, the universe, and my path within it. I simply accept my path, with the moon, the stars, the cypress tree, the dune, and the ocean as my witness, as I sit, held in the palm of God.

Will You Remember Me?

The footprints in the sand
I so carefully planted
Along the ocean's edge
Wash away without a trace.

Will the same happen to the ones
I laid with love
Upon your heart?

Take the Child to the Beach

Take the Child to the Beach.
Rub on lots of lotion,
bring extra too.
Bring a hat and shirt
Need funky sunglasses
Shaped like hearts to see the sights.
A towel to lay on and one to dry off with.
A bag of snacks,
Carrots, corn chips, and cookies,
A jug of water.
A bucket for the treasures, and
Don't forget the spoon so we can dig to China.

Bring these things with you.
Let all else happen through Nature.
All you have to do is
Find the love, acceptance, and patience to
Take the Child to the Beach.

Rhythm

A lone tear runs down your cheek.
The waves of grief for your lost life
Rush in to bear you out to sea.
As you reach out to grasp the shore

You feel the solid beat of your heart
Pumping in, pumping out a still powerful rhythm
In time with a world of hearts.

– Grace

I forwarded Grace an audiotaped guided meditation, designed to facilitate a body-based reflective state. The audiotape included questions that arose when I read the above. This was her response:

Jay's Meditation

January, 2001. I awake early Sunday morning, before dawn. The waves of the ocean come and go, gently guiding me from my dream world into consciousness. I luxuriate at the feel of the warm skin on the intertwined legs of my new husband beside me. Normally I do not feel this as I usually cover every possible inch of my body with warm clothing for sleeping. It is cold in our scantily-heated home and our bedroom window is open so we may be rocked through our dreams by the incessant sounds of the ocean. Last night, I bled through my various menstrual apparati, even my sleeping pants, and was too befuddled to find new ones. Hence the bare legs and the skin-to-skin contact this morning.

This is the third morning since I have learned that the large tumor found two months ago in my uterus is currently benign. For 2 months I have been carrying the weight of this uncertainty and the knowledge of a surgery I have not wanted. Two days ago my oriental medicine doctor gave me good reason to hope he can address my situation without the immediate total hysterectomy recommended by my gynecologist. As I thank God for my day, I know that this is the morning I will be with Jay in his meditation.

As of late it has been unusually cold here. I begin some tea to steep while I dress for this meditation. I have recently discovered that I can care for myself by putting on warm clothes before I enter the unheated glass room on our third story, where I meditate. It is important news to me, symbolic news, that it is not necessary for me to tough it out! I put on Polartec pants I do not wear out of the house because they add ten pounds to the lower half of my body. They are very warm on me now. For this special occasion, I step into my

mother's slippers. Although they are a size too large, she wore them on her own feet. They are high and cover the ankles with snuggly fur. I am wearing an expensive imported flannel nightgown I bought when I was a different woman, working and spending money to fill my endless longing. I cover my body in the new, bright red, oversized Polartec robe my husband gave me for Christmas, the culmination of a long search to find just the right one for me. As I heat my tea, I watch the dark shapes of seagulls in their morning flight across clouds tinged with rising sun. My heart is full as I ascend the steps to meet with Jay.

As I begin the meditation, and am led through my body, I become aware of my habitual bodily responses: the knot of fear in my belly, the strong feelings of love tinged with some holding-back in my chest, the clenching of my jaw, the tension wrinkle of worry on my brow, the lifting and holding of my shoulders as if I planned on wearing them as earrings, the tension in my legs as I take a stand against the world and my life. These patterns are familiar, normally present to one degree or another.

Longing to be in Nature

This longing, described to my spiritual director, is a concurrent desire to be held and hold, to be contained, to feel connected with and a part of life, to move with the rhythm of life. I feel it primarily in my chest, as an ache, sometimes an expansion that moves with my breath. I feel it in my arms as they yearn to reach out—and in my hands as they wish to grasp, to stroke, to touch, to entwine. I want to wrap my legs around life, to engulf life within me, to become engulfed in it. I feel it on my skin, as I want to feel the drops of meaning, connection, and emotion like cool drops of rain on a hot summer night, changing my temperature, penetrating into my soul. But most of all, I feel this in my chest, as my heart desires to beat with the rhythms of all that surrounds me. At the same time, I am aware of the ever-present knot of fear (loss of self, of illusions of control?) in my stomach, and the band of protection around my chest.

Being Known

The desire to be known manifests physically as a desire to be touched, caressed by the breath of life on my skin. I want to have some other look into my eyes and see my love, gentleness, tenderness, loveability, and vulnerability. As I fall into this desire, I

feel my heart opening, like the time-elapsed photograph of a blossoming flower, petal by petal, layer by layer. With this comes the belly-based fear (of hurt, of being judged and found wanting??) and a slight sensation of wanting to close the flower. There is this ebb and flow of opening and closing. On an emotional/thinking basis, I have a strong sense that I have not served my purpose in this life. I want my life to have had some meaning in this world. I am searching for that. Without having raised a "healthy" family, I have a great longing to somehow leave a mark, however small, so that my life with all my gifts will have been one of giving rather than taking. I have a sense that part of this will be through allowing myself to be transparent and known.

Connections with Dying Creatures

These connections are complex. I feel sorrow for what I imagine to be the suffering of the animal. I feel powerless to help in any way. I have a microconnection to the individual animal, a prayer for its soul, and for blessings for its path. With at least one bird, as we looked into each other's eyes, I wondered if it was asking me to end its suffering. I was unsure, so I could only pray for its soul. I felt my heart pierced with sorrow. With another dying gull I stood with the protective rage of a mother and threw stones at the crow who was tearing at the gull's body before it died. With dying seals I have learned the best help is to not look at them and to leave them in peace, with a prayer. This has been a powerful lesson involving my own ideas of helping and the needs of the recipient.

At the same time, I see in my connection to dying creatures the grief of my own isolation in suffering, especially as a young girl and woman. I recognize my desire for others to connect with me in that place of aloneness and to provide support and caring. I have also cried for what I perceive as cruelty. This includes the cruelty of the crow tearing at a still living entity and of the human who shoots the seal, whether for sport or to protect their catch. I have searched myself for this cruelty. Mostly what I retrieve is the hopelessness of not being able to care for all the world's sufferings. At times this becomes the self-defense of callousness. During the day I think of all the suffering occurring at that given moment, often the result of human cruelty and callousness, and I weep. I weep for others, for my own suffering, and for my helplessness to alleviate any of it.

Acceptance of Potential of Death

Being surrounded by the acceptance of Nature helped me come to terms with the possibility of my own life in this world ending. Growing up, being trained, and working and living in the Western world created almost exclusively by Man imbued me with a certain need to fight my life rather than flow with it. The inevitability, the changes of Nature, and the acceptance I have found in Nature all support me in my own process. The cypress tree in front of our home grows in the direction it is shaped by the winds. I imagine it does not expend all of its energy struggling against the wind. I needed to learn this by watching Nature, for I did not learn it elsewhere. Further, I needed to feel in my body the oneness of my molecules with all that surrounds me, including both my powerfulness and my powerlessness. I imagine and even dream of myself floating on the waves, washing to and fro, towards and away from the shores. At the time of this acceptance, I feel held, by Nature, by God, by the love of my partner, and by my own caring for myself.

Thoughts on Longing and Grief

I have long had an intimate relationship with grief, even as a child. This was my reaction to unfulfilled longing for connection with the Divine and to my unmet desire for acceptance, from others and later from myself, as a beautiful child of God in the as-is state. Throughout my life, I had many experiences that seemed to justify this grief. Over time, the grief transformed into something filled with hopelessness, a gray and black density covering over other emotions, obfuscating the original longing. An examination of my body would show this, for this hopelessness manifested dense and armored: tension in my stocky legs (standing against the world), great pain in my low back (no support), a wide steel band around my chest (protection, trying to be small), constant tension in my neck and shoulders (many burdens), and clenching, grinding teeth (fighting the material world).

As I have unpacked this grief, I have been able to isolate and experience these manifestations in my body and to excavate the original longing. This longing is a desire to feel connection with all of life, just as I am, in the moment just as it is, without constantly needing improvement. I feel this the most in my chest, and I believe the steel band is now just a big piece of elastic, maintaining some pressure and constriction, but still permeable and flexible. My arms

want to throw themselves open, alternately flapping like bird wings and moving in fluid, spiral-like motions, as do my legs.

I began this process in the parks along the Los Gatos running trails where I once lived, and carried it into Willow Glen, in the lovely garden I planted in our mini backyard. I have only opened into the fulness of awareness here on the coastside, facing the twenty acres of state park, endless ocean, and all the elements here. I have an image, developed in my mind, which I now carry in my body. It is of an hourglass shape. There are many beautiful lines from the earth that lead into a tight center, then expand again into the endless sky. The lower lines expand wide and deep, down through the earth and across the earth, and are of varying earth-type colors. They represent all that is available in the world for an individual, all of the support, the grounding, the wisdom. These lines concentrate into the center. This is the individual (i.e., me). For many years, I went no further in my development. I had the world available, yet I stayed tangled up in the dense concentration of my self, my angst, my experience, etc. As I have prayed to be different (beginning about fifteen years ago), and dedicated my life to service, the second half of the hourglass has become available to me. These heavenly lines are of light, shiny colors, and expand infinitely into the universe. These are the lines of giving to others. So, in summary, I pull from the power of the earth into my own particular configuration of gifts and challenges, and spew gifts out into the universe. One of my missions is to help others be aware of the resources available to them, to get past themselves, and pass these resources along.

All this came from my awareness of the longing under my grief. So now, when I feel grief, it is a grief best summarized by a saying printed on a sketch I purchased about eight years ago. "She said she usually cries once each day not because life is so sad, but because life is so beautiful and so short." The grief is not a longing for what could have been, but more for the poignancy of life, the needless suffering of so many, and yes, even the cruelty of Nature and Man. My longing is with me, and I believe I could not continue in my search for the Divine and my missions without it. It is soothed by self care (as opposed to self pampering) and by the ever changing rhythms of Nature. At this point, I do not know if I can survive living in the city, surrounded primarily by man-made rhythms. I have not yet come to that point of internalizing what I absorb from Nature. All I know is that everything has changed for me, and this time in Nature constantly reminds me of the fragility and beauty of life.

Juana Ocasio

Juana Ocasio has been an educator and therapist for over 30 years. She now spends much of her time on her land near Lake Michigan, nestled between the Manistee National Forest and a swiftly moving creek. In this rich environment, Juana relaxes, recharges, and reaffirms her connection with nature. She paints watercolors in the forest near the creek and writes poetry and prose stimulated by meditative Great Lake beach treks. Juana has recently cultivated the practices of Quigong and T'ai Ch'i, which she has started teaching to others.

> I have felt emotional extremes upon entering the forest or countryside from elation to melancholy. I always considered these states as my soul connection with nature, its mysteries, depths, and delights. I have the good fortune of owning both city and forest property, spending approximately half the year in each of these environments. My forest land of 20 acres in Michigan is situated on a spring-fed meandering creek deep in the forest surrounded by state and federal lands. I am able to immerse myself in this environment relatively free from human contact. On dark or cloudy days it seems like a gloominess pervades everywhere much more potently than in the civilized environment. Conversely, on sunny days, the cheerfulness is overwhelming, almost too much to absorb. However, laced throughout all of these emotional depths is the undercurrent of sadness.
>
> I think I am beginning to understand this phenomenon with the insights of author Thomas Moore from his book, *The Re-enchantment of Everyday Life*. In speaking of nature he breaks the word ecology down to its roots: *eco* coming from the Greek *oikos*, meaning "home," and *logos*, meaning "the study of." Connecting the two into ecology, the word's deeper meaning contains the mysterious notion of home. Maybe what we are experiencing as sadness is actually nostalgia. *Nostos*, meaning to return home, and *algia* meaning pain. Moore states, "Nostalgia has to do with home and ecology and could be understood as an emotion appropriate to enchantment, as a calling home, a bittersweet feeling of longing for a

> life once enjoyed but now lost . . . a mixture of sweetness, longing, melancholy and a touch of bitterness."
>
> To me, this pretty much defines the experience: primordial memories calling us back to our real home. Today more than ever before, our separation from our real home is increasingly extreme. Our longing awakens only when we venture out of our concrete and plastic world and enter into the intricate array of natural wonder.
>
> Since alienation from nature is so pervasive, it is only those who open their souls and know they belong to the natural world who are aware of the meaning of our attachment and yet separation from home. Even today's hunters with their beer and gear love to sit in the woods, unconsciously yearning to return to their primordial connection and home. It is the home of our spiritual foundation long forgotten by the consciousness of our culture but looming beneath the surface in the "old brain."

Laura Huber

Laura Huber grew up in an orphanage, where she learned to see the dark side of everything. Now in her 40s, Laura is the mother of three children, ages 25, 19, and 15. A problem solver by nature, she has worked over 20 years in sales support, rising to the level of senior manager. While continuing her career, Laura also recently began to study holistic psychology through the graduate program at Antioch University. Over the last few months, Laura has been blessed with many exceptional, life-changing experiences. When she first wrote to me, Laura described her experiences as still raw and unfolding, and told me she would not be able to communicate effectively in writing. One afternoon, Laura and I connected on the phone. I typed into the computer while Laura talked. What follows are her words, written practically verbatim.

> People were often telling me I had an energy about me—they felt it when I walked into a room. I wanted to know what they were talking about, but I couldn't narrow it down or focus on it.

It occurred to me to learn zen meditation. I wanted to find out about calmness. I went to a zen meditation weekend. They took us through imagery meditation and asked us to imagine someplace we could be. I looked out the window and saw a little running creek. I became that creek. I soaked into the earth, could *feel* myself soaking into the earth. At first, I was just aware of flowing, as though my blood, and the water, were the same and were flowing. I was nourishing the earth. My legs tingled: They are tingling again now, from my shins, to the top of my thighs, and up through my hips. I can picture that moment—I'm there in that moment, soaking down into the earth. I could see the whole world through a telescope. I said to myself, let it go. Then I cried. I was thinking, how blessed am I. For 20 minutes, I cried. But I was happy, awed with the beauty. I was able to see myself as part of a massive system. I thought: if we don't take care of this system, there won't be a system. I felt very fluid, like mercury in a thermometer, very protected and very fluid. I did not want the experience to stop. Ever since that weekend, which was only a month ago, I have been flooded emotionally. Blessed and honored.

What emotions? Sometimes I am scared that I am seeing things I did not see before. The other day, I was sitting in traffic, at one intersection for half an hour. The snow was piled high. I stared at one drop of water dripping from a mound of snow. I didn't see cold or gray or time. How awesome to see a little drop of water. It returns into the water system and it was so beautiful. I wondered why I was worthy of seeing this. For whatever reason, I was blessed with being able to see this. My blinders were off. I was happy. Bubbles in a champagne bottle.

Twenty-five years ago, I lived in Tennessee. I went back last fall to sky dive. I fell through a cloud, became one with the universe. I felt like a fairy, like I wasn't real. The whole universe was in front of me for the grabbing. I could see a quarry and become a fish in the water. I never saw such blue water in my life. Then, I had tears of joy, tears of ecstasy. Awe. To fall through a cloud. When I cried, I was not hysterical; I had gone into this with fear and respect. Better than a front row seat. Awe. Full of emotions.

I went back to sky dive eight times. Once, Pigeon Forge, just outside the Smokies, very touristy, but you can see the mountains. I left O'Hare at 6:00 p.m. and arrived in pouring rain. I had to drive in the rain. Black. Mist or fog. I had no idea where I was going, but just followed the road. Every once in a while there was a

light and a shadow from a tree, a profile. When my mind would turn to fear, to uncertainty, I would see a white fog formation and say, "thank you." Certainty came back. The roads were treacherous. It took over 4 hours.

The next day, I went for sky diving in an inside tunnel. There were huge jet engines; it sucks you up. It was for training, to build on skills and posture, but it wasn't right. I wasn't outside. I finished quickly and drove into the Smokies. I saw a mountain weeping. A mountain weeping. Crying. Not water, not a waterfall, not a creek, but weeping. Then I was crying to take care of her because "you're all I've got." If you don't, you have nothing. Now these were tears of sadness.

Later in the day, I drove in the mountains along side roads, being adventurous. It was the first time I saw creeks running along both sides of old dirt roads. I saw a mountain covered in a golden veil and slammed on the brakes. I knelt at the presence of the mountain. Humbled. Truly, truly humbled. Awe. Just stared. Then, emotionally, a lot of turmoil again. Unworthy. What have I missed all my life? Angry that I have always been so busy doing instead of enjoying. Sad for all those cars that were rushing by me. I never cried so much in my life. But there were two kinds of tears. Tears of sadness that others around couldn't see, they kept driving by. Also, tears of ecstasy and awe to be blessed by this beauty. Angry at myself for not having seen it before, thinking I was always so busy doing. I had cheated myself. I mourned for myself throughout the day. I "mourned"—I don't want to use the word grieved. I mourned. I was thankful I did not let the analytical Laura kick in.

I brought a piece of the mountain back and have it on my desk. It layers my life. I'm part of that system. I have value and the mountain showed me I have value. I can stand tall and proud and the mountain showed me what everyone has been saying about my energy–my rawness, my boldness. There you are Laura, standing as tall as that mountain in natural beauty. The mountain gave me that. The mountain gave me that understanding and helped me see through the layers of steps that I have taken to get where I am in my journey. I touched the mountain. It was cold, wet, hard, strong, but so giving.

I walked through the warehouse today at work, wearing flat shoes. Walking up an escalator, I felt the earth going one way and me another. We held each other in balance. I went to my office and

journaled it. Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. You've got it, now run with it and don't look back.

People ask me what has happened. They say, something is different, the tone of your voice, how you carry yourself, how you walk. I used to wear my hair shoulder length. Clairol bottle, toward my face, pixie, with big sunglasses. I was always hiding. Now I have my hair pulled back, totally back. I can run my hands through my hair. I am beautiful. I am unique. There is one of me and I am here to make a difference. Now I don't go anywhere without index cards. I want to record what I am smelling, feeling, who was there, what I had on. Then later I go back to the moment and just write.

In my classes, they have wanted me to write about my childhood, about the orphanage. I cannot do it. What I remember is home, all the children with me. Home is the smell of mittens on a radiator and the sizzling sound they make. All those mittens, mittens and mittens. That's what I remember.

At a seminar, someone gave me a little pine cone and said I wish you to grow as strong as a pine tree that can bend through the turmoil. I still have the pine cone. It sings and shares my story.

Experience of God Through Deep Sensory Connection With Nature

As seen in prior sections, when describing experiences of deep sensory connection with nature, some people speak of connection with God. While some of the following stories also display elements of more ecologically or personally oriented feelings, these stories also articulate more directly an "experience of God" aspect of the range of experiences under study. While most participants in this project use the word "God" in their descriptions, others use "higher power," "the universe," "the creator," or "spirit." Regardless of the words used for "the experience of God," there are many similarities in the psychological and somatic experience which begin to make the experience recognizable, in some respects distinct from experiences described previously.

This includes emphasis on numinosity, wonder, and rarity; the ubiquitous expression of gratitude; implicit humility; and acceptance of self as part of a natural order. I view these experiences as part of the same healing continuum noted previously.

Jenny P. Lee

Jenny P. Lee lives in north London. She recently opened her home as sanctuary to the Lotus Foundation, which offers music, poetry, movement, and other workshops. Jenny, who paints, and Jay Ramsey, a poet, collaborated on a book, Alchemy of the Invisible, *which will soon be available through www.lotusfoundation.org.uk.*

> Walking due west on a cold winter's day in London, along the street where I live, the sight of a winter flowering cherry hit me in the chest. The sudden awareness of the pale pearl-like blooms against the black bark of the trunk came as a physical blow to my body, for the sheer perfect beauty of the tree revealed itself to me not as a mental experience but one of the body. A physical experience. For a single moment, the tree and I shared in its creation.
>
> My experiencing the tree on a winter's day in an urban street was very important in its clarity. With the awareness that we are not separate comes understanding that a delicate offering of beauty is there for us free. Challenging our sense of values. Opening other dimensions. There was a recognition of unity in the physicality of the experience and a sense of gratitude. We know so little . . .

Valerie

Valerie is interested in almost everything: colors, the outdoors, the arts, an array of friends and acquaintances, work, and hope—hope for all that she does not understand or know. Valerie was born and raised in eastern Pennsylvania and moved with her family as a teenager to Ohio, where she still makes her home. Valerie loves her job with the police department and also "messes around" in the garden and with

antiques. She is involved in several service organizations and garden clubs. It's taken Valerie 52 years to finally feel comfortable in this world. Life is good!

i have always had an emotional feeling when outside, nature. the most emotional and overwhelming are rainbows. right up with rainbows is the sun.

also, that very first day of spring. it's one certain day a year. to me, the color of the air is different, and there is a certain smell and an overall feeling that hits me right in the sternum. the first thing i do is breathe in real deep, then get the chills, shut my eyes, and i feel like i am being transported back in time to maybe when i was a little kid. this is the feeling i get the first day of spring. it's not grieving, it's melancholy, more than anything.

maybe it's not being transported to when i was young, because i really didn't like being a kid. my life is best right now. it's as if that certain feeling, that certain color and smell of the air transports me SOMEWHERE, but no place i have been. i WISH it would be clearly a real spiritual experience, because i would love that. it is more a familiarity, maybe in another lifetime spring had great meaning. (my cousin in florida would definitely tell me that, i am sure.)

it's not the feeling of missing something (it's more a returning). it's not sad, not bittersweet. it's very tender, very loving. it's not painful, not sad. it's some type of connection.

when i am in the sun, i feel "connected." that's the only way i can describe it. it's like i feel connected to G-d. i sometimes practically cry because i want so badly for G-d to know my 'soul' and i want the sun to wrap itself totally around me, like a bug hug.

i have been around people in the workplace for a long time, but i do not connect with them. i adored my parents but really did not connect with them. i have no idea why, but that's the way it was, much as i loved them so much. i tried and tried.

now, rainbows, that's another thing. sometimes i feel in my gut that there is going to be a rainbow, and get in my car & drive around looking for one. my heart is beating a thousand times a minute, and i will drive all over town looking for one. (i always

thought i would die someday looking for a rainbow and running into a semi!) again, it takes my breath away and is totally overwhelming. i almost cry out, nothing in particular, just the amazement of it all.

most of the people i love have died, unfortunately, and i have taken all of that very hard, very long grieving times, and i really never forget anyone i have loved. yet, with nature, it's not grieving for them, it's not anything ecological, it's the beauty of it, going right through me. right in the sternum area, and i get that strange feeling like a person gets when they're taken by surprise, that kind of funny empty feeling like feeling for a flash, again right there at the sternum.

lots of times on the way home from work about 4 p.m., i see a tiny rainbow near the sun. a cloud is there, and there must be some moisture built up and it makes a faint rainbow. and that gives me the same feeling also, the beauty of it just takes my breath away and i keep saying to myself, 'thank you! thank you!" for letting me see this special thing that maybe no one else notices.

the smell of the earth, dirt, gives me that sensation, but not like the sun or rainbows. i love being in the dirt, getting muddy, planting things and replanting and planting, and replanting, just getting my hands in that dirt. that has a smell, too. it is a real shame that i don't know what i am doing, and since it's not about planning and that type of thing, i made up my mind, that it's the act of digging in the dirt, feeling the plants and the roots, and talking to them, and apologizing to them because they are so stuffed in there, and i will try real hard next year to give them a little more space; it simply makes my heart feel so good, it is so comfortable, it is fun, it is hard work, it is freedom.

thanks for listening and letting me express myself.

After I received the above from Valerie, I wrote and asked a few questions.

Valerie wrote back giving additional thoughts:

i have been thinking how my very first response to you was right from the gut and heart and i think after that i wasn't able to get the feelings to be able to express them to you.

today i was thinking, well, it's not the right time of year, there's a blizzard out there, can't concentrate, too busy at work, etc. etc. etc.

then, a little later this morning, the snow stopped and the sun came out and the clouds were unbelievable. the clouds were so huge and dark and light, and it was just gorgeous. then on the way home, the sky was very dark, then boom, out came the sun, bright against that blue sky in the west, and i looked in the rear view mirror. of course, the dark clouds were there. so unconsciously even though i knew it was too much to hope for, i did a yuey right in the middle of traffic so i could head in the other direction. if only it were warmer, there would have been a great rainbow.

it just goes to show you when you are not looking, there it is. it was a very encouraging sign for me and just like a shot of energy.

i was also thinking about the sun, and the more thinking about it, i am sure that there have been a few times that i have cried. and yes, i am sure years ago it was intense grieving for my mom, especially because we shared lots of time in the sun. as the years have gone by, it's a grieving, and maybe more of a spirit thing, that connection, with my mom and dad and G-d. on a few occasions, i remember finally being able to relax, and almost feeling as though i could be cradled and taken to that spiritual place. of course i knew that couldn't happen, and wasn't happening, but i did feel that connection i have been telling you about. that G-d could hear my thoughts. believe me, i never get answers and as previously mentioned, never have any "experiences" like those out-of-body things people talk about and all that stuff. it's just a wonderful feeling, except that nothing visual is ever shown to me, it's like walking through the woods blind.

even though i have grieved for that closeness i had with my mom, at the time it was just grieving. it wasn't that i expected something, so it wasn't disappointing, it didn't hurt that something fantastic didn't happen. i think it just enabled me to grieve in private and cry to myself, and connect & share my heart and feelings with G-d, i hope.

oh . . . and then tonight when i got home, around 7 p.m., it was COLD. but i looked up and it was snowing but the sky was clear

and the moon was out, hazy, but it was out, and this bright, bright star, yet it was snowing. it was wonderful. had to take a good deep breath there and take it all in because it was a neat sight. and no huge emotions, but a very strong appreciation for the beauty of it all. and sometimes a very strong appreciation brings tears. (once i saw CATS and the girl who sang Memories was so unbelievable that i just couldn't help crying, and i do not cry), but there are some things that just bring out uncontrollable emotions, the sun for me.

well, take care and thanks again for listening—

Adam Butler

Adam Butler, 28, lives in Austin, Texas, where he writes advertisements for television, radio, and print. He enjoys learning from people, books, and experiences (especially outdoors ones).

It was around 8:30 on a Sunday morning when I arrived at the entrance of the Muir Woods National Monument. I'd spent the lion's share of the previous 3 weeks in hotel rooms or in dank buildings editing commercials. I was long overdue for a trip outside.

The Muir woods are 295 acres of uncut old growth redwoods. Some of the trees are upwards of 1,000 years old. I had never beheld such majestic trees in all of my life. I could not wait to enter the shelter of the canopy that extended upward so far it obscured the rising sun. I felt like a child headed for the base of a Christmas tree on December 25.

I began to hike briskly to warm myself from the cool morning temperatures. The cathedral-like presence of the trees only made the place feel colder. Yet the coldness provides a warmth I cannot explain.

As I climbed up from the floor of the woods my heart began to beat hard. I could hear it. I could feel the artery in my neck throbbing against my skin and hear it brushing up against the collar of my rain coat. My lungs filled with and expelled air steadily. I began to perspire. Because my heart was literally pounding in my chest, I was very aware of my temporal body. All at once I was struck by how fast I was walking, though I had no schedule to keep. It was at that

very moment that a poem arrived. I quickly pulled paper and pen from my shoulder bag and wrote the following:

> As I walk, I breathe the old air of these woods,
> A glutton in such a giving place.
> I walk faster to speed my breath.
> Tomorrow I will not breathe here.

Several weeks later, while rereading the poem, I was struck by its subconscious revelations. It seemed to be about the well-worn mantra "carpe diem." In that moment I realized the temporal nature of my very human existence. I realized that I may never make it back to those woods. And that, moreover, the next beat of my heart could quite possibly be the last.

The natural world always reminds me to be thankful for my life. The lack of noise both literal and figurative leaves me with only that which passes the giant screen that is mind. Indeed, it always allows me to examine my thoughts at a critical distance. I always return from such trips to nature more aware and awakened. A walk down a busy street has never done that for me.

I'm also humbled by the sheer size of many of the places I have encountered. They make me feel small. The Rockies have literally caused me to panic on more than one occasion. Their sheer magnitude is a vision that leaves me without foundation. Yet always around the corner is a feeling of empowerment. And I am bolstered by the knowledge that I was made to be amongst such places.

The natural world gives me a context in which to view matters of the heart and soul. It allows me to extrapolate a plan for living. Be prepared. Know the terrain. Stop and smell the roses. Rest when tired. Be alert.

I'm a seeker. I believe in Jesus Christ but that is not an end, merely a beginning. I love talking to other people about what they believe and why. When I'm alone in nature, it's as if I'm carrying on a conversation with the Creator himself. I'm amongst His work. Imagine being in a Salvador Dali painting surrounded by melting clocks. You can learn more from touching, smelling, and feeling than simply from seeing. It's a more full experience. I believe nature is a gift to experience.

Michael Leas

Michael Leas grew up in Nebraska and now lives in San Diego. He is a professional artist whose works depict angels and other inner truths. In his work, Michael draws upon his own exceptional experiences, including a near-death experience in 1979. His art and stories can be explored at moonfeather.org.

I was climbing Mt. Rainier with my two brothers and my dad. We were witnessing the sun rise up 13,000 feet. My senses could not take in all the splendor of this experience. I found that I was able to feel it inwardly beyond what I knew was real. It brought tears to my eyes to feel such a connection to life. We were roped together with ice axes in our hands and crampons on our boots feeling the true power of the mountain. We started climbing at about 12:00 midnight so by sunrise we were nearing the top of the mountain. It was breath taking to literally feel the roll of the earth, while strapped to the mountain and seeing the sun kiss the edge of the world as it rolled up into the sky. I have climbed a few other mountains. They were all splendid, but this sunrise is embedded in my memory.

