

THE TEARS OF TELEMACHUS: AN INTUITIVE INQUIRY INTO
AWAKENING EMPATHY AND COMPASSION IN AT-RISK BOYS
THROUGH MENTORING AND THEIR WRITING

by

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Abstract

The Tears of Telemachus: An Intuitive Inquiry Into Awakening Empathy and Compassion in At-Risk Boys Through Mentoring and Their Writing

by

Jacob Shefa

This qualitative, intuitive inquiry resulted in the creation of an original *9 Gates of Mentoring* template. The study investigated how mentoring and writing can awaken empathy and compassion in 12 at-risk, 9th grade, teenage boys. The research also investigated a parallel process of awakening in the boys' mentor, the author of this study. Nine broad *preliminary* lenses were crafted to reflect the perceptual filters through which the joint odyssey of mentor and boys was undertaken. These preliminary lenses were then released as a second set of 12 *refined* lenses were crafted as a direct result of fieldwork. Finally, 9 *transformed* lenses became the *9 Gates of Mentoring*. Writing activities, individual mentoring sessions, weekly classes, group councils, and mindfulness meditations helped students to identify pathways for opening to empathy and compassion toward self and others, as well as illuminating obstacles to this awakening. A resonance panel of 3 members reviewed the introductory and results chapters, offering validation and critique of the study's efficacy. The boys' insights throughout the 16 weeks, catalyzing growth as demonstrated both in writings and live exchanges with their mentor, indicated that a character-education-based approach to writing served as an effective tool for discovering, quickening, and strengthening the qualities of both empathy and compassion. Educators new to these notions, as well as transpersonally inclined or transpersonally based educators, can employ these findings as a way to guide students toward empathy and

compassion, and to consider how the power of mentoring and writing can serve this awakening process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Mentors and elders are those who have awakened to their inner gifts and life callings. In learning to live with genuine purpose, they develop second sight and become able to perceive the gifted nature and natural inclinations of other people. In perceiving the god-given gifts of the youth they become midwives of the soul and “god-parents” in the original sense. (Meade, 2010, p. 112)

“Human beings, even when stripped of all we consider human dignity, even in the wake of a world mercilessly destroyed and left in wreaths of smoke, even when deeply wounded and scarred, can access the greater power of empathy” (Glaser, 2005, p. 7). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experience of the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys. This intuitive inquiry also investigates the efficacy of the writing process as a tool for catalyzing empathy and compassion in this population of boys. Finally, the study chronicles and illuminates the process of mentoring these challenging, inspiring adolescents and the parallel development of empathy and compassion in the boys’ mentor, who is also the author of this study. Presented in this dissertation is the *9 Gates of Mentoring*, an original template of the mentoring process that emerged through this research and was developed to chart the depth, complexity, and enormous potential in a successful mentoring relationship.

The three aspects of the study—the boys’ struggles with and journey toward empathy and compassion; an investigation into the power of writing as a tool for awakening empathy and compassion; and the parallel journey of the author of this study in his own engagement with these qualities—are interwoven to form a chronicle of the lived experience of empathy and compassion in the students and their mentor. Obstacles to such an awakening are also investigated.

The choice to focus the research on both empathy and compassion reflects the need for emotional balance in at-risk adolescent boys. Empathy is understood in this context to be the *receptive* capacity in a person that cognitively recognizes the feelings of self (self-empathy) and others and affectively attunes to those feelings (Dalai Lama & Eckman, 2008; Ladner, 1999; Rifkin, 2009), whereas compassion is the *active* capacity that is compelled to relieve the suffering of self (self-compassion) and others (Chodron, 1994; Germer, 2009; Glaser, 2005; Neff, 2011). The awakening at the center of this research is thus revealed as twofold: the receptive attunement of empathy and the active embodiment of compassion.

Teenage boys have been variously described as an isolated and defiant “tribe apart” (Hersch, 1999, p. 1) and, semi-humorously, as being “temporarily brain damaged” (Bradley, 2003, p. 134). With added risk factors such as incarcerated or otherwise absent parents, drug and gang involvement, or profound alienation from society in general, they have even been depicted as “violent zombies” (Cullen, 2009, p. 206). Contemporary portrayals of teenage boys hardly evoke an image of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddhist deity who had developed a vast sense of empathy and compassion for all sentient beings (Glaser, 2005; Ladner, 2004); yet, teenage boys have *also* been portrayed as “wanting wisdom” (Fox, 2006, p. 9), as beings who “shimmer with life” (Taffel, 2005, p. 7), and as coming to a counseling or mentoring encounter “yearning to be made visible” (R. Frankel, 1998, p. 4).

A challenge that lies at the heart of this dissertation is the fact that although empathy and compassion are almost universally depicted as essential qualities of an evolving human being (K. Armstrong, 2010; Campbell, 1947; Fox, 2006; Glaser, 2001) and as a central stage of awakening in the core of models of spiritual development East and West (K. Armstrong, 2010; Murphy, 1993; Wilber, 2001), the American educational system, with its intensive focus on intellectual

knowledge, largely marginalizes or even ignores this aspect of youth development. A question that haunts this research is: What price is being paid for holding to a model of education that marginalizes or ignores the need for developing empathy and compassion in our youth?

Fortunately, through new developments in American education, including the incorporation of social and emotional learning skills (Goleman, 1995; Kessler, 2000; Lantieri, 2001) and the beginnings of inclusion of such activities as mindfulness and compassion training in K-12 education (Greenland, 2010; Schoeberlein, 2009; Willard, 2010), an expanding perspective is emerging, at least in part, in which the learning of a new ABC—attention, balance, compassion (Greenland, 2010)—or 3 Rs—relationship, reflection, resilience (Siegel, 2010)—or 10 Cs—contemplation, character, cosmology, chaos, compassion, creativity, community, critical-consciousness, courage, and ceremony-celebration (Fox, 2006)—begins to offer an alternative vision to the largely cognitive emphasis of traditional K-12 curricula. This current research is an attempt to add to what one might call a transpersonal infusion into mainstream K-12 education a voice that honors the spiritual dimensions of human existence (Johnson, 2001; Kessler, 2000; Miller, 2000). Additionally, a nationwide red-alert regarding what has been called an epidemic of bullying among children and adolescents is revealing the urgent need for a balance between IQ-heavy intellectual learning and EQ-rich emotional intelligence skills attainment (Cullen, 2009; Lantieri, 2001; Meade, 2010; Sax, 2007). Such an expanded vision of education is especially needed for at-risk teenage boys who are experiencing increasing disenfranchisement and disconnection from our educational system (Sax, 2007; Tyre, 2008).

From violent zombies to shining beings, the dramatic spectrum of teenage boys' abysmal and stellar qualities invites an inquiry into the perceptual and attitudinal filters through which the mentor—or any educator—beholds these boys. Fundamental to this study of mentoring, and

considered a critical determinant in terms of the quality and efficacy of the mentoring relationship, is the question of how a mentor beholds (apprehends), holds (compassionately contains), and upholds (champions) his mentees. These perceptual and experiential lenses that he brings to his encounter with them inform the atmosphere within which the potentially healing or potentially toxic meeting can unfold.

As mythologist and long-time at-risk youth-worker Michael Meade (2010; Meade, Somé, Rodriguez, Kornfield, & Bishop, 2002) and other innovative youth-workers (Cousineau, 2001; Somé, 1995; Stephenson, 2006) have poignantly observed, and as the following research affirms, a sometimes hidden aspect of mentoring is its potential for reawakening the mentor's *own* emotional wounds as well as heralding the potential transformation of those same wounds; this process becomes a source of mentor development. Speaking for the male mentor, in opening himself to meet the boys in all their shining potential and their capacity for violence to self and others, a resonant reservoir of the mentor's own wounding is revealed, often in relation to the same troublesome areas of life with which his mentees are struggling. In the case of the present study, mentoring these boys catalyzed a search into the origins, one might say the etiology of empathy and compassion's *absence* in this researcher's own life; a search that became interwoven with an inner tracing of the origins of my own call to mentoring. This ultimately transformative journey was undertaken while I underwent a prolonged initiation into loss, sorrow, and grief concurrent with leading this odyssey to empathy and compassion with my mentees. In fact, a spiral of regeneration, involving a new awakening of my own empathy and compassion, began in earnest during my semester-long encounter with these boys.

This study embraces *both* the peril and the promise of at-risk teenage boys' lives. It reveals troubling social and emotional fault lines that can appear in the absence of empathy and

compassion (Garbarino, 1999; Kipnis, 1999), from a general state of disconnection to self and others (Garbarino, 1999; Kipnis, 1999), to bullying (Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009), to outright violence (Cullen, 2009; Garbarino, 1999). The study, however, points simultaneously toward the capacity for a quickened awareness of the inner lives of self and other that can arise when empathy and compassion begin to awaken.

In my work over the past decade as a counselor, mentor, and teacher to teenage boys in public middle and high schools and in high schools within juvenile halls, culminating in the present study, I repeatedly experienced the hollowness in the absence of empathy and compassion as well as the connection and enlivenment that comes in those moments when both qualities awaken in these same boys. I observed how these challenging adolescents often adopt a too-cool-to-care persona, donning a seemingly impenetrable mask crafted in the shadows of agonizing wounds within. These are the boys who often laugh at violence and who can even watch a brutal murder on film, only to emerge with the comment, “Wow, that was cool!”; yet one would be foolish to miss the cry of anguish and the call for guidance and mentoring that lies within their impulsive, sometimes brutal behaviors.

In the 2002 *Genius of Mentoring* symposium conducted by Meade, among other innovative mentors of at-risk youth, African tribesman and mythological scholar Malidoma Somé, characterized these brutal or violent behaviors as being “commensurate with the wound within” (Meade et al., 2002, track 2). When the cry and call within that wound is met by the compassionate presence of a mentor, these same afflictions—stemming from abuses of various kinds suffered throughout childhood, from continual failure at school, or a broader, pervasive sense of unworthiness—can become the very birthplace of empathy and compassion in these boys. Echoing a perennially mythic theme of wounds-turning-to-blessings, one of the boys in

this study, Arrow, who had witnessed his brother being stabbed in a gang retaliation, told me, “I dreamt a garden was growing from my brother’s belly. It was so weird; because beautiful music was coming out of his wound.” Through mentoring and writing, as this traumatized young man worked through his unprocessed grief after witnessing the near-death of his brother, he experienced a tentative awakening of empathy and a stirring of compassion as he considered the anguished scene from multiple perspectives.

Phil Cousineau, one of whose principal mentors was the eminent mythologist and cartographer of *The Hero’s Journey*, Joseph Campbell (1947), wrote, “The true mentor, the soul guide, sends his or her pupil in search of the story that will reach the heart” (as cited in Cousineau, 2001, p. 125), intimating the link between telling (or writing) one’s story and an awakening to empathy and compassion. Transpersonal educator Christopher Bache (2008) has written movingly about the dynamic, palpable fields of energy, which he calls *The Living Classroom*, in which such transformative learning encounters take place. In a potent mentoring relationship, the living qualities of empathy and compassion may be quickened, potentially transforming both student and mentor as each finds new levels of storied awakening. Such an encounter can be life changing for both student and mentor. As transformational educator Parker Palmer (2007) wrote,

Mentoring is a mutuality that requires more than meeting the right teacher: the teacher must meet the right student. In this encounter, not only are the qualities of the mentor revealed, but the qualities of the student are drawn out in a way that is equally revealing. (p. 22)

Intriguingly, Palmer’s depiction of mentoring evokes the ancient meanings of the word *education*, from the Latin, *educere*, “to lead, to draw out that which is within, and *educare* meaning ‘to shape, to mold’; i.e. to bring to light what is hidden, to render actual what is only potential, to develop” (Assagioli, 1968a, p. 2).

Humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow (1970) suggested that one important purpose of education is to help children to look within and, from that encounter, to begin to develop a set of values. Transpersonal psychologist Frances Vaughan (1974) claimed that “transpersonal education, like science, is concerned with knowledge and discovery of truth” (p. 1). Depth psychotherapist and former Catholic monk Thomas Moore, echoing his mentor James Hillman’s (1996) *acorn theory of the soul* (see Chapter 2), asserted,

In its deepest form, education is the art of enticing the soul to emerge from its cocoon, from its coil of potentiality and its cave of hiding. Education is not the piling on of learning, information, data, facts, skills, or abilities—that’s training or instructing—but is rather a making visible what is hidden as a seed. (Moore, 1996, p. 3)

An awakened quest for values, knowledge, and truth is urgently needed by today’s at-risk boys, who lack a purposeful compass to navigate adolescence, in the absence of which at-risk behaviors can flourish. Appearing in schools throughout the United States are new programs that emphasize social and emotional learning and the importance of emotional intelligence, utilizing such transpersonal tools as mindfulness meditation, group councils, and imaginative writing that may serve to craft this compass, helping the ship of adolescence to steer clear of risky behaviors (Greenland, 2010; Kessler, 2000; Lantieri, 2001). The *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program, which was the intervention utilized for the present study, aspired to be one such tool.

One key setting for this purposeful compass is the felt experience of empathy and compassion toward self and others, as it brings connection and a sense of meaningful encounter, yet many young boys, including some who participated in this study, often show little inclination to learn about and experience empathy and compassion and even question the need for having a rich feeling life (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Pollack, 1998). Like Telemachus, the disaffected son of Odysseus, whom the reader meets at the very beginning of Homer’s (1998) *Odyssey*, these boys often lack will or motivation to engage fully in the passage from adolescence toward

manhood, a key part of which involves a willingness to undergo an education of the heart. Often, they may even appear to be virtually bereft of empathy or compassion toward themselves or toward others (Garbarino, 1999; Kipnis, 1999); yet, like their ancient counterpart Telemachus, in struggling to articulate their pain and longing for connection as well as the experience of a meaningful mentoring encounter, the very absence of empathy and compassion can become the site of their awakening.

Another reason for their reluctance may be an education system that focuses predominantly on intellectual learning—an abstract, from-the-neck-up approach that may even allow the boys to continue in their disconnected state, especially because school is designed to control and predict, and the awakening of these qualities is often messy and unpredictable (Meade, 2010; Sax, 2007). Although educators recognize increasingly that the American system may be narrowing our boys' larger education by not honoring this part of their development (Tyre, 2008; Whitmire, 2010), a reluctance to opening these floodgates persists. In the case of boys who are having and causing trouble in many instances, what could happen if they actually became in touch with their wounds? One earnest high-school principal told me when I proposed conducting the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program at his school, "It's all very well, these boys 'finding their stories,' just tell me how it's going to raise their test scores" (personal communication, 2009). Yet, a meta-analysis of 213 school-based universal social and emotional learning programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high-school students actually showed an 11-percentile-point gain in *academic achievement* (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011).

Working with at-risk teenage boys during the past 9 years and culminating in this study, I arrived at a series of core questions about the challenges as well as the possibilities inherent in

mentoring at-risk boys. Looking back, I realize that these broader questions, unanswerable in their totality, were already beckoning me toward the heuristic depths of an intuitive inquiry into these matters. The nature of these questions could be likened to a process of deeply wondering about the role that mentoring, along with writing, might play in such a transpersonal approach to education as well as pondering my own call to mentor. Heuristic researcher Clark Moustakas (1990) explained,

Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal significance. (p. 15)

Although some of my questions go back a number of years preceding my formal research, each of them was re-enlivened through the process of my study. Including these questions in this introduction to the study is intended to reveal how the threads that wove the path into this intuitive inquiry began long before the formal research process began:

1. As Hillman (1996), inspired by a myth from Plato, noted when he wrote that “each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived” (p. 4), is each boy on Earth for a specific purpose, representing a unique seed that, if allowed to flower, has an appointment with destiny?
2. If the above is true, can authentic mentoring serve as one aspect of that appointment, providing the necessary atmosphere and agency that might serve this soul-quickenning function?
3. Are the qualities of empathy and compassion fading or receding in teenage boys?
4. Are empathy and compassion transferable qualities that can be imparted from one life to another?

5. Is there or can there be a *barakah* (blessing), as the Sufis call it (Frager, 1999; Helminski, 1992): a transfer of spiritual substance in a blessing-flow of empathy and compassion through the mentoring connection?
6. Traditionally, one thinks of empathy and compassion as qualities that flow outward to others. Does that outward flow first require the awakening of an inward flow, *self*-empathy or *self*-compassion?
7. In what ways can the writing process serve as a medium for connecting to the qualities of empathy and compassion? In what ways are empathy and compassion master keys to effective writing?
8. What are the specific natures of the wounding experiences that damage, crush, or destroy empathy and compassion in teenage boys?
9. How does the living quality of empathy and compassion in the life of a mentor impact teenage boys?

These nine questions formed a substrate of inquiry that called for both deepening and clarification, eventually leading to my undertaking this research about the roots and potential flowering of at-risk adolescents through a mentoring relationship. In Homer's (1996) *Odyssey*, it is Telemachus' encounter with Mentor, the wise elder charged by Odysseus to guide his son in the father's absence, that catalyzes Telemachus' journey of transformation. The image of the *tears* of Telemachus from the title of this dissertation is a mythic metaphor with regard to teenage boys' awakening to empathy and compassion, with the tears symbolizing the catharsis, opening, and flowing of these qualities.

The present study focuses on the journey to such an awakening, using the stories and experience of 12 at-risk ninth-grade boys, ages 14-15, who participated in a semester-long

character education and writing intervention program for at-risk high school students. The *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program in which the boys participated served over 4,000 students over a span of 9 years and currently operates under the new name of *Wisdom Writers*. The boys, my coresearchers, were selected from a group of students in a self-contained school-within-a-school program located in a public school in the Southern California desert, in which two-thirds of the daily curriculum focused solely on writing, reading, and math. *Odyssey Writes of Passage* was introduced into the school-within-a-school program precisely because the administration and faculty recognized that the boys' behavioral challenges, struggles with writing, and lack of positive role models required an additional intervention.

Over the 9 years preceding this research, the demographic breakdown of the boys attending the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program was approximately 5% African American, 58% Hispanic, and 37% White or other. One key aspiration of the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program was to catalyze movement toward empathy and a turn toward compassion through brief, introductory-level mindfulness meditation and guided imagery sessions, group councils, and, most relevant to the focus of this study, ongoing writing activities. Also employed were the following: mini wisdom lessons, short lectures drawn from greatly simplified teachings from mindfulness literature, highlighting the need for developing moment-to-moment awareness toward attaining greater presence and focus both academically and in life; psychosynthesis, emphasizing development of awareness of subpersonalities within the journey to the transpersonal Self; logotherapy, focused on the exploration of meaning and purpose in human life; and compassion teachings from various spiritual and literary traditions, illuminating the power of connectedness and kindness toward self and others. The 12 boys received 30-minute (approximately), one-on-one mentoring sessions with me, the *Odyssey* mentor, four times

throughout the 16-week period. These mentoring sessions were provided to help each student identify developmental themes, goals, and challenges, with a specific focus on nascent threads of empathy and compassion that emerged from the student's individual writing as well as their participation and experience in the classes.

Overall, the study explored ways that the awakening of empathy and compassion could be invited, inspired, and fostered in at-risk teenage boys. The process of writing was considered a sound vehicle for the potential manifestation of this revivifying process. Finally, in accord with the emphasis placed by the methodology of intuitive inquiry on the researcher's own involvement (Anderson, 1998, 2006, 2011), the study examined the parallel processes within the life of a transpersonally oriented mentor in guiding this awakening.

The word *Odyssey* was chosen in naming this program in order to connect participating teens to a sense of quest, as in Homer's *Odyssey*, in which both father, Odysseus, and teenage son, Telemachus, are journeying through thrilling and sometimes perilous adventures toward psychological and spiritual maturity. The phrase *Writes of Passage* was chosen to invoke the sense of the ancient cycle of a *rite* of passage (Campbell, 1947; Eliade, 1965; Stephenson, 2006; van Gennep, 1908/2004) that awaited adolescents as they moved toward maturity.

Finally, the W was added to *rite*, to stand for *Writing*, in reference to the boys' use of writing as a central vehicle to chronicle their *rite* of passage into empathy, compassion, and, ultimately, maturity—hence, *Odyssey Writes of Passage*. Writing has been central to high-school education; however, as taught in most American public school settings, it has become anathema to many adolescent boys (Fletcher, 2006; Newkirk, 2002). This study concurs with the opinion of high-school writing instructor Ralph Fletcher (2006), who warned, “We simply cannot afford to write off a generation of boy writers. Writing is a skill that no student, no citizen, can do

without” (p. 15). In the approach taken for this study, the act of writing was presented as a tool for discovering the truths of the heart and a vehicle for giving them voice.

During the past decade, when I would begin conducting the program with a new group of students, my common practice was to ask, “How many of you ever had to write essays about something in which you have absolutely no interest?” Consistently, with no hesitation, nearly 100% of the hands were raised. The very word *essay*, with its origin in the French word *essayer*, meaning “to attempt” (Essay, 2013), often evoked enormous resistance in my students. To instead regard writing as a sort of rite imparts some sense of the art and craft of writing as a *process*—one that is potentially interesting, possibly even healing, rather than a product disgorged or disposed of in order to receive a grade. Intimating to the boys that the considerations of their own minds and the reflections from their hearts, had value and could even partake of the sacred, served to recast the act of writing as an adventure into self-discovery and self-expression.

The ancient counterparts of my coresearchers underwent *rites* of passage that often included terrifying *physical* encounters and challenges (Stephenson, 2006; Turner, 1987; van Gennep, 1908/2004). The *rite* of passage undertaken by my coresearchers was aimed instead toward an initiation into *emotional* connectivity and depth, yet both their ancient counterparts and my coresearchers faced danger. Both groups had to summon courage, resolve, and belief. Both groups experienced varying degrees of insight and illumination at the culmination of their quest. Only the tools used and the terrain traversed by these ancient and modern questers were different. Setting the stage by utilizing evocative music as a background for timed writings and emphasizing the quest to find one’s own true voice were ways that were utilized in this intervention to bypass the spell of boredom that often wraps boys in resistance and apathy.

“I have a voice. It is ancient, it is new. It is mine,” wrote one of the boys in this study. Likewise, one of the reflections I received several times from boys over the years was that the *Odyssey* class was the first time they felt that their own thoughts were truly heard, not to mention that an elder, a mentor, a teacher actually showed respect for and even honored their minds. In the realm of public school education, where the sheer volume of information processed—or attempted to be processed—contributes to what one high-school teacher and writer termed “readicide, the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 2), the experience of slowing down to behold the contents of one’s own mind with a sense of wonder and even respect allows the possibility of another level of education. Revolutionary creation spirituality teacher and education reformer Matthew Fox (2006) suggested that “wisdom is what young people and adults want” (p. 9), yet lamented, “Unfortunately, neither young people nor adults are acquiring wisdom from most school systems” (p. 9). Fox (2006) also considered the development of compassion to be central to educating our youth (p. 9).

Although transpersonal studies have minimally addressed adolescent development and education, one transpersonally oriented youth-worker who has mentored high-risk teenage boys for more than two decades, Bret Stephenson (2006), in his book *From Boys to Men: Spiritual Rites of Passage in an Indulgent Age* wrote,

Weaving in the concepts of transpersonal psychology . . . creates a very powerful and healthy way to work with adolescent boys. . . . Because they are archetypal and have been used by many cultures over many centuries, they are time-tested. (p. 183)

The following study explores the practical utility and potent transformative power of bringing both a transpersonal perspective and a set of transpersonal tools to this work with at-risk boys. In her book, *Psychosynthesis in Education*, psychosynthesis counselor and educator Diana

Whitmore (1986) wrote, “It is only through an awakening of the transpersonal dimension that the answers to many of the most profound existential questions of adolescence may be found” (p. 166). At the heart of this infusion of transpersonal energies and intelligence is the education of the heart, central to which is the awakening of empathy and compassion. Addressing this educational task, the Dalai Lama (1999) stated,

From my rough impression of the Western educational system, although it is very impressive to see the high standard of the facilities, the many material resources, and the perfection of so many different aspects of intellectual development, the thing that seems to be lacking is the dimension of enhancing and developing the heart. The questions we must ask are how to promote these other human values. How to teach the development of a good heart? (p. 87)

A boy in whom empathy has begun to awaken is one who is beginning to access emotional intelligence, or EQ, which includes self-awareness: the ability to manage emotions, empathy, motivation, and social skills (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Daniel Goleman (1995), author of the groundbreaking book, *Emotional Intelligence*, regarded the awakening of empathy as the foundation for the development of EQ. Goleman (1995) also suggested that the awakening of empathy is a journey that begins with empathy for oneself, which is referred to in this dissertation as *self-empathy* and is regarded as the ability both to know and to feel one’s own feelings. In working with at-risk boys, many of whom may appear disconnected from their feelings and emotions, self-empathy can awaken and quicken a flow of cognitive and affective awareness about one’s own felt experience in the moment. Within the flow of that awakening or stirring, empathy may then begin to move more freely toward others. Goleman (1995) wrote that “the more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings” (p. 96) in others. This movement from self-empathy into empathy for others, which Goleman (1995) calls *attunement*, leads to “real listening, to taking another person’s perspective” (p. 285). He added, “Empathy, as we have seen, leads to caring, altruism,

and compassion” (Goleman, 1995, p. 285). Psychologist James Garbarino (1999), who works with extremely violent and incarcerated teens, challenged, however, that “most violent boys have a history of dissociation, the emotionally self-protective strategy of choice for children facing trauma. . . . This adaptation shuts off and compartmentalizes feelings, and very likely inhibits empathy” (p. 138). By way of illustration, throughout journalist Dave Cullen’s (2009) study of the Columbine High School massacre, *Columbine*, written after a decade of reflection on its causes, the author frequently cites the chilling absence of empathy in the two killers, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

In 9 years of conducting the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program and in the research for this study, between the beginning of September 2010 through the end of field work in January 2011, chronicled in this dissertation, I witnessed both ends of the spectrum: the haunting absence of empathy in some boys as well as the deeply moving awakening of empathy in boys who, mythically speaking, cried the tears of Telemachus and went from being deeply wounded and guarded to connecting to a sense of empathy and even compassion.

The boys who were coresearchers for this current study stood at a crossroads in which the awakening of empathy and the stirring of compassion beckoned to help them to move from at-risk to at-promise. The term *at-promise* has gradually entered middle and high school educational terminology over the past decade. Although a classification of *at-risk* can be limiting, if not damaging (as well as somewhat generic and nonspecific), the term *at-promise* seems to be a tacit admission that we need not identify our students solely through their past transgressions; instead, we can uphold expectations and even beckon a sense of hope and belief for what they might become. In fact, holding and beholding these boys as at-promise is itself a potent teleological stance or alignment that is part of my transpersonal toolkit as a mentor.

Perhaps, as Michael Meade (2010) proposed, the essential mentoring task is precisely to excavate the promise that lies within the risk:

The inevitable troubles of youth are a kind of second labor of life intended to lead to a revelation of the inner nature and innate gifts of the soul. . . . Each child may be a gift to its people, but each can become a burden to the community until their inner abilities are found and used. Young people need hints of their inherent orientation to life or they can become rebellious in the wrong direction or else passive consumers at the table of life. (p. 108)

Holding a vision of the potential bridge between risk and promise helps to create and strengthen the living field of connection between mentor and student, beckoning these boys to become empathic, compassionate young men. The mentor literally holds a sense of the promise these boys represent, while being mindful of their wounds—as did Mentor, through whom Athena spoke when the elder challenged Telemachus to awaken from his wasteland slumber (Homer, 1996). In doing so, the mentor has to be willing to stand in a place *betwixt and between*—a perennial term for the liminal, developmental location of initiation (Turner, 1987)—upholding a vision of noble character that is often masked within afflictive behaviors.

Finally, in working with at-risk boys, many of whom have the untamed ferocity of a warrior lacking the guidance and discipline to tame his fire, mentoring involves helping them to realize also the *passionate* aspect of empathy and compassion, ushering them into a heartfelt connection with their own and others' feelings (empathy) and an awakening determination to relieve suffering in self and others (compassion). In taking up such a courageous stance, their fierce yet tender hearts are invited into the educational journey, as they join a lineage that extends through such potent warriors of compassion as Odysseus and Telemachus, each of whose mythic journey moves them closer to healing their hearts; King Arthur and Merlin in the quest for the holy grail; Arjuna, the hero of the *Bhagavad Gita*, who, standing on the battlefield,

dares to open to the blazing heart of compassion and commitment to life; as well as such religious icons as Jesus and Buddha, both of whom were spiritual warriors of the heart.

When these tales are presented as mythic embodiments of a hero's journey rather than as religious indoctrination, the boys can begin to recognize the level of passion, precision, and intensity that is required for the awakening and expression of genuine empathy and compassion as well as the sheer grit that is sometimes required in facing and responding unflinchingly to suffering, within and without. Through opening to a mentoring relationship that champions these qualities and through engaging in a writing process that fosters the development of empathy and compassion, their (w)rite of passage invites emotional intelligence, the wisdom of the heart, into their educational odyssey. Rather than empathy and compassion being dismissed as *soft* qualities that the boys cannot relate to or see as attractive or useful, through these inspirational, mythic examples, such an alignment honors their budding warrior energies, and even their latent wish to be of service to others, while inviting them into connection to their deeper self.

Three Central Research Questions

The three central research questions addressed by this study were the following:

1. What is the lived experience of the awakening of empathy and compassion in 12 at-risk teenage boys who participated in a semester-long character education and writing intervention program designed to foster this awakening?
2. How can the process of writing serve to awaken and foster empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys?
3. What was the corresponding or parallel-lived experience of the development of empathy and compassion in the mentor who is facilitating the process of these 12 at-risk teenage boys?

Intuitive Inquiry Research Method

Transpersonal theorist and creator of the intuitive inquiry research method, Rosemarie Anderson (1998), wrote that “intuitive research methods emphasize the unique and personal voice of the individual researcher and depend on the experiences and insights of the researcher at every phase of the research process” (p. 75). This current study provided rich opportunities for both the researcher and his coresearchers to excavate, explore, and express this unique voice as it emerged through both individual and group practices.

Intuition, from the Latin, *intuitus*, pertains to direct perception of knowledge (Anderson, 2011, p. 19). In “bringing the compassionate heart to scientific inquiry,” said Anderson (1998b, p. 71), intuitive inquiry is “a search for new understandings through the focused attention of one researcher’s passion and compassion for her or himself, others and the world” (Anderson, 2011, p. 17). This relatively recent approach to transpersonal research was particularly suited for this study as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of what one might call the *inner odyssey* into empathy and compassion that simultaneously unfolded within the boys and within me as their mentor.

In fact, given the intensive, initiatory journey that I underwent throughout the study (and beyond, throughout the writing of this dissertation), the choice of this method proved to be a perfect vessel for holding, informing, and enlightening this process. Intuitive inquiry also invited an exploration of the lived experience of the intimate encounter at the heart of mentoring. Anderson (2006) wrote, “Through *empathetic* identification or *compassionate* knowing writers, actors, psychotherapists, and scientists inhabit the lived world of another person or object of study” (p. 8, emphasis added).

One of the transpersonal tools that Anderson developed out of the intuitive inquiry method and that is infused into my reports on the mentoring encounter (selected portions of *Mentor's Journal*) is that of embodied writing, a method for endeavoring to capture the inner essence of a given experience. As Anderson (2001) defined it, embodied writing

brings the finely textured experience of the body to the art of writing. Relaying human experience *from the inside out* and entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world, embodied writing affirms human life as embedded in the sensual world in which we live our lives. (p. 83)

My personal approach to embodied writing for this research included an embrace of the spiritual, depicted as a living, unfolding presence in the lives of the boys and their mentor, which imbued the mentoring encounter with moments of deep silence, awe, and wonder.

Intuitive inquiry also embraces the richness of paradox, allowing an honored place for *tricksterism*, where, according to Anderson (1998b), “auspicious bewilderment may signal the beginning of renewed understanding” (p. 84). The appearance of Trickster, where “confusion takes us in unanticipated directions” (Anderson, 1998b, p. 84) sounds almost like a course description of the thrilling and sometimes perilous path that I experienced unfolding with these promising young boys. It would also be accurate to say that it is the empathic attunement of mentors *themselves* that guides their shape-shifting into Trickster, the better to capture the attention of their mercurial mentees. Mentors’ willingness to be shape-shifted into whatever is required in order to serve their mentees is what makes them fit vessels for this trickster energy. As I worked with the boys, it was often not my attainment but my desperation to reach the boys that invited Trickster and his shape-shifting energies. Compassion for the suffering and the sublime masked within the boys’ problematic behaviors inspired new creative approaches to mentoring in order to connect and to guide our odyssey.

The Trickster aspect of this intuitive inquiry also appeared throughout the research and writing odysseys in the way my own life unfolded. As I continually set and reset the firm intention to understand and experience as large a depth and scope of empathy and compassion as possible, I discovered it was as if a greater wisdom, my own Athena connection (Athena being the inner presence who inhabits Mentor in Homer's [1998] *Odyssey*), so to speak, responded by saying, "I will first give you a stunning encounter of empathy and compassion's *absence* in your own life, in which you will be given the learning opportunity to experience what happens in this absence." From this standpoint, perhaps the only essential difference between myself and the boys was that I was able to say "yes" to the wound—the painful recognition of empathy and compassion's absence—which affirmation signaled a breaking *open* rather than a breaking *down*. This wound began to transform into the blessings of my own awakening empathy and compassion only through the systematic application of my own transpersonal practices: central to which was journal writing interlaced with embodied writing; mindfulness meditation; the Tibetan Buddhist compassion practice of *tonglen*, which involves a deep acceptance of the suffering inherent in existence; an ongoing imaginal dialogue process with my own inner mentor; and other practices outlined in the Literature Review and Method chapters of this dissertation. As Jungian scholar and psychotherapist Robert Romanyshyn (2007) wrote, "The work that the researcher is called to do makes sense of the researcher as much as he or she makes sense of it" (p. 113).

Chapter 2 of this dissertation presents a literature review followed by a discussion of research methods in Chapter 3. The literature review provides an overview of mentoring as well as adolescent development theories, both modern (Freud, Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and others) and ancient or perennial models (rites of passage, the hero's journey). The literature

review also considers the contributions of Roberto Assagioli's (1975) theory and practice of psychosynthesis and Viktor Frankl's (1946/1978) logotherapy, two approaches that offer the richness of transpersonal insight and a wealth of practical tools to help at-risk boys, although to date, they have been only minimally used in the field of adolescent development, especially in the arena of public education. Hillman's acorn theory of development is also considered.

Neurobiological correlates and ancient approaches to the states of empathy and compassion such as those found in Buddhism and other spiritual philosophies are also introduced through a consideration of relevant studies. A review of innovative programs for teens that utilize such transpersonal approaches to education as mindfulness training, empathy development, and compassion training is offered to illustrate a recent, promising move toward a broadening and deepening definition of education that embraces the education of the heart.

Chapter 3, Cycle 1 and 2, on method, presents a description of the recruitment of participants, or coresearchers, for the study. Also described are the overall design of the study including its qualitative tools of assessment, unique components such as the inclusion of writings from the students (with permission from the boys and their parents), and an ongoing *Mentor's Journal* that chronicles my journey as mentor in my encounter with these boys in their odyssey toward empathy and compassion.

Chapter 3 thoroughly outlines the five unique cycles of intuitive inquiry as illuminated by Anderson (1998b, 2011). The chapter also contains both my Cycle 1 intuitive inquiry process of clarifying and focusing the research topic and my Cycle 2 intuitive inquiry process of identifying and articulating the preliminary lenses through which the topic was viewed before engaging with my coresearchers.

Chapter 4, Cycle 3, presents the results of the study based on my original fieldwork with my coresearchers. This Cycle 3 process of gathering original data contains depictions of my opening, ongoing, and concluding mentoring moments with my coresearchers; select writings by my coresearchers, interlaced with mentor commentary excerpted from my field journal; and two distinct sections that chronicle my own transformative journey as mentor during the time of the research, a journey that included the deaths of both my father and mother as well as the shattering of my marriage of 23 years. In chronicling my own story during this research period, I seek to embody Anderson's (1998b) suggestion:

Like heuristic methods, intuitive research methods emphasize the unique and personal voice of the individual researcher and depend on the experiences and insights of the researcher at every phase of the research process. The depth of the researcher's intuitive understanding gives a universal voice and character to the research findings. (p. 75)

Chapter 5, Cycle 4, presents, summarizes, and then synthesizes the collected data. Discussion includes revisiting my original, preliminary lenses regarding the research, offers refining lenses, and presents my final set of transformed lenses, which manifested an original mentoring template derived from this work, entitled *The 9 Gates of Mentoring*.

Finally, Chapter 5, Cycle 5, concludes the research, discussing successes and challenges encountered, suggesting possible future research avenues to be explored, and considering the usefulness of my research as an original contribution to transpersonal psychology. Cycle 5 also includes the reflections and experiences of a "resonance panel" (Anderson & Broad, 2011, p. 297). The panel utilized experts in the field of education, at-risk youth, and trauma who were drawn to investigate new approaches to working with at-risk teens. The purpose of the panel was to probe for sympathetic resonance, or the lack of it, which would be a challenge to validity. The entire dissertation then concludes with a closing reflection.

Introductory Reflection

Depth psychologist and Buddhist compassion teacher Aura Glaser (2005) wrote the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter: “Human beings, even when stripped of all we consider human dignity, even in the wake of a world mercilessly destroyed and left in wreaths of smoke, even when deeply wounded and scarred, can access the greater power of empathy” (pp. 6-7).

Based on my 9 years serving as mentor of the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program that culminated with this research, I was not surprised that, like me, several of the boys in this study had also experienced or witnessed various traumas in their lives such as the death or serious illness of a parent, the near-death of a brother to violence, and physical and emotional abuse, to name just a few of their struggles. Equally important, several boys arrived at the threshold of this odyssey disconnected and dispirited and thus too weary to feel empathy toward self or others, let alone the energizing fire of compassion.

This study researched how, through the application of a compassionately mentored intervention, these boys might, like the fabled phoenix, rise from the ashes, empathy awakened, with the gate to compassion for self and others now opening into life. It also investigated a parallel process of awakening in their mentor, while considering the subtle relationship between these dual awakenings. Movements toward awakening were also often revealed to have cul-de-sacs and blocks along the way, which one might call incursions of Trickster. Anderson (1998b) observed, “In indigenous cultures worldwide, tricksters open gateways of awareness and insights.

. . . Confusion takes us in an unanticipated direction” (p. 84). Such auspicious bewilderment occurred frequently throughout this research along with many instances when bearing witness to the *absence* of these qualities was an equally significant phase of the journey. As one of my

coresearchers, Arrow, wrote, “I breathed in deadness—but suddenly felt . . . alive.” In its most potent and poignant moments, the helix experiences of mentor and mentee formed an alchemical elixir of awakening to empathy and compassion that was exciting and held promise for the possibilities of breathing the transpersonal into the education and formation of at-risk/at-promise teenage boys.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This review of literature begins with a set of operational definitions of key concepts—empathy, compassion, at-risk, mentor, and transpersonal—central to the research. It then moves into an exploration of empathy and compassion from the dual viewpoints of psychology and neurobiology. Compassion is also briefly considered through the lens of religion, specifically highlighting an emerging convergence of observations on the topic, between Buddhist wisdom, mindfulness studies, and ongoing psychological and neurobiological researches. (Note: Having only first come into usage in the early 20th century, there is no exact equivalent for the word *empathy* in ancient writings.) This tracing of empathy and compassion through different disciplines is followed by a review of mentoring that ranges from the present to its ancient appearance in myth, particularly Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*, which is the origin of the word *mentor*. This explorative review is followed by an overview of theories on adolescent development, including the perennial model of the rite of passage and the hero's journey as articulated by Campbell (1947) and others who have applied the hero's journey model therapeutically (Larsen, 1990; Stephenson, 2006) in their approaches to working with teens. A special section of the literature review that follows highlights the significant contributions of Meade and other innovative mentors who work with his Mosaic Multicultural Foundation in redefining and embodying mentorship in light of myth, wisdom traditions, and transpersonal psychology. Recent programs for adolescents, whether school-based or extracurricular, are also considered, especially in regard to their potential for awakening empathy and compassion in youth.

Also considered in this review is the Gnosis model, created by transpersonal scholar and practitioner Robert Hutchins (2002) as an alternative to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR; APA, 2000)* to provide a psychospiritual assessment tool which focuses on positive resiliency factors such as gifts and assets. Positively oriented psychospiritual models that were applied to work with at-risk boys are also introduced, including Assagioli's (1975) psychosynthesis model, in which the journey toward the transpersonal self is cast as a potentially transformative spiritual quest; and Frankl's (1946/1978) logotherapy model, in which a dispiriting sense of meaninglessness is countered with a revivifying search for meaning and purpose. Bringing these hope-inspiring models into the arena of mentoring recasts the journey of development not as a grim trek into academic, social, and emotional failures but rather as a potentially exciting adventure toward maturity, in which the development of the steady character traits of empathy and compassion invite emotional intelligence and the awakening heart into the educational odyssey.

Following the discussion of relevant models of therapy, an understanding about the process of using writing as a tool for awakening emotional intelligence and moving toward empathy and compassion is offered. The literature review concludes on two personal and anecdotal notes: The first reflects briefly on experiences working with at-risk boys over a 9-year period in the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program; and the second chronicles an intervention, in the spring of 2009, with a young boy who was one of the masterminds of a game called Beat the Jew, which erupted in the news locally. As I wrote at the time, this event, which reverberated in my community throughout the summer of 2009, represented "a colossal failure of empathy" (Shefa, 2009, p.5) on the part of the students, hence its inclusion at the end of this chapter as a cautionary tale in the literature of empathy and compassion.

Operational Definitions

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the terms *intuitive*, *empathy*, *compassion*, *mentoring*, *at-risk*, and *transpersonal*, or *transpersonal education*, were used repeatedly. In order to set the stage for this review of the relevant literature and to ground these considerations on a more solid footing, the following section offers operational definitions and core considerations.

The words *intuitive*, *empathy* (including *self-empathy*), *compassion* (including *self-compassion*), *at-risk*, *mentor*, and *transpersonal* can be defined in many ways and at many different levels. For the purposes of this study (which concerned itself with the odyssey of *at-risk* teenage boys and their *mentor* to *empathy* and *compassion* utilizing viewpoints and tools from *transpersonal* psychology), crafting operational definitions of these five terms is a way of outfitting for the journey into a living research. Clearly, each of these terms evokes a vast realm, and the literature review that follows further explores the deeper origins, meanings, and applications of these concepts, while placing them in the context of this study.

Intuitive/intuition. As stated in Chapter 1, the origin of the word, intuition, is the Latin *intuitus*, and it refers to the direct perception of knowledge (Anderson, 2011, p. 19). In relation to the method of intuitive inquiry, Anderson (2011), wrote that intuition “allows for direct and embodied ways of knowing prior to conceptual or psychological interpretation” (p. 19).

The stages of an intuitive experience were investigated phenomenologically, with great subtlety, by Claire Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999). Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999), a specialist in information systems design and knowledge representation, observed that intuitive realizations can take many forms including “an image, a kinesthetic feeling, a sound or word, even a taste or an odor, most of the time in several simultaneous or successive sensorial forms” (p. 69). She concluded that intuition “does correspond to an experience, that is, a set of interior gestures

which involve the entire being” (Petitmengin-Peugeot, 1999, p. 76), and that, as contrasted to the progressive accumulation of knowledge, actually “consists in emptying out, in giving up our habits of representation, of categorization, and of abstraction” (p. 76).

In her most recent update of the intuitive inquiry method, Anderson (2011) offered a typology of five principal forms of intuition: unconscious, symbolic, and imaginal process; psychic or parapsychological experiences; sensory modes of intuition; empathic identification; and that which is activated through our wounds. A discussion of the different intuitive practices utilized in this research can be found in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. My particular resonance with the fifth form of intuition, *through our wounds*, is chronicled in Chapter 4, which documents my fieldwork, and further investigated in the final chapter. Anderson’s penetrating observations about this form were revealed to have a special significance for this study. She wrote, “From a spiritual perspective, these wounds are also openings to the world, enabling personal and research explorations along the fault lines of the personality to invite change that transforms these wounds to sources of inspiration for others” (Anderson, 2011, pp. 25-26).

Empathy. The word *empathy* derives from the German word *empatung*, which can be translated as *feeling into* (Firman & Gila, 2002; Goleman, 1995; Ladner, 2004). Empathy is the ability to attune to the feelings or emotions of another. This can be seen as a dual-aspect process involving *cognitive* empathy—knowing *how* another person is feeling—and *affective* empathy, vicariously experiencing the emotional states of others (Davis, 1994; Goleman, 1995; Perry & Szalavitz, 2010). Psychologist and world-renowned emotion researcher Paul Eckman spoke about empathy as both *emotion recognition* and *emotional resonance*, stressing the cognitive and affective components of this richly complex process (Dalai Lama & Eckman, 2008).

Working over the past decade with teenage boys who were often distanced or even disassociated from their own feeling lives, I have found that the first stages of empathy's awakening often begins with *self*-empathy, simply because "boys, beginning at a young age, are systematically steered away from their emotional lives toward silence, solitude, and distrust" (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000, p. xix). The causes for this schism are multiple, including a boy culture that often exalts navigating through life without the so-called weakness of feelings (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Kipnis, 1999; Nikkah, 2000; Pollack, 1998); those boys who, by virtue of traumatic experiences, have distanced themselves from their own feelings, from their own hearts, as it is simply too threatening to allow themselves fully to feel (Garbarino, 1999; Kipnis, 1999); and an educational system that places ultimate value on the cognitive, intellectual aspects of development (Fox, 2006; Sax, 2007).

The awakening of self-empathy can thus be seen as the establishment of a flow between a boy's cognitive and emotional experiences and his attunement to his own inner life; from that platform, empathy can also then flow outwards to others. To cast this process in poetic terms, and specifically grounded in Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*, from which the word *mentor* is derived, one might say that, having connected to self-empathy, the boys potentially have finally found water, their own wellspring—their tears of Telemachus; they may now draw from that wellspring to experience others empathetically. To embrace this awakening as an essential aspect of emotional literacy and as integral to a wholistic educational journey is to invite the transpersonal directly into the arena of education. Deploying such transpersonal tools as short mindfulness excursions, group councils, guided imagery, and writing prompts that excite the imagination and challenge the latent compassionate warrior, are ways to test the water, dowsing for the tears of Telemachus.

Social scientist Jeremy Rifkin (2009), in his book, *The Empathic Civilization*, wrote,

Early evaluations of student performance in the few places where the new empathic approach to education has been implemented show a marked improvement in mindfulness, communications skills, and critical thinking as youngsters become more introspective, emotionally attuned, and cognitively adept at comprehending and responding intelligently and compassionately to others. (p. 15)

Finally, the attunement of empathy may also become a pathway to a broader happiness.

Buddhism speaks of four immeasurable qualities that are essential to a fulfilling life: loving-kindness, equanimity, compassion, and *empathetic* joy (Chodron, 1994). Over the past 9 years, in response to the introduction of an intervention or curriculum that seeks to awaken empathy and compassion, one of the resistances mounted by public school educators and, notably, by the boys themselves is that these qualities are somehow “soft,” or “touchy-feely.” The other resistance encountered is that these qualities seem to be focused on pain and suffering. As one principal at a school that turned down the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program bluntly stated, “Children already in pain are not looking for more pain—and neither are their parents” (personal communication, 2010). Although educators are prudent to question interventions that can inspire greater attunement to suffering in children who have already been labeled at-risk, the alternative of accepting disconnection and lack of feeling as the norm has its own pitfalls, including students who show up to school disembodied and thus lacking presence and passion. Expanding even the definition and the experience of empathy for these boys to include empathetic joy, which is the ability to celebrate the happiness and success of another, fits within the educational needs of community building and meets the boys’ need and hunger to celebrate and enjoy. Helping these same boys to discover the lineage of empathetic and compassionate warriors, from Krishna to King Arthur and King David to Odysseus, reveals the fierce, protective aspect of these perennial qualities, thus addressing their concerns about the “softness” of empathy and compassion.

Compassion. The literal origin of the word *compassion*—from the Latin roots *com* (with) and *pati* (suffer) (Compassion, 2012)—provides an excellent starting point for a consideration of its core meaning. Compassion is, first of all, simply the experience of suffering with another.

Recent research has begun to focus on self-compassion (Germer, 2009; Neff, 2011) as a vital component of mental health. The essence of self-compassion is no different than compassion itself but now directed inward, toward oneself. Quite simply, self-compassion is being moved by one's *own* suffering—and being motivated to alleviate that suffering. Viewed as a precursor to care for others, Germer (2009) advised that “self-compassion is the *foundation* for kindness toward others” (p. 86).

Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron (1994) remarked that when her teacher, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, first taught Westerners the Tibetan Buddhist compassion practice known as *tonglen*, which involves consciously taking in suffering and pain and breathing out lightness and relief, he found that he needed to adapt the practice to include meditating on *self*-compassion. Both Trungpa (1993) and the Dalai Lama (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 1998) have remarked on their surprise that Westerners often struggle with self-criticism, even self-loathing; hence, the need for a practice of self-compassion.

In considering the progression from empathy toward compassion, the Dalai Lama (1999) wrote that empathy can be seen as the “springboard to a love still greater” (p. 123) expressed in compassion. As the human embodiment of the Buddhist deity of compassion, *Avalokiteshvara*, the Dalai Lama has dedicated his consciousness and his life to a systematic exploration and progressive embodiment of the living quality of compassion, an essential aspect of his universal service being simply the alignment and willingness to radiate or broadcast the incarnated presence of this quality wherever he goes, filling the vessel of this world with the living quality

of kindness and compassion (Thurman, 2008). Although the Dalai Lama's (1999) spiritual attainment seems lofty, he continually stresses that with attention and cultivation, open-hearted compassion is possible for all and that "this causes the one who is compassionate to dedicate themselves entirely to helping others overcome both their suffering and the causes of their suffering" (p. 124).

As religious scholar Karen Armstrong (2010) suggested, in her book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, "All faiths insist that compassion is the test of true spirituality and . . . it brings us into relation with the transcendence we call God, Brahman, Nirvana, or Dao" (pp. 3-4). Inspired by this revelation of the universality of compassion, Armstrong (2010) launched the global effort of a Charter for Compassion in 2008, in order to bring together leading figures from major faiths to "restore compassion to the heart of religious life. The charter would counter the voices of extremism, intolerance, and hatred" (p. 6). Underscoring the centrality of compassion to an emerging global vanguard, individuals from Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism met in Switzerland in February of 2009 to proclaim to the world that "the principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 6).

Another allusive inroad into the word *compassion* comes through an examination of its meaning in Semitic languages. The postbiblical Hebrew word is *rahamanut* and in Arabic, the word is *rahman*; both share an etymological root to *rehem/RHM*, which means womb, evoking the notion of compassion as a place of fertility, birth-giving, life-bestowing. It is in the *womb* of compassion that our humanity can flower (K. Armstrong, 2010).

In the context of this study, the potential for compassion's awakening is nested within the experience of empathy. Having cognitive recognition of and affective attunement to another's

experience can often move a person toward compassion, inspiring or compelling that person to want to actively do something to ease the suffering of another (Glaser, 2001; Ladner, 1999). Compassion can not only extend out to include the individual for whom one has empathy but also expand to embrace a group of individuals, a family, community, and all of life (Glaser, 2001; Ladner, 1999). In each case, the experience of compassion carries with it a quiet imperative to ease suffering.

If the awakening of empathy has its origins in self-empathy, the same can be said about the pathway to compassion. In *The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion*, psychologist Christopher Germer (2009) viewed self-compassion as, first, “acceptance of ourselves while we’re in pain” (p. 33). Germer (2009) continued:

If we can find ourselves in the midst of suffering and acknowledge the depth of our struggle, the heart begins to soften automatically. We stop trying to feel better and instead discover sympathy for ourselves. We start caring for ourselves *because* we’re suffering. (p. 33)

Kristin Neff (2011), in her pioneering work on self-compassion, directly linked the experience of compassion with its arising in self-compassion, stating simply,

Compassion, then, involves the recognition and clear seeing of suffering. It also involves feelings of kindness for people who are suffering, so that the desire to help—to *ameliorate suffering*—emerges. Finally, compassion involves recognizing our shared human condition, flawed and fragile as it is. Self compassion, by definition, involves the same qualities. (p. 10)

At-risk. The term *at-risk*, for troubled youth, first came into use in the wake of a 1983 report entitled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, published by the U.S. Department of Education, National Commission on Excellence in Education. Although originally focused on the risk to *academic* success, the term has subsequently expanded to refer to a child’s potential involvement with drugs, gangs, premature sexuality, and self-injury, to name just a few of the *risk factors* that face today’s teens, though it could also refer to those who have undergone

trauma, are suffering through poverty, or are simply carrying low educational expectations. The term is also used in a more narrow academic sense to denote a student who is at-risk of not being promoted to the next grade level. In either case, these words suggest an interval or a passage throughout which threats to successful adolescent development and academic achievement loom large. Books that have resonated strongly in popular culture, such as psychologist Mary Pipher's (1994) *Reviving Ophelia*, about adolescent girls, or child psychologists Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson's (2000) *Raising Cain*, about the emotional life of adolescent boys, suggest that, at a certain level, all teens reared in a culture that has become in some ways antithetic to healthy social and emotional development are "at-risk."

In many ways, the equation of adolescence with risk goes back to early theories of adolescent development that painted a foreboding picture of teen life as a stormy, often out-of-control emotional tempest. As early as 1904, G. Stanley Hall, in his book, *Adolescence and Its Relation to Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, depicted the passage through adolescence to adulthood as a *Sturm und Drang* developmental journey. Ernest Jones (1948), a colleague and biographer of Sigmund Freud who was influenced by Hall's views and wrote a widely read paper in 1922, entitled "Some Problems of Adolescence," further etched the image of adolescence as a period of rage and instability (as cited in Ponton, 1997).

What is missing from these grim scenarios is the potentially *positive* role of risk in development, and, as psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Lynn Ponton (1997) suggested in *The Romance of Risk*, the fact that "frequent risk-taking is a normative, healthy, developmental behavior for adolescents" (p. 6). Several of the boys who participated in the following study were drawn to risk-taking activities such as gang involvement, repeated truancy, flirtations with drugs and tobacco, and theft as well as legal risks such as racing BMX's, skateboarding at super-

speeds downhill, and even climbing the walls—literally, not metaphorically—of their school. During the course of our work together, some were able to see the link between the *physical* risks several of them consistently took and their thirst for a more intense experience of *life*, an escape from boredom.

The dark and grim portrayal proffered by early adolescent theorists also fails to address the notion of *necessary risk*, as taken by one who braves an inner excavation to bring forth gifts of understanding, empathy, and compassion. Such risk was an inherent feature in the rites of passage ceremonies found throughout primordial cultures (Campbell, 1947; Eliade, 1965; Foster & Little, 1987; Stephenson, 2006).

Mentor. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, the origins of the word *mentor* go back to the Greek *mentos*, meaning “intent, purpose, spirit, and passion”; the Sanskrit *mantar*, meaning “one who thinks”; and the Latin *monitor*, meaning “one who admonishes” (Mentor, 1996, p. 538). Woven together, they evoke a broad notion of mentoring as a purposeful spiritual endeavor, directed with heartfelt passion and clear-thinking intent, that offers course corrections.

Mentoring is generally defined today as a relationship between a mentee who is less experienced in a given field, or in life in general, and a more experienced individual, the mentor. Both in recent time and traditionally, mentoring is most often viewed as a one-on-one, face-to-face, long-term relationship between a mentor and his/her mentee. The field of operation varies widely, from professional achievement, to academic growth, to personal development (Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000).

Whether formal or informal, mentoring relationships can be long or short-term and can take place in cyberspace or face-to-face (Kasprisin, Single, Single, & Muller, 2003; Packard,

2003). Mentors can be peers, or peers who are a step ahead of their mentee; supervisors; or masters of their field (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001).

Currently, mentoring programs flourish throughout educational institutions, business or commercial endeavors, and nonprofit or service organizations, from federal programs such as AmeriCorps—sometimes referred to as the domestic Peace Corps, which deploys thousands of mentors nationwide in K-12 schools (Corporation for National Community Service, 2013)—to programs in corporate America. Even with the plentitude of mentoring programs available, whether in educational or business sectors, mentor training generally only minimally, at best, addresses the *inner* course of development that may be needed for truly effective mentoring. Both in educational and corporate settings, a mentor is nowadays regarded as a wise and responsible role model—an experienced person who guides, inspires, and offers advice (Maxwell, 2008; Zachary, 2011). In education, the words *mentor* and *tutor* are often used interchangeably, with little regard to the fact that a tutor of math or English may have little qualification, training, or even interest in attending to the emotional developmental issues of a mentee—even when these same developmental issues, along with other risk factors, are key causes of poor academic achievement. When the field of the mentoring endeavor is strictly circumscribed, as in business or corporate mentoring, where the mentor may support an individual's career progression while illuminating the dynamics of corporate politics based on his own experience, successful mentoring involves the attainment of specific goals, whether project-based, or more generally, in the step-by-step career development of the mentee (Clutterbuck, 2004).

Broadly speaking, two general categories can be seen to encompass the roles played by a mentor: career-focused mentoring and psychosocial mentoring. In career-focused mentoring, the

mentor functions as a sponsor or coach, guiding the professional development of his/her mentee, whereas in psychosocial mentoring, the mentor adopts the role of counselor, or trusted friend (Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1997). Generally speaking, the concept of a mentor functioning as a role model cuts across career and psychosocial mentoring (Donaldson et al., 2000; Scandura & Williams, 2001).

Within the above categories, a mentor may take on one role or many; in other words, mentoring is not an all-or-nothing endeavor (Kram, 1985; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). The group of examples described above indicates that a definitive explication of mentoring, in its modern appearances in terms of both form and function, is virtually impossible to obtain, so varied is the field. Further, mentors may be of various genders, socioeconomic background, ethnic orientation, or even field of study.

A recent study conducted at Loyola University, headed by Julia Pryce (2012), an assistant professor of social work, and published in the *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, considered the exceptional level of effort and commitment required for a high-quality, relational mentoring experience. Surveying various helping relationships—from that of therapist and client, to student and teacher, and supervisor and supervisee—as well as analyzing hundreds of interactions between mentors and young people working in a school-based mentoring program led Pryce and her team to conclude that *mentor attunement* was central to a successful mentoring relationship.

Pryce's (2012) study was guided by consideration of the therapeutic concept of attunement—the unfolding connection between therapist and patient as the therapist strives to understand and enter the client's world (Erskine, 1998)—as it relates to the connection between a mentor and mentee in a successful mentoring relationship. Attunement, which also figures

strongly in the process of secure attachment in childhood (Firman & Gila, 2002; Kohut, 1977; Winnicott, 1965), as well as neurophysiology in the consideration of mirror neurons as they relate to empathy (Hanson & Mendius, 2009) were seen to be major factors in one's relationship with others, specifically, in this case, the mentoring relationship.

The study (Pryce, 2012) included 39 adult volunteer mentors and 33 students. The research team observed weekly meetings of mentors and students in an attempt to assess the interaction style of each dyad. In charting the components of the mentoring relationship as it evolved, the researchers focused on patterns of interaction, emotional/affective tone, modes of communication, conflict and anger, and tasks and activities. The researchers' observations were triangulated with all youth and mentor interview data. In order to ensure triangulation of the data, in some cases, two observers regarded the same match.

Significantly, the study revealed that, transcending all variables of school context, gender, age, or race of either the mentor or mentee, mentoring success was most affected by the level of mentor attunement (Pryce, 2012). Furthermore, it found that mentor attunement fell on a continuum ranging from high to minimal, with high-attunement mentors bringing to their mentoring encounters such qualities as respect for their mentee and a willingness to enter into the relationship with no assumptions. Highly attuned mentors also demonstrated flexibility in their approach, monitored verbal and nonverbal cues, and even allowed for creative conflict and struggle as part of the evolving mentoring relationships, whereas minimally attuned mentors were characterized by inflexibility and the failure to explore the needs and desires of the youth under their care.

Pryce (2012) and her team concluded that mentor attunement was comprised of flexibility, creativity, and attention to the needs of mentees and that attunement was a trainable

skill. Some of these skills were active listening, responding to both verbal and nonverbal indicators, eye contact, flexibility, and inviting the youth under their care to suggest activities for their mentoring contacts.

This study (Pryce, 2012) reveals the fact that training is a significant part of the mentor's journey, with the quality of attunement, which is akin to the quality of empathy, being a key component of the mentor's art and skill. The research did not, however, consider the many subtle stages at play in a deepening mentoring relationship nor did it address the spiritual component in mentoring. Such a transpersonal view of mentoring, which guided the outlook and methodology of the present study, can be found later in this literature review where the ancient origins of mentoring, particularly in regard to Homer's (1998) *Odyssey* and other ancient portraits of mentoring, are considered. Also discussed are the ways that these spiritually-infused approaches can be reenacted and extended today.

Transpersonal. Anderson wrote that “transpersonal psychology is the study of the bodily, psychological, and spiritual dynamics involved in the process of individual human and communal transformation” (as cited in Caplan et al., 2003, p. 144). Transpersonal psychology was further described by transpersonal pioneer and cofounder of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology—now Sofia University—Robert Frager, who called it “the study of the full range of human experience, from psychosis and dysfunction to creativity, genius, and genuine spirituality” (as cited in Caplan et al., 2003, p. 147). Although this may seem a tall menu for ninth-grade boys, one premise of this present study was that by experiencing a sustained intervention that had a transpersonal quality, the boys might begin to move from dysfunction to creativity and, through the awakening of the connective qualities of empathy and compassion within the mentoring relationship, to an encounter with their own genius and spiritual core.

Interlaced throughout this study are moments that reveal this broader awakening in the lives of the study's coresearchers.

Whereas the word *transpersonal* evokes the notion of an outlook, experience, or set of practices that move beyond—*trans*—the personal, the term *realm of the transpersonal* evokes a living *domain* that, in this case, at-risk boys can enter and sustain through individual and group practices in order to stabilize and heal through the awakening and development of empathy and compassion for self and others. Vaughan (1974) stated that transpersonal education “focuses, rather, on the process of discovery and transcendence of self which results from spiritual practice, affirming subjective experience as valid and even essential for determining the nature of reality and the relative validity of revealed truth” (p. 1).

To date, transpersonal theory has minimally addressed the transpersonal possibilities inherent within childhood and adolescence. As psychologist Thomas Armstrong (1984) wrote, even transpersonal theorists often “ally themselves with the principles of ego psychology and other traditional developmental models where the child is concerned [and] have tended to minimize the importance of spiritual dimensions within the child's being” (p. 208). In his article on spirituality and education published in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Armstrong (1984) lamented the fact that “contemporary transpersonal thinking has therefore often turned to ego psychology, cognitive psychology, and other non-transpersonal models of development for an accurate description of childhood processes” (p. 208).

In the study documented in this dissertation, regarding the transpersonal as a living field and thus as, metaphorically speaking, the invisible ground and horizon for this intervention served to transform the mentoring arena into what Bache (2008) called “the living classroom” (p. iii). Bache (2008) wrote about potent moments of connectivity between him, as the teacher, and

his students in which “our hearts seem to merge, and from this open field of compassion comes a slow stream of thoughts that I, as spokesperson for the group, unfold and work with” (p. 46).

Bache’s (2008) intriguing viewpoint is vast in its implication, transforming the classroom into a place where there is

a living intelligence operating in groups, a subtle field that weaves those present into a larger operational whole, a true mind that receives and integrates our many life experiences, an intermediate structure between the individual and the still larger patterns of life. (p. 51)

Such soul-rich educational moments were also recognized by Palmer (2007), who wrote in *The Courage to Teach*, “Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together” (p. 2).