The other time that stuck out was when my wife and I were in the Sequoia forest with the massive trees. Again, I was overawed to see and feel the love in this forest. I was so welled up inside to know this is my nature of life. This is the roots of the Human. I was able to transcend all the materialization of our earthly domain. When we were by a row of four trees, it brought out a sensation of timelessness and the true meaning of eternity. These trees were here before the time of Jesus and have the unwritten history of the world inside them. Through the daylight and the environmental weather existence they have the vibrational essence of life expressing through them.

I have had quite a few other inner experiences while out in nature, but these stand out the most. These experiences helped me to grow. I can appreciate even a blade of grass and at times get the same feelings all over again. Nature breathes the breath of life into us all.

Beth

Beth lives in St. Joseph, Missouri.

I have not shared my story before but it is one of the "moments of communion" which I recall when thinking about the highlights of Living. It is among a few including the birth of my first child.

In approximately 1992 there was a terrific ice storm in northwest Missouri which left thousands of trees broken and power lines down. Yet amidst all the negatives, there was great beauty. In St. Joseph, there is a very graceful boulevard system, and for miles the main focus is trees. I ventured driving down the boulevard the morning after the storm and found a beautiful ice city. It was overwhelming as the trees bent over the boulevard from both sides. The sun was bright and shone on the trees causing them to burst into crystalline radiance which was totally encompassing. It was such a statement of depth and such a communion with nature, that crying and thanking God were the only things I could do. I was talking to myself and God in thanks and gratitude for such a gift. It was transient in some sense, but forever in my soul.

Louis Nielsen

Louis Nielsen, 57, grew up in Denmark. He worked in the liquified petroleum gas industry for 30 years, residing in Germany, Bermuda, and the U.K. Since 1996, Louis has been semi-retired. He remains a partner in an international oil brokerage firm and works part-time as a volunteer with the elderly in London. His interests include nature travel, skiing, hiking, and sailing.

I have felt strong emotions on a number of occasions when being in the wilderness, be it in the mountains, at sea, or in the bush.

The most memorable experience I have had of this nature was on a wilderness trail in the Umfolozi Nature Reserve in Natal, South Africa. The trail was organized by the Wilderness Leadership School. The WLS aims to renew the original bonds between man and

the earth and, as they put it, to give man the opportunity to be alone with the living earth.

The Umfolozi is inhabited by most of the wild animals from that region, including lion, hyena, hippo, crocodile, and rhinoceros.

During the trail you walk for 4 to 6 hours every day then set up camp for the night where you sleep under the stars near the fire. Members of the team take turns to keep a watch during the night.

One morning I walked away from the camp alone (against the rules) and before long I found myself standing within 30 feet of a large male waterbuck. He had not noticed me and I stood completely still and watched him. After a little while he must have caught my scent. He looked up and saw me. I had fully expected him to run away at this point. However he just stood there looking at me. I felt a deep wish that he should not run away. I attempted to communicate my friendly feelings toward him. Perhaps he sensed this. At any rate he returned to his grazing within a few minutes. The fact that he continued grazing gave me a sense of extreme happiness. I felt a sense that this animal and nature in general was willing to accept me in spite of the danger that human beings normally represent. It made me feel a part of the nature around me, the earth underneath me and the sky above. I felt a connectedness to the universe, a sense that I merged with the world around me. Strong emotions welled up inside me. I had the sense that time stood still. I felt a gratitude for my existence. I felt complete and deep inner peace.

The meaning of the experience is hard to explain. Perhaps in that moment I was embraced by the universe, universal consciousness/God.

After receiving Louis's description, I wrote to ask whether there had been tears as part of this experience. Louis wrote,

There were no tears and I was not near tears. Rather, there was a heightened awareness which had no time for tears. Tears could have been a distraction.

It was as if all my senses were alert and focusing on the experience. It was as if all the senses operated in unity. There was a

fullness of the heart. I felt complete and fulfilled. I did feel gratitude and love for the animal, the nature around me and the universe. I felt a gratitude for existing. In my view compassion does not apply. As I understand compassion, it has to do with one's recognition of the suffering of other sentient beings. There was no element of longing or loss.

I did have an experience in connection with a mountain climb in the Himalayas. Strong emotions came into play. This time with tears. The emotions occurred when I reached high camp prior to the assault on the peak of the mountain. Also then I felt a sense of gratitude.

I do not ascribe the same value to this experience. Partly because there was a strong element of having achieved something which at times seemed impossible. Partly because the tears may be attributable to the high altitude and the lack of oxygen which is known to cause these type of emotions. However the emotions were very, very strong indeed.

Jaene Leonard

Jaene Leonard is an actor and writer living in New York City. Compassion is important to her and the moment is everything.

Nature has always been an important part of my life. As a child growing up in a suburb of St. Louis, I remember summer evenings coming home in the car with my family. I always liked the window down, and I loved the wind rushing into the back seat and through my hair. I'd watch the moon frolic along with us all the way home and gaze at the stars feeling a profound sense of wonder.

When I was about 7 or 8, I had a magical experience that I believe has led to an even deeper connection with nature. I was leaving for school out the back door, and just as I stepped outside the gate and into the road, I turned back to wave at my mother, who always watched and blew kisses from the kitchen window. It was a late summer morning, and the sun was rising, although her direct light hadn't yet reached our block. The shade from the swaying trees in our neighborhood—tall pines, oaks, and in our yard a lovely middle-aged sugar maple—cast a lazy chill that spilled onto the yard and into the street. All of my senses were enticed—the air smelled

deliciously of morning dew and fresh cut grass. The blue sky pierced through the green canopy in a commanding, comforting sort of way. Through our screen door and onto the sweet breeze wafted a barely audible melody from the console stereo my mother always had playing. And the birds—robins, sparrows, bluebirds, cardinals, blackbirds—all sang hymns in the delicate branches of the trees.

A propellor plane moved through the sky with a soft hum. I looked up, closed my eyes, and breathed the day into my soul. I was aware for the very first time that I was alive. I was filled with bittersweet joy and a sort of remembrance of the connectedness of everything. The moment was new, and yet ancient. I felt a birth of gentleness inside me. I believe that moment shifted my entire perception of life.

Since that morning, I have relived that moment over and over again trying to label it. Recalling it is easy; describing it is difficult. Even writing about it, the words seem to fall short in conveying the magnitude I experienced in that one tiny moment. I feel I could go on describing it for pages and never get to the sacredness of it. I do know that my heart broke wide open that day, for that was the day I was introduced to God.

Ana Ines Avruj

Ana Ines Avruj is 53 years old, married, and has two children, 28 and 24 years old. She is Argentinean and a psychotherapist by profession. Ana and her husband Julio, an engineer, are among the founders of ATRA (Transpersonal Association of the Republic of Argentina) and Abilities Argentina, a community organization dedicated to improving the lives of people with physical challenges. Ana is author of the book, Viaje del Alma: Guía de autoconocimeiento y transformación interior (Journey of the Soul: Guide for Self-learning and Internal Transformation) *and has published articles within the field of psychology. She gives workshops in Argentina and in other countries.*

Ana's contribution was written in Spanish and translated into English by Vicki Capestany. Vicki lives in San Jose, California, where she teaches 5th grade in a Spanish immersion elementary school.

Ana wrote the following about 5 years ago, to be read informally as a report of her experiences while traveling with a group of friends. It is an excerpt of a longer text titled Chronicles of a Journey of Death and Rebirth or Story of an Initiation.

> Day before the full moon of Gemini. Reclining on a flat rock, with the caresses of the sun on my skin, I am filled with the beauty of the place. I give thanks to Mother Nature for her gifts and feel that she sends me her messages of love via a funny squirrel and two delicate blue birds who silently keep me company.
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> The waters of a mighty cascade fall in a rushing torrent, forming a river that aims itself directly at me. The energetic wind splashes ice-cold drops on my body. What makes this place so powerful is the profusion of energies present: the imposing mountains, the water, the aged trees, the pure air. My heart is full of pleasure and admiration. It is in that fire that alchemy is produced.
>
> I begin to breathe deeply, exchanging my energies with the waterfall: I inhale its vigor, its beauty, and its force; I exhale my gratitude and love. Everything around me begins to disappear or all begins to be integrated. The intensity grows between the waterfall and me: I inhale its powerful energy, exhale my openness and surrender. Each time more excitement, each time more exaltation. I feel the waterfall entering my body and I entering into her. The moment is magic, there is no time, there is no friction, there is almost no separation. I am making love with the waterfall, I feel it in my skin, in my flesh, in my breath. The two of us become one. All is One.
>
> During those precious instants of inloveness and profound union I felt as though it were a wedding with the energies of the Mother that would be confirmed that night with the full moon. It was then that I perceived for the first time with such clarity how distinct are the energies of the sky and the earth. The ones from on high are serene, harmonious, elevating: when I come into contact with them, I feel that I expand, that the limits are diluted and the body is erased.

Nature's energies are also harmonious but not serene. Vital, strong, wild. It is an exultant energy that penetrates all my cells, my body is totally present. I feel as though I've integrated into my life a new dimension of the feminine and of love, that my perception of the divinity has been completed. Now I see the feminine aspect of God formed by the Celestial Mother of the Heavens and the Divine Mother of the Earth united in the holiness of my Presence. The ethereal sweetness of the Virgin Mary and the energetic vitality of Mother Nourishment are the two faces of the same archetype that became balanced in my heart.

How did this story begin?

Last year, when we decided in our group, "Travelers of the Soul," to plant our hearts in the seed of light, I chose the seed of love so that it would germinate in the warmth and power of the shared effort. Since then, I water and care for that intention, confirming it day to day. By aligning myself with the energy of love, something began growing softer inside of me: that love which was expressed toward the outside returned in greater respect and care for myself. I began to let go of the rigid self-criticism, the severe judgments, the anger against myself. Something began to come unblocked and to act as leavening for what would manifest itself later.

In May of 1996, my husband and I left for Curitiba–"ecological capital of Brazil"–a very special city, full of enchantment and surprises. There, at the University of the Environment, in one of the most beautiful and serene places I have ever known, surrounded by mountains and dense vegetation, there lies hidden an absolutely still lake. Its waters reflect, like the most perfect mirror, everything that comes there to rest. The world becomes a waking dream since everything has its perfect double: swans, rocks, trees. Sitting near its bank, my soul is also reflected in the lake. Gratitude rises from the greatest depth. I feel as though I am hand-in-hand with life, that it has given to me, and I have given to it. That my thirst for mysteries has been quenched and that I have brushed harmonies without equal. That I have known deep pain and all the subtleties of the emotions, from the most hurtful to the most exquisite. That I had the necessary courage to live several lives in one, and the fatigue of having already repeated several lives. That I had the privilege of having met wise men and loving Teachers and an internal motor that rarely let me rest. That life hurts me through its intensity, for the children without a home, the grandparents who are

hungry, the men and women who go through life suffocated by senseless resentment and violence born in suffering. That life dazzles me with its beauty and unlimited wisdom.

I no longer remember how many images passed through the mirror of the lake of my soul. I only remember the uncontainable cry that flowed from within me, a mix of pain, gratitude, and purification. I felt as though that was a beautiful place in which to die, to leave the body where the body belonged. These were not tears of shame nor of pain for me, I have shed many of those already in my life. They were tears of a different quality, of a grateful farewell for all I had received, a recounting.

I remembered that Julio, my husband and learning companion, had asked me to read him a prayer when he is in his last moments of incarnation, designed to guide him in his crossing (Yoga Guru: Practice for Union with the Essential Nature of the Teacher). I had promised him, as if taking for granted my immortality, or at least, that he would precede me on the journey. I became conscious of the possibility of my dying first and was okay. It is difficult to explain, in that moment I didn't feel either attraction or rejection for life or for death. I was saying farewell to life, not due to pain, but because of a sensation of culmination, of ending. It was really a beautiful place and a good place to die and something actually died within me.

When Julio returned from his meditation, he told me, "Paradise exists, above and below." For him, the doors of the heavens opened.

The following days, very busy ones, made me forget that experience. We were at a conference in Manaus. There, I met some people totally and completely committed to their own growth and work for a better world, others with deep innate wisdom and love for the earth, and others who still confused spirituality with colorful phenomena, with the fantasy of buying pieces of Wholeness or the intention of conquering pieces of the sky by storm, something fast and light that can momentarily fascinate but doesn't result in real changes in the conscience. It was a time of questioning, an unbalanced time. Energies of compassion and service were mixed with more dense energies, with a low spirituality or a complete absence of one. What was happening at the conference, added to, or influenced by, the energies of the place, Julio's intense experience in the jungle, the exuberant jungle and the power of nature's lavishness,

stimulated my own interior process and I felt an intense interior movement in my first and second chakras.

Now, looking backwards, I see that it was a beginning from the start, to be born again to the levels of consciousness of the first chakras, as in physical birth. The world captured via the senses, a growing sensuality, sexuality exacerbated. But there was something different. Along with the sensuality and the sexual excitement I felt deep clarity of thought. It wasn't the mind in its mechanical mode; rather, a clear vision of what was happening. I was experiencing the world and people directly, without intermediaries, without my mind getting in the way. I was experiencing things intensely and saw how the mind wants to use rationality to escape that intensity, which frightened it. I was open sensually and sexually, unattached to any object, more like contact with the energy of cohesion of the Universe which attracts the particles within it. I was awakening to love as it is manifested in the first chakras. It was a powerful and impulsive energy, but, while seeing it playing in me, going through me, I did not feel at its mercy. I could contain it, enjoy it, admire it, and allow it free movement without an urgent need to guide it toward its conclusion.

This process, which germinated in Manaus, became more intense in San Francisco. We went there to be taught by S. S. Kusum Lingpa, a Buddhist teacher of compassion.

A dear friend, a soul brother, welcomed us in his home. The meditations before his altar once again connected me more to my center, with that opening of my heart that I had felt in Curitiba. These were days when much feeling and tears seized me frequently, beyond my will. My heart was so open that I felt the raw pain in my friend's life and my children's, as well as the pain of a world of mistakes and ignorance. I once again felt that I was bidding farewell to the world.

I now understand another aspect of the farewell I was saying: I was bidding farewell in a definitive way to my search for external teachers, to incarnate teachers. That search began very early in this life and I know for certain that it was also the reason for much of my past existence. I was not abandoning my need to learn; rather, the belief that wisdom belonged only to enlightened beings and that without their grace I would be unable to attain it. I am aware that this requires a more detailed explanation so that it can be interpreted clearly. It can be found in the next chapter of these chronicles.

We were, then, in San Francisco, lovingly cared for by the lama and the Buddhist community who attended him and had worked so hard to be with him. Some of the meetings were held in the center which had belonged to lama Trungpa; others, at the homes of families. Given my difficulties with the language, much of those meetings remains fixed in my heart—like a mantra repeated in my mala, the seed of love. The moments of serenity were mixed with those of anguish and of excitement.

One more milestone on this very intense trip was our experience in the labyrinth of Grace Catherdral in San Francisco. This labyrinth was constructed to match the style and dimensions of Chartres Cathedral in France. The journey toward its center works as a catalyst for the crossing toward our own internal center, the path toward the heart of God. The pilgrimage in that direction is a letting go, liberating, surrender, to arrive at the silence of the internal depths. In the center, I once again fixed in my heart the goal to generate more love and I had a flash of a more encompassing understanding about the process that I was living.

About 25 years ago, I established my first contact with my teacher, "Union," my internal mentor. Her teachings guided me—with greater or lesser listening on my part—toward a growing perception of the conscience of unity, of the Whole that together we all form. "Union's" friendly face and warm and compassionate smile appeared in the reverent peace of the center of the cathedral's labyrinth and of my conscience. Her transparent eyes told me that my actual search for "Love" was another twist on the same spiral. "Union" had showed me more of the masculine facets, the mental. "Love" offered me the feminine aspect, the heart. The integration of both completed me. The way out of the center of the labyrinth toward the periphery was very enjoyable, light, happy; I was returning with the One in my heart.

From San Francisco, we continued our trip by car toward Kayumari, the spiritual center/community of Jyoti (Jeneane Prevatt) and Russell Park. And this also deserves clarification. From Manaus we returned to Buenos Aires to change planes in order to fly to the U.S. On that one day that we were home, we found a very loving letter from Jyoti and Russ in which they told us that they were settled there and warmly invited us to visit them. We understood that that was the reason (or part of it) for our return home and it lit a desire in us to see them.

Kayumari, at the top of a majestic mountain of abundant vegetation, is a delicious place of pure energies. Peace, silence, perfume in the air. Friends of the heart, eager to share. Ever since the effervescence of the first and second chakras had been awakened in me, I practiced ways to elevate my energy. With mindfulness I did an exchange of energies with nature—I have and I received; I elevated, expanded, breathed with the cardiac chakra focused on my intention to generate more love. If I had wanted to choose a better place to do this, I would not have found one more favorable than where I was. I am joined to California with ties of affection, of admiration for its natural beauty and of spiritual connection. I felt content and grateful to be there. Framed by Kayumari, in such a welcoming climate, I continued with my practice and confirmed with Russ the validity of what I was doing. I perceived energy circuits in which I was a link. I felt full of vitality and strength.

All this continued on the trip to Yosemite National Park. There were moments where the internal process was so intense that what was outside became abstract. The movement was strong; the change, continual and rapid. If I tried to focus on something, I lost it.

With those energies and those internal movements, I come back to the waterfall experience, which allowed me to integrate it more fully.

Day before the full moon of Gemini. Reclining on a flat rock, with the caresses of the sun on my skin, I am filled with the beauty of the place. I give thanks to Mother Nature for her gifts and feel that she sends me her messages of love via a funny squirrel and two delicate blue birds who silently keep me company.

The waters of a mighty cascade fall in a rushing torrent, forming a river that aims itself directly at me. The energetic wind splashes ice-cold drops on my body. What makes this place so powerful is the profusion of energies present: the imposing mountains, the water, the aged trees, the pure air. My heart is full of pleasure and admiration. It is in that fire that alchemy is produced.

I begin to breathe deeply, exchanging my energies with the waterfall: I inhale its vigor, its beauty, and its force; I exhale my gratitude and love. Everything around me begins to disappear or all begins to be integrated. The intensity grows between the waterfall and me: I inhale its powerful energy, exhale my openness and

surrender. Each time more excitement, each time more exaltation. I feel the waterfall entering my body, and I entering her. The moment is magic, there is no time, there is no friction, there is almost no separation. I am making love with the waterfall, I feel it in my skin, in my flesh, in my breath. The two of us become one. All is one.

The key word on this journey was *integration*. The celestial and earthly, masculine and feminine, body and spirit. To leave nothing outside, to become aware that all can coexist in the present. Differences are erased, "this is yours, this is mine," "this is from here, that belongs over there." All can be integrated, included, and that causes an energy explosion. Every barrier dissolved is tons of energy that begins to circulate once more through the system.

My trip ended in Los Angeles where another dear friend honored me by letting me share her life and her home for three amiable days. With her warmth, her authenticity, and the tenderness of her gestures, I was able to continue processing what I had experienced. Among her many attentions, she took me to the meditation gardens of Swami Yogananda, very beautiful, and with a different serenity, more static.

And now I am here. That awakened energy continues to bubble in me. Jyoti and Russell call it "the kiss of Kundalini." I know this is part of a broader process and I look forward with curiosity to what will happen when the love energy goes through the next chakras. I am waiting for it as if for an unknown and exciting adventure. I thank God for what I am living.

Ryan

Ryan is a young man who recently moved to Missouri, where his wife will study and he will work. He writes about an experience occurring during a pagan nature retreat, where he had been asked to lead seminars on sacred sexuality.

On a small holiday with my wife and a close friend of ours, sitting on a cliff in southern central Missouri, I began to cry (and by returning to that moment in my mind, will likely do so again before I am finished). These tears were not of sorrow, nor joy, really. As I sat there alone, what was one moment just some trees, pastures, and a small river came together and revealed itself for what it truly is. I was

taken aback. The first instant was realization, the second was a complete assessment of everything I had ever done in all my life, which only took the time of one inhalation of breath. After that, being in that place, mindful of being in a gathering of friends, accompanied by the two people I love more than any others on Earth, the only thing I could feel was gratitude. A gratitude so sublime, so powerful, so unlike any other emotion one can encounter, that my body cannot contain my mind, heart, and spirit as they swell and transcend the seams that physical existence place around them. No words can truly describe this experience, nor could anything spoken be enough to express that thankfulness.

This wasn't the first time I've cried, nor the last–it's simply the most vivid in my mind because it was all in a very special time. I think it was just time for it to happen. As I sat crying, our friend, whom I knew at the time but not very well, joined me. She and my wife had been preparing to take part in a sweat lodge later that afternoon. I have always been very guarded with my tears. To date, only a scant few trusted friends have seen them, but I was so completely comfortable around her that I didn't stop crying (which was unprecedented). In fact, I kept going even harder than before, and she held me. My wife joined us soon after, and joined in, and we just sat there for quite a while.

As a man in American society, I was indoctrinated from birth that a crying man was a vulnerable man, a weak man. I know now that this is patently false. I said that I saw the pastures, trees, and river reveal what they really are, and it is this: This miracle, this gift, this happenstance, whatever you believe Nature to be, it is the most pure form of innocence to which one may bear witness. This beauty exists and welcomes me without regard to what I've done wrong in life, to myself, to others and to itself. It provides comfort, sustenance, shelter consistently . . . all the necessities of life, and though it should be tended and cared for, it requires little and asks for nothing. Nature has provided all that makes it possible for me, my loves, our existence, and the blessed encounters we have every day of our lives, and it does so without judging, and without requirement. It is responsible, in some form or another, for every experience every one of us has ever had—I've had some bad, I've had some good. But every so often, I have an experience which causes me to fill with such utter joy that it makes everything else easy to deal with. And for those moments, I am grateful beyond words. I don't need them though,

because Nature doesn't need words; it expresses only nurturing without condition.

So I have no words of thanks, I have tears. All my thanks, my tears—full to brimming with the love, fear, anger, sadness, joy, and pain, and with gratitude for all of my life, and the lives of those who made it all possible, from beginning to end—fall to the ground. Those seemingly insignificant drops of water then sink into the soil, disappearing from sight, rejoining Nature, that which made it all possible. Nature feels that gratitude I give, though probably not in the way we feel it. Life feels itself and I know that Nature knows how grateful I am, because I am part of it like everything else, and some day, my body will nourish it as its body nourishes me. Until that day, my tears and my actions (though not nearly in as large a quantity as it should be), will give back what precious little they can.

Why are tears thanks? How to word this—well, while the body does do some things autonomously (twitching and spasms and the like), tears are not one of them (unless one is chopping onions). I like to think that tears of an emotional nature are the result of one's spirit articulating what one's mind and body cannot express without some assistance. In my estimation, the mind and body are merely tools of something more sublime, and that sublime quality, which I refer to as spirit for lack of a better term, is actually connected to the spirit of all things, if they are even separate at all. This force is ever present, but in this day and age, few are aware of it. We exist in a culture of secular self-fascination. Not that I condemn taking care of one's self and one's interest, but much as our society has become one based on the bottom line, so too have the people in it. We measure our success not by how we feel, but by what we have, to the detriment, I think, of our overall well-being. There are few pioneers. Humanity has stopped feeling its spirit.

But I digress . . . In the simplest way I can express it, tears are caused by and contain, within their seeming innocuous salt water, the sublime essence of our true emotion. When one really takes the time to experience how one feels, there are not words that can adequately express them to another person, because each individual approaches an experience differently. But spirit has a common language, so when the spirit expresses itself, all those who listen with their spirits will understand. Nature is a living, active spirit. This is obvious when one truly listens. As such, it is always listening itself,

> and can better hear us when we forget our words and speak in a common language.

Awareness of Brokenness or Loss of Source

The following two writers know the experience of "encounter with God" through nature—but find themselves experiencing grief as well as joy. They articulate an awareness, triggered by contact with nature, of something not present or lost. With echoes of ecological grief, these writers grieve something which seems to be missing, but something conceived more broadly than humanity's problems with the environment. Tears flow in both these stories–a complicated mixture of tears, but tears which I would characterize as having a large "spiritual" component.

Lisa Graiff

A native of Texas, Lisa Graif, 28, has traveled extensively in Europe and lived a few years in the small English town where her mother grew up. Lisa studied architecture at the University of Texas, Austin, and works for an architectural firm in Dallas, mostly on "big ole skyscrapers." She loves to paint, dance, read, and write.

> Quite often when I'm in nature and sitting quietly observing I find myself crying. I wouldn't exactly call it grieving, but more like an overwhelming mixture of conflicting emotions that rise to the surface all at once bringing me to tears.
>
> I would say the main conflicting emotions are great joy and great sadness. Each of these emotions seems to incorporate many others. The joy is an awareness of wonder, love, amazement, security, peace, and contentment. The sadness is an awareness of hate, insecurity, turbulence, and discontent. I believe longing is also a part. For me, this has to do with the awareness that everything is happening as it should, and yet, from where I sit, so much seems so wrong. I long to know why and yet I feel that doing so would somehow lessen my part in the whole process.

The following is a journal entry I made when experiencing the feeling that you are studying. Following that is a poem I wrote one evening after I had just seen a really stupid movie and while driving home saw a homeless man with a cardboard sign at a street corner. It wasn't the same kind of crying that happens when I'm in nature, but I think it describes some of the same conflicting/overwhelming emotions that arise in nature.

December 29, 2000. I am sitting at White Rock lake–it is a wonderfully bright day, the kind of bright that seems to happen when the air is crisp and cool and the sky is that crystalline lightest blue color with only the occasional billowy cloud passing by and the winter sun shines and everything is just a little bit brighter and more clear. There is a slight breeze, my hands are cold, and I am crying. I think because on days like today, sitting in nature, I can almost feel God's presence and the feeling overwhelms me. A mixture of conflicting emotions seem to rise to the surface all at once—wonderment and joy tinged with great sadness—and the tears start flowing.

For a moment I feel as if I am aware of all that's right and all that's wrong in the world. I came here to think about next year, to make resolutions. I feel that this is going to be a year of breakthroughs for me after the turbulence of last year. I have been sitting here on the root of a tree watching a squirrel building a nest out of twigs in the crook of a branch of a neighboring tree. She scampers down to the end of one of the branches, chews off a twig and then struggles with it back to the nest and to find a place for it. Sometimes her twigs are just too big. She'll struggle to get one back to the nest only to drop it at the last minute, but no matter—off for another. She's taking a break right now. She took a good look at me then inspected my car and is now off running around. It occurred to me that I should learn a lesson from this little squirrel and just drop those things that I know don't fit in my life and go on to find others that do.

Now I'm sitting out on the pier. I scared off all the birds. It's a little warmer out here in the sun. The water is softly glittering and the steeple of a church stands proudly among the rooftops in the distance. I'm reading the graffiti on the planks and notice someone has written a prayer to God. It makes me think of the Buddhist tradition of writing prayers on flags and then putting them up in a high place where the wind can take the prayer to God. The flag stays

there until it disintegrates. I'm wondering if I had to write down one prayer to God, what that prayer would be.

WHY?

Why am I crying?
Because I feel your closeness and my distance at the same time.
Why, why am I crying?
Because everything is right and yet everything is wrong,
Because I feel all and nothing together,
Because love escapes me and yet is me,
Because of the wind and the rain and the moon and the stars,
Because the earth cries through me,
Because I seek an answer to a question that doesn't have one,
Because I am both the cause and the solution,
Because all that is and all that was, isn't and wasn't
Because of stupid movies and men at roadsides holding cardboard signs
Because time means nothing in the end and everything right now
Because of the past, the present, and the future
Because of family and friends and strangers and enemies
Why do I cry?
Because if I do, maybe somebody else won't.

After receiving the above, I asked Lisa a few questions, which included my curiosity about the meaning of the line "stupid movies and men at the roadsides holding cardboard signs." I wondered whether this meant she thought the culture was failing.

This does involve for me a feeling that our culture is failing. I was struck by the thought that someone spent millions on the movie I had just seen and yet there are so many people who are just barely able to keep themselves alive on the streets. Nature does seem more perfect as it is, with its natural cycle, nearly devoid of the negative human traits of greed and selfishness and hate and so many others. On the other hand, nature is also almost devoid of some of the positive human traits like kindness and charity and even love. Nature in its constancy, its cyclical nature, its relationship to the whole (interrelatedness) reminds me of both the amazing potential and the great failings of mankind.

> I think, for me, the feeling of God's presence in nature leads to tears because in sensing God's absolute love and perfection, I am more acutely aware of my failures and imperfections. It is that opposites thing again—in being aware of one I am, at the same time, more aware of its opposite.

Elaine Gallovic

Elaine Gallovic is a registered nurse who worked for many years with geriatric patients. She grew up in northeastern Ohio, the greater Cleveland area, and now lives with her husband on three acres of beautiful woods. Beginning in 1994, Elaine has followed her heart to study and practice the healing arts. Now a Certified Healing Touch Practitioner, she uses gentle hands-on techniques to clear and align a client's subtle energy field. Elaine commits herself to friendship with the Earth and humanity, inviting others to recognize their oneness with everything.

> One summer I was walking frequently in a metro park near my home. I was walking a paved "all purpose" trail. I often noticed a huge old maple tree near the path and would silently greet the grand old beauty with a "Namaste" as I passed it. On each walk, I found myself looking forward to the place on the path where I would see this tree. One time I stopped and noticed how many lower branches the tree had lost. I felt the sadness of the old fallen limbs scattered all around the base of the tree. In my heart, I honored how much this tree had seen, had endured season after season, year after year. A road now runs close to the area where the tree grows and I recognized how the tree now has to deal with pollution from cars driving by. I am sure that when this tree was a sapling, there was no road.
>
> I observed how many people quickly pass by the tree and most likely never notice its grandeur. I began to think of this maple as "my tree." I felt that the energy of the tree was feminine and was more and more drawn to spend a little time with her. After admiring my tree from the path, one day, I felt compelled to go over to the tree and stand with my back against the wide trunk. I stood there for a time, feeling such peace, contentment and stillness. I silently talked to the tree and thanked her for her contributions to life. Suddenly, I did

not want to leave, even though I had thoughts of completing my walk. I told the tree I would be back. And as I walked away, I felt overcome with tears and a feeling that I can only describe as pure love. The tears were tears of joy that one only sheds in a divine connection. I touched the spirit of the tree and the spirit of the tree touched me very deeply. I had an experience of love unlike the love of the human experience.

In reflecting back now, I can recognize that I was also experiencing sadness and overwhelming grief. I believe the grief was the feeling of loss one has when one becomes separated from the Divine. I believe this experience was of my soul remembering my connection to my source and possibly even remembering the separation I felt at my birth on Earth. I would imagine that this separation from our source may be the reason babies cry when born. So, this was a bittersweet experience—the flow of pure love while connecting to the tree and of the separation from pure love when I chose to step away from the tree.

My feeling may also have been related to the loss of not feeling this level of love with people. One would certainly "long" for this type of love connection with all living things. And most of all, it seems to be a longing of our soul to be one with the One.

Return To Experiencing Oneself as Part of Nature

The final two stories bring the project full circle. These two writers know ecological grief, but have found ways to bring themselves into experiential alignment with a natural ecosystem, even with their knowledge of ecological problems both specific and general.

Laurel Smith

Laurel Smith has a doctorate in marine biology and lives in Houston, Texas. Now retired, she does volunteer work, including serving on the board of Urban Harvest, a non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening communities through planting gardens and orchards.

I have felt profound sadness upon reading that some researchers believe some dolphins and other mammals deliberately beach themselves in protest to the pollution of their marine environment. I wonder what dolphins breaching the surface of the water think when they see New York City on the horizon instead of trees and beach sand. Are they amazed, disgusted and angry? To even think that dolphins might be committing suicide in protest, when their human audience cannot begin to grant them the respect to believe they would be capable of such as act is deeply moving. It fills me with remorse, powerlessness, awe, and shame.

Sometimes when I am driving alone, I can achieve a feeling of connectedness to this planet with a ritual I have devised. I imagine my car like an ant on a large beach ball. I'm chugging along, buildings, signs, trees, marshes, water rushing by. The freeway is like a tiny asphalt ribbon on which I am moving. I think of the immensity of the planet and how we all exist sharing its gifts of sustenance. I can frequently reach a place where I feel connected to everything on this planet. I remember that every living thing shares common biochemical pathways and similar DNA sequences. This is one of our connections. I like to think we are also connected by philotes. Philotes, I read in a sci-fi novel, are invisible, undetectable threads that attach everything on a planet to everything else. I like this imaginary concept. Do we need these threads to acknowledge our connection to our earth? Do we need proof?

Coming by boat to dock at Athens, Greece, I pointed out to my husband and daughter how from a distance the city, with its predominantly white, short buildings, looked like a crusty tumor or growth spreading over the skin of the earth to the edge of the deep blue sea. Will these multiple growths kill the earth?

And my final thoughts. I live in Houston, a metro area of 4 million people. I love this thriving, improving city. Sometimes I feel disconnected from nature here. However, outside I see myriad trees and green spaces. I work in my flower and vegetable gardens. Digging in the dirt makes me feel better. When I stroll down my street I admire the beautiful yards. In the distance I hear the freeway, not half a mile away. The speeding cars and trucks sound like a rushing river. I imagine an immense flow making the noise. I accept that this flow of energy—cars? water?—is all right. It can even be soothing if I let it.

Marie McLean

Marie McLean lives in the area of Toronto known as The Beaches. She teaches kindergarten, having recently returned to the classroom following a hiatus stemming from her realization that problems in teaching were not educational in nature, but, as in many other fields, were systemic and needed to be addressed as such. Marie is completing a doctorate, with a double major in "Applied Ecopsychology and Scientific Intuition." Her scholarship involves articulation of a systemic model of healing. Marie wrote the following for one of her courses. The subject was a response to readings and nature-connecting activities in Reconnecting with Nature *by Michael J. Cohen (1997).*

> I was walking to return to a beautiful garden near City Hall where I had done a connection activity with the word "love." I wanted that experience again. When I was a block away, I came upon barricades, a St. John Ambulance emergency treatment vehicle, canopies, a sound system, and an Elvis impersonator (!) booming out that it's Saturday night and time to party.
>
> I caught myself groaning and thinking a wrangled thought about how people would "ruin" my contact with nature. I also wondered if anyone had asked permission from this spot to use it as a stage. But of course, we are all by and of nature and so I thought to myself, "It will be an interesting opportunity to integrate this." I went to my spot in the garden to visit my old friends, asking for communion with them. There was a (fake) stream running through this little ecosystem and I was attracted to it immediately. Elvis couldn't drown out its babble, and my mind went straight to "love flowers." I was startled by how quickly this came up. I then spotted a grouping of flowers that riveted my eyes. It was the blending of their colors that captured me.
>
> I moved away from the area to get a quick peek at what Elvis was wearing. As I stood there, a shaft of the setting sun came out from behind me and fell directly on the middle of my back. I had the sensation with no label attached to it and that made me smile. I almost felt it was solid enough to lean into. I closed my eyes and the

words "love is warmth in the heart" came up. God, I felt so good. I didn't want to leave, but I had promised to bring home a pizza.

I thanked the area and as I stepped back out onto the street I felt my senses assaulted. The street was barricaded and there were all manner of carnival things happening. I decided to focus on all the nature things the city had either preserved or planted. I went from tree to hanging flowers to dogs. When no greenery was near I looked at the sky and the clouds and the few shafts of light cutting through the low buildings.

As I looked into the distance I could see tree tops blocks away. With the sky as a backdrop, all of a sudden I had that "symphonic" experience again. I got a bigger picture feeling. It hit my senses that whereas before I used to feel remorse and hunger that cities had taken over the earth and kept meager pockets and pots of nature around for decoration, I now had the macro sense that earth keeps pockets of cities!!! Earth and nature are everywhere, popping up and even breaking through concrete. Earth surrounds us and engulfs us and supports us and will never leave us and will, somehow, endure our madness. I had a curiously satisfying vision of nature, hundreds of years from now, somehow thriving quietly, and intelligently, and over the centuries mulching up all the buildings and reestablishing itself with love. "Nature creates no garbage and recycles ours." I felt inured to the commotion around me and, more important, I felt lovingly enveloped by nature in the middle of the street while on a pizza mission.

On another occasion, I wanted to walk to the store, which takes 45 minutes down one of the busiest streets in Brampton. It is one of the ugliest sights, I think, to have six lanes of traffic lying between horrendous strip malls, golden arches, and other such places. It gets really discouraging for me to expose myself to that. The traffic creates so much white noise that I always strap on music and try to make the best of it.

As I walked along, once again, I got that macro thing happening. As I scanned the horizon, I could see the tops of trees above all the housing for a few blocks and again got that feeling of "cities in nature" rather than "nature in cities." It felt soothing and reassuring, and the walk began to feel better. I could shrink down the effect the traffic and ugliness had on me. I began to feel happy.

> The sidewalk dipped down into a depression (no jokes, please) while the road kept going straight. Through my headphones, the song of a bird grabbed me and I stopped. There to my right were the most unusual flowering "weeds." They had spiky purple blossoms and were about six feet tall. I asked permission to touch them and they felt wonderfully and firmly fuzzy. I looked past them and there was the most lush area! I sat down on a stone wall and just stared. It was then that I caught sight of a brilliant little yellow and black bird . . . I had a sharp intake of breath to see that shot of colour.

Personal Composite Story

The following composite story is offered as a means to consider how various experiences described in this project may relate to each other in the life of one individual. It is not intended as the distillation of essential components of a universal experience of grief in response to nature. The composite story is a slightly fictionalized version of my own experience, as deepened and clarified through this project. While some events did not occur exactly as described or in the order described, the story is nonetheless absolutely true about my own experience.

> I grew up in the suburbs during the massive post-WWII urbanization-suburbanization of most of the United States. While my youth included camping trips, pets in the house, and sometimes snakes in our back yard, at least before the neighborhood was completely developed, the rhythms of my life were set by human culture. During those years, American culture became increasingly national, uniform, and oriented toward consumption. What I did, what I wanted, and how I experienced myself took place for the most part within the contours of what I sometimes call the "Newsweek culture." Newsweek magazine, with its glossy format, its advertisements, and its assumptions, embodies for me the national American culture. What is most important are the assumptions, for the most part implicit, about the inevitability of most of our ways, including, perhaps most important, the notion of wealth as constant expansion of our present economy.

While "Newsweek culture" often pays respect to traditional religions and to moral values which do not conflict with our economy, I do not experience the culture as grounded in spiritual values. I could not have articulated this 20 years ago, but this feeling always left me slightly at odds with where I am living. I will grant that my experiences and perceptions are shaped by my own personal inadequacies, fears, and needs, but it remains true that I do not find the mainstream American culture one in which it is easy to live with compassion for others, respect for nature, or reverence for the ineffable. In particular, the attempt to inhabit any sense of quiet or peace usually feels to me as though it requires action against the cultural grain. Within the dominant culture, it has been very difficult for me even to understand what sort of values or lifestyle would feel in synch with spirit.

Against this background, in my mid-30s, I found myself seeking other ways to experience the world. I was living in San Jose, California, which is part of Silicon Valley, with my wife and three children. I began to have a series of exceptional experiences which convinced me of the reality of spirit, which I am comfortable calling God. This led to much upheaval in my life, including quitting my job as a lawyer and beginning the study of transpersonal psychology. My studies included not only traditional academic work, but much experiential work, such as yoga, meditation, and breathwork. Through this work, I began to have access to sensations and, in particular, emotions which I had never experienced. I began to feel more as though I were inhabiting my own body. There were a few years in which emotions relating to many matters in my personal psychology seemed to come forth. This felt like healing.

During this time, I began to feel a different relationship with nature. As I felt more and more *in* my body, I felt more and more drawn to the natural world. I also began to inform myself about ecological matters. What I read was consistent with my own experience: The natural world is shrinking and the by-products of the western lifestyle are ravishing the environment. I began to feel within my body that I was missing something by not living closer to nature. When coupled with the knowledge that nature may be disappearing, there arose within me a sense of longing to live within a natural environment. While I had never spent large amounts of time in nature, I began more and more to seek out parks and open lands. I felt drawn to animals and to undeveloped areas. Traffic and concrete were increasingly difficult for me to take. Near my home was a creek

which meandered through suburban homes and businesses, unknown to most area residents. Sometimes I would go there to meditate and I would watch birds, and lizards, and running water.

Throughout my life, I had always felt drawn to nature during times of crisis or mourning. When relatives died, I tended to seek solitude around trees and open spaces. Sometimes I cried, as a sort of release of the grief, but sometimes I was just comforted by being in nature. During the time I was studying transpersonal psychology and trying to learn new ways to be in the world, I was working hard on my own psychological issues. I found that sitting quietly at my creek gave me solace and sustenance. Specific trees and animals became known to me. I felt they knew me as well. For several weeks, a particular lizard would appear on a rock when I meditated. I would sense him and open my eyes and he would be there. Sometimes, I felt as though I merged with him. I felt I could feel how it feels to be a lizard, to be this lizard, to be him. I looked forward to returning to the creek. I felt silly as I realized that I thought the inhabitants of the creek knew me and remembered my visits. This felt good. I felt more whole. I felt better able to deal with my problems. When there were small items of trash at the creek, I picked them up and put them in my pocket. I felt as though the creek appreciated my efforts. I thought this was silly, but this was how it felt.

One day, when I arrived at the creek, I immediately saw there had been some kind of party. The area was littered with trash, a grocery cart was pushed into the creek, and someone had hacked apart several small trees, for no apparent reason. This was not something I could easily clean up. I sat down. On the rock next to me was my lizard friend, dead, inside a glass jar. He looked scorched by the sun's rays. He had been trapped on purpose. I felt overwhelmed. I cried briefly. Seeing this brought to mind what I had recently read about the attitude of the American government to worldwide efforts to curb global warming. The government was denying that global warming existed. The curbs proposed by other governments were rejected as bad for our economy. I understood that I was very enmeshed in the culture which had trashed the creek and which gave rise to the present federal government. I did not know how to live in any other culture. I felt remorse, guilt, and shame. I touched the jar with the lizard and the hacked trees. I asked for forgiveness. I wanted some sign that nature at the creek understood, but nothing happened. I felt alone and powerless. Then I felt angry at those who seemed to

propel forward the culture which held no respect for nature. Eventually, I used this anger to become better informed and to do what I could to help the environment.

Circumstances changed and I did not have time to sit at my creek. I missed my time at the creek as I would miss a loved one. I felt torn up inside because I knew my responsibilities did not allow time for the creek. I wanted to meet those responsibilities, and even enjoyed the work I was doing "in the world," but I missed the sustenance that came from quiet time at the creek. Once, sitting in my car in traffic, I cried briefly because I remembered what it was like to sit at the creek. This was a soft crying, with some mild sobbing.

I continued my psychological work and my reading on social and ecological issues. I began working with a therapist trained in bodywork. I did more breathwork, which seemed to awaken new parts of my body and spirit. I continued to meditate. One morning, I had a very important experience while trying to meditate. Around that time, I was getting up at five in the morning before my family started its routine. I would meditate, pray, and sometimes do yoga. On this particular morning, it was raining. I sat on a cushion in my office and directed attention to my breath. As I tried to quiet the chatter in my mind, and to follow my breath, I noticed that I actually heard the rain in a way I had not been hearing it before. I could visualize–within my body visualize, even experience–thousands of raindrops contacting wood shingles above me, and at that point, as I noticed this, I began to weep. The weeping felt like an easing open, a relaxing, an accessing: And it felt good, as though something stored within my body was finally allowed release. This weeping felt like a remembering, and while it felt good, there was also deep grief as I became conscious of the loss of this connection to the natural world in most of my life. Some portion of the tears may have been tears of wonder and joy at connection with the rain, but a large portion involved a bittersweet, even painful, memory of something lost.

This experience was not the only experience I had pointing me away from Silicon Valley, but it was the most precise and memorable. After this experience, it became less acceptable to me to spend my life within the confines of concrete, traffic, and human greed. I longed to live in a way which felt more in synch with the harmonies of nature. This would mean a move toward a slower-paced life, with more time in natural settings, and less time around people racing to amass money. I coveted the experience of those who could

live as I imagined I wanted to live. Imagining myself as trapped within a Silicon Valley lifestyle felt suffocating to my spirit. It was not just a matter of wanting to be surrounded by nature; it was a matter of needing to transform how I experienced the world and myself in the world. It felt like a compelling need for self-expression. Focusing on this need produced deep longing and grief, and sometimes anger, if I felt the need could not be met.

As the result of some hard work, risk-taking, and luck, my family moved to Montana. We have a house in the mountains, with space around us. We also have animals, including dogs, cats, chickens, horses, and goats. At first, where we lived scared us because we did not know what to expect. The prior owner of our house talked about watching a mountain lion walk along our fence. A neighbor told us a bear was in his woods and not to let our children play in that area. Soon enough, the rural neighborhood began to feel normal. It has always been exhilarating. I can walk outside in the morning and see mountains in national forest lands, devoid of visible human impact. The weather is much more extreme, letting me feel I am living on the planet. Summers are full of light and heat; winters are dark and cold. The heavens are more immediate; rain and snow are usually glorious shows. My children now know where to expect the moon to rise. Nights of full moon are so bright it is hard to sleep. While we still work and pay bills and clean up dishes and worrying over schools, there has been a noticeable slowing in our lives, a shift toward rhythms that feel more calmed by the air, mountains, and animals.

Almost every day, I see something in Montana that takes my breath away. While I have walked out my front door scores of times, I am frequently stunned by the sight of the mountains across the Missouri River. I feel some sort of personal connection to this range of mountains. They are always the same, though they change with the seasons. In summer they are blue and green; in winter, there is white. When there were fires, you could see areas in flame—a shocking sight. When I see these mountains, I feel warmth in my chest. I am almost always surprised at the beauty. I feel gratitude, which seems an extension of the warmth in my chest.

I frequently feel gratitude for my life, which includes thankfulness for living where I live. After I was offered a job in Helena, my wife and I had lunch in a restaurant on the main street, called Last Chance Gulch. After we ordered, I filled up with tears of

gratitude that this move was going to happen. There was something very meaningful about the name "Last Chance Gulch." I felt I was being offered a new chance and I wanted to take it. The first several months I lived in Montana, I wept fairly frequently, usually in the car, as my heart made contact with the land, whether it was distant mountains, green expanses, or fields of white snow. I was particularly susceptible to the curves where valleys rise into mountains or hills. I loved to see animals on slopes. The tears were usually very soft and the feeling was one of gratitude—that I was allowed to see what I was seeing, that I had managed to learn to appreciate what I was seeing, that I was actually experiencing the feelings I was feeling. Those same feelings continue, though with less force. While I continue to feel awe and gratitude for the experiences, there is now less turbulence in the emotions. I believe the more turbulent emotions were associated with longing and fear that the life I wanted was beyond my reach. This element of grief seems to have for the most part dissipated.

A few months ago, I drove across country, to help my dad move. The largest cities I drove through were Dallas and Denver, but there were numerous others. While there are still many open spaces on the route we took, there were not spaces I would consider wild or close to wild. Most of the land seemed developed or more or less barren. Once you hit Wyoming, you feel more a sense of the wild, but then you reach Billings and Interstate 90 through Montana. Interstate 90 is beautiful in many places, but does not give me the feeling of wild land. When we got closer to Helena, it was snowing lightly. Not terribly cold, but crisp.

When we arrived in Helena, my family was still out of town, so my dad and I ate in a small restaurant. On the wall near us was a photo of a buffalo, framed, but it looked torn from an old book. When I looked at the buffalo, I felt tears and grief well up. Because I was working on this dissertation, I tried to discern aspects or sources of the feelings. I concluded I was feeling relief and gratitude to be back in Montana, a place which now felt familiar and which sustained me. Some aspects of the grief seemed to flow from relief and gratitude, but the lion's share of the strong grief emotion felt like response to trauma. I flashed on the most difficult driving in Denver. I had been in control of a 26 foot Jartran truck, which I am frankly surprised people like me are allowed to drive. There were not exactly any near misses, but the freeways in Denver were a mess and there was some white knuckle driving. Seeing the buffalo allowed that

memory to surface and I believe to heal. These feelings contained an element of that old very turbulent, grasping-sort of grief. My heart seemed to be saying: I don't want any more of that urban stress; I want to live here; I was afraid I wasn't coming back.

As I responded to the buffalo portrait, within the mix was also knowledge, learned through reading, of what had happened to the buffalo. The northern prairies were once dark with millions of buffalo. Prairie Indians lived in large part off the buffalo. Programs sponsored by the United States government encouraged the wholesale slaughter of the buffalo, which was deemed necessary to allow the building of railroads, the growth of farming, and the domestication of the Native Americans. Some of my feelings involved remorse and guilt over that occurrence, which generalized to many occurrences in American history and, beyond that, human history. I was aware of the contradictions and realities: While I resonate with Native American beliefs and ways as they are now understood by people like me, I am a product of European-American culture. If I had come west in the 1800s, I would have wanted my farm without intrusion of buffalo or threat of Indians. The whole thing is tough. Some of my tears involved these understandings. I did feel some anger at imagined railroad magnates, those greedy, hard-hearted bastards. But for the most part I knew I was part of a culture that had produced what happened. I was not wracked with shame, as shame for what others have done in history, even my ancestors, feels somewhat self-indulgent to me. But I was not letting myself deny my entanglement with a complicated situation. All of these feelings and thoughts were occurring simultaneously and were mixed up with more personal feelings of relief and release.

While most of the longing-sort of grief seems to have subsided, I continue to have many moments when my heart fills with warmth and gratitude, which sometimes contains a bittersweet quality. This usually happens suddenly and unexpectedly. Sometimes it is seeing one of my horses walk silhouetted against my favorite mountains. This sight is best at evening. I love it most if the day was hot and pockets of cold air seem to emerge from the trees. The movement of the horse, so easy, yet so strong, stuns me. I feel it in my chest. I tend not to cry in those moments now, but sometimes tears do come if the moment is particularly precious or if I have tears from some other issue needing to emerge, as when my mother died. After my mother died, seeing birds fly, particularly hawks circling effortlessly on mountain drafts, would bring up memories of her and

some grief. I sometimes wonder what would have happened to those memories and feelings if I was still spending so much of my life in traffic and in hectic pace. Inexplicably, birds in flight seem to ease my fear of death.

I have been fortunate to have several experiences which I would describe as feeling very close to God. Not all of these experiences have occurred in nature, but nature seems to encourage such experiences. While the best description of the experiences I have in mind may simply be "feeling close to God," the elements of the experience for me include awareness of unconditional love as what feels like a tangible, physical energy, the sense of acceptance by that energy or love (God), and the sense of being known by that source in a way that feels personal. Nature sometimes seems to express this unconditional love, or to mirror this sense of God. It may be that intellectually I consider nature to be God's creation, so that feeling held by nature feels like being held by God. But I think it is more of a pre-conceptual experience. I think it involves a general sense of peace and comfort in nature, coupled with an intensity of sensory and emotional connection with nature. This seems to allow more personal, perhaps "psychological issue oriented" feelings to emerge. Nature then seems to accept and soothe these issues, which feels like acceptance through unconditional love.

Other times the experience of "feeling close to God" involves awareness of an order, a system, in which everything is happening as it is meant to happen. This is not to say that nothing needs improvement, or to minimize the suffering experienced in this world. But there is a mysterious and indescribable way in which both the best and the worst of earthly life can be held in one instant. This feels like God. Nature seems to mirror this. My 7-year-old daughter recently saw a bull snake swallowing a still living shrew. The snake was under a bush near the lake. The shrew was struggling and squeaking. My daughter described what she saw with awe and some terror. She felt special to have seen this. Why do I keep thinking she had a glimpse of God? It makes no rational sense to me, but the feeling persists.

Also, most simply, really seeing some precise piece of nature can feel like seeing God. When I watch a horse move, if I am particularly quiet, I am seeing God. In those moments, I love that horse with all my heart. I can cry in those moments, but these tears are soft, as though they merely overflow the eyes. If there is grief in

those moments, it is for others who don't see this, for the years I did not see it, and for the culture which does not seem to encourage these forms of experience.

Although these tears are more quiet now, there were times in my life when seeing God in one of these ways produced a torrent, just a flood, of emotion. Deep, deep emotions would arise from what felt like depths of ages. There was weeping which did not want to stop, which had to play itself out. The sobbing would go on for many, many minutes and seemed to impact me for weeks. This felt like remembering. Remembering God and remembering I was supposed to and could live in synchrony with God. These feelings brought me to wanting to live in harmony with nature and could be brought on by close contact with nature. Part of the tears in these instances felt like remembering moving away from God to incarnate on earth. I am not claiming a reality in that description, just saying what it felt like and what came to mind. Sometimes, this memory seems to get placed onto real situations with nature on earth. If I am going to be separated from an animal I love, around whom I feel the awe and mystery and unconditional love, the feelings sometimes seem all mixed up with memory of the loss of this source.

All this is very much tied up with the body. The more I feel *in* my body, the more I feel all sorts of sensations and emotions. It grows on itself. The more I feel all sorts of sensations and emotions, the more I seem to be inhabiting my body. Living more within nature is enmeshed with this. If I am participating in nature, I feel more in my body, and the more I am in my body, the more I want to roll around in nature. I feel I am going back to my heritage, even if in small ways, even if in ways that remain affluent, American, and part of these times. Particularly as I come to understand these feelings, I am able to be grateful, very grateful, for many aspects of the culture in which I live. But still, I love the little ways in which I buck civilization and flaunt with the wild. Being dirty can be a real kick for me, getting really muddy or sweaty. Not wearing deodorant, stinking. Having chicken blood on my pants. Letting a dog who rolled in horse manure sleep next to me (though keeping her away from my wife). Pissing outside, though out of view of the neighbors. Ranting at the heartless bastards. Moving more closely with rhythms of the earth, God's rhythms.

As nature more and more seems to be me and I nature, there has been a shift in my perspective. When I am in cities, in the worst

of the endless concrete, noise, and metal, I can now see such places as something that has been placed temporarily on the earth. The earth is the background—the mountains and oceans and trees and animals and me—and within my body I know that nature is tolerating the conglomerations of concrete and metal. These things are within nature and nature will hold them and, eventually, to the extent necessary, will heal them. The energy of nature is eternal, like God. We humans are at risk, and we put other species at risk, but the life-force of nature is indestructible. Still, I don't want to live in the endless concrete and metal and still, it hurts me.

Sometimes now, as I near the completion of this dissertation, and wonder what I will undertake next, I like to be alone outside in the dark. It is October and getting cold, particularly at night. I like to balance on the wooden rails of the fence and watch the whitish glow behind the mountains, where the sun is setting far in the distance. As night envelops me, I sometimes pray in the dirt behind the barn. I started this as a more or less regular practice after the events of September 11, 2001. There is a comfortable feeling of being on the ground in the dark, but also some fear. Some of it involves the commencement of what we are calling war. In many ways, Montana is a few worlds apart from the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and future likely terrorist strikes. On the other hand, Montana has many nuclear weapons stored underground. You can see the silos when you drive to Great Falls from Helena. I assume that a terrorist war would not involve a sophisticated first-strike on American nuclear weapons, but you never know. Several times a day now I have an image of a nuclear explosion over the mountains. Sometimes when I am outside I consider what I can hide behind, as if I would have time.

Some of the fear is more personal. My mother died of a stroke last year and I now think about my own death. All the years of stressing myself out have surely taken a toll on my heart and my arteries. While body practices, such as meditation, would surely help, sometimes the attempt to make time to meditate or practice yoga just seems to add more stress to my life. If I die now, I wonder what will happen. There have been times when I felt sure in the knowledge that I would return to God. Other times, facing the dirt under a huge expansive night sky, I am not so sure. Is it all right if my consciousness, all my striving, simply dissipates into nothingness? It is scary, but what choice do I have. I draw in more breath and try to feel the press of the dirt on my forehead. I now like to pray in what I envision as an Islamic prayer position, facing east, down on my

knees, my arms stretched before me and my forehead on the ground. I can feel small, sharp grains of dirt pressing into my brow. I like the feeling, though it is uncomfortable in a sense. I try to sense the energy of my breath going all through my body and just see what comes up. I think of the people who lost their lives in the terrorist attack and of those whose anger led to the situation. When I do this, as I do nearly every night, my attention inevitably goes to the families of each. I feel some grief and it feels general, for us all. It is very close to fear—will I be able to accomplish what I want to accomplish, will humanity? As I sense myself extending into the land around me, I do have faith and all the fears seem just barely all right.

Chapter 5: Discussion

As a preface to this chapter, I will set out relatively concise summary statements of my main understandings. The primary interpretation—what I consider the essence of the whole—is that experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature represent moments in a process of psycho-spiritual transformation capable of healing the splits between mind and body, and between humanity and nature, that are prevalent in contemporary industrialized society. Viewed in the context of one life, such experiences tend to restore a sense of equilibrium and integration within the body *as part of nature*. Considered more broadly, such experiences, particularly those of ecological grief, tend to change individual perspective in a manner that, in the aggregate, could foster profound social change, guiding us back to a style of living more harmonious with nature.

Other interpretations involve looking at this transformational process, or aspects of it, from different viewpoints. These viewpoints continue to group themselves in accordance with the angles from which I have looked at this project from its inception: the body, nature, grief, and weeping. A summary survey of these viewpoints will be offered here, with the remainder of this chapter fleshing out my understandings. From the viewpoint of the human body, (a) attention to sensation and emotions of the body, particularly as experienced in relationship to surroundings, facilitates psycho-spiritual healing or transformation; (b) viewed broadly, this healing or transformation involves increased experience of oneself as one's body; (c) because humans evolved in sensory connection with nature, as nature, sensory relationship with nature is uniquely situated to

heighten the experience of sensations and emotions, facilitating this psycho-spiritual transformational process; and (d) the experience of oneself as one's body and as part of nature tends to be experienced as a sense of belonging, unconditional love, spiritual experience, and/or experience of God's presence, in turn bringing about new understandings and facilitating this transformational process, heightening the experience of wholeness of body and self and body and nature.

From the perspective of nature, (a) deep sensory and emotional connection with nature is felt by humans as healing, often as unconditional love; (b) when in this healing presence of nature, emotions of grief surrounding personal losses are allowed to surface; (c) the personal losses may involve any personal trauma, or may involve broad social trauma, such as grief over harm to the environment; (d) the healing presence of nature tends to feel "right" or "as it is meant to be" or as "coming home"; (e) some people long for immersion within this healing presence, that is, to come home to nature, which can give rise to a deep craving and longing that propels them on what is experienced as a transformational or spiritual path; and (f) deep understanding of the loss of immersion within nature can associate to, or bring forth, understandings felt as deeply spiritual, such as understanding the brokenness of the human condition or the loss of original source (God) in the human condition.