In the research for this present study, the writing process was used as a central portal to this transpersonal domain, as the boys began to glimpse the promise and rewards of regarding their life with an empathetic and compassionate eye. Inviting the transpersonal to the table welcomes the imaginal and the mysterious into education. This enlivening infusion was a huge relief to boys whose most-often-used, one-word description of education was “boring.” Immersion in transpersonal practices such as mindfulness meditation, guided imagery, councils that taught deep-listening skills, and imaginative writing prompts that encouraged empathy and compassion as well as touched on life’s meaning and purpose provided repeated opportunities to probe the validity of the boys’ own truths as they began to detect and describe experiences that suggested or directly described an awakening to empathy and/or compassion.

No less an authority on quest and transformation than Campbell (1991) succinctly articulated the central role of compassion on the developmental journey when he stated, “The purpose of the journey *is* compassion” (p. 24). Infusing the educational journey of at-risk teenage

boys with a mentored intervention that emphasizes the development of both empathy and compassion through writing contrasts sharply with the emphasis on standardized testing and curricula that seems to disenfranchise so many of these boys, often resulting in strong resistance to education in general as well as to the writing process, specifically. In *Why Boys Fail: Saving Our Sons from an Education System That's Leaving Them Behind*, educational writer Richard Whitmire (2010) noted that “many high school principals are seeing a phenomenon something akin to a fog-induced interstate pileup, in which boys pile up in ninth grade, with many of them never making it as far as tenth grade” (pp. 21-22). His observation is consistent with my near decade-long experience of working closely with ninth-grade teenage boys who are also one focus of the present study. Linking the process of writing, so fundamental to succeeding in high-school and beyond, to the enlivenment and connection possible when empathy and compassion awaken was an attempt to break this gridlock of failure.

Finally, any discussion of a *hero's* journey begs the question: What of the *heroine's* journey? What, if any similarities or contrasts, particularly in terms of the importance of, and the development into empathy and compassion, might be found on such a feminine rite of passage? Feminist theorist Carol Gilligan (1993) has suggested that an emphasis on *relatedness* is central to girls' developmental journey, and a solid foundation of relatedness can be seen to be a seedbed for empathy and compassion's awakening. Indeed, in the book *Women's Growth in Connection* (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, & Stiver, 1991), the authors boldly question the core assumptions of the classic models of development, all crafted by men, that emphasize separation and autonomy as key indicators of psychological growth. Throughout the book, the fact that women are brought up in continual relating, at least in most American and European cultures, is

seen as fundamental to a conception of self that honors connection as a key to feminine development.

It is noteworthy that this journey to the grail of compassion is, for the *hero*, a movement from individuality to a concern for one's fellow human and, indeed, for all life, which can be seen as a move toward increasing *relatedness*. By contrast, in Jungian-oriented psychotherapist Maureen Murdock's (1990) *The Heroine's Journey*, she wrote about the movement toward *singularity*, so often equated with *masculine* development, as being a vital aspect of *feminine* development: "This is the sacred marriage of the feminine and masculine—when a woman can truly serve not only the needs of others but can value and be responsive to her own needs as well" (p. 11). These complimentary masculine and feminine trajectories of individuality and relatedness both underscore the place of empathy and compassion in a developing human life.

Empathy: A Deepening View

Self psychology's founder Heinz Kohut regarded empathy as central to the therapeutic task. A therapist practicing empathy was seen by Kohut (1977) to be engaging in "vicarious introspection" (p. 306). He also regarded empathy as "the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person" (Kohut, 1984, p. 82). Nevertheless, emphasizing a presumed scientific objectivity, he was also adamant that the therapeutic use of empathy not be confounded with "such fuzzily related meanings as kindness, compassion and sympathy" (Kohut, 1977, p. 304). Such ideas, Kohut (1977) maintained, threaten "a replacement of the scientific mode of thought by a quasi-religious or mystical approach" (p. 304).

Kohut (1985) and others (Moursund & Erskine, 2004) also considered the neutral aspect of empathy, thus showing how the capacity to feel-into could potentially be turned to destructive uses. Kohut (1985) provocatively observed that in the case of such negative empathy, "I figure

out where your weak spots are so I can put the dagger in you” (p. 222)—words that may reveal something of the malignant *empathetic* alignment in the bullying behaviors so destructive to boys’ development and their seeming success in school and society (Garbarino, 1999).

Early psychoanalytic psychologist Alfred Adler (1957) wrote expansively about the critical importance of empathy, both in the therapeutic encounter and in one’s relatedness to life in general. His words suggest the empowerment and sense of vastness possible within the living experience of empathy: “Empathy occurs in the moment one human being speaks with another. It is impossible to understand another individual if it is impossible at the same time to identify one’s self with him” (Adler, 1957, p. 57). Further,

If we seek for the origin of this ability to act and feel as if we were someone else, we can find it in the existence of an inborn social feeling. This is, as a matter of fact, a cosmic feeling and a reflection of the connectedness of the whole cosmos which lives in us; it is an inescapable characteristic of being a human being. (Adler, 1957, p. 61)

Humanistic psychologist and father of client-centered therapy Carl Rogers (1980) placed empathy at the heart of his entire approach to healing, proclaiming that “a high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly *the* most potent factor in bringing about change and learning” (p. 139). Rogers’s unique insights into the inner dynamics and felt-experience of empathy, reflecting a lifetime of empathetic work with patients, bear quoting at length in order to convey their full scope.

An empathic way of being with another person has several facets. It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing, felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in the other’s life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments; it means sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover totally unconscious feelings, since this would be too threatening. It includes communicating your sensings of the person’s world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which he or she is fearful. It means frequently checking with the person as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive. You are a confident companion to the person in his or her

inner world. By pointing to the possible meanings in the flow of another person's experiencing, you help the other to focus on this useful type of referent, to experience the meanings more fully, and to move forward in the experiencing.

To be with another in this way means that for the time being, you lay aside your own views and values in order to enter another's world without prejudice. In some sense it means that you lay aside your self; this can only be done by persons who are secure enough in themselves that they know they will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange or bizarre world of the other, and that they can comfortably return to their own world when they wish. (Rogers, 1980, pp. 142-143)

Jewish theologian Martin Buber (1923/1970) based his entire *I and Thou* philosophy on the profound possibility of moving from regarding others as a static "it," to beholding and experiencing them as a living "thou" whom one meets in the holy space "between" (p. 84), revealing further depths possible within the empathetic embrace. Buber (1929-1939/1947) regarded empathy as a way "to glide with one's own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object, a pillar, or a crystal or the branch of a tree, or even an animal or man, and as it were, to trace it from within" (pp. 114-115).

Transpersonal psychology broadens the examination of the depth and scope of empathy to include the possibility of a radiant *spiritual* empathy. Psychosynthesis scholars and practitioners John Firman and Ann Gila (2010) posited that

spiritual empathy denotes a "feeling into" the *spirit* that is the other. . . . It is at this level that a solidarity and even union with the other is realized—a connection in and through the Ground of Being, Self. In other words, spiritual empathy is a sense of unconditional love, an expression of agape, of altruistic love. (p. 49)

In *The Empathic Civilization*, social scientist Jeremy Rifkin (2009) concluded a magisterial 616-page investigation into the personal, psychological, societal, and global importance of empathy by pondering the critical role that the flowering of this quality across this planet can play in the establishment of an entire civilization as one connected to and embodying this quality. His words also prophesize potential crises humanity faces if this empathetic revolution is arrested:

The Empathic Civilization is emerging. We are fast extending our empathic embrace to the whole of humanity and the vast project of life that envelops the planet. But our rush to universal empathic connectivity is running up against a rapidly accelerating entropic juggernaut in the form of climate change, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Can we reach biosphere consciousness and global empathy in time to avert planetary collapse? (Rifkin, 2009, p. 616)

Empathy can be considered to be a mirroring process, *resonant empathy*, wherein the emotion inside one person is mirrored in another (Margulies, 1989). Writer and environmental activist Marc Barasch (2005), author of *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life*, poetically evoked the connective dynamics at play in the pivotal, mirroring moment of empathic resonance:

A neuronal circuit flashes on. Your sadness or happiness evokes a corresponding feeling in me before I'm quite aware that it's happened. Studies have shown that just seeing another person's expression triggers, below the threshold of consciousness, the same facial muscles in the observer, which in turn stimulates the same inner feeling. (p. 55)

Another kind of empathy is conceptual in origin, wherein a person imagines what another person's inner state might be, based on observation and memory (Margulies, 1989, p. 17). This is the *feeling into* mentioned by Buber (1923/1970). Margulies (1989) also noted, significantly, that in order to engage successfully in this kind of empathy, one has to "submerge oneself, to submit to *not-knowing*, and to put oneself aside" (p. 19). Such a recognition of what one might call *the utility of not knowing* resonated with the experience of my work with my student coresearchers. Surrender to a state of deep, yet highly attentive uncertainty, which might be called a state of fertile unknowing, often proved to be the harbinger of new mentoring insights. Such a state of deep attentiveness on the cusp of unknowing bridges ancient Buddhist concepts of emptiness or *shunyata* (Chodron, 1994) with current neurological research on empathy (Glaser, 2005; Hanson & Mendius, 2009). Within the context of the present study, this state of unknowing was seen as a prerequisite to meeting one's mentees with an alignment of openness. Such an alignment allowed

the living quality of the boy's inner condition to be empathetically experienced by the mentor, without the imposition of preconceptions or agendas.

Scientists are increasingly investigating the neurological correlates to empathy. According to a study published in the September 2012 issue of the journal *Brain* by an international team led by researchers at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York (Gu et al., 2012), the anterior insular cortex area of the brain may be the actual neurological center of human empathy. In the study, patients were shown color photographs of people who were in pain. Three of the patients studied had lesions which were caused by removing brain tumors in the anterior insular cortex, while another set of nine patients had lesions in different parts of the brain. Finally, a control group of 14 patients had neurologically intact brains. The researchers discovered that the patients who had damage restricted to the anterior insular cortex showed deficits in both explicit and implicit empathetic pain processing; in other words, the patients who had suffered anterior insular lesions experienced difficulty evaluating the emotional state of people in pain and feeling empathy for them, compared to the patients with anterior cingulate cortex lesions and the control group. The researchers concluded that their study strongly indicated that a specific area of the brain actually mediated the process of empathy.

Gu et al.'s (2012) study was limited by the very small size of its participants. Nevertheless, by attempting to locate the origin of empathy deficits in a specific area of the brain, it opens the way for cognitive and behavioral therapies to be developed that compensate for damage to the anterior insulate cortex and its connected functions.

Self-compassion researcher and psychologist Christopher Germer, in conjunction with his colleague Kristin Neff, has spearheaded worldwide interest in the juxtaposition of mindfulness and self-compassion and has given extensive training for individuals and health professionals

wishing to develop in these areas. Germer (2009) echoed the above findings, writing that “empathy for others and awareness of our own internal states seems to have a common neurological basis in the area of the brain called the *insula*” (p. 88). He cited British researcher Hugo Critchley, who stated, “People who scored high on an empathy scale were good at tracking their own heartbeats, knowing what was going on inside their own bodies” (as cited in Germer 2009, p. 88). One could infer that such an ability to track internal processes might also translate to one’s ability to recognize one’s internal *emotional* state as well and, furthermore, suggest a potential for sensitivity to and awareness of the changing states of another person. In the context of the present study, the introduction of mindfulness, an approach to writing that was not hurried and was even meditative, and a way of mentoring that honored the moment all served to help the boys to slow down and attune to their inner processes.

The literature on empathy, which paints a vivid picture of the positive potential for the development of healthy relationships with self and others, also considers the many developmental, educational, and societal obstacles to connecting to or establishing this quality. In regard to the mentoring of at-risk boys, where establishing the flow of empathy helps provide insight and illumination, its blockage, diminishment, or absence are of paramount consideration. A growing concern in science and education about an overall diminishment in empathy, particularly in youth, is fueling an investigation into the cause of this diminishment. Psychiatric researcher Sara Konrath and her coresearchers Edward O’Brien and Courtney Hsing (2011), for example, in analyzing empathy data that encompassed 14,000 college students, found that today’s college students are considerably *less* empathetic than college students of the 1980s and 1990s. The study revealed that the biggest drop in empathy had come after the year 2000 and

found that college students today score about 40% lower in empathy than the empathy levels of their counterparts 20 or 30 years ago, as measured by standard empathy tests.

Konrath et al.'s (2011) research was a meta-analysis that combined the results from 72 studies of American college students conducted between 1979 and 2009. Empathetic statements such as "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective," or "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me" found less agreement amongst college students of today as compared to their counterparts from the late 1970s.

Probing further to track overall changes in kindness and helpfulness over this time period, Konrath et al. (2011) also analyzed responses from nationally representative samples of Americans. Presenting a preview of the study in Boston at the 2010 annual meeting of the Association for Psychological Science, Konrath (2010) observed that "many people see the current group of college students—sometimes called 'Generation Me'—as one of the most self-centered, narcissistic, competitive, confident and individualistic in recent history" (as cited in University of Michigan, 2010, para. 7). Konrath's colleague, O'Brien (2010) speculated that a growing emphasis on the self may be "accompanied by a corresponding devaluation of others" (as cited in University of Michigan, 2010, para. 8). Yet the question for those who consider the development of empathy to be an essential aspect of maturation is: What is behind the diminishment of empathy in our youth? Konrath et al. (2011) and colleagues looked to a greatly increased usage in video games as one possible determinant of the growing empathy deficit. Echoing concerns of her colleagues at the University of Michigan, Konrath (2010) hypothesized that "exposure to violent media numbs people to the pain of others" (as cited in University of Michigan, 2010, para. 11). The researchers also conjectured that the exponential expansions of

social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram may also play a role in the drop in empathy. O'Brien (2010) speculated that "the ease of having 'friends' online might make people more likely to just tune out when they don't feel like responding to others' problems, a behavior that could carry over offline" (as cited in University of Michigan, 2010, para. 13).

Konrath et al.'s (2011) study sent shock waves through the national media, where it was widely rebroadcast. The study's broad generalizations about a generational, dramatic drop in empathy levels in young adults represented both the strengths and weaknesses of the research. Clearly, by providing a quantitative portrait of the chilling notion of a "Generation Me" (Twenge, 2006, p.19), the study seemed to articulate a shadow element in the *zeitgeist*. At the same time, this meta-analysis accomplished little in definitively articulating the causes of the growing empathy deficit in the younger generation.

Other factors can also amplify the empathy deficit, including curricula that fails to connect with students' interests or concerns and for which they fail to understand the reason why they are learning the material. In *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men*, Leonard Sax (2007) contended that the increasing emphasis on abstract knowledge in education may be contributing to the marginalization of many boys. Sax, a psychiatrist and medical doctor who works with at-risk boys and their families, argued that boys thrive most fully in active, hands-on learning, as contrasted to abstract learning. Sax saw an increasing emphasis on *Wissenschaft*—scientific, abstract learning—away from *Kenntnis*—experiential, hands-on knowing—throughout the U.S. education systems. He argued:

If boys are deprived of that balance between *Wissenschaft* and *Kenntnis*, they may simply disengage from school. . . . The shift in the curriculum away from *Kenntnis* toward *Wissenschaft* has had the unintended consequence of diminishing the motivation of boys to study what they're asked to learn. (Sax, 2007, p. 32)

Another major factor implicated in empathy deficits is insecure early childhood attachments, which Firman and Gila (1997) have termed “primal wounding” (p. 89). The critical importance of the child experiencing a secure attachment to his or her prime nurturers in early childhood has been extensively discussed by pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1965, 1986) and Kohut (1971, 1977, 1984, 1985), among others. In tracing the lack of empathy in later life, one can look to Winnicott’s (1986) insights into the failure of the connection between caregiver and child; and one can likewise note Kohut’s (1977) perception that the lack of secure attachment to what he called the *selfobject*, the source of potential nurturance and the constellation of a solid sense of self, factors heavily into the development of an overall sense of disconnection. Indeed, Kohut (1977) saw this missing connection potentially giving rise to extremes of dread and disintegration anxiety, which are, again, conditions within which empathy cannot take root, grow, or flourish. He observed that “the importance of the matrix of empathy in which we grow up cannot be overestimated” (Kohut, 1985, p. 166).

Psychoanalyst Michael Balint (1968) pointed to the “emptiness, being lost, deadness, futility” (p. 19) that ensues when there is a “lack of ‘fit’ between the child and the people who represent his environment” (p. 22). These haunting evocations of empathetic failure resonated with my experience conducting the present study, having borne witness, over the past decade, to hundreds of boys for whom secure early childhood attachments were weak, broken, or nonexistent.

A lack of empathy suggests a weak ability, or inability to take on another’s perspective or even to feel sympathy for his or her suffering (Davis, 1994). In considering the introduction of empathy in working with at-risk teenage boys, some of whom show an alarming lack of this quality, a pertinent question might be: If empathy is the ability to “feel into” another’s

experience, in those who seem lacking in positive empathetic connectivity can there be a sort of *negative* empathy, an acuity for attuning to a person's weaknesses, the better to inflict a wound, as suggested by Kohut (1985)? Some at-risk teenage boys who have a tendency to bully often display just such an upside-down or negative empathy, zeroing in, with laser-like acuity, on the weaknesses of their prey, the better to wound or even torture; these are exceptions though, whereas the more common experience is simply one of an alarming lack of empathy. Kohut once provocatively suggested that even Nazis could use empathy to "perceive their victims vulnerability" and then to exploit them (as cited in Glaser, 2001, p. 49). Garbarino (1999), who has worked extensively with extremely violent teenage boys, observed in them a shadow side of empathy that one might call the abyss of empathy's absence. He found that "violent boys often seem to feel they cannot afford empathy. Troubled and violent boys have been so emotionally busy struggling with their own internal demons that they have had little psychic energy for others" (Garbarino, 1999, p. 230).

Garbarino (1999) and others (Hubner, 2005; Kipnis, 1999) who have studied extremely violent boys have also suggested that even amongst boys who have murdered or committed other violent crimes, it is still possible for empathy to awaken. Garbarino (1999) reasoned, "Because we know that empathy is the enemy of aggression and that depersonalization is its ally, all efforts at moral rehabilitation of violent and troubled boys hinge upon cultivating empathy and fighting against their tendency to depersonalize others" (p. 230). One such effort at awakening empathy in young lives woefully disconnected from this quality was chronicled in John Hubner's (2005) *Last Chance in Texas*. In his book-length study, Hubner (2005) described the program at Giddings State School, a unique juvenile justice program in Texas with a remarkable rehabilitation rate that treats adolescents who have committed extremely violent crimes, some of

whom are facing sentences of up to life in prison. A central goal of the program is the awakening of empathy in adolescents who, by virtue of traumatic upbringings and their denial of the suffering they have caused others through their violent crimes, have shut down their feelings. An essential part of the therapy undergone by a juvenile offender involves *telling the story* of his traumatic childhood, thus beginning to rebuild an emotional structure to foster self-empathy, the ability to feel his own feelings. From there, the child must then retell the story of his crime twice: first, from his perspective and then by taking the perspective of the victim in the recounting of what happened, sometimes telling it repeatedly until he is able to empathize with the one whose suffering he has caused.

Even in less extreme circumstances, the work of awakening empathy requires first helping boys to establish an emotional vocabulary, or emotional *literacy* (Goleman, 1995; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000). Mentoring boys toward fluency in this emotional currency may help them to increase in clarity about their feelings and those of others. These seeds of empathetic connection are quickened by an awareness of the fact that others actually exist, have needs, suffer, and seek happiness. Regarding the development of empathy, psychosynthesis therapist and theorist Piero Ferrucci (2006) wrote, “Bit by bit, empathy—which at first is only a simple instinctual capacity to resonate—develops and becomes the capacity to understand other people’s feelings and points of view, to identify with them” (p. 108). Ferrucci’s mentor, Assagioli (1974), expressed this notion most succinctly when he wrote, “Genuine existential understanding is not possible without *empathy*, i.e., the projection of one’s consciousness into that of another being” (p. 88).

The term *self-empathy* used throughout this dissertation, embodies the same projective dynamic as empathy toward others, but instead, the trajectory of the empathy moves inward,

setting up a conductive field of empathy within one's own person. This conductive field can be seen as the ground from which empathy to others can then flow; for "one cannot form an empathic connection to the deeper levels of another unless one has established an empathic connection to those levels in oneself" (Firman & Russell, 1994, p. 228).

Relevant to considering either self-empathy or empathy toward others, Assagioli (1975) traced empathy's roots a step further, beyond both humanistic and psychoanalytic theorists, to a spiritual, underlying reality. Following his understanding of the ultimate origin of empathy leads to a transcendent Reality (Firman & Gila, 2000)—a "spiritual Self who already knows his [the individual's] problem, his crisis, his perplexity" (Assagioli, 1975, p. 204), yet this deep-level connectivity can also occur within the Self:

The individual builds relationship to this empathic, spiritual Self through an inner-directed process of dialogue, as one might intimately converse with a wise guru or spiritual teacher. This technique of inner dialogue has the added effect of expanding one's own capacity for empathic self-understanding. (Firman & Gila, 2000, pp. 10-11)

Ultimately, the possibility is for an awakened empathy to form a connective tissue that embraces all of life, as psychosynthesis scholar Chris Meriam (1996) theorized.

Taking this further, we might conclude that empathy is the key to understanding our connection to all forms of life and all existence. We may even have a keen sense that everything from the tiniest particle of sand to the most distant star is held together in empathic wholeness. (Meriam, 1996, p. 23)

Compassion: A Deepening View

Emotion researcher Paul Eckman (2008), when meeting with the Dalai Lama reflected,

While compassion has been a central issue in Buddhist thinking and is also emphasized in other world religions, it has only very recently become a particular topic of scientific study. This is remarkable, but given the hallowed place of compassion in the spiritual realm, it seems to have been considered off-limits to scientific examination. (Dalai Lama & Eckman, 2008, p. 139)

Over the past decade, however, interest in the investigation into the nature and efficacy of compassion has greatly increased in such diverse fields as psychology (Germer, 2009; Glaser, 2001; Hanson & Mendius, 2009; Ladner, 1999; Neff, 2011), and education (Fox, 2006; Goleman, 1995; Kessler, 2003; Lantieri, 2008). Indeed, Eckman's own enlivening dialogues with the Dalai Lama on the nature of emotions, empathy, and compassion show the potential for new insights when the wisdom of ancient technologies such as Tibetan Buddhism engage in respectful dialogue with Western science and vice-versa (Dalai Lama & Eckman, 2008). The root understanding that the development of compassion involves both conceptual knowledge and steady practice was a consistent theme in Ekman's dialogic investigation with the Dalai Lama, summed up succinctly by the Dalai Lama himself, who stated that "compassion or loving-kindness does not develop spontaneously, but through training, through reasoning" (Dalai Lama & Eckman, 2008, p. 140).

The span of research into the nature and efficacy of compassion does have ancient roots. In Buddhism, where compassion is central to the spiritual endeavor, the deity *Avalokiteshvara*, the archetype of compassion, is depicted with both a thousand arms *and* a thousand eyes—one in each hand. His thousand eyes see the universe in all its pain and glory, while his thousand arms reach out, offering solace and relief. As Glaser (2005) wrote in *The Call to Compassion*, "This image unites the two-fold nature of being and doing at the heart of compassion" (p. 49). Such mythic depictions of the vibrant dynamics of compassion could be said to be the "scientific" illustrations of the ancients. Perhaps another twofold interpretation of this evocative symbol might be that it artfully evokes the discernment that must accompany compassionate action in order for that action truly to be effective.

Spanning ancient religion and modern science, a neurobiological correlate to this evocative imagery of an ancient, thousand-armed, thousand-eyed deity of compassion can perhaps be found in a 2003 study by professor of psychiatry and psychology Richard Davidson, an expert on imaging the effects of meditation, along with mindfulness pioneer Jon Kabat-Zinn and their colleagues (Davidson et al., 2003). Published in *Psychosomatic Medicine* and entitled “Alternations in Brain and Immune Function by Mindfulness Meditation,” the study found that utilization of mindfulness meditation held the potential to create enduring, positive changes in the brain and in the functioning of the immune system.

Davidson et al.’s (2003) study focused on 25 biotech employees from the Promega company located near Madison, Wisconsin, who were suffering from stress and who participated in an 8-week mindfulness meditation training. These employees were compared with members of a control group of 16 similarly stressed employees who did not meditate. (The control group members did receive meditation training after the study was completed.) EEG recordings showed that the meditators had increased activation in the left side of the frontal region of their brains, an area associated with positive emotions. This brain activity was evident even when meditators reflected on *negative* experiences in their lives, suggesting that they had learned to adapt well to unpleasant mind states.

The effects on immune function were also tested in this study (Davidson et al., 2003). Both groups received a flu vaccine at the time of the completion of the 8-week meditation course. At 4 weeks and again at 8 weeks after the meditation training ended, blood tests were given to both groups, measuring the levels of antibodies present against the flu vaccine. As anticipated, both groups showed increases in antibodies; however, the group that had practiced meditation showed significant increases over the control group, at both 4 and 8 weeks.

The chief researcher, Davidson, concluded that the study was preliminary and merited more research *and* that it revealed a biological, scientifically validated impact from the application of this perennial practice (Davidson et al., 2003). Clearly, although results of this study do suggest that a strengthening of positive emotions and an increase in resiliency in the face of negative experiences may be an ideal basis for the fostering of compassion, more research is needed, perhaps with larger groupings as well as a longer observation period, in order to validate these findings further. Nevertheless, the study is evocative, metaphorically, as it highlights again the growing body of research into the nexus of Eastern meditative “technologies” and the ability of Western science to extract meaningful data from these investigations. The thousands of neuroreceptors that lit up through meditation in this study might be likened to a modern embodiment of the thousand eyes and arms of Avalokiteshvara.

Another study in which Davidson participated with associate scientist Antoine Lutz studied the ways that meditation may foster the development of compassion and kindness (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). This study was perhaps the first such research to utilize functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to investigate the possibility that positive emotions such as compassion and kindness could actually be *learned*, just as one, through practice, learns a sport or becomes adept at playing a musical instrument. The fMRI scans showed that the practice of compassion meditation dramatically changed subjects’ brain circuits used to detect emotions.

In terms of participant selection for their study, Lutz et al. (2008) intriguingly compared 16 Tibetan monks and practitioners of compassion meditation, who had practiced meditation for a minimum of 10,000 hours, with 16 control-group members, who were age-matched but who had no previous training in meditation. Two weeks before the brain scans, the control group was

taught a compassion meditation wherein they concentrated on loved ones, focused on their well-being, and wished that they be free from suffering. The intention was to investigate if this voluntary generation of compassion affected the brain systems involved in empathy. After further training sessions, the control group were then instructed to generate similar feelings in themselves while thinking about all beings.

Both groups, all 32 subjects, were placed in the fMRI scanner and instructed to begin the compassion meditation or to stop (Lutz et al., 2008). The subjects were then exposed to sounds designed to evoke empathic responses as well as sounds of a more neutral nature, such as a baby laughing, or a distressed woman, or simply background noise in a restaurant. The researchers observed that when the highly experienced meditators were generating compassion as they were exposed to the emotional vocalizations, the insula, near the front part of the brain and playing a significant part in bodily representations of emotions, showed considerable activity. As the meditation intensified, the insula activation strengthened. Researchers also saw an increase in activity in the right hemisphere of the temporal parietal juncture—an area important in processing empathy and the ability to perceive emotional and mental states in others. This finding offered compelling support for the notion that the brain's plasticity, its ability to grow new connections, can respond to training in compassion.

Noteworthy for the present study was the fact that as Lutz et al. (2008) including Davidson and his team of researchers concluded the study, they were strongly motivated to begin teaching compassion meditation to young people, particularly adolescents, as a prevention strategy against aggression, bullying, and violence. This demonstrated link between an ancient practice, modern science, and the potential for creating school cultures where compassion prevails over bullying is most encouraging.

Buddhism was not alone in placing compassion at the heart of religious and spiritual development. “Out of mere compassion for them, I, abiding in their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance” (Shankaracharya, 2004, p. 264) was the Hindu avatar Krishna’s formulation for innate compassion. Variations upon the Golden Rule, beginning with Confucius’s admonition to “never do to others what you would not like them to do to you” (K. Armstrong, 2010, p. 9), reveal a perennial religious and spiritual investigation by the sages of all ages into the essential nature of compassion and self-compassion. From primordial religions through Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, compassion is seen as one of the essential ingredients of a spiritual life. Christian mystic and Dominican scholar and priest Fox (1999) boldly proclaimed,

Might one even say that, given the Biblical teaching on the Godhead as compassionate, that Jesus is not so much compassionate because he is divine as he is divine because he is compassionate? And did he, whom Christians believe is the incarnation of compassion, the Son of the Compassionate One, not teach others that they too were to be sons and daughters of Compassion? Sons and daughters of God? And therefore divine because they are compassionate? (p. 34)

Just as social scientists are beginning to articulate the contours of an impending empathic civilization (Decety & Ikes, 2011; de Waal, 2009; Perry & Szalavitz, 2001; Rifkin, 2009), so psychologists, social activists, poets, and politicians are undertaking a broad and deep investigation across multiple disciplines to comprehend the potential personal, societal, and planetary efficacies possible in a world where compassion is honored and embodied. The global Charter for Compassion, introduced by religious scholar Karen Armstrong (2010), and Stanford University’s founding of its Center for Compassion Research and Education are just two examples of the deepening current of interest in compassion.

In psychology alone, research had been conducted in such areas as charting the difference between self-compassion and self-esteem (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007); understanding *compassion fatigue* as a form of empathy that lacks self-compassion

and equanimity (Baker, 2003; Christopher et al., 2011; Figley, 2002); the development of compassion-based therapies that help clients to actually develop the trait of compassion as a means of self-soothing and treating emotional pain (Germer, 2009; Gilbert, 2009; Neff, 2011); and the neuroscience of compassion (Lutz et al., 2008), in terms of the actual effects of the awakened quality on the brain. All of these studies reveal a vibrant, expansive research into what one might call the art and science of compassion.

A recent study, “Self-Compassion and Psychological Resilience Among Adolescents and Young Adults” (Neff & McGehee, 2010), considered the relationship between self-compassion and psychological resilience in adolescents and young adults. Of special interest to the researchers was investigating how the development of self-compassion might serve as a more stable platform for resiliency than attempting to build self-esteem in adolescents. They also considered how “the construct of self-compassion provides an alternative model for thinking about self-views that promote resilience among adolescents” (Neff & McGehee, 2010, p. 226), thus avoiding some of the shadow elements that sometimes accompany self-esteem building, such as bullying, aggression, and narcissism (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Crocker & Park, 2004). Narcissism in adolescents can give rise to the “personal fable” (Lapley, FitzGerald, Rice, & Jackson, 1989), the belief that others cannot possibly understand what they are going through, so unique is their personal experience. This egocentrism, in turn, can contribute to a lack of self-compassion, “if one’s difficulties and failings are not recognized as a normal part of what it means to be human” (Neff & McGehee, 2010, p. 226).

Participants in the self-compassion and resiliency study (Neff & McGehee, 2010) included 235 adolescents, with an average age of 15.2 years, and 287 young adults, with an

average age of 21.1 years. The subjects were administered the 26-question Self-Compassion scale, which probes Self-Kindness, Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, and Over-Identification. The study also employed a revised version of the 21-point Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck & Steer, 1987), assessing cognitive, affective, motivational, and somatic symptoms of depression.

The study found that self-compassion was a significant predictor of mental health in both adolescents and in young adults (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Less depression and anxiety were reported in both adolescents and young adults with higher self-compassion. Significantly lower levels of self-compassion were found in both adolescents and young adults who displayed the personal fable (the belief that one's experiences are unique and not shared by others). Regarding the relationship between egocentrism, or even narcissism, and the way these factors can undermine both self-compassion and resilience, the authors commented:

One of the key features of self-compassion is understanding and recognizing that suffering, failure, and disappointment are all part of life—something we all go through. Without much life experience, however, adolescents and young adults may not have learned that the pain they are going through is normal and natural. This sense of isolation may exacerbate self-criticism and self-pity, running counter to the ability to feel compassion for oneself in the struggle of life. (Neff & McGehee, 2010, p. 236)

The study was limited by the narrowness of its participants—mostly white, middle-class. A study of self-compassion in relation to at-risk adolescents could be highly significant in testing the strength of resiliency available to youth in crisis. The study is, however, a hopeful beginning to considering alternatives to traditional self-esteem models found in public high-schools, which have been shown to risk the development of egocentrism and narcissism (Baumeister et al., 2000; Twenge, 2006) and actually to *undermine* resiliency in the face of difficulties or crisis.

In a world where even small children increasingly lament being “stressed out” (Greenland, 2010; Willard, 2010), compassion meditation may also hold the potential to improve

emotional responses in the face of stress, according to a study reported in the medical journal *Psychoneuroendocrinology* (Pace et al., 2009). In another example of the emergent interconnectivity between ancient meditative arts and Western science, the study's lead author, Charles L. Raison, clinical director of the Mind-Body Program, Emory University's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Emory School of Medicine, worked closely with Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, senior lecturer in the Department of Religion, the codirector of Emory Collaborative for Contemplative Studies and president and spiritual director of Drepung Loseling Monastery, to design and teach the meditation program that was used in this study.

The study focused on the ways that inflammatory, neuroendocrine, and behavioral responses to psychosocial stress were influenced by compassion meditation (Pace et al., 2009). Bringing together 61 healthy college students, 17-19 years of age, the researchers divided the participants into two groups. One group received 6 weeks of compassion meditation training, while the control group were randomized into a health discussion group. The specific compassion meditation employed with the first group was based on the Tibetan Buddhist practice of *lojong*, which is part of *tonglen* meditation (discussed in the Method chapter of this dissertation as one of the intuitive spiritual practices that sustained me during my work with my mentees), while the control group discussed such health topics as stress management, drug abuse, and eating disorders.

Following their respective interventions, each student participated in a laboratory stress test, investigating the body's inflammatory and neuroendocrine systems' responses to psychosocial stress (Pace et al., 2009). The researchers found no essential difference between the two groups. Within the meditation group, however, they did find a strong relationship between the time spent practicing the meditation and consequent reductions in emotional distress and

inflammation. More specifically, by dividing the meditation group into high and low practitioners, according to how frequently the meditation was practiced by a given group, the researchers found that when compared to the low practice group and the control group, the high practice group showed reductions in inflammation and distress.

This study (Pace et al., 2009) and other compassion researches show the challenges inherent in empirically demonstrating the efficacy of the subtle quality of compassion, as contrasted with the relatively more easily tracked signs of empathy's effects. More specifically, this research did not require stress tests to be conducted both before and after the intervention, which might have resulted in a more precise assessment of the efficacy of the intervention. The findings do, however, add to the emergent picture of the many ways that meditation—and specifically meditations focused on such positive states as compassion and kindness—can potentially impact emotional well-being. These findings also add to the larger, more encouraging body of evidence that is accruing regarding the possible health benefits and, for the layperson, the accessibility of meditative technologies that emphasize the cultivation of positive emotional states, benefits and accessibility of which were previously ascribed to the domain of religious practitioners. The study strongly suggest that a growing recognition of the importance of compassion is underway.

Before this current renaissance of interest and research into the perennial subject of human compassion, Western psychology, with its ever-increasing emphasis on quantitative measurement, had put limitations on the concept and even on the place of compassion in the therapeutic endeavor. Glaser (2001), in her doctoral dissertation, *The Alchemy of Compassion*, wrote, “The paradigm of scientific objectivism influenced the field, from its earliest beginnings, to adopt the stance of dispassion” (p. 1). Glaser (2001) believed that this stance of *dispassion*

marginalized the quality of *compassion*. Glaser (2001) noted that Freud, Jung, Kohut, and others, while highlighting the importance of empathy, meeting, or transference, “give only fleeting attention to compassion and love and its transformative role in the psyche” (p. 27). She also noted that “there seems to be a complete absence of methodology for cultivating, enhancing, and stabilizing these positive states” (Glaser, 2001, p. 27).

Glaser (2001) also pointed out the bridge between the flow of empathic awareness and the movement of compassion.

The Tibetan Buddhist tradition approaches compassion developmentally. Etymologically, our English word *compassion* is derived from the Latin *compati* which signifies suffering with another. Compassion, in this case, also begins with an empathic “suffering with,” but then extends beyond it. Compassion begins with the wish, grown out of empathic awareness, for others to be free from suffering, but is then developed into a profoundly transformative commitment to work towards helping all beings overcome both their suffering and the causes of their suffering. (Glaser, 2001, p. 29)

Ladner (2004) similarly described a process of compassionate acts in repetition that “increases one’s own habitual or karmic familiarity with compassion” (p. 171). Such a depiction of the intentional, willed nature of compassion reinforces the notion that compassion is not true compassion unless it is active (Soygal Rinpoche, 1993, p. 187). It also suggests a sort of movement or trajectory: from empathy *to* compassion or, in other words, from *suffering with* toward the commitment to attend *to* suffering through specific acts of service. The acceptance and embracing of this core concept of the movement *from* empathy *into* compassion inspired me, to focus my research on this awakening as a *twofold* journey; in other words, my coresearchers would be neither simply studying empathy, which seemed to lack commitment to action, nor, conversely, attempting to focus solely on the awakening of compassion, which might be too much of a leap for boys struggling to feel at all, let alone to experience the empathetic connection to self or other that is a steppingstone to compassion.

As stated earlier in this review, Campbell (1991), having dedicated his life to the study of mythology, came to the conclusion that the journey from experiencing states of compassion to the establishment of compassion as a defining character trait was actually the summit of what he called the hero's journey. He believed that "the key to the Grail is compassion, suffering with, feeling another's sorrow as if it were your own" (Campbell, 1991, p. 53) and claimed that "the one who finds the dynamo of compassion is the one who has found the Grail" (p. 53).

To ancient mystics, human compassion could function as a beacon to attract the "compassion" of the divine. Kabbalist and therapist Estelle Frankel (2005), in describing the mystical psychology of Moses Cordovero, a 16th-century kabbalistic mystic, wrote,

Through compassion, Cordovero writes, we not only come to resemble God, but we actually have the power to open up the flow of divine compassion in the universe. Changing the usual "as above, so below" to "as below, so above," Cordovero suggests that our actions here on earth influence the heavens because God needs our mercy in order to fully manifest divine mercy. "Just as you conduct yourself below," writes Cordovero, "so are you worthy of opening the corresponding sublime quality above. Exactly as you behave, so it emanates from above. You cause that quality to shine in the world." (p. 184)

Ancient Origins of Mentoring: A Deepening View

Athena came close to him,
Likening herself to Mentor in form and in voice.
And speaking out to him, she uttered winged words:
"Telemachos, hereafter you will not be a coward or senseless.
If there is really instilled in you the good might of your father
And you are as he was to achieve both word and deed,
Then the journey will not be fruitless or unachieved." (Homer, 1998, pp. 22-23)

The origins of mentoring lie in myth and spiritual literature, where the figure of the mentor is a crucial catalyst to mentee growth, an awakener to higher potential, and a nurturer of a mentee's unique gifts and talents. Although such diverse figures as Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, and, more recently, Mother Teresa, and the Dalai Lama could be regarded as embodying the function of *spiritual mentor* (consideration of which would require another, separate literature

review), the figure of Mentor himself first entered the world stage in the ancient myth of Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*, which was written sometime between the 6th to the 8th century, according to various sources (Carne-Ross, 1998; Cook, 1995; Knox, 1996; Mumaghan, 2000), though it may have existed in oral form in further reaches of antiquity. Indeed, when carefully analyzed, the *Odyssey*—specifically in the odyssey-within-the *Odyssey* of Telemachus and his relationship to Mentor and to the Goddess of Wisdom, Athena—can be seen to encode fundamental wisdom regarding the ultimate identity and possibilities available to he—or she—who takes on the function of mentoring youth in crisis.

At the beginning of the tale, as written by Homer (1998), Odysseus' son, Telemachus is suffering acutely from the absence of his father who has been away for almost the entirety of the youth's life, fighting the Trojan War for a decade and then lost at sea for another. Without his father's royal presence and command, the kingdom has been overtaken by marauders, who have courted his mother.

Telemachus is in despair as he mourns his father and passively witnesses the takeover of the kingdom. He is mired in an inner wasteland, lacking vision or initiative, not unlike the teens in the present study, centuries later. As he struggles in his anguish, Telemachus meets first an old family friend, Mentos, a helmsman and master sailor, who is actually the Goddess Athena in disguise. Mentos appears only briefly, at the very beginning of the tale, recognizing Telemachus as the spiritual warrior-heir of his father, Odysseus. Mentor, an elder family friend whom Odysseus had charged to watch over his son in his absence then takes over in guiding Telemachus' awakening to action, challenging and charging him to go on the journey to find out what has become of his father. Mentor, however, is also the shape-shifted semblance of the

Goddess Athena; within Mentor dwells the Goddess of Wisdom. Telemachus' journey to the father becomes his own journey to manhood—and to the awakening of empathy and compassion.

Telemachus' brief initial encounter with Mentos at the very beginning of the *Odyssey* (Homer, 1998), and his more sustained encounters with Mentor that follow, challenge, encourage, and inspire the youth to cease languishing in his despair and to courageously address his situation. Telemachus first calls a council of the marauders who have usurped the very center of the kingdom. There, he speaks what is in his heart about their transgressions. He is met with praise and ridicule, yet neither deter him from moving forward on his mission. Under Mentor's guidance, Telemachus finds a worthy vessel and 20 able men to go on his own odyssey to unlock the mystery of his father's disappearance. Mentor's "work" with Telemachus thus far has been to recognize his inherent nobility, to bestir him from torpor, to paint a picture of what is possible, and to charge him to act in a royal manner. In the context of the present study, it could be said that Mentor's mirroring, challenging, charging, and envisioning begins to awaken Telemachus to feel and experience his own situation (self-empathy) and to quicken the wish to ease his own suffering (self-compassion), thus giving him a compass of purpose for his own odyssey.

At this point in his journey, Telemachus is *betwixt and between*—the ancient phrase for rites of passage—an extended boyhood and latent manhood. Symbolically, it could be said that Telemachus stands at the edge, the place where Mentor manifests, betwixt and between two phases of development in the life of a youth. Notably, Mentor's response to the plight of Telemachus is not to offer simple comfort but rather, in the spirit of a true mentor, to embolden Telemachus to begin a quest to find his father, which can be seen as a symbolic journey into greater suffering, yet also potential transfiguration. His core wound, the missing father, creates an optimal hunger, and holds the potential to become the very agency of his accomplishing his

odyssey. “You need not linger over going to sea,” says Mentor and adds, “I sailed beside your father in the old days, I’ll find a ship for you, and help you sail her” (Homer, 1998, p. 27).

Again, the fact that Mentor is a vessel for the goddess Athena, the goddess of Wisdom, suggests the power of mentoring as a vehicle for transmitting wisdom and the transformative potential of a mentoring relationship for a young boy at the crossroads of development. Mythologist Meade, who has worked extensively for decades with at-risk boys using transpersonal tools such as storytelling, psychological reflection, and council-dialogues, has provided a broad definition of mentoring that encompasses these transpersonal dimensions. In his symposium, *The Genius of Mentoring*, Meade (2002) beautifully expressed the depth of commitment and discernment at play in seeking or endeavoring to mentor at this level: “To mentor is to seek actively to acknowledge and bless the gifts in a younger person” (Meade et al., 2002, track 1). Meade (2002) also added that those selfsame gifts in the young person often “lay near their wounds” (track 1) and claimed that when an elder mentors a youth, the wounds of the mentor are also activated.

Homer’s (1998) *Odyssey*, as in other ancient tales with a mentor figure guiding the hero, reveals nothing about Mentor’s activated wounds or even a course of rigorous development Mentor might have undergone to become a fit vessel to house the Goddess Athena. As depicted in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, my inner experiences mentoring my coresearchers revealed much about this process. Tracing the word *mentor* to its oldest available sources, we see from this Homeric consideration, however, that mentoring holds the potential for an in-depth encounter that can mirror, quicken, and enliven such transpersonal qualities as empathy and compassion, even when they occur as mentoring moments—brief, catalytic encounters that may take place even amidst the harried atmosphere of high school. Such mentoring moments can

open to a sense of the timeless, a connection to the essence of wisdom. When Palmer (2007) wrote about the courage to *teach*, he could have been describing the courage to stand in the function of *mentor* in these seminal moments: “Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this ‘I’ who teaches—without which I have no sense of the ‘Thou’ who learns” (p. 10). It is here, in the living classroom, that “the connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts—meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self” (Palmer, 2007, p. 11). Palmer (2007) incisively depicted the nexus-point where excellent teaching becomes transformative mentoring, and mentoring becomes the gateway to a dynamic bridge between youth and elders.

Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching’s great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn. (Palmer, 2007, p. 26)

Since the inception of the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program and as the present study unfolded, it became increasingly clear that these mentoring moments as well as a steadily developing mentoring relationship can serve as a tremendous force of stability and inspiration in the lives of at-risk boys. At its most potent, mentoring can become a meeting between *I* and *Thou*, which Buber (1923/1970) called beholding the divinity within the other, inviting healing and wisdom by which both mentor and mentee are potentially transformed. As Jungian analyst Hans Trub (1964) expressed, after his own transformation resulting from just such a mentoring encounter with Buber, that Buber met him “with love and understanding, like an elder brother” (p. 499). At such moments, the aptness of Homer’s (1998) characterization of Mentor as a vessel for Athena, goddess of wisdom, is transparently clear.

Adolescent Development Theories and Theorists

Because the type and variety of theories are so vast, this literature review considers only a select group of key theorists who have addressed adolescent development; however, even amongst these giants in the field such as Freud, Erik Erikson, and Jean Piaget, little attention has been devoted to the development of empathy and compassion as a significant indicator of maturity. Lawrence Kohlberg's (1984) and Gilligan's (1993) moral development theories both move toward notions of justice and relatedness, considerations that can potentially begin to invite the qualities of empathy and compassion.

Freud's (1995) model of development focused heavily on the satisfaction of biological needs and the discharging of tension in the human organism. He linked the stages of development—oral, anal, phallic, and genital—with the physical organs that he believed released tension at a given age. He regarded adolescence as a time of great upheaval and struggle, as the young person experienced the eruption of instinctual urges that could conflict with societal norms, beginning with the Oedipal struggle as early as 4 years of age and moving through the ongoing battle between the id, the ego, and the superego. When Freud and several of his younger colleagues visited with G. Stanley Hall at Clark University in 1909, they embraced Hall's views on adolescence as a battleground of conflict and turbulent emotions (Ponton, 1997).

Piaget (2001) theorized that children and adolescents move through four stages in cognitive development: sensorimotor (birth to 2 years of age), pre-operational (2 to 7 years of age), concrete operational (7 to 11 years of age), and formal operational (11 to 15 years of age). Beginning in adolescence, which Piaget saw to be roughly between the ages 11 through 15, a child's cognitive abilities lie somewhere between concrete operational and formal operational modes. In other words, for Piaget, a hallmark of adolescent development was signified by the

movement from concrete ways of thinking to a more analytical mode. The application of logic to problems in school and in life was heralded by a move toward abstract thinking.

Erikson placed crises of identity at the heart of his eightfold model of the entire life span (nine, including death, which, in Erickson's model, is preceded by old age and wisdom). For Erikson (1994a, 1994b), adolescence is characterized by a battle: identity versus role confusion. He believed that the resolution of the conflicting demands of one's inner self with outer roles enabled one to move into the next stage of development. Erikson (1980) also regarded adolescence as "a more or less sanctioned intermediary period between childhood and adulthood, *institutionalized moratoria*, during which a lasting pattern of *inner identity* is scheduled for relative completion" (p. 110).

James Marcia (1966) built on the work of Erikson to suggest that rather than ascribing identity confusion and identity resolution as the central developmental challenge in adolescence, this passage could be more precisely defined as a movement from a time of crisis or choosing to a time of commitment. For Marcia (1966), the time of crisis represented a period during which the adolescent questioned old values and reevaluated choices in the spheres of religion, relationships, vocation, and gender roles. He claimed that such a reevaluation leads to a commitment to values and roles in these areas of life.

The *Odyssey Writes of Passage* intervention program utilized in this research honored this facet of adolescent development by inviting students to reflect inwardly, discuss in councils, and then write about their core values such as love, hope, faith, joy, friendship. Students also made the connection between a hurtful experience from their past and the violated value that underlay the wound, for example, an experience of emotional abuse, wherein their self-respect

felt violated. By developing a compass of values, internally held and beginning to be embodied in positive behaviors, the students could experience a new resiliency in facing challenges.

Rather than addressing age-specific development, Kohlberg (1984) offered a model of human life that focused on the development of morality. In Kohlberg's (1984) model, different levels of moral reasoning develop, from *preconventional*, focused on obedience and punishment as well as individualism and exchange; to *conventional*, characterized by good interpersonal relationships and the maintenance of social order; to *postconventional*, involving the social contract and individual rights along with universal principals. This vastly ranging model portrays development as moving from the unsophisticated level of obedience and punishment and extending all the way to universal considerations of justice. In his tracking of movement toward these universal considerations, Kohlberg's (1984) work has special relevance for this study's exploration of empathy and compassion; for how can justice be assessed without empathic attunement to the state of the aggrieved, and how can justice be fairly administered in the absence of compassion? Of course, such a conclusion regarding development raises the question, "How are empathy and compassion nurtured?"

Gilligan (1993) offered a bold critique of other developmental theorists, including her mentor, Kohlberg. She pointed to the fact that most previous theories, which were mainly crafted by men and largely focused on male development, stressed separation, individualism, hierarchy and logic, thus marginalizing relatedness, connection, and communication. Gilligan's (1993) work invited the heart of connection into the developmental journey by considering the importance of relatedness and thereby opened the door to valuing empathy and compassion as developmental touchstones. Gilligan's (1993) three-stage framework for moral development, moving from the *selfish* stage to *conventional morality* and then to *postconventional morality*,

although developed through her work with young women, has potential application in the lives of adolescent boys, in that it shows the link between caring for oneself and caring for others, moving from self-compassion to compassion.

Gilligan's groundbreaking insights on relatedness have been challenged most notably by Christina Hoff Sommers (2001) in her book, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men*. Often provocatively, Sommers (2001) challenged that Gilligan's research, the scientific basis of which Sommers strongly questioned, suggested that boys somehow need to be saved from becoming slaves to the patriarchy at a very young age. Sommers (2001) instead argued forcefully that a boy's natural aggression and high-spirits along with his motivational energies are being hijacked in the name of political correctness and a public school system that seems to have greater sensitivity to the needs and learning styles of girls. Since the 1990s, however, Gilligan herself has given great consideration to the developmental needs of young boys and inaugurated the Harvard Project on Women's Psychology, Boys' Development, and the Culture of Manhood, a 3-year program of research on boys.

James Hillman and the Acorn Theory of the Soul

The word *soul* is ubiquitous in most psychological circles. Regarding his *acorn theory* of development, Hillman (1996) wrote, "You and I and every single person is born with a defining image" (p. 11). He posited that at the core of each life was a central image, calling, or destiny—the acorn—which he called *the soul's code*, also the title of his book. His utilization of different words for the unique, defining image at the core of each human life reflected his wish to not literalize or reify the essential mystery of the soul. He asserted that "each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived" (Hillman, 1996, p. 6), and the acorn theory posits that "each life is formed by its unique image, an image

that is the essence of that life and calls it to a destiny” (p. 39). It is this image, this calling, that Hillman connects to the mysterious property of the soul. Challenging psychological models of development that emphasize the wounds of childhood over the compelling call of the soul’s defining image, Hillman (1996) wrote,

We dull our lives by the way we conceive them. We have stopped imagining them with any sort of romance, any fictional flair. So, this book also picks up the romantic theme, daring to envision biography in terms of very large ideas such as beauty, mystery, and myth. In keeping with the romantic challenge, this book also risks the inspiration of big words, such as “vision” and “calling,” privileging them over small reductions. (pp. 5-6)

In terms of the present study, Hillman’s (1996) acorn theory of the soul can be regarded as a bridge that extends from primordial models such as the rites of passage, to Campbell’s (1947) hero’s journey template, through Meade’s contemporary mythopoetic work on mentors and elders, and to my own work in *Odyssey* that seeks to synthesize these approaches while offering a new template, the *9 Gates of Mentoring*.

Applications of Rites of Passage and the Hero’s Journey

Other perennial models for adolescent development directly address the development of empathy and compassion while casting the adolescent passage as a journey of genuine transformation. An approach to working with at-risk adolescent boys that is *informed* by perennial models such as the rite of passage and these more hopeful models and takes counsel from both ancient and modern approaches can be helpful in radically deepening and broadening the lens through which one views, and encounters, these challenging youth.

Arno van Gennep, writing in the early 20th century, discovered a commonality of rites of passage ceremonies in different cultures. Van Gennep (1908/2004) saw the phases of separation, transition, and incorporation as universal. *Incorporation* referred to the adolescent’s return to the community, marked by incorporating or harvesting the fruits of the journey made through

separation and transition. In applying van Gennep's (1908/2004) model to at-risk teenage boys, many of whom consider separation to be their native habitat and transition to be their mode of life, what is most glaringly absent is the final resolution, or culmination phase of incorporation resulting in the return to a purposeful place in the world, having been welcomed back by the larger community. Distilling into a simple message one of the most consistent cries heard for nearly a decade from boys in the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program, that message might read, "I am *not* a part of the community. I do *not* count. I *cannot* imagine how I will find a place in the future." Within the despair and even rage conveyed by these words, one can sometimes detect both a justification for aberrant behaviors such as burning down the community, because there is no true warmth or connection, as well as the perennial cry for a return to the community, for recognition and honoring of their unique gifts.

In the anthology, *Crossroads: The Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage* (Mahdi, Christopher, & Meade, 1996), authors from around the globe considered the costs to youth and culture when adolescents are bereft of these empowering rituals and ceremonies. As editor Meade (1996) warned, "The loss and avoidance of rites of passage have created an increasing gap between young and old" (p. xxii). Throughout their writings in *Crossroads*, the authors lament the spectacle of a culture where youth seem lost in violent or apathetic behaviors, and violence is on the rise, Meade (1996) further cautioned that "because youth is a stage of extremes, the vacuums that society leaves will be filled with extremes of destruction if they can't be filled with excesses of creation" (p. xxii). A contributor to the book, African Dagara tribal elder and scholar Malidoma Somé (1996), sounded the alarm: When rites of passage vanish from consciousness and cultural credibility, "they surface as misguided and misinformed attempts to

change one's own life. They become miscarriages of meaning, tragic acts of empty forms, and ghostly shapes" (p. 29).

Another contributor to *Crossroads* (Mahdi et al., 1996), Dadisi Sanyika (1996), a teacher and facilitator of youth work—including rites of passages—who was raised in the ganglands of South Central Los Angeles, revealed the tragic correlation between traditional rites of passage stages and initiation into a gang, moving through the following stages.

Separation. The seeker into gang membership separates from his everyday world, both in inner attitude and, eventually, physically.

Sacred Place. The locale of the gang's turf is sacred, to be protected at all costs.

Symbolic Death. The aspiring gang member has to fight several gang members simultaneously. Through his ordeal, he dies to his old self and begins a new life.

Trials and Tribulations. From robbery to car-jacking, drive-by-shootings, or even assassinating an enemy of his new gang, the novitiate proves his loyalty and worth.

Revelation. The transforming gang member is educated into the history, values, and standards of his new "family."

Resurrection or Rebirth. The newest member of the gang adopts a new name and the uniforms and colors of his tribe, flashes gang signs, and generally adopts the lifestyle of his gang family.

Reincorporation. The initiated youth is reborn into the community as a gang member, proud to be known by his affiliation. (Mahdi et al., 1996, pp. 121-123)

In his book, *Boys to Men: Spiritual Rites of Passage in an Indulgent Age*, transpersonal counselor and at-risk youthworker Bret Stephenson (2006) likened the difference between the harmonizing, integrative transformation of traditional rites of passage and modern distortions of this primordial pattern of passage to the difference between a labyrinth and a maze. He observed that a labyrinth offers a clear path of unfolding development, with an orderly progression from core to periphery and from the periphery back to the core, which could be likened to the relationship between moving back and forth from the subtlest spiritual currents of life and the most peripheral aspects of daily living; a maze, on the other hand, with its blocked passageways and blind alleys confuses and confounds the journeyer (Stephenson, 2006, p. 5). Stephenson lamented the loss of elders and mentors in our time who can help young men identify the ways out of the maze and into the labyrinth. He issued a clarion call to the mentor or elder-in-waiting:

We, the former travelers of adolescence, are bound by love, history, and experience to create clearer paths for our youths, to provide maps for them to follow, and remodel our mazes into labyrinths. One of the great crimes in modern times has been to steal these practices from our youth, forcing them into the maze and taking away the responsibility and the rewards of walking the time-honored paths to adulthood. The second greatest crime has been in holding this irresponsibility against them. (Stephenson, 2006, p. 38)

Stephenson (2006), a 28-year veteran in the field of adolescent development, with a special focus on high-risk teenage boys, has adapted Campbell's (1947) *Hero's Journey* (see Figure 1) as a model for working with at-risk boys.

Stephenson (2006) wrote,

Boys are constantly involved with the Hero's Journey whether they know it or not. I learned long ago that once they understand how it works, they will readily use this ancient model of growth as a pattern or template for their own lives. The Hero's Journey gives them a frame of reference for the struggles or challenge they will be dealing with at various stages and times in their lives. (p. 103)



Figure 1. Model of stages of the Hero's Journey. From "What is the Hero's Journey?" by J. Anderson, 2013. Reprinted by permission.

His adaptation of the Hero's Journey template moves from Conventional Slumber to The Call to Adventure (including Crossing Thresholds of Difficulty), through Discipline and Training, Culmination of The Quest (including Crossing The Threshold of Difficulty on Returning) to the final stage of Return and Contribution. He stated that most of the boys he works with "are stuck in a prestage, what Campbell called 'The Refusal of the Call.' If beginning the hero's journey is the call, then these boys are holding back at the gate, getting lost in drugs, gangs, and other risky behaviors" (B. Stephenson, personal communication, March 10, 2003).

Stephenson's seasoned observations are echoed by Waldorf educator Betty Staley (2006), who, for 30 years, has utilized myth as a key strategy in framing adolescence—which she calls *the sacred passage*. In recasting, for example, the legend of Parzifal from the Arthurian Grail mythos as a model of adolescent development, Staley (2006) wrote,

This is not simply a story about a boy becoming a man in relationship to various significant women. It is the story of the human soul with its masculine and feminine aspects. Opening the pages of *Parzival* is opening gates to the pathway of human development. (p. 4)

In the Spirit of Homer's Mentor: Michael Meade and the Renaissance of Spiritual Mentoring

Mentors and elders are those who have awakened to their own inner gifts and life callings. In learning to live with genuine purpose they develop second sight and become able to perceive the gifted nature and natural inclinations of other people. In perceiving the god-given gifts of the youth they become midwives of the soul and "god-parents" in the original sense. The idea of god-parents derives from the intuition that someone needs to protect the gifts of young people and help them reclaim what is essential for fulfilling their lives. (Meade, 2010, p. 112)

One of the most artful and articulate practitioners of an approach to mentoring that is imbued by the ancient revelations encoded in Homer's (1998) *Odyssey* and woven throughout world mythology is mythologist and at-risk youthworker Meade. Informed by the findings of transpersonal psychology, Meade's in-depth work over the past 20 years into the origins, inner ingredients, and the importance of the mentoring relationship for revitalizing the threads that link youth, elders, and culture, take the art and science of mentoring to a new level. The model of mentoring he has presented honors ancient wisdom through world mythology yet is firmly planted in addressing the present in working with severely at-risk youth, while envisioning a regenerated culture in which the creative bonds between youth and elders are reestablished (Meade, 1993, 2010, 2012; Meade et al., 2002). Meade's spiritual approach to mentoring, honoring the mythic aspect of the relationship, was a key inspiration for this research and a constant source of guidance and wisdom.

Meade has written eloquently of the importance of mentoring, in such works as *Men and the Water of Life* (1993), where much of the focus is on initiation, and *Fate and Destiny: The Two Agreements of the Soul* (2010), wherein a consideration of mentoring is nested within a

larger consideration of the importance of creative, nurturing relationships between youth and elders. However, the mentoring revelations of this eloquent storyteller who uses myth as a central method of transmission can be most powerfully received as *oral* transmissions. His most significant, extended findings and teachings on mentoring can be found in his two seminal audio presentations, *The Genius of Mentoring* (Meade et al., 2002) and *Roots and Branches of Mentoring* (Meade, 2009). These two oral transmissions represent the fruits of decades of in-the-field mentoring at-risk youth.

The Genius of Mentoring (Meade et al., 2002) is an audio presentation of a symposium for which Meade gathered together some of the most innovative and penetratingly incisive practitioners of a transpersonal approach to mentoring—an approach that boldly addresses the challenges facing young people, while championing their potential. The contributors to this dialogue were Luis Rodriguez, who came out of gang involvement as a youth to become a poet and novelist; Jack Kornfield, Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist; Malidoma Somé, whose work with youth bridges African tribal wisdom and perennial teachings on initiation; Orland Bishop, who has pioneered urban truces and mentored countless at-risk youth; and Meade himself. These men honor the ancient depth tradition of mentoring, while bringing to bear a gritty contemporary grasp on the very real dangers faced by at-risk youth. Perhaps the evocative breadth of in-depth knowledge and hard-won mentoring experience gathered at this event can best be encapsulated in a quote from Bishop: “Mentorship begins with an attempt to remember something older than the time in which we live” (Meade et al., 2002, track 5). Bishop also described mentoring as “a transmittance of an ancient way of being” (Meade et al., 2002, track 5).

In defining the core dynamics at play within an in-depth mentoring engagement, Meade elucidated a notion of what one might call the *wounded mentor*, illuminating how such a potent mentoring engagement can simultaneously activate the wounds in both mentee and mentor.

To mentor is to seek actively the gifts in a younger person; to acknowledge and bless them, but there's a small issue in that the gifts reside right next to the wounds; so that in mentoring, you're bound to get involved in the wounds of the person you're mentoring; there's no way around it. Not only that; since we imagine the mentor is further along the same road than the younger person is going on, that's why they found them, the involvement with the younger or less knowledgeable person will trigger the wounds in the mentor. That is to say, to mentor is to have your wounds opened, as well as to demand that your gifts become present. (Meade et al., 2002, track 1)

In *Roots and Branches of Mentoring*, Meade (2009) placed the art and activity of mentoring in the context of the healing of an entire culture, in which mentoring is one facet of the renewal possible when youth and elders connect. Conversely, he revealed how youth are cast adrift in a culture bereft of authentic mentors and elders, lacking the pattern of initiation or rites-of-passage ceremonies for youth.

Continuing his explorations of the ancient lineage of mentoring begun in *The Genius of Mentoring* (Meade et al., 2002), in *The Roots and Branches of Mentoring*, Meade (2009) returned to an in-depth illumination of Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*. He reminded the listener that the goddess Athena is the source of Mentor's wisdom. He described Mentor as coming from "the line of wisdom people" (Meade, 2009, track 6) and stated, "If a person is genuinely mentoring, Athena will enter them; that is to say, Wisdom will come into them" (track 6). Finally, Meade (2009) reiterated throughout this transmission that mentorship involves a rigorous developmental journey yet one that is richly rewarding, in that "mentoring, when done authentically, has inspiration for the mentor" (track 6). He painted a picture of mentoring as a richly challenging, spiritual endeavor in which the mentor must develop the tenacity to stand firm and awake,

bearing witness to the anguish of the mentee, while continually striving to listen for, excavate, and then foster the awakening of the inner gifts that often lie sheltered within the wounds.