From the perspective of grief, (a) grief is the body's recognition of loss; (b) nature tends to allow the experience of grief to emerge, as nature tends to bring people into contact with their sensations and emotions, and tends to enable an experience of belonging or unconditional love assisting the emergence of grief; (c) the healthy process

of grieving, through which loss is accommodated into the lived experience of the body, is facilitated by close contact with nature and can lead to a transpersonal opening to nature, assisting not only the grieving of the particular loss, but the reorientation of the individual within the whole of nature; (d) awakening to grief over the loss of personal embeddedness or harmony in nature tends to create a longing to experience nature's harmony more routinely or more deeply; and (e) if many people awakened to this longing, social and political problems involving Western culture's failure to live in harmony with nature might be impacted for the better.

From the perspective of the phenomena of weeping, crying, and tears, (a) some forms of weeping, crying, or tears are cathartic, restoring physical equilibrium; (b) tears in any of their forms may restore the connection between self and body, yielding equilibrium in an embodied sense; (c) when tears in their various forms are responsive to nature, the sense of healing may extend to the individual's sense of belonging within nature, creating a transpersonal healing of the experiential split between self and nature; (d) humans are capable of experiencing deep connection with nature that is felt and interpreted as spiritual experience or "the experience of God's presence"—sometimes tears or weeping are simply in response to this sense of presence; and (e) weeping in connection with nature may express a form of gratitude for life, signaling or coinciding with an experiential sense of unity of all life as creation.

Before turning to the extended discussion of these understandings, I would like to touch upon the differences between my present understandings and those articulated prior to the gathering of data. When compared to the "interpretive lenses" listed prior to

data-gathering (see Chapter 3), I find that my present understandings are not different, but are deeper, broader, and more textured. I continue to understand the experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature as emerging from a sensory and emotional connection with nature; but I now understand this as a process, with transformational potential, having many related facets. For instance, while I initially sought to exclude what I came to call *ecological grief* because it seemed more a sadness *about* nature's plight than a bodily reaction to nature, I have come to understand *ecological grief* as part of a continuum of experiences very much involving the visceral reactions of many participants.

Similarly, while I did not focus initially upon the healing of personal traumas within nature, this aspect of the experience became very important upon contact with the stories of participants. When I re-read the initial lenses, it is very clear that I described my own experience up to that point, which focused primarily on coming to understand my personal grief for not living more closely with nature and natural rhythms. While I had certainly experienced healing of other types of trauma in the context of connection with nature, I had not focused upon that form of "grief in response to nature" as connected with the whole of what I was studying. Similarly, while I had experienced my own grief as spiritual, I had not been able to articulate very well why that was so. These understandings came through reading the contributions of participants.

When I re-read the earlier lenses, I also see viewpoints that, in the dissertation as it manifested, were not fully explored. For instance, I had posited that cognitive understanding of the experiences as they occur deepens the experience. I still believe this

is likely, but this did not become a focus of the study. In addition, I posited that such experiences compel changes in life circumstances. Important changes are noted, or are implicit, in many stories, but the exact type of practical changes (such as changes in life circumstances or political views) did not become a focus of the study leading to specific interpretations.

The primary change in my understanding in the course of the project, I believe, is that I became more precise in understanding, and being able to articulate, the various components of the experiences and their relationships to each other. Whereas before I understood the experience primarily in terms of my realization that I strongly desired more contact with nature, I later came to understand the presence throughout my life of a longing to experience myself as nature, to live personally more ingrained within nature, to live in a social structure organized more in harmony with nature, and to experience spirituality through nature. Simultaneously, I came to understand that different people have their own precise experiences, more or less well placed into the categories offered in Chapter 4, that all seem to be manifestations of this general transformational potential: Experiencing onself as within and part of nature feels restorative of something missing for many in contemporary culture, is conducive to healing of many types of trauma, *and* is felt by many as deeply spiritual.

Some of the pre-data lenses were termed "procedural," which I considered a means to signal ways in which I thought effective method would work in this dissertation. My preliminary understandings of appropriate method were carried out in the dissertation, a process explained in Chapter 3 and in the final section of this chapter.

The remainder of this chapter weaves the stories together with the reviewed literature in order to explain and illustrate my interpretations. While I have drawn heavily on the stories, the interpretations are mine and are not intended as a synthesis of the viewpoints of participants. This chapter also reflects upon the research methods, both generally (intuitive inquiry, hermeneutics) and specific to this project. I try to acknowledge what this study does not and cannot claim to be, while defending the choices I have made in research methods. The chapter concludes by suggesting areas for further research.

Experiences of Grief, Weeping, and Other Deep Emotion in Response to Nature as Moments in a Process of Embodiment

As noted above, the heart of my understanding of what I have studied is this: Experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature are moments in a process of embodiment, a process facilitating reparation of the experiential split between mind and body, and between humanity and nature. In understanding this idea in more depth, it helps to consider the matter first in terms of the individual's internal process, then to broaden consideration to the individual's relationship to environment, then to broaden once more to consideration of the culture's relationship to the earth. When considering these things, it is necessary to view both healing (as I have used the term) and psycho-spiritual transformation as a matter of restoring equilibrium within a physical system. I do not mean a physical system exclusive from, or separate from, spirit or God, as I believe that contact with spirit can play an enormous role in healing and psycho-spiritual transformation. But I nevertheless want to focus attention on

restoration of equilibrium in living physical systems, both individual people as bodies and the whole of life and matter on the planet as the embodied earth.

In the life of an individual, weeping, crying, and tears may be considered the physical aspect of a psychological and biological process by which the individual moves toward restoration of equilibrium in the body. The weeping literature, much of which portrays weeping as a process of catharsis, supports this view. Many of the stories—particularly those in the healing section—illustrate this process. Later in this chapter I will draw upon the stories for illustration. For the moment, just consider the following example. I have been feeling increasingly distraught over the lack of connection with my animals while I have been writing this dissertation. For the most part, I have pushed this out of awareness. As that loss moves from awareness, I lose embodied contact with the animals. The time I continue to spend feeding them during this period has begun to feel like a chore. Some of the animals have begun to get on my nerves.

As part of this same process, I do not feel as healthy as I did when I spent time with the animals. My blood pressure is on the rise. I am not there yet, but I can feel myself moving toward the day when I can relax and sit down and grieve, with tears, the loss of connection with these animals over the past couple of months. When I do that, my body will feel better, my blood pressure will lower, *and* I will feel more connected with the animals. The facade will have broken, and I will naturally gravitate toward the experience of equilibrium in my own system—and in connection with the animals. I will be able to *be* more connected with them, which will restore a previous balance I had in my body. I will feel more present, more in my body, more embodied. Knowing myself, I

might get there gradually, little by little, over time—or I might stand there one day and cry about it and get there in a moment. When I feel best, I feel that I *am* my body.

Grief has been described in the psychological literature as a process, by some as a transformational process. In one of the following sections, I will draw upon several stories to illustrate my understandings of this process. For the moment, consider the grief that humans feel at the loss of a cherished loved one. It tends to be overwhelming. Equilibrium tends to be lost. The ability to sense and feel is shut down for many people. In order to move through the process, it seems to be necessary to allow many feelings to surface, including anger and deep, powerful sadness. The loss needs to become and remain physical and, through the physicality, to move the individual into new relationship with the environment (meaning simply, the outer world). Eventually, feelings are processed and a new relationship to the world is developed. A sense of equilibrium is restored, albeit often with different elements in the individual's world structure. I would argue this is a process, as what has been necessary is the gradual allowance of sensations and feelings, the gradual return to presence, and a relating to the outer world.

If culture (the civilization process) is viewed as pulling us out of our bodies, then grief, and weeping, can be seen as returning us to our bodies. If culture is viewed as pulling us into a head realm (Levin, 1988), dominated by culturally formed preconceptions, in which feelings and sensations are often blocked (e.g., Reich, 1933), then a return to feelings and sensations is a return to embodiment. This is simultaneously a return to individuality as against molding through culture. Grief often knocks us straight out of our culturally formed routines and brings us face to face with the biological reality

that our bodies, our whole systems, are hurting from loss. Similarly, weeping events tend to make us feel real, and inside our bodies. Such events can allow us to see and feel anew, to see and feel what matters, to be restored to what feels like a more *right* way to be in relationship to what matters.

Now, to grief, weeping, and deep emotions in response to nature. As we have seen, nature seems particularly suited to allowing people to release their emotions and to begin to feel a return to balance. This is discussed in depth below with regard to healing through nature. We have also seen that many people grieve, and some shed tears, through what I have called ecological grief. As I will suggest below, this is also a form of healing, a way to repair the individual's and culture's relationship with nature. For the present, I want to suggest that both forms of grief in response to nature are a transformational process of embodiment. If it is nature to which the individual is relating when grief (or a weeping event) is experienced, then the individual becomes more embodied in relationship to nature. The person comes into experience of his or her own body in relationship to a natural setting. The person is embodied in the individual body and in nature, in relationship to nature. This is a process of embodiment in nature. *Individual* equilibrium is restored *while in* relationship with nature: Thus, the equilibrium is in and through nature. Weeping events, in particular, are moments of this process.

Now, to a broader conception, a conception of culture. As I will articulate in more depth below, and as has already been suggested through discussion of the deep ecologists, it is not difficult to view contemporary technological culture as out of equilibrium with nature. When we grieve in response to that imbalance, we restore that

imbalance—at least we take a step, individual by individual, in that direction. If embodiment is a matter of presence and reality in environment, then a culture out of balance with the natural world is a disembodied culture. As we return, individual by individual, to the body in time and place, through grief and/or tears in response to nature, then the culture gradually becomes more embodied. If these individuals find a way to remain with sensations and emotions in time and place, to remain embodied, I believe that little by little the distance between human culture and natural rhythms will disappear. People will naturally tend to act in resonance with nature, which, I believe, in turn allows creation of a civilization that acts, naturally, in better equilibrium with nature.

In an individual life, an episode of grief, weeping, or other deep emotions in response to nature, represents a moment of embodiment, a moment of healing, in and through the body. As a cultural occurrence, grief in response to nature—particularly ecological grief—is a moment of cultural embodiment, a moment of healing, an instant of restored equilibrium. In those instants, there is no longer the separation between humanity and nature.

How do the examples of "spiritual" grief and weeping fit in? That will become more clear through the discussions below. For the moment, consider the ways in which these concepts may relate: equilibrium = balance = everything is all right as it is = unconditional love = the way it is with God. One of Laura Huber's recollections helps me illustrate this suggestion. As she felt merged with a stream, Laura Huber noted, "Then I cried. I was thinking, how blessed am I. For 20 minutes, I cried. But I was happy, awed with the beauty. I was able to see myself as part of a massive system. . . . I felt very fluid,

like mercury in a thermometer, very protected and very fluid." Is it possible that spiritual tears also involve a restoration of equilibrium—an awareness of a natural equilibrium? Such tears in response to nature may be complex, but I believe they may be usefully understood as part of a process of embodiment returning the individual, even if only briefly, to a sense of unity and equilibrium with natural order.

The Presence of the Body in Psycho-Spiritual Healing and Transformation

> Most people are *on* the world, not in it–have no conscious sympathy or relationship to anything about them–undiffused, separate, and rigidly alone like marbles of polished stone, touching but separate. (John Muir, 1954, p. 313)

Most somatic psychologists share the belief that culture in modern industrialized society teaches people *not* to experience their bodies, i.e., not to be embodied. In this sense, the concept of culture includes the family of origin, and the ever-widening circles of community through which the individual is shaped. Somatic or body-oriented therapists, in general, heal through assisting the recovery of the senses and emotions of the body. For instance, the gestalt therapists (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951) brought clients into the physical "here-and-now," Gendlin (1981, 1996) taught focusing, and Mindell (1985, 1987, 1998) developed a process of following "sentient, generally unrecognizable sensations that eventually manifest in dream images, body experiences and symptoms" (1998, p. 12.) Similarly, the Hendricks (1993) articulated, and teach, techniques designed to encourage embodiment: presencing, magnification, breathing, moving, communication, grounding, and manifesting.

As noted above, I understand the body to *have the capacity to mediate psycho-spiritual healing or transformation by restoring equilibrium through experience of sensations and emotions.* As will be discussed further below, experiences of grief, weeping, and deep emotions are manifestations of this capacity. As will also be discussed, nature is uniquely situated to enable this form of healing in that humans are attuned to sensory connection with nature and tend to feel unconditional love within nature. Before turning to those matters, which lie at the heart of this topic, I would like to draw upon the stories to illustrate the presence of the body in psycho-spiritual healing and transformation, at least that which takes place in response to nature.

Ralph Litwin was exercising (running) in "green rolling hills" when grief surrounding environmental devastation hit him suddenly. While exercise does not guarantee embodiment, or even necessarily the experience of one's sensations and emotions, there may be something about its physicality that contributed to the emergence of his grief. On another occasion, Ralph was receiving a massage, an experience that often brings forth dormant sensations and emotions, when he wept with what he terms negative emotions involving human neglect of the earth. Similarly, a massage seems important in Dana's experience upon coming across a deer in the woods. A shiatsu practitioner helped reawaken her sensations, likely putting her more *in* her body: in her words "drain[ing] away blockages and energiz[ing] me." A few moments later, she was sobbing as she gazed into the face of a young deer, feeling the "many years and defensive walls separating me from the barefoot child I had been . . . recogniz[ing] how far removed I was from who I was supposed to be." The experiences of both Ralph and Dana seem to

have brought specific matters to the surface, to body experience. I believe this constitutes healing of the psyche and spirit; and represents a step in a transformative process.

Several participants mentioned body practices or activities associated with heightened sensations and emotions. These include meditation (Terry Taylor), energy practices (JoyBeth, Nancy Russell, Gerry Eitner, Dana), kundalini awakening (Janet), dance (Roseann), hiking (Adam Butler), and mountain climbing (Michael Leas). In response to my question about practices important in her own healing journey, Julie Longhill mentioned massage, body work, dancing, yoga, and meditation. I did not require all participants to describe in depth how body practices, and likely resulting tendencies toward embodiment, shaped their own experiences of transformation. Nevertheless, this seems implicit within the lives described by many participants.

Some participants experience grief in response to nature as physical pain. Roseann wrote, "I only weep, and feel the poison from within. . . . My joints are stiff and my muscles tight. Doctors cannot find a reason." Similarly, Terry Taylor "ache[s] from head to toe at the repercussions of acid rain, noise pollution, litter bugs, and [her] little piece of earth that is in harm's way." Terry recalls always feeling grief for nature physically, recalling an incident in childhood when she felt "very nauseated, in a type of physical shock," after *feeling* another child kill a harmless snake. Particularly in the sense noted by Mindell (1985, 1987, 1998), these experiences can be viewed as the body's manifestation of the world's ecology, making these individuals painfully conscious of situations that become very important in their own psychological and spiritual development.

Freud (1900/1994), as well as contemporary dream theorists (e.g., Van de Castle, 1994), recognized that dreams can be manifestations of instincts or emotions of the body. The dream described by Ruth Davis—in which she felt tremendous grief at the invitation to leave the earth, a destroyed earth—can be understood as a message from her body to consciousness. Somewhat similarly, Jim Hipkins's journey to a power spot in the woods, taken when he lay in recovery from open heart surgery, can be viewed as the product of his body's desire for strength to heal. Both individuals give these experiences heightened importance in their personal growth.

Before turning to the role of nature in healing, I would note that even those stories that do not mention specific body practices, or body-associated activities, display a form of embodiment. Among the elements of embodiment described by S. Kay Toombs (1993) are *being-in-the-world* ("an embodied consciousness which engages and is engaged in the surrounding world"), *body-intentionality* ("directedness towards [attentiveness to] the world"), and *primary meaning* (an understanding of the world first through "the experiences of sense perception and bodily action") (p. 53-55). Each participant has, in her or his own way, manifested a directedness towards the natural world simply through the telling of a story of being-in-the-world. Even without express articulation of an understanding of the body's presence in this being-in-the-world, that presence is implicit through the stories gathered for this project.

Healing Through Nature

> Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares drop off like autumn leaves. (John Muir, 1954, p. 311)

When talking with me about my dissertation, Jeannette said, "I'm not sure whether I cry in response to nature or whether the woods are just a good place to cry." I told her I understood what she meant and that looking into that distinction, and other distinctions, and whether they were distinctions, was at the heart of my dissertation. Some of the most important realizations I had while studying this topic involve the ways in which many different forms of grief (and tears) in relationship to nature are interrelated in human experience. I believe what binds these experiences—some of which are distinct from certain angles—is the healing capacity of the body, particularly in relationship to nature. Before discussing the relationship of these various experiences through the lens of healing, I would like to note distinctions between some of the experiences that I believe are useful to understanding.

During study of the stories, I grouped some together as illustrating what I came to call *ecological grief*. This included the stories of Ralph Litwin, Rosie Kuhn, Roseann, Terry Taylor, Raymond Voet, Marilyn Armstrong, Ruth B. Davis, James R. Hipkins, and JoyBeth. At one level, these stories, in particular, describe grief *about* nature and the plight of nature in contemporary times. Ralph Litwin had been "reading some particularly alarming reports of environmental destruction" and, one day, while running across a golf course, he was overcome by strong emotions and wept profusely in sorrow, "not only for

the environmental and animal devastation, but also for humanity's immense spiritual vacuum, ignorance and stupidity, which allows the devastation to occur."

Rosie Kuhn, like many of us, experiences "layers of despair and disbelief, dismay and depression" as she reflects upon specifics such as pollution and, more generally, humanity's lack of respect for nature. Rosie described an intentional trip to the ocean, where she wept with a sense of contrition about humanity's present inability to honor nature. Similarly, walking past cut-down Christmas trees in New York City brings Emily Squires to tears. At least at one level, her story is about the many destructive and disrespectful acts of people with respect to nature. Projecting myself into Emily's story, I would have tears for the presentation of Christmas trees as just another commodity within the holiday, chasms away from what I imagine were initially sacred practices with respect to evergreen trees around the winter solstice. Somewhat similarly, Ray Voet cries for specific agricultural lands, once tendered wisely and lovingly, but now, in his experience, depleted. He connects this with the reality that "people have become separated from the land, the soil."

Marilyn Armstrong hardly cries for any reason, but experiences grief in response to any type of harm to nature. Her grief seems broader than that of many environmentalists—she finds it difficult to accept any harm to animals and plants, even that which may be part of nature's way. Terry Taylor also grieves for the senseless harm to animals and plants, and gives examples that seem almost archetypal to present times. On the very day she received information about my project, she was sitting in the woods with her friends "the trees" and "cried over the paint can in the stream." Ruth B. Davis's

dream also seems archetypal, beginning with the image of our "once-beautiful planet . . . a blackended, smoldering, uninhabitable ruin," destroyed by "human greed, ignorance, and disrespect."

Jim Hipkins also wrote of feelings emerging from contemporary culture's disrespect of the earth. Jim's Native American background gives him great attachment to the earth, making disrespect to the earth feel like disrespect to that which sustains and maintains life within Creation. He wrote, "I cannot imagine *not* crying over the earth." Roseann has similar experience, which she connects with her faith's principle of Tikkun Olam. As she looks out over the ocean, grief swells in her body, and she prays, asking, "Why?" The answer, which she hears as coming from Mother Earth, is "Save me. I am dying." Like that of several other participants, Roseann's grief is in one sense manifestly ecological—she is grieving for and about the earth, about understood *loss* of the earth.

Others, like Jeannette, have described experiences that are closer to finding "a good place to cry" in nature. During initial study of the stories, I came to think of the following contributions as illustrating most clearly experiences of healing personal wounds or losses within nature: those from Jeanette, Janet, Nancy Russell, Peter Kessler, Walter, Julie Longhill, Linda Carroll Hasler, and Christine Dudoit. Jeannette articulated the process beautifully. She often walks a particular trail "to seek refuge and solace," because, as she writes, "When I am sad, afraid or at a loss for what to do, plodding my feet on the raw earth helps me to hold on or to figure out a next step." She believes nature allows her to touch her sadness so deeply because she feels "unconditionally loved and accepted," that she "belongs."

Janet also described feelings of acceptance and belonging, brought on by the combination of fellowship in a church group and the sun setting over a lake. She wrote, "There was illumination, as if the sky were brilliantly lit up. Behind me was the soft voice of the leader [and] I felt quite overwhelmed by the combination of the illumination and the comradery . . . " For Janet, the experience confirmed her instinct that her family of origin, which did not provide her with such feelings, was dysfunctional. This gave rise to "relief, that, yes, there are others who feel as I do . . . a sense of helping others, of offering support, and the tremendous feeling of love." This theme of relief or release was echoed by numerous participants.

Several participants described the healing potential of nature during times of deep personal crisis or loss. After the sudden death of her husband, as her home filled with condolence flowers, Nancy Russell learned to find "amazing relief . . . as I STARED at and then visually merged with a flower. The pang and sharpness would ease in my chest. It would melt away momentarily and I would briefly feel relief and release." Similarly, Peter Kessler found solace in his cherished Swiss woods while his wife was ill and after her passing. He wrote,"[I]n those times of grief and sorrow I often went to my beloved forest, one day here, another day to another wood nearby or farther away. . . . I only know that the trees were my trusted buddies, ready to hear any mourning, taking in any tears and strongly supporting life with their own type of wisdom."

Christine Dudoit also found healing in nature during her husband's illness and after his death. Cavorting with him in the woods, feeling rain hit her body, Christine understood in an instant "that Liam's presence was beyond his physical self and . . . felt

reassured. . . . Everything was going to be all right, because even if he did die, we would always be together." Eighteen months later, Christine found a way to carry her love for Liam with less of the burden of loss. She wrote, "Arms open and legs widely spread, I stood facing the valley before me. I closed my eyes, took a deep inhalation and let out a scream that soared and echoed for miles and miles into the distance. . . . When I opened my eyes again, I sensed I had been enveloped by the powers of nature's wonders."

While Walter's story is very brief, he describes a form of healing during a time of personal illness. He was very weak, lonely, and depressed when he began his drive north from southern California. When he arrived north of the Bay Area, "the luscious greens, streams, and rivers had a SHINE or BRILLIANCE to them" which he had never noticed before, leading him to cry, which he did for "a couple of hours, repeatedly." While Walter does not state this experience helped his illness, he has described what feels like quite a release and relief, which others have described as healing and transformative. Linda Carroll Hasler was more direct in her description of the healing presence of nature. During difficult times, she wrote, nature "seemed to embrace me, to comfort me, to allow me." She continued,

> After all, it was all around and it was both alive and also, non-threatening, not even moving really. It's like a giant bed. At home, we need our beds to cry in, to cover us up, to hide away, from comfort, so we can be protected by the sheets and blankets, the softness underneath. Nature provides that on a grand scale, and because it's so big, it is as if God and the Great Ones on the other side are there, are our side.

Similar to Jeanette, Julie Longhill described a practice of going to nature for personal healing. When she started recovery "from child abuse in particular," she "sought

it out, purposely." She found an apartment close to the Cleveland Metroparks so she could walk. While she was involved in therapy, and several other personal growth modalities noted above, Julie also simply immersed herself in nature, taking her walks, beginning to paint outside. She found that she "became one with the trees, the waters, the flowers." Unknown to her, "this was another kind of therapy, Nature's therapy." She felt "safe there, and calm, and inspired." She felt truly "LOVED" and she loved nature back. She wrote, "I was disconnected with myself before this healing—I was numb, not in my body, my body had been traumatized. I can gladly say now . . . I am RECONNECTED. And Nature has played a huge role."

Such experiences are readily understood as healing through contact with nature (see Clinebell, 1996). Most interesting to me are the threads of relief, release, and unconditional love that weave through the stories. As Julie articulates so clearly, these are experiences of the body. This can be understood within the context of the writings of the somatic psychologists, many of whom posit that we develop "armor" to hold off sensations or emotions that are painful, not socially sanctioned, or just feel too much for our circumstances. In particular, to survive traumatic experiences, or to keep up a front deemed necessary, people sometimes stave off difficult emotions, such as deep grief. By connecting with nature, some people are able to allow such emotions to surface, which can be considered a loosening of armor or release of protective repression. Others may not find catharses, but simply a form of healing solace. In either case, I believe that nature has pulled these individuals into an opening of sensation and emotion, which eases an experience of personal trauma. Participants write that nature is not judging, that its love is

unconditional. This could be another way of saying that one is allowed to sense and experience all that the body produces, without erecting the armors taught by family and society. Julie Longhill wrote, "When I am in Nature, I am not judged, or dismissed, or shamed for my feelings."

Experiences that initially seem different, but I now view as part of the same continuum, are those describing sustenance through nature. I consider this a form of anticipatory healing—a holding, loving presence of nature which assuages the knocks and shakes of life before they take hold of the body. This is illustrated most directly by two of the stories, those of Susan Gray and Rhea White. Susan describes the way in which lands of her home turf, Montana, were able to sustain and revive her, both emotionally and spiritually. As a young mother, Susan was put upon, tired and, what is worse, guilty for any moment taken for herself. She describes one day when she walked out alone on the prairie. "The sun was shining, not a cloud in sight. The wind was a breeze and kept the mosquitoes at bay. There wasn't a sign of civilization. . . . Just me and the prairie. . . . I sat there a long while enjoying the silence, the smells of spring, the aloneness." Times like these helped sustain her and also "awakened . . . an intense interest in nature and an awareness of life that surrounds us all the time."

Rhea White describes the sustenance she received growing up near fields and a particular plot of land she called Peter's Lot. One particular day, just before she was to finish high school, and move even more firmly into the world of people, Rhea went up to the fields, taking a bittersweet farewell. She wrote, "I knew it had never been like this before and never would be again—at least for me. I loved it so and ached with the thought

of parting at the same time that I was eager to go. I felt very close to God, and to the life that burgeoned so bounteously for the occasion. . . " Rhea was "thankful for all that Peter's Lot had given me for so long. . . . It brought together the best of what I knew, and in some way I didn't try to understand, the best of what was to come." As I understand Rhea's description, the intimacy she felt with nature was to remain with her through life, a gift not shared by many people, such as myself, who forged bodily-felt ties with nature only in adulthood.

The stories of Gayle Abbott and John Bullaro illustrate another aspect of healing in nature. Sometimes, in order to move into new periods of faith, it is necessary to experience a sense of fearful solitude in the wilderness. While Gayle Abbott described many experiences of sustenance in nature throughout her life, she also told of times when the ocean, in particular, "can bring altogether different emotions, as I feel that I could easily become lost, very much alone and insignificant in its vastness. The emotion of fear is present as my heart quickens and chills spread over my body." Gayle finds that the night sky can also "produce feelings of insignificance and loss," but that such feelings typically "give way to hope—and faith."

John Bullaro's time in the desert can be viewed similarly. He wrote, "As night closed in, I began to experience strong feelings of loneliness. . . . In the distance, I heard coyotes yipping as if playing games with each other. I envied them for having a group they belonged to. . . . The night was long and terrifying." When day came, along came a ranger, whose synchronous story gave John information he needed to hear. In this way,

descent into the neighborhood of despair through nature can herald new beginnings, in many respects bringing healing of past hurts.

While I initially viewed this range of experiences as distinct, working with the stories and the literature led me to understand them along a continuum, bound together by the human ability to heal through contact with nature. Macy (1983, 1991), Glendinning (1994), and Clinebell (1996) provide a way to understand grieving *about* nature as a healing experience, not as different from the healing of more personal trauma as I first imagined. Each of these theorists posits that many contemporary people carry around deep grief involving their awareness—often not completely conscious—about environmental matters. Having observed the ways in which many people repress awareness and full experience of this grief, Macy has developed workshops to assist people in gaining access to these feelings.

When people express this form of grief, they are accessing grief that has broad social and cultural implications, but it is nonetheless, as experienced by them, a personal, individual experience of grief in the body. I believe that, in a sense, weeping occurs when more intellectually felt understandings of ecological problems become a personal experience in the individual's life as lived, and, particularly, in the body. When those of us experiencing ecological grief weep, we are weeping because our bodies produce tears in response to the awareness of a loss that has finally been personally felt, not merely as an idea or a fact, but as an experience. While usually not felt as deeply as the personal loss of a loved one, this grieving is nonetheless for a personal loss. When I experience ecological grief, I am allowing into consciousness, into my body's awareness, the extent

of my understanding of ongoing loss of nature. This begins a healing process, just as a walk in the woods, during which grief is allowed to surface, begins a healing process. In this way, ecological grief as experienced by participants is but a variation on healing in response to nature.

The potential merger or simultaneity of these two forms of grief—personal grief released and relieved in nature, and what I am calling ecological grief—is seen in several stories I initially titled, "longing for deep sensory connection or harmony with nature." These include the stories of Dana, Gerry Eitner, Grace, Juana Ocasio, and Laura Huber. My own story also illustrates this process. In my experience of feeling connected with the rain, I found myself noticing and grieving many things at once, but I believe the main thing that happened was this: By feeling connected with the rain in a deep, embodied sense, I realized the extent to which I did not ordinarily have that experience. While I cried for my personal loss of embeddedness in nature, and was thus personally healed by deep contact with nature, layered within that loss was the realization that we have constructed a society in which the experience of deep connection with nature is difficult if not impossible for most people. I also cried some in *response* to that realization, and grieved more later as the result of deepened understanding about the relation of people to nature in the contemporary industrialized world. This is one example of the merger of an experience of "personal healing of nature" into "ecological grief."

The other stories mentioned point toward this relationship between personal grief and ecological grief as a matter of healing. Although Dana did not describe grief in overtly ecological terms, when she cried in response to the deer, she felt she "was on the

city side of a vast river tricked into believing the chimera of upper middle class life was reality." Her tears were simultaneously in realization of how far she had come from "the barefoot child" she had been, a personal loss, and in response to how she was stuck "on the city side of a vast river." While the latter realization is also personal, it implicates the social structure in which Dana finds herself, with the "city side" not fostering sensory ("barefoot") connection with nature. Similarly, in the office of her spiritual director, Grace looked "out the window at the sun on the leaves of trees, watching the incessant Santa Clara Valley traffic whizzing by through the trees." In that context, she cried while discussing her deep longing for God, which she believed could only find expression by the ocean. She realized she had "become smaller than God intended, with the cramped and congested cities and quarters in which [she] lived reflecting [her] inner life."

Laura Huber poignantly described her opening to the earth, a transpersonal experience. During a guided meditation, Laura looked out a window and experienced herself merging with a creek. This was personally healing, but also contained, simultaneously, an element of ecological grief. Laura explained,

> I could see the whole world through a telescope. I said to myself, let it go. Then I cried. I was thinking, how blessed am I. For 20 minutes, I cried. But I was happy, awed with the beauty. I was able to see myself as part of a massive system. I thought: if we don't take care of this system, there won't be a system.

On another occasion, she knelt beside a mountain. She wrote,

> Truly, truly humbled. Awe. Just stared. Then, emotionally, a lot of turmoil again. Unworthy. What have I missed all my life? Angry that I have always been so busy doing instead of enjoying. Sad for all those cars that were rushing by me. I never cried so much in my life.

Though Laura did not articulate the ecological grief aspect of her experience as precisely as some others, her sadness and crying for "all those cars that were rushing by me" suggests grief over humanity's inability to really see nature, an aspect of ecological grief. Her simultaneous realization—we are part of a massive system, and if we don't take care of this system, there won't be a system—goes to the heart of the connection between ecological grief and healing in nature. In both cases, as illustrated by Laura's story, there is transpersonal connection between the individual's experience and the whole of nature. As Gerry Eitner articulated, feelings of "deep caring" for nature are often "papered over": "We protect, just in case." Her own experience of grief upon leaving a spot in nature "was like looking in the face of truth, a reflecting surface which just couldn't be denied." This helped her reestablish connection with what seems sacred to her, including the natural world.

In reflecting upon the role of nature in facilitating healing and providing sustenance, I have considered to what extent the experience turns upon solitude, rather than precisely upon contact with nature. Most of the experiences described in the stories emerge during the participants' time alone in nature, away from other humans and the demands of life. Further research would be useful to explore the distinction between solitude in nature and solitude in a civilized setting, and between solitude in nature and participation with nature in the company of others. My initial thought is that solitude is a part of the experiences under study, but that the experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions investigated in this dissertation do turn upon connection with nature.

In my own experience, I feel an odd sense of solitude sometimes within cities—never in automobiles, but often on city streets, or on public transportation. I may be surrounded by other humans, and by the buzz and activity of a city, but the absence of other people expecting anything from me, and the time available for my own thoughts or absence of thoughts, gives rise to a certain peace and sense of wholeness. In those times, I may experience myself as a participant in the activity around me, and that may feel a tad exciting, and even transpersonal in the sense that I experience myself as part of an organized human activity—related to that activity. But these experiences have felt somehow "on the surface" to me—not as deeply experienced within my body, or as profoundly peaceful, as experiences within nature. Indeed, there have been times when I have wandered alone in cities and found myself, eventually, sitting amidst a group of trees. I may be staring at a statue placed in a city square, but my back would want to be up against bark, if possible. For me at least, there is something grounding about nature that feels different in kind from man-made objects, even if they are made of natural materials. Solitude with nature is a different experience, one that feels deeper and closer to a higher power, closer to all-understanding and all-compassionate creation.

I believe investigation would corroborate that solitude assists the production of feelings, and the sense of healing, as well as the experience of harmony with natural order and spirit. I also believe, however, that there is something unique about communion with nature, our experiential source through millions of years of evolution, that facilitates such experiences.

Grief in Response to Nature as Personal Transformation (and Transpersonal Experience)

The psychological literature portrays grief as a process of accommodation to loss. Though most of the literature does not discuss grief as an experience of the body, I believe grief emerges from the body's lived experience of loss. Drawing upon his experiences in Zen Buddhism and through work with grieving clients, Edwards (1997) articulates this very precisely: "In grief we immediately encounter the pain of the loss of someone's or something's physical presence. This loss is often felt as a direct bodily fact that is known prior to any rational consideration" (p. 446). Particularly in recent years, some researchers have described grief as a process of transformation, which I would argue is transformation of the body as lived in relation to the lost object and, more generally, to the world. In the pinwheel model (Solari-Twadell, Bunkers, Wang, & Snyder, 1995), transformation of the individual through a healthy grieving process is specific in the sense that the individual learns a new way to cherish the person or object of bereavement and general in the sense that the individual comes to a new attitude toward life. As noted by Solari-Twadell, Bunkers, Wang, and Snyder (1995), what is "at stake is the achievement of a new balance in one's orientation to reality" (p. 324).

The process of "ecological grief" may be viewed through this lens, drawing upon the literature on grief. As noted above, Macy (1983, 1991) and Clinebell (1996), in particular, recognized the ways in which grief about the environment may at first be suppressed or denied. This corresponds to Kubler-Ross's (1969) initial stage of denial-isolation. Like Kubler-Ross, Edwards (1997) identifies an early stage of grief in which

the individual has difficulty "recognizing and accepting the reality of the loss at all levels" (p. 442). I would posit the difficulty could be viewed in terms of bringing the experience into the body, into awareness through sensation and feeling. Macy's seminars to assist the emergence of "ecogrief" likely produce, for many people, an emotional and sensory awakening of the body to suppressed grief about the earth.

Kubler-Ross's (1969) next three stages of grief involve anger, bargaining, and depression. Similarly, Edwards (1997) wrote of "working through the pain of grief and identifying and expressing important latent feelings and thoughts" (p. 442). Although Edwards does not articulate the range of latent feelings and thoughts typically involved, the range certainly includes both anger and sadness. Several contributions to this project may be viewed in this context. Rosie Kuhn's visit to the ocean illustrates a range of emotions. Rosie seems deeply saddened by humanity's treatment of nature and her own sense of responsibility and culpability. Although she does not use the word "anger," I believe there is healthy anger beneath her description of humanity's lack of respect for nature. Even more interesting to me is the way in which Rosie can be understood to be bargaining with nature. She knows nature will not answer her, yet she asks for "*mercy*." She writes, "Prostrating myself before the illimitable creator, I asked for forgiveness and assistance to reverse the present trend of world destruction." Although Rosie does not say this, projecting myself into the situation, I envision myself as offering all that I have, all my tears and heart, in the hope that nature would only offer *me* some guidance in what to do. My words, *I will prostrate myself before you if you will tell me what to do.*

While it became important for Ralph Litwin to find ways *not* to hold onto anger, anger was part of his own ecological grief. "I wept as I ran, not only for the environmental and animal devastation, but also for humanity's immense spiritual vacuum, ignorance and stupidity, which allows the devastation to occur." When he sang Memphis Slim's *Mother Earth*, he was investing one particular line "with a great deal of negative emotion: hatred for all those hard-hearted bastards, the captains of industry, financiers, politicians, and so forth, who justify ecological destruction with self-aggrandizing rationalizations." While not using the word "anger," Ray Voet wrote of similar feelings, asserting that "people are ignorant of our connection to the land and believe what is promulgated by 'authorities' who often have hidden agendas, mostly financial or fear mongering. Perhaps I am wrong, but I fear, and I cry." Also not using the word anger, Ruth Davis nonetheless described healthy anger arising from ecological grief. She described some of the emotions she felt following her dream with a series of phrases, including: "it is capable of self-launch on an instant's notice;" "woe to those who get in the way;" "one blow from it is like a sledgehammer to a block of ice;" "it scorches a straight-arrow path to the heart of things."

The final stages of grief recognized in the psychological literature are the most suggestive of transformation. Kubler-Ross (1969) described acceptance, which suggests an incorporation of loss and a peaceful re-orientation. While not using the word "acceptance," Edwards (1997) articulated a similar culmination of a healthy grief process. He notes "readjusting and reawakening to the world," followed by "reinvesting emotional

energy and opening oneself" to new possibilities, and "integrating the grief experience in ways which are adaptive, healthy and of value to the bereaved person" (p. 442).

Several stories suggest this sort of transformation of grief. Ruth Davis lists the specific concrete changes made in her own life following her realization that she was willing to die for the earth. New practices such as keeping her bird-feeder full, religiously taking her dog for a walk when returning home, and vowing never to pass by a lost dog, represent specific new ways to hold nature, literally transforming Ruth's grief into action. Similarly, Gerry Eitner articulates the way in which grief for connection with nature transformed her work in the world. She wrote, "Although I haven't had this deep grieving/longing experience in nature very frequently, the experience seems to precede a deep opening in my ability to move things forward." She believes that the specific incident of grief described for this project—in which she grieved leaving a particular locale, where she wanted to hold a workshop—led her to action regarding her workshops, helping her "put into motion two programs that are very dear to my heart."

In more general ways, many of the stories reflect personal transformation through grief. My own story illustrates this process. By coming to feel my longing for nature, which emerged from my awareness of loss, I began a process that led to major changes in my life and that of my family. We moved to Montana, where we are still part of the American way, but are surrounded by animals, mountains, and trees. Grace describes a similar process. Like me, Grace was involved in psycho-spiritual transformation well before she was able to voice her desire to live closer to nature. Recognition of grief around nature played an important part in that ongoing

transformation. When explaining her desire to find God by the ocean, Grace "poured out my grief and anger at this unfairness of life." Then, after "a set of fortuitous circumstances," and "with the courage to undertake a massive fixer-upper project," Grace moved to the coast. Now, "gratitude and wonder" are woven through her life, "no matter what is occurring at the moment."

Most of the stories in this project can be viewed as tales of psychological and spiritual transformation in which nature plays a critical role. A few make the transformational process particularly evident. As noted above, Julie Longhill sought out nature when she embarked on a course of healing. "I started therapy in 1990 and about the same time, I started painting outdoors. Painting was very meditative and I became one with the trees, the water, the flowers." The process was transformative and transpersonal. She writes, "When I am in Nature, I feel CONNECTED to something BIGGER. My body feels the wind, feels the birds, feels the trees. The silence and beauty allow the space for me to feel my emotions."

Christine Dudoit described personal transformation through the process of grieving the loss of her husband. Nature was central to her experience. After her scream to the mountains, described above, she turned to others in her expedition and laughed. "And they laughed and our voices echoed together, thanking the mother earth for her blessings." Christine recognized the process as transformative, specifically involving her grief and generally involving her spiritual growth, which would be a lifelong path. She wrote, "I knew I could not simply regard the height of 3,000 meters I had climbed as the summit of my expedition. That day I understood I had only begun making a huge leap,

climbing the echelons to the spiritual freedom, that level of pure bliss and self elation that one wishes she can reach one day." She concluded, "Well, if I am ever going to make it there, at least now I understand where the path begins." Christine's process was also both transformative and transpersonal:

> When I opened my eyes again, I sensed I had been enveloped by the powers of nature's wonders. They all lived in me, as I lived in them, the same way I had breathed the moon the night before. Though this time they were all in unison, the sun, the moon, the mountains.

The stories of Julie and Christine illustrate the way in which grief, the body, transformation, and transpersonal experience are linked together—as predicted by David Levin (1988). By coming into deep, healing connection with nature, both women, like many other participants, experienced a process of transformation that included not only healing of specific trauma, but change in their way of experiencing the world. These changes in orientation were transpersonal in that both Julie and Christine began to sense themselves as connected with nature, as part of nature. Predicting this sort of experience, Levin (1988) wrote that movement toward body-experience, leaning into what he calls the prepersonal subject, involves "an experience of life into which everything else is embraced, everything gathered, gathered into a whole" (p. 285). In his "corporeal schema," this is a transformational healing, and represents a transpersonal process that is structured into human experience as "a process of self-development, as the fulfillment of a structural potential already schematized and carried by the experiential body" (p. 283).

Grief in Response to Nature as Cultural Healing

> In God's wildness lies the hope of the world—the great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and the wounds heal ere we are aware. (John Muir, 1954, p. 315)

Glendinning (1994) wrote that contemporary people do not "live in communion with the Earth, and yet we are people who evolved over the course of millions of years—through savannah, jungle and woodland—to live in communion with it" (p. ix). Abram (1996) warned of "a precarious situation, given our age-old reciprocity with the many-voiced landscape" (p. ix). "Without the oxygenating breath of our forests, without the clutch of gravity and the tumbled magic of river rapids, we have no distance from our technologies, no way of assessing their limitations, no way to keep ourselves from turning into them" (p. ix). In describing Western civilization as an addictive process, Glendinning (1994) spoke of techno-addiction, the tendency of industrialized societies to live "in a state of out-of-control, often aimless, compulsion to fill the lost sense of belonging, integrity, and communion" (p. x). Mindell (1985) provided a link to the personal body: "[O]ur body problems are also problems of the world around us, we suffer in the way the whole world suffers" (p. 76). In this way, Mindell recognized personal healing and cultural healing as interwoven.

Personal transformation through grief in response to nature can be viewed also as cultural transformation, merely through the ways in which each personal life touches others. The stories contain numerous illustrations of participants engaging in various activities, small and large, that will ripple out into the culture. Emily Squires describes

what has come along with her awakening to ecological matters. "Over the years we have all seen what's happening to the Earth. I belong to at least 15 environmental and animal rights organizations. And I eat organic food and care about farm animals and on and on." Though understanding New York City from one perspective as "a dirty, noisy, cement world," she has found a way to marvel at "a little blade of grass pushing its way mightily up through a crack in the sidewalk." With her husband, Emily has recently written a book on *Spiritual Places In and Around New York City.* Those who read Emily's book are likely to increase their connection with nature, even in the city, and to begin or continue their own transformative experience.

In response to her own painful ecological grief, Roseann has choreographed dances that interpret the ocean's experience of pollution and disrespect. Dance transforms Roseann's experience into movement and outreach to others. Among those who watch the performances are people who will be moved and transformed in their own approach to nature.

Several contributors to this project are teachers and/or healers of some kind. JoyBeth is a metaphysical counselor-educator, Jeannette a therapist for adolescent girls and teacher of creative writing, and John Bullaro an environmental educator. Dana practices Polarity, an energetic healing art, while Nancy Russell and Gerry Eitner are both Reiki masters. Juana Ocasio is a therapist and teacher of Quigong and T'ai Ch'i, and Ryan a teacher of sacred sexuality in the context of nature. Julie Longhill, Juana Ocasio, and Michael Leas are artists. Through their contact with others, the nature experiences of each of these participants will necessarily transform others. Even through telling their

stories here and in other settings, each of the participants will necessarily transform others and the culture, if little by little.

Particularly when our culture's attitude toward nature is considered part of an addictive process, I see no real alternative for healing than through the body, little by little, in the context of individual lives. This is most clear when focusing on grief *about* nature and personal longing for close sensory connection with nature. As people *personally* grieve environmental devastation, and their own personal loss of embeddedness in nature, transformation in their relationship to nature seems a natural product. In the aggregate, this becomes cultural transformation of relationship with nature, a fact recognized by Macy (1983, 1991) and Clinebell (1996), among others. Equilibrium of the culture in relationship to nature is restored as that equilibrium is regained within individuals, person by person.

I believe the bodily process is particularly important. I will use myself as an example. I have my share of addictive tendencies, most notably now to food that is not good for me. I tend toward high blood pressure *and* I tend to eating greasy, salty food. Sometimes I *try* to will myself to eat properly, to resist the bad stuff, to threaten myself with heart attack and stroke. Those techniques have a certain amount of success, but that success is nothing compared with what happens if I connect with my body and nature. When working on the final stages of this dissertation, I fell into old patterns of eating junk food fast, not exercising, not spending time outside or with animals. My blood pressure was in bad shape, and I felt like hell. When the terrorists attacked New York and Washington, I found myself needing to pray, which brought me back into body practices,

including yoga. I was also running again with some regularity. *With* renewed contact with my body, my tendency toward bad food decreased on its own, through my body, without any effort of will or conscious *should.* While I have not been outdoors as much as I would like, I know that if I spent time hiking this natural tendency toward what is sound for my body would increase.

I believe it is the same with regard to *body* experience of connection with nature, particularly as mediated by grief. If people know in their bodies what it feels like to grieve a trashed beach, or to yearn for connection with animals and the outdoors, I believe they will naturally tend toward ecological attitudes. Like Roseann, they will pick up trash on the beach not because they have read articles and think they should, but because their bodies grieve and hurt and propel them to clean. They will vote against politicians disrespectful of nature not because they have been persuaded by rhetoric, not because they have seen statistics of one thing or another, but because they know from experience what it is to sit in endless traffic, or to yearn for a place by a stream and to know, like Terry Taylor, that one's small piece of nature is in harm's way.

Cultural transformation, of course, involves more than simply change in ecological actions and attitudes. Ultimately, an opening to transpersonal experience may be the key. When I was in Montreal with my family last summer, I walked through a bookstore, dictionary in hand. I have been trying to learn French for the last year or so, in large part an effort to move myself into identification with my heritage, which is French. I came across a book by Jean-Francois Kahn (2001), a French historian and social critic. The book was titled *Moi, l'autre et le loup,* which translates, *Me, the other, and the wolf.*

I was intrigued. I read enough to understand Kahn's thesis: Social change will not occur until people are actually able to *experience* what it is like to be "the other," those against whom individuals or groups are thrown historically, socially, or culturally in an antagonistic way. Without actual *experience* of the experience of the other, it is to easy to remain a predator, a wolf. I stood there thinking to myself, this is a transpersonal psychology, and Kahn understands it to be necessarily at the heart of social and political progress.

What does this have to do with nature experience? I would argue that connection with nature, whether or not it is mediated by experiences of grief, might be the experience best situated to open people to experiences of the self as inclusive of other, whether the other is other people, nature, or anything else beyond the self. Because we have evolved embedded in nature, I believe nature is uniquely situated to bring us home to experiencing ourselves as part of a whole, to sensory experience of the other. Even as I write this, I am aware that humanity has a long history *within* nature which was often violent, with tribe pitted against tribe. Some might argue this arose *after* humans separated from nature (Quinn, 1992). While that discussion is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I suggest that *after* civilization, the return to transpersonal experience of nature, and of the interconnectedness of all life within nature, may be the only route to real human progress. Grief in response to nature, as noted, may be an opening to a transformative process capable of heading our culture in this direction.

Weeping, Crying, and Tears As the Body's Manifestation of Healing or Transformation, Including Spiritual Transformation

> No amount of word-making will ever make a single soul to *know* these mountains. As well seek to warm the naked and frost-bitten by lectures on caloric and pictures of flame. One day's exposure to mountains is better than cartloads of books. See how willingly Nature poses herself upon photographer's plates. No earthly chemicals are so sensitive as those of the human soul. All that is required is exposure, and purity of material. "The pure in heart shall see God!" (Muir, p. 318)

While the psychological literature on weeping, crying, and tears is over a century old, it feels very young to me. Though some forms of crying are widely assumed to be cathartic, there has been difficulty establishing, at least in quantitative studies, a relationship between any form of healing or restoration of equilibrium and weeping or crying. Even within the last few decades, some (e.g., Cosgrove, 1973) have sought to prove crying a neurotic mechanism, not a healthy catharsis. I believe a pluralistic approach (James, 1912/1996) may be the key. There seems little doubt that crying, in some instances, represents infantile or regressive behavior, not the best adult adaptation to particular circumstance. While participating in various personal growth groups, I have observed people who seem to become stuck in crying that does not lead to resolution, but leaves them feeling powerless and small. That form of crying is not the subject of this dissertation, though it would be interesting to study.

What this dissertation gathers are stories of many people for whom weeping, crying, and tears represent a manifestation—almost a breaking open—of the body's ability to lead in healing and transformation. In some cases, this is bodily, embodied,

recognition of grief relating to some experienced loss. In some cases, there may or may not be elements of grief, but the body's production of tears, whether easy, joyful tears or strong weeping, is a process of embodiment. Something mental has become physical, or at least any defensive mental process has eased. In my experience, and I believe as illustrated by many stories in this project, this process of embodiment is a transformative, generally healing process.

While the stories do not articulate this process in these words, I believe many are illustrative of aspects of this process, particularly the stories that involve healing of personal wounds, of a personal sense of isolation, or of a prior lack of deep understanding of the human condition. To begin with, some attention should be given to which stories do and which do not involve weeping, crying, or tears. Twenty-six of the 40 contributions describe tears of some kind or what the literature might call a "weeping event." An additional five stories are ambiguous as to whether weeping, crying, or tears occurred. In these five stories, from context, it seems likely that weeping or tears was part of the overall stage of the individual's life, of which we have had a glimpse, though no specific "weeping event" was detailed. That leaves approximately one-fourth of the stories which do not include tears, which might be said to *exclude* tears.

Most of the stories excluding crying, weeping, or tears fall into these categories: primarily describing sustenance through nature, without healing of specific, already-existing grief (e.g., Adam Butler, Juana Ocasio, Susan Gray, Rhea White, and, for part of her story, Gayle Abbott); "dark nights" in nature prior to a restoration of faith and a new beginning (John Bullaro, Gayle Abbott in part); and what I call a "return" to experiencing

onself as part of nature without a high level of grief (Laurel Smith, Marie McLean—as discussed in more depth below). The remaining stories (or parts of stories) without tears involve people who describe themselves as "not criers" (e.g., Marilyn Armstrong) or experiences which seem predominantly spiritual experiences without a strong element of healing of personal wounds or prior sense of isolation (e.g., Jaene Leonard, Adam Butler, Louis Nielsen).

This leaves the stories *with* tears or weeping events as primarily descriptions of personally healing experiences or primarily descriptions of what I will call spiritual weeping or tears. These stories can be understood as involving personal healing, if merely healing of a sense of isolation, or healing of a prior lack of understanding that is common in the human condition. As noted below, this category of spiritual weeping or tears has many similarities to Anderson's (1996) "sacred weeping," though may not parallel her description entirely.

Numerous stories corroborate the common experience—discussed in the literature—that crying or weeping feels cathartic or restorative of equanimity. Few stories contain all the details necessary to illustrate catharsis in the long run, but, in general, I believe many participants have described experiences in which emotions welled up, came forward through tears, and left some resolution. Three examples will suffice. After crying in response to the deer, Dana found that her "body immediately felt lighter, as though a release of some sort had occurred." Jeannette wrote that a cry in the woods was "deeply satisfying." While she might feel either rejuvenated or in need of more rest after one of these cries, in either situation, she "feel[s] sustained and held." Julie Longhill described

one particular walk through the Cleveland Metropark, taken when she was feeling down about herself and the world. She wrote, "My relationships weighed heavy on my mind, and I couldn't shake this funk. As I walked, I began to cry. I was very aware of NATURE all around me . . . the trees, the sky, the birds . . . the air! Crying felt good and rejuvenating. I felt as if NATURE were nurturing me and holding me in its arms. The further I walked, the more serene I became, and the tears turned into humming."

Several stories provide illustration for subjects discussed within the weeping literature. One issue is the extent to which the experience of tears, even whether tears manifest, is dependent on the individual. This may seem obvious, but the weeping literature is replete with analyses and studies that, to one degree or another, take individual experience and personality out of the picture. While a fair amount of attention has been given to different types or functions of weeping, crying, or tears, not enough attention is given to the interaction between a type or function of weeping and the individual.

Many theorists and researchers posit a difference between men and woman regarding the occurrence of tears, though I found no study that looks at gender differences with respect to different *forms* of tears. Labbott and Teleha (1996) made an insightful attempt to address individual experience by considering the impact in the quantitative context of whether crying or inhibition of crying went against the grain of personal tendencies. They found this to interact with measures of whether stress increased or decreased in crying. Particularly in quantitative studies, if significant results are to be

achieved, more and more account should be taken for individual differences in relationship to various forms of weeping.

Several stories illustrate the ways in which the experience of weeping–and, again, whether weeping even manifests–depends on the individual. Assuming for the moment that human physiology produces weeping as a cathartic release of emotions, there seem to be differences in whether people experience this as comforting or as uncomfortable and enervating. Emily Squires seems to experience grief, and even crying, in response to nature as an important part of her process, yet she writes that, "Crying in response to nature is painful for me. It happens often and naturally. When it does, it takes a lot out of me." In contrast, one of the first phrases I wrote about my own grief experience in response to hearing rain was that "it felt good, as though something stored within my body was finally allowed release." Jeannette wrote that her experience after crying is different from one time to another: "After a good cry in the woods, I may feel restored–ready to move on. Other times I feel exhausted and realize that what I need to do is rest. Either way, I feel sustained and held."

The stories also depict individual differences in whether tears come. While Marilyn Armstrong wrote about her strong grief over destruction of plants or animals, she wrote that it is very difficult for her to cry, though when she did cry, "how wonderful it felt to let it all out." Though "tears came" to Janet's eyes when she was with the church group at Cultus Lake, she noted, "I was not a young person who cried. There seemed no point in moaning because there was nothing I could do about my situation until I could get to work and earn enough to get away from home." She suggests that tears now come

more easily to her: "Now sometimes during healing experiences tears come to my eyes because the pure healing love is so amazingly beautiful, the feel of it coming in." Somewhat similarly, while Walter writes that the brilliance of nature in northern California "was so beautiful that [he] could not resist crying," he conveyed that he is "not the crying type."

While the stories contain numerous examples of men weeping or having tears, they also illustrate the likelihood that tears are, in general, different among men and women. Peter Kessler found great solace in his Swiss woods, but wrote, "I am not sure whether I was able, or better said, allowed myself, to cry then. Sure I felt the emotions of loss, but I could still feel great peace when embracing the small or not so small trees . . . " In the more meaningful of two experiences he described, Louis Nielsen noted "there was a heightened awareness which had no time for tears. Tears could have been a distraction." Louis did experience tears on another occasion, but believed those may have been attributable to the lack of oxygen at high altitude. Ryan explained his experience that "[a]s a man in American society, I was indoctrinated from birth that a crying man was a vulnerable man, a weak man." He noted, "To date, only a scant few trusted friends have seen [my tears]."

These few illustrations suggest consistency with the finding of Williams and Morris (1996), and others cited by those authors, that men cry less often and with less frequency than women. More interesting to me is consideration of another finding of Williams and Morris in the context of the stories in this dissertation. Through quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses, those authors concluded that sex differences in crying

were most "marked for situations involving criticism from others, anger, or problems at work, where men were particularly unlikely to cry, and least for those situations Darwin described as involving tender feelings" (p. 479).

Though my study can do no more than suggest through illustration in this area, I note that this study did not produce many examples of men crying in nature for reasons of personal healing. While I placed Peter Kessler's story in the "healing" category, his story, as just noted, did not involve many tears, if any. Walter is the only other male whose story was placed in that category. I would note that Walter's story involved healing from what sounds like a long and emotionally draining illness, and also has elements of a spiritual encounter with nature. It is possible that any gender distinction that may exist is mostly cultural, rather than biological, but these few stories at least illustrate the way in which personal healing tears in nature may be more common among women than men.

As I noted previously, if I had put my own story in any category, it would fall in that of longing for deep sensory connection with nature. If my story were included in that section, I would be the only male in that group. I suggest a similar observation could be made about the relative lack of male stories in this section. This category involves a large component of personal healing, involving personal longing to live in harmony or connection with nature. While I would not go so far as to suggest that men are less likely to long for deep connection with nature, it may well be that men tend less to cry through this experience. Again, this is likely due, at least in part, to socialization rather than to biology, though I believe some consideration is due to the notion that men, biologically, are less likely to cry for reasons of personal longing or healing.

What is more interesting is to look at tears, and crying, in other categories of experience described in this project. The stories contain several illustrations of men having tears, often quite freely, as ecological grief or experience of God through deep sensory connection with nature. While running in those green rolling hills of New Jersey, Ralph Litkin "was overwhelmed instantly by strong emotions and wept profusely in sorrow . . . not only for the environmental and animal devastation, but also for humanity's immense spiritual vacuum, ignorance and stupidity." Ray Voet has cried in response to devastation of the land, which he associates with ignorance and financial or fear-mongering motives of authorities. Jim Hipkins cannot imagine "not crying over the earth . . . No matter what is done to her, she continues to sustain and maintain life within Creation." Weeping for ecological reasons may not exactly be the tender emotions described by Darwin, as noted by Williams and Morris (1996), but there is something about ecological weeping that, I believe, feels beyond the individual's own personal needs, which may allow men to have tears more freely.

Four of the nine people whose stories fell into the "experiences of God" section were men, but only three described tears. Michael Leas did not describe weeping, but noted tears on two occasions of connection with nature's magnificence. Watching a sun rise from 13,000 feet, he could not take in all the splendor of the experience: "It brought tears to my eyes to feel such a connection to life." Another time, in a Sequoia forest, he "was so welled up inside to know this is my nature of life. This is the roots of the Human." Although not associating tears with his most moving experience, Louis Nielsen did describe tears, along with "a sense of gratitude," when reaching a high camp in the

Himalayas. Ryan was the only male to describe what sounds like profuse weeping in nature, which occurred amidst a "gratitude so sublime, so powerful, so unlike any other emotion one can encounter." While this small sampling can do nothing more than suggest through illustration, it may be fruitful to investigate whether in fact gender differences in weeping are less significant when tears involve experiences of the sort I have called encounter with God (see also, Braud, in press, on wonder-joy tears).

In the literature review, I gave much attention to distinctions between forms of crying, which I believe associate to some degree with the words crying, weeping, and tears. I believe these distinctions are usefully considered with regard to healing or transformation through tears, weeping, or crying, if for no other reason than to begin to suggest distinctions that may be useful in addressing this subject matter, and "weeping events" more generally, in future projects.