Contemporary Approaches to Development of Empathy and Compassion in Youth

Usually entering under the mantle of social and emotional learning, mindfulness meditation—including meditations focused on the cultivation of compassion and the practice of council, which promotes deep listening and speaking from the heart (Kessler, 2000, 2003; Zimmerman & Coyle, 1996)—are increasingly making their way into the public-school arena.

One key reason compelling innovative educators to craft these new approaches was expressed by one of my own mentors in this work, Rachael Kessler (2000), who wrote,

The void of spiritual guidance for teenagers is a contributing factor in the self-destructive and violent behavior plaguing our nation. For many young people, drugs, sex, gang violence, and even suicide may reflect a search for connection, mystery, and meaning as well as an escape from the pain of not having a genuine source of spiritual fulfillment.
(p. 2)

As students learn to connect with and stabilize a dynamic stillness within, empathy can more easily arise, and compassion for self and others can begin to flow. In what one might call a counterpart to learning one's ABCs, Susan Kaiser Greenland (2010), author of *The Mindful Child* and director of the InnerKids Foundation, suggested updating the ABC acronym to read Attention, Balance, and Compassion, which are elements of mindfulness taught in a program she helped to implement in selected schools in the greater Los Angeles area. In New York City, another program, The Lineage Project (<http://www.lineageproject.org/>), teaches mindfulness meditation and compassion meditation to incarcerated teens. Such organizations as the Mindfulness Awareness Research Center at UCLA, the InnerKids Foundation, and many others that have appeared in the past decade teach children how to meditate and to develop compassion,

while instructing teachers in methods for bringing these ancient, renewed technologies to the classroom.

In a June 16, 2007 *New York Times* article entitled, “In the Classroom, a New Focus on Quieting the Mind,” mindfulness-in-the-classroom researcher Philippe R. Goldin challenged: “Parents and teachers tell kids 100 times a day to pay attention, . . . but we never teach them how” (as cited in Brown, 2007, para. 8). During its 9 years of operation, including the period covered by this study, the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program also used brief interludes of mindfulness meditation to help students to move beyond impulsivity, to reflection, and into empathy—toward oneself and toward others.

A current example of a work of compassion in action involving teens can be found in the creation of *Rachel’s Challenge*, inspired by the tragic death of Rachel Scott, the first victim of the 1999 Columbine School massacre (Cullen, 2009). In the year before her death, Rachel had written an essay about compassion in which she stated, “I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion then it will start a chain reaction of the same” (Scott, n.d., para. 3). After her murder, Rachel’s father, inspired by her essay and determined to phoenix forth from the death of his daughter into service to others, created *Rachel’s Challenge* (<http://www.rachelschallenge.org/>) to invite students to fulfill his daughter’s vision by committing to performing acts of compassion in their family, school, and community. Rachel’s Challenge has grown into a national movement, inspiring students, teachers, and parents to create a more compassionate school environment and society.

While engaged in this research, I was invited to attend a day of Rachel’s Challenge at a local middle school in the Fall of 2010. It was particularly moving to witness several boys shift from a stance of resistance to the presentation, including denial of responsibility for heartless

behavior such as bullying, to acknowledgment of the effects of their actions on others. A few boys cried as they listened to the story of the massacre at Columbine High School and the atrocities that can occur in the absence of compassion. During the year following the presentation, the school brought together students, teachers, and parents to consider ways to sustain the impact of Rachel's Challenge and to foster a school community based on compassion. Such gatherings, or *councils*, are currently being implemented in schools world-wide.

The practice of council. One of the most powerful and profound practices for awakening both empathy and compassion is the practice of council. With its origins in primordial cultures (Kessler, 2000; Zimmerman & Coyle, 1996), council is found in Homer's *Odyssey* (1998) and other journey literature such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Tolkien, 1991).

Council, which is utilized in schools throughout the world, promotes authentic communication by emphasizing both speaking and listening from the heart. In council, students sit in a circle, while one person, holding a talking stick, speaks at a time. All others in the circle practice deep listening, encouraging empathetic attunement to the speaker. Council is a nonhierarchical practice that invites compassionate individual speech, while fostering the wisdom inherent in the collective gathering.

Near the beginning of his own awakening to empathy and compassion in Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*, Odysseus' son, Telemachus convenes a council to speak his heart before his mother's suitors who have ravaged the realm in the absence of his father (pp. 93-101). He announces, "I was the one who called us all together. Something wounds me deeply" (Homer, 1998, p. 96). Telemachus' empowerment to summon the council comes immediately after his first mentoring encounters with the goddess of Wisdom, Athena, who first adopts the form of Mentos, an elder sailor, and then that of Mentor, whom Odysseus had charged to oversee Telemachus'

development in the king's absence at war. In a testament to the power of council to promote deep listening and truth-telling, after Telemachus has commandingly spoken his heart before the assembled, astonished listeners, he becomes

Filled with anger,
down on the ground he dashed the speaker's scepter—
bursting into tears. Pity seized the assembly.
All just sat there, silent . . .
no one had the heart to reply with harshness. (Homer, 1998, pp. 95-96)

This dramatic portrayal of the effect of council demonstrates the roots of compassion. In *PassageWorks*, a program of social and emotional learning established by the aforementioned Kessler (2000), the practice of council is a key methodology for awakening empathy and compassion—as well as what Kessler refers to as *soul*:

When soul is present in education, our attention shifts. We listen with great care not only to what is spoken but also to the messages between the words—tones, gestures, and the flicker of feeling across the face. We concentrate on what has heart and meaning. (p. 3)

At-risk boys re-visioned: From diagnosis to Gnosis. At-risk teenage boys are often referred into therapy or into a program such as *Odyssey Writes of Passage*, feeling singled out, failing, and even pathologized. Encountering such boys, the mentor is challenged to seek out positive lenses through which he views these mentees, so that his inner compass for the intervention is pointed toward gifts and potential, while remaining mindful of the genuine obstacles the boys face. An integral part of the intuitive inquiry method in writing this dissertation was to depict the mentor's endeavor to engage these positive frameworks in working with the boys.

Three psychological models were particularly well-suited for envisioning and beholding at-risk teenage boys in this positive light: the Gnosis model (Hutchins, 2002) of diagnosis; Assagioli's (1975) psychosynthesis, and Frankl's (1946/1978) logotherapy. Hutchins's (2002)

Gnosis model invites the mentor to attune to the potential callings, assets, and gifts of the mentee, while remaining mindful of any pathologies that might fall under the traditional *DSM* diagnoses; psychosynthesis casts the adolescent journey as an odyssey toward the transpersonal Self; and logotherapy's perspective frames the intervention within the quest for meaning and purpose. In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, a fourth model is offered, one that developed from this research, known as the *9 Gates of Mentoring*. These models became inspirational lenses through which the mentoring endeavor was perceived and experienced.

The Gnosis model. Transpersonal psychologist Hutchins pioneered a Gnosis model of diagnosis that focuses on gifts and abilities and serves as a counterpart to the *DSM-IV-TR*'s (APA, 2000) almost exclusive focus on pathologies. In his article, "Gnosis: Beyond Disease and Disorder to a Diagnosis Inclusive of Gifts and Challenges," Hutchins (2002) outlined his model, which uses the *DSM-IV-TR*'s axes as a departure point. The Gnosis model is constructed as follows:

- Axis I: Calling and Goals
- Axis II: Core Gifts and Abilities
- Axis III: Physical Gifts
- Axis IV: Psychosocial and Environmental Supports
- Axis V: System Gifts: Family/Community/Culture. (Hutchins, 2002, p. 103)

As a perceptual underpinning, Hutchins's (2002) model was utilized in the present study as a more hopeful and encouraging lens through which to behold the boys, as it focused on potential assets and strengths, including the boys' inner assets and in terms of family and community support. Notably, Hutchins (2002) is not advocating for the elimination of the diagnosis of pathologies but rather offering a parallel, positively oriented counterpart to the traditional *DSM-IV-TR* (APA, 2000) model. The Gnosis model challenged my ability as mentor

to hold a dual-lens in working with the boys, seeing the shadows and the wounds as well as talents and gifts. As Hutchins (2002) wrote,

Using the Gnosis model and axes is more than merely enhancing the DSM-IV. It involves shifting one's central focus and clinical concerns to a view that incorporates a person's problems as well as his or her goals, gifts, and abilities. The effect of this shift can be profound. (p. 107)

Witnessing the boys through the lenses of callings and goals, or core gifts and abilities, served to reverse the tendency, so pervasive in public education, to orient the intervention toward what is perceived to be “wrong,” and instead turned it continuously toward what could go *right*. This approach honored boys who were potentially bright, hungry for learning, and yearning for authentic development. It also invited them to behold *themselves* in the mirror of gnosis, a tradition of seeking knowledge characterized by clear seeing and illumination. In turn, as a mentor encountering these boys through such potent and positive lenses, it helped to awaken my own potential to behold (the word is used deliberately; *be*—signifying being truly present—and, *hold*—steadfastly holding a vision of their potential) and to witness the seeds of transformation that lay coiled within the seeming maze of their risky behaviors. This alignment also called upon my skills as a mentor to be considering my own callings and goals along with my core gifts and abilities; for how could I ask the boys to follow their dreams, if I were not following my own? The more a mentor can radiate the struggle and accomplishment of this living encounter within himself, the more potentially “lights up” in the boys, according to Meade and Somé (Meade et al., 2002).

Viktor Frankl and logotherapy. Frankl (1946/1978) famously wrote: “Everything can be taken from a man except the first and last freedom—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances; to choose one's way” (p. 86). Such a message, pointing toward the possibility of finding meaning even in the darkest of circumstances, is one that spoke powerfully to the at-risk

teenage boys I mentored, many of whom had lost parents, family members, and friends, while others had endured and were still undergoing various trials and traumas, some self-generated, others as simply part and parcel of difficult life circumstances. Utilizing Frankl's (1946/1986) hard-won wisdom as writing prompts provided an opening for disconnected teenage boys to consider and sometimes discover the place of a deeper, more positively oriented meaning in their own lives.

Frankl himself began his career working with hopeless and despairing teens in Austria at the time of the stock market collapse in 1929, when unemployment was rampant (Graber, 2004). At that time, Frankl set up youth counseling centers throughout Austria where he first field-tested his theories about the central importance of finding meaning and purpose in life. By as early as 1933, he had systematized his theory of logotherapy, which centered on treatment through the discovery of meaning. During Frankl's incarceration in four concentration camps, he found that his theories held up; the torch of meaning could help one to navigate hell itself (Frankl, 1946/1986).

In a study (Jeffries, 1995) based on Frankl's meaning-centered work with 120 adolescents, including 77 teenage boys, using the Life Purpose Questionnaire Adolescent Form (LPQ-A), a relationship was shown between fulfillment and the discovery of a sense of purpose. Moreover, this newfound or awakening sense of purpose included, "Positive familial and peer relationships, altruism, purpose and creativity" (Jeffries, 1995, p. 61). Although this study shows no direct causality, it can be inferred that key components of altruism are empathy and compassion: the ability to feel into others' experience (empathy) and, having made that connection, to be moved to act in an altruistic manner to ease the suffering of others through generosity (compassion). Frankl (1946/1986) wrote that

life can be made meaningful in a threefold way; first, through what we give to life (in terms of our creative works); second, by what we take from the world (in terms of our experiencing values); and third, through the stand we take toward a fate we can no longer change. (p. 15)

Frankl's (1946/1986) work was brought into consideration for this study to serve as a *guiding inspiration* and a *positive lens* through which the boys could be regarded. Logotherapy's key insights informed the outlook of the study, amplifying this researcher's own experience in the past 9 years of observing the connection between the awakening of empathy and compassion and the unfolding of a sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of troubled adolescents.

Prior to the present study, I had witnessed the efficacy of Frankl's writing in serving this awakening when carrying the *Odyssey* intervention into my work with direct-file adolescents—those who were being tried as adults, due to the severity of their crimes—in juvenile hall. My paper, "Viktor Frankl and the Homeboys" (2008), attempted to show the explicit connection between empathy, compassion, and meaning in teenagers who use writing as a tool to connect to these states. One boy, Omar, responded with extraordinary openness and depth to Frankl's work, even while locked into a grim reality:

In a tiny, grim cell in juvenile hall, a sixteen year-old gang member facing life in prison for murder finds his entire existence takes on meaning and purpose when reading a slim book published over half a century ago by an Austrian psychiatrist. Alone in lockdown, he finds a curious sense of freedom in taking responsibility for the suffering he caused and in deciding that he will find a way, even from his iron enclosure, of mentoring others away from gang life. (p. 1)

Several of the writing activities in the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* intervention-curriculum actually invited students to reflect on meaning—or meaninglessness—in their lives. In doing so, students often linked the discovery of a sense of meaning to the awakening of empathy and compassion. In one such activity, students were given a sheet of simple, yet powerful quotes from Frankl's work and then invited to discuss and write about the quote's application in their

lives. Regarding the quote about freedom and attitude cited at the beginning of this section, one student wrote, “I would like to have this quote floating before my eyes every time I get ready to blame others” (as cited in Shefa, 2010, p. 39).

Roberto Assagioli and psychosynthesis. Assagioli’s (1975) psychosynthesis model can be used to introduce teens to their transpersonal *Self*. Psychosynthesis offers a grand vision of the spiritual possibilities of development, within which the qualities of empathy and compassion might be uncovered, nurtured, and developed.

By placing *synthesis*, the integration of all aspects of the psyche (including the spiritual) into wholeness, rather than *analysis*, Assagioli, although an early student of psychoanalysis, set off on his unique path as early as 1910 (Firman & Gila, 2002). Although the Italian psychiatrist respected Freud’s pioneering accomplishments in psychology, he parted ways with psychoanalysis on several critical and fundamental points: what he felt was an overemphasis on analyzing the dynamics of childhood; a reductionist drive theory which he felt to be “limited” (Assagioli, 1968a, p. 280); Freud’s strident contempt for religion and spirituality; and lastly, the notion of the disengaged attitude cherished by early psychoanalyst practitioners.

Assagioli’s steadfast belief and experience that spiritual drives are as fundamental to human life as sexual or aggressive drives distinguished psychosynthesis early on as a bold new approach to human psychology. His dedication to a psychology that embraced the transpersonal realms was revolutionary for his time.

Psychosynthesis . . . became the first approach, born of psychoanalysis, which would include: the artistic, altruistic, and heroic potentials of the human being; a validation of aesthetic, spiritual, and peak experiences; the insight that psychological symptoms can be triggered by spiritual dynamics (often now called *spiritual emergency*); and the understanding that experiences of meaning and purpose in life derive from a healthy relationship between the personal self and a deeper or higher Self in ongoing daily living, or what is called *Self-realization*. (Firman & Gila, 2002, pp. 1-2)

Assagioli's transpersonally informed model of the psyche was born of his own profound studies in spirituality, as well as his experience of deep suffering. During World War II, his Institute in Rome was closed by the Fascist dictatorship, and Assagioli was eventually imprisoned for his humanitarian views and locked in solitary confinement (Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 13). True to his indomitably positive outlook, however, Assagioli decided to utilize his time in solitary to probe into the innermost realms of the psyche. Writing later of his experience in this externally imposed imprisonment and internally surrendered to spiritual retreat, Assagioli rhapsodized his findings:

A sense of boundlessness, of no separation from all that is, a merging with the self of the whole. First an outgoing movement, but not towards any particular object or individual being—an overflowing or effusion in all directions, as the ways of an ever expanding sphere. A sense of universal love. (as cited in Schaub & Schaub, 1996, pp. 20-21)

Assagioli also lost his only son, Illario, who died of tuberculosis in 1951, at the age of 28 (Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 13). In the face of his suffering, he persevered in his work, inspired by meetings with such spiritual exemplars as Martin Buber, P. D. Ouspensky, Alice Bailey, Lama Govinda, Rabindranath Tagore, Dane Rudhyar, Inayat Khan, D. T. Suzuki, Viktor Frankl, and Abraham Maslow. His writings bore testimony to the depth and scope of his studies, referring to Western psychological pioneers, Freud, Jung, Adler, Frankl, and May but also arcing wider to embrace the psychological and spiritual geniuses of Dante, Emerson, Nietzsche, Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Gandhi, Schweitzer, Socrates, Plato, Buber, and countless other artists, spiritual leaders, and revolutionary figures (Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 15).

In *Psychosynthesis in Education: A Guide to the Joy of Learning*, educator Diana Whitmore (1986), one of the few who has applied the psychosynthesis model to working with adolescents in schools, wrote,

This Transpersonal essence, lying at the core of each of us, is something which is beyond our everyday awareness, beyond our egoistic impulses. It is what might be called the true Self or the essential Self. It includes, but it is more than, our personal day-to-day consciousness. From this Self we discover meaning and the experience of having a purpose in life, which often brings fulfillment. It knows who we are and where we are going as well as what is worthwhile and of value for us in life. (p. 16)

Assagioli (1968b) himself wrote about psychosynthesis and education, advocating for “first, producing a human being who functions harmoniously, radiantly and productively in relation to his [sic] own capacity. And second, establishing the conditions in which such an ideal could be realized” (p. 8). By providing teens with access to this transpersonal dimension—through guided imagery, mindfulness meditation, basic philosophical questioning, and, specifically, writing—they are given the opportunity to discover their own capacity to function harmoniously (Whitmore, 1986).

As stated previously, little has been little written on the application of psychosynthesis to working with adolescents, much less at-risk teenage boys. This is rather surprising, in that the psychosynthesis model depicts human development at all ages as an exciting journey, which could serve as an antidote to the boredom that so often afflicts the boys on their educational journey. The incorporation of guided imagery, meditation, and philosophical questing—a sort of secular spirituality—in psychosynthesis is particularly suited to address the spiritual hunger in today’s students in a lively, engaging manner, while still respecting the separation of church and state that is fundamental to public education. Whitmore (1986) wrote, the goal is to “transform the learning process into an adventure, filled with the depth and richness these faculties provide. A child or adolescent learns most effectively when his whole being is actively engaged in his education” (p. 24).

One fascinating, earlier attempt at utilizing psychosynthesis in working with at-risk teens occurred the early 1970s. As recorded in a transcript from a seminar held in New York on

November 17, 1972, entitled, “Preparation of the Vessel, or Plugging the Holes in our Buckets: A Psychosynthesis Approach to Working with Adolescents,” Mark Horowitz, then a guidance counselor in the Massachusetts school system and a practitioner of psychosynthesis, spoke about his work with adolescents, teens who had run away from home, dropped out of school, and become involved in various risky behaviors. As Horowitz (1972) described them, “These were kids who didn’t like the situation they were in; they were very depressed, very down; they weren’t very happy where they were in life” (p. 3).

Horowitz (1972) used psychosynthesis exercises authored by Assagioli but which he adapted toward use with teens—guided imagery, journal writing, and identity investigations—on strengthening the will to address what he saw to be the major challenges the adolescents were facing: a negative self-image and a lack of will and the ability to envision a better future. In the spirit of psychosynthesis’ quest for the transpersonal self, he inspired the students to contemplate “Who Am I?” while dis-identifying from their image as a “bad kid” and “self-identifying” their more positive traits (p. 9). Reflecting on the hunger in these at-risk adolescents for a more positive identity, Horowitz (1972) stated,

The only thing you have to do is plant the thought in their minds and they latch onto it. It’s beautiful. It’s like the way a flower moves to the light. They begin to see a way out of the dilemma that they’re in. (p. 9)

Finally, Horowitz (1972) recognized the pivotal role played by a counselor or mentor in facilitating this transformation: “I have to be an example of everything I’m talking about—openness, honesty, putting out good energy, saying good things about myself, affirming my own being” (p. 9).

Writes of passage. This literature review has so far considered the elements of empathy and compassion through the lenses of neurobiology, psychology, religion, and spirituality as key

indicators of healing and awakening in at-risk teenage boys. Obstacles to the awakening of empathy were also considered. A trace of the mentoring dynamic, from pre-classic Greece to the present day, revealed the durability and potency of this nurturing relationship between a youth and an elder, particularly in its ability to catalyze the awakening of empathy and compassion. The work of various developmental theorists was introduced, to show the different lenses through which adolescence has been viewed. The indigenous model of a rite of passage and the hero's journey were also considered as early and perennially applicable maps for adolescent development, as well as the contemporary mentoring work of Meade and his colleagues. An overview of cutting-edge programs that address the developmental and social and emotional learning needs of students was provided. Finally, the Gnosis model of diagnosis was introduced as a powerful way to behold the potential of these boys—even while the mentor continues to keeps a firm grasp on the depth and scope of their challenges—and positive psychospiritual models, psychosynthesis and logotherapy, were cited as potential beacons during the journey of adolescence.

Even though these positive pathways are theoretically applicable to work with at-risk boys, each boy presents the mentor with a significant challenge: What is the way forward for teenage boys who have become disconnected from empathy and compassion, disenfranchised from the school system, and are largely floundering in their lives without a sense of meaning or purpose? As pointed out earlier in this literature review, in the absence of empathy and compassion, these boys who are disconnected from education and society often struggle to find meaning and purpose through initiations of gang valor, the “rite of passage” of drug use, and other highly risky enterprises. Referring to an earlier quoted passage,

the vacuum created by the loss of serious rites of transition will be filled with something. Because youth is a stage of extremes, the vacuums that society leaves will be filled with

extremes of destruction if they can't be filled with excesses of creation. (Meade, 1996, p. xxii)

The *write-of-passage* intervention that was the focus of the present study attempted at least to partially fill this vacuum in the context of public-school education. The need for engaging boys in the writing process was seen as critical at multiple levels: first, to allow academic passage through high-school and then, more to the heart of the research, to help the boys to construct a crucible within which they might wrestle with issues of meaning and purpose and confront the struggle to awaken empathy and compassion.

In *Boy Writers: Reclaiming Their Voices*, teacher and writing instructor Ralph Fletcher (2006) proclaimed that “writing is much more than just another school subject. It is a life skill, a lifeline we throw out at the darkest, as well as the most triumphant, moments of our lives” (p. 15). Seeing the central importance of developing the skills to express experiences and inner values through the written word, Fletcher (2006) warned that “we simply cannot afford to write off a generation of boy writers. Writing is a skill that no student, no citizen, can do without” (p. 15).

Fletcher's (2006) experiences working with adolescent boys for decades also guided his insights into the pivotal role that a teacher or mentor might play in the formation of a boy's core attitudes toward writing and toward education in general. In discussing the sequence of withdrawal that occurs in a young male writer, Fletcher painted a portrait of writing disengagement that echoes the experience of countless educators across the country (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Sax, 2007; Shefa, 2008; Tyre, 2009). Fletcher (2006) captured the educational fault line widening when a boy's first attempts at writing are discouraged because they do not seem to fit strictly academic criteria:

First he gets angry, resentful. Then he turns off and gives you that “Whatever” look. He glances around the classroom and says to himself: “This writing stuff isn’t for me.” At the very least he recognizes: “This is not where I can do the real writing.” Writing becomes one more example of school’s necessary evils, something you have to do even though it doesn’t have much value or contain much pleasure. (p. 43)

The intervention that was the focus of this dissertation, *Odyssey Writes of Passage*, utilized the writing process as a central vehicle for awakening empathy and stirring compassion in teenage boys and, in a majority of cases, connecting this awakening to a sense of renewal, hope, and meaning. By writing of their odyssey from confusion to understanding and from the lethargy of un-caring toward an experience of *states* and the development of *traits* of empathy and compassion, the boys made a *write* of passage toward maturity. They discovered that they had a voice and that this inner voice, both wise and ever new, could itself become an inner guide to awakening. Additionally, like the mostly working-class college students in Bache’s (2008) Ohio State University classes on religious studies, many of whom did not regard themselves at all as writers, some of the boys found that “the act of writing, when courageously followed through to its end, often becomes their way out of a personal hell” (p. 180). The term *write* of passage signified the following: using the crucible of the writing process to navigate the waters of the psyche, like Odysseus or Telemachus upon perilous seas, seeking the boys’ reconnection to their inner and outer homelands. In *Writing as a Way of Healing*, writing teacher Louise DeSalvo (2000) cited writer Alice Walker’s terse, potent description of the writing process as “*a very sturdy ladder out of the pit*” (p. 8). Climbing that ladder, rung by rung, especially when encouraged by the believing mirror of a compassionate mentor, can remind even the most reluctant or unconfident writer that, as Walker invited, “though there’s a pit, there’s a way out that’s safe and strong and dependable. . . . All you have to do when you’re in the pit is to

remember that writing's there. And use it as a way to reach freedom and safety" (as cited in DeSalvo, 2000, p. 8).

Jungian psychologists and school counselors John Allan, Jr., and Judy Bertoia (2003), in their book *Written Paths to Healing: Education and Jungian Child Counseling*, affirmed that

adolescents can transform some very negative emotions and painful experiences through the writing process. Not only are they able to bring about a change in their emotional well-being, but they often gain a new understanding of themselves and their world and are able to make substantive changes in their perceptions, cognitions, and behavior" (p. 3).

This newfound understanding "can turn feelings of hopelessness into awareness and the possibility of action" (Allan & Bertoia, 2003, p. 17).

James Pennebaker (1990), social psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, spent decades researching the relationship between writing about trauma and healing as well as the relationship between writing and the immune system. In his book, *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, Pennebaker (1990) summarized his controlled clinical researches conducted to investigate how writing about painful experiences seemed to hold the potential to move people of all ages from states of trauma, hopelessness, and anxiety to new levels of health and well-being.

Pennebaker (1990) began his investigations by considering the ways that *talking* about trauma, grief, or difficult situations could begin to effect healing. He referred to this as "the act of confronting a trauma" (Pennebaker, 1990, p. 10). Out of his initial observations, he began to consider how the important element in the healing equation might be that

confronting a trauma immediately reduces the physiological work of inhibition. During the confrontation, the biological stress of inhibition is immediately reduced. Over time, if individuals continue to confront and thereby resolve the trauma, there will be a lowering of the overall stress levels on the body. (Pennebaker, 1990, p. 10)

Taking his observations to the next logical step, Pennebaker (1990) then asked the provocative question, “Is talking necessary for the talking cure to cure?” (p. 29). With his associate, Sandra Beall, Pennebaker asked 46 college students from Southern Methodist University to write in journals for 4 days, 15 minutes per day. The groups were then placed into smaller subgroupings: The first group was simply asked to “just vent . . . emotions” (Pennebaker, 1990, p. 31) during the writing sessions, the second group was asked simply to write in a factual manner about the trauma, and the third group was tasked to write about both the facts and their emotions surrounding the trauma.

Before even tabulating their results, Pennebaker and Beall were first simply “stunned and depressed” (Pennebaker, 1990, p. 33) by the depth of anguish evidenced by the writings from these mostly upper-class, 18-year-old college students as well as the fact that they “had so readily revealed” (p. 33) their pain. They wondered what such disclosures might suggest about students brought up in more grim or hostile environments.

Almost 6 months after the four writing sessions, Pennebaker (1990) and Beal compiled data from the university’s student health center at the college, including the number of illness visits that each student had made in the 2.5 months before and 5.5 months after the experiment. Their findings suggested a strong correlation between writing and health:

People who wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings surrounding a trauma evidenced an impressive drop in illness visits after the study compared with the other groups. In the months before the experiment, everyone in all the groups went to the health center for illness at the same rate. After the experiment, however, the average person who wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings went fewer than 0.5 times—a 50% drop in the monthly visitation rate. (Pennebaker, 1990, p. 34)

Like their older counterparts in Pennebaker (1990) and Beall’s study and subsequent studies Pennebaker conducted on the relationship between writing and the immune system, writing of difficult experiences or even traumas often resulted in a sense of acceptance and

empowerment for the young boys of 14-15 years of age featured in this current study; transforming their suffering into compassion for themselves and others.

Mary Pipher (2007), who has worked with and written extensively about at-risk adolescents, spoke about the empowering act of writing in a speech entitled “Fostering Moral Imagination: Empathy Is a Radical Act”:

Writers foster the growth of moral imagination in other human beings. We help people explore the question of who we call “us.” Our work widens the category of “us,” and narrows the category of “them” in the lives of people we teach. Humans are hardwired to construct a circle of caring. (p. 3)

Throughout her book, *Writing to Change the World*, Pipher (2006) amplified the themes of utilizing writing as a vehicle for awakening empathy and compassion—first for oneself, and then for others. In using writing in this manner, students can begin to embody the meaning of empathy as a feeling into one’s own or another’s experience while stirring the fires of compassion, in that writing with passion about the plight of self and other brings the truth of suffering close to the heart, while pointing the way toward its alleviation through service.

The challenge nevertheless remains: How does one inspire adolescent boys, particularly at-risk adolescent boys, to engage the writing process? Again, Fletcher (2006), pointed to the central role played by the writing teacher or mentor in fostering writing confidence in boys. He found that when responding “Yes” to the item on their student questionnaire that stated “I am a writer,” most boys attributed their affirmative statement to “one year, one teacher, one powerful writing experience” (Fletcher, 2006, p. 151). From this observation Fletcher (2006) went on to offer a veritable mentor’s guide to empowering boy writers to find their own voice:

Encourage him to use words and phrases that sound like him. Allow him to do the writing only he can do. Let him see you react to and enjoy his writing. Create a classroom where he can reclaim his voice; the unique qualities of a writer’s personality that show up on the page. That’s the greatest gift he will take from you, and it will fuel him long after he leaves your class and goes on to write the future of his life. (p. 167)

Personal and anecdotal evidence. During the years 2002-2011 and culminating with this study, I was involved in creating and facilitating the in-school *Odyssey Writes of Passage* intervention program for at-risk students, which utilized writing as a means of awakening empathy and stirring compassion (the program is now called *Wisdom Writers* and currently operates at the middle-school level). Working in small-group settings with over 300 students per year, I repeatedly witnessed how boys who had been identified as “at-risk” of failing academically (especially in terms of writing) and “failing” in life flourished when mentored by an elder who guided them to excavate and express these qualities in their developing lives, with writing being one of the central tools to promote this awakening.

As the 2009-2010 school year moved toward its conclusion, I was inspired to see middle-school students writing deeply moving essays on the power of empathy and the presence of compassion in their lives. I was greatly encouraged to see that young students—many of whom were struggling with an array of personal, familial, and academic challenges—could discover, reflect on, and write about the qualities of empathy and compassion in wise and moving essays that added their young voices to the great roundtable of consideration that stretches across the ages.

During the same week that my middle-school students were sharing the inspiring results of their empathic and compassionate researches, the desert community where I live was rocked by the story of a group of high-school students who had been suspended for creating and playing a game called Beat the Jew. This “game” involved students called Nazis chasing and trying to catch a runner, who was designated as a Jew, as hunter and hunted raced on foot and in cars down some of the busiest streets in town. Although virulent anti-Semitism was not involved, it

was clear that this so-called game represented a colossal failure of empathy in a valley inhabited by so many holocaust survivors and an abyss of compassion on the part of the students.

As the community sought to come to grips with what had happened, although I was not working at the school that the students involved attended, I was called in as a consultant to work with one of the “architects” of the Beat the Jew game. When I met with the boy, two things were clear to me: First, he was terrified of backlash from the community—a community with a strong Jewish and holocaust survivor population; second, the boy was afraid of the possibility of losing his scholarship to college (threats had been made to contact his college, to inform them of his activities). Finally, though, it was abundantly clear to me that this straight-A student had set up the Facebook page for the Beat the Jew game and served as one of the heads of the activity in the heedless *absence* of empathy and compassion.

As we spoke, I worked to help this young man to see the interconnections in the ripple effect of a single action. I helped him to put himself “in the shoes of another,” the colloquial shorthand for empathy. I sought to make real to him the living souls—as well as the extinguished souls—whom he might have offended. My intent was not to punish but rather to help him to *see clearly* and thereby see himself and all that he was connected to by his heedless acts. Into this situation, which was already highly inflamed, I sought to invite insight and equanimity along with empathy and compassion.

Meeting at the Tolerance Education Center in Rancho Mirage, which was founded by a Holocaust survivor, I invited the boy to watch with me a remarkable documentary about a local resident. I reminded him that this survivor had been a teenager, the same age as him, at the time of his incarceration at Sobibor, Majdanek, Dachau, and Buchenwald concentration camps. In a

mentoring moment in which the room seemed to become radiantly still, I was reminded of the power of language to create or destroy.

Through watching the documentary and our concluding discussion, this student began to experience an awakening to the absolute importance of empathy on the journey: the odyssey to becoming a true human being. He began to understand, with both head and heart, why his actions were so objectionable, and he expressed strong resolve never to forget.

Conclusion

In presenting neurological, religious, and spiritual correlates of empathy and compassion, this review of literature attempted to reveal the vast, challenging territory of awakening empathy and stirring compassion in teenage boys through mentoring and writing. The review also presented different models of adolescent development, modern or primal, psychological and futuristic. The art and activity of mentoring was reviewed as a highly conducive human medium for transformation, while the use of writing as a means of mentoring, self-knowledge, and healing was explored. Personal anecdotes revealed the art of mentoring in action in a present-time, local community.

The chapter that follows introduces the method of this research, intuitive inquiry, and offers a set of lenses through which the phenomena being studied were approached. Chapter 4 features Cycle 3 of this intuitive inquiry, which is the fieldwork that was conducted with the 12 boys. Intuitive inquiry and its technology of embodied writing, which are defined in Chapter 3 and interlaced through Chapter 4, challenged not only my skills as a writer attempting to depict subtle shifts in the evolving mentoring relationship but also my ability as a researcher to combine intellectual rigor with the wisdom of the embodied heart. Correspondingly, this method invites

readers to open their senses and sensibilities as widely as possible not only to understand but to *experience* a living realm.

Chapter 5 presents the final discussion of my research. The chapter includes my refined as well as my transformed lenses, the latter of which took the form of an original template of mentoring, inferred from the results, known as the *9 Gates of Mentoring*.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

As we circle around the object of inquiry, we look at it again and again. Another word also carries the flavor of repeated looking: *respect*. When we respect someone or something, we look again (*re-spect*), we pay special attention, we honor. The resemblances of these words suggest that at some important level, *research* and *respect* are synonymous. (Braud & Anderson, 1998a, p. 26)

General Design

This qualitative, intuitive inquiry researched a process of awakening empathy and compassion in 12 at-risk, ninth-grade teenage boys who participated in a semester-long, in-school mentoring and writing-improvement intervention program known as *Odyssey Writes of Passage*. The central components of this intervention were developing a one-on-one mentoring relationship with the author of this study, and ongoing writing activities by his 12 coresearchers. The writing activities took place during weekly group meetings, over a period of 16 weeks. The content of three of these writings, the prompts for which were designed to invite the qualities of empathy and compassion, became a central theme in individual mentoring sessions of approximately 30-minute duration. Individual mentoring sessions for each of the boys took place four times throughout the 16-week period.

This research also traced my corresponding developmental journey as the boys' mentor and the author of this study. I attempted to elucidate both the subtle dynamics at play in a developing mentoring relationship as well as the necessary inner transformations required of one seeking to mentor effectively and at depth. By regularly *writing* about my struggles and breakthroughs throughout the study (recorded in a *Mentor's Journal*), I also attempted to verify the efficacy of the writing process as a tool for self-knowledge and as a catalyst for awakening and sustaining empathy and compassion.

The present research focused on a particular form of in-depth mentoring, in which the awakening of empathy and compassion in both mentor and mentee was central to its design. Historically, research on mentoring has been predominantly reported in quantitative studies, which only nominally, at best, addressed the intrapsychic dynamics of the mentoring process or the potentially transformational development of the mentor. Similarly, no studies were discovered that combined (a) the mentoring of at-risk youth with (b) the awakening of empathy and compassion, in which, (c) writing was a central activity of transformation for both mentor and mentees. One of the fundamental attunements in this process—the orienting notion that one’s wounds could, when made conscious through mentoring and through writing, become the agency of awakening—was a component completely lacking from previous studies.

Intrinsic to this study’s design was the necessity for the mentor to practice empathetic attunement, or identification, and compassionate concern for the welfare of his mentees. Built into this imperative was the notion that effective mentoring of others, in terms of awakening or catalyzing empathy and compassion, was dependent upon a mentor’s awakening these qualities within the sphere of his own life. “The researcher’s preparation and even his or her very being may importantly influence the nature and outcome of a research study, and some of these factors can be quite subtle and operate through equally subtle means” (Braud & Anderson, 1998a, p. 17).

The above considerations guided me in embracing a qualitative research design, with intuitive inquiry as the chosen research method. “In qualitative approaches the researcher is the actual measuring instrument, and his or her qualities and sensitivities become critically important” (Braud & Anderson, 1998a, p. 21); in addition, intuitive inquiry invites the transformation of both researcher and coresearchers as central to the unfolding narrative. This

transformational research narrative, which also included the articulation of significant obstacles to said transformation, utilized the crucible of the mentoring relationship as the arena of development and deployed writing as the chief activity that bore witness to the relationship and transformation of mentor and mentees. During the relationship-building while conducting the program and the data collection of writing, the principal of resonance validity was utilized to signify authenticity and verisimilitude. A thematic content analysis was later utilized to harvest core themes and meanings.

Transpersonal Outlook

Writing about the word *transpersonal*, Anderson (1998a) described a realm that resonated strongly with the intervention utilized in the study, as well as my motivation to investigate the topic of the study:

The word transpersonal has its etymological roots in two Latin words: *trans*, meaning beyond or through, and *personal*, meaning mask or façade—in other words, beyond or through the personally identified aspects of self. Whenever possible, transpersonal psychology seeks to delve deeply into the most profound aspects of human experience, such as mystical and unitive experiences, personal transformation, meditative awareness, experiences of wonder and ecstasy, and alternative and expansive states of consciousness. (p. xxi)

In this research, the 12 boys were invited to move beyond the personal into a series of encounters with a deeper aspect of self, through mentoring and writing, with a special emphasis on awakening the qualities of empathy and compassion. The potential for transpersonal research to catalyze or strengthen transformation—not solely in one's coresearchers, but in the researcher as well—was confirmed as this study unfolded. In his book, *The Wounded Researcher*, Robert Romanyshyn (2007) wrote,

Research as a vocation is a journey of transformation. What the knower comes to know changes who the knower is. It is an alchemical process in which one knows only insofar as one lets oneself be known, a process that is an Orphic dismemberment of the researcher by the work that has called him or her into its service. (p. 117)

The research was particularly suited to an intuitively inquiring transpersonal framework in that attempting to illuminate the depths of the subject matter called for innovative methods that “incorporate intuition, direct knowing, creative expression, alternative states of consciousness, dreamwork, storytelling, meditation, imagery, emotional and bodily cues, and other internal events as *possible strategies and procedures in all phases of research inquiry*” (Anderson, 1998a, p. xxx). All of these methods were deployed in this research.

Because the growth and even transformation of both the individual boys and their mentor was at the center of this study, and because these transformational stories were best incarnated through a narrative approach (as depicted in Chapter 4 of this study), a *qualitative* study approach was most appropriate, in that the subtleties and highly individualistic nuances of personal growth cannot be adequately captured or embodied through a quantitative research. In fact, to approach the material quantitatively would have run the risk of omitting nearly all that emerged as unique and relevant during the course of the study.

Finally, as an approach of attunement with intuition, an alignment to mentor the awakening of the hearts of at-risk teenage boys shared a kinship with the challenge put forward by Hillman (1996), when he introduced his acorn theory of the soul—discussed in the Literature Review—at the very beginning of his book, *The Soul’s Code: In Search of Character and Calling*.

We dull our lives by the way we conceive them. We have ceased imagining them with any sort of romance, any fictional flair, . . . [without] daring to envision biography in terms of very large ideas such as beauty, mystery, and myth. In keeping with the romantic challenge, this book also risks the inspiration of big words, such as “vision” and “calling,” privileging them over small reductions. In a nutshell, then, this book is about calling, about fate, about character, about innate image. Together they make up the “acorn theory,” which holds that each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived. (Hillman, 1996, pp. 5-6)

Such a “romantic” approach, regarding each boy’s life as containing a potential calling, resonated strongly with the notion of attuning to each boy’s gifts and assets, even when those gifts and assists were nested inside of wounds and afflictive behaviors. Hillman’s (1996) hypothesis—“The acorn theory provides a psychology of childhood; it affirms the child’s inherent uniqueness and destiny” (p. 14)—became for me, as researcher, part of the research vision that guided my mentorship of the boys. Such a mythically-informed approach to mentoring was also consistent with Meade’s (2008, 2010, 2012) repeated counsels to listen for the potential gifts in a young man, which often lie next to his wounds. “The inevitable troubles of youth are a kind of second labor of life intended to lead to a revelation of the inner nature and innate gifts of the soul” (Meade, 2010, p. 108).

Research Paradigm

“Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration without apology or comparisons to quantitative research. Good models of qualitative inquiry demonstrate the rigor, difficulty, and time-consuming nature of this approach” (Creswell, 1998, p. 9).

In the Preface to Anderson and Braud’s (2011c) *Transforming Self and Others Through Research*, the authors wrote that

in addition to *information*, [qualitative] research can provide opportunities for *transformation* as well. Such transformation—in the form of important, meaningful, and sometimes profound changes in one’s attitudes and views of oneself and of the world at large—can occur in the researcher or scholar; other participants, including colleagues and research participants; the readers or audience of the report; and even in the society or culture in which the researcher or scholar is situated. (p. xv)

Not to regard one’s subject solely as a potential source of new information but rather to hold the possibility that to enter a research is to *enter a living domain containing transformative potential*

for researcher and coresearchers is to bring to the research endeavor a tautness of expectancy along with a sense of impending adventure.

Expert on research design, John Creswell (1998), noted that a hallmark of qualitative research is *emergent* design, with the result that “the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (pp. 175-176). In the case of the present study, in which awakening to potentially life-transforming qualities such as empathy and compassion was central, the ability to extract meaningful data from the phenomena under investigation, especially when these phenomena included subtle, transpersonal forms of knowing such as intuition, a discovery of new meaning and purpose, and even the awakening of a sense of spirituality amidst traumatic life experiences was best nurtured within a paradigmatic framework that both recognized and, in a sense, welcomed the full disclosures of these realms. A qualitative approach met this criterion.

Rationale for the Method

“Throughout intuitive inquiry, compassion toward self and others is considered central to understanding” (Anderson & Braud, 2011a, p. 6). Former Director of Research at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, William Braud, and coauthor Anderson (1998a) noted the fact that conventional research—and conventional frameworks of research—often exclude highly significant events or passages in our lives, including “moments of clarity, illumination, and healing” (p. 3). These innovators of new transpersonal research methods invited transpersonal researchers to include alternative forms of knowing in order to “more faithfully honor complex and exceptional human experiences” (Anderson & Braud, 2011a, p. 4).

The developing mentoring relationships that are extensively chronicled in and form the central narrative of Chapter 4 were conceptualized as containing a mythic component, relating

back to the origins of the very word *mentor*, in the myth of Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*. The elder, Mentor, who fosters Odysseus' young son Telemachus' development, is revealed to be a vessel for the living presence of Athena, the goddess of Wisdom. Most writings on mentoring contain, at most, a very brief literary allusion to this fact. In the present study, however, as in the creative mentoring works of Meade (2004, 2010, 2012; Meade et al., 2002) and others, the Mentor-Athena connection, seen symbolically or mythically as representative of those moments when a mentor becomes a conduit for wisdom, is regarded as highly significant for mentor development. In a sense, what happens to Mentor could be seen as an ancient *method* for conducting a successful mentoring relationship: Mentor is called to attune to and become a vessel for Wisdom, within which the awakening of the heart, and specifically empathy and compassion, are seen as central.

Utilizing the method of intuitive inquiry, which honors the unique voice and hence the unique *stories* of both participants and researcher, "positions the experience and interpretation of the researcher at the center of the inquiry" (Anderson, 1998b, p. 75). The positioning of experience and interpretation allowed me, as the researcher, to chronicle my own *odyssey* toward greater empathy and compassion, through my encounter with the boys who participated in the study as well as through the initiatory events that unfolded in my own life during my time in the field.

Undergoing these catalytic events—which included the loss of both parents and the shattering of a marriage of 23 years—while simultaneously conducting the research with the boys, was both personally challenging and transpersonally liberating. It meant that my own awakening to empathy and compassion became both a survival tool and a way of mentoring the boys, in which the felt experience of the fact that, according to Meade, "to mentor is to open

one's wounds" (Meade et al., 2002, track 1) became repeatedly revealed. At the same time, as the 16 weeks progressed, there seemed to be a relationship between my own process of breaking *open* and the *breakthroughs* of my students, though definitive causality could not be ascribed to this phenomenon. Bache (2008) wrote about a similar process:

It appears that my "private" attempt to actualize a more authentic existence and deeper communion with life was causing my person to act as a kind of lightning rod triggering sparks of a similar awakening among those students who were receptive to this influence. (p. 38)

As Braud and Anderson (1998a) expressed, "Reality (being) and knowing are coconstitutive" (p. 22).

Significantly, for the present research, one of the important elements of intuitive inquiry is what Anderson (1998b, 2000, 2006) has termed *Tricksterism*, a state that is characterized by a sense of "auspicious bewilderment" (Anderson, 1998b, p. 84), where "contradictory stories and examples move us deeper into the intricacies of the topic of inquiry" (p. 84). Regarding the origins of this original term, Anderson (2011) wrote, "In indigenous cultures worldwide, tricksters are playful, mischievous, and outrageous characters who take one on a merry or dangerous chase, but often open gateways of awareness and insight along the way" (p. 63).

In working with his coresearchers, the author of this study repeatedly experienced how the alignment to accept and even embrace this frequent sense of auspicious bewilderment and confusion widened the framework of expectations to allow for new clarity to be born of apparent chaos. The period of in-the-field work with my coresearchers, September 2010 through January 2011, brought forth numerous occasions for auspicious bewilderment.

A feminist research outlook, in which the goals are "to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative" (Creswell, 1998, p. 83), resonated with the heart

of this endeavor in its advocacy for honoring the social and emotional inner life of at-risk teenage boys. Although feminism traditionally evokes considerations of the inequality or marginalization of *women*, comparative religions scholar Rita Gross's (1992) *Buddhism After Patriarchy* discussed feminist research's avowed social vision as seeking a society that ends diminution and marginalization *for all*. Feminism's championing of the voices and rights of the individual seemed especially apt in seeking to hold and behold these young boys compassionately, many of whom had become disenfranchised within the public school system in spite of the positive potentials nested within their afflictions and risky behaviors. In fact, I repeatedly witnessed how the boys' gifts and assets were coiled within their wounds. A nurturing, mentoring relationship and environment and an array of transpersonal interventions such as mindfulness, council, guided imagery, and, especially, creative writing activities which focused on character development were deployed to help these boys connect to empathy and compassion toward self and others.

Inclusion of the three coresearcher writings, in addition to ample selections from a *Mentor's Journal*, my in-the-field reports, was deemed essential to this research design. The thick, rich data of the boys' and my own writing were the most immediate and vivid artifacts of both the boys and my own processes of awakening to empathy and compassion as well as to depicting our individual challenges regarding this awakening.

Within this frankly feminist outlook, which also characterizes intuitive inquiry, the inner dimension and the possibility of transformative awakening in both participants and researcher were ongoing foci, "bringing the compassionate heart . . . to the way we, as researchers, ask our questions, set our hypotheses, devise our instruments, conduct our investigations, analyze our data, construct our theories, and speak to our readers" (Anderson, 1998b, p. 71). Such an

approach invites the reader—and the researcher—to encounter the universal in the personal, whereby the “depth of the researcher’s intuitive understanding gives a universal voice and character to the research findings” (Anderson, 1998b, p. 71).

Validity Parameters

“In all phases of the research endeavor . . . [comes] a melting away of the boundaries between three activities that typically are kept separate and distinct: research, clinical (and other) applications, and our personal psychospiritual development” (Braud & Anderson, 1998b, p. xv). With a bow to conventional definitions of validity that center on the ability of arguments, findings, and conclusions to command serious attention and acceptance, Anderson and Braud (2011b) considered what may be left out that has “to do with what is authoritative, brave, bold, courageous, helpful, encouraging, and appropriate to the end in view for a range of audiences who might be served by the findings” (p. 281). More specifically, the authors claimed that perhaps validity or trustworthiness can best be determined by *investigator validation* and *participant validation*. With regard to investigator validation, the researcher himself or herself serves as the main instrument of a qualitative inquiry and also carries the main responsibility for assessing validity in the study’s finding; however, *participant validation* is an essential, balancing supplement, “fully honoring the views of the research participants themselves in establishing the validity of truth value of a study” (Anderson & Braud, 2011b, p. 290). One purpose of the regular mentor-mentee meetings when conducting this study was to register this ongoing validation process.

Anderson (1998b) proposed unique validity parameters for intuitive inquiry, chief amongst which were *sympathetic resonance* and the use of *resonance panels* as validity indicators. Later, Anderson (2006) and Esbjörn-Hargens and Anderson (2006) proposed the term

resonance validity, which describes ways that sympathetic resonance can be employed to evaluate validity in an intuitive inquiry. In essence, the psychological principle at play is found within resonance principles in the physical realm, in which, when two systems or structures that contain similar identifying characteristics are activated or disturbed, the second will invariably mirror the first. “Resonance can have intellectual, emotional, bodily, or intuitive aspects. The degree and extent of such resonance (or nonresonance or antiresonance) reactions can indicate the degree of accuracy, fullness, or generality of certain findings” (Anderson & Braud, 2011b, p. 297).

Resonance *panels* are a systematic format for assessing sympathetic resonance. Although the procedure of resonance panels bears similarity to *member checks* that are frequently employed in qualitative researches, it differs chiefly in the fact that the resonance panel is comprised not of the original participants in the study but rather of a subsequent grouping that reviews aspects of the study, probing for sympathetic resonance and reporting on their findings (Anderson, 2011).

In the present study, the resonance panel was comprised of three members, two of whom had worked in the field with at-risk teens for more than 30 years as creators of student assistance programs throughout California and the nation as well as being long-time school counselors; the third member was a doctoral graduate and adjunct faculty member from Sofia University, who also teaches at another university. The panel was convened to assess the documented fieldwork (Chapter 4) of the researcher (me) and coresearchers (the students) carefully. The panel members were also given the introductory chapter to review in order to orient them to the fundamental intentions of the study.

Validity Limitations

The limits of the study's potential validity were attributable to the fact that some participants from this highly select group of students began with an extremely low baseline of empathy and compassion; hence, even small gains in these areas appeared substantial. Even though measured against the more general student population, these gains may have been slight. More generally, it was uncertain whether the study's findings would be generalizable to the larger student/adolescent population, so specifically tailored was the mentoring approach to each individual student. It was also uncertain if the findings would be generalizable to the opposite gender, or different cultures, though it could be postulated that further development of empathy and compassion was possible across each gender and any culture, because there is no final attainment, as these qualities partake of the boundlessness of the human spirit.

The transpersonal aspects of the program, both the mentoring intervention and the writing activities, were each realms where gains were difficult to measure. Indeed, significant improvements registered in the mentoring encounter or in the highly personal writing activities were mostly measured through transpersonal tools such as resonance, being moved emotionally, and the quickening of empathy and the stirring of compassion in the mentor/researcher, and, ultimately, in the resonance panel convened to review the study.

Ethical Considerations for Well-Being of the Participants

The ethical considerations for this study, including the overall well-being of the participants, were of paramount importance to me as the researcher. I felt especially cautious entering this research, having spent nearly a decade ministering to the emotional well-being of at-risk boys; fighting for their acceptance, in terms of both academic and social inclusion; honoring their voices in pain and triumph; and attending to their awakening to compassion and

empathy. I believed it was critical that the boys came to see the mentoring relationship as additional help rather than further scrutiny of perceived judgment by yet another authority figure.

With regard to the prospective *content* of the intervention, whether through the writing activities or the mentoring engagement, based on my past experience, it seemed probable that many of the boys would write about or discuss extremely challenging or even traumatic life events. Although I could look to nearly a decade in the field, during which not a single student was noticeably harmed by this process (alongside significant benefits during this same period), the possibility existed that traumatic memories could become activated. In this case, it was made clear to parents in the orientation meeting, and to students periodically throughout the intervention, that outside counseling help was available, free of charge, should that become necessary. In the case of 1 student, who had witnessed his brother being stabbed less than a year before engaging in this study, although the student seemed to be faring extremely well in the individual mentoring, writing, and group work, I did contact his mother and make the offer of referring the student to a counselor who specialized in working with teens who had undergone trauma. The student and his mother saw the counselor three times.

Initially, in moving toward selecting students to be involved in the study at the designated school, I conducted a parent/guardian and student meeting open to ninth-grade boys in the SWAS intervention program for students who were at-risk of not being promoted to 10th grade, and outlined the purposes, procedures, and goals of the study. I paid special attention to any worries or concerns, whether articulated or implicit, that either parent/guardians or the student had in regard to their participation. Every effort was made to address these worries or concerns with clarity and specificity. To secure informed consent for the students' participation in the study, their parents and/or guardians were given the Parent/Guardian Consent Form (see

Appendix A), and selected coresearchers were given the Consent Form for Student (see Appendix B), which were then signed.

Potential Researcher Bias

The most prominent potential researcher bias could be encompassed best by the phrase *double-edged sword*. Throughout the study, I communicated to my coresearchers, both collectively and individually, that I cared passionately about their development and that I was even willing to experience a sense of desperation in regard to all that oppressed them as well as in regard to their own self-destructive tendencies. While the sentiment was genuine, expressing it to the boys was also a consciously decided *mentor strategy*, an essential ingredient of my Mentor's toolkit. A majority of the boys had faced trauma, extreme disappointment in their elders, and a sense of failure in regard to school and their future possibilities. These experiences resulted, often, in a sense of hopelessness that many of the boys carried in regard to their own life situations and future possibilities. Encountering a mentor who cared about them deeply and was oriented toward their gifts, even when those gifts were hidden so often behind wounds, was a unique experience for these boys. Through this mentoring strategy, emerging from genuine respect and value for each youth, trust was built, deepening the mentoring relationship and encouraging the boys to meet their mentor with authenticity.

In order to see possibilities for empathy and compassion to awaken and to have the ability to write movingly about their lives, I had to check myself continually to make sure I was not asserting an agenda, my vision of *how* and *at what rate* my coresearchers should be expressing their progression. In other words, the trajectory of the mentoring relationship needed to move toward the boy catching a vision of his *own* possibility, becoming excited about it, and committing to work to overcome his obstacles while embracing his genuine potential. In this

regard, my ongoing work in *Mentor's Journal*, where I reflected on my motives and recalibrated my alignment to a given boy when necessary, was essential. The practice of mindfulness reminded me to return always to *beginner's mind*, a state of attentiveness that held no agenda but rather listened for what was seeking to emerge—as in the root meaning of the word for education, *educere*, “to draw forth or lead out” (Educare Institute, 2008, para. 2). In this way, the double-edged sword of caring passionately about each boy was balanced with the mentoring art of letting go.

Delimitations of the Study

The study's delimitations, or deliberate limitations, included the fact that the students involved were from a highly select group of 14- and 15-year-old boys who had been identified as being at-risk of not being promoted to 10th grade as well as having been identified as demonstrating behavioral problems. Because the students had already been identified as at-risk and were committed to at least one semester in the School Within a School Program (SWAS), with the *Odyssey* intervention integrated as a component, they were ideally suited to participate. The study's design focused on boys rather than girls, or both, because (a) boys comprised a greater proportion of participants in the SWAS; (b) the boys had a greater concentration of documented behavioral issues, in the form of past referrals and suspensions, many going back to elementary and middle school; and (c) the majority of the boys' struggles to write and even resistance to the writing process, as opposed to a lesser amount of these factors among the girls, made them worthy candidates for an intervention that sought to reverse their relationship to writing—from a sense of futility and failure to one of meaning and empowerment.

Participants

The 12 participants or coresearchers for this study were selected from a larger group of 38 ninth-grade boys who are part of the SWAS intervention program for students who are at-risk of not being promoted to 10th grade. The *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program was an integral part of the SWAS, contracted by the school district to provide weekly character education and writing intervention through mentoring.

Students in the SWAS program, which generally breaks down to four boys for every girl, were identified in eighth grade (i.e., before entering high-school) as being either credit deficient and/or behaviorally disadvantaged. Their behavioral issues, though not severe enough to merit a special education designation, were nevertheless problematic, and included incidents of school violence, referrals for defiance toward teachers and other authority figures, drug or alcohol use, and inappropriate use of language, to name just a few. A substantial portion of the students were in single-parent or mixed families. As anticipated, based on past years of running the program, in the current economic crisis, it was not infrequent for a parent or guardian to be unemployed and the family to be moving from home to home; in short, another risk factor was the instability of the students' home life. All of the students in SWAS, which focuses solely on English and writing skills (the same students also attended a double-period of Math each day), had struggled to write effectively and to reach academic grade-level standards. (Although, as Chapter 4 reveals, several of the boys could write powerfully and effectively, they were largely resistant to the writing process as it was taught in their traditional classes.)

The demographics of the students selected for the study were as follows: 5 Caucasians, 4 Hispanics, 1 Korean, 1 African American/Caucasian, and 1 Hispanic/Caucasian. In a brief screening process conducted with the SWAS teacher and me prior to selection, these 12 boys, as

contrasted with the other 16 boys, expressed a willingness to: (a) leave class once a week for group sessions, (b) leave class at least four times throughout the 16-week intervention for individual mentoring sessions, and (c) make a reasonable effort to attempt each of the writing activities.

Especially concerning in many of the boys was a sense of emotional disconnection and/or emotional volatility evidenced in discipline referrals for refusing to do school work, defiance of authority, and fighting with other students, as noted by school counselors, teachers, and parents. This feature also contributed to their assignment to the SWAS Program. SWAS students invited to participate in the *Odyssey* Research Study fell into this category: students who, in addition to being at risk academically and behaviorally, had been identified by counselors as being either emotionally disconnected or emotionally volatile. In many cases, as chronicled in Chapter 4/Cycle 3, the boys had faced traumatic experiences such as being burned in a fire, the catastrophic loss of parents in a car accident, and the stabbing of a beloved brother, to name just a few of the extreme circumstances undergone by my coresearchers prior to our work together.

Researcher's Experience of Topic

Something . . . has called to me from within my life experience, something to which I have associations and fleeting awarenesses but whose nature is largely unknown. In such an odyssey, I know little of the territory through which I must travel. But one thing is certain, the mystery summons me and lures me to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 13)

I undertook the present study at the end of nearly a decade of working in the field with thousands of at-risk boys and girls at the middle and high-school levels, in public schools as well as in schools within juvenile hall. The *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program brought together my passions for integrating various transpersonally based practices into public education. Those practices included in-depth mentoring, utilization of the writing process as a tool for excavating

and expressing core values, Council as a method for students to develop skills of deep listening and speaking from the heart, and recasting teachings from diverse *wisdom traditions* and modern psychology into forms that spoke to adolescents.

As chronicled in the following chapter, fieldwork with the boys and my strivings to foster their awakenings to empathy and compassion significantly challenged my own development in these same areas. Furthermore, my effectiveness to mentor these at-risk teenage boys was revealed, as the study unfolded, to be deeply interwoven with my own struggles to awaken empathy and compassion in myself. One of the salient questions this situation raised was to what degree this struggle rendered me more or less effective as a mentor? A thorough response to that pertinent question can be found throughout the remaining two chapters.

Research Approach: Introducing the Five Cycles of Intuitive Inquiry

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys through mentoring and writing. It was also intended to illuminate the inner process of my own awakening of empathy and compassion while mentoring. Three central questions were addressed by this study:

1. What is the lived experience of the awakening of empathy and compassion in 12 at-risk teenage boys who will receive a semester-long character education and writing intervention program (*Odyssey Writes of Passage*) designed to foster this awakening?
2. How can the approach and the tools employed by the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program (the intervention), especially mentoring and writing, serve to awaken and foster empathy and compassion in these at-risk teenage boys?
3. What is the corresponding lived experience of the boys' mentor in facilitating the awakening of empathy and compassion in these 12 at-risk teens?

The method of intuitive inquiry, based on hermeneutic, heuristic, and phenomenological approaches to research, is “a search for new understandings through the focused attention of one researcher’s passion and compassion for oneself, others and the world” (Anderson, 2006, p. 2). Intuitive inquiry provides five rigorous and deep-probing cycles, a “full hermeneutical process of interpretation” (Anderson, 2006, p. 3), to guide the research from its initial contemplations of key notions toward highly creative presentations to the world. “Each cycle around the research question changes, refines, and amplifies the researcher’s interpretation of the experience studied. Attention given to recording both objective and subjective data accompanies each iterative cycle” (Esbjörn-Hargens & Anderson, 2006, p. 305).

The journey through the five cycles parallels more traditional research approaches, though with a strong accent on the *inner* process of the researcher in encountering and potentially being transformed by his or her subject (Esbjörn-Hargens & Anderson, 2006). The following list paraphrases Anderson’s descriptions of the five cycles:

1. Cycle 1: Clarifying and focusing the research topic.
2. Cycle 2: Identifying primary lenses through which the topic is viewed.
3. Cycle 3: Collecting and summarizing data.
4. Cycle 4: Synthesizing the data and transforming the lenses.
5. Cycle 5: Testing validity through an integration of the findings with the literature review and by employing a “resonance panel,” probing for sympathetic resonance.

In-depth overview of the steps in each cycle of intuitive inquiry. The five cycles of intuitive inquiry (Esbjörn-Hargens & Anderson, 2006) are delineated here as adapted to the present study. The activities and practices involved in the research method are described in detail.

Cycle 1: Clarifying and focusing the research topic. The Cycle 1 process involved clarifying and focusing the research topic. I began this cycle considering various selections from texts and images that related to the research.

For this process, I drew on my experience as a full-time mentor of at-risk boys for nearly a decade, wide reading in the subject areas to be investigated, and a dual process of mindfulness meditation (focusing on the breathing process, and moment-to-moment awareness), followed by active contemplation of an image or text. This evolving practice of mindfulness meditation and focusing on an image or a text involved seating myself at approximately the same time each morning before my research table (between 4:30 and 5:00 a.m.) upon which I had placed evocative talismans such as a Native American Storyteller doll, a picture of a blank scroll, a turquoise candle, and various books that I considered to be central to the research.

Throughout this period and continuing into my field work with the students, I engaged in nine intuitive practices to support mentor development and stabilization. The practices I engaged in were the following.

Mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation, while rooted in Buddhism, has evolved into a nondenominational practice of “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, pp. 4-5).

Tonglen meditation: This Buddhist compassion practice provided a way of moving toward, rather than away from the suffering I encountered in the boys—and in myself. In the Tibetan language, the word *tonglen* means “giving and receiving” (Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993, p. 197) and refers to our willingness to breathe in both our own and others’ suffering and then send out happiness and ease. In *tonglen*, one takes in suffering and breathes out relief to and from the

Buddha-self (Kyabgon, 2007; Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993; Wallace, 2007), which can be seen as the inviolate core of Spirit.

Tonglen is actually part of a larger meditation practice known as *Lojong Meditation*, which involves continually returning to a contemplation of 59 core sayings or slogans. *Lojong*, said the Dalai Lama, is “a technology of peace, the technology to produce love, kindness and open-heartedness” (as cited in Druppa & Mullin, 1993, p. 13). Of the 59 slogans, my intuitive practice constellated around the following 13 touchstones of compassion and equanimity, which I memorized and would notate regularly as well as in times of particularly acute challenges during the ongoing research:

All activities should be done with one intention.
 Always maintain a joyful mind.
 Be grateful to everyone.
 Correct all wrongs with one intention.
 Don't act with a twist.
 Don't be so predictable.
 Don't be swayed by external circumstances.
 Don't bring things to a painful point.
 Don't expect applause.
 Don't malign others.
 Don't wallow in self-pity.
 Drive all blames into one.
 Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation. (Chodron, 1994, pp. 155-156)

The wise figure meditation. Concerning this meditation, which Whitmore (1986) claimed originated with Assagioli,

Each of us has a source of understanding and wisdom within which knows who we are, where we have been and perhaps where we are going. . . . The one most commonly associated with this source is that of a wise and loving old man or woman. (p. 182)

For the purposes of this study, this wisdom figure meditation was re-visioned as “The Mentor Meditation” (see the full meditation in Appendix C). The whole purpose of this imaginal journey through nature, which arrives at a mountaintop where one meets and consults with a wise figure

(pp. 183-184) was to find the wise person or, for this study, the wise *mentor* within. I also deployed this practice in working with the boys.