In discussing different forms of weeping, crying, and tears, I find it most expedient to begin with my own experience and tentative conclusions. I start with my own example because it is easiest for me to illustrate what I believe is a difficulty with separating out different forms of crying–that any one weeping event may shift between types of weeping, crying, and tears, particularly because the experience tends to be healing and cathartic. Here goes: A typical pattern for me is that deep connection with nature, if the time and place are right, will produce what begins as a feeling of welled up, emotional gratitude, which produces tears. At first, these are what I would call soft tears, flowing over my eyes. Then, quite often, at least at one point in my life, this would lead into a feeling of deep awareness or connection with God, which produced what I would

call weeping. This involves some change in breathing and some sobbing, but relatively quiet sobbing.

The sense of connection with God would then, on some occasions, bring up some aspect of my life in which I have felt hurt, abandoned, or harmed. At that point, the weeping would tend to become more what I would call crying: it would contain sobs, perhaps putting a hand to my head, a sense of soothing myself, more staccato breathing, even some vocalization, such as a moan. This "crying" feels more personal and more specifically cathartic to something in particular in my personal history. This "crying" can then lead to a sense of gratitude for the healing, which can then crescendo into a feeling of even closer connection to God, which can then shift into what I would more readily call weeping with gratitude.

Near the beginning of these types of experiences, I believe I frequently had a sort of catharsis around a prior lack of body-knowledge of the existence of a loving force in the universe (i.e., God) and would "cry" in catharsis over healed doubt. I also very frequently shifted over into deep understanding of the consequences of my own action on others, particular those close to me. Tears then became of penitence, involving sought forgiveness. Those events may have been the most cathartic and convulsive of my experience as a "weeper." Those events felt like very personal "crying," but with support from a higher power, not merely self-soothing. During these experiences, I would also sometimes shift into an awareness of the tragic dimensions of human life, which would broaden the experience away from me personally. Sometimes this would include awareness of humanity's present inability to live in resonance with or respect for nature.

This awareness would tend to produce softer, less convulsive tears, which I would describe with the word "weeping," and the whole experience might end more or less where it began, with soft tears of gratitude or appreciation for the beauty and perfection of life.

I begin with this description because it suggests the way in which weeping experiences, especially those of the sort covered in this dissertation, may shift and transform. I believe it is precisely because weeping experiences can be healing experiences of the body that such shifts occur. If I am brought into contact with senses and emotions through weeping of one form, then those sensations and emotions may bring forth something that needs healing, which might give rise to crying of another kind. Catharsis of what sought healing may then deepen the emotional and sensory experience, allowing a deep experience of connection. This is often felt as unconditional love, which in turn allows healing of some other experience brought forth. I believe that such experiences within the context of nature are uniquely powerful, given that people tend to experience nature as unconditionally loving, and as a transpersonal matrix for all life.

When I began this project, I did not understand this relationship very well at all. Indeed, as noted in the Methodology Chapter, my desire to understand these sorts of relationships was a large impetus behind this dissertation. Because these understandings came during the dissertation process, I did not design my questions to participants to seek out the relationship between various forms of crying and healing, nor did I even seek to distinguish between forms of tears. Though the texts were not written for the purpose of

making firm analysis in these areas, I believe useful observations may nonetheless be made through use of the stories.

Turning to the stories, they provide interesting texts for considering possible distinctions between "weeping," "crying," and "tears." While I am mindful that I did not ask participants to use these words with precision, I believe the word *choice* may well, in most cases, reflect the nuances and common meanings of the words discussed in the Literature Review. When the object of tears is a condition outside the individual, such as the state of the environment or the human condition more generally, I believe people tend to *weep*. Ralph Litwin wrote that he "*wept* profusely in sorrow . . . not only for the environmental and animal devastation, but also for humanity's immense spiritual vacuum, ignorance and stupidity, which allows the devastation to occur." This sounds like "weeping" in response to the tragic dimension of human experience, which includes the present ecological situation. On the other hand, Ralph wrote that he "had a good hard cry" during a meditation and let go of anger he was hoarding against the "hard-hearted bastards." This "crying" sounds like more personal catharsis. While this may indicate no more than which word is used in which context, I suggest the words point toward differences in the experience.

Rosie Kuhn wrote of what I will call penitent tears. She described "crying" and "sobbing" while asking forgiveness for both humanity's, and her own personal, lack of respect for nature. She wrote, "My heart needed to make an act of contrition in order to express my true feelings for how we as a species continue to devastate this planet . . ." While her description has a global element to it, her experience seemed very much one of

personal penitence. What reads as fairly convulsive crying on her part—she used the word "sobbing"and describes very strong emotions—is consistent with my own experience of "crying" during penitent tears. Though with a less detailed description of the "crying" aspect of her experience, JoyBeth used the word "cried" when writing of similar penitence. She wrote, "I sat on the mountain behind our home and cried. As the tears kept streaming down my cheeks, I kept on saying over and over, 'I'm so sorry. Human beings are so unaware. I'm so sorry. Human beings are so numb. I'm so sorry. Human beings are so greedy. They just don't get it!" Both these events involve turmoil *within* the individual. Both also, of course, are descriptions from women.

Stories reporting elements of physical pain tend to use the word "cry." Terry Taylor "cried" over a paint can in the stream, writing in the same breath that she aches "from head to toe at the repercussions of acid rain, noise pollution, litter bugs, and my little piece of earth that is in harm's way." Walter, who had been suffering from physical illness for some time, had episodes of "crying" for hours at a time. Roseann, who also aches, uses the word "cry": "It is Mother Earth speaking to me. My body aches. I sit down. I too have trouble breathing. Asthma. I understand her and I cry." Roseann's tears contain an element of penitence, also consistent with "crying": "'I am sorry my mother. I don't know how to stop it. Forgive me. Forgive us.'" While Ray Voet used the word "cry" in the context of ecological grief, his crying seemed specific to his personal reaction to what has happened to particular lands. While Ray's descriptions of tears were not detailed, the use of the word "cry" is consistent with the observation that "crying" may tend to occur when the experience includes personal pain, even if it is emotional pain.

Descriptions of personal-healing tears tend to use the word crying or to describe what I have characterized as attributes of personal "crying." Jeannette wrote, "I walk for awhile and then the tears come. This is a good place to cry. I often let out *big heavy sobs* and let them keep coming until I feel spent and finished." Julie Longhill wrote that "crying felt good and rejuvenating," noting that nature has helped her heal her "emotional wounds." Linda Carroll Hasler describes "crying while enveloped in and by Nature," including times when she was "distraught over a problem or some unreasonable action by someone who was hurting himself and others . . . " This seems a self-soothing cry with the help of nature: "It's like a giant bed. At home, we need our beds to cry in, to cover us up, to hide away, from comfort . . . " While Linda's use of the word "cry" is consistent with my understandings, it should be noted that she also writes that she has "cried in Nature because its magnificence, beauty, perfection moved me so much."

In describing connection with the deer, followed immediately by the realization of her own disconnection, Dana used the word "sob." She also used "crying," which is consistent with my understanding of her experience as being personal, involving deep recognition of her own loss of "the barefoot child." Similarly, Grace writes that she "cried as [she] told [her spiritual director] of [her] deep longing for contact with God" and her feeling she "could only find God by the ocean." These were feelings of personal desire and loss.

Gayle Abbott and Valerie both "cry" in the context of nature for people who have passed on. This, too, involves grief for personal loss. Gayle wrote that the "vastness of the night sky can also produce feelings of insignificance and loss. I sometimes cry for people

who have passed on, simply because I miss them." Similarly, Valerie notes that she has cried in nature as part of "intense grieving for my mom, especially because we shared lots of time in the sun."

If she used her words intentionally, Christine Dudoit may have recognized alternating sources of her tears during her run with Liam in the forest. She wrote, "I cried and I wept, then the tears turned to laughter because at that very moment I understood and felt it was my freedom that I needed to search for, not HIS!" Though she does not articulate this, I would project into the situation aspects of "crying" for her anticipated personal loss of Liam, and for the agony of not knowing whether he would be taken, coupled with "weeping" in response to the spiritual realizations taking hold of her.

Like Christine, Laura Huber used a mixture of words, though the word "cry" tended to predominate. But beyond choice of the operative word, the details of Laura's descriptions suggest a mixture of types of tears consistent with my own experience. Laura found awakening, marvel and release through experiencing herself as a stream, as part of the whole matrix of nature. She told me, "I said to myself, let it go. Then I cried. I was thinking, how blessed am I. For twenty minutes, I cried. But I was happy, awed with the beauty." While she says she "cried," the positive, awed, tone of the tears, and their length, describes the same kind of "weeping" in response to deep connection with nature that I have experienced. On another occasion, stopping by a mountain, she uses both "crying" and "weeping," but she seems to describe a predominantly "weeping" experience. She stated, "Crying. Not water, not a waterfall, not a creek, but weeping. Then I was crying to take care of her [nature] because 'you're all I've got.'" Consistent with my own

experience, Laura has moved from weeping in gratitude and awe for connection with nature to crying in response to realization that nature is not being protected.

Stories describing "tears" without "crying" or "weeping" tend to involve experiential connection to God or response to beauty. This can be viewed as healing of a particular sort: healing a sense of isolation or separation from transcendent experience. Such experiences may, in fact, be connected with healing of specific trauma. For instance, Janet's experience was with quiet tears. She wrote, "Suddenly I was overcome with the beauty and tears came to my eyes." Later, in the Saskatchewan corn field, she felt "an inner illumination, an overwhelming feeling of peace and happiness. I just stood there with tears streaming down my face. It was so beautiful." Janet's experience of "tears" rather than "crying" or "weeping" likely involves, to some extent, her personality, as she herself suggested in the text. But she also seems to have described a different form of tears, similar to what Braud (in press) calls tears of wonder-joy. While some quantitative research (Labott & Martin, 1987) suggests tears for joy may be different in kind from other tears, I remain convinced it is fruitful to consider these tears as another aspect of transformative, healing, *embodying* tears. Janet's experience illustrates this possibility: The experience of transcendence through beauty moved Janet to tears and also, simultaneously, mixed together with personal healing of her experiential lack of unconditional love.

Valerie also described "tears" flowing sometimes with "very strong appreciation for the beauty of it all,"as did several others. Elaine Gallovic noted "tears of joy" involving the sense of pure love from a tree, though these tears were mixed with more

bitter tears at separation from source. Michael Leas had "tears" in response to the sunrise. While sky-diving, Laura Huber "had tears of joy, tears of ecstasy" when seeing, actually seeing, the blue of the water in a quarry. Somewhat similarly, when Christine Dudoit stood atop the mountain in western Canada, feeling "enveloped by the powers of nature's wonders," there were "tears [that] kept rolling down my cheeks." While Christine was involved in deep catharsis and healing, she was also, perhaps at the moment she describes with the above phrase, in awe of nature's wonders. Although not explored in depth, some of these stories arguably illustrate a mixture of cathartic tears and wonder-joy (Braud, in press) tears. All seem to illustrate a form of quiet tears ("rolling down the cheek") that seem to involve a feeling of transcendence through witnessing beauty or perfection through nature. Again, I would suggest this may involve healing a bodily sense of separation from such splendor; though for many it may be enough to merely note that tears come with such awareness.

When describing experiences of connection with God, several participants used the signifying words (weep, cry, tears) more interchangeably, but I believe they have described similar forms of what I will call spiritual weeping. I consider spiritual weeping both healing and transformative. When these experiences occur in response to nature, I believe the primary healing may occur around our typical experience of separation from nature, which tends to mix together (see discussion below) with experienced separation from spirit or God.

For instance, Beth wrote of her exhilaration at nature when witnessing the aftermath of an ice storm: "Yet amidst all the negatives, there was great beauty. . . . It was

overwhelming as the trees bent over the boulevard from both sides. The sun was bright and shone on the trees causing them to burst into crystalline radiance. . . . It was such a statement of depth and such a communion with nature, that crying and thanking God were the only things I could do. I was talking to myself and God in thanks and gratitude for such a gift. It was transient in some sense, but forever in my soul." While Beth did not flesh out the actual crying experience, she has described tears of gratitude—a description used by several others—with crying seeming the "only thing" she could do, another sentiment echoed by others.

Ana, in South America, communes with a waterfall, and, more generally, with mother nature. She wrote,

> Gratitude rises from the greatest depth. I feel as though I am hand-in-hand with life, that it has given to me, and I have given to it. That my thirst for mysteries has been quenched and that I have brushed harmonies without equal. That I have known deep pain and all the subtleties of the emotions, from the most hurtful to the most exquisite. That I had the necessary courage to live several lives in one, and the fatigue of having already repeated several lives.

In this context, Ana could "only remember the uncontainable cry that flowed from within me, a mix of pain, gratitude, and purification." She "felt as though that was a beautiful place in which to die, to leave the body where the body belonged." As she explained, these "were not tears of shame or pain for me, I have shed many of those already in my life. These were tears of a different quality, of a grateful farewell for all I had received, a recounting." While Ana perceives these tears as different from tears for "pain," they may nonetheless represent a form of healing—that of separation from spirit or God.

Ryan describes a very similar experience. His experience began sitting on a cliff, when suddenly, "what was one moment just some trees, pastures, and a small river came together and revealed itself for what it truly is." While Ryan does not state what nature "truly is," the reference to what many call God—or life itself—seems implicit. It is almost uncanny how Ryan's descriptions parallel many of those of others describing this experience. Like Ana, he wrote these "were not tears of sorrow, nor joy, really," and he emphasized an overwhelming gratitude that seems simply the best way to describe the experience: a "gratitude so sublime, so powerful, so unlike any other emotion one can encounter."

Ryan explicitly links this experience to an experience of healing or nurturing, and one which seems to involve a reflection or even recapitulation of life. He wrote,

> I am grateful beyond words. I don't need them though, because Nature doesn't need words; it expresses nurturing without condition. So I have no words of thanks, I have tears. All my thanks, my tears–full to brimming with the love, fear, anger, sadness, joy, and pain, and with gratitude for all of my life, and the lives of those who made them possible, from beginning to end–fall to the ground.

Again, no precise description of the physical experience of tears, but the tears seem to have flowed freely, and, like Beth, were "all that he could do."

While the stories of Beth, Ana, and Ryan show tears of gratitude, their tears also seem to involve a simultaneous holding of many things, many opposites, many aspects of life. Lisa Graiff's story focuses on this holding of opposites. It may be that this very holding of opposites produces tears. It also seems, itself, an experience some people consider an "experience of God." Lisa wrote, "Quite often when I'm in nature and sitting

quietly observing I find myself crying. I wouldn't exactly call it grieving, but more like an overwhelming mixture of conflicting emotions that rise to the surface all at once bringing me to tears." Lisa described the "main conflicting emotions [as] great joy and great sadness. Each of these emotions seems to incorporate many others. The joy is an awareness of wonder, love, amazement, security, peace, and contentment. The sadness is an awareness of hate, insecurity, turbulence, and discontent." She further explained, "For me, this has to do with the awareness that everything is happening as it should, and yet, from where I sit, so much seems so wrong. I long to know why and yet I feel that doing so would somehow lessen my part in the whole process." Describing one such incident in particular, Lisa guessed she was crying "because on days like today, sitting in nature, I can almost feel God's presence and the feeling overwhelms me. A mixture of conflicting emotions seem to rise to the surface all at once—wonderment and joy tinged with great sadness—and the tears start flowing."

Elaine Gallovic's story addresses an analogous experience expressly as an experience of remembering loss of the divine, or God. Elaine often visited a particular tree, an aspect of nature that brought her "peace, contentment, and stillness." When she left the tree on one occasion, she was overcome "with tears and a feeling that I can only describe as pure love." Elaine experienced these tears as "tears of joy that one only sheds in a divine connection." Yet at the same time she was crying in response to feeling divine love, Elaine "was also experiencing sadness and overwhelming grief . . . the feeling of loss one has when one becomes separated from the Divine." She concluded, "So this was

a bittersweet experience—the flow of pure love while connecting to the tree and of the separation from pure love when I chose to step away from the tree."

In this respect, Elaine's story shares a bond with Lisa's. Both women seem, from at least one angle, to be crying at the point of realization of simultaneity and dichotomy in human experience. As humans, we are able to experience the heights of connection, complete with love and joy, as well as the pain of separation, the sensation, in Lisa's words, that "so much seems so wrong." As Lisa writes in her poem, "Why am I crying? Because I feel your closeness and my distance at the same time."

Returning to the literature, many of this project's descriptions of weeping, crying, and tears are illustrative of descriptions provided by Van Heukelem (1979) and Anderson (1997), who discuss spiritual tears. Van Heukelem described a form of Christian tears associated with grief over the loss of others. As noted in the Literature Review, I interpret her discussion to involve experiential separation from those who have assisted the individual in experiencing God, such as, in the Christian tradition, Jesus. This is similar to crying over separation from source, as described by Lisa and Elaine.

Van Heukelem also described "tears of penitence," which she viewed as "the cry of a mature Christian, of one who sees the continuing corruption of his fallen nature [and] mourns over it." As noted above, several stories illustrate tears of penitence—often involving what I have called ecological grief, an awareness of humanity's disrespect for nature—experienced as deeply felt contrition, actual grief, for what could be called humanity's sin. Van Heukelem's description of crying over distress, which I have

associated with awareness of a fallen nature of the individual or society, is illustrated by Lisa's story, by her tears over God's presence and humanity's distance.

Anderson's characteristics of sacred weeping find reverberation in several stories. Anderson identified the characteristic of "relinquishing of superficial concerns and aspects of self, of 'breaking through the facade.'" Many stories contain an element of sudden realization, or breaking through. Ryan articulates this most directly, noting, "As I sat there alone, what was one moment just some trees, pastures, and a small river came together and revealed itself for what it truly is. I was taken aback."

Anderson identified a "sense of the 're-integration of lost aspects of self.'" While several stories point toward a new sense of integration of the individual (see discussion of transformation above), the stories of Ryan and Ana most pointedly illustrate the experience of having all of one's history come up together at once in a few moments of realization. Although Ana expressly stated she felt an integration, one *feels* an integration by reading Ana's recollection of having known all the subtleties of the emotions, of having lived several lives in one, of having met wise people and loving teachers. Ryan describes more exactly a summation of his life: "The first instant was realization, the second was a complete assessment of everything I had ever done in all my life . . . " Like Ana, he also described a simultaneity of a range of emotions and experiences: "the love, fear, anger, sadness, joy, and pain, and that gratitude for all of my life . . . "

Another characteristic of sacred weeping identified by Anderson is "being in touch with the impulse of life throughout the universe or of 'touching reality' beyond one's ordinary awareness." I believe the several experiences noting "connection with

God" illustrate something similar: It seems likely that the word "God" is used by many people to suggest the sensation of touching the impulse of life, or touching reality beyond ordinary awareness.

Anderson described a "holding together the seeming (and sometimes bittersweet) polarities of human existence" (Anderson, 1997, p. 168). While many stories, including those of gratitude, contain an element of holding polarities, Lisa and Elaine, as quoted above, are most articulate in describing this experience. Similarly, Anderson's characteristic of apprehending "the tragic dimension of human existence" is reflected in several stories of gratitude, but most poignantly by Lisa's description. Likewise, the sense of "being startled, awakened, and triggered into a new sense of reality" seems implicit within the stories describing spiritual tears or weeping (Anderson, 1997, pp. 168-171).

Anderson, the chair of this dissertation, precedes this particular project in elucidating quite clearly the elements of "transformational and sacred weeping" as gleaned from a review of Christian contemplative literature and interviews of contemporary sacred weepers. One of her definitional components is weeping "that is not caused by obvious immediate stimuli or a set of conditions known to the weeper." That differentiates "transformational and sacred weeping" from the "spiritual weeping" described in this project, as my participants have described what seems to have brought on their weeping, and I have posited nature as having some bearing on the experience. Nevertheless, there is much similarity between "sacred weeping" as found in the Christian literature and several of the experiences noted in this project, including the element of gratitude ("it seems a gift," Anderson, 1996), the way in which it seems "all

that can be done" ("seeming involuntary," Anderson, 1996), and the transformative nature of the experience.

Like Anderson, I view these forms of weeping as transformative. I would also use the word healing, to bring these forms of weeping into a continuum including crying, weeping, and tears that are healing of more specific personal wounds or trauma. What is it that spiritual and transformative weeping heals? Some of Anderson's categories are useful in making the explanation. There is healing of dwelling upon superficial concerns and facade; a sense of re-integration of lost aspects of the self; a healing of disconnection from the "impulse of life throughout the universe or of 'touching reality' beyond one's ordinary awareness"; a healing of repression against understanding the "(sometimes bittersweet) polarities of human existence" or "the tragic dimension of human experience"; a healing of the split between "body, mind and spirit"; and a renewed sense of freedom, of liberation (Anderson, 1996, pp. 168-181). I view these things as simply the sorts of healing or transformation available to humans, through the body, particularly in connection with nature, at the mid to later stages of psycho-spiritual transformation.

Body and Nature Based Spirituality

> There is a love of wild nature in everybody, an ancient mother-love ever showing itself whether recognized or no, and however covered by cares and duties. (John Muir, 1954, p. 311)

The preceding sections suggest a spirituality based in nature and the body, grounded in a natural tendency that I believe is the birthright of humans. The way to begin the discussion is by returning to Ina Miloff (1997), who wrote of loss at the core of all humans. She posited a state of being inevitably lost by humans, "a holding presence

which allows us simply to *be*" (p. 91). She means "*being* that is not based on conditional reactions, on defenses, on early object relations . . . but instead is based on one's responses to the present moment, with all the awareness, involvement, and spontaneous experience of affect . . . " (p. 91). Adding the insights of Abram (1996) and Levin (1988) to the picture, I understand this presence in terms of our original situation in nature. Our loss is, then, our extraction from sensory grounding in nature, from unadulterated, unthought-about presence and responsiveness in nature. Using Miloff's basic model, I would argue that we remember at some level this experience of presence in nature, we grieve the loss of this experience, and all future experiences of loss (and grief) are layered upon that original experience. For each individual person, this likely involves a personal memory of infant experience in physical form, when all was nature and not conception, prior to the commencement of categorical hard-wiring of the brain that occurs with development. If we can speak of phylogenetic memories, the memory is of being in nature without such categories, perhaps even of arising through nature in an evolutionary sense.

Elaine Gallovic described another memory which I believe often becomes intertwined with the memory or instinct toward embeddedness in nature. Because Elaine felt pure love, described as divine love, through connection with a tree, walking away from the tree led to an experience of "overwhelming grief." She believes "the grief was the feeling of loss one has when one becomes separated from the Divine . . . this experience was of my soul remembering my connection to my source and possibly even remembering the separation I felt at my birth on Earth." While Elaine did not use the

words "belonging" or "acceptance" in connection with this experience of "source," I believe those words would apply to the experience of "pure love" she articulates.

I would argue that humans have inherent tendencies toward two very similar experiences of intense belonging and intense grief upon separation. The first involves what Elaine described, the experience of pure love when in connection with source (God), followed by overwhelming grief upon separation from source. The second involves the sense of "elemental belonging" (Levin, 1988) or *being* (Miloff, 1997) when in deep, sensory, transpersonal connection with nature, followed by overwhelming grief upon realization of separation from that connection. Some might argue these two experiences (relationship to source, relationship to nature) are the same experience. That is not my personal perception, as my own experience suggests that matter may be a manifestation of spirit, but is not the actual equivalent of spirit. I would suggest, however, that the two experiences are deeply equivalent, much more equivalent than other similar experiences of connection and separation, for example, love when in connection with parent, friend, or lover, followed by grief when in separation. There is something about these two experiences that is fundamental, as though it grounds an important element of human experience.

While *any* experience of connection and loss may be layered upon or intermingled with all other experiences of connection and loss, I believe the two experiences closest to representing the matrix of the connection-loss experience are those involving loss of source and those involving loss of elemental (sensory, bodily) belonging in nature. The former represents our spirit's recollection of immersion and loss of immersion in the

whole (God); the latter represents our physical incarnation's recollection of immersion and then loss of immersion in the whole of manifested nature. Both are at the core of human experience and may pre-dispose humans to some of the problems I believe are widespread in our culture: lack of a real, experiential connection with spirit; lack of an identification with nature, which leads to treating nature as a commodity, which leads to degradation of our very beings, though we rarely understand that.

Along with prior research, most notably that conducted by Janet Ruffing (1997), the stories gathered for this project suggest the ways in which nature may be uniquely situated to remedy this loss—to both mediate the experiential loss of elemental belonging in nature and to return into human experience the *experiential* reality of spirit. Put more psychologically, humans tend to have experiences of deep connection with nature that are felt and interpreted as spiritual experience and, more literally, the experience of God's presence; this may involve return to a sensory, embodied experience of unity, which simultaneously mediates the loss of immersion in sensory experience in relationship to the environment and immersion in source (i.e., God).

In our day-to-day, year-to-year lives, we humans tend to have very painful experiences of separation and loss, which arguably lead to innumerable addictions in the effort to replace the experience of wholeness, of connectedness. Some (e.g., Glendinning, 1994) might argue that many problems with contemporary culture are related to the loss of sensory immersion in nature and our unconscious attempt to replace this loss. This may be why spiritual solutions to addiction (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous)—that is, solutions that encourage the individual to experience him or herself in relationship to a unifying,

higher power—are often viewed as the only solution to addiction. In transpersonal experience, the loss of embeddedness is relieved, allowing a lessening of the pressure toward specific addictions, a habituated solution to the loss of experiential connection. Bringing the matter back to this project, my point is that nature can play an important role in reparation of these forms of "original" loss. I would argue this involves an issue of returning nature to a dominant position in spiritual and *religious* systems.

Summarizing her own research, Ruffing (1997) wrote that "experiences of God in nature occurred both universally and frequently among the participants" (p. 42). One of her participants spoke of watching a sunrise and going "right down to my knees. It was such a powerful . . . You talk about tears, I mean I was sobbing. It was sunrise. It was God" (p. 48). This dissertation gathered many similar stories, which suggest the way in which human response to nature, experienced as response to God, is spiritual experience reparative of the fundamental loss posited above. Also witnessing a sunrise, Michael Leas wrote, "It brought tears to my eyes to feel such a connection to life." Describing another experience, in a Sequoia forest, he wrote, "I was so welled up inside to know this is my nature of life. This is the root of the Human." Michael was "able to transcend all the materialization of our earthly domain . . . it brought out a sense of timelessness and the true meaning of eternity. These trees were here before the time of Jesus and have the unwritten history of the world inside them. Through the daylight and the environmental weather existence they have the vibrational essence of life expressing through them."

Jenny Lee wrote of the "pale pearl-like blooms" of a winter flowering cherry hitting her in the chest, "as a physical blow to my body, for the sheer perfect beauty of the

tree revealed itself to me not as a mental experience but one of the body." With this experience, "[f]or a single moment, the tree and I shared in its creation." Adam Butler wrote, "When I'm alone in nature, it's as if I'm carrying on a conversation with the Creator himself. I'm amongst his work."

Jane Leonard wrote of a magical experience when she was a child, leaving for school on a late summer morning, amidst the company of trees, grass, and birds. "I looked up, closed my eyes, and breathed the day into my soul. I was aware for the very first time that I was alive. I was filled with bittersweet joy and a sort of remembrance of connectedness of everything. The moment was new, and yet ancient . . . I feel I could go on describing it for pages and never get to the sacredness of it. I do know that my heart broke wide open that day, for that was the day I was introduced to God." Louis Nielsen, upon feeling connection with the waterbuck in the Umfolozi Nature Reserve, began "to feel a connectedness to the universe, a sense that I merged with the world around me. . . . Perhaps in that moment I was embraced by the universe, universal consciousness/God."

In actual human experience, longing, loss, and desire for "home," a loved one, or God is often mixed together. Juana Ocasio wrote about a sadness she found lingering beneath the emotional depths of her experiences in nature. Drawing on the words of Thomas Moore (1997), she wrote of a "bittersweet feeling of longing for a life once enjoyed but now lost . . . a mixture of sweetness, longing, melancholy and a touch of bitterness." She articulated a feeling of "primordial memories calling us back to our real home." Gerry Eitner described her experiences of grief in response to nature as "a deep longing for connection. Perhaps I could say that my body cycles, or vibration, had been

out of step with the rhythm of nature. . . . The grief stage, though, is so visceral that it feels as though a loved one is on the other side of a paper thin shield; and I can't touch them, hold them, tell them I love them, really connect." She associated this experience to longing for spiritual connection. Similarly, Valerie wrote that feelings of grief for her deceased mother arose in nature, very painfully at first, then transformed into the desire to feel cradled or hugged. She "wanted the sun and the whole sky to 'just know.' Know what I mean? That G-d could hear my thoughts."

If nature is uniquely situated to mediate the presence of the divine, and loss of nature often mirrors the experiential loss of source, then it would make sense to position nature within our religions as a mediator of the divine experience. Janet Ruffing (1997) does not expressly argue for this, but her research is implicit support for the legitimacy of nature experience in Christian tradition. Putting the matter more explicitly, I would suggest that any system of spiritual beliefs and practices would do well to draw upon the ways in which nature calls to humans in order tap the spiritual and healing tendencies of the human incarnate. Neither Ruffing's participants not the participants in this project appear to have described thought-based experiences, but to have shared experiences that simply happened—the response of their bodies, their incarnation, their whole beings, to nature. If this is true, then spiritual systems (or any healing system, such as psychology) may bring many of their followers "home" merely through facilitating body experience of nature. It would not be a matter of proselytizing, convincing, or hoping the congregation would see the light, it would be a matter of drawing upon what Levin (1988) would call the inherent tendencies of human embodiment.

The subject of death, which unexpectedly came into this dissertation from several angles, illustrates what I mean. One of the roles played by religion over the eons has been to explain and comfort in times of death. While death was not a subject I sought to draw from participants, several people touched upon death, illustrating what I believe is the natural tendency of humans to feel less threatened by death when experiencing deep connection with nature. Linda Carroll Hasler describes the feeling of security she has in nature because she is surrounded by living things. "Small in nature, most of them, nevertheless, they are LIFE coursing through them. Therefore, we are related, we are the same, I am not alone. . . . GOD is there in all that life." Recalling an experience in which she watched, over time, the decay of a dog's body, the return of the dog to nature, she wrote: "This was impressive. This is Nature, too. And what is so scary about that?"

Susan Gray described a time when she was driving with her family along Flathead Lake, in western Montana. "I was not thinking about anything in particular when I looked out the window and saw a V of ducks, perfect silhouettes against a silver sky. I instantly felt that when I die I will fly with the ducks and, somehow, know all I need to know." She finds "that memory has been a great comfort to me during tough time. It has greatly reduced my fear of death." Similarly, Grace found that immersion in nature assisted her own fears of death. She wrote,

> Being surrounded by the acceptance of Nature helped me come to terms with the possibility of my own life in this world ending. Growing up, being trained, and working and living in the Western world created almost exclusively by Man imbued me with a certain need to fight my life rather than flow with it. . . . I needed [to learn to] feel in my body the oneness of my molecules with all that surrounds me, including both my powerfulness and my powerlessness. I imagine and even dream of myself floating on the

> waves, washing to and fro, towards and away from the shores. At the time of this acceptance, I feel held, by Nature, by God, by the love of my partner, and by my own caring for myself.

I believe nature is uniquely situated to bring humans home, if not into, at least toward an experience of wholeness, safety, and love. I agree with Miloff (1997) that any experience of grief and loss is layered over original experiences—and I believe the two primary, original experiences are loss of source (God) and loss of experiential embeddedness in physical life, in being. Whether or not the loss of experiential embeddedness is the same thing, at some level, as the loss of source (God), I believe both are experientially similar. If so, then, in terms of human experience, assisting people in the deep experience of nature may be assisting the reparation of the separation of humanity and source (God). If I were designing the faith of tomorrow, or tinkering with the faiths of today, I would place nature, and human immersion within nature, at its heart.

Social Criticism: Restoring Cultural Equilibrium

> Some are dinning in our ears that we Americans, and moderns generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or even the Elizabethan men. But what is that to the purpose? A living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang himself because he belongs to a race of pygmies, and not be the biggest pygmy that he can? Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made. (Henry David Thoreau, 1854/1960, p. 216)

As I began to gather my thoughts to write this chapter, I kept remembering a passage I had quoted from Gadamer (1976) in the Literature Review:

> Actually, the historian even the one who treats history as a "critical science," is so little separated from the ongoing traditions (for example, those of his nation) that he is really *himself engaged in* contributing to the growth and development of the national state. He is one of the "nation's" historians; he belongs to the nation. And for the epoch of national states,

> one must say: the more he may have reflected on his hermeneutical conditionedness, the more national he knows himself to be. (p. 28)

The reason this passage keeps coming to mind is that working on this dissertation has somehow made me feel more like an American. I began working most seriously on the draft of the complete dissertation at the end of August, 2001. The work continued, on weekends and on days off, during September and most of October. This meant I was immersed in this dissertation during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the anthrax assaults, and the frightening period of national and international history that has commenced. I am revising this section on November 12, 2001, the day an American Airlines jet crashed in Queens. From reports now on the news, it is not clear whether this was what one commentator referenced as a "garden variety" airline crash, or a terrorist assault.

Given these events, it is difficult not to consider oneself in terms of national identity. As suggested by the NBC News header, this is an "Attack on America." More often than not, I feel out of step with American culture and viewpoints, but there is no denying where I live and the countless ways in which this culture has shaped me. While I complain about the culture, I live within it and reap its many benefits. For one thing, I like the safety most of us have felt within our borders. I like the "rule of law," not to mention medical care and the educational systems, even if I wish both were less costly and more open to all. I like the many machines that make my life easier and more safe, that give me time to hang out with my children and animals. I like the *idea*, even if it is not always

manifested, that America is free, democratic, and open. As becomes more and more clear, there are places without even the aspiration to our lofty goals.

Although the government and media seem to be urging patriotism that feels nationalistic to me, I do not feel myself an American in the sense of "United We Stand" against the designated "evil" others in the world. The week of September 11, my wife pointed out something very interesting. Aside from the personal stories of loss, what moved her most was news that *The Star Spangled Banner* was played at the changing of the guard in London and on the streets of Paris. Even thinking about that now chokes me up. I believe this is because of the sense that civilized people want to stand together against atrocity, which gives me hope that someday humans will figure out a way to live in peace. News that our national anthem was played in other countries gives a feeling of inclusion, of expansion, not of closing ranks. Unfortunately, there is enough talk about closing ranks. This weekend, our President gave a speech at the United Nations full of "you're with us or against us" terminology. As is usually the case in time of war, the public is being rallied to patriotism in part through demonization of the other.

What does this have to do with this dissertation? There is a way to understand the conflict, viewed broadly, as involving the earth, as involving living in harmony or equilibrium with the earth. It does not take a rocket scientist or political pundit to figure this out. While "they" are mad at "us" for a number of reasons, including the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, the presence of the United States in the Middle East involves oil. We need oil because we operate a lifestyle that is not sustained by the earth. When the clock-radio went off this morning, National Public Radio had just begun a

report on a pressing present political question: drill in the Arctic for oil or preserve the environment. The conflict as it was presented in the two minute spot, and doubtless how it is being argued by some on Capitol Hill, is between "patriotism" and "environmentalism." My concern—of course shared by many—is that big business oil interests, who happen to have quite an ear in this administration, will shape the public dialogue for their own interest.

Within North America, the question is not just whether we will invade one more natural eco-system to take out oil, but when we will begin to devote *real* attention and money to developing ways to live that are in synchrony with nature. Within the world, the question involves what happens when our need for consumption, driven by our inability to live in harmony with our particular settings, manifests in our presence in the lands of other peoples. Even while the power structure in many countries (for instance, Saudi Arabia) caters to American interests in the light of day in order to make money, we are discovering the level of resentment present even among those considered "our" friends. This resentment is not just about economic presence and need, but blends into reaction against many of the ways of our society. I believe the strongest and most resilient arguments against "us" will involve the ways in which we over-consume, in which we do not live in equilibrium with the earth, in which we are not grounded—neither in the earth, nor in a spiritual system in harmony with natural rhythms.

Very precisely, this is the context in which I have written this dissertation. At this point, having finished most of the work, and finding myself immersed in the news of national and international events, I am understanding this as a very American project.

While I am aware that not all my contributors are citizens of the United States, it is very clear to me that we are all products of the industrialized West. Plus, the impetus of the project is mine, as are the interpretations. In my gut, I am feeling that much, if not all, of the angst that created this project was American angst. While industrialization has taken hold of much of the world, and while environmental problems exist almost everywhere, there is something about the United States that is a virtual steamroller over the Earth. Put most succinctly, we worship the economy, which presently is driven by consumption, extraction, and profit, not by balance. A moment perfect in its ability to define came for me when President George W. Bush explained with a straight face that the United States would not follow the Kyoto protocol being negotiated by much of the carbon monoxide emitting world because it may interfere with our economy. Many leaders would have recognized the implication of the statement—the United States economy is more important than the earth—and would have found some other way to put it. Yet there is a way in which President Bush is the consummate example of a certain aspect of this nation.

Looking at the matter broadly, if there is to be change in humanity's relationship to the earth, something has to happen in the United States. That something might have started September 11, 2001, but the outcome will probably not be known for years, if not decades. If the deep ecologists are to be believed, what needs to happen is a "major paradigm shift—a shift in perception, values, and lifestyles—as a basis for redirecting the ecologically destructive path of modern industrial growth societies" (Sessions, 1995, p. ix). While there is much in this dissertation that I believe is timeless and descriptive of

humanity generally, regardless of nation or era, there is an important way in which the structure and energy of this dissertation is intertwined with the social-political context of early 21st century Western socio-economic-political life. To ground what I am saying more precisely in this dissertation, when we grieve in response to nature, we bring with us, and grieve in the context of, this current state of industrialization and the impact it is having in our world and in our day-to-day lives. If I am writing a "history" of a nation-state, as Gadamer suggests, then I am writing within, and reacting within, what I have described.

Oddly enough, working on this dissertation has led to my understanding of civilization itself in new ways, including a new respect for humanity's "progress" in coming out of the wilds of nature. Even as I have grounded myself more firmly in a perspective critical of many of the ways of contemporary American civilization, I have been able to start appreciating major aspects of what humanity has accomplished. What I think happened is this: I was able to flesh out and in a sense push to the limit my understandings of how "civilization" has led me to lose nature and, in a sense, to lose God. Having written this dissertation, I am less murky in my understandings in those areas. There is less struggle within myself on these issues, less need to project that struggle outward and blame and argue with my conception of what many of us call "Western civilization."

That being the case, I am now able to turn and look at some of my questions from the other side. Now, the question feels more like this: Given that I need immersion in nature, given that I believe the culture needs to return to synchrony with nature, what is it

that must be retained from my "civilized" life and from "civilization" more generally? More important, if there is to be a "major paradigm shift—a shift in perception, values, and lifestyles" (Sessions, 1995, p. ix), *how* would this be done? *How* do I (how do we) return to experiential connection with nature while retaining those things that improve and protect life and health? That is, of course, an enormous mess of a question. To begin with, what I think improves and protects life is not necessarily a given to all, and vice-versa. Nevertheless, I hope you will see the way in which my question has shifted as the result of this project. I am now looking *toward* civilization, even American civilization, whereas before I was looking away from it.

With the shift of the question comes a whole new perspective, a new frame of reference. Before undertaking this project, I was in an important sense immersed in reaction against "civilization," which I experienced as taking me away from my body, depriving me of a sense of embodied wholeness, and, in all truth, distancing me from God. While I am still a product of my culture, I have managed to move myself into a new perspective from which I am looking at my questions. I could say I am no longer in the process of grieving a loss, but am wondering how to think about what to do next. I feel less that I am yearning for nature, and more that I am allied with nature, even if I still have a long way to go. My identification with the thrusts of American culture, and my battle with them, are lessened, even though I exist within the culture. To use Chellis Glendinning's notion of addiction to Western culture, I know I will always be in the process of recovery, and will fall off the wagon repeatedly, even constantly, but at least I feel my identity has shifted. I now know more firmly I am part of the earth, part of nature.

I understand more readily that civilization exists within the matrix of nature, not the other way around.

In this way, I feel more in synch with the stories I have grouped together under the heading "The Return." Laurel Smith shares many of my concerns about civilization's encroachment on the earth, yet she has found ways to remain personally connected with nature. She wrote,

> Sometimes when I am driving alone, I can achieve a feeling of connectedness to this planet with a ritual I have devised. I imagine my car like an ant on a large beach ball. . . . I think of the immensity of the planet and how we all exist sharing its gifts of sustenance. I can frequently reach a place where I feel connected to everything on this planet.

Laurel has even found ways to allow the sound of rushing traffic to remind her of a rushing river, becoming soothing if she lets it.

Marie McLean articulates very precisely an experience I had myself, even before moving to Montana, beginning once nature reached a certain critical mass within my system. Marie wrote,

> With the sky as the backdrop, all of a sudden I had that "symphonic" experience again. I got a bigger picture feeling. It hit my senses that whereas before I used to feel remorse and hunger that cities had taken over the earth and kept meager pockets and pots of nature around for decoration, I now had the macro sense that earth keeps pockets of cities!!!

Marie understands that, "Earth surrounds us and engulfs us and supports us and will never leave us and will, somehow, endure our madness." Like Marie, I now feel less "remorse and hunger." The lessening of "hunger" is important, as it feels less of a struggle. This does not mean my viewpoint of social criticism changes, but it does mean I can gradually allow myself to open into the experience of being on the planet and to see

what happens. At bottom, I understand movement into this experience as reparation of the split between me and nature.

Last week, I drove back to Helena from Billings, where I had been for work. I have driven the I-90 route many times with my boss and he almost always points out the Crazy Mountains. Now I know them from the highway, though I have never been into them. They are very appealing mountains, in part because they are so distinctive. Rising abruptly from the yellow plains, the Crazies soar into the blue sky in a way that feels reckless. They are a different kind of mountain than other mountains in the area, much higher, more jagged, more rugged. In the way they seem extreme, they are almost a caricature of mountains, not quite a joke, but at least a quip. You are not quite sure what they are doing there, how they got there, what is their intention. I have thought to myself that must be why they are called the Crazies, though the real story of their name is more poignant. In *Crazy Mountains: Learning from Wilderness to Weigh Technology*, written by eco-philosopher David Strong (1995), two possibilities for the "white man's name," Crazy Mountains, are given:

> The most common is that a woman left a wagon train near the town of Big Timber, got lost, went insane, and lived in the foothills of the mountains. However, I find it hard to believe that these mountains, these first definitive mountains of the Rockies, did not have a settled white name long before the wagon trains. The story that makes the most sense to me is the following: When the first white people came to the region, they asked the natives what they called these mountains. Not understanding each other's language, they had to communicate in sign language. The natives tried to tell them that they were a place of visions. The whites interpreted the signs to mean that these mountains were a place where people went crazy. (p. 6)

I bring up the Crazy Mountains and David Strong because Strong cogently describes the place I am moving into and hope to inhabit. Strong uses the Crazies, and their precarious ecological situation (roads being built, lack of designation as protected), to illustrate what is happening specifically and concretely in one wild place in danger of taming. Like Abram (1996), Strong combines philosophy with writing, making the world a concrete and wonderful place. His description of the Crazies is as follows:

> The vast expanses of central Montana have an edge and a suddenness. Along the Yellowstone River, sandstone rimrocks line the horizon. Beyond these rims, the flats, benches and swells of the high plains, arid and mostly treeless, yet gold in autumn with prairie grasses, define a precise division between a yellow earth and a youthful sky. As a boy I was told that "Montana" meant land of the shining mountains. Mountains, especially the Crazy Mountains, seem to explode here into the blue as a child might draw them. (p. 3).

As tends to happen when people pay attention to the concrete, Strong is realistic more than theoretical. While urging the deep ecological perspective, he wants to talk about what would happen if the deep ecological perspective were to become a mainstream reality. "Most of us," he writes, "sense the need to dwell again," but, he asks, how is that really to happen? (p. 205). He wrote,

> Yet consider how much remains in the dark. How does tomorrow, even, call to be shaped differently? How should we be different in our work and our leisure, with others, with friends, with family? What would the reform of technology mean for agriculture, towns, and cities? What would it mean for businesses? For travel? For Third World countries? For symphonies, theaters, restaurants, and television? For the homeless and for children? (p. 205)

As Strong explains, "we need to realize first that expecting a program is itself a sign of the unreformed, universal and a priori approach of technology" (p. 205). This is

because "much that matters most cannot be laid out in advance or be articulated in isolation from the context of each of our individual lives, communities and regions" (p. 205). He wrote,

> The reform of technology will not be masterminded; rather it will be the result of communities of people who are able to speak and convey to each other what things matter in the way they matter. It will be the result of people working together and taking a few deliberate steps at a time, as possibilities open up. The true frontier for us is not literal wilderness any longer, nor is it a frontier we can conquer without irony and contradiction. Accepting and insisting on a particularist approach to a wilder future is the first of many steps toward reforming technology, toward learning to build again. (p. 206)

I read Strong with great relief, the same kind of relief I feel when looking into the Crazy Mountains from my safe, warm car on the interstate. I am relieved the mountains are there, still pretty wild, and a good place into which I can project my soul and dreams of wildness. I am relieved I am not lost up in the mountains in the cold, trying to stay warm, build shelter, fend off bears, and worry whether my children will die from exposure to the elements. I am relieved that Strong is realistic about where we are *and* that he directs the first order of business as insistence on "conveying to each other what things matter in the way they matter." As Warwick Fox (1995) argued, any major shift in paradigms will occur, if it occurs, person by person. Ultimately, *that* is what this dissertation has done, at least that is my hope. I have gathered together the voices of several people who, along with my own voice, convey something that matters to them. It is quite a relief to read from Strong that this might be the first step, as I don't know, at this moment, of any other.

Still, I know there is more. While my own experience of the Crazies is still one of driving by them, they already have quite a pull on my body and soul. They seem a huge, wild island, very different from the tamer range of Rocky Mountains where I live. When we first moved to our home outside Helena, my wife and I were actually, to some extent, afraid. The former resident talked about seeing a mountain lion walk along the fence. Later, the neighbor behind our house told me not to let my kids play in his woods until he shot the bear. These were different problems than traffic. Fortunately, we have all remained safe and, knock on wood, we will keep our heads and continue to be lucky. But even with wild animals potentially on our doorstep, the area now seems entirely tamed, virtually suburban. It *is* suburban; it's just that when I first moved there, I found any sense of space and remnant, sporadic traces of the wild very exotic.

And still, there is pull to what remains of the *real* wilderness. When I see those Crazies from the interstate, they allow me to imagine a wilder world I could sometimes visit. It looks like you could disappear into those mountains. Do I want to do that? Part of me does, but that is no solution in the long run. As wild as those mountains may feel, the reality is that a few hours drive would bring me to the many nuclear silos buried in the Montana flats. You can see some of them from the interstate—not the interstate from which I view the Crazies, another one crossing the state—when you drive from Helena to Great Falls, surrounded by fences that look to me pretty much like the one outside my dad's house, looking fairly vulnerable to me in these times, but what do I know?

Realistically, there is no escaping the world humanity has created. But what I can do, and intend to do once this project is finished, is to begin to learn some more

wilderness skills, and make enough money to buy a horse trailer. That way I can haul my horses on the highway to the foot of the wilderness, and trek in with groups. We can sit around the campfire at night, talking about what we saw, heard, and felt during the day, and telling each other our stories and dreams for a renewed civilization. From my heart, I hope that I have begun that story telling with this dissertation, by sharing a perspective, enabled by the beautiful stories generous people have been willing to share. I can't rebuild the world—and I have no business imagining I can—but I can offer the true stories of people whose bodies are pointing them in the direction home.

Final Thoughts

> If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business. (Henry David Thoreau, 1854/1960, pp. 70-71)

The research method I have used in this dissertation has felt both extremely honest and extremely risky. While I have tried to maintain rigors deserving of the award of a doctorate in psychology, I have made this my own story, at the risk of striking the reader as self-indulgent and self-enamored. The justification has been my strong belief that psychology, particularly transpersonal psychology, can be very effective if presented in an embodied fashion, in the context of real lives. I believe this holds the potential for psychology that is both more interesting (Anderson, in press) and more truthful. If I had not written in the first person, and left out details of my life and my personal understandings and beliefs, the *facticity* (Heidegger, 1927/1961) of those things would

have nevertheless been present, propelling the dissertation into manifestation. The difference would have been that I would have pretended otherwise or, perhaps worse, shaped my own viewpoint, even my own being, into what I imagined would be consistent with the ubiquitous, nameless voice of science, the perspective from which much of the social sciences has been written in the last century.

In this sense, attempting an embodied dissertation is an act of manifesting what feels to be me, rather than conforming myself to an existing hierarchy. I consider this practically a political matter. In the passage just quoted from Strong (1995), he advises, "Accepting and insisting on a particularist approach to a wilder future is the first of many steps toward reforming technology, toward learning to build again" (p. 206). There is a way in which the mechanistic paradigm under which most Westerners have lived for several generations (Glendinning, 1994) has contributed to the disembodiment of both daily life and of the social sciences, particularly psychology. In both, there is an assumption of a uni-voiced technological reality into which individuals are presumed, even expected, to fit. By injecting my own voice, I encourage both a return to my own embodied self, and the creation of a more populist, life-as-lived version of psychology.

By insisting on making this dissertation my *particular* story, then, once again, there is a merger of form and content in the process of this dissertation (Anderson, 2000). Descriptions of return to the body and to nature (return from a technologically oriented, *head realm*) are conveyed through a method that itself feels embodied. By using this method, I sidestep the assumption that I may only legitimately look for universal laws within the context of prevalent "psychological, philosophical, and technological

constructions of our civilization" (Glendinning, 1994, p. ix). I create from the body out, from life-as-lived out, at least in theory. This itself becomes an act of purpose, an act of reclamation, even an act of redemption, consistent with the very subject matter of the topic.

While these are my justifications, I am aware of the risks of subjective research. Some of the risk involves personal vulnerability. Including my own story, and writing from my own perspective, has been like sharing a dream with a group of people. It has felt good, and honest, but I have done it knowing full well that I am exposing myself in ways that may strike others as self-indulgent, boring, or immature. If I approached the research, and wrote, from the perspective of ubiquitous science, the most I would risk is conclusions that did not follow from data or were less than important. Writing from a personal stance, and in the context of my life, offers myself up for judgment. You can assure me otherwise, but, believe me, this is the case. If I were reading this dissertation, I would constantly be wondering, are his experiences what he says they are; is he misguided; is this really anything more than his own psychology? This is the nature of the beast.

To return to justification, I would suggest this is a good thing, even if the risk of personal humiliation is present. Without suggesting that I am an original or great thinker, compare a study of this nature to the psychological writings of those who are: for instance, Freud. Freud's writings may not have been overtly autobiographical, but with the biographies that have been written, it is commonplace among many to assume that Freud's theories are the working out of his own psychology vis-a-vis his young, attractive

mother, who married an older man. With Carl Jung, it is commonplace to wonder whether he was not just working out his own mental breakdown, with details from his memoir and biographies used to make the point. Ultimately, if we are honest, most of us will admit that we wonder these sorts of things when we read any study (e.g., is it shaped to please those providing funding? Is it to meet implicit demands of superiors in a department? Is he just a misogynist for personal reasons? Is she a man-hater? Does he have a God complex? Is she missing the point because of her own psychology? Isn't this only what he wants to believe?). In a sense, by writing personally, and admitting personal stance, I have provided context in which you can evaluate these sorts of questions.

A more serious matter arises from the academic risks of a subjective study and of this study in particular. This dissertation is objective in the sense that it contains information from real people, which I have undertaken to examine and report methodically, but it lacks most of the safeguards that have been commonly understood to lend validity in psychology for most of the last century. Consistent with the observations of Braud and Anderson (1998), I view this mostly as a matter of what this study can and cannot claim to constitute. I believe it is necessary, nonetheless, to discuss some of the specifics. If nothing else, this focuses exactly what it is that this study can claim to represent.

Many methods in psychology have claimed validity, and the ability to generalize truths applicable to particular populations, on the basis of having found participants through a random sampling of that particular population. I have, of course, not done this in the least. I sought people who were willing and able to describe the sort of experiences

I wanted to hear about. As it turned out, 31 of 40 participants (over three-fourths) were located by networking with members of the Institute of Noetic Sciences. (I would hazard a guess that most, if not all, of the remaining nine would happily associate themselves with IONS, or may already have, just not to my knowledge.) If it is argued that I have merely studied people of a certain disposition, people like myself, I will readily agree. That means I do not claim to generalize to any particular population. Even more specifically, because I have not used a random sample of IONS members, I do not even claim to generalize to the population of IONS members.

While this will make some uncomfortable, or leave them "unconvinced" of something, I believe this approach is necessary to the study of experiences not typical in the culture. In the case of this dissertation, I consider myself astoundingly fortunate to have found 40 people who even knew what I was talking about. If unusual experiences are to be studied, I believe it is necessary, at least initially in the particular subject of research, to approach people who are likely to have had the experience. My going to IONS does not strike me much differently than if I were researching the effects of aging on the ability to play basketball and sought participants from a gym, with basketball court, frequented by middle-aged people. In both cases, those with relevant knowledge are likely to have gravitated to the tapped source. This does not allow me to claim that all humans have the experiences under study, but it does allow me to describe, with depth and particularity, what I am trying to understand.

If others are interested in the area of research, they may, some time down the road, test my insights against general populations with methods allowing different kinds of

claims. I believe this may be one of the enormous contributions of the Intuitive Inquiry approach. It offers leadership, particularly in areas of psychology that are still understood only dimly or incompletely. I believe the area of weeping, crying, and tears provides a good example. As I observed in the Literature Review, a number of studies into weeping, especially the quantitative studies, did not yield the results expected, at least not in a statistically significant fashion, or gave rise to only partial or seemingly inconsistent conclusions. I believe part of the problem has been failure to discern different types of weeping, crying, and tears. While some studies have already made the effort to differentiate types of crying, I believe methodologies such as intuitive inquiry, which is suited to explore in depth the particularities of various types of crying, and can offer the insights and understandings of people having the experience, can probe deeply into the subject matter, suggesting new ways to understand types of human experience.

A specific way in which this dissertation differs from more presumptively valid research projects is my subjective inclusion, preparation, and analysis of the stories. Many researchers, perhaps *particularly* those using qualitative methodologies, would be more comfortable with my study if I had done the following: defined with particularity *before* gathering data exactly what type of experiences I would include and exclude; asked the same questions consistently, even religiously, of participants; insisted on gathering equivalent stories from participants, covering the same questions; reduced the information conveyed by participants to essential components following a prescribed manner of reduction; then generated themes or composites from those essential components.

Research approaches identified as phenomenological (e.g., Giorgi, 1975; Moustakas, 1994) follow such practices. These approaches claim validity, even in qualitative settings, in that these practices are designed to reduce the likelihood that the researcher shapes information to his or her own liking, to fulfill his or her projections. Phenomenology also suggests a practice known as *bracketing* or the *epoche*, essentially a mandate that the researcher identify and set aside her or his personal biases and expectations in the effort to make qualitative findings more objective (see Moustakas, 1994). This is done with the goal of making qualitative research objective–I always imagined to answer the expected criticism of those within the rationalist, or behaviorist, paradigm.

I will readily concede that this study contains none of these safeguards. Indeed, I have done the opposite in most respects. While there was, for the most part, consistency in how I solicited researchers, I allowed the solicitation process to flow and bend with my changing intuition as to what was important for me to study. Initially, I presented all participants with the same list of questions, and similar descriptions of embodied writing, but I did not insist on answers to all aspects of the inquiry. While I probed in almost all cases, I allowed stories to be complete when it seemed, through my intuition, that the participant was finished describing what she or he wanted to describe. I included stories not because they satisfied my pre-formed statement of what would be included, but because the story struck me, intuitively, as relevant to my inquiry. My emotions and my body played a huge role in this. If the story was in the general ballpark, and I thought I could learn from it, and that it could illustrate what I was learning, it was in. In particular,

if I was moved and the description felt real, I wanted the story in the project. I assumed that others might be moved and might believe as well.

I fully accept that this dissertation is *exactly* my projection, albeit my projection assisted and shaped by my research participants. In this sense, it has the congruity and honesty recommended by hermeneutics and intuitive inquiry in particular. I *am* researching at a time and place through the lens of my personal understandings, so I may as well push that personal *facticity* to its limits by following my intuition where it leads. The danger, however, is a real one and involves what I noted above. It is possible that all I offer through the method I have chosen, as I have used it, is a glimpse into my own psychology. If that psychology is particularly immature, or halted, or not *at all* well appreciated by me, then I have not offered much that is of use to others–except perhaps as an unintended case study of the researcher.

Given this risk, the question may arise: Why not adhere to the safeguards recommended by methods such as phenomenology? My answer is that, I believe, at least in some cases, those safeguards may not allow as full a discovery and presentation of human experience, particularly if the experience is not yet well understood. In this particular project, I first envisioned a study of grief in response to nature, that is, grief that arose in the body when someone felt very connected to nature. I thought I would exclude descriptions of grief *about* nature–that which I came to call ecological grief. While I knew tears were important, I thought I would also exclude tears that were responsive to beauty or awe, not having the element of longing or loss (grief). As I began to receive contributions, however, I came to understand that these things were often connected in

the context of lives as lived. Most important, I realized the ways in which my own experiences were over-determined or shifting, which confirmed a suspicion I had from the outset, but had not yet been able to flesh out. By following my intuition as to what to include, I believe I gained understandings that would not have been present had I insisted on pre-defined criteria.

The process of preparing the stories, and developing interpretations, was similar, though considerations of conveying understandings to others began to play a dominant role. If I had applied uniform rules as to what subjects each story must contain, I may have gained consistency, and perhaps avoided criticism that this study is too free-floating, but I believe I would have lost some of the power of the writing. I am also not sure such insistence could have been accomplished. For example, Jenny Lee's story ("Walking due west on a cold winter's day in London . . . the sight of a winter flowering cherry hit me in the chest") is only 10 lines long. She suggests much, but does not cover subjects covered in depth by others. Had I insisted that Jenny write more, she might have told me no, and I might have lost the story, which I happen to find very moving and important to the project. More important, I consider the story as it was given to me perfect in its concision and brevity. Jenny's sharp, short writing is in a way the same as the sudden sight of the winter cherry hitting her in the chest. It is *her*, and it had to remain as it was.