Journal writing. Keeping a journal as a stabilizing and illuminating awareness-practice has been extensively chronicled (Baldwin, 1990, 2007; Cameron, 1999, 2002; Ellis & Brown, 2011; Johnson, 2001, 2006; Progoff, 1992). In a study that utilized writing as a key focus of the mentoring intervention, it was essential that the mentor's own writing practice be sustained as a form of role-modeling the efficacy of the writing process as a tool for self-knowledge and stabilization. Daily writing in *Mentor's Journal* served to chronicle my initial, preparatory encounters with texts and images, my work in the field, and my ongoing inner work.

Dreamwork. Although I had not originally intended for dreamwork to be an integral part of the research process, the arrival of a powerful dream at the end of my Cycle 1 process alerted me to the wealth of intuitive insight available through paying attention to the offerings of my dreams. Regarding dreams—and equally importantly, the psyche that gives birth to the dream—with respect and curiosity is a fundamental tenet of dreamwork (Johnson, 1989; Taylor, 1983).

The blank scroll meditation. This original meditation/guided imagery visualization combined the use of mindfulness meditation as a base, and then added the image of an ancient blank scroll. This imaginal scroll was contemplated as an invitation for the appearance of “essence names” for each of my coresearchers and for myself as researcher. These names had a mythic cast to them, honoring the storied unfolding of our individual and collective odysseys. They were not shared with the students, but were an inner touchstone for myself as their mentor.

Hiking in nature. Following the death of my father less than 2 weeks into my fieldwork with the boys, the shattering of my marriage soon after that, and the death of my mother a week after my fieldwork with the boys, I hiked, actually for the first time in my life. Ascending and

descending a mountainous hiking trail near my home on a near-daily basis helped to ground my energies in nature while steadying my resolve to persevere—in research and in life—even in grief. Depth-psychologist and wilderness guide Bill Plotkin (2003) wrote that “*the most effective paths to soul are nature-based*. Nature—the outer nature we call ‘the wild’—has always been the essential element and the primary setting of the journey to soul” (p. 15).

Tehora He (the soul is pure) meditation. In Hebrew, the words, *tehora he* mean, “the soul is pure.” In Rabbi David Cooper’s (1998) book, *God Is a Verb: The Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism*, he introduced a meditation that involves contemplating the pure, undefiled, inviolate light that dwells within each person, even when that light may be shrouded by afflictions.

As I prepared to enter into the field with my mentees, I called to mind the countless at-risk adolescents with whom I had worked whose personas were so deeply damaged, often harsh, and occasionally insulting. Determined not to be taken in by the sometimes problematic attitudes and behaviors of my new mentees, I set the mentoring intention to practice this *tehora he* meditation so as to remind myself continually of the inviolate light within. I also felt that this would help me to attune to the gifts and assets of my mentees. Throughout my fieldwork, this meditation provided a steady reminder of my mentee’s core goodness.

Lectio divina. The final intuitive practice which I utilized to bring a depth-perspective or orientation to my Cycle 1 process was the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, which means “holy” or “divine” reading (Paintner, 2011, p. 1). Although it originated in early Christian mysticism, a form of *lectio divina* can be found in all religions and spiritual traditions that revere sacred texts. In my Cycle 1 process, I understood that the selections I was going to be encountering were not

traditional holy texts, but within the quest of becoming a worthy mentor to at-risk teenage boys in our time, they held a certain sacredness in relation to my endeavor.

Cycle 2: Identifying lenses. Toward the end of this Methods chapter, I present not only further elaboration on Cycle 2, but likewise, in elaborated fashion, a presentation of the preliminary lenses foundational to this research study.

Cycle 3: Collecting and summarizing data. For this study, Cycle 3 consisted of the more traditional structure of the research project interfacing with the journey that unfolded through my intuitive inquiry research. My Cycle 3 process is included in Chapter 4.

In this phase, according to Anderson (2006), the researcher does the following:

1. “identifies the best source of the data for the research topic” (p. 24)—in this case, the 12 boys who were selected to participate in the study
2. develops criteria for the selection of research informants *or* selection of extant historical, empirical, or literary records—again, the 12 boys who were enrolled in SWAS
3. collects the data
 - a. selections from *Mentor’s Journal*:
 - i. “Opening Mentoring Moments” between the mentor and each boy
 - ii. Ongoing mentoring encounters, often revolving around the content of the boys’ writings
 - iii. “Closing Mentoring Moments”
 - iv. Portions of *Mentor’s Journal* that *chronicled my own journey* toward empathy and compassion in working with the boys

- v. Three *Odyssey Writes of Passage* writing assignments that offered windows into the boys' journey toward empathy and compassion
- 4. "prepares summary reports in as descriptive a manner as possible" (p. 24)—which, in this case, evolved from my encounter with the boys' writing, the opening and closing mentoring sessions, mentoring moments springing from three of the boys' writing assignments, and my reflections on the group sessions, as chronicled in the *Mentor's Journal*.

The instrument used and the procedures and protocols to be followed included various transpersonal approaches such as mini mindfulness meditations; a technique from psychosynthesis adapted to the classroom wherein the student engages in a written encounter with a wise mentor as well as a guided meditation upon this inner figure; and Council, a form of deep listening practice that honors speaking and hearing the truth of the heart. The students participated in weekly *Odyssey* class sessions, which included writing activities found in individual worksheets for each student and part of my work-in-progress entitled, *Writes of Passage—A Mentored Odyssey to Self-Knowledge for Teens: Finding Empathy, Compassion, Creativity, and Commitment Within*.

Writing activities. A significant portion of the writing activities—approximately 33%—invited students to write about real-life situations where empathy and compassion were appropriate responses to the challenges they faced or might be facing. Although it was possible for the student to complete the writing assignment without articulating a significant degree of empathy or compassion (i.e., abstracting their own reactions from the description or even describing a callousness or cruelty in the face of the challenge) students also had abundant opportunities to *express* empathy and compassion through the written word. The three student

writing activities central to the Cycle 3 process were designed to encourage, inspire, challenge, and chronicle the awakening of empathy and compassion. Other writing activities offered throughout the 16-week period served to increase mentees confidence in trusting their own writing “voice” and to invite those whose creativity felt stifled in the face of a plethora of writing rules to adopt a flexible, nonjudgmental approach to the writing process.

The writings I chose to focus on for this dissertation were generally assigned in the 2nd, 7th, and 13th weeks of the class, respectively, with some time alterations for students who were absent. Again, the three writings were (a) “*Tonglen* Poem,” (b) “Meeting with Mentor,” and (c) “Compassion Write.”

“*Tonglen* Poem” (see Appendix D) asked the students to imagine that they had the power to “breathe in” anything in their life, or in the world, that was unwanted or unpleasant or even something that made them angry or that they detested. They then “breathed out” the antidote to that unwanted aspect of their life. I called it the “*Tonglen* Poem,” because it was basically a way of writing about the inner dynamics of the compassion practice of *tonglen*—breathing in what was unwanted, breathing out the relief or antidote—through writing.

“Meeting With Mentor” (see Appendix E) invited students to imagine they had the undivided attention of a wise mentor who saw them with total clarity. The writing prompt was designed to facilitate perspective-taking. The students were encouraged to write from both the mentor’s standpoint and their own, autobiographical standpoint, in order to invite empathy to flow both ways on the page.

As with “*Tonglen* Poem,” entering into the “Meeting With Mentor” writing was intended to help reverse the students’ whole relationship to difficulty and suffering—as well as their “allergy” to the writing process. In discovering that this wise mentor had perspective, practical

advice, and even deep guidance, the students could realize that there was help available to them now and even discover that there was *wisdom* within. Finally, just by virtue of summoning a mentor to the page, the boys were actualizing the notion that they might have a “wise mentor” within themselves, whose presence and insight could be evoked through the writing process.

Finally, the purpose of the third piece, “Compassion Write” (see Appendix F) was to invite students to connect with the power of compassion, whether that be an expression of compassion for self, for another, or for both self *and* other. By focusing on a single incident or moment when a painful experience evoked the wish to diminish, relieve, or even remove suffering in self or other, the student had the opportunity to capture, in writing, the interconnectivity and empowerment of compassion in action.

Mentoring sessions. I met with each student at the beginning of the course and at the end, for introductory and closing meetings, as well as at least four times throughout the semester, in brief (up to 30 minutes), focused mentoring sessions. The sessions took place in a small group meeting room adjacent to the school library. A portion of each session focused on the boy’s awakening *to* empathy and obstacles to this awakening as well as any indicators of compassionate motives and/or actions of service to others in regard to his school, home, and community environments. As mentor, I made every effort to underscore these instances of empathy and compassion, in order to reflect them back to the student, while helping him to reason through the possible effects of demonstrating empathy and acting with compassion or *nondemonstration* and *nonaction*, thus helping him to understand the ripple effects of his action or nonaction. The process and results of these mentoring encounters were logged in the *Mentor’s Journal*.

In my initial thinking regarding the components of this cycle, I had considered including a quantitative measure in order to establish some sort of baseline for the boys entering the program and the study. Upon careful consideration, I determined that focusing on the opening and closing mentoring encounters as the bookends to individual mentoring sessions would be more in keeping with the spirit of this qualitative study, which was meant to honor the unique story of each boy.

The purpose for including moments from the opening meeting in my Cycle 3 process was to convey a portrait of each boy, and the purpose of including moments from the closing meeting in this same cycle was to provide a reflective overview of the journey—the *odyssey*—each boy had made. Along the way, in our individual mentoring sessions, I attempted to reflect back to the boys movements I saw them making toward empathy and compassion, including the small successes as well as challenges and even so-called failures. Writing in *Mentor's Journal* after each session or after a series of sessions, I reflected on my own possible role in any breakthroughs as well as impediments to the mentoring process—places where I was stuck—which then, by proxy or resonance, might have resulted in or contributed to a problem-saturated mentoring dynamic.

A guiding intention throughout my fieldwork with my coresearchers was that the authenticity of the mentoring relationship be held and upheld as being of primary importance. To have focused solely or rigidly on producing results would have threatened the internal validity of my work with the boys. What they responded to most directly and what invited their progressive opening to empathy and compassion was the authenticity and intensity of our encounters. In this context, even failures provided insights about the mentoring process. Also, because my own initiation into greater empathy and compassion was greatly intensified by a series of catalytic

though rather traumatic events in my own life during this time, I chronicled these events and experiences within the Cycle 3 process. These initiatory-flavored experiences became integral to my development as a mentor.

Finally, I continually adapted and tailored my approach to each boy as much as possible in the opening and closing meetings, in the individual mentoring sessions, and even in the group processes, working first to establish a baseline of trust and mutual respect, progressing toward our exploration of the movement of empathy and compassion, and underscoring successes and challenges at the journey's completion. Working with the wild energy of at-risk teenage boys can be likened to trying to hold mercury in one's hands.

In the pre and post interview processes, depicted as "Opening Mentoring Moments" and "Closing Mentoring Moments," as well as in the regular mentoring sessions, my honesty as the boys' mentor was essential. The message that genuineness and honesty were welcome and honored served to minimize the *Hawthorne effect*, which is the tendency of coresearchers to answer questions in a way that they feel will please the researcher (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). As the relationship between us developed, both individually and as a group, the boys recognized and began to trust that what was being invited to the mentoring sessions was not a preplanned result but rather expressions of their own genuineness.

In considering the journey of the mentor and the fact that the mentor and author of this study were the same individual, each function (mentor, author) needed to be kept distinct. This proved to be principally a matter of inner alignment—a dynamic alignment that could never be allowed to become static or fixed. As the boy's mentor, my function was to bring as full-bodied and mindful a *presence* as possible to each encounter with the students, both to the group and individually, a subtext of which was striving toward sustaining a witnessing consciousness. Only

after classes or individual sessions, though—upon reflection, meditation, and writing in the *Mentor's Journal*—did the function of *writer* become activated. This oscillation or helix between mentor and writer was one that I had constructed as an inner alignment during the past 9 years of working with teens, mentoring, and then writing about the experience. The sustained journey of the research study both deepened and broadened this inner alignment process in me.

With both student and parent or guardian permissions, I have included, in Chapter 4, the three student writings that, in the overall *Odyssey* writing curriculum, pertained most directly to the development of empathy and compassion: “*Tonglen* Poem, “Meeting Mentor,” and “Compassion Write.” Because the writing activities and the mentoring sessions were braided together, with the focus of the mentoring often prompted by what was written by the students, it was imperative to include these three writings in their entirety in order to portray accurately the boys’ movement toward empathy and compassion, including their awakening and their encounters with obstacles.

Cycle 4. Synthesizing the data and transforming the lenses. Drawing together my own writing on the pre and post mentor-student meetings, and reviewing the writings of my students in *Mentor's Journal*, I summarized the data through a juxtaposed combination of thematic analysis and embodied writing in the form of portraits of the boys and their journeys. The results can be found in Chapter 5.

Cycle 4 of my intuitive inquiry, as presented in Chapter 5 of this study, involved synthesizing the data, and refining, and transforming the lenses first presented in Cycle 2. In this cycle, having encountered, processed, and expressed the living wave patterns of my data in Cycle 3, I then set about refining the lenses crafted in Cycle 2 to incorporate the insights which had occurred as a result of my work with my coresearchers. In this cycle, I sought to become a

sort of alchemical vessel in which the core entry notions first articulated in Cycle 2 were married with the insights and discoveries wrested from the data in Cycle 3, resulting in, first, a refined set of lenses and, finally, a transformed set, which became the *9 Gates of Mentoring*.

In actual experience, what occurred in my Cycle 4 process was quite dramatic. Having crafted nine preliminary lenses that were extremely expansive in their scope, I then saw the need to contract my vision radically, in accord with my experiences in the field. This resulted in my releasing all nine of the preliminary lenses in order to craft a new set—my refined lenses—that truly reflected my experience in the field with the boys. This coming-down-to-earth process, going from a vast vision of mentoring, empathy, compassion, and writing to an intense focusing of perspective was like the contractions of a birth process: painful, yet essential.

Cycle 5: Testing validity. In Chapter 5/Cycle 4 section of this dissertation, I depict my discovery of nine distinct stages in the mentoring process, which I call an *original mentoring template*. These nine stages became my final, transformed lenses for the study. Anderson (2011) wrote that “the method allows for inductive theory building on the topic of study” (p. 66). These final, transformed lenses synthesized the wide-angle vision of my preliminary lenses and the close-up focus of my refined lenses into a vision of the mentoring process that embraced the awakening of empathy and compassion and the efficacy of the writing process in serving this awakening.

Cycle 5, reported further into Chapter 5, contains the conclusion of this dissertation. This cycle involved testing validity through an integration of the findings with the literature review and by employing a resonance panel probing for sympathetic resonance.

The resonance panel read Chapter 1 as well as the extensive Chapter 4. Each of the three members were given an emailed orientation to intuitive inquiry’s approach to resonance panels,

culled from the work of Anderson and her colleagues. They were asked to provide both written and verbal reports on their responses, explaining their resonances or lack of resonance with the work in as specific a manner as possible. The panel members' written responses were followed up with a conversation to clarify any necessary points. A summary of the panel responses are included in Cycle 5, in Chapter 5. (A complete transcript can be found in Appendix G.)

Included in this cycle was a summing up of the entire research cycle, including reflections upon the process of the interpretative cycle itself: Did it work? What was actually revealed? How was I, as the researcher, changed? What, overall, was accomplished and what did I see as the seeds of future research projects? What still remained to be done?

In-depth depiction of intuitive inquiry cycle 1. After a period of several weeks, my meditation and contemplation practice guided me to select the following image and texts as those that could serve to clarify and focus my research:

1. The image of a Native American Storyteller Doll
2. A passage from Joseph Chilton Pearce's (1992) book, *Evolution's End*
3. A series of brief statements from Fox's (2006) educational manifesto, *The A.W.E. Project: Reinventing Education/Reinventing the Human*
4. A passage from the ancient Tibetan text, *Devotion to the Mentor*, found in Robert Thurman's (2005) book, *The Jewel Tree of Tibet*. (All 3 textual passages are found in complete form in Appendix H.)

The striking image of the Storyteller Doll (see Figure 2) and the three passages, or textual touchstones (see Appendix D), were subjects of a daily meditation at my research table. A *Mentor's Journal*, adorned with images that focused my attention toward the importance of this

research, was the place where I recorded my daily insights as I worked with the image and the passages.

Per Anderson's (1998, 2006) repeated counsels, I also considered, even at this early stage, the intended audience(s) for my research. I affirmed that, beyond the adolescents who would now or in the future receive such transpersonal-education interventions, the aim was to reach those who were moved to transform education by broadening its definition to include the many-faceted, nondenominational faces of spirituality.

Developing a daily practice of focusing on the image of the Storyteller Doll and the texts helped concentrate the research. In gathering together these intuitively evocative mentoring attunements, I was resounding the intention to gather the energy and insight that could move my intuitive inquiry forward. I recalled Romanyshyn's (2007) insight: "The psychologist who does re-search with soul in mind is a border figure. He or she stands in the gap between the conscious and the unconscious" (p. 49).

Contemplating the Native American Storyteller Doll. Entering into contemplation of the native American Storyteller Doll, I was not seeking to *decode* the image according to a standardized interpretation but rather to *unlock* my own internal resonances with this image. Jung's (1964) thought regarding dream images and the importance of honoring the integrity of one's own inner mythology matched my alignment to meeting the image of the Storyteller Doll:

It is plain foolishness to believe in ready-made, systematic guides to dream interpretation, as if one could simply buy a reference book and look up a particular symbol. No dream symbol can be separated from the individual who dreams it. (p. 55)

Native American Storyteller Dolls are usually depicted as maternal figures with several small children sitting on her lap (see Figure 2). Traditionally, the dolls represent the storyteller's sacred stories as little children that the storyteller has placed in her care, as expressed by the

maternal quality of holding or embracing (Babcock, 1986). Daily contemplation of the Storyteller Doll brought the realization that the research was calling for me, as mentor, to bear witness and to hold sometimes painful, even traumatic life-stories, knowing that “what we teach will never ‘take’ unless it connects with the inward, living core of our students’ lives, with our students’ inward teachers” (Palmer, 2007, p. 32).



Figure 2. Native American Storyteller Doll. Sculpted by Gwen Piña. From G. P. Originals by Gwen Piña, 2012. Reprinted with permission.

The Storyteller Doll also served to remind me of the feminist outlook of this research that champions at-risk teen-age boys. In the maternal, holding atmosphere of Mentor’s regard, the boys would be given the time and space to find their own stories from the past, to bear witness to the story of their lives unfolding, and perhaps to begin to find meaning in their stories. The sense of a maternal beholding and holding and being a custodian of each student’s stories emerged as the salient features of this contemplation.

Contemplating Pearce’s passage on the “great expectation” of adolescence. My first textual contemplation for Cycle 1 was from *Evolution’s End*, by Pearce (1992). In the chosen

passage, he focused on the precise ages of my coresearchers: 14 and 15. He concisely and incisively addressed the “great expectation” that arises in the heart of adolescents at this time:

Starting at around age eleven, an idealistic image of life grows in intensity throughout the middle teens. Second, somewhere around age fourteen or fifteen a great expectation arises that “something tremendous is supposed to happen.” Third, adolescents sense a secret, unique greatness in themselves that seeks expression. They gesture toward the heart when trying to express any of this, a significant clue to the whole affair. (Pearce, 1992, p. 190)

In allowing myself time in my daily contemplations to consider this passage, I reflected on the at-risk teenage boys with whom I had worked over the past 9 years, whose number was close to 2000. (Note: I also worked with at-risk teenage girls throughout this same period and hope, at a later date, to honor their stories through a parallel research study.) The passage reminded me of the countless disappointments I had observed over the years as I had seen boys instinctively responding to the great expectation arising in them about their lives, while often simultaneously experiencing the shattering of their hopes. Contemplating this passage helped me to realize that much of the work I had done with these adolescent boys was an attempt to contact this “secret, unique greatness” (Pearce, 1992, p. 190).

Contemplating passages from Fox’s educational manifesto. My second textual contemplation consisted of seven core statements on education selected from Fox’s (2006) educational manifesto, *The A.W.E. Project: Reinventing Education, Reinventing the Human*. As an educator for over 40 years and a pioneer in restoring a beneficent, cosmic view of Christianity based on the notion of “original blessing” (p. 17) as contrasted with original sin, Fox came to regard the work of educating young people to wisdom and compassion as an absolutely critical need for our society. Below, I summarize the fruits of my contemplations, much longer versions of which were entered into my *Mentor’s Journal* as part of my daily practice.

1. *“Education is a spiritual act, an essential work of compassion”* (Fox, 2006, p. 34). As I contemplated the compassion aspect of this quote, it suggested that the mentor-as-educator’s compassion lay in inviting the spiritual essence of each student to emerge and to begin to find its essential expressions through writing, council utterances, in the stillness of mindfulness meditation, or other practices.
2. *“All the spiritual traditions of the world honor education, considering it a spiritual practice for learner and teacher alike”* (Fox, 2006, p. 34). Considering Fox’s (2006) description of education as a “spiritual practice for learner and teacher alike” (p. 34), I reflected on moments I had experienced in the past 9 years, when such qualities as awe and wonder transformed the learning encounter into a moment of awakening. That awakening could be a student simply discovering his capacity for finding peace in a painful world (as in mindfulness practice); or experiencing the ability of his imagination, using nothing more than a pen, to travel deep into the past or future (as in writing practice); or having the felt experience of empathy and compassion, in which the student looked across at another student whom he or she had formerly judged or simply ignored, and who, through an opening of the heart, recognized the other’s common humanity (as sometimes occurred in council practice).
3. *“I believe wisdom is what young people and adults want. Unfortunately, neither young people nor adults are acquiring wisdom from most school systems”* (Fox, 2006, p. 9). Contemplation of this quote caused me to consider the themes that students had written about in *Odyssey Writes of Passage* the last several years. These themes were the exact same wisdom-themes that had been written about through the ages: the meaning of the soul and the spirit, human purpose, the power of forgiveness, the

sacredness of family, and the healing nature of compassion, to name just a few. I renewed my commitment to mentoring this wisdom voice.

4. *Traditionally, in both the Western biblical tradition and in Hinduism and the East, education has been understood as a work of mercy or compassion, that is to say, as an avenue to relieving ignorance and lifting the veil of distorted relationships with reality. We might question whether education is lifting such veils of distortion today or actually contributing to them.* (Fox, 2006, p. 19)

Contemplating this passage evoked a sense of sorrow over the current state of public-school education in America, where the idea of education as a “work of mercy or compassion” (Fox, 2006, p. 19) is contrasted by a focus on information, commerce, readying students for a competitive job market, and on information transfer as the pathway to economic success, both for the student and for the nation. The quote catalyzed a questioning of how one can relieve ignorance or lift the veil of distorted relationships with reality if no educational consensus exists on what constitutes “reality.”

5. *“Do schools educate for meaning or for meaninglessness?”* (Fox, 2006, p. 23).

Contemplating this quote led me to consider the importance of Frankl’s (1946/1978) central insight. He identified meaning as the core motivator or drive in human life.

This led to a remembrance of the countless traumatized students with whom I had worked who sought to understand and find meaning in their own suffering. Again and again they asked why their education seemed to offer them little to nothing in regard to finding meaning in their lives. Fox (2006) asked if we are educating our youth for meaning or meaninglessness. In preparing to compose my primary lenses, I

- uncovered a serious concern that I recognized I was carrying into this research: What happens when our students begin to equate education *with* meaninglessness?
6. “*Is our education mindful or mindless? Does it contribute to filling the person with wonder, confidence, and empowerment? Or to alienating the learner and disempowering him or her?*” (Fox, 2006, p. 27). Contemplating this quote caused me to consider the growing movement to introduce mindfulness into public education. The notion that stillness could be a learning state was beginning to gain credence, perhaps as a counterpart to the avalanche of facts that students encounter (Greenland, 2010; Willard, 2010). I thought of what a high-school administrator of an alternative (formerly known as continuation) high-school said to me, in private, when approached about having *Odyssey Writes of Passage* at his school, “I’ll try it; nothing else seems to be working with these kids.”
 7. “*There is universal agreement from all the world’s wisdom traditions that the best humankind has to offer is compassion and that compassion is not beyond our capabilities*” (Fox, 2006, p. 121). Contemplating this quote brought me full cycle back to a recognition that compassion exists, however deeply buried or masked by hurt and anger, in virtually every student I had mentored. The whole premise of the study I was entering, the odyssey upon which the boys and I would be embarking, was consistent with the message of the Dalai Lama that I heard in countless speeches by this master of compassion: *Compassion, the seed of compassion is in each of us; it is awaiting the right environment*. This final quote from Fox caused me to wonder if one of the core purposes of education is to generate the atmosphere, offer the tools, and embody the mentorship that quickens the seed of compassion in each life.

Contemplating The Mentor Devotion. The final Cycle 1 contemplation was from *The Mentor Devotion* by Nagarjuna, 2nd century CE, found in the book, *The Jewel Tree of Tibet* (Thurman, 2005, p. 245). Nagarjuna's devotional text speaks to this spiritual alignment:

Through the great bliss state,
I myself become the mentor deity.
From my luminous body,
Light rays shine all around,
Massively blessing beings and things,
Making the universe pure and fabulous,
Perfection in its every quality.

Nagarjuna's exalted words, a mystical view of the spiritual attainment of the mentor as a blessing-conferring deity, completed this cycle of contemplation of relevant passages and a core image. The passage resonated clearly with certain mentoring moments I had experienced over the past 9 years, when the mentor-mentee relationship formed a state of connection that seemed to thread back from Mentor and Telemachus through all the great mentoring dyads found in myth, literature, and history. Such moments always contained a sense of vast expansion of perception. The spirituality of the quote returned me to the question, "What is the source of this enhancement that infuses the mentor with vision and compassion?"

Such contemplations led me to ponder mentoring as both a state of inner alignment and an outer action of blessing, where an ineffable quality is transmitted through mentor to mentee. To speak of blessing as related to mentoring might seem both exalted and extreme, yet a blessing might be something that transfers beyond words, so that there is no violation of separation between church and state. It could be an unspoken, invisible act that nevertheless transmits something healing yet ineffable. Visionary author David Spangler (2001) suggested, "Like life, all blessings come from a single source: the soulfire of an intelligent love and compassion willing to give of itself" (p. 23).

Contemplating this final quote from Nagarjuna (as cited in Thurman, 2005, p. 245) quickened my deepest wondering about mentoring. Although, empirically speaking, it is impossible to prove, when one is in alignment to the full spectrum of possibilities in the mentoring relationship, one accesses a realm wherein the archetypal or mythic is radiantly present. In these timeless moments, silence is as much a revelation as the words one speaks. The air becomes charged with a rare atmosphere in which one feels as if connected to some larger force that mentors the mentor: a luminous intelligence that appears to be both wise and compassionate. At such moments, a transfer of blessing from mentor to mentee appears to occur. This passage from Nagarjuna speaks of the ultimate source of that blessing and holds out the promise that it is possible for a mentor to connect to that source.

My Cycle 1 journey into the imaginal realm of the Storyteller Doll, and the potent textual touchstones from Pearce, Fox, and Nagarjuna was capped by a powerful and mysterious dream. In many ways, it seemed like a *big dream*, in the way that Jung (1933/1970) spoke about those dreams that seem to open deep insights at pivotal times in our lives:

The primitives I observed in East Africa took it for granted that “big” dreams are dreamed only by “big” men—medicine-men, magicians, chiefs, etc. This may be true on a primitive level. But with us these dreams are dreamed also by simple people. (p. 152)

As is my common practice, I wrote down the dream in the present tense in order to capture both the vividness and the intensity of my experience. While it remained utterly mysterious, having this dream seemed to grant a sort of internal permission to proceed toward composing my preliminary lenses.

Dream of the Tallis Man

I am on a beach at twilight. The sands of the beach are an iridescent turquoise. As I walk, the shade of turquoise seems to deepen to a royal blue, taking on a living quality, as if I am breathing in some sort of nourishment from the very color and the sense of yearning it evokes in me. I feel an ache in my spine as I look at this brilliant color.

The moon is exactly half-full, as if neither waxing nor waning, a point of equipoise. A boy seen only from the back, stands a ways away from me. There is a tremendous feeling of sadness emanating from him. His shoulders gently heave, tremble, as if he is weeping.

From seemingly “out of nowhere” (these were the words that formed in my mind as he approached), a man comes walking toward me. He is a very, very old man, and he is wearing a blue, white and silver prayer shawl that is called, in Judaism, a tallis. The silver gleams and sparkles, sending out silver rays, radiating. The blue is “made up of fallen sky bits,” and the white is “white before all color appeared,” I think in the dream.

This “Tallis Man” has no shirt on under his prayer shawl, and I see, as he draws closer, that the hairs on his chest are a gleaming silver. His chest seems amazingly youthful for such an old man. For some reason, as I look at him, I think of all those passages in the kabbalistic book, Zohar (trans. Matt, 2007), where it describes the anatomy of God, even counting the number of hairs on his head and body.

In the center of his chest, the Tallis Man wears a sort of necklace. I’m drawn to him like a magnet. I move closer. I see that the necklace has the 10 spheres of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life (see Figure 3) on a sort of open scroll.



*Figure 3. Necklace depicting the 10 spheres of the Kabbalist Tree of Life. Artist unknown. From “Kabbalah Necklace, Tree of Life Pendant,” on the website *Sacred Geometry Web: Images Library*, by N. Das, 2013. Reprinted by permission.*

In one swift, yet elegant movement, the Tallis-Man takes the necklace off his chest and slowly, almost ceremonially or ritualistically puts it around my neck. He says three words, which at first I cannot hear, but then he bends over and whispers them into my left ear, “The entire scripture,” a phrase which seems to have great meaning, though I have no idea what it means.

As I stand there looking at him, the necklace right over my heart, the Tallis Man then takes the top three spheres, and, amazingly, puts two of the three spheres into each of his eyes. His eyes now shine out like jewels, long distance beams emanating from each eye. One is silver, the other gold. He takes the final one, the third one, the one that had

occupied the very top of the tree, and places it in the center of his forehead, a clear or colorless jewel, now embedded there. As he does so, something amazing happens: The Tallis Man's whole body lights up, becomes illuminated. A sphere of clear light descends from I know not where, landing on his head, which lights up, pure white. He is now pure light, from head to toe. As I watch him, he then shimmers and disappears—"evanescent" is the word in my mind!

Suddenly, everything is extremely calm—a supernatural quiet and stillness. Then, the ocean pulls back on itself, and an enormous wave begins to swell.

I awake. I write down this dream.

Jungian scholar Helen Luke (1995) wrote, "Each of us has a well of images within, which are the saving reality and from which may be born the individual myth carrying the meaning of a life" (p. 9). Images from the dream of the *Tallis* Man returned to my contemplations throughout this research. Because my journal writings on this dream were quite lengthy, I have omitted them for space purposes. My dreamwork investigations led me to consider that, in the uncanny way that dreams can offer meaningful wordplays, the *Tallis* Man was offering me seven . . . *talismans*. This discovery led to a series of lengthy processes wherein I pondered possible meanings and resonances with these seven talismans. Eventually, I came to the notion that encoded in these seven talismans were the following words or phrases: scroll, mentor, odyssey, rites of passage/w-rites of passage, empathy, compassion, spirituality in education. These seven words or phrases were at the very core of my research, containing, in micro, the entire vision of what I was attempting in this study.

In-depth depiction of intuitive inquiry cycle 2. As Anderson (2011) wrote, "This process of engagement with the art object or text should be continued until the creative tension between the intuitive inquirer and the text or image feels resolved and complete" (p. 36). Moving from the first level of Cycle 1, and culminating in my dream of the *Tallis* Man/talismans brought about a sense of preliminary saturation in the research. Movement from a steady engagement with a primary image and texts to a culminating dream seemed to confirm that the research now

had its own momentum and unfolding direction. Anderson (2011) encouraged researchers: “Methodologically, intuitive inquiry sets the stage for new ideas to happen. They often do” (p. 64). I was now ready to move into Cycle 2, the crafting of my preliminary lenses.

My Cycle 2 process involved identifying primary lenses through which the topic would be viewed. I studied the available literature on adolescent development models, from ancient to modern; empathy and compassion considered neurobiologically; the realms of emotional intelligence and social and emotional learning; the literature of mentoring; spiritual literatures in which the states and traits of empathy and compassion appeared; and passages on connective writing as a tool of awakening. I entered into a creative dialogue with these texts, utilizing embodied writing in *Mentor’s Journal*, to engage all the senses in a way of writing that invited presence through vivid, impassioned description (Anderson, 2011).

Anderson (2006) wrote that in intuitive inquiry, “lenses are *both* a way of viewing a topic and what is seen” (p. 21). I recorded these textual encounters in my *Mentor’s Journal*.

Gradually, I distilled my findings and *Mentor’s Journal* entries into a set of initial lenses, which were core working notions about the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys through mentoring and writing. An important distinction is that unlike the bracketing of personal influences found in a strictly phenomenological approach, intuitive inquiry invites the *inclusion* of these hermeneutically crafted personal lenses, setting them in place at the front of the study in order to illuminate changes or even transformations later, in response to incoming data and a later review of these same texts in light of data analysis as well as potential changes in the researcher. The story of the researcher’s evolving lenses thus becomes central to the research. Referring to heuristics, Moustakas (1990) counseled that “the investigator

must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated; there must have been actual autobiographical connections” (p. 14).

Out of this process, nine preliminary lenses regarding my subject were written. The studies I brought to the research, my encounter with texts, and my experience as a full-time, transpersonally based mentor for nearly a decade led me to craft these initial lenses on as vast a canvas as possible. More broadly speaking, the breadth of my preliminary lenses reflected my primary belief that the origins of empathy and compassion as well as the sources of mentoring and writing lie in the spiritual impulses that animate, sustain, and inspire their persistence throughout human experience. In crafting these lenses, I was following the counsel of Meade (2009), who, in his *Branches of Mentoring* seminar, advised that one come to the mentoring enterprise with as big a vision as possible—one that is commensurate with the largesse of the human soul (track 3). These preliminary lenses also reflected the etiology of my own call to mentoring, which had first appeared through the study of literature and myth as well as spiritual texts.

I was mindful of Anderson’s (2011) admonition:

It is extremely important to articulate Cycle 2 lenses *before* collecting data. Once data collection begins, there is no turning back to reclaim the researcher’s pre-understanding of the topic because engagement in data collection propels the intuitive inquirer into a different mode of engagement and perception. (p. 45)

I surmised that these lenses would be ground down and become more focused as the research continued.

Preliminary lenses. What follows describes my nine preliminary lenses.

Lens 1: Both ancient myths and world literature have imaginatively portrayed the awakening of empathy and compassion as central to the education of the heart and the rite of passage to maturity (the journey of development).

- Lens 2:* The world's spiritual templates—from primordial spirituality to the religions of the East and from esoteric Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, to the Perennial Tradition, which embraces the common core at the heart of all religions—cohere in placing the development of the intelligent heart, with its twin wings of empathy and compassion, at the center of the awakening human microcosm.
- Lens 3:* Throughout ancient myths, world literature, and spiritual traditions, the role of the mentor or guide is depicted as being a key catalyst, nurturer, and sustaining beacon for the awakening of empathy and compassion in his or her mentees (students, disciples). The most potent mentoring of empathy and compassion occurs when a corresponding process of awakening is unfolding in the mentor by virtue of the principle of resonance.
- Lens 4:* The relatively minimal attention accorded empathy and compassion in both developmental psychology and therapist-training is being transformed by discoveries in neurobiology as well as the infusion of spiritual technologies emphasizing the primacy of empathy and compassion in human happiness. Looking deeper though, one finds a sustaining thread of value for these qualities in psychosynthesis and humanistic approaches to psychological well-being as well as throughout the unfolding of transpersonal psychology.
- Lens 5:* The weakness or absence of empathy and compassion training in the developmental education of teenage boys may be a factor in tragedies such as the shootings at Columbine, and other schools. When boys remain ignorant or denying of the interconnectivity at the heart of empathy and compassion,

violence to others in multiple forms becomes an accessible and acceptable form of conflict resolution.

Lens 6: Empathy and compassion are master keys to the writing process, granting potential access to the emotional and soul lives of self and others. The writing process can catalyze, awaken, strengthen, and stabilize the qualities of empathy and compassion by helping boys attune to the inner lives of self and others. When at-risk boys find their story and connect to others' stories, utilizing these master keys of empathy and compassion, their writing becomes vibrant and compelling, and these qualities spill over into their lives.

Lens 7: The education of the heart, an essential aspect of which is the awakening of empathy and compassion, is an essential missing link in the character formation of teenage boys, providing an irreplaceable counterbalance to excessive intellectuality and a gateway to meaning and purpose. The writing process, often anathema to at-risk teenage boys, can serve this educational awakening of the heart.

Lens 8: An essential prelude to experiencing empathy for others may be to experience empathy for oneself. Self-empathy is the process of raising cognitive awareness of one's own feelings and the simple ability actually to feel one's feelings while they are being experienced. Accessing self-empathy could be regarded as the establishment of a flow of empathy, which then has the potential, as in drawing water from a well, of flowing to others.

Lens 9: An essential prelude to experiencing compassion for others may be to experience compassion for oneself. Self-compassion is the connective process of having the wish to alleviate suffering in oneself and beginning to act on this wish.

Concluding Cycle 2. My preliminary lenses represented an initial distillation of my understandings regarding the connection between the most ancient sources and the most modern researches. Completing the articulation of my preliminary lenses allowed me to reflect on the organic wisdom of the intuitive inquiry method.

Timeline of the Study

This study began in September of 2010, in concert with the commencement of the 2010-2011 school year. Data analysis and writing of results began in late January 2011, with the final written work completed on April 24, 2013. The reasons for the lengthy writing period are chronicled at some length in Chapter 4/Cycle 3 of this dissertation, mainly attributable to the intense, prolonged initiation into my own developing empathy and compassion and my quickened evolution to a new level of mentorship.

Conclusion

This chapter considered the design and construction of a qualitative intuitive inquiry to investigate the awakening of empathy and compassion in 12 at-risk, ninth-grade teenage boys through their being mentored and through their writing. Data collection was accomplished through the selection of three mentee writings and excerpts from a *Mentor's Journal*, which chronicled the mentoring relationship and the mentor's own developmental journey. This chapter provided an overview of the five iterative cycles of intuitive inquiry, with a full depiction of intuitive Cycles 1 and 2, and a preview of Cycles 3, 4, and 5. The following Chapter 4/Cycle 3

presents the results of the fieldwork, and Chapter 5 contains Cycles 4 and 5 in the discussion of the results.

Chapter 4: The Odyssey to Empathy and Compassion of Mentor and His Mentees

Overview

This chapter begins with brief introductions to my 12 coresearchers, the students participating in the study, as well as an introduction to myself as their mentor. Following these introductions, descriptive portraits of the students are offered, derived from our first sessions together and recorded in my *Mentor's Journal* as "Opening Mentoring Moments." A descriptive portrait of me is included. The term *mentoring moments* is utilized throughout this chapter to reflect the lived-experience of mentoring in the often hurried setting of a public high school. As mythologist and mentoring expert Meade stated, "In a hurried world, you have to grab your mentoring in moments" (personal communication, May 24, 2004).

The next section focuses on three writings created by each student during our work together: "Tonglen Poem," "Meeting With Mentor," and "Compassion Write." The title of this dissertation, *The Tears of Telemachus: An Intuitive Inquiry Into Awakening Empathy and Compassion in At-Risk Boys Through Mentoring and Their Writing* deliberately enshrines the boys' writing as a central artifact of the mentoring relationship as it progressed. This unfolding relationship was deeply interwoven with the writing process and the emergent writing content of the boys. Providing a sufficient picture of their progress necessitated the inclusion of at least three writing pieces. In essence, mentoring and writing formed the living helix of our relationship. These pieces were rewritten by the boys, with my feedback, both to clarify content as well as to correct grammar and spelling. The pieces are transcribed here with no further editing. In all cases, permission was given by the boys and their parent or guardian to include their writings as part of this study, and I, as the transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix I).

The boys' written pieces are accompanied by selections from my *Mentor's Journal*, again presented as "Mentoring Moments." These selections document the progression of the mentoring relationship, which often focused on the content of the students' writings and what these writings revealed about the students' lives. These sections from *Mentor's Journal* are interlaced with passages of embodied writing, which I employed as an intuitive inquiry tool for capturing the elusive essences of the unfolding mentoring relationship in an attempt to illuminate the inner world of the mentor and to intimate a flavor of the subtle *art* of mentoring.

These mentoring moments selections are followed by a section entitled "Concluding Mentoring Moments," which examines the challenges and progression of each boy in regard to empathy, compassion, and writing, and document the challenges and progressions experienced through the mentoring relationship. As indicated throughout this chapter, challenge and difficulty, when embraced as integral to a successful mentoring relationship, provide the grit to persevere, while adding grounding and depth to the enterprise. Interestingly, the character development benefits of maintaining an attitude of quiet determination and perseverance in the face of difficulty was one of my ongoing messages to the boys.

"Quiet determination and perseverance" was also my ongoing encouragement to myself, as my own life during this period underwent intense trials that tested me as a man and as a mentor. Following the chronicle of the sixth of the 12 students' writings and our mentoring encounters, a section entitled "Mentor's Odyssey, Part 1," recounts the first portion of my personal journey mentoring the boys during this period. As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, the entire period of my research constituted a personal rite of passage that had a direct impact on my own development toward greater empathy and compassion, while significantly reshaping my relationship to mentoring and writing. Similarly, after the final

student's writings and our mentoring encounters are portrayed, a concluding section is offered that describes my own journey, entitled "Mentor's Odyssey, Part 2." These sections show how my intention to develop empathy and compassion as a means to become a better mentor was both challenged and strengthened by unfolding events in my own life.

Pseudonyms

Each student was given a pseudonym that corresponded to an essential aspect of his character as perceived by me in my function as mentor. The purpose of utilizing a pseudonym was twofold. First, at the most basic level, the pseudonym preserves the anonymity of the students in this research. These pseudonyms, or "essence names," as I came to call them, were solely for my own self-reference; they were not nicknames that were bestowed on the students themselves. More specifically, these essence-names were employed to help me attune to the boys at a more intuitive level by emphasizing symbolic aspects of their character and story, whether latent, embodied, or teleological.

In the following section, I introduce the essence-name of each boy as well as my rationale for why the name was appropriate. The cycle of discovering these essence-names was an intuitive process that evolved out of my usage of the original meditation described above, which I informally referred to as, "The Blank Scroll Meditation."

My preparation for this meditation involved first going into a process of basic mindfulness meditation for 5 to 15 minutes before each naming process. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, mindfulness meditation is a form of meditation that invites us to "pay attention, on purpose in the present moment, non-judgmentally, as if your life depended on it" (Kabat-Zinn, 2006, track 3).

I began by simply seating myself at my research table, closing my eyes, and following my breath. Once I stabilized a steady awareness of my breath along with a feeling of calm and centeredness, I allowed my meditation to shift from bare witnessing of my breathing into an active visualization process, within which I imagined a blank, ancient scroll slowly opening. After this image stabilized in my mind's eye, I then invited the student's essence name, embodying an essential element of their journey, to appear on the scroll. This process took a great deal of patience, as sometimes nothing appeared, while at other times, it was simply very slow. Sometimes the essence name would be heard through inner audition; other times, I would actually see it in my mind's eye as a literal script appearing on the scroll, like a painted image developing. Still other times, I merely experienced a felt-sense that the name appearing in my mind was resonant with the essence of a particular student.

All of the names that intuitively presented themselves for each student had a decidedly mythic aspect to them. This imaginative flavor embodied an approach to mentoring that attempted to see through the veil of afflictive, outer behaviors to positive, even potentially heroic qualities within each student while I sustained an ongoing effort to attune to each student's essential story or myth. This approach also corresponded to the positively oriented gnosis model of diagnosis (Hutchins, 2002) that was introduced in the literature review. Attempting to divine core gifts and callings, while seeking to understand how, in this specific life, wounds might be transformed into blessings (Campbell, 1947, Meade, 2010) spoke to an approach to mentoring that honored the heroic journey to the heart that I saw these boys to be undertaking.

As the naming process progressed, I found that the mythic flavor of these names amplified my sense, as their mentor, that the dramas these boys were enacting—the stories they were living out—were perhaps not solely modern tales of at-risk boys struggling through high

school but, more significantly, represented a new chapter, both unique and timeless, in the perennial saga of a young man coming to heart-intelligence with the awakening of empathy and compassion. (Note: My findings in Chapter 5, Cycle 4, which includes the evolution of my preliminary lenses into refined and transformed lenses, goes more deeply into how this mythic approach relates to an original *9 Gates of Mentoring* template that focuses on gifts and callings of each boy.) Seeing each boy in both his mythic aspect and his present moment, an often gritty reality, created a dual focus that constituted a way of honoring the nexus of time and timelessness in which the mentoring relationship unfolded.

Brief Introduction of Coresearchers and Mentor

Leif. Leif is a 14-year-old Hispanic boy. His essence name reflects his wiry frame and the way he moves silently through the world—like a leaf. Leif’s body and face were badly burned in a fire when he was very young. His initial attitude to writing was one of begrudging willingness.

Initially, I was caught by Leif’s combination of strength and fragility. Only after discovering this name in meditation did I connect Leif with the Norwegian explorer, Leif Erickson, who may have arrived on American shores 500 years before Columbus. The connection, slowly revealed, was that in Leif I saw the quiet courage of one willing to explore his own feelings. In our first meetings, Leif appeared singular and austere lonely.

Sereno. Sereno is a 15-year-old boy of mixed heritage, Hispanic and Caucasian. His essence name reflects an ongoing struggle to remain calm in the face of difficulties. Behaviorally, Sereno was anything but calm; he had a tendency to speak rapidly and sometimes completely lose his train of thought.

In his previous writing attempts, Sereno had spun many alternate versions of a simple notion and his thoughts easily became tied up in knots when struggling to write. He approached the task of writing with a feeling of being incapable of getting to his essential truth or what he simply was trying to say.

Merlin. Merlin is a 14-year-old Caucasian boy. His essence name stems from his ability to weave words in a magical manner as well as an air of mystery that he carries. Merlin is 1 of 2 amongst the 12 boys—the other was known to me by the essence name Rimbaud—who actually began the research with a love of the writing process. After his name appeared intuitively, I realized that the measured way that Merlin spoke gave him an air of deliberation and precision that was unusual for a boy of 14. The stately cadence of his language had a certain magical, calming quality.

Archer. Archer is a 15-year-old Caucasian boy who struggles greatly with shyness. His essence-name reflects more of an intention or hope on my part as his mentor that his inner struggle to be more articulate and precise and to move with confidence through the world would be resolved.

Archer's name seemed to be teleological; that is, while hiding most of the time behind hair that nearly covers his eyes like a curtain and having the tendency to let his words fall to the floor rather than project outward, Archer would, even from the beginning, look up from time to time and speak with momentary directness about his situation in life. This left a seed of wonder in me: What would Archer be like if in maturing, he could come into the flowering of this momentary confidence, this ability to speak with emotional directness? The name also reflects this boy's droll, arch sense of humor. Archer was one of countless boys whom I had encountered over the years who repeatedly, proudly proclaimed, "I hate writing!"

Perceval. Perceval is a 14-year-old boy Caucasian boy who has grown up in a family that is virtually consumed by drug use. His essence-name reflects his quiet struggle for honor and dignity as well as his earnest appearance. One aspect of my intuitive reasoning for this name was that, quite simply, Perceval's physical appearance suggested to me what I imagined a very young knight-intending might have looked like in ancient times. Although I was not thinking of it consciously when Perceval's name was received, I had been aware that Perceval was a sort of holy fool (Campbell, 1968, p. 456) in the Arthurian mythos. In group discussions, this modern-day Perceval was often the one to speak humorously yet also with piercing honesty. Perceval's initial alignment to writing was that it was something he "had to do to get a grade."

Metta. Metta is a 15-year-old boy of mixed African American and Caucasian origins. His essence name, the Pāli word for "loving-kindness," reflects his extremely kind and gentle disposition, as well as his deep concern for others, especially noteworthy in a boy of 15 years of age. "Pali is fundamentally a language of Buddhism . . . [and] thus the canonical and liturgical language of Theravada Buddhism in such countries as Burma, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand" (Gair & Karunatilake, 2001, p. xvii).

Of the 12 boys, Metta's name came to me the most directly. From our very first interview, it was clear that he was a young man of extraordinary kindness. Amazingly, his gentle demeanor did not evoke the usual derisive terms from the other boys, such as gay, or queer. Such homophobic language can be rampant in teenage boys, and I had come up against it many times in past years, always challenging its heedless usage.

Metta dragged a long "backpack of failure" (as I termed it) behind him in regard to writing. In his case, though, he wanted to improve in writing, both to be able to express his deeper feelings better and because he hoped to one day go to college.

Milarepa. Milarepa is a fierce, young, Caucasian male of 15. Milarepa's name, taken from the story of the Tibetan rogue saint who went from criminal to holy man (Heruka, 2010) reflected the fact that, already at his young age, Milarepa had gotten into a lot of trouble, yet he was now determined to follow a straight path. An intensity of focus and a singularity about Milarepa struck me even in our initial meeting; yet, a strong, potentially volatile edge to him gave me the sense that Milarepa could easily erupt or "go off" on someone if they struck him the wrong way. Milarepa's alignment to writing was "I've got no problem with it—as long as you don't tell me what to say or how to say it!"

Osiris. Osiris is a razor-thin Hispanic boy of 14 who has suffered from childhood with a rare illness. He is prone to joking about nearly everything and plays the class clown, though he is sometimes the first person to speak honestly about his feelings—if he is in the mood. Osiris has a cutting sense of humor that begins with his own proclivity toward self-deprecation. Osiris's name seemed to reflect his literal situation of having been close to death on several occasions. When I did the Blank Scroll Meditation in order to intuit his name, I had a brief yet very clear image of an Egyptian youth lying horizontally on a sort of platform with the god Horus leaning over him. In this case, I actually "heard" the name, Osiris. I did not know what to make of this at first, but then realized it may have reflected my own concern about the outlook for Osiris's health.

Osiris considered *any* writing to be boring, as part of the overall boringness of school itself. Differing from the allergy to writing that boys like Archer professed, Osiris simply found writing to be a non-activity, offering no interest or reward.

Rimbaud. Rimbaud is a weary yet intense 14-year-old boy, born of Korean parents, whose mother died when he was 8 years old. He is dreamy, opinionated, hysterically funny, and

often exhausted at school. Rimbaud's name reflects his rebellious, irreverent nature as well as the fact that his appearance simply reminded me of pictures I had seen of the French poet, Rimbaud, in which his face had an almost oriental appearance.

Interestingly, I was not yet aware of Rimbaud's love for writing rap poetry when the name came to me in meditation. For Rimbaud, however, the leap from writing rap on scraps of paper, to producing written work for school, especially a formal essay, seemed considerable, and he initially had little inclination to make that leap.

Beat. Beat is Hispanic and a 15-year-old giant of a boy, already nearly 6 feet tall, with a broad figure. He has run away from home before and has experimented heavily with drugs but is now drug-free and determined to stay in school. He has adopted a punk-rock attitude and ethos featuring a defiance toward authority.

At the introductory meeting about the research, Beat was wearing a jacket-vest, which he had created by jaggedly cutting off the sleeves. The vest was adorned with all sorts of symbols—peace symbols (he had taken off the swastikas by request from the school), hand-drawn dragons, and his own initials. He took great pride in this garment. Also at that meeting, Beat was carrying a copy of Jack Kerouac's book *On the Road* (the wild, stream-of-consciousness version known as "the original scroll," published in 2007, a half-century after the original publication), saying he felt like Dean Moriarty, the spirited main character of the book. His naming process was therefore as much simple observation as it was an intuitive process. He had only recently developed a love for reading yet still could not see himself as someone who had something to say or possessing any ability in regard to writing. Nevertheless, he was willing to try.

Futuro. Futuro is a 14-year-old Caucasian boy who has diabetes. He has shown much rebellion about his diabetes, which was diagnosed 2 years ago, sometimes consuming large

amounts of sugary foods or beverages and relying on his insulin pump to balance him. His parents have never been married, though they have lived together several times. Futuro battles frequently with his mother, has little interest in school, and had no interest in writing.

Futuro's name puzzled me at first, even though I had a basic trust in my ability to register something of the essence of each boy through this intuitive process of essence-naming. Only after receiving the name in the meditation did I realize that Futuro evoked a singular fear in me: How likely was Futuro to even *have* a future, given his self-destructive behavior in regard to his health? Although this fearful reflection made me aware of a degree of projection on my part, it still seemed to fit, not to mention that Futuro lived for the future time when he would be free of school and all authority figures.

Arrow. Arrow is a 15-year-old Hispanic boy whose brother was stabbed in a gang fight the previous year. He came to this school in order to get away from bad influences at his former high school. A tall, restless boy with striking features, he has little interest in school. In Arrow's case, he feels like he is good at writing but has thus far found little use for it, other than the obligation to complete assignments.

Arrow's unwavering gaze, his blunt directness, and his angular appearance all seemed related to this name. His name is somewhat ironic yet also embodies a sort of prayer for the future, reflecting the fact that he seems to have no goals or targets—short, mid, or long-term—as yet in his life. Perhaps this absence is a byproduct of his own fears that the boys who tried to kill his brother might also come after him at any time.

Mentor. Mentor is the author of this dissertation. He is 56 years old at the commencement of this study, and has been leading small group classes in character education and writing for at-risk boys as well as for girls for nearly a decade. He feels that writing,

mentoring, and teaching—in that order—are his principal callings in life, while the development of empathy and compassion is his most pressing inner work. At the outset of his research, in the beginning of September 2010, Mentor had little idea that his own journey into greater empathy and compassion would include extensive loss and trauma or that the completion of his dissertation would take an extra 2 years as he strove to integrate his experiences.

Crediting myself with the name Mentor for this study was an empowering imaginal act. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, in Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*, Mentor, while identified as an elder and friend of Odysseus, whom Odysseus entrusted to look after Telemachus during his prolonged absence, is also, significantly, an outer, shape-shifted form for the goddess of Wisdom, Athena. As the *Odyssey* unfolds, Mentor acts as a sort of catalyst and guide to Odysseus's teenage son, Telemachus, as the youth sets out on his own odyssey of discovery. In adopting the name as my essence or quest-name for this research, I thus sought a link between this ancient mentor archetype and me. I was petitioning for connection to the archetypal energies of Mentor to work through me in service to my coresearchers, the 12 "faces" of Telemachus, so to speak. Even more broadly speaking, it was a petition to connect with and join myself to the ancient lineage of mentors across the ages. Biochemist Rupert Sheldrake (2009) wrote about the existence of *morphogenic fields* of information that contain the aggregate history and information of a specific area of human study. A morphogenic field can be likened to a sphere of potentially enriching and revelatory data containing the living *gestalt* of any given subject. I entered this odyssey with the hypothesis, born of research and experience, that there may be a morphogenic field of mentoring—a subtle, yet potent realm that contains information and energy to help guide and empower a mentor in service to his mentees. Naming myself Mentor was a way of testing the validity of this concept.

Initial Interviews With Participants

The portraits of the boys that follow are framed as “Opening Mentoring Moments” of each of the 12 boys in the study and emerged from our initial mentoring sessions. Each session was conducted in a small-group meeting room adjacent to the library at the high school the students attended. The interviews were conducted during the first 2 weeks of September 2010.

Prior to meeting with the boys, I had read each of their “cum” files, which contain their cumulative record from kindergarten through the present, including academic performance and behavioral issues or incidents. One must read these files with a great deal of care, because they are far from complete, and the accuracy of any given reporter cannot be verified when it comes to behavioral issues. I had also been briefed on each student by his teacher, a compassionate educator who had been my collaborator for the past 6 years, though their teacher, like me, was just getting to know the boys.

I knew that the opening mentoring session might very likely present singular challenges. Many of the boys struggled with attention issues. However light my approach, a timeframe up to as much as 30 minutes of focused inquiry would be a considerable stretch of time for some. Also, because the sessions came at the outset of our odyssey together, I was barely beginning to establish trust. A foundational element of relationship for these boys was trust; in fact, without it, no significant mentoring relationship was possible, because many of them carried the experience of betrayal, particularly in terms of the lack of reliability of adults, and failure to succeed in the school environment. The interviews were therefore strategically casual on the surface, to help the boys to feel at ease, even though I had a definite set of simple questions and lines of inquiry that I wished to pursue.

Crisis—and opportunity. At our orientation meeting held during the first week of school, I had clearly addressed the recording of my opening mentoring session with students, parents, and guardians. Both the students and their parents or guardians had signed the consent forms at that initial meeting, yet all this up-front protocol seemed to have gone right past the boys—or they chose to act as if it had. When I took the first boy, Leif, for our interview the following week, he absolutely refused to be recorded. I reiterated the reasons for needing the interviews to be taped, but he was adamant in his refusal. I decided not to push it at that time, concerned that Leif might close down entirely.

We returned to the classroom where the other students were working with their regular teacher. Between the end of the class period and the beginning of the next (the boys stayed with their teacher for two periods), word had gotten out and, as was the way of this select group, they bonded together against the new “authority figure” in an all-for-one-and-one-for-all refusal to be recorded. The teacher, with whom I had repeatedly discussed the whole design of the study, had been present when I made my introductory presentation to the students and their parents and guardians. She understood my wish to record, yet she also knew this population quite well, having taught in this program for a number of years. She felt that a mutiny could take place regarding their participation in the study if we insisted on doing the recordings. I told her to wait until the next day to allow me time to ponder this bewildering turn of events.

I had to wonder if Trickster, in all his reveling in auspicious bewilderment, had not already appeared in my research. Anderson (1998b) had woven an endorsement of Trickster’s creative potential into the very fabric of intuitive inquiry, writing that “in indigenous cultures worldwide, tricksters open gateways of awareness and insights” (p. 84). As stated in the literature review, a wise acceptance of Trickster’s visitations was perfectly consistent with

mentoring at-risk boys, in light of the fact that “confusion takes us in an unanticipated direction. Paradox challenges our assumptions” (Anderson, 2011, p. 63).

I had often told my students over the years that crisis could be a gateway to opportunity. That night, pondering what had happened, I had to admit that I initially saw little opportunity in *this* crisis. In fact, I worried that my entire research might be sabotaged—because “teenage boys can be so difficult, irrational, and obtuse,” as my mind described my dilemma to myself. The irony of my falling into these condemnations of my coresearchers was lost on me until, beginning to write in my *Mentor’s Journal* about what had happened, I gradually began to see the opportunity this turn of events presented. I knew that I had to make a fundamental decision in this regard, weighing my insistence on one way and one way only to “record” the interviews versus my passionate endeavor to begin the mentoring process by laying a strong foundation of trust and respect. Having worked with at-risk teens for the past decade, I was painfully aware of how deep betrayal and, hence, mistrust, likely figured into the life stories of these boys. Because this key issue roared to the surface in my attempt to capture my very first interview, I knew I would have to craft a solution that demonstrated respect for the boys, began to build trust between us, and yet also honored my intuitive inquiry research.

With this occasion of auspicious bewilderment, I also had concerns about the power issue involved. Would I be seen at the start as capitulating and thus as being a weak mentor? I realized that this was one of my own struggles, as a mentor: finding a dynamic balance between firm authority and fostering an atmosphere of freedom and play in which each mentoring relationship could embody the original, twin meaning of the word *education*, from the Latin, *educere*, meaning “to draw forth from within,” and *educare*, meaning “to shape and to form” (“Education,” Funk, 1976, p. 401). A mentor who fell into trying to be a nice guy could lose

authority or command, whereas a mentor who always took the “hard” stance could grow inflexible and fail to see the tender aspect of his mentees even within the guise of unruly behaviors. In this case, the issue was trust.

In the end, I settled on a solution that would actually serve to strengthen my already strong memory and a compromise that allowed me to also record our mentoring encounter, but in writing. Perhaps more importantly, the solution called upon and challenged my intuitive ability to attune still more deeply to the essence of each students’ story, attending to the totality of their communications, even beyond their words—in short, to practice empathetic listening to as thorough a degree as possible. This challenge would also summon my abilities as a reporter and a writer to try and accurately record our encounters. Fortunately, I had been trained as a journalist, had worked on two newspapers as a younger man, and was particularly adept at taking notes while simultaneously engaged in interviewing or in dialogue. My technique, even then, was always to capture key phrases or *essence* phrases that seemed to embody the heart of the communication.

As my reflections about this combined crisis and emergent opportunity deepened, I realized that mentors had been meeting with their mentees for thousands and thousands of years, bringing deep attention and a steadiness of presence that took record of the encounter. Presented with this challenge for deep listening and scribe-like recording, an image arose in my mind of a famous picture from ancient Egypt that I had always kept near my writing table. It showed a scribe seated in a sort of meditation position, with his whole posture and mien radiating sharp and penetrating attention as he prepared to write. This image became my imaginal touchstone for summoning the faculties of the scribe to attend our mentoring sessions.

My more immediate, practical solution was that after completing the day's interviews, I would write extensively in my *Mentor's Journal*. (In actual practice, I conducted three interviews of 20-30 minutes each over two class periods each day, and *then* recorded them in my journal, sometimes taking as much as 2 hours for this process.) The additional compromise that I would make with the boys as a group, was that even during the sessions, I would be taking extensive, handwritten notes in *Mentor's Journal*, capturing key phrases, sometimes more lengthy exchanges, from which I built my longer writings during the extended time after the three interviews.

The following day, I told the boys as a group and then reminded them again individually as I met with them for the opening mentoring sessions that they were just going to have to put up with the fact that "I am a writer who writes about everything, constantly. I do it so I can breathe. It's no different than you drawing pictures, or lettering" (an activity I sometimes allowed them to do when I was speaking to them, just as, at other times, I gave them mandalas to color—a dual-focus technique that seemed to help to gather, rather than disperse attention). With an air of finality, I told the group there would be no argument or even disagreement. As the sessions progressed, I found it became easier for me to focus intently on the boy seated before me, while allowing my hand to write freely, capturing key phrases and sometimes whole chains of dialogue as they unfolded within the mentoring encounter.

After doing each of three interviews each day over the next 4 days, I was able to combine my notes, and make my recordings in my journal. I discovered that having to listen with such concentration actually served my intuition by bringing my attention into sharp focus. Seated before my coresearchers, I felt I was listening with my whole body while paying more attention to the boys' body postures and expressions, even to what was *not* said, along with any shifts in

the atmosphere that pervaded the interview. The living archetype of the Scribe was revealing itself to me as another facet of Mentor and confirmed the power of the writing process to capture the energy, the flavor, and even the essence of these mentoring encounters.

The following section begins with summaries of the first meeting with each boy. In the case of 2 boys, I allowed them to draw during our interview, and I realized that they regarded my writing in a similar way. Long before, I had recognized that for boys who were hyperactive, what appeared to be just doodling could serve as a way of staying focused.