When I first envisioned this project, and even as I began to gather data, I was equivocating over whether I would try to analyze the received texts in a fashion informed by phenomenological methods. Early drafts of my Research Methods Chapter contained references to the *epoche* and to reduction of text to essential components. I was thinking

this might yield some increased validity and, as I thought, what could it hurt, other than perhaps taking more time. When the time came to analyze the data–actually, even as I was receiving the data, when analysis was beginning in my mind–I realized that I was still very much in the process of figuring out what this dissertation was all about. In addition, while the stories propelled my understandings, and would help me convey experientially my understandings, the understandings I was gaining were broader than the stories as finite texts. If I had reduced the texts to essential components, excluding my own projections, I may have captured a large percentage of the understandings I ultimately offered, but I believe I would have missed many of the connections, and insights, I deem most important to this project. It took my projections, aided by the stories, to bring this to fruition, at least to the fruition I needed.

Another way to explain what I mean is that I find the process of intuitive inquiry an expanding process, wheras the process of reduction to essential components, with *epoche*, feels to me more like a restrictive process. I do not intend to disparage phenomenological methods, which I believe provide valuable, precise descriptions of experience. But there is a way in which intuitive inquiry feels creative to me, as though it draws upon the creativity of my entire self, including my body, rather than only my analytical skills. What I am saying is connected to embodiment, embodied writing, and presentation of research with the goal of resonance in readers. If I allow subjectivity in the analytical process and the process of drafting interpretive lenses, I feel as though I am drawing upon what emerges out of me, including what emerges from my body. Personally, I feel more embodied as this takes place. I feel the insights I offer are phrased

in a more embodied fashion, rather than reflecting only the essential components to which texts have been reduced.

While I hope the interpretive lenses feel useful to readers, I have to confess that I find the real contribution of this project to be the stories themselves, including my own composite story as summary. This raises concerns in my mind. One of the criticisms I have directed against myself throughout this project is that I am not involved in academic psychology, but am fulfilling my secret desire to write and edit stories. Well, having confessed an interest in creative writing earlier, I suppose the desire is not so secret. In fact, my major in college was English, with Emphasis in Creative Writing. Does this slant of the project make it suspect as psychology? I don't think so, for the following reason: While my goal has been to interest and move readers (also a goal of fiction), I have primarily sought to convey understandings of human experience. I have tried to shape the presentation of stories not just to entertain, but to suggest through immediacy the experiences under study. The choice and organization of descriptions has been with the goal of suggesting particular experience, not simply interesting a reader.

As a matter of method, specifically, method of reporting results, I believe the presentation of descriptions written by participants is a legitimate tool of psychology. Returning to William James (1912/1996), who advocated "radical empiricism" as the metaphysic for psychological inquiry, he argued empiricism must stress "the part, the element, the individual, and treat the whole as a collection" (pp. 41-42). As James contended, this was "essentially a mosaic philosophy" (pp. 41-42). The mosaic theme was echoed by Anderson and Braud (1998), who recognized "the importance of particularity

(especially the researcher's voice and the participant's voice) in communicating the unique and yet potentially universal nature of the experiences studied" (p. 30). In my view, what better way to convey a mosaic, preserving the particular and individual voice, than to allow participants to write for themselves?

As for the downside of this approach, there is one in particular. The participants in this study are a group of people who are able to write well. They are articulate people comfortable with describing their experiences in writing. One could argue this approach excludes a wide range of people who do not have this kind of writing skill or interest in writing. On the other hand, it is possible that even if I had interviewed people, my participants would have been people with verbal skills of articulation with an interest in explaining their experiences, not much different from my actual participants. In any investigation into somewhat uncharted human experience, the first studies tend to draw upon people with relatively mature self-understanding, insight, and articulation skills. Arguably, this study is not much different from others of its kind.

While I believe that is true, I am also very specifically aware that the participant-writing approach excluded some people. For example, there was one young woman who contacted me about my dissertation but did not participate. She was interested in the subject and described experiences potentially relevant, but my impression was that she had not gone through much formal schooling and was wary of writing words that others would read. I invited her to write something or contact me again, but she did not.

Another check on validity used in some qualitative studies, and recommended by Anderson (1998) in some circumstances, involves use of a resonance panel. This allows

some gauge as to whether conclusions represent *only* the projections of the researcher, or find verification in the experience or understandings of other people. I did not offer the draft results chapter to outsiders to the research, but I did request review by participants. My letter requesting review (Appendix E) asked for comment and verification. At the least, I feel comfortable claiming that this process confirmed that I have accurately reported the experiences of real people. In addition to that confirmation, several participants reported resonance with the interpretive lenses, though most people did not have the time to study the entire Results Chapter with sufficient detail to respond fully. Nevertheless, I can report there was little disagreement with my conclusions, and that the few suggestions for reconsideration were incorporated into the project, as described in the Research Methods Chapter. While this provides some validity to the results, I believe the process of this sort of dissertation invites a comradery and politeness that militates against my receipt of actual disagreement with my conclusions.

Ultimately, the validity of this dissertation must rest in the judgment and experience of the reader. I opened this section by quoting a few sentences of Henry David Thoreau, himself a great experiencer of nature. He wrote, "If you stand right fronting and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career" (Henry David Thoreau, 1854/1960, pp. 70-71). While I believe the pluralistic construction of the project provides a form of "mosaic validity" of its own, the final determination of validity, in my view, is simply whether any of the stories, and any of my interpretations, have caused movement within you. While

this may not necessarily be determinative of truth in any objective sense (see Braud, 1998), it is enough for me if you and I have connected, and something has grown. If through this growth we have found ourselves "alive, [then] let us go about our business" (Thoreau, p. 71).

As I noted above, upon concluding this dissertation, I noticed a shift in my own relationship to matters of deep ecology, with my glance turning back toward civilization. In an analogous fashion, having completed this subjective study, I am finding my interests veering toward what might be more objective ways to measure some of the subjects tackled in this dissertation. My current life is not such that I have time for further research, as I have about exhausted the patience of my family, employer, and animal-friends; but there are some of you who have that path. Conveniently, this leads to what will conclude this chapter, a brief discussion of ideas for further research.

One thing I regret about this study is that I did not have time to canvass world literature for writings that might be considered examples of the experiences I have studied. I know there are many. Anderson (1996) used writings within the Christian mystical tradition as text for investigation of sacred weeping. I believe there are several bodies of literature that could be considered text for investigation of some or all of the experiences described in this study. One possibility, of course, is poetry reflecting on relationship with nature. Other possibilities are the growing literatures on earth or Goddess-based spirituality, and/or the historical, anthropological literatures on such systems of practice or belief.

If writings from other periods of human history are used, it would be particularly interesting to note which aspects of this dissertation's experiences tend toward the universal, and which aspects seem to manifest something peculiar about our times. Ecological grief comes to mind: I wonder if people have always grieved destruction of nature? I assume this is a heightened experience in present times, but it is possible that some people have always found it personally painful to see animals harmed, or nature misused. On the other hand, I suspect that experiences such as those described in the "encounter with God" section have occurred throughout human history. This is suggested, of course, by Anderson's (1996) study on sacred weeping.

I believe further research could be conducted on the relationship between embodiment (or body-experience, access to emotions, experience of sensations) and psycho-spiritual healing or spiritual experience. If I had insisted on further descriptions from my participants, I might have contributed more in this area. Some possibilities for further research: Of people who report experiences within particular categories, for instance, encounter of God through nature, what is their experience of embodiment throughout life, along particular criteria, for instance, those suggested by Toombs (1993)? Of people experiencing ecological grief, what is their body experience, what is the impact of the experience on their bodies? Of those people who find personal healing within nature, what is their body experience? Is body experience different, generally, among those who weep and those who don't, or between men and women.

The experience of grief could be an entry point for fruitful further research. If one began with populations of people suffering deep personal loss, I wonder if there would be

differences in experience among those who found deep resonance in nature and those who did not. I wonder if there would be correspondence between groups of people who find healing in nature and those who report spiritual experience or spiritual belief. Therapists working with grieving clients could draw upon those willing to make outings into nature and to discuss their experience. If healing is reported, that information could be useful to others assisting grieving clients. Of those reporting healing, it would be interesting to me personally to know whether those individuals had prior experience in nature, tendencies toward embodiment, and/or prior spiritual experience or belief. Of those who become stuck in a grieving process, it would be interesting to devise a delicate means to investigate that group's relationship to embodiment and/or nature experience.

As the reader will have gathered, I have a particular interest in the study of weeping, crying, and tears. I believe there is much more research that could be done in this area. I would be interested in knowing in more depth and detail what is the difference in experience between different forms of weeping. I would be careful to be cognizant that any one weeping event can include numerous causes and meanings, with shifts in forms of weeping, crying, or tears. As we near the 100-year anniversary of Borgquist's (1906) study on crying, it would be interesting again to distribute questionnaires asking generally about people's experiences of crying, including meanings attributed to weeping events. It would be useful to design questions more likely to elicit descriptions and differences between the various types of tears noted in this project, both in the literature review, the results chapter, and this discussion. Braud (in press), Anderson (1996), and this study suggest that tears of wonder-joy, or sacred tears, or other forms of tears may be very

different experientially than other forms of weeping or crying. It would be interesting to investigate this probability through either qualitative or quantitative methods.

Finally, my thoughts keep returning to Warwick Fox's (1995) recommendation for both a "psychologizing" of deep ecology and an "ecologizing" of transpersonal psychology. More needs to be done toward this goal, but what? I believe the key lies in attending to individual human experience, as suggested by the theories of both Kahn (2000) and Strong (1995). I would recommend more studies that gather descriptions of the individual, personal experience of people who are deeply feeling the present plight of the earth and humanity's place on the earth. It is through attending to these individual stories that the rest of us will return home to who we are: joint inhabitants, descendants, and caretakers—on and of the earth—in and through our mortal, and imperiled, flesh.

Epilogue

For the Epilogue I will go out on a limb. That is fine because if you are still reading by now you have already decided to indulge me. If you find I am now going too far and close these pages, you will not miss much, as we are right at the end.

The night before last we took our son Max, almost 15, to a lecture by a woman who discusses her contact with aliens and predicts "disclosure" of their existence some time in the foreseeable future. She is a credible enough woman and, what is more, she is grounded in a system of spirituality pretty much equivalent to that shared by much of the transpersonal community, out of which this dissertation grows. Consensus consciousness scorns those who "believe" in the existence of extra-terrestrials. Even most of the transpersonal community, sensibly enough, steers clear of UFO connections. This makes sense: It is tough enough to be accepted talking about woo-woo spirituality without throwing in the alien stuff. Personally, I believe that if one looks at the evidence, it is difficult to ignore all of it. One particular example: in March, 1997, hundreds of people over Phoenix, Arizona, saw the same lights which appeared to be spacecraft. A credible family described a huge ship passing right over them. There is no explanation for what it was: I am thinking, extra-terrestrial.

Okay, you don't have to believe this stuff, but just indulge me, as we are near the end. Some argue that the problem with disclosure is the turmoil that will exist as people digest the ramifications. Some argue that the most troubling ramifications will be of a spiritual nature, that is, that it will be difficult for many people to continue to believe some of the teachings of some of the faiths. These people argue there will be no

moorings, and that lack of moorings leads to fear and chaos. When I listen to lectures of the UFO kind, or read books in that genre, one thing that becomes clear is that with disclosure that we are not alone in the universe, we become of the earth in a way that is ancient and yet new. Along with all our animals and plants, and even rocks, we will be uniquely of the earth. The Earth will be us.

Indulge me a bit more. If this happens, then we will need practices and a world view that grounds us in the earth and in our own bodies. It is possible that enormous grief would be experienced by many in these circumstances, as centuries-old ways of understanding would be challenged. In this event, it may be necessary to return to the earth and to our bodies. Our spiritual practice would need to return us to our bodies and link us to the earth. Our conceptions would need to *place* us in our bodies and *as part of* the earth. Otherwise, we *will not* have any moorings at all. This does not mean that we would not acknowledge spirit and energy beyond the material. Indeed, the point is that we may be forced to acknowledge versions of spirit and energy beyond the material, beyond our wildest dreams: and not as distant, comforting tales, but as reality. If this happens, we would no longer be able to remain even marginally healthy unless our spiritual systems take account of scientific knowledge and ground us fully in the earth and our origins.

OK, I will confess I am not sure I believe this kind of thing. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. But for you, all I want is for you to *really* try to view us as uniquely of the earth and on the earth. Because if we *are* of the earth, we need to *be* of the earth. We need to experience ourselves as our physical bodies and as products of the earth. The mystery has to be in that place where spirit moves into matter. We need to use our

objectifications when they are useful, but to ground ourselves in our lives as we live them. We need to grieve the separations that have been created by dominant culture, and begin to heal them. We need to come home. We need to recognize that we are home or that, like Dorothy of *The Wizard of Oz*, we have the power to be home. All it takes is a few deep breaths and the commitment to be present, in the body, and to follow what happens. All it takes is slowing down and connecting with nature. All it takes is looking into the life on this planet and saying, yes, that is me, that is us, we are one.

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Appendix A: Consent Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in assisting with my research project. This letter will describe the contribution I am seeking from research participants and will also serve as the disclosure and consent form required for participation in dissertation research.

The research will be conducted in two phases. Phase I will involve submitting to me a written description of one or more particular experiences of weeping, grief, or loss you have had when feeling deeply connected with some aspect of nature (e.g., an animal, a tree, the rain). You may use a description you have already written, such as an entry in a journal or excerpt from a letter, or you may write from your recollection of your experience. Supplementing prose descriptions with art, recorded music, or poetry is welcomed.

The project encourages what I am calling "embodied" descriptions of experience. By that, I mean descriptions that are rich with concrete details of sensation or emotion, which convey *how it felt* to have the experience. The goal is to allow readers to resonate with the experience, to come as close to possible to knowing what the experience feels like *in one's body*.

Given the project's focus on experience "of the body," I am very interested in specific descriptions of sensations and emotions, but I would also like to learn about thoughts which occurred during or after the experience, as well as meanings ascribed to the experience. Participants are asked to include the following when describing their experience:

1. What specifically seemed to cause the experience (e.g., feelings of deep connection with falling rain)? Please describe the specific context of the experience in detail (e.g., "I had been hiking in the mountains, I sat down to rest on a rock, I noticed a lizard, and shut my eyes . . . ," but with more detail.)

2. How did it feel to be you during this experience? What sensations were occurring? What emotions? What thoughts?

3. What meanings, if any, do you give the experience?

4. How, if at all, did the experience impact your life? Was there are effect upon your views, behaviors, or lifestyle?

The amount of time participants will devote to preparing their description will vary. I believe it likely that most participants will spend one to two hours writing their initial descriptions. I would appreciate receiving your written descriptions as soon as possible. Due to my need to meet scheduling deadlines of my dissertation process, I will only be able to accept initial descriptions from participants through _____.

After I have received descriptions of experience, I will ask some individuals to participate further in the project. This will be called Phase II participation. Phase II participants will be asked to delve even more deeply into their reported experience. This will include listening to a guided meditation I will forward, and noting any additional sensations, emotions, thoughts, or memories that arise. I will ask these individuals to expand upon their written descriptions. I will send questions, or make suggestions, aimed at clarifying or expanding what has already been written. This process may go back and forth several times, with the goal of working toward "publishable" descriptions of

experience that meet standards of grammar, usage, and style ordinarily required by book and journal editors, and are able to engender resonance for the experience in most readers.

Although the time devoted to Phase II by participants will vary, I expect that most Phase II participants will spend two to five additional hours, probably spread out over a week or two.

After I receive Phase II materials from participants, I will draft a "composite experience" based upon my review of the experiences shared with me. I will also prepare a set of observations or interpretations of important elements of the experience. I will share my composite description and my interpretations with participants and aks for comment. I expect this process to take an additional hour of the participant's time.

The descriptions prepared by all participants will be published as part of the "results" of the dissertation. Publication in this sense means inclusion of the writings in my final dissertation, which is "published" as a dissertation available through academic channels. Publication in other media (e.g., an article) is also possible, though not planned.

For protection of your privacy, I will not use your real name in publishing, reporting, or referencing your experience, unless you indicate your preference that I use your real name. At the end of this letter a place is provided for you to indicate a pseudonym for use in this study, or to request that your real name by used. If you do not indicate a choice on this point, I will select a pseudonym for use regarding your experience.

Your signature below indicates that you are comfortable with my use of any and all details about your experience which you share in this endeavor. If there are details about your experience you are not comfortable sharing, please feel free to disguise those details to protect your privacy, as long as you provide a description of your experience that you feel honors its essence.

Unless you request that I use your real name in this project, your identity will be kept confidential and all information received from you will be kept confidential as to source. I will keep the information in a private place in my home to which no one other than myself has access.

Prior research indicates that the reporting of experiences such as those I am requesting often serves to validate the importance of the experience. Your participation in this project may thus facilitate and deepen your understanding of the personal significance to you of the experience you describe.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. Disclosure of experiences studied in this project might cause a degree of anxiety for some people as many people do not ordinarily share such experiences publicly. In addition, by their nature, such experiences may be uncomfortable or troubling in part. If at any time you have any concerns or questions, I will try to discuss them with you and give options for resolution.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me collect at ---------- or e-mail me at dufrechou@aol.com. You may also contact the Chair of my dissertation committee, Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D., at (650) 493-4430, who was also the head of the

Ethics Committee of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology for the 1999-2000 academic year, when my Proposal was approved. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology assumes no responsibility for psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during this study without penalty or prejudice. Participation is entirely voluntary.

You may request a summary of the final research findings by letting me know of your interest. I plan, in any event, to share the pertinent results with all participants.

Thanks for your interest in this project. I am hopeful it will add to the understandings of humanity's place in nature and may suggest ideas relevant to present ecological and social problems felt by many. I also hope this study will be an enriching experience for participants.

Please complete the signature page and information sections below and return one copy of this letter to me in the envelope provided.

Jay Dufrechou

Researcher

I have read and understand this letter and have had any questions about this research answered to my satisfaction. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage my participation. My signature indicates my

willingness to participate in this project as described above, including publication of my writings provided to the researcher as described above.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Participant's Name Printed

I would like you to use my real name in the published study, as follows:

_____

Please use this pseudonym for me in the study:

_____

Participant's mailing address:

_____

_____

Telephone (optional): _____

E-mail: _____

Appendix B: Flyer

Have you ever felt really connected with some aspect of nature (a tree, a deer, the rain) and suddenly found yourself weeping, or otherwise feeling grief or loss well up in your body?

I am a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology researching the above experience. I am seeking people who are willing to write about their experience for use and publication in my study. The writing need not be long, but should convey to others the story of how it felt to have the experience and what the experience means to you. I would be very grateful for any contributions.

If you are interested in participating, or know someone who might be, please contact me:

Jay Dufrechou

Helena, MT 59602

Jdufrechou@earthlink.net

Appendix C: Revised Flyer and Letter

Have you ever felt really connected with nature and found yourself weeping, or feeling grief, loss or other deep emotions welling up in your body?

For the dissertation I am writing through the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (Palo Alto, California), I am asking people to write about such experiences. The writing need not be long, but should convey how it felt to have the experience. I am particularly interested in concrete details of sensation and emotion, but any description that feels comfortable to the writer is welcome. My goal is to allow readers to resonate with the experience not only intellectually, but also in their hearts and with their entire bodies.

In writing, you might consider the following:

Where were you? What were you seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling? Were you initially tired, happy, sad, energetic, "in synch," "out of sorts"? Was there something specific that brought on the experience? Have you had this experience on numerous occasions?

When you wept, or felt grief or other deep emotions in response to nature, how precisely did this feel? Where were the feelings in your body? What sensations were occurring? What emotions? What thoughts? How long did the experience last? How did it end? Were you changed in any sense?

What meaning, if any, do you give the experience?

How, if at all, did the experience impact your life? Was there any effect upon your views, behaviors, lifestyle?

I will be grateful for any contributions.

Jay Dufrechou

Helena, MT 59602

Dufrechou@aol.com

Dear _____,

Thanks you for your interest in my dissertation. This letter formally describes my project and will serve as the disclosure and consent form required by dissertation ethical protocol. If you are moved to write something for me, please complete the blanks at the end of the letter and return at least that section of the letter to me when you send your piece of writing.

What I am looking for is a written description of one or more particular experiences of weeping, grief, loss, or other deep emotion you have had when feeling deeply connected with some aspect of nature (e.g., an animal, a tree, the rain). You may use a description you have already written, such as an entry in a journal or excerpt from a letter, or you may write from your recollection of your experience. Supplementing prose descriptions with art, recorded music, or poetry is welcomed.

This project encourages descriptions to include details of sensation or emotion, which convey how it felt to have the experience. The goal is to allow readers to resonate with the experience, to come close to knowing what the experience feels like in the body of the writer. I am also interested in the thoughts, associations, and attributions of meaning which are involved in such experiences. Thus, I am asking writers to consider the following when describing their experience:

1. What specifically seemed to cause the experience (e.g., feelings of deep connection with the forest, or realizing that "my mountain" was now built up with houses)? Please describe the specific context of the experience in detail (e.g., "I had been hiking in the mountains, I sat down to rest on a rock, I noticed a lizard, and shut my eyes .

. . ," or "I really became aware that this forest may be cut down, and I felt as though I was about to lose . . . ," but with more detail.)

2. How did it feel to be you during this experience? What sensations were occurring? What emotions? What thoughts?

3. What meanings, if any, do you give the experience?

4. How, if at all, did the experience impact your life? Was there are effect upon your views, behaviors, or lifestyle?

The amount of time participants will devote to preparing their description will vary. I believe it likely that most participants will spend one-half to two hours writing their initial descriptions. After I receive your description, I may ask you to supplement it somewhat if I have questions about certain aspects of the description. This will likely involve briefly answering a few questions. If you do write something, and are interested in participating further in the project, I will make available a taped guided meditation to invite deeper focusing on the experience. I will then ask you to make note of any additional sensations, emotions, thoughts, or memories that arise. I would expect this process to take an additional couple of hours.

After I receive materials from several participants, I will draft a "composite experience" based upon my review of the experiences shared with me. I will also prepare a set of observations or interpretations of important elements of the experience. I will share my composite description and my interpretations with interested participants and aks for comment. I expect this process to take an additional hour of time from those interested in this aspect of the project.

The descriptions prepared by all participants will become part of the "results" of the dissertation. For protection of your privacy, I will not use your real name in publishing, reporting, or referencing your experience, unless you indicate your preference that I use your real name. At the end of this letter a place is provided for you to indicate a pseudonym for use in this study, or to request that your real name by used. If you do not indicate a choice on this point, I will select a pseudonym for use regarding your experience.

Your signature below indicates that you are comfortable with my use of any and all details about your experience which you share in this endeavor. If there are details about your experience you are not comfortable sharing, please feel free to disguise those details to protect your privacy, as long as you provide a description of your experience that you feel honors its essence.

Unless you request that I use your real name in this project, your identity will be kept confidential and all information received from you will be kept confidential as to source. I will keep the information in a private place in my home to which no one other than myself has access.

Prior research indicates that the reporting of experiences such as those I am requesting often serves to validate the importance of the experience. Your participation in this project may thus facilitate and deepen your understanding of the personal significance to you of the experience you describe.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. Disclosure of experiences studied in this project might cause a degree of anxiety for some people as

many people do not ordinarily share such experiences publicly. In addition, by their nature, such experiences may be uncomfortable or troubling in part. If at any time you have any concerns or questions, I will try to discuss them with you and give options for resolution.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me collect at ---------- or e-mail me at dufrechou@aol.com. You may also contact the Chair of my dissertation committee, Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D., at (650) 493-4430, who was also the head of the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology for the 1999-2000 academic year, when my Proposal was approved. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology assumes no responsibility for psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during this study without penalty or prejudice. Participation is entirely voluntary.

You may request a summary of the final research findings by letting me know of your interest. I plan, in any event, to share the pertinent results with all participants.

Thanks for your interest in this project. I am hopeful it will add to the understandings of humanity's place in nature and may suggest ideas relevant to present ecological and social problems felt by many. I also hope this study will be an enriching experience for participants.

Jay

I have read and understand this letter and have had any questions about this research answered to my satisfaction. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage my participation. My signature indicates my willingness to participate in this project as described above, including publication of my writings are provided to the researcher as described above.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Participant's Name Printed

I would like you to use my real name in the published study, as follows:

_____

_____

Signature

Please use this pseudonym for me in the study:

_____

Participant's mailing address:

_____

_____

Telephone (optional): _____

E-mail: _____

Appendix D: Meditation Transcript (Basic Form)

Hi____. This is Jay. This is a guided meditation I have prepared for you in connection with my dissertation project. I very much appreciate the description you have sent to me. I'm asking that you listen to this meditation and then write a bit more about your experience.

Please find a comfortable place to sit and relax. If you have particular place for meditating, you may want to use that place. If you mediate in a particular posture, you may find that posture comfortable for this meditation. If you need to turn off the tape recorder to find a comfortable place, please do that. You may also want to have a pen and paper ready, in case you want to jot anything down.

When you are settled, close your eyes and take a deep breath. Begin to relax. Notice your breathing and begin to place attention on your breathing. Feel the air coming in and going all the way down into your body, then turning around, and coming back out. Gently let your attention follow your breath. Your breathing may become more slow and relaxed as you follow your breath. Your breath may feel as though it is moving deeply into your body. Your breath brings in energy moving all through your body, into your chest, into your belly, down into your seat, and all through your body.

Notice any thoughts you are having, and gently let them go, returning attention to your breath. As you follow your breath, notice any thoughts that come and gently let them go, returning to your breath. The thoughts and concerns will take care of themselves later. For now, gently let them go and follow your breath.

Be aware of any sounds around you other than my voice. Notice the sounds and let them go, returning to your breath. Whatever sounds you hear will relax you further. Inhale and exhale, following your breath. Any thoughts, any stress, just gently notice them and let them go. You may notice a hum with this recording. Notice that and let it go as well.

Gently begin to be aware of your body. Notice the muscles in your face. Let your teeth part just a bit and relax this area. Sometimes the tension and stress gather in the jaw, so feel your mouth and jaw and let go of any tension you notice.

Feel your temples and your forehead. Begin to notice any tension in your temples and forehead and let it go. Notice your breathing, in and out, and breathe out any tension from your face, your jaw, your temples or your forehead.

Notice the muscles in the back of your neck and shoulders. Notice any stress in the back of your neck and shoulders and begin to let that go as well. Let all of the muscles in your shoulders, running down your arms to your fingertips, relax.

Notice your breath moving into your belly. Feel the breath coming into your lungs and reaching down into your belly. Notice your gut and how it feels. Notice any emotions, and feelings, and gently release them. Follow your breathing and gently notice and release anything you find in your belly.

Notice your chest. So much can be held in the chest. As your breath moves in and through your chest, notice whatever you hold in your chest, in your heart. Allow yourself to feel what is in your heart. Let your breath sustain and hold you, and feel what is in your heart. The breath will sustain and hold you and bring in sustenance.

Notice your legs and feet. Feel the breath moving into your legs and down into your feet, and turning and coming back out. Notice any tension in your legs and feet and gently let that go.

Continue to follow your breath, noticing the breath coming in and going out of your body. Be aware of your body and all that it contains, your sensations, your emotions, your thoughts. Be aware of all that it contains and let your breath sustain you.

Now, let me ask you to remember your experience of _____.

Let that experience return to your body. Imagine yourself in _____ when you were having this experience.

Describe details of setting per the description.

Ask to remember what it felt like to be there, what it felt like in the body.

Notice what else comes up for you. Make a note of it if you like.

Conclude: take a deep breath and begin to come back to the room.

Appendix E: Review and Resonance Letter

July 3, 2001

Dear

Enclosed is the first draft of the Results Chapter of my dissertation. I am sending this because most people helping with this project asked for a copy of results. I would also like to be sure you are "okay" your own contribution as it now appears. In many cases, I have slightly edited contributions, usually to save a bit of space or to make sure the writing style conforms to the general style of the dissertation. I have tried to preserve each person's individual voice and story, but I would like to be sure the final version feels right to you. I am certainly not asking at this point for additions, but I would welcome any changes you think are appropriate. Your contribution begins at page_____.

Assuming you have the time and interest, I would also very much appreciate your reading and commenting upon the "interpretative lenses" I have drafted, particularly those that relate to the section of the chapter into which your contribution falls. As you will note from the chapter's introductory paragraph, I have created eight sections as a means of assisting a read through the contributions. After each section are the "interpretative lenses" which represent my analysis or synthesis. These are very much a first draft. Any comments you make on these interpretations–ranging from "yes, right on" to "that's not it"–will be of enormous value to me. Indeed, the "science" of this type of project looks in part to your comments as a means of "validating" my analysis.

Assuming you have some time to help with this, the first request I would make (after you check your own contribution) would be that you read all the contributions in the section in which your story appears. Your section starts at page _____. After reading all the stories in your section, please then read the "interpretative lenses" for that section. Then please jot down your thoughts, agreements, disagreements, comments.

If you continue to have time and interest, I would *very* much appreciate your reading all of the stories in the chapter, all the interpretative lenses, and the Composite Story which appears at the end. The entire chapter is 86 pages long, so I completely understand that many contributors will not have the time to take this on. On the other hand, there is not one story in this chapter that did not move me, teach me, and interest me greatly. So, you may find the reading interesting and information. If you are able to digest the whole and send thoughts, your comments will greatly add to my dissertation.

I would ask that if possible, you give attention in the near future to your own contribution and let me know if it is all right. I hope to make final revisions in mid to late August, and to begin writing the Discussion Chapter, which would incorporate your general comments about the project, during September.

You can email your ideas to me at your convenience, at dufrechou@aol.com, or if you prefer or do not have email, please call me at ----------, or mail something to me. If you would like to send me extensive "hard" comments on a copy of the results chapter, let me know and I will send postage. Please note that I will be out of town from July 4 through July 18. Thus, if you communicate with me during that time, I will get back to you upon my return.

Again, thanks very much for your contribution to my dissertation.

Jay Dufrechou

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