The initial mentoring moments are followed by a section focused on three writings executed by each boy: (a) “*Tonglen Poem*,” (b) “*Meeting Mentor*,” and (c) “*Compassion Write*.” The content of these three writing prompts was introduced in the Methods chapter. The three writing activities were created (first drafts) and crafted (editing, rewriting) in week 2 of the 16-week *Odyssey Writes of Passage* program (“*Tonglen Poem*”); week 7 (“*Meeting Mentor*”); and, finally, in week 14 of our journey together (“*Compassion Write*”). Absences, always a challenge with at-risk students, required both flexibility and the ability to stay on course with writing assignments. Students were allowed to make up the assignment in the following week if they were absent or had somehow missed the assignment. Summaries of the closing mentoring encounter with each boy indicate the challenges and breakthroughs that occurred as a result of the journey.

Writes of passage. In the course of this study, some of the most significant mentoring occurred in the moments when the boys and I reviewed their writings. Using the written word and rewrite process as mentoring prompts opened up life challenges encoded within the writings themselves, particularly in regard to the feeling lives of the boys and, more specifically, their relationship to empathy and compassion.

Although I often felt extremely challenged to rise to the function of mentor, given the accelerating challenges in my own life, I saw that my task as Mentor was to bestir myself continually while not denying the tempest within, focusing and refocusing on holding the boys to their best, most empathetic and compassionate selves in these encounters. Sometimes this task took the form of holding up the mirror to a boy's *lack* of active empathy or compassion, patiently reasoning with him, seeking to consider together the karmic effects of this missing link in his relational life, and even challenging him by holding up the torch of his higher possibility. These skirmishes were not always pleasant or fun, and it was critically important that as Mentor, I distinguished, first in myself and then to the boys, that these reflections were not judgments upon them as persons but rather reflections of their actions or non-actions.

Midway through the following 12 portraits, after the sixth boy's work and our mentoring encounters are presented, the text pauses to introduce the parallel journey of Mentor. My odyssey with the boys was interwoven with significant events in my own life that included the death of my father, the shattering of my marriage, and the death of my mother, all within the timeframe of my research window. (My mother actually died the week after my in-the-field research with the boys was concluded.) These personal rites of passage were highly significant to the process of Mentor, evoking an inner struggle to simply stay steady and show up; continual realignment to purpose; an ongoing petition for help; and, sometimes, simply sheer grit to keep moving forward. It was not lost on me that these were all inner qualities and alignments to life that I, as Mentor, was trying to impart to the boys to fortify them for their own journeys. After the final portrait of the boys, the text returns to this self-portrait of Mentor, again tracking the unfolding journey into empathy and compassion that was being challenged and inspired by events in my own life and my responses to these events.

Formulating the opening questions. In an attempt to simplify, allow for depth to unfold, and offer an open-ended format that invited each boy's essence and story to emerge, the opening mentoring session orbited around three core questions. I could reasonably conjecture, based on nearly a decade of working with boys in this class, that it would be extremely challenging to elicit clear or anywhere near complete answers to even these three questions. I knew that these first meetings had to initiate the establishment of trust between my mentees and me, and I worried that my asking even three set questions would give the boys a pinned-down feeling, as if they were being "studied," in a way that might make them feel defensive. I therefore had to use the questions more in the way that I used writing prompts with the students, knowing that even if they did not answer the questions directly or wandered off course, valuable data would still emerge, and the foundational work of establishing trust could begin. The three questions that I brought to our opening mentoring sessions were as follows:

1. When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?
2. What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?
3. When you or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about this suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?

I had originally conceived of *nine* questions for the boys, but quickly realized that this would likely constitute an overload and ran the potential risk of beginning our work with a process that could be experienced by the boys as simultaneously too probing *and* boring. These nine questions also assumed a certain knowledge of the study's core topics, empathy and compassion, and I was wary of beginning our mentoring encounter with something that felt to the boys like a teaching session, when what was more important was laying the foundations of

trust. Also, I reminded myself of the fact that for these boys, as for so many students, the cardinal sin as a mentor or teacher, was to be guilty of (what I called) the “B word”—boring!

Nevertheless, the three questions I decided to use were derived from the original nine, which, by virtue of being in my consideration, did imbue these initial interviews with my basic intent. Also, crafting the nine questions was a strong, early step in Mentor’s development. Finally, the nine questions were testament to the inner alignment I held during these all-important opening mentoring moments. They guided my own inner investigations as well. In order to show my deeper thinking as I approached these interviews, I offer the original nine questions here:

1. What does the word *empathy* mean to you?
2. When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are (for example, your body, your thoughts, your feelings, and even a deeper part of you that some people call “the soul”), how important are your feelings in this overall picture of you?
3. Do you pay attention to your feelings as they come and go? Can you recognize, or even identify specific feelings you have when they’re going on?
4. What, if any, importance do the feelings of *others*—family, friends, acquaintances, even strangers—hold in your life? Can you recognize or even identify specific feelings that any of these people might be having when you see them?
5. Do you ever (sometimes, often) have the feeling that you can, in some way, actually feel what others are or might be feeling, or that you know, specifically, what they are feeling?
6. What does the word *compassion* mean to you?

7. When you are hurting in any way, what is your basic attitude toward that hurt; for example, do you feel like you want to help to relieve (make lighter or lessen) your pain or suffering; or, at the opposite end, do you maybe judge yourself for hurting, or just ignore the hurt?
8. When you or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel like you might want or need to do about that suffering?
9. Do you ever feel like you want to do something about the suffering that's going on in the world? (The world could be as big as the whole Earth, or as close to home as your friends and family, or your community, city, state, or country.)

As I worked with the boys, I saw that the decision to go with the simpler, more concise three questions was the better choice. Although I would have valued such extensive, upfront data, insisting on getting it would have made far too much of a demand in the very beginning of the mentoring relationship and may even have catalyzed much resistance up front with the boys. Composing the nine questions, however, helped prime my faculties for the opening mentoring sessions documented below and thus served a purpose in my overall preparation.

Mentoring Sessions

Leif. Opening mentoring moments as well as Leif's responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor's Journal). Leif is a 14-year-old Hispanic who carries himself like an ancient, wizened man. As a young child of 6, he was burned in a fire. His body and face are scarred with deep grooves, giving him a look of great intensity, almost otherworldliness. Leif wears a hood whenever he can, though his teachers make him take

it off on a daily basis, something he resents, citing school policy on hoods and attire that could be construed to be gang-like. While it is fairly obvious when looking at him that Leif went through some sort of catastrophic event, there is nothing scary about his face to me; it is just surprising in its intensity. His eyes are kind, if guarded, and he has a twinkling smile, though only flashed on very rare occasions.

Leif seems both sensitive and intelligent, yet he approaches school, and specifically writing, with what I call “bare-minimum-itus,” a phrase I’ve coined to mean doing as little as possible in order to slide by. Leif’s bare-minimum-itus is hardly unique to him; it is a trait found in many at-risk boys, in regard to academics. When I explain what this coinage, bare minimum-itus, means, Leif smiles. He prides himself on his ability to “be chill,” which presents to me as Leif showing little or no emotion.

Leif’s father works in construction, and his mother is in the hotel service industry. With two older brothers and two younger sisters, the family struggles financially. In speaking with Leif, I am struck by the evenness of his mood, coupled with a slight air of weariness.

I begin to ask Leif the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

At first Leif says that feelings are “not that important” to him. When I ask, “What is?” he says, “I don’t know. Hanging out with my friends?”

Leif asks, with an air of weariness, “Why would I want to talk about my feelings?” He explains that he does not even really like talking about his feelings “with anyone!” I wonder if these questions, up front, even just these three, are too probing, too on the nose.

I ask Leif if, when he hangs out with friends, what they talk about is mostly school, about ideas—intellectual stuff? I am partly just trying to draw him out, even if it is by irritating him just a bit.

“What? Are you kidding?” he asks, incredulous.

“So, maybe what you talk about are feelings,” I suggest. “Feelings: How you look at the world. What is really cool. What sucks. All of that is really about your feelings about those things,” I explain.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Leif says that while he loves his older brothers, they are “not the greatest role models,” and his younger sisters “mostly annoy” him, though he would “kill anyone who tried to mess with them.” Leif says that who he really cares about are the kids he meets every summer in a place he calls “Burn Camp.” Leif says that, yes, it is actually called Burn Camp. He has been going to Burn Camp for a number of summers, but this summer, he is hoping to be a sort of mentor to some of the younger boys. The whole purpose of the camp, according to Leif, is basically to “hang out and learn from other kids who have been burned.” It shows them that they are not alone, and it even introduces them to the idea of inner beauty, he tells me. It helps them deal with the trauma and find strength. Leif really likes it when “I see a little kid come out of his shell at Burn Camp.”

Leif explains that he can tell a kid is “locked up” inside himself by watching him; the way he moves, says little, seems like he is “exploding in.” Leif understands it because, he says, “I’ve been there.” The first few years at camp he barely spoke.

Leif’s face grows more animated, while his eyes become serious, his focus sharper, not resorting to the irony machine that comes so easy to him. He talks about a little kid who

befriended him at the camp last summer. Leif was not an official mentor yet, but this little boy just kind of glommed onto him. In the last 2 days, the 8-year-old boy was smiling, and Leif described a moment when “we were all getting ready to leave to go back home, and the little guy just ran up to me and hugged me. He fist-bumped me, and then ran away.” Leif laughs deeply, though briefly, remembering the moment.

I suggest to Leif that when we come to the end of our odyssey together, and he gets to do one longer writing, “Compassion Write,” he might consider writing about just that moment, including everything that led up to it, how it made him feel, and what it means in his life.

“I could do that—if I feel like writing!” Leif says, excited, then pulling back.

I ask Leif about the hood he wears most all of the time. What happens when he takes it off?

“I have to take it off in my other classes.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. F**k ‘em!”

I skip over the swear word (this time), not wanting to miss the moment. “I think you should be able to wear it for as long as you like, whenever you like,” I tell him. I have decided within myself that I will simply claim ignorance, should anyone come into the class and wonder why Leif is being allowed to wear his hood. This seems to put Leif at ease and is a good way to end our opening mentoring meeting.

I do not ask the final question, “When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about this suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?” He has given me my answer, in his story about the little boy at Burn Camp.

Leif's teacher told me that he has a stance that he never tells the story of what happened when he was burned, even though he remembers it vividly. She learned this fact from his mother. She also revealed that it was an accident, and that he nearly died.

Already, in our first meeting, I feel enormously privileged to have met this young man in my role as mentor. I am humbled by his courage. It is too early to reflect these things to him; I have an intuitive sense that he would feel uncomfortable with a question that is too direct and on the beam. Leif is a boy who loves the oblique. Things have to fall gently, yet decisively, like a strong leaf, bruised and burned by the sun, but making its presence felt and known. My mind is haunted by an unseen image of a small child nearly consumed in flames. I wonder greatly how this blazing moment reverberates throughout the life of Leif.

Leif's "Tonglen Poem." This is what he offered.

Breathe in fire
 Breathe out cool
 Breathe in boredom
 Breathe out chill
 Breathe in scared and scarred
 Breathe out Burn Camp
 Breathe in ugly
 Breathe out faceless
 Breathe in anger
 Breathe out total peace
 Breathe in death
 Breathe out lightning

Mentoring moments, week 3 (from Mentor's Journal). I met very, very briefly with Leif today. I knew that he had taken a risk in writing his "*Tonglen* poem." When I had marked his draft, I only suggested grammar and spelling corrections. Somehow I knew that any direct comment would cause Leif to pull back, to become sarcastic or ironic.

Leif tells me that he appreciates the fact that I do not require him to remove his hood in the classroom, even though he guesses I might “take sh*t” for letting him wear it. I tell him that “people see what they want to see anyways—what they let themselves see.”

“What do you mean?” he asks, looking straight at me.

“I don’t know,” I answer, realizing that it was kind of a trite thing to say. “I guess I’m more interested in what you see, how you think and feel, than how you look, or how anyone thinks you look.”

That’s about as much direct reflection as Leif will allow. I can feel the retreat in him as he looks off to the side, shuffles his feet.

I tell Leif that he did a really good job today.

Mentoring moments, week 7 (from Mentor’s Journal). Leif struggled at first with the “Meeting Mentor” writing assignment. Failing to read the instructions in the writing prompt, he thought he had to write about meeting me in our original meeting! In the characteristic bluntness of at-risk teenage boys, he simply said to me, “I don’t want to write about our meeting—nothing happened!”

I had Leif reread—or, rather, read for the first time—the instructions or prompt at the top of the page.

“Can I write about a dream?”

“Is this a dream you actually had?”

“Does it matter?” I thought about it for a moment.

“Is it true for you?”

“It’s what I can write,” Leif said, flatly. I did not want to waste any time—or lose him when he was showing at least some willingness to write! A dream was a product of Leif’s psyche, whether it was “true” or not.

“Sure, write about the dream of meeting a mentor,” I said.

Leif’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” This is what he offered.

My mentor comes in a dream. In the dream, I’m in a desert. It’s a desert, but there are a lot of trees. There’s a fire in the desert that I can stop with my mind. I have to get totally chill inside to stop the fire. No feeling. I’m watching as flames shoot backwards. They fly up to the sky like burnt eagles.

I look exactly like I am now in the dream. My body is not different. It’s still all burnt, but I feel different. I’m walking, looking for something or someone. I somehow know this majorly old man is there in the middle of the desert. I have to talk to him about something.

Now I’m sitting down in this sort of tropical place. It’s still the desert, but it’s like an oasis, with huge, ancient palm trees that no one has ever trimmed.

[Note: Leif couldn’t find the word for *oasis* at first, describing it as “a peaceful place, shady, where you can stop and rest.” He raised his hand. He tried to describe to me what he meant. I suggested *oasis*, and he said, “Yeah.”].

There’s a strange man in one of the palm trees with something fiery about him. He’s looking down on me as I come into this oasis. It’s like he called me here or something. He has an “ugly face, like me,” is what I think in the dream. It’s like he’s been burned a thousand times, but still lived. It’s hard to explain, but somehow I know that this is what happened to him. “The Man Who Lived Through Fire,” is how I think about him in my dream. Those words make me feel both sad and majorly happy at the same time.

I feel like he knows my story. I’m kind of expecting him to say something kind and gentle. Like he’s probably got some sort of healing ability, just through his words, his voice.

“God, you’re ugly!” he says instead. Then he starts laughing this incredible laugh. His laughter booms like an explosion. At first, I can’t believe he’s said that. I’m so mad . . . but just for a moment. I feel like I’m going to explode with all the anger I feel. But then something happens which is really, really weird. Somehow, it’s like him saying that, the big forbidden “U” word, it just is so funny. All of a sudden, I can’t stop laughing along with the man. We are both laughing like mad men! He’s laughing so hard that the tree he’s in starts shaking like crazy, and then I’m shaking too. The shaking fills me with a wild feeling. I just have so much energy.

Mentoring moments, week 12 (from Mentor's Journal). When Leif handed me his “Meeting With Mentor Write,” all he said was, “I told you I was nuts!” The faintest smile appeared on his face, then he pulled off his hood and left the class as the bell rang.

During the final weeks of *Odyssey*, the boys will be writing their culminating piece of writing, which we call “Compassion Write.” As his odyssey unfolds, Leif has shown some increased willingness to write. Nevertheless, he first said that he did not want to do the final writing. I feel, sometimes, like he is slipping back to where we began the semester, but in fact, that is not true. There have been small breakthroughs; he has spoken up more in class, he is at least willing to do most of the writings.

The biggest breakthrough I have had with him was the day he came to class and took off his hood as he entered; not because I asked him to take it off, but because it seemed he felt he did not need it. Respecting Leif's wishes has done much to break down the wall he usually keeps securely in place when dealing with authority figures. Being, in a sense, forced to expose his wounds because of a dress policy had only added to Leif's sense of violation, and so he had seemed to really appreciate the respite from facial exposure in *Odyssey*.

Leif's unveiling of his face, so to speak, came of his own volition and timing. I am relieved, because during our mentoring session last week, I ran the risk of making Leif feel he could not trust me when I suggested that actually by wearing the hood, he could be putting out the message that he cared about other people's judgments about his appearance.

“I don't!”

“Then show them you don't. Anyways, do you really think they see the real you, just because you take off your hood?” I go on to tell Leif that his hood has nothing to do with it. I

suggest that most people are so caught up in their own stuff, their own stories, they do not even pay attention. “Why not be proud of who you are?” I ask.

Somehow we get to talking about different Native American warriors, battle scars, worn proudly, and also the dream he had about The Man Who Lived Through The Fire with the fierce laugh that he wrote about in his mentor essay. I remember that there is a huge book of photographs by Edward Curtis of Native Americans in the library here. Leif and I walk into the main part of the library, find the book and look through it. He gets very quiet as he looks at the portraits, haunted warriors, with strange, withered beauty, like ancient trees—like the boy who sits here now, looking through these portraits, seeing a glimmer, the possibility of his own beauty, beyond the flames.

“I think he was laughing because he didn’t give a damn what anyone on Earth—or in Heaven or Hell, for that matter—thought of him,” I say. I tell Leif that “I see that sort of power in you, too.”

Leif’s “Compassion Write.” This is what he offered.

At Burn Camp, I have power. I know who I am there, and everyone knows who I am. I don’t have to explain or tell my story, or feel like that’s all people see is a boy who was burned.

At Burn Camp, I have a purpose. Sure, I’m there to have fun, and we really do have fun there, but that’s not the most important thing. It’s a place where I know that everything that has happened to me somehow has a weird, mysterious meaning to it, like it was supposed to happen or something.

I feel that way especially strong when I think about Isaac.

[Note: Isaac is not the boy’s real name. I had suggested to Leif that he change the name of the boy, for the purpose of this writing and guarding anonymity, and he totally got it.].

Isaac was just a depressed little guy when he first came to Burn Camp. His accident had happened less than two years ago, and he still looked pretty bad. He still was looking at some more operations. I knew what that was like. It can take a long time to get to “normal,” or at least to try to get there.

I really can’t remember how it happened that Isaac sort of just started following me around, but he did. He really didn’t say much at all. I still wonder how or why he picked me out.

In fact, the first word I think I said to Isaac was just “Hey,” and that was pretty much the first thing he said to me. But eventually we got past that. I really don’t know how I just knew that telling Isaac what had happened to me when I was burned, and telling him some of the things that happened to me afterwards might help him to open up. I guess it kind of helped me, as well, even though Isaac was a few years younger. It had been a long time since I talked about it. I got sick of talking about it a long time ago.

Isaac listened. He wanted to know if kids ever stop teasing you. I told him they mostly did. I told him that he had to focus on how much he loved his parents, to pay attention to the real friends he had, the ones who didn’t tease him. He talked about one friend, a really tough little guy (though somehow I pictured him as huge, even though he probably wasn’t that big) who punched out another kid who was teasing Isaac. His friend got suspended for three days for hitting the kid, but when he came back, he said to Isaac, “I don’t give a sh*t; I’d do it again. We’re friends.”

I couldn’t give Isaac any big “It’s all gonna be okay” talk. That would just be bullsh*tting him. I told him that I would be here for him each summer at Burn Camp, until I was done with high-school. I told him he could call me anytime.

I feel like I understood what Isaac was going through. To tell you the truth, he looked worse than I did, but I saw something really tough in Isaac that was going to survive. I guess if I taught him anything it was that he shouldn’t be so tough that he couldn’t feel good feelings, but not to be stupid about choosing “friends” who turn out not to be friends at all.

On the last day of camp, Isaac came running up to me. He high-fived me and fist-bumped me. He said he would be back next year, for sure. I told him again that I would be here for him and said it would be cool to talk or text once in awhile during the year. He then did something that really took me by surprise. I’m not a huggy sort of guy. Anyone who knows me will tell you that. Isaac didn’t seem to know that though. He threw his arms around me and hugged me.

“Thanks,” was all he said. I have to admit, I almost cried.

Closing mentoring moments, week 14 (from Mentor’s Journal). In today’s mentoring session, Leif used the phrase “burn victim.” I suggested to him that he might consider no longer referring to himself as a “victim.” He has survived the fire, like the ancient man in his “Meeting With Mentor Write.” He is a burn survivor; he is The Boy Who Came Through Fire.

I am glad that in Leif’s final write for the class, he returned to the theme of Burn Camp. His writing reveals a progression from the reluctant boy with whom I had met just a few months ago, hooded and veiled in so many ways. He has gone on an odyssey to empathy and compassion, connected with his inner mentor, engaged with his outer mentor (me), and even found himself in a lineage, so to speak, of mentoring, in that he has harvested meaning and

purpose, in his “Compassion Write,” from his own ability to bring hope to a young burn survivor.

Leif asks about *Odyssey* for next year: Does the program work with tenth graders? I tell him, honestly, that I am not even sure if the program is going to continue, because of funding, but that once I am a mentor to someone, I am always available and can always be reached through the counseling department. I also give him my district email address and say that I hope he will write to me, and even share any writings he might do.

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Leif the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Leif says that one of the things he has gotten out of the class is that his feelings are, in fact, a part of him. He says that he is never going to be a “brainiac” in school, but that he is a good friend, and he cares about people. He even cares about himself. Somehow, it is a big deal to me that he was speaking these words with his hood down and mostly looking me in the eye.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Leif answered, “I guess I do really care about kids like Isaac. I just kind of want to say to any burn victim—‘You can make it.’ That makes me feel strong, even saying that. I want to protect them, but I also want to show them that they don’t need my protection, that they can be their own protection.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Leif answered, “Kind of like I said. I think we burn survivors are like warriors. I remember you saying how metals are ‘tested’ by fire. I want to show these guys that they are warriors.” Through our mentoring encounter, I have come to see Leif as a warrior himself; tested by fire, now beginning to show the courage to open his heart, and to tell the story of this opening. It has been a privilege to work with this hauntingly beautiful soul.

I remind myself that L-E-I-F anagrams to L-I-F-E. Leif, like the phoenix, seems to be finding his way to a stronger, more positive connection to Life.

Serenio. Opening mentoring moments, Sereno’s responses to the three questions, and closing mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). Sereno is a 15-year-old boy who is of mixed heritage, Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon. He was raised predominantly by his grandfather, for whom he has a deep reverence and respect. Sereno met his father only one time. His mother has been involved with drugs and prostitution—hence, his living with Grandpa.

Serenio has struggled greatly with putting his often philosophically rich thoughts into written expression. He is a boy who combines an emotional warmth with wild intellectual energy. He loves to philosophize about life, people, “The Big Stuff,” as he calls it: “The Meaning of Life; What Happens After We Die,” and “How People Get Evil, or Become Evil.”

In our initial interview today, Sereno lit up when I reiterated the idea, introduced in the orientation session with parents and guardians, of two complimentary intelligences, IQ and EQ. I reminded him that a lot of *Odyssey* involves EQ-like skills: understanding one’s feelings, learning to calm oneself, perseverance, and the development of empathy and compassion. Seeming to grasp the concept, Sereno says that he sees himself as “more of an EQ guy,” because “my head gets in the way.”

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Sereno says that, like his grandfather who cries easily and loves to hug him, he is “not ashamed to be a man of strong feelings.” As he says the words “a man of strong feelings,” it is as if, for a moment, I can see into a deeper, more serene aspect of Sereno: a fine, measured Mexican gentleman, who is nested inside his surface fragmentation and sometimes disjointed communication style. He says that his “feelings are strong,” especially for Rachel [pseudonym], who is also in the ninth grade. Sereno is “in love” with Rachel, but she is driving him crazy. She, at 15, is also a philosopher, so to speak, like Sereno. They love to discuss things, talking on their cells till late at night “till our ears burn” and even, at one point, keeping a friendship journal together, where one person writes in it one day, the other the next. He says that he and Rachel have written about everything. It was in keeping the friendship journal, which no one else knew about, that he began to first “fall in love with her.”

At first, he did not even think she was particularly attractive, but now he thinks “she is completely beautiful.” He believes they are “soul-mates.” Sereno uses the word “soul” a lot, which is a delight for me, as mentor, to hear from a 15-year-old boy. In a public school setting, where such a heavy weight is put on intellectual experience, the word *soul* is rarely uttered. He repeats that he and Rachel are “soul mates,” but she has a hard time seeing it. She is “scared to love,” and “keeps everything up in her head,” according to Sereno. He sees how he had a tendency to do that, but Rachel’s beauty, body, mind, and soul, is “pulling him down,” he laughs, since he obviously means “down” in ways that include a sensual or sexual way. Yet he is also very respectful of her when he speaks, almost courtly.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Sereno says, “The feelings of my grandfather matter the most to me.” He, Sereno, has “screwed up at school, a lot,” and he knows that breaks his grandfather’s heart. His grandfather did not graduate high school; he worked in the fields, and he wants Sereno not only to graduate high school but even to go on to college. Sereno does not think he can get his brain behind college, because his “thoughts are all over the place.” Yet when he is more calm, he expresses himself well verbally, if in a somewhat convoluted manner at times, rather scattered at others.

Rachel’s feelings “matter too much” to Sereno, he says. He wishes, “in a way,” that he “didn’t care so much.” He says, “It kills me that she keeps changing her mind—we’re ‘friends,’ we’re ‘boyfriend and girlfriend,’ then we’re ‘friends’ again!”

Sereno says he has always been “super-aware of how other people feel” about him. He wants to be liked, even though his grandfather tells him that the only person he should want to please is himself, the only person who has to like him is “you, when you look in the mirror.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Sereno says, sadly, that his grandfather’s heart is broken about Sereno’s mother, his daughter. He tried to do everything to save her and feels like he failed. When his grandfather talks about his daughter, Sereno feels like he sort of “becomes the parent” with his grandfather, trying to show him that it was not his fault, that his mother was “just born under a bad sign,” as he says. It breaks his heart that his grandfather carries this pain. He says he knows that if his mom “could help herself, she would.”

I am moved by Sereno’s focus on his grandfather’s sadness and the depth of pain, of empathy, really, that he feels for his grandfather. I wonder if this aging Mexican gentleman is

Sereno's portal to empathy. His feelings toward his beloved elder are simultaneously fierce and tender.

I reflect to Sereno how he sits up straighter when he talks about his grandfather, and he tells me that his grandfather is always telling him to sit up straight, so "it must have gotten through some, at least!" This comment brings my awareness more into my own body. I sit up straighter. Subtly, I feel a linking with Sereno. He appears clearer; the air around us feels more charged. I tell Sereno that he is already showing me, teaching me about empathy and compassion in the way he cares for his grandfather. Sereno's eyes are slightly misty, and I sense that all this talk has touched upon his feelings, not just for his grandfather but perhaps for his mother as well, lost in the maelstrom of drug use. I wonder what might have happened to Sereno without his grandpa.

Mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor's Journal). Sereno warns me that he "is not a poet." He likes to write long journal entries, where he can spin out his thoughts "into infinity." He does not "like to be narrowed down to just one way of looking at things."

I tell him that poetry does not like to be nailed down, either. I have explained to the class about my practice of *tonglen*, breathing in the unwanted, breathing in pain even, and then breathing out relief, openness, spaciousness. I have also told the group, repeatedly, that we are not doing the actual practice, only using the poem as a new way of looking at life, a way that does not always seek to run from difficulty or pain even. At first, several found the whole notion to be crazy, and were relieved I was not asking them to do the practice. Several said they would not do it anyways, having enough "crap" in their lives. At the time, Sereno joked with me that it was "like, sick to want to take in other's pain, Mr. Shefa." That led to a discussion about how compassion equals connection, equals a kind of happiness, joy even. It was one of those

classroom discussions where I knew I was laying track for the future, or planting seeds, since it mostly seemed to whizz right past the boys. Besides, most of these boys have so much pain in their lives already. That is why I have introduced the “*Tonglen Poem*” as a very brief, indirect experience of the *tonglen* mindset or heart-set, through writing, as opposed to inviting them to take up the actual practice. The whole purpose of the poem is to invite a flow of feeling, to move toward self-empathy, setting up a conductive field within each boy. If it moves toward empathy for others, all the better.

“What about when you said how much you wish you could take your grandpa’s pain away about your Mom?” I ask. “Would you take some of his pain in if you thought it would relieve his suffering somehow?” I tell Sereno that I am not saying he “should” relieve his grandfather’s suffering. He does not need a staccato of shoulds from me.

“That’s different. I’d do anything for my grandpa—anything!”

Sereno’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in his sadness
 Breathe out the joy of seeing me graduate
 Breathe in Rachel’s fears
 Breathe out walking together, just holding hands
 Breathe in my scatterbrain crazies
 Breathe out a smooth mind
 Breathe in fears of screwing up my life like _____ [Sereno left this blank]
 Breathe out my own destiny.

Mentoring moments, week 3 (from Mentor’s Journal). Sereno tells me that he deliberately left one word “empty” in his “*Tonglen Poem*.” Even though I figured that the blank space represented his mom, he says he wanted to “leave a space there.” I had noticed that Sereno became philosophic when speaking about his Mom. The wound that he feels around his Mom is ever-present. Two ways he seems to have kept it at bay is by first speaking philosophically about it, talking about how his mom is “just sick” and even how “it was just an unlucky roll of the

dice” for his mom, his grandpa, and for him. The other way he distances himself from his pain is by focusing on his grandfather’s pain, wishing it could be relieved, knowing it cannot. Sereno worries a lot about the feelings of others and what he can do about them.

Early in our mentoring relationship, I see that my task is to be receptive to Sereno just as he is, to meet him with a sort of fertile emptiness. This is actually the way I approach all the boys. From the clarity of that emptiness, it is my task to reflect back to Sereno what I see, but without putting anything upon it. His “*Tonglen Poem*” shows his pain, quite nakedly, and that is what I tell him in our mentoring session. I reflect to Sereno that I see how the very wounds he has been so honest in portraying, even if he did not put in the word “Mother,” is connected to his gift of being a man of feeling—like his grandfather.

“But my grandfather . . . that’s his weakness, in a way—he feels too much.” We go back and forth on this point: Is there really such a thing as feeling “too much,” or is it more a matter of not being able to have a philosophic framework, a way of looking at life that both accepts the deep feelings, and keeps a steady compass of purpose, keeps us from caving in to those feelings? Sereno is very interested. Together, we have hit on some key themes in his life, not because I am such a hot-shot mentor, but because his honesty has allowed me to see himself as he is.

It is not like I am trying to give Sereno a formula or convey to him that I am somehow the wizard of balance here, between feeling and thinking. I have done too much thinking, maybe not enough feeling, in my own life. My marriage has gone numb; there is a huge hole in my heart around my father, a hole that will never be filled, perhaps never “should” be filled.

This whole issue of passionate feelings, distancing oneself from one’s feelings through thinking—these are all prime issues for me, as well as for Sereno. Does this make me a better or worse mentor, the fact that I am struggling with the same areas or issues in my own life? It is

what I bring to the living classroom, this struggle, now, sitting straight with Sereno, while my life seems to be falling apart in so many key ways. Together, we are in a fertile field. If I have anything to offer Sereno as a mentor, it is perhaps my very willingness to stand within the uncertainty.

By bearing attentive witness to Sereno's wounds around his mother and his grandfather, I am able to discern, even more clearly, his gift—the gift of being a young man of great feeling, with a latent ability for expressing the shades and nuance of feeling. While right now that “ability” feels to him like a scramble, I feel confident that he will, at some point, begin to discover discernment within the maelstrom of his feelings.

Sereno's “Meeting With Mentor Write.” This is what he offered.

Listen in to the thoughts of my mentor as he waits to meet me. I'm late, as usual. My mentor is a figure from long ago, but in today's jeans. He has so very much patience for me, but I really do drive him nuts. Here he is:

“Ah, will this boy ever grow to be a man? I know he has a sad heart, but he acts as if he doesn't have any worries at all! He is going to be a real man one day . . . if he can get it together. Until that time, I worry.

“I see that his grandpa brought him up well. For a boy of fifteen, he's got a lot of courtesy. But that's also part of the problem. I worry he stuffs his feelings while shaking hands. He smiles, always saying ‘thank you, thank you, thank you’ to everyone. I guess I'd like it if he showed some fire sometimes, even some anger.

“There is a big hole in his heart. That hole holds all that he never, ever says about his mom. His mom fell into drugs . . . and I'm afraid she is never going to climb out of there.

“I think maybe this boy's biggest enemy is hope. What do I mean? I think that he secretly hopes that his mother will climb out of the deep well she fell into. His heart whispers that one day she will come towards him, smiling, full of love, the past all forgotten and forgiven. No, little man; don't fall for that. Sometimes hope is not a man's job. Sometimes you have to look straight into life's eyes and see what is really going on. Can you do that?” I believe that you can do it. Look straight into life's eyes. Come down out of your head and let your heart be your guide.

Mentoring moments, week 8 (from Mentor's Journal). (Immediately after class) I see that in Sereno's “Meeting With Mentor Write,” he is able to wrestle with polarities of feeling and thinking, forgiveness and speaking one's truth, strength and weakness. Interestingly, his

depiction of “Mentor” seems to be a blend of qualities he has attributed to his grandfather and qualities that he has in himself, some of which I reflect to him, and others, which he seems to intuit. He also chooses to write in a sort of stream-of-consciousness manner, taking the perspective of the mentor, a potential path into empathy.

Sereno does not like his “Meeting With Mentor” piece. He feels like it is “sentimental crap!” I wonder, first to myself, then to him, if it is not too honest, or at least cutting too close to the bone. As I saw in our original meeting, Sereno either speaks about his mother in a somewhat abstracted, philosophic mode or focuses on his grandfather’s heartbreak, rather than touching on his own.

Having read Sereno’s essay immediately upon completion, I ask Sereno to stay behind for a few minutes while the other boys return to their regular class. I suggest to Sereno that writing from the perspective of the Mentor is a bit like the Meeting the Wise Elder guided imagery we’ve done as a group. It allowed him to “hear the story being told” by another, perhaps deeper or even wiser part of himself. He does not say anything, and I have the sense that he is able at least to hold this as a possibility—that his abstracted or projected “caring” for his Mom could be but two ways to “handle” or deal with the challenges.

Leaps in mentoring, real mentoring moments, sometimes involve following a hunch, knowing that it could fail spectacularly, but to fail to risk such a breakthrough could be to allow stagnation, a frozen situation to remain so. The safety net is the Hippocratic Oath, Do No Harm, knowing what one would not do and being clear about one’s own power issues. I decide that it is safe to proceed.

I ask Sereno if he thinks it possible that having a broken heart, really living through the experience rather than avoiding it, could actually make a person stronger—make him into a

warrior even. I am thinking of both Sereno's situation with his mother, the long-standing heartache, as well as his situation with Rachel, which also had its heartrending aspect.

"Rather than just sucking big time?" he asks, humor covering his pain.

I tell Sereno I think it actually can make you stronger, much stronger, and that I even know that from my own life. I remind him about how he told me a few weeks ago that I was a "great mentor." I tell him that if I am a good mentor at all, part of what makes me a good mentor is the fact that I have had my heart broken many times, but that "I decided, a long time ago that I wouldn't let it get me bitter, that I'd learn from it, and that it would make me more compassionate." Sereno does not say anything. I ask him if he remembers when I showed the class that picture of the phoenix bird that a former student had drawn for me, the phoenix whose tail was transforming into a pen writing on a scroll, and how that was my symbol? He remembers.

"That's the phoenix idea. Well, not an idea, but a real thing that you live."

"Well, the writing still sucks."

I remind Sereno what I told them at the beginning of the class: I am not that concerned with all the usual "stuff" of writing—grammar, spelling, how many paragraphs and all that—especially in their first draft. The grammar and spelling are actually the easy part, I tell him, and we will go over that together. I tell Sereno that what makes me respect him is the fact that he got outside himself in trying to see, to write from Mentor's standpoint, and that he was willing to write about something he had carried around for years! "You can always rewrite it later," I add, trying to encourage.

"But I can't 'rewrite' my life!" He says, somewhat desperately.

I tell Sereno that it is true that he can't "rewrite" what happened to his Mom or even what is happening with her right at this moment. I explain that I am not talking about creating some fantasy, but that he can decide how he responds to having a mom who is facing such difficulties. I ask him if he remembers that quote I gave him the first week, from "that guy who was in the concentration camp," Viktor Frankl.

[Note: I had given the boys a sheet of quotes from Viktor Frankl at the top of which was one from *Man's Search for Meaning*.]

Sereno seems a bit unsure, so I again quote Frankl (1946/1978) to him: "Everything can be taken from a man except the first and last freedom; to choose one's attitude in any given circumstance, to choose one's way" (p. 66).

"I remember," he says decisively.

I remind him that Viktor Frankl was the one who figured out that sex and power were not the most important thing, the thing that could keep you going even in hell. "Remember, he said that it was meaning, a sense of purpose, though, that could?"

Now Sereno remembers and says, "I even talked to my grandpa about it." His grandfather did not know of Viktor Frankl—Sereno's grandpa had not even gone to high school—but Sereno says that Frankl's statement actually "sounds like something my grandpa would say!"

Mentoring moments, week 14 (from Mentor's Journal). (An introduction to Sereno's "Compassion Write.") Sereno has shown a lot of care, concern, and even compassion toward his grandfather, toward his mother (once he began to speak and write about her), and frequently toward Rachel. He is a worrier by habit. We have talked about the difference between *worrying*, which I half-kiddingly call "prayer-in-reverse," since it often seems to amplify or even attract the very thing one is worrying about, and *concern*, which is focusing attention on an area that may

need healing, uplifting, or changing. Yet, as I so often mention in helping the boys to see the potential gift buried in the wound, Sereno's proclivity toward worry masks a great well of kindness, a quality that, based on his descriptions, I feel his grandfather would be proud to know has been reborn in his grandson.

For Sereno's final "Compassion Write," he has spent a long time writing and writing a complex and convoluted piece on the connection between his care for his grandfather and his care for Rachel. He is the kind of writing student who wants me to look at every line, as if the fate of the whole essay hinges on each successive sentence hanging together just right. I keep sending him back to his own mind, trying to help him build a trust in knowing what "rings true," what's authentic, and what written expression bears the closest resemblance to the truth unfolding in his heart.

At almost the last minute, Sereno jettisons his labyrinth of an essay for something much simpler. Right from the beginning of our odyssey, I had introduced the boys to the notion of self-compassion, drawing chiefly on the work of Kristin Neff who, with her colleague, Christopher Germer, had done some of the pioneering research on self-compassion. At the time, I had explained that "it may actually be hard for you to even have compassion for others if you can't have it for yourself." Perhaps this has a special relevance for Sereno.

I had told Sereno that he seemed to have so much compassion for his grandfather, for Rachel, for his mother even. "What about compassion for yourself?" I asked him.

It was meant as a gentle challenge. I did not know that Sereno would find a way to put his foundational thoughts on self-compassion into the essay. Like a lot of courageous writers, Sereno was willing to sacrifice an unsatisfactory writing, to not know what, if anything was going to follow. I knew that, as happened with some of the other boys, what followed might be nothing at

all, the moment having passed. Having made the sacrifice, I was inviting Sereno to be brave enough simply to wait, and then, perhaps to come forward with something that contained some powerful insights about himself, about compassion, and meaning.

Sereno's "Compassion Write." This is what he offered.

I'm the rescue guy. Got pain? I'll be there! Crisis? Call me! I've been doing this my whole life, rushing relief to the scene, then going back . . . to sleep.

The last on the list. The last one to get help. The last one I notice is in pain. Never being willing to admit that the rescue guy needs rescuing. He hurts. His life is screwed up in a lot of ways (even though he really does believe it will get better).

Grief is like a fire that never stops eating you up. I have a lot of grief and I see it needs to be taken care of. It's like I've been running around putting out fires and never noticing that I had caught fire a long time ago. I better stop and call 911, help put out this fire.

I need to slow down and to see that I'm not that bad. I don't have to save everyone—Grandpa, Rachel, or my Mom. I need to recharge, to find my own feeling of peace.

This class has taught me a lot about putting out the fire. It's made me see that I need to take care of me. I'm going to write that again: I need to take care of me! Not because I'm selfish, but because I have to build myself up rather than tear myself down.

The funny thing is, all of that will make me a better grandson, one that Grandpa could be proud of. It will make me a better . . . whatever . . . friend? . . . lover??? . . . to Rachel. It will even make me a better son . . . even if I never see my Mom again.

I was one of the few guys in the Odyssey class who even knew what compassion meant when we started. But I didn't know what it meant to give it to yourself. Maybe I didn't even think I deserved compassion.

Cut yourself some slack, dude.

Start by loving yourself.

Peace, out.

Closing mentoring moments, week 15 (from Mentor's Journal). Sereno is less inclined to self-deprecating comments now. He tells me that he spoke with Rachel about his feelings, very directly. He realized that he was always worried about doing this, that he was going to upset her, or lose her friendship if she did not feel the same way, which, it turns out, she does not. "She loves me as a friend." Now, at least he feels like he could speak truthfully without being hurtful.

Sereno says, emphatically, "I realized that I don't want anything 'from' her." He admits that he would love to be "with" her, but that is going to come if it does. "I can't force it. It hurts

me, actually, to talk with her, but it's worse not talking with her." He says that it seems to help that she doesn't feel this "you have-to-decide-now feeling" from him "all the time," and that they can "relax together."

Sereno also realized that his writing could come easier, that he does not have to try and "say everything every time." He admits that he was not really pleased with his "Compassion Write." "It kind of stank, Mr. Shefa; but it was honest." I tell him that the honesty, the courage to be honest meant that it did not stink.

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Sereno the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Sereno feels, "I've got more of a handle on my feelings." He corrects himself. "I guess that sounds like I'm trying to control them, like a wild horse or something." He says, it's not really like that. "It's more like I don't have to figure out, or decide if my feelings even have a right to exist. It was never about me not having feelings, you know that!" he laughed.

I tell Sereno that, actually, he did an excellent job. It is not like there is a final exam on expressing feelings. I tell him that he really did some amazing work here the past few months. "You were willing to look at some things that aren't that easy to look at; plus, you were willing to change, and that's huge!"

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

"I think that other people's feelings maybe have less importance for me now."

"Less importance?" I ask, somewhat surprised.

"Yes, hey, way to go, Mr. Shefa; I'm a real bastard now!" he jokes.

I tell Sereno that what I hear him saying is kind of what he wrote about in his essay; that he has realized that he has got to take time for his own feelings before he can really be there for others.

“But it’s not really like I’m going to become this ‘me, me, me’ sort of bastard, right?”

I do not think that is even possible with Sereno; caring runs deep in him, perhaps a legacy from his grandpa, perhaps even coming from his wounded heart with his mother—and now Rachel. I am treading lightly here, as he has signaled that he does not want to go into talking about his mother, and that is fine to me. Instead, I ask him if he remembers what the first thing was that we said when we sat down together today. Sereno pauses, looks up like the answer is floating in the air.

“You asked me how I was doing? Like you always do . . .” Sereno ventures.

“No,” I said, emphatically. “We started by you asking me how I was doing. Do you know how rare it is for me to get asked that—for any teacher or counselor?”

“I always ask you that.”

“True; but you always are actually interested! It means a lot to me, and it shows that you are definitely not just a self-centered . . . ass . . . well, you know what I mean!”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Sereno says that “everyone is suffering, and everyone is beautiful in some way.” He adds,

At least with my grandpa, and with Rachel, I can see how their suffering and their beauty are not two different things. Like with Rachel: she is beautiful to me because she feels so much . . . and because she feels so much she suffers so much. We were just talking about this, her and I. She said it’s the same for me.

I ask again about “doing something” about people’s suffering. Sereno says, “I’m not sure. I think before I thought I was actually ‘doing something’, when maybe I was just running around having

a big frickin' drama about it. That wasn't really doing sh*t!" Sereno asks about the name I had given to this behavior. I had given a name to Sereno's running around taking care of everyone but himself, just something that sprung into my mind early in the class. He asks me what the term was.

"I said you were doing the 'Nervish-dervish dance' of taking care of everyone else!"

"Exactly!"

In mentoring Sereno, I have been continually reminded of self-compassion, his gift to me. What strikes me now, in closing our sessions, is that our mentoring encounters have not really changed Sereno at all, not in an essential way. If anything, they have created an atmosphere in which Sereno feels more permission simply to be himself, with all his glorious flaws. I certainly have been upfront with him about my own flaws, even sharing some of my present struggles, though careful not to dramatize them, or to put any of the burden of them on him or any of the boys. But I see now that our work together has been as much about allowing our weaknesses, accepting them, as it has been about brandishing our so-called strengths. Perhaps this alignment is part of what I have come to call, with the boys, "the compassionate warrior."

Merlin. Opening mentoring moments, Merlin's responses to the three questions, and closing mentoring comments follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor's Journal). Merlin is a 14-year-old Caucasian boy whose life has been marked by a singular tragedy, in the face of which he has shown remarkable heroism. He has been raised by his aunt and uncle since age 11, after his parents were killed in a car accident. Merlin is a quiet, ironic boy who speaks with a deliberation that belies his age.

Merlin, who actually loves to write according to his teacher, has a sly smile, is quite reserved, and very dry in his wit. He tends to use double meanings, obfuscations to hide behind or to protect himself. I decide, right from the beginning, that I will honor Merlin's great reserve, seeing much of this as a result of what I consider to be his premature initiation into the fact of death—his parents lost in the blink of an eye. Yet, because I see so much potential in Merlin—his poise, his facility with language, his acuity, his sheer ability to persevere after losing his parents—I also feel that part of my task, as mentor (as Mentor!), is to challenge him to bring his gifts to the community.

One large challenge I face with Merlin is that I see a lot of myself in him. I am concerned with seeing him clearly, because of this similarity of frequency. I did not lose my parents at a young age (although, because of my artistic and spiritual pursuits, I felt like a stranger in their midst from a very young age), but I have some of the same qualities of reserve, secretiveness even, as well as the sly wit. Similar to how I sensed Merlin would be, based on a conversation with his teacher and my initial observations, I often send my deeper, even braver part “into the world” through my writing. I have the sense that we share an inner wonder: Will anyone, could anyone really ever understand us at depth?

At this point in our encounter, all I can do is take note of this similarity, be mindful of its potential for projection and counter-transference, and stay alert. Meade suggested, in *The Genius of Mentoring* symposium, “In mentoring, the gifts lie close to the wounds” (Meade et al., 2002, track 1). This holds true for both the mentee and the mentor, and Meade (2002) had cautioned that “to mentor is to open one's wounds” (track 1). Will mentoring Merlin bring my wounds forward at a time when I am so raw following the death of my own father?

I am already discovering that there is something in each of my mentees for whom I can see at least some corresponding quality, trait, or even wound in myself—sometimes, uncannily so: Metta, with his kindness that seems to bear relationship to his being broken or shattered; Beat, with his sometimes reckless tendency to take a defiant, antisociety stance; Milarepa, with his bottled rage; Sereno, with his love of the old ways of gentlemen; Leif, in his isolation and strangeness; Futuro, in his rebellious recalcitrance and self-destructiveness; Osiris, in his tendency to go numb, go dead emotionally; Arrow, in his hiding from the world; Archer, in his being haunted by a past trauma; Rimbaud, in his poetic/defiant way of seeing the world; and Perceval, in his love of oblivion.

Obviously, there is much that is completely different about me, not to mention that I am “ancient” in comparison to these young boys. Yet, this to me is a key dilemma—or is it a key opportunity?—of myself as Mentor at this time: How can I mentor these boys in the face of so many wounds, when I am wrestling with my own brokenness, my father gone, my mother’s health unraveling, my marriage failing? How can I see them clearly with these reflections of myself that meeting them provides? I believe that an essential key here is to remember my core motives as a mentor; fostering the awakening of empathy and compassion through writing, while also attending to my own growth and development in these areas. I have never felt more inadequate—and more determined. Interesting combination!

As I face Merlin for the first extended time today, I think of all the times I had wondered if I was mentoring as much from my flaws or weaknesses as from my strengths. But perhaps it is these weaknesses that allow light to pour in. It may be my very flaws that leave me porous, open at the heart to these boys in their trauma and potential triumph. Perhaps it is Merlin’s vulnerability, a vulnerability that he has obviously learned to live with, that scares me.

I decide, as we sit down, that what matters, in terms of my effectiveness as a mentor, is my willingness to work on these qualities. A fundamental willingness to meet myself exactly as I am could translate, or transfer, into a willingness on the part of my mentees, to be themselves—or at least to be or allow more of themselves. This alignment of basic willingness could send a resonant signal that radiates the message, “You can work on this, in yourself, too. You can open and not be destroyed.”

I ask Merlin the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Merlin says that “feelings have made a lot of trouble for me.”

“What do you mean?”

He says, “I don’t like just whipping out my feelings. That’s not who I am.”

He is seated with his hands folded, looking across at me as if interviewing me. He looks composed, but it is a harsh, seemingly forced composure, something clamped down.

My confidence, as Mentor, has these . . . holes in it, rabbit holes, down which I fall into insecurity, self-doubt. Yet over the years, it has gotten better—in fact, much better. I have learned to abide with the awkwardness, as I do now, sitting before Merlin who seems more composed, more on top of it, than I do. It is like he has been so used to being in pain, being uncomfortable, a stranger, for so long, that a part of him takes it as given, as baseline.

I tell Merlin that in some ways, feelings get everyone into trouble. “They also get them into happiness, joy, humor,” I add.

Merlin says that he kind of likes “to put a lid on them, and then let them out one at a time.” Merlin opens his hands like he has just allowed a butterfly to emerge.

“Your teacher says that you love to write. Do you think you write mostly from your head, your heart, or . . . ?”

He shoots it back at me. “She told me you love to write, too. What about you? Where do you write from?”

A bit unseated by his blunt directness, I tell Merlin that I try and write from all the different parts of myself, depending on what I am trying to express. For example, I might have a character who flips back and forth, from head to heart, and so I would have to try and write like that.

For a moment, Merlin looks disdainful. There is a sudden coldness that veils down over the openness that I felt just a few moments ago. I tell myself to be careful of this open/close dynamic in Merlin, not to push but to weave around things, to go the way of Story, meandering, but with a purpose. “I just hope you don’t expect us to gush out our feelings or something. I mean, no one ever asks about that kind of stuff at school.”

What strikes me about Merlin is that he is asking these probing questions without his face betraying much emotion at all. He is very practiced at being in control. I feel my own body wanting to tense up, or to offer a tit-for-tat of wit. I suspect that Merlin gets a lot of that thrown his way, though, if he tends to use wit as a protection and a provocation, as I am already getting the sense that he does. I feel a wave of sadness as I think of the inner structures of protection this boy—he is a boy, do not forget!—has built. Those have sustained him, yet they also may bar his way in terms of becoming a young man who unites head and heart.

I tell Merlin that I am absolutely not going to ask him to think, say, or do anything in here that he does not want to do. Later, I will, no doubt, challenge him, if we can build trust, but for now, this statement is an honest one, and part of building safety between us. I tell Merlin that if

he just wants to sit there and say nothing, that is fine with me—“although it will make for some pretty quiet councils—more like meditations,” I add. I tell him that if he refuses to write—although, knowing he actually loves writing, I do not know why he would do that, but that is none of my business—and just wants to sit there with the others when we meet as a group, that is fine, too, “as long as you don’t disturb anybody.” I pause and look straight into Merlin’s eyes. “But I think it would be a tragic waste, I really do.”

“Tragic?”

“Yeah,” I say. I tell Merlin that although it is a cliché—“and I’m sure you know what that means”—he is truly an old soul, which means he has a lot of wisdom in there . . . at least that is my feeling. “But we all know feelings can get us into trouble, right?” We both laugh.

“Cool.” Merlin smiles again, this time a bit more open.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Merlin says that the second question “sounds like the same question; just about others.” He is looking straight into my eyes, neither warm nor cold, just looking with eyes that seem both the eyes of the young man he is, and that touch of ancientness that I sometimes attune to in mentoring. Merlin says that he has “got like a satellite system for others’ feelings.” He says, “I can actually tell what people are feeling a lot of times. Like reading them. My ‘satellite’ picks up their feelings sometimes.”

“I think that’s fantastic, though it can be . . . disturbing, like having too many channels of a TV all going at once.” I decide to tell Merlin something about my life. Very briefly, I tell him that sometimes, when there are a lot of crises, or even pain in your life, you can tune in even more, not less, to others’ feelings. It is like your “satellite” gets a power-boost. I tell him about the last few months: losing my father, my mother’s health sinking fast (I do not say anything

about my marriage), dealing with grief while still having to run on very little sleep, and so on. I tell him that sometimes a person can break open, rather than down, and that is kind of what is happening with me, a “good thing.” It seems odd yet, at a deeper level, just right, to be sharing this information with my mentee, with Merlin. Rather than feeling weak, I feel stronger, as if I am sitting in the center of the unfolding scroll of my life, and I am somehow, at this very moment, in the exact right place in the universe, at the exact right time, with the exactly right person—what the Buddhists call being in one’s seat. I have taken my seat with Merlin, two males at different points on the wheel of age, appearing here in time, touching on the timeless, considering the great issue of men and feelings, empathy and compassion.

“So, you feel a lot, maybe especially your friends’ feelings, people you love? I’d say that’s because you really care.”

Merlin says, “Yeah, I guess so. But I’d still like to not care too much. Believe me, that really can get you into trouble.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Merlin laughs. “Jesus! We’re not going to go around taking away suffering for this class, are we—some sort of community service project you guys didn’t tell us about?” He is sort of half-kidding, half taunting.

I reassure Merlin that we are not going to be going around taking away everyone’s suffering—“like sweeping up after lunch!” But I also tell him that I worry about how self-centered we are all becoming—teachers, students, our whole society.

Merlin is not ironic now, not sly. It is as if the whole meeting has led to this moment, like a great inductor of energy that was calibrated, beyond my conscious control, just enough to get him to ask me,

“You know my story, right, what happened a few years ago?” He is dead-serious.

“Yes.”

“Could I not answer that one now?”

Merlin’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in silence
 Breathe out music
 Breathe in masks
 Breathe out faces
 Breathe in screams
 Breathe out poetry
 Breathe in death
 Breathe out time-travel

Mentoring moments, week 4 (from Mentor’s Journal). Merlin’s *tonglen* poem touched me very deeply. It had an air of mystery punctuated by abrupt, surprising turns, such as the juxtaposition of death and time-travel. Although I tried not to leap to interpretative conclusions, I could not help but wonder if he was expressing the wish, perhaps the core wish of his life, to travel back in time to the scene of his parents’ death, and to be able to reverse the tragic event.

When I praise the writing to Merlin, he says, “It’s a weird format. When you first introduced it, saying you ‘stole’ it from a spiritual exercise.”

Merlin is taken by the idea of breathing in pain and suffering, and breathing out ease, relief, healing, as in *tonglen*. I had explained to the class, repeatedly when they worked on the poem, that I was under no circumstances asking them to practice *tonglen*. I was not introducing that as part of the curriculum. I did not know that they had the ego stability to take on such a practice, and it seemed contraindicated for such young souls.

But I see now that what Merlin has picked up on is the underlying notion of *tonglen*; that it is not about changing anything that happened, or changing anything that is happening right now. It is about changing our relationship with what had happened, or with what is happening. It is about changing our relationship to suffering, and it makes a strange sense to me that Merlin would find such a notion alluring, given the density of suffering in his young life. Perhaps *tonglen* is the ultimate trauma medicine, offering a dramatic inner shift in alignment to life as it unfolds before and within us, moment to moment.

“I want to try it, that exercise,” Merlin said, referring to *tonglen* as an “exercise.” “I think it would help me.”

I tell Merlin that while we will continue doing brief mindfulness meditations and council together, I cannot instruct him in *tonglen*. What I do not say to Merlin is that I feel, forever, like a beginner myself in this practice. Who am I to be teaching such a penetrating and exalted spiritual teaching, not to mention the whole church-state separation paranoia that I have? As a perennial guest on campuses—I am not a district employee, but a consultant—I have always characterized this work as “character education” or “social and emotional learning,” even while believing that these buzz-terms are more like Trojan horses from which I am able to smuggle in the transpersonal education tools of mindfulness meditation, council, writes of passage-type writings, and other methods for opening the heart, clarifying vision, inviting depth and meaning. Even thinking about introducing *tonglen* practice, I have visions of parents or guardians calling the school, saying, “He’s telling them to breathe in the suffering of the universe; my son’s already suffering!”

“No one has to know that you’re teaching it to me.”

“I’ll know! I can’t.”

“That sucks!”

In the end, we come to a compromise. When Merlin sees suffering or pain, he can send out light, healing, space, as in the basic *tonglen* instructions. But for now, I do not want him doing the first step, breathing in pain and suffering.

I tell Merlin that it will be a big thing if he can just take his awareness of his own and others’ pain, which he obviously already has, and then “send out beams of good stuff, good thoughts, wishing them peace, freedom from pain, joy, and lightness.”

To my surprise, Merlin tells me that he’s already done a search on the internet and even got a book at the local Barnes and Noble that talks about *tonglen*. It turns out that the book is *Start Where You Are*, by Pema Chodron (1994).

At least he has chosen a great teacher—Pema Chodron. I think to myself that in other cultures, say in Tibet, such teachings were integral to education, even for adolescents. Was it really mine to stand in the way? I have to admit that, in addition to not wanting to mess with the slow trajectory of Merlin’s grief journey toward healing, I am also just covering my ass. I feel that of all the students, Merlin probably could handle the *tonglen*, and I am secretly thrilled that the writing of a simple poem whose format was inspired by the practice, has shown up in Merlin’s consciousness as a mentoring, a beckoning presence toward an ancient/modern practice, in the life of this young man who has known too much pain, too young.

Mentoring moments, week 8 (from Mentor’s Journal). (An introduction to Merlin’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.”) When first challenged with the “Meeting Mentor” assignment, Merlin tried to submit a writing he had done on his own, all about a wizard and a young boy. It was full of “good writing,” by which I mean writing that had lots of ornate, gothic (Merlin has a bit of the goth about him, in terms of his proclivity for dark pants and shirts, his occasional

sullenness, his aloofness) flourishes. I read it carefully and told him that while I enjoyed it, I thought he wrote “all around” the heart, that it was as much about him not saying anything as it was about him making a declaration. I asked that he compose a completely fresh piece.

My reflection seemed to irritate Merlin. I remember the African authority on traditional and modern mentoring approaches, Malidoma Somé talking about his own experiences with his tribal mentor. Malidoma said that “What I remember is how he irritated me” (Meade et al., 2002, track 2)! Am I now, already, starting to irritate Merlin, and can I say it is not a potential positive step in our mentoring relationship? Yes, challenging Merlin, now that there is some degree of relationship, of trust even, seems more important than having him even like me. As he takes up the practice of *tonglen*, and as he approaches the “Meeting With Mentor Write,” I see that our relationship could hold and contain a degree of challenge, or, again echoing Somé (Meade et al., 2002), accept that “in the mentoring relationship, there are some skirmishes” (track 2). Let the skirmishes begin, and let them serve the higher purpose of *educere*, to draw from within, and *educare*, to shape or to mold, the original meaning of education!

I also understand that the heart opens and closes, empathy and compassion flow and become blocked. Yet sometimes, an apparent “closing” is a holding pattern, a harbinger of a wider opening to come. So it is that Merlin’s second “Meeting With Mentor Write,” while appearing to portray a distancing, a closing down even, or at least a severe abstracting away from connection, seems to portend a possible future opening of the heart. If I did not have that sense, I would have been not just worried but may have fallen into my shadow fields of doubts about my own ability to mentor, wondering if I have pushed him too far, wondering if now he is retreating to an isolation, a closing off of self-empathy and self-compassion that would not, in the end, serve him well.

Although his second mentor writing is a bit oblique, in that we never quite meet the mentor, I feel like a mentoring presence haunts it, breathes through it. He writes as of one who has had a significant encounter that he is still trying to process, to get to grips with through the writing. I do not know who, or what this “mentor” was; I certainly do not assume it was me, nor do I discount that it might, in some way, be partly inspired by me, or the feeling of being connected to a mentoring presence that Merlin might have experienced during our meetings, or in the group work. His writing has a haunting strangeness, which marries in my memory, as I read, with that ancient and future light I see streaming from Merlin’s eyes when the masks are dropped.

Merlin’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” (His second submission—after I rejected the first.)

It was near the end of the world, or so it seemed to the boy. He had seen lots of signs pointing to just that, for he knew how to read the times. He would survive, but many would not, as the hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanoes and all sorts of calamities erupted and reshaped the Earth.

It had to be that way. All the holy books had predicted it, even if they had given clues as to how it could be avoided. But humans did not listen, too full of ambition, power-hungry, not caring.

He knew it other ways, too, traditional ways that were known by his ancestors. A bird’s flight, the pattern made by swirling stars, even the language of silence.

He would survive, he had to. He had a story to tell, something that could help the people of the future. How did he know that?

The Mentor had told him. The Mentor had told him of many things, given him a mission that seemed almost too big to understand. He had mixed feelings about this mentor. These feelings were beyond love and hate, really. Their relationship, if that’s what you want to call it, seemed older than the stars, older than time. It was and is a mystery, and about mysteries, it is best to say little. Which is why this tale now ends.

Mentoring moments, week 13 (from Mentor’s Journal). I understand that my relationship with Merlin has had a strange rhythm, one of openings and closings, silent intervals, mystery moments. I cannot yet tell if his love of mystery is an act of bravado, pretending he is content with not having things explained or even illuminated, or if it is a byproduct, at least in

part, of the aftermath of his profound loss, the fact that nothing will ever feel “complete,” be solved, or bring closure. What is the “closure” when your parents are ripped away by death from you at such a young age? What “ends of the world” would not feel natural or expected by Merlin after this primal severance?

There is something wild about Merlin. I intuit that his evolution, if I could call it that, as a writer, and as a soul, depends on honoring that wildness, but maybe giving it a container in which it can unfold. Since first meeting Merlin, I have learned that in his first years in the desert, following the loss of his parents on the East Coast, when he was brought here to live with his aunt and uncle, he had been in lots of fights, his rage spilling out into the present, unable to process the unfathomable grief and sorrow as he was seeking only relief. Now that grief is a substrate of his life, a potent wave upon which he walks, the soil that carries him, yet always expecting the “end of the world,” an “earthquake, volcano, tornado” as part of the natural cycle.

I say very little to Merlin about his “Meeting With Mentor” writing. Once again, I am learning to fly the plane while in the air, even after 10 years of mentoring (14, if you count the 4 years that I ran the AmeriCorps mentoring program and had 44 full-time mentors working for me in 12 different schools). While I keep the silence to respect the air of mystery that he seemed to frame his writing in, I also do it, although I am not fully conscious of it at the time, to allow some space between us, to allow some hunger even, in him, for the mentoring encounter. They say that a pilot literally flies by the seat of his pants, sensing the currents in his instinctual area (the seat of the pants), and adjusting the plane accordingly. Bishop, in *The Genius of Mentoring* symposium, said that “mentoring begins with a relationship that is older than time . . . eternity, that one has to be able to ‘read the currents of the time’” (Meade et al., 2002, track 5). He also talks about the fact that one has to be as desperate as the person one is mentoring in order to

break into a new order of intelligence or illumination as to how to proceed. That desperation is like a lance that pierces through to a realm of intelligence that can shower insights, in the form of new perception, illumination, and shape-shift a willing mentor into a skilled practitioner of this subtle art.

It is very clear to me, I feel it in my heart, in the aching sensations that travels up my belly to my spine whenever I sit with Merlin, that he is desperate. He has found a homeostatic way of going on: his distancing, his irony, his iron-guard around his feelings. He is eloquent about his feelings—yet in a way that one never quite feels that he is feeling them at that point (and, again: How much like me is that!). I sensed, from his essay, no danger to self, or that he is contemplating the end of his own world. I sense, rather, that he is feeling the end of an identity, a mask that he has adopted in the face of unbelievable loss, one that has served him the past few years but is now outwearing its welcome, imprisoning him even, a “world ending,” All of this is in the runes of his writing, at least to me as his mentor, whispering through veils. Yet I do feel him slowly changing. We have not spoken much about *tonglen*. Honestly, I did not want to give him the idea that I was endorsing his practice, if he has, indeed, continued.

Merlin’s “Compassion Write.” This is what he offered.

I have visited my parents’ grave only once; right after they died. After that, I was moved here to California. I visit it often in my dreams. More important, I see my parents in my dreams. Those are the best dreams, even when they hurt.

My mom was always cooking, baking; it’s what she loved to do. She was an amazing cook or baker. She put all her love into her cooking and baking. That’s part of what death took from me, from the world.

My father was the strong, silent type. He didn’t really like to talk. I think that was hard on my mom, because she is such, well, was such, a talker. But she loved him so much, it didn’t really matter. Death took away that love—or did it?

Maybe, just maybe, the love lives on, because that’s the way they are in my dreams. The only difference is that my father talks to me in my dreams. He’s full of stories, full of happy energy, something that I can’t remember from the first eleven years. He was always so serious.

I didn't want to write a fancy essay or creative writing for this last piece of Odyssey. I've been "found out" as the guy who sometimes hides behind words: guilty! I wanted to write something from my heart and it is this:

Mom, Dad, if you are somehow reading this right now, you know that I never wanted to lose you. My life ended that night in so many ways. Before that though, even when I was mad, even that one time I said I didn't love either of you, that was just dumb kid stuff. I loved you more than God loves his children, and I know you loved, still love me more than anything.

I want you guys to know that I made it. I really was just angry for so long after you left, but that it isn't so bad anymore. I will always feel sadness. It's my black anchor, sometimes pulling me down. But I've found lots to keep me going. Mostly, it's that I know that you guys want me to keep going, to really have a life, not just looking back in tears.

I'm going to do something in this world to make you really proud, I don't know what yet, though maybe something with writing, or teaching, I really don't know. Hey, give me a break, I'm still a kid! But whatever it is, you'll be watching, you'll be there. We'll be together, like we were always meant to be together. I feel you and love you.

Closing mentoring moments, week 14 (from Mentor's Journal). The tension I felt around Merlin at the beginning of our relationship has greatly diminished. Like me, Merlin is not awkward with always being awkward. He has that satellite overhead, attuning him to the feelings of others, perhaps even "others" beyond this life, as attested to by his final writing.

I share with Merlin that what impressed me so much about his final essay, what touched me, is the fact that it is so simple, so directly written from the heart. There are no arabesques of language (though I am quick to point out that these things, in and of themselves, can be good sometimes), no layers of deliberate enigma, no poetic flourishes that hide more than they reveal. I explained that it is fine, sometimes just the right thing, to write around something, or to weave a spell of words. All of it says something, does something. But for Merlin, it is a huge thing that he has written so . . . nakedly, so directly to his parents. He had sealed that away behind seven veils, and now here it is, just directly from the heart.

Earlier this week, Arrow had reflected to me, just in passing, that there was something "similar" about Merlin and me, something, "like you're his uncle or something, I don't know." It

is true. My mentoring relationship with Merlin has sought to accept, even embrace, these similarities. It is a mystery to me, since, again, I did not have a profound loss at an early age, as did Merlin, a pivotal loss. But then, it came to me, that perhaps I had. Perhaps I had lost . . . myself, since it was right about Merlin's age, in ninth grade, that I began using drugs, heavily, especially hallucinogenic drugs. I was too young to be using these initiation drugs, and I took them in the absence of Mentor, so to speak. Perhaps the sorrow that I resonated with in Merlin was a sorrow we did share; the loss of a beloved—in my case, the “beloved” of my emergent self, drowned in drugs. My ability, if that is what you want to call it, to be in loss, day-by-day at this time, and to accept it, to breathe it in, perhaps gave permission to Merlin to breathe in his own loss, do *tonglen* (as he has continued to do anyway!) upon himself, spiraling into the heart of the most central loss of his life, accepting, opening up space, moving forward. Together, we had gone deeper into the mystery of the wound and the blessing, this mentoring field, this timeless moment, in time. Was it too much to believe that we were perhaps each entering a new opening, a new movement into the heart of life itself? To gauge his journey to empathy and compassion, I ask Merlin the same three questions I first asked in our initial mentoring encounter.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Merlin answers, “They are at least half of me, and probably more.”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“Same answer.” Merlin says that when he wrote the essay about his parents, “I felt like they were sitting right there with me, like I could feel them next to me. It was a good feeling.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Merlin says that what he is doing now, “practically,” is *tonglen*. “I think you knew, Mr. Shefa, that I was never going to listen to you about that. For now, that’s what I’m ‘doing’ about suffering.”

“Do you think it helps?”

Merlin says that he does not “actually know,” and adds, “But I know it helps me.” Merlin says he doesn’t actually know if doing *tonglen* really helps other people. He remembers me saying, “Well, it can’t hurt them!”

If I’ve had any “success” with Merlin in our mentoring odyssey together, I think it has come from him feeling an unwavering acceptance from me. Over the years, so many tried to change his sorrow, push him out of it, whereas I have allowed him space in which his sorrow and grief can, themselves, mentor him. Only from within that acceptance has something of the phoenix dynamic appeared. From the beginning, I saw that Merlin’s gift of composure, so exquisitely devised for such a young man, was also his mask. I did not ask him to take off that mask, any more than I would have asked Leif to “take off” his burns. The tapestry of trauma and sorrow that comprises Merlin’s life is part of a larger picture. More and more, I begin to think of mentoring as one long bow to the other—to the Other.

Archer. Opening mentoring moments as well as Archer’s responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). Archer is a 15-year-old Caucasian boy who struggles greatly with shyness. He was held back for a year in elementary school because he was so slow to read and write and did not do assignments much of the time.

Archer veils his face beneath long hair, holds his body bent over—and occasionally shows a rare smile. Trust is paramount to him. He has struggled in all his subjects and “hates” writing. One-on-one, Archer cries fairly easily. He feels not valued by his family, especially his father who, he says, “cuts me no slack.”

Archer hides a lot. Yet I can see something in him that, when he steps up, can be powerful. In this initial meeting with Archer, I feel extremely uncomfortable in my body. I know this feeling so well. It is what I call the “price of empathy,” the cost of connection.

What does that mean, “price of empathy”? It is as if I have to get on his wavelength, set up the connection, and then something of that affective experience of empathy now flows through me, a distinct set of feelings with their own ingredients; in Archer’s case, awkwardness, lumpy feelings of being not confident, wanting to sink through the floor, through the earth. I already have the cognitive part; well, not “have,” in the sense of “having” it on lockdown, all sewn up. But I can see and observe how awkward Archer feels inside himself: the tight expression round his mouth, the squirming, the rearranging of his feet, his hair constantly arranged and rearranged by his hands to further cover his face.

This is Archer, in all his awkwardness, and I need to feel this, feel, in a sense, like him, in order to bear witness to both his wounds and any gifts that might lie there, like the proverbial jewel in the lotus. Only from there, from that knowledge received, can I beckon him forward, toward some teleological pattern that I see and sense, some positive, yet latent blueprint ready to bloom. It is worth the awkwardness, and my proxy experience of this is nothing really, compared to the real thing: Archer living inside this awkwardness always. This is why his essence-name, Archer, is one of intention; that he find his way to clarity, focus, determination. I see it in him,

and hope that his experience in *Odyssey*, and our mentoring relationship, can serve to bring these qualities into manifestation.

I ask Archer the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Archer says, “I don’t get it.” He fidgets, flicks his hair, rearranges his chair. I try and say it more simply.

“Do you think that your feelings are important to you?”

“I still don’t get it.” More fidgeting. This is not going well. I do not want to ask him, “What are you feeling now?” or something like that.

“Would you say you’re more of a feeler or a thinker?”

“My dad says I don’t think—period! Maybe more of a feeler.”

Fair enough, and duly noted about his relationship to his dad. A bit of information for later. Missing fathers, absent fathers, veiled fathers, angry fathers. The fault line, the schism between father and son, something I have witnessed now hundreds and hundreds of times over the years. The number of “missing” fathers I have heard about over the past decade is extraordinarily high.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“I still don’t get it.”

“Do you worry a lot about what another thinks about you?” This is a bit of a leap, but it is exactly what I feel, already, is one of Archer’s afflictions; a paralysis of spontaneity because of fear of judgment. I try and imagine Archer as a little kid, full of spontaneity, doing the crazy

things that kids like to do for grownups: dances, songs, little crazy theater pieces. “Did he ever do that?” I wonder to myself.

Archer says that he worries “way too much about what almost everyone thinks about” him. He looks up at the clock. We have only been together a few minutes, and he is ready to hit the road! Plunge forward, or you will lose him entirely. I ask the question, expecting nothing.

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Like a curtain parting, just a bit, Archer actually brushes back his hair for just a moment. He takes in a sharp, audible breath. For a moment, I think he is going to start crying, or get angry, run away, but nothing like that happens. It is more like that single in-breath has charged him, giving himself some momentary confidence to speak from the heart. He asks me, “Do you know how many kids get bullied at this school every day?”

I tell him that I know that there are a lot—“in a lot of ways.”

Archer is more emphatic now, really wanting me to get what he is saying. Archer speaks with a trace of bitterness, looking up at me, then back to the ground, tracing dignity’s downward spiral. He says that “the worst are the word-bullies; they don’t hit you, they just wear you down with their words, tear you down.”

“What do you do?”

“Nothing. You can’t stop them.”

I suggest to Archer that he seems to feel bad not just for himself, but for other kids who get bullied. Does he wish he could do something about it?

“You can’t, no one can. They make it seem like we’re just too sensitive, like we’re making it up even.”

“I want to talk about that with you. And maybe you could even write about it?”

“I hate writing—and I stink at it!”

“I know. I know. I hate some kinds of writing, too! Like I said the first day, all I ask is that you try. I think you have something important to say—about bullying.”

“No one listens.”

“I’m listening.”

“Whatever.” Now, Archer is a little pissed, it seems. Perhaps he does not like stirring all this up, which is why I end the session with a twist.

“Can you write badly?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, if I asked you to write a crappy poem, could you?”

“Probably.”

“Then write a crappy poem when you get the assignment.”

“I may even suck at writing a crappy poem,” he says, not without humor.

“Then you can write a sucky, crappy poem—but at least it’ll be yours!”

“Whatever. Thanks, Mr. Shefa.” Hair now back over the eyes, hunched up, shuffles away.

Archer’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in bully words
 Breathe out smack words
 Breathe in nothing
 Breathe out something
 Breathe in having to write
 Breathe out leave me alone
 Breathe in this sucks
 Breathe out better than sitting in class.

Mentoring moments, week 4 (from Mentor’s Journal). Archer says that he just blew off the “*Tonglen Poem*” assignment: “I told you I hate writing. That’s not going to change. What’s the use, anyway?”

I ask him if he thinks he is going to have to write more or less in high school, and, of course, he says, “More.” This is a kind of standard reasoning process I do, trying to encourage the boys to feel into the future, to begin thinking about what kind of future they will be walking into and how they will meet it, in terms of possible preparation; even though it is a bit precooked, it works. I ask Archer if he wants to graduate high school?

“My father will kill me if I don’t.”

Continuing the reasoning, I ask Archer if it would be better, not to mention make it actually easier, if he could get over this “allergy” to writing? “Like I keep telling you; all you have to do is try. That’s what you did with your poem.”

Archer proclaims that his poem “sucked big-time!”

I kid him that this proves that he can follow instructions really well. “I asked you to write a poem that sucks—and you did!”

“So, you thought it sucked—see?” Archer is faintly smiling, having caught me—he thinks. I am reminded of how much humor can figure into mentoring, providing relief, opening up the space between mentor and mentee as, together, we smile and laugh at the craziness of the world—and ourselves. There is a timeless quality about this together-laughter, taking each of us out of the locked-in feeling that sometimes comes with identifying with being a certain age. This laughter-liberation is one of the real gifts, blessings even, that come from mentoring. Who doesn’t love to laugh?

I talk to Archer about the first two lines. I tell him that at least he had a response to the bullies—“smack words,” talking smack. I add that although maybe it is not the best response, because it often just makes them jack up their own smack-talking, at least I could see Archer standing up straight, looking them in the eye in his poem.

“That’s kind of what I was thinking when I wrote it—like I wasn’t just . . . eating their crap anymore. But my Dad would also kill me if I got in trouble for fighting.”

We briefly discuss this perennial dilemma I see boys having: It is important that they stand up for themselves, have dignity, but here at school there is . . .

“I know, ‘zero tolerance’!”

I reiterate to Archer that it counts that he had a response. That he saw himself, in the “*Tonglen Poem*,” as empowered.

Mentoring moments, week 7 (from Mentor’s Journal). Did not meet with Archer last week individually, as he was absent. Although I had felt like something had sunk in with Archer from our discussion about the poem, he has kind of withdrawn himself lately, hiding behind his hair, so to speak. In other words, “parked” in class, not present!

I must admit that I was not expecting much from Archer on the “Meeting With Mentor” writing. Before we got to writing today, I actually had to ask Archer to step out of class twice, because he was just cracking dumb jokes, distracting others, not doing the pre-writing. I did not want to lose him.

I had a mentoring dilemma. I knew that Archer already had a male figure in his life who tended to get mad a lot, and that Archer’s response, or reaction to that was to fold in on himself, hide behind his hair, sink beneath the chair while churning up some bitter, ironic comment. I had to find a way to show him that he was letting himself down while maintaining equanimity.

I told Archer that even though it would be really unfortunate, because I knew he had something to contribute, I might have to ask him to leave the group today, to return to the class with his teacher. I could not risk wrecking it for the other boys by allowing him to continue to disrupt. I told him that I would consider still meeting with him individually, after class, which is what we wound up doing today. I reminded him about my study, which I know is mostly only a background noise to most of the boys, since I try to not bring it up too much; I just want to do the work with them, knowing that the more they feel “studied” in any way, the less open they will be.

When we met after class today, I told Archer that he was letting down a contract we had together, something he gave his word about.

“Has anybody ever gone back on something they promised they’d do for you?” I asked. I share with him how I sometimes think most of the boys believe that “old guys” like me have no feelings, or that I do not feel bad when I am let down. More firmly, I reiterate that I still really feel as if he could get something out of this class; but not unless he is willing to try.

“It’s just the writing; I hate writing.”

I am starting to feel exasperated inside myself. Archer has been saying that for weeks now, and in a way, it is getting annoying. Still, I doubt my annoyance can serve him. “Let’s find a way through this, so you can stay,” I try, softening.

“I want to stay. I like the class. I like the other stuff we do, even the meditation stuff. It makes me feel peaceful. It’s just that when I write, I get all jumpy.”

I tell Archer to write about being jumpy. To write like a crazy person. To write with his anger. “I just want you to try. Try it one more time, and then we can decide if you should stay,” I wager.

“You just don’t understand. You think I can just do it because you said, or because I want to.”

“Then write about how no one understands about how hard it is to write.”

“I don’t know if I could do that.”

“I don’t either, but I do know you can try.”

Archer promised me he would try. I stay in the room writing up these notes. When I go to say goodbye to his teacher, between classes, nearly 2 hours later, she hands me this writing from Archer, which apparently he wrote in Math class, then returned to her class, to “give to Mr. Shefa and tell him I’m sorry.”

Archer’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” This is what he offered.

I have two mentors. Mentor1 says nothing. He is silent. Silence is his language. Mentor1 tells me I can calm down. I can do it. He tells me I’m good. I don’t need to change. He tells me all of that without words.

It’s peaceful with Mentor1. It feels good. I feel happy.

Mentor2 is mad at me again because I won’t write. He thinks it’s because I don’t want to. He thinks I’m another bad kid.

Mentor2 told us he worked in Juvenile Hall before, so he knows what a real bad kid is like, even a kid who killed someone, like he told us about. I’m not a bad kid. I just hate to write.

I think I just like being with Mentor1. He makes me feel good. He understands me even though he doesn’t say anything. He just sits there, smiling, like a big fat Buddha, haha!

Mentor2 holds up a pencil, a pen, a piece of paper, and says “Write, Write, Write! Just try; blah, blah, blah!” I don’t have to listen to him.

There’s only one problem. The two mentors are the same guy. If I screw up with Mentor2, then the big, fat, happy Buddha dude (Mentor1) goes away. Then I can’t just sit and be silent, breathing in golden light. It’s a real problem!!!

Mentoring moments, week 8 (from Mentor’s Journal). As I read Archer’s “Mentor” writing I crack up. His writing is so basic, so simple, but it holds up a mirror—a mirror for me! The last thing I want to do is harangue these boys about writing, as if it is the only way the soul can express itself. To be another irritated adult voice telling them that they must do this thing that

is boring for them, or that they feel like they cannot do, being forced to unpack the backpack of failure, getting heavier each year, take out the pencil—and fail.

Again and again, I tell the boys that writing is all about finding voice, about touching authenticity, connecting to their own power. That pencil is a healing wand, a telescope for seeing their north star, a GPS (General Purpose System) guide to their heart and soul.

In other cultures, they could do this odyssey many different ways, not writing. I am meeting them in this . . . cognitive-based institution though, where writing is central, this place where they feel slowly extinguished much of the time. But, however they feel about it, writing is a survival tool for the game, the maze called high-school, and they cannot make it through without it. Even if it is all just a confounding maze, they have to get through. *Odyssey* tries to transform the maze aspect of their education into a labyrinth they can travel, with their radiant, adolescent Self at the center. They can write their way to it, do a real “write” of passage. It is why I keep telling them, over and over, not to worry about spelling, grammar, all that “stuff.” Just get into the flow. “Write from the heart, edit with the head.” I share with them an edited-for-school version of Anne Lamott’s advice about writing, “Write shitty first drafts!” (Not that they would be the least bit shocked by the word!)

What I am up against is a certain . . . Write-A-Cide (which I define as the systematic destruction of the love of writing—in the name of “learning to write well”); the history of all that they have “had” to write, all that has disengaged them from the living flow of learning, discovery, awe, and wonder. Of course there’s a place for very deliberate, methodical writing. But if there is no flow, no clay to work with that comes from getting gloriously lost in the process, then what is it that they are editing?

My dilemma is that if I undersell the writing, then these boys will not do it at all. Here's someone they just might be coming to respect telling them that there are other ways besides writing—the one thing that several of them want to get out of—that will do the same work. And it is true. Empathy and compassion, the opening of the heart—these can happen in a thousand ways. But we are not in the thousand-ways-world here; so, I have to sell them, trick them, be Trickster who entices them to write. I do believe though, and my experience of many years tells me, that even with the most reluctant writer, breakthroughs can happen, a sense of liberation, freedom to express. I have seen their eyes shine when they are proud of their writing.

I tell Archer how funny I thought his writing was; but also, how he really taught me a big lesson. “I can see that I’m beating you guys up a little with this ‘write, write, write, just try’ business,” I confess. “You showed me that. So, you are able to wake up someone like me—through your writing! What you said was like you mentoring me! Doesn’t that kind of show you that you can write?”

“Great. So can I be excused from writing—like . . . forever?”

“No, but at least in this class I will try and go a little easier.” I suggest to Archer that maybe he can meet me half-way. Maybe he can relax a bit about writing, do not worry about getting it “right,” just get something written. “You’ve shown me that you can do it.”

“Maybe.” But Archer is smiling. Is there some brain and heart rewiring going on here, I wonder, even changing the chains of connection about writing? The writing is just the vehicle for inviting them to journey through the labyrinth to find one moment of true feeling, a semblance of their authentic voice, something that, once heard, felt, experienced, can become a homing signal for the soul. But this is part of my problem! How can I ever give a grade to that awakening? How can you quantify it? It is as much a problem for my study as for my work in general!

Archer's "Compassion Write." This is what he offered.

I used to hate bullies. I used to be just afraid of them. I am still afraid, but now I see how afraid they are.

What kind of kid needs to feel good by making someone else feel bad? What happened to that bully to make him so screwed up?

Maybe he got smacked around or something. Maybe he had something much worse done to him. Now the only way his screwed-up brain and heart can go on is to crap on someone else? I feel sorry for him.

Maybe he's bullying on the outside, but inside he's screaming. That doesn't make it right. That doesn't mean I have to eat his crap. But behind his bully mask he is probably screaming and crying. I don't know if I feel compassion for him though. I can't say I want to help. I just wish it would go away, cause bullying is crap.

Closing mentoring moments, week 14 (from Mentor's Journal). Archer is still Archer; he is still surly, a bit bitter, often hiding; but he is also stronger. Through his writing, he has "spoken" to the bully. He has seen through the mask. These are big things, big perceptions.

He still "hates" writing—but "not so much." He says, with more firmness than I saw in him at the beginning, that he now knows he can do it, and that, more importantly, "Maybe I have something to say, even though I'd rather say it than write it."

Together, we reflect on the incident a few weeks ago. One of the boys was teasing Archer about his "weirdness." I was about to intervene, but saw that Archer was engaged. He moved his hair out of his face. The other boy laughed, as did a few others, adding to the standoff. Then, Archer came out with one of his surprisingly tart responses, saying, "You are deeply unintelligent!" It was just so off the wall, the twist of combining "deep" and "unintelligent," that the boy just stared at him, and then started laughing—and the class moved on. It was a moment easily missed; to me, it showed that Archer could take command.

Still, I worry about Archer, his future, if he will be able to ground himself in this new, yet fragile strength. But this odyssey we have taken was just one class, one intervention even.

I really cannot even say if I succeeded, failed with Archer, or what. Maybe it is not for me to say, as Mentor? Maybe I plant the seeds, reexamine my intentions, my interventions, adapt, and keep scattering seed. What else can I do? To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Archer the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

“Oh, here we go again!” he laughs.

“Just answer the question,” I say, prodding. I could never have had this ease with Archer in the first weeks; could never have said this in the beginning, so perhaps there is some progress. Archer likes the repartee of wit, something I have learned from him.

Apropos of nothing, he begins speaking about how he talked to his Dad last week. He and his Dad are a team; his Dad often tells him this, though the next moment he is again criticizing Archer. He had first talked it over with his mom, and she encouraged him to talk to his Dad.

“I told him that he makes me feel really bad when he tells me I’m dumb, or that I’m a disappointment to him—really bad.”

“It sounds like you told him without blaming him.”

“I just wanted him to know how I felt. Don’t you remember saying to me that I should talk to him?”

“I remember suggesting to you that it might help.”

“Whatever. Anyways, he seemed really surprised. My Dad is a big guy, and maybe me being so little is one of the things that just . . . bugs him about me. But then he apologized to me. That’s something he never does. He said that he had no idea I felt so bad, and that he was just kidding, just trying to ‘get a rise’ out of me, to get me to work harder.”

“Wow, that’s fantastic that you talked to him.”

“Well, he was back at it again a few days later, when he saw my progress report. But this time he stopped himself. I told him that I’m really trying, and he . . . stopped.”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Archer says that he realized, “I really want to make my dad happy, but I don’t want to make myself unhappy doing it.”

“You mean that your own feelings also matter?”

“Yeah.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Archer talks about the final write, on compassion. Even though writing still—and forever, apparently!—“sucks,” it helped him to write. “It was like I was writing to the bully. I imagined that he was sort of sitting there like a person does in court. I was thinking about that phrase you made us memorize, ‘If you stand for nothing, you’ll fall for anything.’ I don’t want to be the kid who stands for nothing.”

Archer has gained some confidence, found his voice even, somewhat. He will always be different than his father and his brothers, but that does not mean that he lacks confidence. He can have his own kind of confidence. In his crabby, sarcastic, loveable way, he has set up a channel through which empathy and compassion can flow, for himself, and for others.

Perceval. Opening mentoring moments as well as Perceval’s responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). Perceval is a 14-year-old Caucasian boy who has grown up in a family that has been virtually consumed by drug use.

His father has been twice incarcerated, and his older brothers and sisters have also fallen heavily into drugs. His mother has struggled with alcohol use for a number of years.

Perceval is determined not to go on this path, though he has already experimented some with pot and alcohol, but says that he “can’t stand” either of them, actually. He writes with ease, though he is not particularly interested in writing.

Perceval prides himself on always being “fine,” not showing much feeling, except about skateboarding and music, his two passions. In fact, like many boys I have worked with, Perceval tends to answer in one or two words. When I ask him what is the most challenging thing about school, he mumbles, “Everything.” When I ask him what he really loves doing, he smiles and says, “Skateboarding.”

I ask Perceval the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Perceval first says that he’s “cool with any feelings” he may have, “cool with other people’s feelings.” I am not sure exactly what this means.

I ask Perceval if his feelings are a big part of who he is?

Perceval says, “When I go skateboarding, it’s pure joy all the time.”

“That’s a feeling,” I say. “It seems to be a big part of you.”

“That’s the thing about skating; I don’t have to think at all. It’s, what did you call it . . . ?”

“An ‘in-the-zone’ thing?”

“Yeah, I’m in the zone. I don’t have to think about all the crap at home.”

I tell Perceval that I understand. But skateboarding is just a small part of his life; at least in terms of time. I understand that it may be the biggest part of his life in another way, because it's so important to him.

“Man, at home I don't want to feel! That's why,” he raises his hands up, making little pantomimed air quotes, “The Good Lord made headphones!” We both laugh, but there is pain here, and he has it so ironically encapsulated, as if he is bracketing out his feelings. Is (what I call) the *irony machine* one part of his survival technique for chaos at home? He is telling me about how important feelings are to him, that he has to surround-sound them. I ask if the “music somehow helps” with what he is feeling?

Perceval launches into a grand riff about how he sometimes puts on rap music that “matches” how angry he feels—and that makes him feel “better.” Other times, he puts on rap music that “feels like” how sad or hopeless he feels. “Either way, it helps. Music and skating always help.”

I drop the question I wanted to ask about his feelings for school, friends. I sense his way of attaining balance—out on the skateboard in the ultimate freedom park of pure motion, away from the screaming, the feeling of being dragged down the drainage ditch of drugs, his fallen elders. Music is medicine for him, as is skating, taking him to a place of balance, a place from which he can cope; that is my “reading,” my initial impression, as Mentor.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Perceval says that he is “burnt out on feeling too much.” He used to “stress so much” about his family. He has had “to forgive over and over and over and over,” and while he “wants to be a good person,” he feels like he will get “sucked down the drain” with the rest of his family. He has to stay strong, stay smart, not get “sucked into all the dramas.”

He “has a lot of feelings” for his friends and considers himself “a great friend.” He says, “I’ve got their back and they have mine.” His friends are mostly skaters, poor academic performers, some in trouble periodically, but nothing major. But even with his friends, Perceval feels like “I need to not get too caught up in feelings; I save that for skating and my music. I just let it all out there.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

“I don’t know. I guess I just wish it would all go away, but I’m tired of trying to make it go away!”

During this initial interview, when describing the embroilment of his family in drugs (a tale, with some variations that I had heard from many boys over the entire 9-years of running *Odyssey*) and his shame over his father’s incarceration, Perceval kept looking down, the bars of his long hair veiling his face. There is a sensation, as Mentor, that I have felt before. As Perceval leans forward, I feel something within myself slowing down, focusing like a camera zooming in, leaning forward, staring into the abyss. It is not about mimicking posture, evoking mirror neurons within, as a way into empathy. It is more of an alignment I am chasing; being willing to abide with the pain he is staring down.

Perceval’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in crazy chaos
 Breathe out peace
 Breathe in yelling and screaming
 Breathe out skating forever
 Breathe in watching my brother screw up his life
 Breathe out a new start
 Breathe in tears of anger
 Breathe out tears of joy

Mentoring moments, week 4 (from Mentor's Journal). I tell Perceval that he “nailed it” with his poem, and how I got such a clear sense of how he deals with everything. “I don’t think you realize how mature you are, how you are determined not to go down,” I say, slowly and deliberately.

Perceval tells me about his next oldest brother, who got heavily into pot a few years ago. He had already seen his oldest brother go the same way, then into more serious drugs, and the same with his older sister. Knowing all that his dad had gone through, all that he had dragged the family through, he felt hopeless. He felt like his brother was just “fillin’ out the gene pool,” and didn’t blame him—at first.

“I feel like he could have done something, could have stopped. I tried to make him see what he was doing, just adding more sh*t to our family, making it impossible for me. It was like I was surrounded by the worst role models. I tried to talk to my brother about all this, and at first it seemed he was willing to talk. He just hated school so much, and he hated being home, so I guess that’s how he came to the idea that smoking weed would be a good ‘solution’. But it just made me feel like sh*t.”

He says that there was a certain point where he just felt like, “Screw it; they are going to drag me down, too.” Perceval actually remembers a deliberate closing off, a decision to save himself. He says that his mother used to listen to music by the singer, Tracy Chapman. She had a song about “standing at the crossroads of hell.” Perceval was out at the skate-park near his house, riding in and out of the huge, deep bowl, thinking about his brother, his family, just wanting peace. “I remembered a part of the song that kept repeating. The words were, ‘Save my soul, save myself.’ That’s what I decided to do: save my soul and save myself.”

His face is resolute, his body slumped at the heartbreak of memory. I remind myself of how young Perceval is, because I see, also, the saddened, disheartened elder. His siblings have reversed the ages on him, he feeling bad, responsible even, for their undoing.

Perceval's words tumble out of him in a nervous staccato, as if seeking to expel the toxic tale from his throat, the poisonous stream of his family. His voice gets soft, evaporating into grief, a tear falling onto the desk, then another, anguish in concentrate. How long has it been since this flow was dammed?

I say nothing, yet I am seated with my spine straight, as the feeling of the small room where we are meeting fills with a sense of something large, expanding, yet beyond words. What can I say that might truly help? Perceval has heard so many reassurances, he tunes them out like babble-rain that falls continuously, pouring out from teachers he does not respect, his parents who say one thing and do another, his siblings as they descend into their pits. "*The importance of education*" is a term he says, bitterly, that "gets thrown around endlessly," disappearing inside him behind clouds of smoke, rage-screams, the fear of family members being taken away.

I have been attuned to silence lately. My father, in the convalescent home where I have been going once, twice a day, even while my research begins, has stopped eating, rarely speaking, vanishing before my eyes. I sit next to him, and I am present. There is a discourse that goes on, just without words, rich to imbibe for one like myself who is so attuned to words.

I am becoming more comfortable in what you might call The Nothing Said Realm. Right now, this breathing moment, nothing is being said, yet much is being communicated: Perceval's sadness, his disappointment in his family, his shame even. I feel present for Perceval, bearing witness, not wishing to change a single thing about him. It occurs to me that silence can be balm but can also appear as Mentor, as in the *Odyssey* (Homer, 1998), when Telemachus' anguish

finds solace in an ancient man who is actually the Goddess Athena, goddess of Wisdom, shape-shifted into the form of his father's old friend.

Slowly, Perceval looks up, through the bars of his hair. He sees me smiling. There is something like peace in this room, the incense of blessing between mentor and mentee; even here, amidst the ragtag atmosphere of a public high-school, the crappy, dog-eared books on the shelves, these lousy desks, the floor unclean (though I had picked up everything I could by hand, having no vacuum).

I think of that moment, described by Ferruci (2006) in his book, *The Power of Kindness* (pp. 253-256), the moment when he sat with his mentor, Assagioli, creator of psychosynthesis, who was by then an old man (as was Mentor when he beheld Telemachus). Ferruci described how Assagioli would meditate on a certain quality—like love, peace, humanity, joy—and how the whole room and the persons in the room would be permeated with a living presence, a palpable flow of that quality they had sought, almost as if a distinct being had condensed out of the purity of their intent and petition, a holy visitation. Ferruci (2006) states that for Assagioli, “these qualities were not abstract concepts but living beings like us. And if qualities are living beings, then it is possible for us to meet them and spend some time in their company” (p. 254). He describes a moment, coming out of the meditation, when he looked across at Assagioli, and saw pure kindness radiating out from him, as if Assagioli had become a human vessel of this quality.

Although not at such an exalted level, I know that I am here to put absolutely nothing on Perceval's story—especially not at this beginning stage. Moreover, that this quality of “nothing,” this baseline of mentoring wherein Mentor becomes a blank scroll upon which the story of his mentee may appear in its original anguish and beauty, is, in itself, a presence, a quality. It allows

for his story to breathe, the babble-rain to cease for a moment, and the space-between, the I and Thou place (Buber, 1923/1970) to open, wherein something larger, perhaps grace-rain, can bless the encounter.

Somehow it is as if Perceval senses this, and a faint smile appears. For what seems like a long time, but which is actually just perhaps a minute or two, nothing is said. Nothing is said, yet something is present. My breathing relaxes, chest softens. For some reason, I think of the whirlpool rides I used to go on at amusement parks, where one is whirled around faster and faster, then the floor drops out and one keeps spinning around.

Then Perceval, mustering himself, flipping back his hair, almost shaking off what happened, smiles more broadly, and says simply, “I’m good.” I take him at his word.

That is pretty much what I have been thinking: he is good, a good kid, who is going to be a fine young man. What I say to him is, “It takes huge courage to take a stand against drugs, against losing your life that way, and I respect you for it.” He does not say anything, just flips his hair back again, his curtain, and shakes my offered hand, somewhat awkwardly, but at peace.

In being nothing, everything has happened, right here at the beginning of this odyssey between Mentor and Perceval. For me, it is a huge moment. For Perceval? I am not sure; so many coarse waves will roll over his life, even today, but perhaps a seed was planted. A big part of mentoring is seed-planting, the fruition of which is often unknown, a mystery.

Introduction to Perceval’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” Before assigning the “Meeting With Mentor” writing, I had told Perceval about a novel I had heard about, whose main character was a teenage boy whose idol was the skateboard legend, Tony Hawk. Tony is actually a character in the story, in a way. He is a poster on the boy’s wall whom the boy talks to. The boy imagines that the poster—Tony—talks back to him. I actually had only read about it, but

thought it might appeal to Perceval (and get him reading). I bought a copy of the novel and gave it to Perceval to read, asking him to pass it along to another skater when he was done—if it was any good.

To my surprise and delight, Perceval not only read the book, but used the literary device of conjuring up Tony Hawk, whom he calls “Birdman,” to be his mentor! After a brief introduction, Perceval’s “Meeting With Mentor Write” piece was written all in dialogue.

Perceval’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” This is what he offered.

Birdman and I are back from skating at the park. Once again he just showed me how to do a 900, and once again I failed to land it! We are back sitting in front of my house before he leaves to go mentor another kid.

“Thanks, Birdman. I don’t know if I’ll ever do a 900.”

“And I know you will. It is already done. You just have to realize that. I can see you doing it, and if you can see it, you can be it!”

“Do you think skating can give me everything I want?”

“Depends on what you want?”

“I want to be free of my family. I just want to skate and listen to music and forget about all that sh*t.”

“Some people use skating to get away from everything. That’s not the way I work though. Listen, you think I don’t have problems?”

“I heard you’ve gotten divorced more than once.”

“True, and believe me, I’ve got other problems. But I don’t use skating to get away from them. Skating is my therapy, but that doesn’t mean I’m skating away from them. It’s more like I’m skating right through them, into something better.”

“But don’t you forget about everything when you are skating?”

“No. I take all that stuff with me. I just kind of let it hang out there. I don’t try and fix it. I don’t try and change it. I don’t try and do anything with it, to it, from it, away from it.”

“What does that do?”

“It just kind of sorts itself out. My problems are all still there, waiting, when I get off my board. It’s me that’s different. I can’t really explain it. Stop trying to change everything. Skate. You’ll see.”

Mentoring moments, week 8 (from Mentor’s Journal). We are not able to meet the week after his “Meeting With Mentor Write.” Perceval has been busted for weed! He was suspended for several days, but now is back. I have to decide, feel my way into my response to this event. I knew that with all his protestations, Perceval was up against a lot, even from a

genetic standpoint. He never claimed that he was super-clean. I knew that he had tried pot, as I found out in our first interview. But he had made a convincing case that he was determined not to go that way.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Shefa.”

I tell Perceval that he doesn’t have to apologize to me. He let himself down. “My thing is: Did you learn anything? Do you know where you are at now?” I remind him of something I said to the group recently: wisdom is knowing where you came from, knowing where you are, and knowing where you want to go.

“I wasn’t remembering anything at the time. It was just a stupid-ass thing to do. I don’t even like weed, really. I felt like I was just going down the drain like my family.”

“But you aren’t; your life begins again from now.” I tell Perceval that he can make a decision about his life; that he may have to keep making this decision over and over, just because of his background. I invite him to “find that place between beating yourself up and saying it was nothing.” I tell him that beating yourself up never does anything. I challenge him to really look at what happened, how he was feeling up till that point, where he stopped paying attention. I remind him that the real reason I give the guys these mindfulness moments, these mini-meditations is not so they can sit in a corner somewhere and meditate in bliss (though I would rather see them in that kind of bliss than stoned out of their minds!) “It’s so that when you are faced with something in your life, you stop, take a few mindful breaths, and then consciously decide what to do. You can see all the ‘ripples’ then, what may happen because you went one way or another.”

“I just forgot, Mr. Shefa.”

“Hey, who doesn’t, dude! Give yourself permission to start again. The wisest man I ever knew told me, ‘Your life begins again from now. And now. And now.’ Yours does, too.”

Mentoring moments, week 13 (from Mentor’s Journal). In spite of his bust, Perceval actually seems to be getting lighter as the semester unfolds. Perhaps by making this “mistake” of almost falling fully into the pit that awaited, he is becoming more determined to stay on course with his skating, his music, his friends. He has found some new confidence in writing, and is one of the students who has done every exercise with ease.

For his final “Compassion Write,” Perceval has decided to do a time-travel piece. I have a favorite word that I like to share with the students. I have told them repeatedly that I liked to give them “impossible” words from time to time. The most recent one, last week, was “teleological,” which, I actually do not even fully understand myself! I told the boys that it had to do with having a goal in the future, a vision of where you want to go, and that this vision, if they believed in it, would be like a living being, a presence that pulled them from the present into that desired future. Perceval, one of the few who sometimes writes down the things I say, has asked me how to pronounce the word. He used it as the title of his final write, “Teleological.”

Perceval’s “Compassion Write.” (Entitled “Teleological”)

Well, here it is 2020 and I’m an old guy of 24, haha! When I think about the kid I was at 14, I want to cry. What a crazy-ass mess my life was! My family was so messed up and I just couldn’t figure out how anything would ever get right, but it did.

A big part of it was my father coming back. He got out early for not misbehaving, and things just started getting better in my family. Maybe Dad had to go to hell and back to see what he had done. I had forgotten so many of the good things about him. In a way, I didn’t really know him before.

But what about me? My life is a good and bad salad. I don’t want anyone reading this to think it is all great. But a lot of it is really great.

The not-great is that a few in my family never got the point. I don’t really want to talk or write about it here. Not because I’m running from the truth. A buddy of mine, Tony Hawk, taught me not to do that. It’s just that I am not focusing on it. But I’ve forgiven them and I am there for them.

I'm married now. Can you believe that. I have a kid of my own, a boy who is two. I work as a salesman for, you guessed it, a skateboard store. But I'm not just a salesman, I'm a sort of manager and I make pretty good money. I still skate, too. I doubt I'll do this forever, but now it's good. Life is good. What about you, reader?

Closing mentoring moments, week 15 (from Mentor's Journal). Perceval continues to move lighter, not be so weighted down with his family's burdensome story. I point out something that he might have missed about his final essay, something very fundamental, but crucial: At least he *has* a future. It may not unfold exactly like that, it probably will not, but he sees himself in the future—he is a survivor!

He has stayed steady, not gotten further into pot, alcohol, any drugs. He believes that the class helped him to “get it all out and decide where I'm going.” I tell Perceval that it is very important that he recognizes that he has choices, that he is not locked into a fated outcome.

“I felt like we might lose you when the bust happened. I felt like, more important, you might lose you! But you turned it all around!”

Perceval says he still “just wants to chill” more than anything. Hearing the modest scope of his “ambitions” reminds me that a big part of my job, as Mentor is to just plant seeds, not to try and manage or be attached to the outcome. To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Perceval the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Perceval says that he feels like “I'm more chill with my feelings, even the difficult feelings.” He says that he was “kinda goofin'” when he wrote about Birdman, but that his advice was awesome: “Just keep skating, don't try and change anything. I think everything we did helped.”

“Everything we did?”

“The mind-flow-ness [he means, Mindfulness], even though it was just a few minutes a day. It helped me to have feelings without having them eat me.” Perceval says he tried to tell his brother and sister about what we do, but “they just thought it was weird.” But it worked for Perceval, he insists. “So did the councils. Not having to judge people, not feeling judged . . . well, most of the time.”

“So, all of that is having feelings and having them be okay?”

“Yeah.”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“Like I said, my main commandment is ‘Thou shalt chill.’ Of course, I care about my family. I can care about them a lot and not go down the drain.”

“Right, how would that help them?”

“It wouldn’t.” Perceval talks about how he linked the feeling of skating, the freedom, with the feeling of mindfulness, just letting things be and paying attention, and how, when he was writing his time-travel piece, he felt a similar kind of freedom: “My mind was free.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Like several of the boys, Perceval is not sure how to answer. I tell him that it seems to me that he has practiced self-compassion. He pulled himself back from the pit—he did that. He feels the pain of his brothers and sisters, even if they are numbed out to it, and he has decided that he does not have to live out the same story. All of that is an expression of his compassion.

We circle back to something I had mentioned in our group odyssey sessions: Sometimes our ‘elders’ are perfect role models—of how not to be. We can forgive their mistakes, while resolving to go a different way.

“That’s what I’m trying to do,” Perceval says. His sadness, alongside his quiet resolve, is palpable.

Looking at Perceval, it seems to me that he is a worthy vessel for his ancient name. He is a knight in a wasteland-blighted world, searching for his own version of the grail. I think of him on his skateboard, free, free.

“That’s all you can do,” I say, “Try. I’m proud of the way you came back.”

There is the briefest moment of silence, then the bell. “Thanks, Mr. Shefa,” Perceval says, turning to leave.

Metta. Opening mentoring moments as well as Metta’s responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). Metta, who is mixed African American and Caucasian, is a 15-year-old boy of remarkable gravitas and compassion. His central family story revolves around his mother’s mental illness, which has her living on the streets, and his father’s struggles to keep their large family together. Metta shows a quiet elegance in his manners. He is comfortable expressing feelings and sees empathy and compassion—both words he understands—as “just being human.”

Near the very beginning of our interview, Metta says, “I didn’t get to ask you the night my dad was there: Why are you doing all this, Mr. Shefa, this . . . study?” Metta looks at me with wide-open eyes, truly interested. I thought, perhaps, he was going to be suspicious, maybe even think I inappropriately “like” teens or something. But the way he is looking at me, I perceive that he simply, genuinely wants to know; and because his interest is so genuine, I spend the first minutes talking to him, at depth, about my core motives: how I did not have mentors or role models when I was his age; how I feel about rites of passage (I do have to explain what I mean

by that term), and the fact that they are largely missing in our time; and, finally, how I've seen kids completely turn their lives around with this program. I tell him about my own attitude as a coresearcher, rather than pretending that I am the "guy who knows it all."

I cannot help but notice that as I talk, it is as if the air around us has become charged, electrified. It is simultaneously very quiet, a sense that the air is thickening, the room even seems bigger, combined with a feeling that we are in a close-up, with each detail—Metta's face, my journal book on the table beside us, everything—just heightened, sharpened. Metta is very still, watching. I have the sense that we are engaged in an ancient or timeless dialogue. The air rings with a bell-like clarity. It is the first time that I have articulated, with passion, some of my core motives. In giving voice to my love for this work to Metta, I feel as if, in a way, I am speaking to all the boys.

I tell Metta that it was good to meet his dad, a quiet, earnest-seeming man. I would have liked to have met his mother.

Metta tells me that his mother has "a mental illness," unspecified. She has been "on the streets" for a few years. "My Mom is the most amazing singer," he says sadly. "She could have been famous; she's that good."

I ask Metta the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

"I am *all* feelings, Mr. Shefa. I've always been that way. I speak from my heart." Metta actually touches his heart as he speaks.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

"Other people's feelings are super-important to me."

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Metta says that he “wants to take away their suffering.” He adds, “I’d do anything to take away my mom’s suffering, or my dad’s pain about my mom.” He feels that way with his friends, as well. “I don’t want them to suffer.”

I ask Metta if he feels as if the suffering he has experienced has changed him in any way? He is not sure, but says that “It’s made me not always be thinking about myself.”

I tell Metta that while I really respect how compassionate he is, acknowledging his sincere wish for his family and friends to be free of suffering, that it is possible that they, too, may be learning from suffering—not that we would *wish* it for them. “I’m not saying that people ‘should’ suffer. I’m saying that if they do, perhaps one ‘positive’ is that they learn, or they become more aware that other people suffer.”

“Yeah, but I just wish my mom didn’t suffer so much!”

“Of course.”

Mentoring moments, week 3 (from Mentor’s Journal). Sometimes when I feel least fit to mentor is when I am, perhaps most potent as mentor; when I feel personally obliterated, but still show up, willing. I remember Pema Chodron, my favorite *tonglen* teacher, in a set of talks called “Getting Unstuck” (2006), talking about how spirituality is partly just showing up.

Today, I really almost did not come; but then I thought, “Just a few weeks in and you’re already ready to take flight?”

I spent the morning at the convalescent home. My father is clearly in the final stages. Spoke to the director about his having reached a “plateau.” Translation: Insurance does not want to pay for him to be there anymore and we have to find somewhere to take him to die; board and

care places recommended. I signed all the hospice forms, as well. Standing in the hallway beside my father's wheel-chair; he seems barely able to comprehend what's going on, yet so fragile, so thin, almost transparent. I would love to say there is some kind of radiance, some kind of illumination coming from him, but I do not sense this at all; more, a dimming. At one point, he looks up at me and says, "I'm not comfortable here." Here? Talking about being in the hallway, all these people walking by, not noticing him? Here on Earth, where he no longer belongs? He sits there as if he is a reluctant participant in an exhibit of his impending death, yet too weary to mount much of a protest beyond, "I'm not comfortable here." I wheel him back into his room, explain that I will be back later, then rush off to the school.

I feel utterly ground down. All I can do is just show up. Raw. This is the state I am in for my meeting with Metta. He is one of the most polite, respectful, elegant young men I have met. His biggest struggle with school is simply getting there. His absences are a by-product of the chaos in his family.

Metta, the Pali word for *loving-kindness* (as in Metta Meditation, Loving-Kindness Meditation), was the perfect "essence" name for him, as he truly is kind and loving. I have some sense now of what has crafted his 14-year-old heart to such a fine degree of openness—the tragedy of his mother's struggles with mental illness, his experience of his father's sadness and struggle to support the family.

Today, the students are working on their "*Tonglen Poem*." We are in a small room with large tables, just off the library. I have finally gotten the boys settled down, and Metta asks if he can speak with me. We go into the computer room, which is presently empty, no class in there. I sense that Metta wants to speak seriously. I am confident that even if he misses the writing assignment today, he will make it up. Metta seems committed to the whole process.

I sit down facing Metta. He looks straight at me, but says nothing.

“I’m glad that you wanted to talk—what’s up?”

“My mother,” Metta begins, “We found her—again.” Metta has told me only that his mother had been “mentally ill” most of his life, and that she was not living with his older brother, younger sister, or his father. I could sense that something was up, something had developed, with his situation. Part of my endeavor, my discipline these past years has been to learn to attune to what is not said, to detect significances in the silence, the pause, the quick look down or away.

My principle lance of inquiry regarding Metta, the thing that I feel is fundamental to his empathy and compassion life, to his life in total, is the weight or *gravitas* he carries. Is its source his mother and father’s pain? Has that possibly opened him to the pain in the world, an attunement to suffering on a larger scale, both in terms of his friends and community, but in the world even? Meade et al. (2002) spoke about how at-risk young men often carry too much weight, and how one task of the elder is to emerge from his cocoon of self-quest, self-indulgence, and to take some of the weight from youth (track 1).

Metta carries the weight of an African tribal elder himself, one who has witnessed great suffering. Seeing the “ancientness” in him . . . Today, I learned more of the story. (I’m writing this after class, sitting alone in the room off the library.) Yes, Metta’s mother’s sickness is severe mental illness. Yes, she has lived on and off the streets for most of his life. Depression. Bipolar disorder. Paranoia. Today, Metta, weeping at different points, tells me that he feels like he has had to watch this his whole life, “a slow motion tragedy I can’t do anything about,” not in a way that counts for his mother.

As Mentor, I have to be very careful in how I speak to Metta. He has done something that few teenage boys are willing to do: be utterly vulnerable to someone he is only beginning to

know. I cannot help wondering if my own state—fragile, waiting for my father to die, also helpless before that fact—in which I have, nevertheless, somehow said “yes” to it all at a deep and fundamental level; somehow this “yes” is enough to communicate to Metta that his suffering can just . . . be; that he can let go, just feel his pain; and that I will not try and talk him out of it, or tell him how it is going to get better, or do anything but be present with him.

What I can do is reflect back to Metta how deeply I respect him, his courage, his love for his mother. “You are showing more maturity than a lot of people my age,” I tell this young man. “Your mother’s behaviors are not the basis for how you see her. You look past that, into her heart, and that is amazing.” I tell Metta about a meditation I do, in which I think of a person who is suffering, and then I think about the part of them that is “inviolable,” which I explain to mean, “cannot be contaminated or touched.” I remind myself that this part, what I call “the soul” is pure. I keep saying to myself, “The soul is pure.” Somehow, it helps; if I am thinking of a person who is in a lot of pain, or a person with whom I am having difficulty. I also talk to him about *tonglen* again, but as with Merlin, I tell him that he could just think about sending clarity, ease, peace to his mother, but not in a way that he expects her to change, or is waiting for change.

Together, we add up the “positives,” as strange as it sounds, of his and his mother’s situation: His mother knows, at some level, that he loves her. Metta does believe that there is a God, that “there’s some reason why she’s had the life she had.” Even the fact that we are able to sit here and add up what he is learning.

I ask Metta what happy memories he has of his mother, and he smiles. “She is an amazing singer. I remember her singing.” We talk about how, perhaps, his mother’s suffering finds some relief or healing even through her singing.

I talk to Metta about initiation again: how in ancient times, and across the world in Africa, and on this very land where we are, America, a young man his age would be tested, initiated into manhood. “A lot of that initiation involved suffering, a lot of pain,” I explain. “I think that, in a way, for a long time you have been . . . initiated into being the amazingly kind soul you are,” I say softly. “I can’t explain to you how life works, why you’ve had to go through what you have so young.”

“Like you said: We don’t control the hand we’re dealt, just how we play it.”

“That’s right. And you are playing it with dignity. The thing that has wounded you the most has also opened your heart.”

Metta seems calmer. When I got to the school this morning, I sat in the car for a moment before getting out. I seriously wondered what I could possibly offer these boys today. It turns out that perhaps the very fact that I feel so ground down has stripped away a few layers of easy-to-get-to answers, has delivered me up to being present, the one thing that I feel certain I can offer Metta: a present and believing mirror in which he could see a portrait of a young man emerging like the phoenix.

The other boys have all completed their “*Tonglen Poem*” draft. A good day.

Metta’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in Mother’s scared eyes
 Breathe out a song she once sang to me
 Breathe in homeless
 Breathe out a garden
 Breathe in people being cruel
 Breathe out love
 Breathe in hopeless
 Breathe in hopeFULL

Introduction to Metta’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” (Week 7) Metta’s mentoring moments while the other boys were writing their “*Tonglen Poem*” inspired him to write a kind

of appreciation piece about me as his mentor. Even given the openness of the writing prompt, the way it lent itself to multiple approaches, I had not anticipated that any of the boys would choose to write so directly about their experience as coresearchers.

Metta's "Meeting With Mentor Write." This is what he offered.

Mr. Shefa is my mentor. He is a kind man who sees a lot. I think he sees more than he says. You can see it in his eyes. His eyes are deep, but kind.

Mr. Shefa told our group that "mentor" means "guide." He's not like a regular teacher; he's better. He has so much patience, even for guys who drive people nuts! He never gives up on anyone.

Not long ago, I was talking with Mr. Shefa about my mother. I started crying because her situation is very, very bad. I don't usually even talk about her. This situation with her has gone on for a long, long time. When I used to talk to people about my mom, people would try and say nice things. But I always felt like they were just saying that, as if they really just didn't know what to say, so, okay, why not just SOUND nice, ya know? Mr. Shefa doesn't do that. He REALLY listens to me. I could even see on his face that he felt the pain of my mom's situation and the pain that I feel about it. He was totally there.

Having a good mentor makes you feel like no matter what happens, there is someone to talk to. Mr. Shefa doesn't pretend to know everything or have all the answers. But he makes me feel like NOT knowing everything, even not having even ANY answers, is okay. He makes me feel like I'm okay, exactly as I am.

I know this may sound weird. But I really think the real word for mentor is . . . love. That's not a word you hear a lot in school unless it's in some dumb way.

Thanks, Mr. Shefa!

Mentoring moments, week 8 (from Mentor's Journal). I am extremely touched by Metta's simple, from-the-heart writing. Actually being moved, heart-touched by something a student or "mentee" says or writes is another part of the mentoring relationship, nourishing Mentor. It is raising a few larger, what for me are perennial issues: Is part of my task, as Mentor, to role model being a man of feeling, a man who can be touched, moved by connection and communication? Does this not speak of empathy? The boys like to play it cool, which they equate with showing little or no emotions. But so often, this feels to me like a defense, a byproduct of having been feeling-wounded, an unconscious decision made to put up walls. Yet

can there be empathy without this vulnerability? It is also part of boy-culture, always playing it cool, appearing cool, unfazed by messy feelings.

At the same time, I have to watch it. This is not about collapsing in a puddle of emotion. So much swirling around me in my own life, that it would be easy to do that, except for the fact that every time—and I mean every time, at least, so far—I step into the function of mentor, my own wounds, all the grief and hurt I am carrying around, seem to alchemize into this rich vulnerability, permeability, such as when reading Metta’s “Meeting With Mentor” writing.

Teachers are supposed to radiate command and being in charge. It is true that I want to show them the strength of empathy and compassion, of having a heart that is richly engaged, open, capable of being deeply moved, and how this, too, can be strong; this, too, can be another face of the masculine.

Introduction to Metta’s “Compassion Write.” Metta’s final write focused on his mother. Once again, the form of the writing, a sort of prose poem, was different from a traditional essay, which is something the school would have liked to see more of, since part of the “sell” of the program is that it helps the students to be better essayists, even though a more fundamental “sell” is that it at least seems to give them confidence to write at all!

Mentoring moments, week 13 (from Mentor’s Journal). I ask Metta if it was difficult to write about his mother. Metta seems genuinely surprised by my question, and says, “No, not at all, Mr. Shefa. It made me feel closer to her, even though it was sad in a way.” He says, “When I wrote this, it felt almost like I was with her or something.”

I remind Metta that this is one of the great powers of writing. We can take ourselves to distant times and places, deep into the past, forward into the future. We can summon our missing loved ones to our sides and “speak” with them.

Metta's "Compassion Write." This is what he offered.

Have you ever heard the most beautiful singing in the world? It comes from the bottom of the biggest ocean in the world. I can't tell you where that ocean is though. You have to find it with a compass locked inside your heart. That's how I got here.

The singing at the bottom of the ocean is songs that sing to your heart. The songs I heard when I got down there were from the heart of a mother I lost long ago.

For a long time, she didn't sing. I found out, and what I learned (down there in the ocean; don't ask me how I learned it!) was that she didn't sing because I stopped looking for her. She just lay there. Then I started looking for her again. I was on a quest, like a knight. Once I was on my quest, she got strength to sing.

I know I can't stay down in the ocean. It's just because of this quest of mine that I got a special breathing pass from God. I know my mother can't leave here. It's where she lives now.

I imagine that there is a cord though, an invisible cord, even though I see it as this thin, octopus cable, between my mom and me that allows me to hear her singing. It's a cable that can carry her beautiful voice even a million miles. I will never lose it again.

She told me one last thing, before I had to go. She said that everyone has a voice they lost that they should get started looking for. Even just starting to swim will make you feel better and it will make the voice gain strength.

Everyone's got their own music, their own song. Go to the bottom of the ocean and find yours.

Closing mentoring moments, week 14 (from Mentor's Journal). I tell Metta how beautifully mysterious I found his writing, and also the fact that his writing, at least to me, was not just *about* compassion, it *was* compassionate. The feeling that it gave to me was that of compassion, of wanting to ease suffering.

I tell Metta that I really thought a lot about that "voice" he wrote about, even though it is pretty much a mystery to me, something I cannot just explain.

"It just flowed out, that whole piece. But you still made me rewrite it!"

"I was just trying to help you dig out the jewels: Flowing and growing, they go together. 'Flowing, growing, then glowing!'" Metta cracks up. The kids have made fun of my attempts at "rappin,'" yet I am indefatigable.

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Metta the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Metta says that he thinks “I’m becoming more of a thinker, or a writer. I feel like my feelings are always going to be there. You’ve seen how easy it is for me to cry.”

I suggest to Metta that this is not a “bad” thing, being able to cry.

“I know! But it’s good to be able to write about your feelings. It helps to kinda put them in order.”

“How?”

“When you write about them, you can still feel them, but they don’t . . . drown you. I don’t know. I’m not saying it very well. It sounds like I’m trying to get away from feelings. . . .”

“Actually, it sounds like you are trying to honor them by being able to express them—like you did in your “Compassion” writing.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Metta says he doesn’t know when he’s going to see his mother again. “I really, really want to.” He says that he has taken my advice though. “I write to her, even though I don’t know where to send it. Somehow that helps. Sometimes, when I write to her, just like when I did here, it’s like she is with me.”

I ask Metta if that is like he can feel her “with” him?

“Definitely.”

I tell Metta that he seems to have found a new way to be “with” his mom. “Who knows, maybe, at some level, she can feel you!”

“That makes me want to cry.” Metta says he realized that for a long time he had a lot of anger toward his mom. He has written about his anger; “Anger-Writes, I call them.”

“But maybe that’s better than letting it get all bottled up inside you. It’s honoring your feelings and theirs.”

“Thanks, Mr. Shefa.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Metta says, “I want to help wherever I can.” He says, “There’s a lot of suffering.” Metta recognizes that his perennial wound with his mother does contain a gift. “Feeling her pain made me ‘get it’ that others are in pain, too.” Yet Metta also recognizes that he has to take care of himself, as well. “I suffer, too, and I can’t pretend like that’s not real.”

The name *Metta*, “Loving kindness,” turned out to be very apt for this young man. I see how he has developed some simple strategies for addressing the suffering of one person who is at the center of his life, even though she is physically absent. He has learned how his thought process can, like the cord or cable images in his dream, reach her, and how this extends his own compassion through empathetic reaching.

Metta has been my teacher in loving-kindness, in courage, and I tell him that.

He smiles. “This is the best class I’ve ever had. It’s not just about some subject; it’s about life. It’s about how to live and love.”

“Thank you,” I say, humbled by Metta’s directness and kindness.

Mentor’s Odyssey, Part One: Betwixt and Between

Research also always has its moments of falling apart, moments when the work falls out of the hands of the researcher, when the work seems to resist the conscious intentions of the researcher and begins to twist and turn in another way. Such moments are crucial to an approach to re-search that would keep soul in mind because they signal a shift from the researcher’s ego-intentions for the work to the intentions that the work has for itself, a shift from what the researcher wants from the work to what the work wants from the researcher. In these moments of breakdown, the researcher is also swept up into the process of falling apart insofar as the researcher in his or her complex encounter with the

soul of the work falls into the work and in the process of working on the work is worked on and even worked over by it. (Romanyshyn, 2007, pp. 47-48)

As revealed in Homer's (1998) *Odyssey* (and discussed in the Introduction and Literature Review), Mentor, who appears near the beginning of the epic to guide Odysseus's young son, Telemachus, is actually a semblance of the Goddess of Wisdom, Athena. In other words, although there is, indeed, an elder named *Mentor* who was charged to look after Telemachus' well-being while Odysseus went on his odyssey, the figure we meet is actually the Goddess Athena shapeshifted into or donning the appearance or semblance of Mentor. Among the countless wisdom-mentor figures appearing throughout myth and story across the ages are Merlin, who serves as a magician-mentor to King Arthur; Krishna, who appears as a mentoring deity to Arjuna on the battlefield; and Virgil, who is a legendary literary figure who accompanies Dante (Alighieri, 1556/1980) in the *Divine Comedy* even through Hell and Purgatory. Each of these mentor figures appears on the scene at critical developmental crossroads for their mentees. These wise elders bring compassionate, life-changing wisdom. They offer stout challenge, heartfelt encouragement, and illumination to their younger charges. When we first encounter these powerfully luminous guides within myth or story, however, they are usually already at a high level of accomplishment, and therefore, little or nothing is revealed about the training or ordeals in the process of transformation that Mentor, by whatever name he or she is called, previously underwent to *become* a fit conduit for wisdom and compassion.

Although obviously not comparing myself to these exalted figures, the more I worked with the boys, while at the same time experiencing the powerful events unfolding in my own life, the more clear it became that an inexorable, paradoxical process of being simultaneously ground down and rebuilt was taking place. Very gradually, I began to see how the challenging, even traumatic events in my life, unfolding in real-time as I mentored the boys, contained a hidden

gift. My increasing willingness to allow myself to feel my own pain, consciously experiencing my own suffering and wishing for its relief, began an awakening of self-empathy and self-compassion in my life. I felt deeply attuned to both the fragility and indomitable strength of what I could only call my *soul*: that part of me that persevered through these trials. (Note: I am permitting myself the assumption of saying it was my soul that was being revealed. Empirically speaking, I could not say that it was, definitively, my soul that I was registering or connecting to at these times. I am referring here to that locus of self-awareness that reveals meaning and purpose emerging from suffering.) Also, the exquisite beauty of the inner lives of my coresearchers appeared before me with greater clarity, even when struggling with troublesome aspects of their character and willingness to work.

Throughout this period, my practice of writing in *Mentor's Journal* provided a heartbeat of contemplation. Writing allowed me to reflect on my experiences, taking a bird's-eye view, while striving for greater understanding and offering myself encouragement and challenge as well as self-empathy and self-compassion. These were skills and alignments that I was simultaneously working to teach the boys.

The meditation practices of mindfulness and *tonglen* steadied my focus and encouraged the development of equanimity, even while my world continued to be shaken by major changes. At such times, returning to the practice of mindfully following the breath, or even breathing in the very difficulty that was proving so formidable (as in *tonglen* practice), strengthened my resolve to open my heart rather than contract or close down; again, these were the very same qualities I was seeking to encourage in my 12 coresearchers. The Wise-Elder/Mentor Meditation helped to connect me to my inner mentor, a source of wisdom for navigating these seas of transformation.

Anderson (2011) wrote about how others who have undertaken an intuitive inquiry have experienced the sense that the research had its own calling. Romanyshyn (2007) offered that the wounded researcher must descend into his own wounds in order to find the thread of narrative that links together shattering experiences and helps one to connect personal experience to a deeper mythological framework. Such a broad perspective on the suffering and the transformation awaiting me was not accessible, however, when first setting forth on this quest to study the awakening of empathy and compassion through mentoring and writing. Like a scroll slowly opening, revealing only the section before me at each moment, what awaited in the future, as the scroll turned, was unknown. I did not, perhaps could not foresee that my father dying would be followed by my marriage of 23 years collapsing or that these twin losses would be accompanied by my mother's rapid descent toward death—and what if I could have foreseen them? Besides, each event and its subsequent reverberations was so intense that, as in driving through a snowstorm, I could only keep my eyes on the journey just ahead.

I had intuitively titled my dissertation *The Tears of Telemachus*, having no idea how many literal tears would fall from my eyes as I sought simply to persevere with my life—and my research. I had spoken to the boys about the concept of becoming a “Compassionate Warrior,” knowing from experience that simply to talk about compassion with them would run the risk of it being dismissed as a “soft” quality. What about my own fierce compassion? Were my tears indulgent or transformative? Was I breaking down, or was I breaking open? As with Odysseus himself and other mythic heroes of old, if I could have foreseen the labyrinth of suffering that appeared to be integral to my next stages of development as a mentor, perhaps I would have faltered at even the first gateway to greater empathy and compassion.

In retrospect, I can see that these events served as necessary shocks, mini-initiations requiring me to adopt new perspectives, new lenses, one might say. From the inside, these experiences sometimes quickened empathy and stirred compassion, first for myself, then for others; while at other times, especially early on in my own odyssey, they served to painfully expose the *absence* of these qualities in myself. Often, it was as if I could not move forward on my journey without experiencing the wasteland of no empathy or compassion and then, grieving the desolation of my inner landscape, dare to open my heart again. This cycle of awakening to absence, contemplating the implications of that absence, then grieving, and finally opening became integral to the mentoring process itself, as I allowed myself the paradoxical experience of feeling-the-absence-of-feeling, the numbness that so often afflicted my mentees. Only from that felt-experience of numbness—again, paradoxically—could I grieve the veiling of feeling in some of my mentees. Such an activation of conscious grief then seemed to allow me to attune to deeper currents of feelings in my coresearchers—feelings that lay coiled within wounds shrouded by numbness. I could not help but wonder, again, about the inner process of my mentor forbearers, my lineage, back to Mentor himself, as suffering and transformation prepared him—or her—for service.

Looking back from the perspective of having gone on the journey—though the awakening to empathy and compassion is a lifelong odyssey—it seems as if by setting an intention to mentor others into empathy and compassion, I inexorably summoned the forces that would sometimes painfully illuminate my own blocks to experiencing and expressing these qualities, even while beckoning me forward toward the strengths of greater connection. The following is storied-data on the odyssey of myself as “Mentor,” which ran concurrent with my work with the 12 boys on their odyssey.

In a fashion sometimes characteristic of intuitive inquiry writing, I am choosing to include documentation on the researcher's process in this Results/Cycle 3 chapter. I include the above passages, which might as well have found their home in the Discussion Chapter, as a useful introduction to the *Mentor's Journal* passages to come. My total writing on these experiences was vast and lengthy. As with my extensive journal-data on the boys, I have selected only those parts which pertain most directly to the dynamics of mentoring, writing, empathy, and compassion. The first-half of the story of my own odyssey to empathy and compassion is told in the following selection, and the second half follows the section on my 12th mentee.

First initiation of Mentor (from *Mentor's Journal*). I have only begun to meet with my 12 coresearchers as a group this week, having completed the individual pre-interviews—which I call “Opening Mentoring Moments.” I have not only survived the debacle regarding tape recording but also have found a way to turn a crisis into an opportunity—another skill I am trying to pass on to my coresearchers! In the end, I think that taking extensive notes during our sessions and then sitting down immediately after my sessions on a given day to expand the notes in the freshness of the encounter is actually a better solution; it puts me into a natural rhythm, a deep listening and attending to nuance, which seems very much in keeping with the spirit of intuitive inquiry. This practice challenges, or resurrects my abilities as a former feature news writer; at a deeper level, it also reinforces the power of writing as a method of intuitive “recording.”

Racing out from the school a half-hour after meeting with the boys, I sit beside my 93-year-old father in the convalescent home where he has been languishing for a number of weeks. My father is wasting away to 120 pounds, communicating less and less, sleeping more and more. My life is filled with this journey between two points on the developmental map: mentoring

youth on the precipice of young manhood and bearing painful witness to an elder of the tribe preparing for departure—a rhythm moving between frenetic masculine energy and my father’s uneasy final repose.

I am totally and utterly exhausted. At a time when I feel I should be charged with sacred, fiery energy to mentor these boys, I instead feel like the filaments of my being are stretched out to near breaking point, flung across the highway as I race from the school in Palm Desert to the convalescent home in Palm Springs where my father lies. Over and over, on this weary journey, I play the CD of *The Prayer Cycle*, by Jonathan Elias (1999), full of spiritual longing, anguish, and exaltation. One cut, especially, called “Grace,” never ceases to fill me with a sort of joyful anguish, as the mournful voice of James Taylor sings,

Father won’t you carry me
 For the ocean’s wide,
 Father won’t you carry me,
 For my boat is so small.
 Father on a moonless night
 Help me cross the stormy sea.
 Out here in the darkness,
 Help me find my way back home.
 Father won’t you carry me,
 For the ocean’s wide.
 Father won’t you carry me,
 For my boat is so small.
 Father in this season of dying,
 Let me sleep in your arms,
 And come watch over me,
 Someone watching over me,
 Over me.
 Father won’t you carry me,
 Father won’t you carry me,
 Father won’t you carry me home. (Elias, 1999, track 5)

My father’s bed has become a rickety chariot of bones, with a fragile, fallen man at the center. He is a wounded bird, contracting for flight, gathering strength to fly free of this charnel house of pain and suffering his wasting body has become. I am the witness bearer; we have

passed through speech to this timeless yet somehow interminable waiting. My chest is tight, that same locked-in feeling I so often had with him throughout our lives.

Sitting beside my father as he vanishes, I continually return to *tonglen*, breathing in his pain and suffering, and breathing out relief—to my father, myself, and to anyone in this suffering wracked world who needs relief. In doing so, there is an opening, a loosening in the chest. At moments, I even feel a deep sense of acceptance, contentment even.

This vigil I am keeping continually calls to mind poet and male mentor Robert Bly, whose poetic descriptions of the mentoring relationship in his two books, *Iron John* (1990), and *The Sibling Society* (1997), were some of the original threads that led to my call to mentor. In the poem, *My Father at 85*, he wrote poignantly about the comingling of tenderness, regret, and fierce resolve that revolved in his heart as he watched his father preparing to cross over:

His large ears hear
everything.
A hermit wakes
and sleeps
in a hut underneath
his gaunt cheeks.
His eyes blue,
alert, dis-
appointed and suspicious
complain
I do not bring him
the same sort of jokes
the nurses do.
He is a small bird
waiting to be fed,
mostly beak,
an eagle or a vulture
or the Pharaoh's servant
just before death.
My arm on the bedrail
rests there,
relaxed, with new love.
All I know of the Troubadours
I bring

to this bed.
 I do not want
 or need
 to be shamed
 by him
 any longer.
 The general of shame
 has discharged him
 and left him in this
 small provincial
 Egyptian town.
 If I do not wish
 to shame him, then
 why not
 love him?
 His long hands,
 large, veined, capable,
 can still retain
 hold of what he wanted.
 But is that
 what he desired?
 Some powerful
 river of desire
 goes on flowing
 through him.
 He never phrased
 what he desired,
 and I am
 his son. (Robert Bly, 1992, p. 67)

When I first see my father today, his hands continually rearrange his blankets, as if weaving and reweaving a pattern. He cannot seem to get them to lay down properly, and so he starts again. He sees me but does not see me—or, he sees *through* me. Can we really know what long-distance lenses are conferred as one prepares to orient to the next world? These walls have become sky portals for him, launch pads into “heaven.”

Father keeps trying to fix the white thermal blanket; gets it right for a moment, then, no, not right; and so he resets the pattern yet again. His hands, always so awkward in their salesman’s bluntness, have a dancing grace as he tries to stitch a garment below to transport him

into the next world. I feel as if he is trying to match the pattern on earth to the place, beyond, that he is trying to enter, the blanket to become his magic vehicle of transport. Perhaps if he could just get the coordinates right, then he could move on.

[Later in the evening] The convalescent home just called. Instinctively, I knew that this was his last day on earth, yet I let the nurse persuade me to come home. She kept telling me not to worry; that he had merely had a UTI, and that this was causing the uptick in “abnormal behavior,” something she claimed to have seen many times.

I did not trust my instinct. Instead of staying, which would have allowed me to be present at the final moment, I drove off, utterly exhausted. Just before I left, my dad seemed to be seeing some sort of figures or entities in the corners of the room, mumbling words as he peered into the corner, gazing beyond this world, all the while arranging and rearranging the edge of his final earthly covering to prepare for launch-time. In what turned out to be my last moments with him, those few times when he looked in my direction, he seemed to be looking at me from another universe, or at least a world betwixt and between this and whatever may come next.

Now everything swirls together, different moments of time, in my mind: a mental and emotional snapshot of him lying on the tile floor when my mother called me in the middle of the night, just a few weeks ago. Blood was on the white tile beneath his head. He looked up to me and said, “I don’t think I’m gonna’ make it.” I remember the last time I helped him take a shower, his tiny, shriveled body taking the downpour like punishing rain, cowering, angry at me for the drops, hitting him “like bullets,” as he cried out.

My father and I had an uneasy relationship for many years. He was the straightforward salesman; I was the indirect poet, allusive and subtle. He could not really understand his artistic, deeply pensive son; though I, increasingly in his final decade, came to appreciate him more and

more. The things that mattered most to me—spirituality, art, nature—were of little or no interest to my father. I tried to find meeting points—talking about golf, which interested me not at all, about politics, about which he became increasingly opinionated, and above all, about my son, Evin, his beloved grandson, who seemed to be his lifeline to remnants of joy and delight.

I am hugely grateful, though, that I attended him in these final months of his life, cared for him in the most intimate aspects of his descent. He deeply appreciated the care I showed to him and my mother, who is also declining rapidly, and who, I fear, will exit quickly “stage left,” so to speak. Even though it was the middle of the night when I called her, Mom showed no surprise, already inured to suffering, sorrow, loss.

Dad’s and my relationship was never strong at expressing affection in any way. I had a lot of unvoiced judgment and even condemnation of him—the arrogant, dismissive way he treated my mom sometimes, especially in these final years, and his rudeness to service people—and I have no doubt that he sometimes had a parallel judgment toward me, his youngest, strangest son. I now believe, with regret, that my judgments sealed me from truly beholding his good humor and his kindness, two traits that others continually said they saw in him. Now he is on his own mysterious journey. In a few days, the family will gather.

Somehow, I mark the end of my father’s life with the beginning of my own tentative awakening to empathy and compassion. Partly, it was his own shortcomings in this regard—at least according to my limited and perhaps biased perceptions and experience. I have sometimes said to my students that it can happen that our elders do a brilliant job in role-modeling how not to live. Was it, rather, simply my own failure to see my father’s particular flavor of empathy and compassion? How can we bear witness to those qualities in another when the coarser, harsh sounds of judgment and criticism are commandeering our attention?

Within my dissertation, I keep coming back to the notion of self-empathy, which I regard as the cognitive act of actually recognizing one's own feelings and the affective experience of actually feeling the living flow of one's feelings. My father had somehow, in the course of his life, and probably with the roots for this severance going way back into his own childhood, become greatly disconnected from his own feelings. As he aged, this absence became more acute. He seemed to lose the ability to read and to open himself to others' feelings, above all, to his lifelong partner, my mother.

What had happened to my father to thus imprison him away from the living fountains of empathy? Was this sealed-within-self quality a "condition" that he had passed on to me, only my manifestation of the condition has taken a more intellectual, supposedly "spiritual," yet ultimately aloof and disconnected personality style? Beneath the facade of spiritual scholar and practitioner, have I inherited a similar empathy deficit in the center of my feeling life?

What I really wonder, though, is if my father might have felt too much, rather than too little. He was not of the "sensitive guy" generation but more like a Jewish "Eisenhower male." Perhaps he simply lacked the ability to process and, most importantly, communicate to others the depth of his empathy and compassion. I wonder about how much a similar disconnect occurs in men and, more importantly for my study, in boys? Is this disconnect a key to understanding why there are so few mentors who are willing and able to come from their own depths with boys who are emotionally wounded?

Perhaps my father's gift to me is precisely this absence of empathy and compassion. Even if it was a misreading on my part, it is how I often perceived him and so it became part of the story I have told myself—and others, I am embarrassed to say—about "myself." Another way to look at is through the notion of optimal frustration, which Kohut (1984) introduced in

regard to a developing life's needs for connection to others. Perhaps, my own optimal frustration in relation to my father as nurturer and as male role model created a hunger for the very quality I felt to be missing—not to mention, a hunger for mentoring. Perhaps this black hole in my psyche has driven me into the very calling I now inhabit, at least partially forming me into a mentor for boys and young men who, by virtue of their wounded upbringing, may be missing this same essential connection.

Those who knew my father would say that he was a warm-hearted, kind man. Why, then, did I see and experience so little of this? The more I judged and condemned my father, the more the question arose: In beholding my father, was I looking at an aspect of myself, with the added spin of intellectual, spiritual scholar, an aspect that allowed me so little space for empathy and compassion for myself and others?

A chasm has opened, wherein I contemplate my own lack of empathy and compassion—just as I seek to mentor others into this very realm! This seems like an instance of the auspicious bewilderment Anderson (1998b, 2011) identified as a key feature of intuitive inquiry. It would be just like Trickster to reveal the very opposite of what I believed I was seeking, illuminating a void and numbness instead of the rich, felt experience of empathy and compassion! I was heartened by Anderson's (1998b) encouragement that “in research, especially transpersonal research, auspicious bewilderment may signal the beginning of renewed understanding” (p. 85).

Second initiation of Mentor: A knife to the heart—My marriage shatters. To be stabbed in the center of the heart was certainly not my chosen methodology of awakening to empathy and compassion, but the evidence of the ages is that when accepted, even surrendered to, a deep wound can become a means of rising from spiritual torpor. My second shock and initiation into understanding empathy and compassion's place or lack thereof in my own life,

occurred during the second month of my research. This experience powerfully drove home the point of the severe price to pay for my dwelling too long in disconnected realms where empathy and compassion could not take root, grow, or flower. At the very same time as the demands to mentor my coresearchers into the awakening of empathy and compassion intensified, I was driven deeper into experiencing the wounding in my own heart. I continually wondered if I should not discontinue the research, retreat, and attend to my own healing, only to decide that the discipline of showing up as Mentor was, indeed, part *of* this healing. The following excerpt from *Mentor's Journal* both illuminates the struggle and intimates the potential gifts that awaited.

On being stabbed awake in the heart (from *Mentor's Journal*). Still reeling from the death of my father, and increasingly taking up the role of principal caretaker for my mother, I failed to recognize the knife that was about to fall from another realm, slicing right through to the very center of my arid heart, the place where empathy and compassion had long been on lock-down. From out of the dead zone of a marriage lain fallow for several years, a settling to quiet misery together, my wife, having lost her father several months before mine died—her father whom she adored and to whom she felt extremely close and loving—announced to me today that she does not know if she can continue our marriage of 23 years. She wants a year's separation. She also reveals that there is another man, for whom she has “a strong attraction.”

Over the course of the last few hours, I refused to accept what was already happening. I wept, I grew enraged, then begged, as I whirled through four of the five stages of grief (Kübler-Ross, 1969) in rapid cycling—denial, bargaining, anger, depression. Acceptance, the final stage, is light years away, and seems, feels, impossible; yet even at this first stabbing of the knife in my heart, a strange sense of inevitability accompanies the acute pain. I will not say I saw this coming; I did not. Our marriage was fallow, riddled with problems, but there was a base,

reality's foundation stone, albeit totally taken for granted, I now see. With just a few words, "there's a strong attraction to someone else," that base vanished.

I cannot stop weeping. Where were these tears through the past several years when this marriage was, underneath the dull surface, obviously unraveling? Even now, with the ground spinning beneath me like a centrifuge, I do see that this is like being stabbed . . . awake; it is an opening of sorts—but an opening to sorrow, grief, lament. I honestly do not know if I can survive this and carry on with my research. At the same time, I also feel closer to, more in touch with the root of my life, call it my *soul*, as it scans its universe for solace and understanding.

My wife's decision to ask for this separation and probably for the dissolution of our marriage reveals the damage I have caused to the once holy vessel of union. It does not take much, or any, interpretation to understand that it is by virtue of my lack or, most likely, absence of empathy and compassion toward my life partner that this has chiefly come about. My excessive mental criticism of a person of great emotional tenderness, my daring her to "just leave, find someone else," has flowered, leaving me staring, aghast, into karma's mirror. Now, she has left, virtually. I cannot say I blame her, though I am completely and utterly desperate to reverse the trajectory of this descent.

Still, if I could strive to take up the practice of regarding everything that enters my life's field as a lesson crafted by a master teacher, by Life itself. . . . Is not that what you, in essence, try and convey to your mentees? If so, then I just received a knockout double-lesson: First, my father, who came to represent a portrait of empathy's steady diminishment and a haunting presence of its absence in my own relationship with him, dies; and now I behold my own reflection in the mirror as a husband bereft of empathy and compassion. Seen from that positive perspective, Life is unfolding a master intensive in empathy and compassion, for my eyes only,

even as I seek to engage the 12 boys in an odyssey into these same sacred qualities. You could say that the universe is showing me, in a most powerful fashion, the holes in my mentor's vessel. What could I actually offer these boys, in terms of empathy and compassion, if together we set sail to deeper levels and my own treasures sunk beneath the waves? I would then be inviting them into a level of feeling and possible healing connection, yet be unable to sustain with them as they descended to wrestle treasures from their own suffering.

Let me not fool myself though about how "useful" this unforeseen knife-wound is; I am completely shattered, devastated, lost. It does not matter that I can see these . . . benefits from being stabbed in the heart. And let me be clear; what is stabbing me in the heart is The Truth, not my wife. Truth has come masterfully to open the damaged organ, the heart bereft of empathy and compassion. I see how, if I am going to survive this . . . rite of passage, emotionally and spiritually, and to keep going deeper into my research, I have to find the two-way directional of empathy and compassion: toward myself, to actually feel—and grieve—my own feelings (self-empathy) and to move toward healing (self-compassion), and toward my wife as well as anyone who finds themselves in this grieving situation (empathy and compassion). There is no time to wallow in lament over failures within my own life and embody the very thing I am supposedly researching! Prescription: Write, practice mindfulness, do the Mentor Meditation of the Wise Elder, do *tonglen*. I accept.

How often have you told boys over the past 9 years that sometimes they just have to "keep going, even when you can't see in the darkness?" How many times have you assured them that facing pain would not devastate them and that, instead, they would rise like the phoenix?

These losses, first my father and now the collapse of my marriage, are twin blows to body and psyche; yet, having already launched into this vast sea of research, the intention to persevere

and the disciplines of meditation, writing, and dialoguing with my inner mentor, put in place before I began this journey, can serve to steady Mentor's vessel. They have to. Most important of all, I have to keep deciding, over and over, to go forward and to enter more fully into the felt-belief that all of this seeming loss is part of a greater teaching, a deepening initiation.

Even while leaving my home and moving in with my mother, whose own health is rapidly failing, I joked to a friend about how next time I say I want to write a dissertation on awakening empathy and compassion, to please remind me that part of the process of becoming a mentor to these qualities in young people will be to dramatically encounter the gaping holes in my own vessel. My ability to stay awake and aware, within the pain of this wound, seems pivotal right now—to my life and to the enterprise of becoming a mentor who is worthy of serving young people. In a very real sense then, these experiences of loss and devastation are revealed as great gifts. They bring at least the potential of awakening.

Mentoring Sessions

Milarepa. Opening mentoring moments as well as Milarepa's responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor's Journal). Milarepa is a fierce, athletic, Caucasian young man of 15. He has been in a series of foster homes since the age of 10, and is currently living with an aunt and uncle. Milarepa has little interest in school, although he enjoys reading (mainly comic books and graphic novels). Milarepa prides himself on being "a warrior." He sees himself likely headed to the military. He is very guarded about feelings. Milarepa has known a lot of physical abuse at the hands of his elders in his short life.

In this first interview, I sense that this notion of being or becoming a warrior might be a way into feeling, into empathy and compassion, with Milarepa. I am remembering discussions

with my dissertation committee, particularly Sharon Mijares, one of the cochairs, on “fierce empathy” and “fierce compassion.” Milarepa strikes me as a wounded warrior, with his latent, noble instincts of service and protection overlaid with the face of adolescent defiance, the only role for these energies he has been able to find thus far. He places a high premium on loyalty to friends, especially female friends, and “will do anything” to protect them. Milarepa feels that these are fights worth having and says that he does not care if there is “a price to pay,” such as being suspended or even expelled from school. Where he sees vulnerability or weakness in those he loves, he is duty-bound to protect them. Where he sees teasing or bullying toward his friends or loved ones, he will “destroy that person if I have to.” When he makes this statement, it is as if the atmosphere around his face is suddenly highly concentrated. His face when he says this is somehow simultaneously relaxed, at peace with himself, and fiercely determined.

All of these impressions tell me that my intuitive blank scroll meditation process of finding a quest name for him was on target. An 11th-century Tibetan saint, Milarepa’s youth was filled with criminal acts (Heruka, 2010). My Milarepa has obviously not occupied the saintly part of his biography yet. This Milarepa, who has been to juvenile hall before and whose father, whom he no longer sees, has done time, is a fascinating combination of street fighter, warrior, and weight-lifter-athlete.

As we walk from the classroom to the small room adjacent to the library where the opening mentoring moments are conducted, Milarepa suddenly appears to walk up the wall! Yes, at least that is how it looks to me, as I watch in astonishment! He seems to walk up the wall, almost as if gravity has been removed, allowing him to ascend the wall, and then do a veritable back flip off as he resumes walking. By practicing this *parkour*, a sport or activity that I have never heard about until this moment as Milarepa gives me the briefest of explanations, he is

daring me to step in, to restrict him, to pull the sacred adult trump card of the rules. He does it again, and for a moment I fear he is going to fall and break his skull! Instead, I chose to simply slow down my walk and wait for him to land next to me; even knowing that, if something happens to Milarepa, I will be blamed for not stopping him.

“That’s amazing,” I say, when he walks up the side of the wall, grabs onto the fence right next to it, and then jumps back down for a third and final time, this time almost hitting me as he comes down. Milarepa works out with weights, and has been doing *parkour* before he even knew that is what it is called.

As we approach the library, I talk to Milarepa about a lineage of warriors: from Krishna on the battlefield dialoguing with Arjuna before heading into the battle of life, to fierce Native American warriors who would live or die for a principal, and King Arthur and his knights. These are the ones I remember mentioning to Milarepa.

“But what does it mean to be a gentleman warrior?” I ask. “Anyone can fight.” I’m not quite sure what I am trying to get to with this. It seems a bit too on-the-nose, and too moralistic, really. I have to honor the fact that Milarepa had to be a fighter just to survive. There was nothing gentlemanly about it! He has known cruelty and abuse from a young age. Let it go.

When we reach the library, I get ready to ask Milarepa the three questions. I must admit that there is something about him that both unnerves and intrigues me. He seems like a wild creature, unfettered, possibly willing to fight to the death even, for something he believes in.

I feel somehow very precious, scholarly: a Talmudic pedant walking beside a young aboriginal warrior. I note my insecurity, that Milarepa may have little respect for the way I comport myself. I know that part of this has to do with the crushing nature of my own experiences the past few weeks, the fragile state it has left me in. My nerves are thin, my

sensitivity porous. Once again, I remember to breathe into this fragility, find fearlessness here within the brokenness. I wonder if it is similar to quiet turnings and realignments that Milarepa has made in the traumas of his life. When I saw him virtually walk upside down on the wall, I thought of the power of defiance, of refusing to accept traditional limits, how intrinsic that is to a boy's development (and, perhaps, to the essence of *parkour*, a sport that seems tailor made for a boy like Milarepa).

I begin to ask Milarepa the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

"That's a stupid question!"

"What do you mean?"

Milarepa calls it a "bubble-in-the-answer question, dude! 'When you think about'" He mocks the question, speaking in a sing-song voice. I had been told by his teacher that Milarepa can be confrontational and how, at times, it flashes out of nowhere, seemingly.

"It's sort of like asking if you see yourself more as a thinker or a feeler-type," I try, dissatisfied with my own explanation. Actually, this is not exactly what the question means.

Milarepa dismissively asks, "Is this what this whole thing is going to be about—you asking me a bunch of questions? No way!"

I tell him that it does not have to be like that at all.

"Well, what does it have to be like? Are you gay, by the way?"

"I'm not, but I really hate that question!"

"Because you are gay?"

“No, because I knew at least two gay kids who were nearly destroyed by kids like you who bullied them!” This is not the way I need to be going here, lashing out back at Milarepa. “I hate bullying in any form.”

“So do I.” He has softened a bit. “I have a cousin who’s gay; anyone f**ks with him, I’ll kick their ass! I don’t care if you are gay. I just thought the question was f**ked.”

Although I hate to segue into an etiquette moment, I tell Milarepa that he is going to have to put “air quotes” around that word, “Say ‘f-ed up’ or something.” I have already been over this, taking a risk, on the first night with the parents, the introductory night. I knew it might throw some of the parents off when I told them about my “method” for dealing with the fact that a lot of kids swear at this age. I told them that my approach was to “reduce the habit, and make them aware of it,” and my preferred method of putting air quotes, or using an acronym, such as one coined by a middle-school group I had: PFC was our chosen acronym for Pretty F**king Cool, which, if anyone asked, became Pretty Freaking Cool.

I then tell Milarepa the story of a boy with whom a friend worked years ago in the Student Assistance Program (SAP) in our district. He had come to her because he punched a kid in the face after being called “Gay Boy” one too many times. He and his mother had come to see my friend because this 11th-grade boy had been suspended for 5 days for violence. It was a requirement that they come for a counseling session at the district SAP before he returned to school.

During the course of the school year, my friend saw this boy several times, and also spoke with his mother. She even spoke with the pastor at his Church. Her mistake, she felt in retrospect, was that she failed to really grasp the extent of the boy’s despair. To make matters

worse, she had been a member of the same church as the boy and his family for a number of years, though she and her husband had switched to another church when they moved.

I tell Milarepa how this boy was wrestling with something even deeper than bullying: his Catholic faith, which he felt a great love for, was at war with his homosexuality. He was torn between his natural, awakening sexual appetites and a teaching in the Church that condemned him as a “sinner.” I try to convey to Milarepa how difficult it was; my friend did not want to get in the middle of his religion, even while she tried to help the boy see how his basic nature was, in essence, good. At the time, I had talked to my friend about Matthew Fox, the Dominican priest who wrote about the “original blessing” that was part of our human identity, a level that ran even deeper than the grafted-on teaching of original sin. My friend had then recast our theological discussions in forms that she felt would work with an 11th-grade boy.

Focused and utterly serious now, Milarepa asks, “What happened?”

“He killed himself.” I tell Milarepa how I feel as if this was like being bullied not just by kids at his school, but also by somebody’s idea of religion. I tell him that is why I hate that question, “Are you gay?”

“Do you get it?” I ask, looking right into Milarepa’s eyes, finding my own sense of rightness in this moment: a power that wishes not to inflict but to instruct. Now, it was my turn to be fierce. “I know you use that term goofing around, but I hate it. Someone can die because of some words. If you get nothing else from me this semester, maybe you’ll think about that. Remember I told you that I saw you as a warrior?”

“Yeah.”

I ask Milarepa if he knows that the word SWORD, if you rearrange it, becomes WORDS. I tell him that he can use his words like a sword, to cut through to the truth—or he can, instead, gut someone with his “sword.” “It’s up to you.”

I look at Milarepa and he seemed somehow arrested in his contentiousness, if not softened. I know that with boys like him there is a great hunger for intensity, for drama even, and it is something they rarely find in their actual classes. So, even though our dialogue seems to have gone off-track in some ways, at least it is intense! I look down at the questions.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“Well, I think you already told me about that. You’re willing to fight for someone else’s feelings, right?”

“I didn’t say that.”

“Well, you did, in a way.” I remind Milarepa how he talked about how protective he feels toward his friends who are female. I am feeling a bit more in command now, but not in a bravado-sort of way. I have seen before how a certain articulate versatility, a facility with language sometimes just . . . shows up in me when dealing with challenging boys. Although I do not articulate it consciously, I know that Milarepa is used to commandeering dialogues right from the get-go. Even though I am feeling my usual enervated lassitude (a byproduct of all that is going on in my life), something grabs hold of my weariness, props me up, and gives me a robust jolt of energy—exactly what may be needed to get Milarepa’s attention. I can already tell that trying to mentor Milarepa will mean, as Malidoma Somé once said, that “there are some skirmishes” (Meade et al., 2002, track 1). It will be worth it though, if I can find, and if Milarepa can encounter, the shining gentleman within the blunt warrior.

“You said you would be willing to f-up anyone who messed with your friends—even your ‘gay’ cousin! That says to me that their feelings are pretty important to you.”

“Okay, that’s true.”

I tell Milarepa that, getting ready for working with them, I have been wondering a lot what it means to have fierce empathy, fierce compassion. I had spent some time with the group on the first meeting, talking about the words *empathy* and *compassion*. I saw how Milarepa had a good understanding of the two words, especially for a ninth-grade boy. So many had not a clue as to the meaning of either word.

We talk about how empathy and compassion are sometimes used in a way that a boy could feel as if these qualities are “soft” or “weak” even. I tell Milarepa that, to me, there is nothing more powerful for a male than being strong enough in himself that he can actually allow himself to know and feel how others are feeling, which is empathy, and how it takes so much courage to actually do something when you see someone suffering, which is compassion.

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

When I ask this question, not really expecting an answer, Milarepa mentions that he thinks there is something even more powerful than empathy and compassion, and it is also just one word. Now he has really got my attention.

“What word is that?”

“Forgiveness. I’ve had to forgive a lot of people in my life,” he says. A moment of stillness, of knowing, the truth of that statement reverberating—and then the bell rings; not the bell of truth, but the obnoxious school bell that always strikes me as a sound that has the quality of animal herding!

“Later!” Milarepa says, going out.

As sometimes happens in mentoring (and in therapy), this is a doorknob moment, telling me so much about this proud soul. Forgiveness is one of his master keys.

Milarepa’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in BAM! BANG!

Breathe out invisibility

Breathe in SMACK! POW!

Breathe out justice

Breathe in WHACK!

Breathe out forgiveness (or don’t; I don’t give a . . . haha!)

Mentoring moments, week 3 (from Mentor’s Journal). It took one word, *forgiveness*, to confer an essential window into Milarepa’s life. When we meet, Milarepa explains to me that he was taken out of his home several years ago because of abuse. His aunt, with whom he now lives, is a wonderful woman who works very hard for him and his brother, also a fierce young warrior who mostly expresses himself through fighting, now in middle school. He does not mention his uncle.

I tell Milarepa that I appreciated his poem. “It was direct and powerful.”

Milarepa is having none of this praise and pronounces his poem to be “a piece of crap. I don’t write poetry.”

I disagree. I ask him if we can at least agree that it was honest?

Milarepa concedes that it was honest, says he “wasn’t going to get into specifics there.”

I tell him that is not what the poem was supposed to be for. I say that the poem did exactly what it was supposed to do though, which was to invite the . . . courage to write about a moment where he felt something strongly, whether it was about himself or another.

“That was more like a thousand moments. A lot went on. I don’t really talk about it.”

“Right. But you put forgiveness in there somehow—almost like you had to . . . not because someone said you had to; but because something in you pushes you to at least think about it.”

Milarepa says that one of the people who was physically abusive has died. He has thought a lot about what made them “so screwed up” that they had to “feel better by hurting a kid.”

He says that he put “forgiveness” in there, in the poem, but that it is not something he has been able to do in his actual life. “I don’t know if they deserve forgiveness, even from God. I’m still burning with anger whenever I think about them.”

“So, maybe it was more like a wonder, like just wondering if that kind of violence can ever merit”

“What does *merit* mean?”

“Deserve. . . . Like you were just wondering, in your poem, if that kind of abuse would ever deserve—merit—forgiveness?”

“Yeah. I don’t have an answer for that.”

I do not have an answer, either. We leave it at that. I find it remarkable that this 15-year-old boy is haunted by forgiveness, when it would be so easy for him to not forgive. If I give anything of value to Milarepa today, in this mentoring moment, it is that I do not have easy answers, either for or against. Maybe he will get from me the idea that some big questions, hell, most of the big questions require us to sit with them, be troubled by them, and to see what arises in us from a deeper, wiser place.

Milarepa is a wounded warrior. Might he one day be a wounded warrior-healer? I believe I see seeds of this, already, in the way he has allowed forgiveness to enter his wounded heart.

Introduction to Milarepa's "Meeting With Mentor" Write. Milarepa took this assignment quite literally. He liked the notion that we had a "wise mentor within" so much so, that he decided to cast his write as a dialogue between "ME" (which he said stood for "Me Eternally") and "MA" (Me Ancient—i.e., Milarepa's "ancient" wise person within). I had to wonder if part of the attraction to this model had to do with his disregard and sometimes disrespect for authority figures; this way, the "authority" lay within himself, and he did not have to give this power to anyone else. But was not that part of the message that I, as Mentor, was trying to convey? Was not my task to be a proxy for the wise elder, the Mentor within themselves?

Given the fact that Milarepa had been taken from his mother, it seemed noteworthy, at least to me, who loves the revelatory aspects of language, that he had chosen an acronym for his ancient wise person that was the same word as that for mother—MA. I decided *not* to point this out to him. Once again, the sheer fact of completing a writing was significant for Milarepa.

Milarepa's "Meeting With Mentor Write." (He entitled it, "A Talk Between ME and MA.")

If I could time travel and meet another version of myself, and those two people could talk, I would call them ME (which stands for Me Eternally), and MA (which does stand for something; it means Me Ancient). This is what I think they would say to each other:

ME: Hello there. I heard you are wise.

MA: The wise never say they are wise. It is stupid to think you are wise.

ME: Wow, that IS wise!

MA: How are you doing?

ME: Pretty good.

MA: Is there anything you wanted to talk about today? I don't know how much time this time-warp will stay open for. We should try and talk about something big.

ME: I can't get this forgiveness thing out of my mind.

MA: Your mind? What about your heart?

ME: What do you mean?

MA: I mean that forgiveness is something that happens in your heart more than your brain!

ME: Okay, whatever. When I think about it with my head, I can't see any reason why I should forgive the people who tried to destroy my life. Even if they are family.

MA: And with your heart?

ME: Then I'm even more mad. It's just HURTS every time I think of all that sh*t that happened.

MA: Then who ever told you that you HAVE TO forgive them?

ME: I thought YOU did, MA!

MA: Maybe. I forget. I'm ancient, remember. Bad memory.

Mentoring moments, week 8 (from Mentor's Journal). I reflect to Milarepa that his dialogue with his ancient "MA" brought him to the same place he has been at all semester—the question of forgiveness.

I tell him that "it says something big that you keep coming back to forgiveness."

Milarepa tenses up, his face tight. "What big thing does it say?"

I tell him that I do not know, honestly. And I do not know that he has to figure it out.

Sometimes, the hardest thing to do is to just accept that there is not an answer.

Milarepa says, "I feel like things are just hanging there, like I can't get into the next part of my life till I figure this out."

"I thought it was pretty amazing, in your writing, when you told your ancient part that it was he who told you that you needed to forgive."

"Yeah, that surprised me even!"

"If he were here right now, I might challenge him about that."

"What do you mean?"

"I guess I don't like the 'should' part of it. Forgiveness grows naturally when we let ourselves feel our pain. It flowers—if it's supposed to. I'm not even sure everything 'has to' be forgiven."

"You got that right. It's not like these bolts of lightning are going to shoot out from my heart and shoot into the people I'd be forgiving."

I tell Milarepa a story about a boy I once worked with who was autistic, brilliant, a scholar of mythology already in seventh grade. The boy used to pluck out his eyebrows (trichotillomania), and was teased mercilessly, called “cancer kid.” When the boy finally had enough of it, after years of being teased, being an outcast, he punched one of the boys who had long been teasing him right in the face. Milarepa laughs, and I wonder if this is the best “role model” story for him, after all! When I asked that boy what he wanted in his life, near the end of our session, the boy looked at me with a kind of wonder, and said, “I want to have healing rays beam out from each of my fingers.”

“You can,” I told the boy, and now tell Milarepa.

Introduction to Milarepa’s “Compassion Write.” Throughout the semester, Milarepa was caught by the idea of a *compassion warrior*. It seemed to be a concept that allowed him to keep his fierceness, while continuing his dialogue with forgiveness, a dialogue that raged and flowed within his own heart.

Milarepa’s “Compassion Write.” (He entitled it, “Compassion Warrior.”)

Compassion warrior. Two words. Compassion and Warrior—they don’t seem to go together, do they? How about Fiery Compassion Warrior? Even worse, right? Wrong!

Let me paint you a picture. Once upon a time . . . Yes, that’s the way to begin. Once upon a time, everyone lived in peace. It was a golden time. Gods and humans lived together on the earth. It was paradise, really. What happened? What screwed everything up?

Well, no one really knows. Pain? There was always pain: Women giving birth, people suffering from being sick, and the pain of war, war, war. But this was different. Somehow pain that should never have been on earth got stuck here because of the stupid way humans lived. People were then in worse pain than regular pain. Every year it got worse, till you get to our time and it’s piling up like you wouldn’t believe.

Mostly people just zombie-out. They forget about all the pain all around and inside them. There’s so much that you can blind yourself with, to block the pain. But then it just gets worse and worse, and what are you going to do when a baby is born and then dies because it can’t even breathe in all this pain? That’s where the Fiery Compassion Warriors are needed.

What? You thought I was going to give you a solution? A happy ending? This is not easy stuff, man! All’s I’m saying is that I’m signing up. I’m going to be one of those

compassion warriors who is on fire to make things better. I want a baby to take one clean breath on this earth. I want the golden time to come again. But I can't do this alone. We need lots of Fierce Compassion Warriors.

Mentoring moments, week 13 (from Mentor's Journal). What is truly worth fighting for? What is not? I am enthusiastic about Milarepa's Compassion writing even though, after two rewrites it still reads more like a draft and is all over the map. But that does not matter in the context of mentoring. He has made a link in here, himself as part of a new or an ancient lineage: The Fiery Compassion Warriors. He has articulated the extent of the pain that is part of human life now, part of life on earth.

But what about sword/words? I suggest to Milarepa that even with his quick rewrites, the essay he has given me is more like a seed. It has the energy, the inspiration—and the compassion. He sees it as a sort of credo and testament and is not at all concerned about its rough, disjointed appearance; in fact, he could care less! He shows it to everyone, proud.

When I suggest maybe one more rewrite he laughs.

“Just give me a lower grade.” He knows that there are no ‘grades’ proper for *Odyssey Writes of Passage*.

I have to take this “success” in context. Milarepa rarely finishes any writing assignments, and he has completed most all of them during the past few months; sometimes haphazardly, sometimes with a bit more care, but rarely willing to rewrite. Maybe then his “Compassion Write” is just perfect. So, all I am doing in respect to the writing process is planting a seed, really: the idea that there might be something worthwhile about working and reworking a piece of writing.

Closing mentoring moments, week 14 (from Mentor's Journal). During the course of the class, Milarepa has gotten into a few fights. He has almost gotten suspended a few times, but

somehow just managed to stay clear. In our final meeting, I speak with him about how he “radiated.” I explain to Milarepa that each person has a “radiation,” an energy that goes out from them, and that people pick up on that energy, no matter if they are conscious of it or not. I point out to him that he is really good at reading people, that he has a sort of razor instinct for sensing brewing conflict when it is “radiating” from others; but that he seems to have been largely unconscious, or only semiconscious of how often his “radiation” is a major factor in the hostility that is coming back at him. In this sense, he constantly underestimates his own strength, the power of his “radiation.”

Throughout our odyssey together, Milarepa and I had worked at helping him to develop a greater flow of self-empathy—through mindful breathing and through a practice of remembering the day backwards before he went to sleep, trying to zoom in on those moments when he felt really happy, or really angry, or sad. What was going on inside of him at these moments? All of this was to help him become more mindful of the flow and fire of his own intense feeling-life.

By the time we reach this final mentoring moment, Milarepa has begun to get that how he approaches people is part of what he can expect to get back from them as well. He has at least begun to contemplate what he deliberately would put into the world. Somehow, he links his angry radiation to the pain he felt as a child.

“What would you tell that little boy?”

“I’d tell him that The Compassionate Warrior is here; he can chill.”

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Milarepa the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

“Not that sh*t again,” Milarepa laughs.

“Come on—try!”

“My feelings? Hmm. . . . I really don’t have an answer to that; I mean, I don’t know how to answer that. I still think it’s a stupid-ass question! What part do you think they play?”

I tell Milarepa that I think his feelings play a huge part. I tell him that he is a young man of deep, intense, passionate feelings. “I told you in the beginning; you remind me of an ancient warrior who is waking up in a strange, modern time; a time that doesn’t even really know what it means to be a compassionate warrior.” I remind him that I saw him come to the defense of different guys in the class, of that friend of his, the girl outside the class that day, when someone was “talking crap to her. All that was part of the big, big feelings he has for people.

“So, there, you’ve got an answer!”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“I think you kind of nailed that one, too.” Milarepa talks about how he is still puzzled about the “whole forgiveness thing.” It is something he thinks about a lot: “Like I somehow have to forgive everybody cause they were such poor f-in’, stupid idiots.” For a second, he takes a sharp breath, and then tears start falling, just for a moment, then he pulls himself up, letting it flow, then snapping back, this budding warrior. It is as if the wave of the past, which he has kept at bay through all sorts of stratagems, this dam has finally broken open, just a bit. The compassionate warrior’s fire has turned to water, and somehow that is okay, just sitting there, the tears themselves the “answer” to everything Milarepa and I need to know.

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

I do not ask the final question. I feel like Milarepa’s tears *are* an answer.

Osiris. Opening mentoring moments as well as Osiris’ responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). One of my personal nemeses is apathy. In the decade that I have been mentoring teenage boys, meeting the dull twang of apathy is perhaps my biggest challenge. Looking out into a face that is neither interested, moved, nor inspired tends to evoke insecurities, desperate stratagems (like wanting to jump-start the process of teaching or mentoring, shock my students “awake”). It also brings up my “issues” about the school system itself, my fears—judgments?—that it is actually shutting kids down, the exact opposite of *educere*, drawing out (the genius) from within.

That apathy is Osiris’ central persona I quickly observed in the introductory meeting, which he attended with his father. I know already that Osiris, a razor-thin, 14-year-old Hispanic boy, has suffered from a rare illness his entire life. He has often missed long periods of school, allowed to continue his studies, to the extent that he is willing to study at all, by having a “home and hospital” teacher visit him. This year, he is doing better, health-wise, and so has missed a lot less school.

Osiris’ teacher has shared her experiences of their first few days together: Osiris is prone to joking about nearly everything, often playing the class clown. He periodically puts his head down on the desk and rests, something that she tolerates because of his illness. He insists that his perpetual tiredness is not from using drugs.

My abilities for matching the resonant frequency so as to align to empathy seems to be expanding; yet this is not always a positive. It certainly is not always a “feel-good” experience. In this first meeting with Osiris, I almost instantly feel exhausted, a bone-level weariness, even though I was feeling reasonably energetic (for me, these days!) a short time ago. I have to rally

myself to attention, as I notice that I am slumping, perhaps in resonance with Osiris' posture and attitude.

As I summon my attention by taking a few mindful breaths, I see that my initial intuitive process of listening for Osiris' name seems to have a certain haunting mythic quality in and of itself. The boy who sits before me is scattered in his attention, in a veritable somnolent state, dragging himself through school, through life, with his arch sense of humor, his irony, a combination of ancient man in a young body, who has nevertheless suffered much. In the myth-stories of Osiris, the god was chopped into pieces by his brother Set, and the pieces scattered across the Nile. It was the task of Isis to gather the broken fragments that were Osiris, to bring them to a new whole. Another mythic image for mentoring: gathering the soul shards?

There is an aloof quality to Osiris, the young man to whom I have given that name, as if, nearly all the time, he is only very partially present. I believe this may be a byproduct of his illness, of having spent so much time "checked-out," his body parked in class, his mind a million miles away.

How can I even begin to bring back his scattered attention? I think about the moment when I originally met with the whole class for the first time, introducing a "mindful moment," the basic follow-the-breath activity, which would be our "home-base." I remember how I tried to not make a big deal about it, normalizing mindfulness, not wanting to evoke resistance. It was Osiris who had first put his head down—and promptly fell asleep. A trendsetter in recalcitrance, I remember now the embarrassment I felt, the sense of helplessness, as, one-by-one, two other boys put their heads down. Later, as we were leaving, it was Osiris though who had said that he really liked that part of our work together. I could not tell if what he liked was the sleeping or the mindfulness. At least he did not interfere.

Osiris has no qualms telling me again, “I hate writing.”

I tell him that I hated a lot of the writing I had to do in school, as well—even though I actually loved writing.

“I hate any kind of writing,” he counters.

I really struggle with how to even ask my initial three questions to Osiris. His weariness is like a wave washing over us, through the classroom, out into the halls, following him like a dark angel. It is an infectious state—especially if the mentor himself “has a thing” about apathy!

Osiris has developed a sort of bug-light protection around him. The more a teacher, or in this case a potential mentor, leans into him, challenges him, the more he ups the ante, zapping anyone in the vicinity with his palpable apathy, attacking their weakness.

The only way I can see my way through this, at least in our initial mentoring encounter when I am getting to know and attuning to Osiris, is to plunge forward and not buy in to the fountain of apathy that flows so abundantly around him. I keep asking myself, “Where has wonder or awe gone in this boy? Where has even *interest* gone?”

I ask Osiris the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

“I don’t have any feelings. Or thoughts. I’m just . . . here.”

I suggest to Osiris that he actually sounds very . . . Zen.

Osiris laughs. “Yeah, I’m freakin’ Buddha! Didn’t you know?”

I rather dogmatically state to Osiris that Buddhists would say we are all Buddha, potentially. “They say that we each have the seed of being Buddha in us.”

Osiris seems to barely hear that. Instead, he asks, not without bitterness, why I am even interested in him . . . in the group? “We’re the retarded class.”

“I don’t see it that way at all.”

“How ‘Buddha’ of you!” Osiris lays his head down. “I’m tired.”

“Me, too.”

Osiris laughs again, bitterly; but I can see that this is also a sort of test. He loves to push it to the limit, and then when people give up on him, it confirms to him that (a) He’s impossible, (b) No one cares, and (c) He/They really *are* the “retards.” It also allows him to elude accountability, purposefully showing up, choosing to be present.

“Okay, Mr. Buddha. Then how about if we both just take three mindful breaths?”

Osiris looks up, his interest mildly awakened. He asks if I really mean it when I said I had 10 bucks for anyone who could repeat back, word-for-word, Jonathan Kabat-Zinn’s (2006) definition of mindfulness.

“Yes, but I was hoping no one would, since all I had with me was 10 bucks, and I needed that for lunch and dinner!” As I always do, I had given the boys Kabat-Zinn’s (2006) briefest definition of Mindfulness: “Pay attention, on purpose, moment to moment, non-judgmentally, as if your life depended on it” (track 3). I have never had a student remember it word-for-word, so I was once again able to keep my money—and, to challenge them to pay more attention, just in case they could “win” at a later date. I told the boys that if they remembered nothing else from me the entire semester except this definition and then tried to live by it, or at least wake up to the challenge it presented from time to time in their lives, then I would have succeeded.

I talk Osiris and myself through a basic follow-your-breath, let-thoughts-come-and-go mindfulness meditation, insisting first that he lift his head up, keeping his eyes open or closed, as

he chooses (he chooses closed). I think that my own attempt to get some sort of a result, get Osiris to answer the three questions, could very easily be taking me *out* of the present moment. Always this mindless momentum of “no child left behind” (what does that really mean?) and “race to the top” (what does the top look like, anyway?). With such a momentum, presence goes into exile. I wonder if perhaps Osiris, at some level that perhaps even he is not conscious of, is hungry for presence. I remind myself that occupying the seat of Mentor is a moment-to-moment task of presence. Although I could never locate the quote’s source, I remember seeing once that Martin Buber said that “When two people relate to each other authentically and humanely, God is the electricity that surges between them.”

I close my eyes, as well, after the first minute of giving instructions. When I open them again, a few minutes later, I see that Osiris has laid his head down and is, in fact, asleep. Here I was thinking that we had entered into this profound meditation together, that I could somehow bypass his incredible lethargy, his years of “failure” at school, his absolutely enveloping boredom that surrounds him like an anti-aura of apathy! I gently nudge Osiris and he looks up at me and smiles.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“Absolutely no importance at all-zero,” he mumbles, unwavering in his adherence to the great doctrine of Nothing. Yes, it is like he has the Buddhist concept of Emptiness, but with no nourishment, no sense of wonder or compassion. It is Nothing as a palpable ghost, a spirit-sucker, and it is against this that I will wrestle throughout the semester, I am sure.

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

“I’m not suffering. Are you suffering?”

“Yes,” I say, not without truth! “Time’s up.”

Osiris stands up and mutters goodbye, shuffles out. Breathe, Mentor—breathe!

Osiris’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in nothing
 Breathe out Nothing
 Breathe in something
 Breathe out Something
 Breathe in breathing in
 Breathe out breathing out
 Breathe in whatever
 Breathe out whatever

Mentoring moments, week 4 (from Mentor’s Journal). Osiris has been absent for nearly 2 weeks after writing his “*Tonglen Poem.*” He has been sick with a bad flu, to which he is very prone, perhaps due to his generally weak immune system. When we finally meet this morning, he seems even more listless, bored, sinking beneath the floor. He has done none of the schoolwork that was brought to him by the “home and hospital” teacher and is not doing any work in any of his classes.

I cannot divine motivation in Osiris. Like his ancient namesake, he is scattered, his motivation dismembered. Yet, following the imaginal lines of his name, perhaps this is another aspect of Mentor’s task; to find the scattered pieces of his motivation, to bring him back to life even—or at least to “attending” school. Somehow that seems too formidable a task, hubristic in the extreme. I feel the pull downwards, a lassitude, exhaustion; why not just let Osiris float down the Nile of . . . denial, his refusal of the call to cross from eternal childhood into maturity; his cleavage to nothing at all, into a permanent mummification? How many times has the bug-light zap of his inertia zapped all initiative in his teachers, his elders? Who am I to think that I can offer something different, really?

When I pull out the “*Tonglen Poem,*” Osiris giggles.

“Pretty good, huh?”

I tell Osiris that, actually, it’s better than he knows, deliberately trying to catch his attention.

“It is?”

I explain to Osiris how I believe that the poem actually really matches how he feels inside—or at least how I feel that he feels. I mention about empathy being knowing what someone feels and also feeling what they feel . . . at least a little bit. I tell him that the way he wrote the poem matched how I feel when I am talking to him. I listlessly recite: “Nothing, Something, Whatever, Whatever”

“Are you making fun of me?” he asked, a little too tired to be classified as *irritated*, but at least mildly . . . piqued.

“I’m just trying to get your attention,” I say. “You have a big ‘I Don’t Give A Fuck’ sign waving over your head. But there has to be something that you care about, something that you enjoy, or even love.” I deliberately use the “F word,” a leap of desperation to get his attention.

“The Beatles.”

“What?”

“The Beatles. The group, The Beatles?”

“Not rap?” I ask, betraying my stereotyping.

“I hate rap.”

A discussion follows about the Beatles, favorite songs (*I Am The Walrus* for me, *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* for Osiris); favorite Beatle (John for me, George for Osiris); and favorite album or CD (*Sergeant Pepper* for me, *The White Album* for Osiris). It is literally the first time I see something resembling, or at least approaching enthusiasm in Osiris.

It turns out that Osiris is a veritable treasure house about The Beatles. He speaks about them almost like they are still up and running. “They are the soundtrack of my life,” he says, his eyes betraying glints of light. I remember that the word *enthusiasm* means “to be filled with the gods.” Is there a way to connect Osiris to enthusiasm for his own life through the Muse of Polyhymnia, Muse of Sacred Song?

He talks about how “f-ed up” it was when George Harrison was stabbed. Osiris even offers his theory that the stabbing may have somehow started the cancer that eventually killed him. Somehow this theory has not been worked out too clearly, but I do not care about that; I am excited that he feels excited about anything, passionate, even, about the Beatles, especially George. He says that George was the “wise” Beatle, and that he was overshadowed by John’s “weird genius” and Paul’s “unbearable cuteness.”

The difference between Osiris’ affect when talking about his cherished Beatles, especially George, and his usual somnolent demeanor is remarkable. It is like The Beatles are the Isis-factor, their magical musical motifs fanning his slumbering soul awake. It is remarkable to see his attention focused and clear, as if by connecting to this line of music that he loves, the “soundtrack” of his life, he has . . . woken up a bit—or at least stirred himself.

I learn that, apparently there is a Beatles song for every possible mood Osiris could have, for anything that could possibly happen in his life, past, present, or future. It is all there, a treasure waiting for him.

My mind shifts to practicalities; thinking how we can somehow “use” the Beatles, his love of their music, to leverage himself into school, into a wider life—and then I stop myself. Where am I going with this . . . utilitarianism? Has there ever, in the history of Osiris, been an adult, an elder who has just sat with him in his love of the Beatles, the one thing, apparently, that

seems to bring him a sense of joy and light, helixing out of the misery of childhood illness, the torpor of school and its tor-mentors?

I ask Osiris, “What would you say to George Harrison if you could have a dialogue with him?” He starts to tell me, and I suggest, “Write about that for your mentor writing, when we get to it. Just pretend you and George are hanging out together.”

“Maybe.”

Osiris’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” This is what he offered.

“George lives!” Was I dreaming? How was it possible? I held something in my hand that looked like a lottery ticket. I looked closer and it had an address. What? It was a house right down the street from me. I began running, which is something I usually hate doing, because of all the surgeries I’ve had. I ran and ran. I was nervous and excited.

When I got to the house with the address, a little black dwarf sat outside, wearing a top hat. He seemed to be guarding the door. I showed him the ticket, and next thing I know I’m sitting down face to face with George. He’s the George from “All Things Must Pass,” long hair flowing down his shoulders, totally cool. The dwarf comes in and tells me George only has ten minutes. “After that, he’s going back upstairs,” he hisses. Upstairs, as in back to heaven? Don’t know.

I remember that my teacher, Mr. Shefa said, “Ask him three questions,” so I do.

“Why does your guitar weep, and why does it weep gently?” I ask. George gets very sad. He sweeps his hands around in a big circle, but says nothing. Does he mean that the whole circle of life is sad? I have Zero (0) idea.

“Why am I so tired all the time?” George pulls his chair up really close to me, staring. It’s like he is giving me an x-ray or something.

“You forgot,” he says, real soft. “You forgot.”

“Forgot what?” Oh, sh-t; I didn’t mean for that to be my third question!

“You forgot,” he says again.

“Times up,” says the dwarf, opening the door. George stands up. He gives me a quick hug. I’m left there in tears.

What did I forget? I blew it!

Mentoring moments, week 9 (from Mentor’s Journal). Osiris keeps going flat, no participation, other than cracking an occasional joke. Although he completed his “Meeting With Mentor Write,” his strange encounter with an imaginal George Harrison, he then sits through the next few weeks of councils, mostly passing when it is his turn, falls asleep during the mindfulness meditations and the guided imageries, and refuses to do anymore writing.

I am torn. He is clearly not willing to engage with school, although he has learned to fly just enough under the radar to not be thrown out. He's getting all Ds, one C in Science, and an F in PE because he refuses to dress out. I cannot find any sense of "true North" in this young man. He wants to be left alone. It is impossible for me to conjure an image of what he might be doing with his life 5 years from now. There are no jobs for Beatles fans. The pain I feel about Osiris is a quiet torment. I have absolutely no vision of how to go forward.

Mentoring moment, week 14 (from Mentor's Journal). Osiris was absent when we did the "Compassion Write." He keeps telling me that he will write it at home, but I never see it. He has a piece of paper he keeps unearthing from the cave of his backpack, at the top of which he has scrawled "Compassion," in a shaky hand, in pencil. He gets it out, stares at it, then writes nothing. There is nothing to be gained whatsoever in trying to force Osiris to do the writing. He is producing the same for Odyssey as he is for his other classes: "Zero!"

Closing mentoring moments, week 15 (from Mentor's Journal). I remember a book from my master's program: *Psychotherapy Grounded in the Feminine Principle*. In it, the author, Barbara Sullivan (1989), talks about how there is a lot of failure in counseling work. The same could be said—and written—for mentoring at-risk teenage boys, in which even at a young age, the challenges they are facing sometimes appear insurmountable. I feel as if I have failed with Osiris, mostly. We had that moment around the Beatles, his bestirring himself to write his George Harrison mentor portrait with its enigmatic circle of sadness, the sense of loss.

At least Osiris knows that I am here for him. Perhaps that is the mentoring, this meeting without any agenda. He has become inured to any agenda-setting, any hoisting up of goals, the future, any "should" do this "shouldn't do that." He is a good-hearted young man who feels lost, dispirited.

It is important that I not place the burden of what *I* wanted to get done with him on Osiris. There are mentoring encounters that do not flower—at least in the way we had envisioned them. But who knows what seeds were planted? Perhaps this presence can be a touchstone for Osiris.

Working with Osiris puts me face-to-face with my hyper-agenda tendency as a mentor, my wish to “have a success.” But he is not a success trophy; he is a young man who has become arrested at the place where the call to leave childhood and the call to become an adult meets the place at the edge of sea and shore where his ancient, temporarily dispirited counterpart, Telemachus, once stood. This is his myth, a tale of suspension. I tell myself that perhaps, with young people like Osiris who did not feel a fire to grow, develop, transform, it is enough to have an elder in their lives who cares about them. Yet, I honestly cannot not really say that I have actually been Osiris’s mentor, since, in a sense, he never really bought into the relationship.

I have tried to find a way “in” through sharing moments of mindfulness, humor, through his love of Beatles music. But, it seems to me now that this was all about me; my looking for an intensity and a direction that seems to be largely nonexistent in Osiris. Perhaps it is the psychological, developmental counterpart to his malady. Because of his illness, his bones are literally brittle, especially the legs and feet. It is as if nothing anchors, gets “legs” under it. Nothing stands upon the earth and says, “I want to exist, to flourish.” I am face-to-face with the soul of apathy, the I-Don’t-Care-Virus.

For Osiris, talking about the class overall, he says, to my amazement, “It was fun. It was kinda cool.” He “likes” mindfulness, though he seemed to sleep through it mostly! He did not have this deep and profound experience, no great openings, or even small ones, just that moment of shared enthusiasm about the Beatles, and perhaps my willingness not to try to change him.

Was that the right strategy? Does that make me less of a teacher and more of a mentor? Did anything happen? Planting seeds.

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Osiris the three questions. My expectations for response are at bare minimum.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

“I’m not into this.”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“I’m sorry if I disappointed you, Mr. Shefa.”

I tell him that he did not. “I just wish that I could have inspired you more.”

Osiris answers flatly that he doesn’t “get too inspired.”

I suggest to Osiris that maybe he just has not found what really matters to him yet. “You shouldn’t consider that a failure. I would feel terrible if that’s the ‘message’ you got from me.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

His answer is chilling, somehow: “I wish there wasn’t so much pain in the world.”

“It’s like George’s guitar is still weeping.”

“Yeah. . . .”

There is a part of me, as a mentor, that wants to think that I touch the soul of every student, that I have maximized every mentoring moment, that somehow an awakening to empathy and compassion will happen in every student. It is not real. This is not a story. This is the life of Osiris that *I*, Mentor, am orbiting *through*. Perhaps this acceptance of him exactly as

he is, even though visions of what he could be appear on the walls of my imagination, perhaps this acceptance is the mentoring he needs at this time, one person who accepts.

I had a friend who is good at calligraphy write up the Five Points of Mindfulness (Pay Attention. On Purpose. Moment-to-Moment. Non-Judgmentally. As If Your Life Depends On It.) on a piece of parchment-like paper. I hand it to Osiris, as much out of a sense of failure as expectation. There is a ribbon around it. He opens it, reads, smiles.

“Thanks, Mr. Shefa. I’ll keep this.”

And then, he is gone—scattered.

Rimbaud. Opening mentoring moments as well as Rimbaud’s responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). Rimbaud is a weary yet intense Korean boy of 14 whose mother died when he was 8 years old. He is dreamy, opinionated, dry-witted, and often bored. Rimbaud is frequently absent from school, a pattern that has been consistent since third grade, and accelerated in middle school.

Rimbaud likes to write; poetry, rap lyrics, and “free-form, just writing down whatever I’m thinking.” Because of his absences, he has consistently gotten low grades; but, as is the case with nearly every “failing” student, he has, nevertheless, been promoted right through to ninth grade. The whole enterprise of school seems to bore him.

I have the feeling, when sitting down with Rimbaud, that he is totally checked out, his thoughts a million miles away, even while his body sits there in the chair, slumped, looking weary, bored.

On a hunch, I ask him a deliberately ambiguous question: “Why are you here?”

“The teacher said I had to talk with you.”

I clarify: I meant, why is he at school on this day? I tell him that the motive for why we are anywhere determines how we are. That seems to float right past him, and even I wonder why *I* have decided to take this circuitous route to a few simple questions.

Rimbaud says that his dad “makes” him go.

“Why are you on Earth?” I venture, even myself wondering where this is going.

Rimbaud isn’t having it and asks me, “Why are you on Earth?”

I feel like I am finally coming into focus here. I tell Rimbaud that right now, I think I am here in order to meet him. “That’s my purpose in this moment.”

I tell him that we can make this the most dead, boring, useless meeting possible, or we can talk about something that matters—something that matters to him, that is.

Rimbaud smiles slightly. He says that what matters to him is rap, and that I “don’t look like a rapper.” I laugh.

I tell Rimbaud that I have got an almost-teenage son who likes rap, and that, believe it or not, I like some rap, too. I add that it seems like he has “summed me up pretty fast.”

“Yeah, I’m good at that.”

I suggest that we begin with the idea that we do not know much about each other.

“Sure, whatever.”

“So, you like Rap?”

“Who doesn’t—I mean, kids my age.”

I ask Rimbaud if he could rap now—right now? “If I gave you a topic, could you rap about it?”

“You give me a subject or something, you mean?”

“Yeah.”

“Can I swear?”

“I don’t know; can you?” I tell Rimbaud that I would prefer that he did not swear; but that, more importantly, I am interested in how he raps. I tell him that if he can rap, he can write poetry, and if he can write poetry, than he can really add to this class. “A lot of you guys are allergic to writing; but you actually like to write.”

“Well, I like to rap, and sometimes I write my raps down.”

“Okay, so rap about . . . A Day When Everything Went Right.”

“Like that old-school song, by . . . Ice-Cube? It is called”

“It Was A Good Day.” Rimbaud is right. I stole the idea from Ice-Cube. A day when everything went right, instead of wrong, a perfect day, even. I did this one in Juvenile Hall, with kids who were looking at years behind bars. Every one of them had a dream of a good day. Yet some of them were looking at decades behind bars and might never actually have that day.

I explain to Rimbaud that the reason I am taking notes is so I can write about our meeting, so that I can better understand what happens, because I think it is that important.

Rimbaud is paying attention. He has sat up straight—a bit. He looks more alert, like his mind is already weaving a rap. He closes his eyes and then begins talking in a fierce incantation that belies the lazy, hazy way he speaks.

He launches into an amazing, spontaneous rap about pain, darkness, light—I am trying to write it down as he speaks (you cannot really call it singing), but am unable to totally keep up, even though it is short. It just pours out of him. I ask him if he could possibly repeat it. Rimbaud says that he does not know if he could repeat it exactly, but he is willing to try. Again, he closes his eyes.

It sounds like the same, or almost exactly the same words. I am able to get down most of it, writing, “It’s not right/No day’s light/No daylight/Just dark/No spark/Brain-parked/You say ‘succeed,’ I just scream and bleed/My creed.” There were a few lines I missed though, and neither Rimbaud nor I can resurrect them, lost in the sand-painting of the moment.

He looks up and smiles, challenging.

“Wow, that was amazing!”

“Hey, I could have gone on and on. This is what I do.”

I ask him if he wants to hear how an old guy raps?

“Sure.”

I have no idea what I am going to say or if I will make a complete fool of myself here before Rimbaud, as I do with Evin [my son] sometimes when I pretend to rap. But he just took a chance, and his rap was pretty revealing, especially as it just came pouring out of him, spontaneously. While there is strategy in mentoring, it is also a richly spontaneous enterprise, trusting my reading of the boy who I am facing, trusting what begins to form inside my mind as a response. What is the aim? To try and bring some life to the moment, to bestir Rimbaud, in this case, from the almost automatic, back-to-weariness state that he returns to even after his amazingly revealing eruption of rap.

I close my eyes. I begin. I chant a few lines, and hear Rimbaud giggling. I keep my eyes open. When I am done, I hold my fingers to my lips. I do not know if what I write down are the exact words I just chanted, but they are close. I write, “Time slips/Trips/Flips/Away/Seconds, minutes . . . a day/Dazed, I climb/Seek the divine/Seizing sand grains/The Reaper’s slain/Squeezing poetry from pain—Awakening lazy brains.”

Rimbaud is still cracking up, really laughing a beautifully free laugh. He high-fives me. “That was pretty bad!” Now he is primed. He closes his eyes again. He taps out a sort of slow military rhythm on the table, syncopated, insistent, but stately. I get almost every word. Rimbaud raps: “My good days?/Far away/Too much haze/I’m crazed/Remake the world?/You swines/I’m pearled/My spirit’s curled/Crouched/Slouched/Up for sale/Watch me flail/My ship?/It’s sailed!” This time, he opens his eyes and really looks at me, just for the briefest moment, guard dropped, no defiance, no slouch of do not give a f*ck. Just a moment. Seen.

“We should do a record, Mr. Shefa,” he says, half-kidding.

“I think I hit my peak there, my friend.” I tell Rimbaud about Homer, and the bards of his time; how they would recite their epic poems from memory. “They were like the rap artists of their day. You should read *The Odyssey*!”

I then explain to Rimbaud that though I would love to see if we could just rap back and forth for an hour, we need to move on. Some disappointment flickers across his eyes. Perhaps I should have lingered in the moment for a bit longer. Yet, I want to see if perhaps this spontaneity can be a platform for opening up the three questions—but I could have been more subtle in making this transition, I realize, with regret.

I ask Rimbaud the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Rimbaud says that he hates how his feelings are “always getting interrupted, especially at school.” I ask him what he means. He says that he likes to “dream a lot,” to feel his way into things, but school is all about “rushing to get one thing done after another,” so at the end of the day, you can have “a big pile of sh*t. Then you add homework sh*t, to make the pile bigger!”

Although I remind him about the language, I cannot help but smile, inwardly, at the image, even while thinking it is also quite sad. This is a bright young man's raw, unedited experience of school. He goes on to explain: "[School] doesn't care about my feelings; so I mostly don't bring em' to school. Why should I?"

Back and forth, Rimbaud explains that he comes to class—in order to get out of class. He came to school, this day—in order to get through this day, to get it over with (even though he admits it has been “fun” and “cool to do something different” with me). We then extrapolate: He will somehow get through ninth grade—in order to get finished with ninth grade. It will be the same for all of high-school; going . . . to get out. I remind him, again, of Kabat-Zinn's (2006) definition of Mindfulness; paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally, as if your life depended on it. He asks me if I think that teachers do that.

“I don't know; *I* try and do that; I try and live that way.” I admit that I often forget—but then I remember, wake up a little.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Rimbaud says he thinks that's a pretty personal question. He says that the person whose feelings he cares about the most is “no longer on Earth.” His mom. No, he doesn't want to say anything else about it.

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

In spite of not wanting to say anything else, Rimbaud says that he still remembers, “super clear,” when his mom was dying. He was 6 when she was diagnosed with cancer and 8 when she died. His whole life, once she was diagnosed, he says, was about “how to take away her

suffering.” When she died, he felt like God had not heard his prayers, but now he thinks it was just life: “Just death as part of life. It wasn’t something I did, or my father did. She just died.”

When I tell Rimbaud that my father just died, he says that he knows, that their teacher let them know. He says he’s really sorry.

Rimbaud’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in a mess
 Breathe out a bless(ing)
 Breathe in cruel
 Breathe out fuel (for love)
 Breathe in death, uncured
 Breathe out roses-words
 Breathe

Mentoring moments, week 7 (from Mentor’s Journal). After the openness of our initial interview, and his willingness to deploy his rap skills in writing the “*Tonglen Poem*,” Rimbaud seems to be closing back down. During our group sessions, he is fidgety during mindfulness meditations, falls asleep during the guided imageries, and is unable to complete the next three writing assignments, promising to do them at home, but not following through.

After a particularly difficult class session last week, during which Rimbaud interrupted me and several of his cohorts, I had to send him out of the class. Because he seemed to be shrouded in an attitude of taking everything for granted, I told him to sit outside and think of seven things for which he felt grateful in his life. I suggested that he write them down. He returned to his teacher, and gave her the writing. He had actually taken the directive as a challenge.

He wrote:

7
 Heaven, where Mom is.
 Stars, which light her way.
 Space, to dream.

Sadness, to rap.
 Laughter, not to cry.
 Rage, because I can.
 Now,
 Because yesterday
 And tomorrow
 Aren't.

Introduction to Rimbaud's "Meeting With Mentor Write." Rimbaud asked me if he could do his "Meeting With Mentor Write" as a poem. My first impulse was to say, "Yes." Anything that would keep these boys writing. But then I thought that perhaps I should be pushing him to learn to write essays, since that was "more important," within the school system, more important for college, etc. I bypassed that though; was that really what I was there for, essentially? With Rimbaud, I needed every buy-in vote I could get from him toward his own education. He had a mountain of "NOs" inside him, piled up, blocking him from actually attending, being *in attendance*, present, at school. I had seen that spontaneous bard awaken in him, and it was a thing of beauty.

In the beginning of our mentoring encounter, when I spoke to Rimbaud about how poets were ancient bards, I could see that he really liked the word *bard*, liked it as a title. I had told him about once hearing Matthew Fox speak about education, during which he had said that in ancient times, all teachers were poets and storytellers, or, as Fox called them, "bards." I remembered Fox saying, "If you weren't a poet, get out of the classroom." Rimbaud loved that. I suggested that when we did the Wise Elder Meditation, *his* elder could be a bard. Since he, Rimbaud, was a sort of modern rap-bard, he might want to think about his life being guided by an ancient bard, a spirit-bard, who understood the way he looked at the world, who understood that rap was his way of being a bard in this crazy world, of bringing beauty and poetry to even life's most painful moments. Rimbaud wrote his bard essay as his "Meeting With Mentor Write."

Rimbaud's "Meeting With Mentor Write." This is what he offered.

Me, nocturnal
 We meet
 He knows
 Glows
 Me?
 All crazy flow
 He shows
 Bard-fire
 How to find it
 Make it
 Steal it if I have to.
 He's here
 Can you see him?
 Left shoulder?
 Right?
 Day,
 Night.
 Mentor-Bard
 Torment hard
 Now I know
 How to glow
 One flow
 Bard of Fire
 Pain become flame
 We are the same
 Bard flames.

Mentoring moments, week 9 (from Mentor's Journal). Rimbaud is pleased with his poem. He likes the fact that "it doesn't explain anything," that, instead, it gives a flavor of the feeling he has about the bard, about his connection to this mythic figure. I tell Rimbaud that his poem shows him reaching for a connection with "the mentor inside of you."

Rimbaud says that he now "wants to get better at writing." I tell Rimbaud the story of the poet William Stafford. The great poet had a practice of writing a poem every day. It did not matter how good the poem was; the practice was to write a poem a day, no matter what. A student of Stafford's tried this for awhile, but then could not seem to keep up the practice. He

found it to be too hard. He came to Stafford and asked him what to do. Stafford's response was, "lower your standards!" Rimbaud laughs.

"If you want to get better at writing, just write, even a little bit every day. You should read more, too; stop priding yourself on being a writer who doesn't like to read!" I can feel that I am a bit loaded about this one, since so many of my students do not like to read, something that I still find so hard to grasp, since reading is, and also has been for me, a great odyssey in and of itself.

But there is something deeper about the poem that I open up with Rimbaud, and it has everything to do with empathy and compassion. It is right there, in his poem. I ask Rimbaud if he knows the word *alchemy*.

"No."

I tell him about transforming lead into gold, the ancient alchemists, the philosopher's stone, a kind of whirlwind tour through this material, with the emphasis being on the transmutation of one substance into another, and connect it to the way a poet can transform experience. From there, a link to transmutation of personal pain into the moving substance of poetry, the "fire" that he gets from the bard, this eternal flame that is passed down through the ages, but also born anew in the human heart.

"You, the writer, 'get it' about alchemy," I say. I praise him for being honest and brave enough to look at himself; not running from that pain, but of taking it and transforming it into . . . this poem . . . and poems that he has not even written yet.

We talk about how mostly people run from pain. We agree that the Bard is courageous. He is someone who can stand in the middle of the fire of pain and find expressiveness, not just

for himself, but because he touches something that everyone can understand, something “universal” about being human, he is able to reach others. His wisdom is the flame that heals.

“I like that: The Flame That Heals,” Rimbaud says, with a touch of wonder in his voice.

Introduction to Rimbaud’s “Compassion Write.” As with all the boys, I meet with Rimbaud very briefly before he starts his final writing. I have been thinking about the track of his writing; the theme of the Bard, the transformation of pain into poetry, the willingness to accept what is, to stand in the middle of whatever is happening, and write from there. Rimbaud has found a certain strength through the writing. I wonder if he has made an empathetic connection with the living lava flow of his own feelings but, more importantly, with something ancient, ever-new, within: the Bard who can transform pain into song. Always with Rimbaud, I am mindful of the primal fault-line in his psyche, his mother’s death at such a young age.

This time though, I do press for Rimbaud to write an essay rather than a poem, though I suggest that perhaps he can begin his essay with a poem, like he is quoting himself, or place a poem at the end, or even in the body of the essay. I know that school will be very difficult for him if he refuses to write in the essay form. I tell him how my own essay writing has been called “poetic” by a lot of people, and that there is no reason why he cannot write a poetic essay. It seems to be something he has never thought possible; essay writing is equated with “boring writing,” for Rimbaud, and for so many of these boys.

“I’ll give it a try, Mr. Shefa,” he says, sighing.

“Try not to freeze up. Just let it flow out.”

Rimbaud’s “Meeting With Compassion Write.”

B = Beautiful, A = Altitude, R = Righteous, D = Divine. B-A-R-D. There’s a Bard who flashes through time. He flashes into my life and reminds me of how crazy-wild-smart you can be with words. His words flow like tears, jump like crazy laughter. To reach the Bard, you don’t need a telephone.

You need two things:

Pain and Purpose. The pain comes with life. The purpose? You got to find that. But even if you're still just searching for the purpose part, and you try and sing your pain, the Bard will come. He sort of hangs around the centuries, waiting to show up in your life.

How do I know this stuff? Am I making it up? Am I sure that is whom I'm meeting, that figure, in flowing robes, who I catch a glimpse of?

It's not science, dude. So, no, I can't prove it to your doubting mind. But if you're asking that question, maybe you're not someone who catches this music. You're busy. You're ticking off time on your watch. You're more about time than eternity. I mean, the Bard could be walking right beside you, ready to tell you a story to blow your mind and heart, and you just keep looking at your watch, rushing, never living.

I was never one of those, but even I sometimes forget who I am, forget my eternal part. Then I go rushing to get through this second, moment, hour, day, week, month, year. Lucky for me, someone or something usually steps on my foot, tells me I should stop and smell the flowers. Wow! That's when I stop, look, and listen. That's when I meet the Bard again. He's right there, waiting.

He kind of looks like me, but better. He's lived, and I'm still trying to do that. But he's got time . . . and he's got . . . timeless.

I could say this much better in a poem. But we'll call it a night.

"A night?" A night/A light/Here comes the Bard-Knight. They say 'no pain'/No gain'/I say/This is pure gold.

Closing mentoring moments, week 15 (from Mentor's Journal). In today's meeting, I share with Rimbaud my respect and admiration for the way he took up each writing assignment, even producing an essay at the end, knowing that this was not easy for him. I particularly emphasize his ability to make an "inner connection" with the Bard, and how, I hope, he will realize that he can find this "voice" any time he "listens for" it.

During the course, I never tried to get him to open up about the loss of his mother. I felt confident that if he needed to write about her, he would. The pressing issue seemed to be for him to establish more of a connection with *himself*. Rimbaud's writing, I tell him, clearly shows him reaching for and sometimes finding that connection.

I explain that his writing is a living example of self-empathy, setting up a flow between his inner feelings and his "outer" notations. "You showed that, again and again, throughout the class, and I'm really proud of you."

“Thanks. This class wound up being amazing. I really didn’t know what to think at first, and I really wasn’t into ‘sharing my feelings,’” he says, using the phrase ironically.

“People always think it’s going to be like that, but really, I try and let you guys be the co-designers of the class.”

Rimbaud asks about next year, and I tell him that, due to funding, I am not sure what is going to happen, but I am pleased that he is interested. Even if we did not have it, I explain, Rimbaud and any of the boys can always contact me, through their teacher. Maybe I will be back. But even more important than me or the class coming back, I add, is that Rimbaud has made a connection to his own “inner-bard,” and, in my mind, I am thinking “tutelary spirit.”

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Rimbaud the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Rimbaud says that he likes the word *self-empathy*. “I didn’t even know what empathy meant, at first, and couldn’t understand why you kept going on and on about it,” he laughs.

I ask what made the concept finally sink in.

“I think it was when you started talking about flow, the way empathy is like a flow of. . . .”

“I think I said ‘signals . . . a flow of signals, from inside to out, or outside to in.’”

“Yeah. It made me think about how much I keep bottled up inside of me, and how rap and writing poetry is definitely a way to move that stuff out; but first, I’ve got to listen.”

“It’s like music that is always playing.”

“You talked about ‘hearing your own voice,’ and I realized all that was to do with empathy; listening to myself and to others.”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

“I was thinking about my dad the other day, and how he is so . . . I forget the word . . . like doesn’t show emotion much, always careful and in control. . . .”

“Stoic?” I suggest.

“What does that mean?”

“It’s sort of like being able to stay in control, emotionally, even when the world around you and even inside you is rockin’ and rollin’.”

“Yeah. I think he was always that way, but even more so after my mom died. He really loved her.”

I tell Rimbaud that what he just described, his way of getting inside his dad’s feelings, “That’s empathy flowing outward, to your dad; for you to recognize that, I mean.”

“So, I never saw myself like I saw him; I always seemed pretty emotional to me. But now I can see how I was using my cleverness with words to hide behind. This class showed me that I could just tell it like it is, even if it’s not clever or smart.”

“That’s great. And what about feelings for others?”

Rimbaud pauses and says that he thinks he was “afraid of being overwhelmed by others’ feelings, especially my dad.”

“I can relate to that.”

“I became the word-spinner kid, the one who was clever with rhymes, jokes, stuff like that.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

“I can listen. Not just think of them as a story, as something I can write a poem about, or rap about. There’s a real person there, not just a subject for a poem.”

“You can just tune into what they’re feeling and see what they need—and then maybe try and give them some of what they need?”

“Yeah, rather than always having this . . . all . . . this feeling like I’m watching people to get a clever story or a rhyme. I don’t know. I still feel like I’m not saying it right.”

“Well, you can always write to me.”

“I might!”

It is no exaggeration to say that I see Rimbaud as being more grounded now. It makes me wonder about the grounding power of finding even a semblance of one’s inner voice—or bard. How much of school is dedicated to finding that voice, giving it room to unfold, and even to fully express itself? And yet, isn’t that what the word *education*, coming from the Latin, *educere*, literally means “to draw from within”? What can education mean if it fails to be a journey, an odyssey, toward this voice, excavating, healing even, finding its contours and range, and then letting it move out onto the page, into the classroom, into the world? What am I doing, as Rimbaud’s mentor, if I am not a midwife to this voice, finding itself at the w-rite of passage known as adolescence?

Beat. Opening mentoring moments as well as Beat’s responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). Beat, who is Hispanic, is a 15- year-old giant of a boy, already over 6 feet tall, with a broad build. He lives with both his parents. He has run away from home several times and has already experimented heavily with drugs. Beat says he has completely stopped using for over a year and is now determined to stay

in school. He has adopted an attitude and ethos from his favorite music, punk rock, a defiance toward authority, a flirtation with nihilism.

Beat describes himself as “a reader who doesn’t like to write.” The name *Beat*, partly reflects my impression of him as someone who would have been more at home in the beat era. But my choice of that essence name for him also reflects the fact that he has actually read, or tried to read, the original scroll version of Kerouac’s (2007) *On The Road*. I tell Beat how, in the early 1950s, Kerouac wrote the so-called scroll on eight long sheets of tracing paper, and how he taped those sheets together to form a scroll that was over 100 feet long! It was all one long paragraph, and he wrote it all in a 3-week blaze of glory, though perhaps partly fueled by amphetamines, which I “strongly don’t recommend.” Beat listens with great intentness.

Beat comments, “It sounds like they were never bored.”

Boredom; the great “B” word. I do not know if they were bored or not; if the whole amphetamine-fueled caravan was not one long escape from boredom, from the conformity of the Eisenhower years. I know that Beat, like so many boys I see, is bored much of the time. School “is boring, big time.” Going home, being at home is boring. Hanging out with friends? *Not* boring. So, Beat has found a thread of intensity in a scroll that Kerouac wrote in a blaze of glory over a half-century ago. We also talk about the fact that Kerouac died an alcoholic, his talent washed out, a raving, bitter man living with his aging mother.

I do not wish to dampen down the fact that Beat has found something of intensity that speaks to his soul, some instance, across the American fresco, of souls crossing the earth, seeking fire, engaging with the beauty of our country’s open spaces, bards being reborn as poets in the modern age. I wonder about the fact that such a work could speak to this young man.

Beat says he does not know if he can do the writing for this class. I tell him that, right now, we are not doing any writing; we are just talking. Do not worry about the writing. “Besides, anyone who likes to read as much as you do, can write,” I add, somewhat forcefully.

Beat tells me about a series of novels, written in the form of poems, that he really likes. *On The Road* was actually hard for him to read. He skipped around, but these books, he reads them, “I inhale them,” with great intensity. They have titles like *Crank* (Hopkins, 2004), and *Glass* (Hopkins, 2009), and tell about a teenage girl who spirals into heavy methamphetamine use.

My alarm bells are ringing, my antennae is up, with Beat. Kerouac (2007) and his amphetamine-fueled scroll. These novels, which, admittedly, I have read only in part, all about this young girl’s being consumed by what she calls “the monster” (Hopkins, 2004, p. 3) of crank or speed. Is he using?

Once again, mentoring is full of leaps, of taking chances, or there is no . . . awakening, no sense of breaking out of the adult-to-child, or teacher-to-child spell of boredom that leaves these boys already switched off, before we might even start communicating, let alone build a relationship. So, I decide, right up front, to speak as authentically as possible to Beat about my concerns.

I tell Beat that I want him to understand that I am asking not because I am looking to get him in trouble. I am asking because I am concerned, and because of my own experiences.

“Are you using meth?”

Beat shows little expression. Bad sign? I tell him that I am asking because of what he is reading—*On the Road*, which was written at least partly on speed; and then *Crank* and *Glass*. “When I was your age, we used to say ‘Speed kills’—because it did, and it does.” I tell Beat

about my best friend in high school, Bob, an amazing poet for someone so young, who bore a great resemblance to Jim Morrison, lead singer of the Doors. In 11th grade, Bob got into speed, big time, and nearly died. Then he got hooked on heroin. He began stealing to support his habit, including from me and my family. He and I were like soul-brothers.

Beat explains to me that he's "tried everything," but that he doesn't use anything now—"except coffee, which I am addicted to," he laughs. He saw some of his friends "go into a really dark place," and stopped, all on his own. Beat says that it was making him mean, too. "When you're living under a bridge, like I did for over a week last summer, you don't want to be on drugs, too. Being homeless, man; it's like its own freakin' drug!"

"So, you didn't like the person you became on drugs, even on weed?"

"That's right. Listen, my parents drug-test me, anyways, so you don't have to believe me. Ask them if you don't believe me."

"I'm not saying I don't believe you; I hardly know you. I'm just putting it right out there, at the beginning." Nothing. An elder and a young man just looking at each other, assessing. Beat seems to be a little more at ease. In a curious way, the intensity of our exchange about drugs seems to produce a sort of calm in him. It is like the stimulant drugs taken for ADHD, which have the effect of slowing the boys down, helping them to focus. It would seem to be counterintuitive, as would the listening to loud, punk-rock music, Beat's music of choice for calming down, his veritable sonic religion. He says that he "feels calm when the anger inside hits the anger in the lyrics," as if they match frequency, soothe, speak to something that is trying to be born in him.

I suggest to Beat that perhaps one reason he likes punk so much is because he cares so much. Again, counterintuitive, in that the whole notion of punk is the too-cool-to-care persona,

which I do see in Beat—slouched over the desk, his huge body so unconcerned with posture, his dirty vest with the sawed-off sleeves—at least less bored than when we sat down.

“What do you mean?”

I suggest to Beat that a person sometimes get mad at something because it insults or violates something they care about; like punk-rockers caring about social justice, people having enough, and being insulted by the lack of justice in the world. “The anger fuels the poetry. Maybe that’s something you could write about.”

Beat says he will think about it. He has written some thoughts down, at different times, in a sort of journal, and he promises to bring it to me to read. Then he reassures me that he is not taking any kinds of drugs, even weed. Of course, I do not know him well enough to know if this is true, but it will have to do for now. At least this moment of confrontation seemed to cause some sense of enlivenment in our dialogue.

I ask Beat the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Beat says that he thinks of himself as “a thinker.” He says that “acting out” his feelings has gotten him into trouble a lot, like when he ran away. He easily loses his temper. He says that he doesn’t really know how to look at himself “like a pie,” to “decide how much is feeling, how much thinking.” He wonders why I’m even asking the question.

I suggest to Beat that there is a connection, perhaps, between his anger and his love of punk rock—that the punk rock gives his anger a “place to go.” Again, we talk about how punk rock is “angry” about what is wrong in the world; the anger is the fuel for the music. I ask him if he has ever heard of Rage Against the Machine, and he has not. I tell him about Tom Morrello,

their amazing guitarist, who is an activist, a fierce advocate for social justice. It occurs to me that the difference between Beat, who is just whipped through the world on the wings of his anger, but has not found a purpose for this anger, and someone like Tom Morrello and Rage Against the Machine is that Tom has found a purpose for his anger, a righteous purpose, you might say.

Yet it is not too much of a stretch, when I look across at Beat, sitting there in his sawed-off vest, to see a latent, maybe a nascent connection between this young man, Tom Morrello, a young Bob Dylan, and back through Woody Guthrie, the Beats, who were all, as Allen Ginsberg (1957) wrote in *Howl*, his groundbreaking poem, “angel-headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night” (p. 1). Beyond that, even, all the way back to the angry prophets of Israel. Am I crazy, drawing these lines between this ninth-grade boy in Palm Desert, California, who does not like to write but who found a thread of meaning and passion in a scroll written a half-century ago, and the whole line of angry prophets, raging against injustice in the world?

What does this have to do with mentoring? How is this going to help him in school? Meeting with Beat, as it stirs up these deeper currents of mentoring in me, makes me wonder—doubt, actually—if the work I feel called to do with these young men actually has any place in this world—especially the world of public-school education? I mean, it is not like I am going to help them find a job as an angry prophet. Is mentoring about just giving a helping hand, or is it about igniting the soul itself? Can I be anything other than myself and be effective? This “call” to mentor is both strange and mysterious. I cannot narrow it down to one single, simple definition. It seems to have something to do with listening deeply, really beholding these young men, hearing their soul’s code or trying to, divine it, and then allowing myself to shape-shift into

whatever that nascent song is calling for. With Beat, it seems to be calling me to connect anger to purpose, in terms of social justice.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Beat says that he has a hard time with his parents, even now that he is back home. He had a hard time before he ran away each time, and he feels like now they are in a kind of “standoff.” Basically, “I just try and stay out of their way—especially, my dad.” He is tired of their fighting, he and his dad. I ask Beat if there was a time when he and his parents got along.

He talks about times when he, his mom, and his dad used to do things together. “Even if it was just stuff like going to the mall, we had fun—or, that’s how I remember it.” All this stopped when Beat hit middle school and started getting into trouble. Also, his dad, who works in construction, began having long gaps when there was no work, putting more burden on his mom, who works for the city and who also then began working at night, teaching English as a second language.

I suggest to Beat that perhaps he misses those times with his mom and dad, misses their closeness. I also ask him if maybe he feels bad for his dad, ever wonders what it might feel like to be out of work. He responds, “My dad’s pretty tough; he never shows his feelings. But, sure; maybe he actually feels like he’s letting down my mom and I by not always having work.”

I reflect to Beat that what he said actually *is* a statement of empathy, him trying to “feel into” how his dad might feel. Beat just listens. He says that the last time he ran away and then came back, he saw how badly he was hurting his mother, and so he “made a decision” not to run away again, “no matter how bad it gets.”

Beat and his dad “get into it a lot,” not physically, but just yelling. He’s so tired of the yelling, which is why, nowadays, he tends to just “tell them what they want to hear,” and then goes to his room and listens to music, mostly loud, angry punk, blasting through his headphones.

I suggest to Beat that, at least during the time of our work together, he considers getting a journal, writing down what is running through him at such times, even if it is angry and crude. I do suggest to him, as well, that he keep the journal “someplace safe,” which is actually, I must admit, code for *hidden*.

This is something I have wrestled with frequently, as a mentor and writing teacher. I want the boys to discover, excavate, unlock, and experience the contours of their own unique voices. I want them to hear and behold themselves thinking, to realize that there is a medley of informative voices within them. These voices, so to speak, are experiencing, perceiving their life-stories as they unfold, commenting on them, offering wisdom even. What I am really trying to do is to help them create a conductive field within themselves of empathetic holding, in which their subpersonalities, their self, and their Self can all appear like musical motifs, with different weights of significance and relevance. I want them to know writing as an unfettered wisdom revelation: their wise, inner elder speaking to their situation, offering insight, encouragement, challenge, helping them to stay balanced, to be less emotionally volatile, to find their own inner mythology rather than focus on or obsess about their pathologies. I want them to know writing as *not* boring, as something that is alive, moving, free.

I know that in positing this alignment to writing, I am, in some ways, going against the training (indoctrination?) that they receive at school, where writing-as-flow-revelation is virtually unheard of, yet I know this “method” works. I have seen so many boys over the years discover this inner voice, find that they can make sense of their suffering, that they can take a

stand, through their words, about things that matter deeply to them, things that they did not even know at first. This is my wish for Beat, and I feel it now like a firmness in my own heart, a quiet ferocity that his spirit will find its voice.

All of this is in me as I sit there with Beat, trying to encourage him—a way of linking the glimmer of insight and inspiration he received when he found himself swirled into the wild, passionate unfolding of Jack Kerouac's (2007) original scroll for *On The Road*. All of this is part of the transpersonal classroom atmosphere that I am trying to create with Beat and all these boys as we set sail on our odyssey to empathy and compassion. I know, already, that I will likely fail in many ways; that what I may find, at best, are certain transpersonal moments, a respite from the boredom that beats through their days, the march through high-school, and then whirled out into the world, utterly bewildered by it all, in most cases. I am trying, in some ways, to insert moments of eternity, moments in which the scroll-myth of their unfolding life is revealed, the mentor appears to guide them, and their odyssey seems hopeful and promising. Stringing together moments of true feeling, in which empathy and compassion begin to awaken the heart, and they are whirled not into increasing meaninglessness, but, instead, into a rite of passage, or a *write* of passage, in which the real classroom is not this dull and dented room where we meet but is the living classroom, the transpersonally energized sphere, in which we sit, mentor and mentee, in the presence of all those great luminaries who have passed through this fallen planet and sought to mentor the young.

I realize that this outpouring may seem excessive; but it all comes from my meeting with Beat, which I am now reflecting about. It is something in his giant awkwardness, his ragged passion, his rage even, that has called all of this out of me. I write it down because all of this was

in me when I sat with Beat last period, and therefore, by way of presence, it was also what may have flowed from me into Beat, the invisible soul-substance of mentoring.

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Beat's response: "I guess that I don't pay that much attention to my suffering or anyone else's." He shrugs.

Beat's "Tonglen Poem." This is what he offered.

Breathe in—rage.

Breathe out—onto the page.

Breathe in—Dad.

Breathe out—Nothing.

Breathe in—Mom.

Breathe out—Home.

Mentoring moments, week 5 (from Mentor's Journal). At the very beginning of the class, I told the boys that they could be excellent participants even if they never said a word the whole semester. I talked about the presence created by someone who is really paying attention, truly listening. I joked that while this was literally true, if everyone took up this invitation, we would have 50-minute meditation sessions, which I knew would be too much of a good thing, even for those who would enjoy the mindfulness meditation moments.

Still, for a young man like Beat, who really did not like to speak that much, especially in groups, this being let off the hook was very welcome. Beat, this huge, lumbering embryonic poet, who loves the anger and energy of punk rock, is actually quite shy. He enjoys the camaraderie of the class. He likes "sinking down" into the "golden moments" of mindfulness meditation. But when it comes to the group councils that we do, Beat usually passes, as is his option, or just utters a very few words. I have not even challenged him. I am waiting to hear his

voice. Still, I have the sense that he is truly present, listening, pleased to be in a class that is not asking him to memorize anything or to “get it right.”

Beat says that he can “see how writing can save your life.” I had told the boys, the very first week, that writing had literally saved my life. I told them the story of a time in my life when I was about 26, and was feeling very down, so much so that I was not sure I wanted to live. I shared with them how I began to write letters to everyone I knew, and then to everyone, living, dead, mythical, fictional, or imaginal, who had ever impacted my life—from Homer to Thomas Mann, to Campbell, to the Goddess Tara! I described the moments when, writing these letters from a despairing heart, I felt myself tap into the zone, the flow of timeless writing, and how, having connected with that zone, my heart got lighter and lighter. Finally, I told them about how the writing brought me into such a state of well-being and hope that I sort of looked up from the page and realized not only that I wanted to live but that I had found one part of my purpose on earth—to tell my story . . . and, later, to help others find their stories.

I wanted the boys to know that difficulty can be the pollen for new growth, rather than always viewing difficulty as oppression and something that was happening to them. As I so often did, I restated Viktor Frankl’s (1946/1978) inspiring statement that “everything can be taken from a man except the first and last freedom; to choose your attitude in any given circumstances, to choose your way” (p. 66).

I do not have a lot to say to Beat about his “*Tonglen* Poem,” other than the fact that it brought home the lesson of alchemy, of changing despair into art. I refer back to Jack Kerouac (2007), writing his original scroll of *On The Road*, and how, at the time, he had no way of knowing that his anguished and joyous tale would be read by a young man more than 50 years

later—by millions of young men, actually—and inspire him to go on his own journey of the mind.

Introduction to Beat’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” For his “Meeting With Mentor Write,” Beat chose to write himself into the scroll, so to speak. As his mentor in *Odyssey*, I was excited to see Beat nominate himself as a worthy character to be included in the great cross-country odyssey, the unfettered American seeker-spirit that Kerouac (2007) sought to capture in the original scroll of *On The Road*.

Beat’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” This is what he offered.

Jack and I are driving across the country, in search of Neil. Jack’s talking a mile-a-minute. Is he on speed? I hope not! I hope he’s just drunk . . . drunk on life itself.

Jack thought he was drivin’ alone, across our great country. Suddenly, don’t ask me how, I’m sitting next to Jack Kerouac in the 1950’s!!! The car is an old Chevy convertible, and we’re zooming across the country. I see cornfields, open space.

Jack is laughing as he drives. His laughter goes straight into me. We are both cracking up. I ask him about writing. I ask him how he creates his characters. I see his face get serious.

“There’s only one thing you need for that, kid. It’s something that is easy, easier, easiest, and hard, harder, hardest.”

“What’s that?”

“Listen. Listen like you are trying to hear God, Buddha, Jesus—or the most beautiful girl on earth speaking, just to you! Hell, listen like the earth was whispering the secret of life to you. Listen like if you could just listen good enough, you would know everything there is to know. Just listen.”

When Jack says “listen,” I feel like everything around me and everything inside of me gets so quiet. It’s a good feeling. I close my eyes to feel it. To really listen—

And then I’m back home.

Being on the road with Jack was great. I hope we take to the highway again!

Mentoring moments, week 12 (from Mentor’s Journal). Beat found his voice in class this past week, in an amazing moment of strength and compassion. In council, one of the boys was talking about a girl who had dumped one of them. A second boy, when the talking piece came to him, added on that he had also heard the girl was “trash.” I was just about to speak, to tell the boys that this was unworthy of them, when Beat stood up, walked over to the boy who

had the talking piece, and held out his hand. He looked very large, standing there in front of Osiris, who is quite small. Everyone sort of froze, as Beat normally said nothing. He took the talking piece, walked back to his place, and sat down.

“I don’t want to hear anyone in here disrespecting women or girls,” he said, intense, firm, but not angry. “You have no idea what that girl has gone through, and you can’t just talk that way without knowing. I know. I know her family and I know things that have happened. You don’t know what you are talking about.”

Beat went on to talk about a novel he had just read called *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Asher, 2007), about a young girl who commits suicide because of gossip. “It all started with one stupid comment,” Beat said. “You guys should really think about what you say and where it might go before you say it.” He paused for what felt like a long time. No one spoke. “Besides,” he continues, showing some real skill in presentation, in catching the interest of the other 11 boys who do not know whether to argue or just be amazed and grateful that Beat is finally speaking, “Your mother is a woman, right? Do you disrespect her, too?”

Beat hands the talking piece back and goes and sits down. No one knows what to say. I find myself trying to think of something wise to add, something that would underscore Beat’s message of respect, but then I realize that this moment, when Beat stood up for a principle, does not need my framing, underscoring, commentary. It is complete unto itself.

I thank Beat for “having the courage to be yourself.” I close the Council, saying, “It was a privilege for me to be with you guys today.” There are no sarcastic or ironic comments from any of the boys as the bell rings and they shuffle out.

Beat’s “Compassion Write.” This is what he offered.

There’s a bridge in Indio where I once “lived.” I had run away from home. This was the second night. It was winter. Yes, even in the desert, we have winter. It feels cold

if you grew up here and aren't used to really cold weather. I was angry at my father, at my mother, at life itself. I was really angry.

I was failing at school. I felt like I had screwed up my life. I wasn't even in high school yet, but I had tried just about every drug you could imagine. I had stolen things. The only amazing thing was that I'd never been caught, never went to jail.

It was the second night. I had run away before, but this time I wasn't sure I was going back home. I wasn't even sure I'd be allowed to walk into my parent's house.

I knew that I had broken my mom's heart. She understood that I was in a lot of pain, she hated my father and I fighting, but she didn't know what to do to help me. I told her that no one could help me, and that she should just forget about me.

I knew that the police were probably out looking for me. I really didn't know what the h*ll I was doing, where I would go. For the second day now, I'd had only a Red Bull, some beef jerky and a few cookies.

The spot where I slept the night before was waiting for me. I knew how to get into the place where no one would see me . . . or at least where it was difficult to find me. I had some blankets and a pillow that I had hidden behind some bushes nearby. I made my bed.

No one reading this will believe me, but something happened that night. I had a dream that I will never forget.

I dreamt that I was walking through a place that had no landscape. It's hard to describe. It was a place that had no nature, a dead place. I was walking and walking and walking. In the dream, I felt terrible because I knew that this path I was on only led to sadness and emptiness.

I stopped. I sat down in the dirt. I started crying. I cried and cried and cried. Here's where the dream gets weird. As I kept crying, my tears sort of became a pool of water around me, then a river, then a whole ocean. The weird thing was, I was myself, sitting there crying, but I was also looking out on that ocean.

The ocean began swirling like a spiral, taking me with it. The spiral felt like it had a rhythm to it. I could feel myself becoming the spiral. For a second, I got scared, in the dream, wondering where I was. Then, I sort of spiraled up into the sky, and became a whole spiral of stars, a galaxy. I was all of that. That's me. I felt a kind of happiness that was unbelievable. It's like my whole body, my whole existence was smiling. The feeling stayed with me for a moment.

Closing mentoring moments, week 14 (from Mentor's Journal). There is a marked difference in the way Beat carries himself. There is a lightness about him, a sloughing off of the burden of sadness that he carried, of hopelessness, the first time we met.

I tell Beat that I really value the connection we have made but that, really, any "success" we have had has little to do with me; he is the one who made breakthroughs. The moment when he took a stance at council was very significant. I tell Beat how consistent it was with (what I

understand to be) the deeper *ethos* of punk rock. I explain that *ethos* means the moral center.

When he spoke up in council, he found one essential thing that he stood for: respect for women, for the feminine.

I cannot help thinking about Telemachus and Athena. In the *Odyssey* (Homer, 1998), each time Telemachus is open to Mentor, he is really in connection (communion?) with Athena, the goddess of Wisdom. That is what I heard that day; the wisdom that is both unique to Beat, that somehow connects such disparate lines as the bard-pulse of the Beats, the ancient prophets, punk rock, and this indefinable essence of this young man, Beat, who found his voice in a dream, beneath a bridge. It is all very mysterious.

Beat became a writer and reader during the duration of our odyssey. Both were there in him, but they needed a certain ecology in which to come to fruition. A magical coming together of strengths and weaknesses, till, blossoming forth, came his voice, his dignity.

He is still Beat: dressed again in his perennial ragged vest, hair a bit wild, a hearty defiance to all that would constrain him. He came to his odyssey carrying a backpack of failure: academic failure, familial stressors, drugs, a sense of no future. Now, something has shifted. He has even found a place, a creative channel, for his anger, using it as a “lightning rod of righteousness,” a phrase that just came to Beat and of which he is very proud. (I have spoken to the boys about how writing can be a “lightning rod” of connection.) I tell Beat that I see him learning to temper his anger so it is a “cool” expression. Beat really likes the idea of “cool anger.”

He is really into these Ellen Hopkins novels, *Crank* (2004), and others, and I am glad, not because, now that I have read one, I think they are great literature but because they seem to stimulate his own writing, while also offering a harrowing portrait of the ravages of drug abuse.

He is one of the boys who really gets that empathy is a key to writing. He has even found some threads of reconciliation and perspective-taking in regard to his father and his anger. Beat's formation of a sort of punk-rock ethos and his ability to connect his rage against the machine of our culture, so to speak, to a vision of social justice has brought him something even rarer: moments of real peace of mind.

As I prepare to ask Beat these questions one more time, I feel an enormous sense of gratitude for meeting him at this point on his journey. Our relationship has embodied some of the deeper currents that move inside of my call to mentor—finding one's story, summoning the courage to write from the heart, and to stand for principles. My hope, I tell him, is that whatever he felt, knew, and acted from within the sacred voyage of his inner odyssey will now begin to flower into his life.

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Beat the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Beat returns to the idea of tempering. He now feels like his anger—he gently knocks on his chest when saying, “my anger”—“has a place to go that is creative.” When he expresses it, through poetry, “the anger changes.” Beat describes the feeling as one that fills him with energy, makes him proud.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Beat says that “people aren't cartoons.” It seems like a curious statement to me. I ask him to explain or put some light on what he means by those words.

Beat says that he thinks that before, he used to not really take people seriously, “like they were cartoon characters,” not really real to him; “Like with my dad; I really didn’t think about what he might be going through, not working, what that might have done to him.” Beat says that they still fight a lot but that once in a while, he stops himself and realizes that his dad is disappointed so much in his own life and that he’s afraid that Beat will not have a chance at life. He sees that this is what is behind a lot of his dad’s anger.

He describes a moment, a few weeks ago, that he had recently touched on in council, though at the time, he was very tentative and only offered a portion of the experience. I believe he was afraid of being judged by the other boys for sharing something so subtle and delicate, in a way. He had been walking through the mall, where he was supposedly meeting a friend. Unlike so many teens, Beat does not really like going to the mall; he just finds it “a stupid consumer hell.” He decided that he would try and do a walking meditation, a “mindful walk,” which is something I had suggested to the boys, and even done with them one time.

Walking through the mall, it took Beat awhile to be able to follow his breath, but eventually he found himself walking in a state of real calm and peace through the fluorescent-bright mall, just breathing and walking as he passed the stores. He describes it as “just waking up . . . to all these people . . . their lives . . . seeing that every single person here had a lot of pain in them, even kids my age. . . . It was funny, because I was seeing so much pain, and yet I felt better and better, like we were just this walking human . . . tribe . . . lost, trying to find our way home . . . and thinking stupidly that we had to buy all this stuff, had to make all this noise to be heard. I almost felt like crying.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Beat says that “the whole world is suffering.” That was “kinda” what his “mini-enlightenment moment” at the mall taught him, he believes. He says that he thinks that it is “kind of conceited” to think that one person can “do anything about the world’s suffering,” and yet, he also is starting to think that maybe he can, “in a weird way—well, in two weird ways!”

First, Beat believes that his punk lyrics make him “less of a walking bomb about to go off.” He’s writing about things that make him mad, but when he is actually writing, he is not so mad. I point out to Beat that he is performing an ancient function: the truth-teller, the one who points out how the human “tribe” is falling below the levels of acceptable human behavior. He is calling for justice.

For his second “weird way,” Beat talks about two books I had loaned him to read, by Noah Levine, the son of Buddhist teacher, Steven Levine. As a youth, Noah had run away from home, spent a lot of time in jail, used drugs heavily, and resisted his father’s Buddhism. But eventually, locked away, he found his breath, so to speak, found his practice. The other thing Noah loves is punk rock. His two books, his memoir, *Dharma Punks* (2003), and his manifesto, *Against the Stream: A Manual for Buddhist Revolutionaries* (2007), show a link between Buddhist spirituality and punk rock. I felt like they were perfect for Beat, as they also showed how Noah had worked with his anger, the anger that was so central to punk rock, and linked it to social justice—and to mindfulness. Levine’s books have begun to show Beat that by changing his state of mind, by breathing anger into compassion, he can, in some small way, do something about suffering.

I cannot help but wonder what Jack Kerouac, not the washed-up, alcoholic, embittered man, but the one on the eternal road, writing the scroll of the quest, linking writing with

moments of enlightenment, *satori*, might think about this young man, “Beat.” I think he would invite him on the road.

Futuro. Opening mentoring moments as well as Futuro’s responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor’s Journal). Futuro is a 14-year-old Caucasian boy who has diabetes. He has shown a lot of rebellion about his diabetes, which was diagnosed 2 years ago, sometimes consuming lots of sugary foods or beverages and relying on his insulin pump to balance him.

Futuro’s parents have never been married, though they have lived together several times, including at this time, though Future does not know how long it will last, as his mom and dad “don’t get along.” Futuro battles frequently with his mother.

He has “zero interest” in school. He does not like to write or read. He sees himself as having feelings mainly for his friends; in fact, when he talks about his former best friend, now in Juvenile Hall for up to 3 years, he lights up, then gets sad.

I ask Futuro the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Futuro says that he spends a lot of time “feeling nothing.” For some reason, he attributes this nothing-baseline to the fact that all through seventh and eighth grade he “smoked weed like crazy” and now has stopped. He stopped not because he wanted to but because he started to get “super paranoid” every time he smoked, and he couldn’t stand the feeling. It got so that he was just waiting for the paranoia to wash over him with the first puff, and he wasn’t enjoying it at all.

“At least I’m saving money,” he laughs. I ask Futuro if he still feels “kind of numb” from all that smoking.

Futuro agrees and says that “I kind of zone out at home. My mom is always on my case and my dad just wants peace. It’s bad.”

He talks about his “best friend” who is in juvenile hall. Futuro smiles broadly, reminiscing, as if the life he had with his friend is reappearing off in the corner where he keeps looking. He misses his best friend “so much it hurts.” They write once in awhile. They had so much fun together, “just hanging out,” though a lot of it centered on smoking weed. They were both daredevils on their skateboards and would do “crazy shit,” skating places where they weren’t supposed to be, not really caring if they got caught. In the end, his friend got caught for vandalism and theft. Futuro was not with him at the time; hence, he is “free,” but says, “I might as well be in juvie, with him—at least we’d be hanging out.”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Futuro claims that his friend is the main, “practically the only,” person whose feelings he cares about. Futuro is already having a lot of trouble with his SWAS (School Within A School) teacher, getting thrown out of class several times in the first week. His attitude is defiant. According to his teacher, he is interrupting, talking all the time, and not doing the work.

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Futuro says that he knows he makes his mother suffer by his attitude (which, I realize, sounds like it is remarkably similar to the attitude he gives to his teacher, though I do not share this perception with Futuro). He knows, intellectually, that she is just worried about him and is trying to point him in the right direction: being accountable at school and outside of school,

thinking about his future, taking care of his health. He “can’t help it.” He says, “She just gets on my nerves. She nags constantly,” and adds, “She brings her own suffering on herself. If she would just back off and leave me alone. . . .”

At this point, I am just listening, bearing witness. At some point very soon, I will suggest to Futuro that he begin to think about the energy he is putting out toward his mother and how it might be coming back to him.

Futuro’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in—mother.

Breathe out—Sam [pseudonym for Futuro’s incarcerated best friend]

Breathe in—nag, nag, nag.

Breathe out—shut the f***-up!

Breathe in—school.

Breathe out—free.

Mentoring moments, week 4 (from Mentor’s Journal). My work with Futuro is challenging all my results-oriented alignment as a mentor. Again and again, I see how I am taken out of process, in quest of some sort of . . . product, so to speak. In this case, the “product” would be something like a completed writing assignment, or a breakthrough in his recalcitrant attitude, or even hearing that he has begun to treat his mother or his teacher with a new measure of respect.

Yet I believe that this very expectation is keeping me out of the present, keeping me from meeting Futuro as he is, unconditionally. I think this is a way of shielding myself from being with Futuro, moment-to-moment. More importantly, it blocks empathy, in that such a drive forward, out of the present moment and into the mirage of an imagined result, does not allow me to attune to Futuro in the now, simply accepting how he is with all its attendant pain, its frozenness, even. It means getting right in there with the part of him that is okay with being stuck, the part of Futuro that has stabilized in this stasis, perhaps even needing this state as

insulation from pain, a sort of titration of acceptance of his situation (i.e., he accepts it a little more, then can experience it a little more directly)—and the same for me, as Mentor.

Yet, what is driving me crazy about Futuro—a craziness I have not really shared with him, or with anyone, for that matter—is the way that he so clearly articulates where he is stuck but then expresses no wish whatsoever to do anything about it; in fact, it is often the opposite. Mean to Mom? Yes, but hey, that is the way it is. Failing his Math (two periods) and English (two periods, one for Reading, one for Writing) classes? Yes, and almost proud of it!

Mentoring moments, week 8 (from Mentor’s Journal). During the time that the group composed their individual “Meeting With Mentor Writes,” Futuro was suspended (for 5 days). Now that he has returned, he shows little interest in doing any work. On two occasions recently, he stayed behind in the classroom with his teacher, while the group went to our meeting place. The teacher felt that Futuro would sabotage any group work we were doing, because he had been doing this in her class since his return at the end of last week. He was constantly talking out, arguing with her, being rude, requiring Security to be called to escort him out of the class.

I have learned that Futuro had been suspended for specific threats of violence to a group of Latino students whom he claimed were gang members. What had happened was that Futuro had bonded with a young man, also in ninth grade but not in his class, who was in a very special situation at the school. In effect, this young man had his own school-within-a-school, a “school” of one, after the same group of Latino boys had, he alleged, threatened to kill him. Although the boy’s claim was not verified, he was kept isolated on campus, in the Career Center, with a career counselor overseeing him while he completed a series of packets that constituted all the education he was presently receiving. It turned out that this boy had, allegedly, neo-Nazi inclinations, and that he had, in the first weeks of school, succeeded in offending virtually

everyone he encountered on campus, without somehow totally crossing the line where he could actually be suspended for more than a few days at a time, though these claims were continuing to be investigated. Only at lunch did he leave the Career Center for a short period of time.

Futuro, with his unerring instinct for steering his life right into the charisma of troublesome companions, had perhaps seen a replacement for his best friend in juvenile hall, and had begun to form a friendship with this boy. Futuro claimed that as he walked to class, he was followed by the Latino students, threatening him, and that he just basically “shot it right back at them,” which was overheard by a teacher as he walked by a classroom.

All of this activity has stirred things up at home between Futuro and his mother. According to Futuro, his father basically “checked out” during this crisis, and so he feels angry at both parents: his mom, for stepping up her restrictions and nagging, and his dad for, in his mind, once again “not being there for me.”

All of this is percolating in Futuro when he returns to class, present in body, but not in mind or spirit, though his emotions are more than ready to play out all his frustrations with his teacher, who, in her frustration, begins to lose her temper with him, which seems to cause Futuro to become even more recalcitrant, more insulting, and more shut down. Finally, to make matters worse, Futuro’s diet has become even more erratic and sugar-laced, as he falls back into his default I-don’t-give-a-f*ck attitude about his life.

During the few moments I have had with him this week, I have made it clear to Futuro that I am here for him, that we can talk about anything that happened, and that, most of all, I want to see him get through this difficult period. Futuro says to me that he has “nothing against” me and that he “likes” me. He is just “too pissed off” to do any work for any class, group, or whatever. He is hoping that his parents will agree to put him in independent studies, a system in

our district whereby a student does weekly assignments for each subject, goes to the district one day a week, meets with a teacher for less than an hour, and then gets the next packet of assignments. Unfortunately, in a sense, Futuro is seeing a pathway wherein he might be able to be rewarded for his negative behaviors by being placed in independent studies.

I point out to Futuro that another suspension will probably result in expulsion from the district, thus eliminating the possibility of independent studies (an option that I do not really think was a good move for him anyway, as it would allow him too much free time; I worried about him going back to smoking weed, his health degenerating, maybe getting into more serious trouble). The next option, much less desirable, is a county-run school, I tell Futuro. In my experience, these schools are often precursors to a school inside juvenile hall, having seen this dynamic played out repeatedly over the years.

I know that it was futile, at least at this point, to try and force Futuro to do his Mentor writing. The irony is that the absence of a true mentoring presence in his life, one that even begins to internalize a sense of the more balanced and wise mentor within, is one of the resiliency factors largely missing from his life, allowing for the slide I witness him descending into, from nostalgia over the good old days of getting in trouble, to constant fighting with his mother and deep disappointment with his father, to a general couldn't-care-less-attitude at school, to his recent involvement with his alleged neo-Nazi "friend."

It is humbling to realize that I have not made the mentoring connection that I sought to have with Futuro. Perhaps I wanted it too much, and this desire for "results" has compromised the moment-to-moment presence that has always been the harbinger of success in the mentoring relationship.

I have wanted Futuro to be other than he is—or at least that results-oriented part of me has. Once again, I remember the haunting encoded in my initial naming of this boy as *Futuro*: the sense that perhaps his future itself is such a massive question mark.

Never before, at least in my memory, have I seen how much mentoring is not, at heart, about the mentee “liking” the mentor. It goes much deeper than that, and even includes times of antipathy, as mentor and mentee skirmish at the gates of advancement. But as a result of those skirmishes, relationship is built, depth is sounded, and a vision opens toward the future.

Mentoring moments, week 13 (from Mentor’s Journal). Futuro continues his spiral into disengagement. He is absent frequently, then returns to class to be disruptive, spending much of the two periods of English sitting outside the class. His teacher will not let him back in until his attitude changes, he treats her—and others—with respect, and stops disrupting the class.

This is a very difficult situation to witness, as I can see how student and teacher are actually bringing out the worst in each other. As a guest in her classroom, it is not my job to criticize the teacher overtly; indeed, her cooperation with my research is essential. With Futuro, I do not want to take sides against the teacher, as this will only magnify and endorse his often unfair critique. At one point this week, Futuro managed to stir up the class to such a degree that several other students began to side with him, turning on the teacher. I was not there at the time, but only heard about it afterwards, from the teacher and from several of our students, though not from Futuro who was out again.

The teacher was embarrassed and ashamed because she had lost her temper completely with the students, screaming at them, and then breaking down in tears in front of them, too. Perhaps Futuro knew that he was at the very least catalytic in this breakdown in the class, and so he was “sick” for several days after the incident.

I feel like I am losing Futuro—that we are all losing him. Indeed, I wonder if I ever really even entered into a mentoring relationship with him. As the boys move toward the completion of our odyssey, Futuro is either absent or not allowed to come to the group. He seems to have ceased caring and this is heartbreaking for me.

In all honesty though, it is all I can do to keep steering this odyssey with the other boys in these final days. As far as the short duration of our time together, approximately 4 months, Futuro may, indeed, be lost. With my mother slipping away and all the different struggles faced by the boys, which I have to hold in my consciousness, I cannot keep going back to the one student who has proved to be the most troublesome throughout this endeavor. If I push down any harder on Futuro, I feel convinced that I, too, will be relegated, in his heart, typecast as yet another adult who does not get him, does not accept him, and who wants him to change into something that fits with our own demands.

Closing mentoring moments, week 15 (from Mentor's Journal). Futuro does not come to school during the final days of the class. The rumor is that he will possibly be back at the beginning of the second semester, or third quarter. The problem he will face is that, having failed to do his work at the level of SWAS, or to have participated in the *Odyssey* Program, his likelihood of success in the mainstream is slim. According to a friend, Futuro is still hoping that he will be able to shift to the independent studies program. Although he has been mostly truant for weeks now, it seems that nothing is being done about it, which is something I see happening quite often, as schools and systems are overwhelmed, leaving these boys dangling, giving them exactly what their refusal-of-the-call-to-adventure selves want: to be left alone to “chill.”

What is the place of grief in mentoring? Losing Futuro—I do not know how else to characterize it—puts me right up against the forces that oppress these boys—forces within and

without. Yet it also gives me perspective on free-will. In the end, no matter how many caring adults encircle him, how much Mentor waits and wishes for Futuro to step into life, this is, after all, his own struggle.

At this point, I see Futuro as one who remains locked in to the *puer*, Peter-Pan dynamic, not willing to cross the gate from childhood into young adulthood. I see how important it is, lifesaving even, to get a handle on this dynamic when seeking to mentor boys his age.

Arrow. Opening mentoring moments as well as Arrow's responses to the three questions and concluding mentoring observations follow.

Opening mentoring moments, week 2 (from Mentor's Journal). Arrow is a 15-year-old boy whose brother was stabbed in a gang fight last year. His brother survived the stabbing, and both boys have come to this school, at the insistence of their mother, in order to get away from bad influences. Arrow is a tall, thin, somewhat nervous Hispanic boy with striking, angular features.

Arrow has some attention deficit issues, which have been addressed on and off with medication, though he is not on any at this time; his mother felt it was not helping and was possibly contributing somehow to his lack of interest in school. He has not fully dealt with the trauma of being next to his brother when the stabbing occurred. He has had no counseling in the wake of this traumatic experience. Arrow is another boy with no father in the picture—a situation I have come to call The Missing Father Syndrome.

When Arrow sits down for our initial mentoring session, I am struck by the way he often looks around, as if awaiting the arrival of someone else. He is very polite and tries earnestly to answer my questions.

I ask Arrow the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Arrow says that his feelings are “all over the place,” especially since his brother was stabbed. He says he is sometimes still afraid that the boys involved will come after both of them now. Only the boy who actually committed the stabbing was arrested; the other boys were never caught.

Arrow says that he’s “not much of a feeler, except with my girlfriend.” His girlfriend, he says, is the one who can get to him—“for good or bad.” With his girlfriend, he is “totally chill.” She knows how to get him to calm down and not worry. They have been together since eighth grade, before he even came to the school.

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Arrow says that his feelings are mostly for his mom and his girlfriend. He was really worried about his mom after the incident. She has done so much for him and his older brother. She has worked like crazy for as long as Arrow can remember—a single mom who never, ever complains.

Arrow says that up until the incident, he and his brother always kidded around—or argued. They still kid around, and even argue sometimes, but he was so afraid of losing his brother. When his brother was lying there in the hospital, and his mom first walked into the room, he thought he was going to “lose it,” he felt so afraid, so worried about his mom. All he could think about was, “What if he dies?”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

At first, Arrow misunderstands the question. He starts talking about how he was ready to go after the guy who stabbed his brother. “I didn’t even care what could happen to me; I was a crazy guy!” He didn’t realize that he could feel that . . . protective of his brother—his older brother; but that’s what he felt “protective and angry.” Then, he started praying. His mother had brought them up Catholic, but they hadn’t been to church for years. Standing there, all he could do was pray, over and over, “Please don’t let him die.”

I ask if that feeling has stayed with him, “that need to pray.”

“Yeah,” Arrow says, quietly. He says that he really believes his brother “lived because of all the prayers that were coming to him,” his voice tinged with a sort of sad wonder. He looks down for a minute. When he looks up at me, there are tears beginning to form. He looks around the room quickly, and gets up to leave without saying a word. I am not even sure he hears me when I say goodbye.

Arrow’s “Tonglen Poem.” This is what he offered.

Breathe in—remembering.
 Breathe out—peace.
 Breathe in—fear.
 Breathe out—peace.
 Breathe in—a night.
 Breathe out—all night.
 Breathe in a knife.
 Breathe out—never happened.

Mentoring moments, week 3 (from Mentor’s Journal). The search for mentoring moments sometimes seems to hinge upon a single word, a single moment. From past experience, I know that at such times, simply bearing attentive witness to a youth’s wounds and gifts, without trying to do anything or to come up with some supposedly wise perception, can open a timeless moment in which the deeper currents of the mentee’s challenges and potentialities may emerge.

All of this is in me as I prepare to see Arrow today. Similarly, I remember how, at such times, the felt-experience of taking up the alignment of the sacred service of Mentor can even infuse the body and mind with a sense of both expansiveness and exactitude. At such moments, which I have experienced as gifts given to the mentor, language formation becomes sharply honed, as if the cry of the unheard, the soul-cry of the mentee is flowing into a sort of antennae that is part of Mentor's toolkit. During these potent moments, as Mentor, I feel close to one of the wisest, most mysterious conversations I once had with my own mentor, who said, "That which is unseen and unspoken make the strongest power lines in a person's aura" (R. Armin personal communication, 1988). Even at the time, I understood him to mean that by virtue of a potent, soul-level truth not being voiced, it was contained and capped, building power and strength because of its containment. Not allowing it to escape, at least in words, capped it at both ends, and caused the strength to build up inside. With teenage boys, among whom so much emphasis is placed on appearing cool or having it together, not showing emotion or (what they perceive to be) weakness, the buildup can be fierce. Yet it is precisely this unsung song that a mentor must be able to receive, in bearing attentive witness to gifts and wounds. It is here, also, that he will find himself ready to experience the twin truths that I have heard expressed most frequently by Meade (Meade et al., 2002), though I believe they are part of the perennial wisdom of true mentoring: First, the gifts of the mentee lie next to their wounds; and second, in mentoring, to encounter another's gifts and wounds is to open one's own wounds.

Arrow, though sleek and thin, still manages to slouch. His smiles are half smiles, quickly vanishing. For some reason, I think of a lizard I once glimpsed on a burning rock in the mountains above the desert where I live, vanishing almost instantly as I watched.

When we discuss his *tonglen* poem, Arrow says a word, then looks down, to the side, as if tracking something or someone. When we walk together toward the room where I meet all the students, he zooms in on our conversation, stops and looks straight at me, then looks around as he resumes his swift gait.

I wonder how much this is a byproduct of his experience with his brother, echoing trauma? How much is his boredom at school, always seeking something around the corner to draw his attention? How much is what I call “that computer game look,” as if we are inside a rapidly moving killer scenario from “Grand Theft Auto,” and this momentary quiet has him restless and ready for the next thrill.

This difficult-to-pin-down restlessness is not unique to Arrow, though I do believe it is intensified or supercharged by his traumatic experience with his brother. Nevertheless, I see the restlessness in several of the boys already; and then they, in turn, seem to be part of a long line of boys seen over the past 9 years, who are restless, inarticulate at first, yet somehow simultaneously energetically erratic and laid back. Arrow is a high-energy yet quiet boy, who carries a secret, a blazing memory of his brother on the ground.

“I want to tell you about what happened that night,” Arrow says almost as soon as we sit down. Before he had written his “*Tonglen* Poem,” Arrow had asked me if they could write about anything they wanted. I said they could, but reminded them that we were at school, that they had to use **** for language “lapses.” No major grumbles about that, but lots of grumbles when I reminded the boys, yet again, that part of our work together, both as a group and individually, was that they might be asked to rewrite their work, especially the final Compassion essay.

The words—“I want to tell you about what happened that night”—shoot out, as if Arrow has been thinking about this meeting, gathering energy and courage. As noted in my initial

portrait of Arrow, in our first meeting he spoke little about this seminal event in his life. The topic of his brother and what happened that night was brought up only briefly, enough to tell me but not reveal. He stated, “My brother was stabbed at a party. My mom moved us to this school to get away from all the crap where we lived.” That was it—and it was enough.

As Mentor, I can clearly sense Arrow’s retreat, his drawing a sacred circle around this memory, this scar. I have begun to wonder what gifts, or blessings even, might lie coiled within that memory.

I want to recount accurately Arrow’s telling of the night that seems as if it changed his life forever. Even now, I wonder if, perhaps, witnessing his brother’s stabbing, as painful as it was, did open Arrow to empathy? In the moment when he saw his older brother lying there—this brother to whom he had looked *up* all his life and whom he now looked *down* upon, fallen, perhaps dying—was there a stirring of compassion, the passionate wish to relieve suffering in another? I record these ponderings as a record of all that is revolving in the thoughts of Mentor, even while another part of me is simply present, open, waiting without waiting. It is for this reason that the following account of Arrow’s story is assembled and told through Mentor’s own recounting, knowing that Arrow’s memory of the traumatic event might be faulty, at least in the order of what happened, and blending his tale with Mentor’s reflections, showing the interweave of mentor and mentee.

Arrow and his brother were at a party in a city called Coachella, which has a lot of gang activity. His brother and another boy, whom his brother did not even know, got into an argument about a girl whom his brother said the boy was “treating like sh*t.” Arrow’s brother uttered the words, “You are a coward, Homes, treating her that way.” The next thing Arrow knew—it happened so fast—the boy had drawn out a knife and shoved it into his brother’s stomach.

Arrow could not believe it was happening; he was literally unable to process it at all, even while he watched his brother fall to the ground and look up at him with an expression not so much terrified as utterly surprised, disbelieving himself that he had been stabbed. Arrow felt as if his ears were whirling, he was underwater, everything was simultaneously frantic and in slow motion. “I was watching it like a f**king movie, Mr. Shefa. I couldn’t find my hands, my legs were locked.” As Arrow speaks, his voice gets more and more harsh, even condemning—condemning himself.

I tell Arrow that there was nothing he could do; he did not have the slightest idea that the guy was going to pull out a knife and stab his brother; how could he? Somehow, I know that Arrow blames himself, irrationally. He is caught in the illogic of the survivor, his mind wishing it could unweave the skein of fate and destiny that brought him and his brother to a single moment.

A lot of people fled the party. Someone took off his own shirt and held it against Arrow’s brother’s wound. Arrow stayed with his brother but was not allowed to ride in the ambulance. Arrow had to stay behind. As the police arrived, they reassured him that his brother had been taken to the hospital. His brother’s breathing was shallow before they took him away in the ambulance.

Arrow was terrified that his brother was going to die. His shame was about the fear he felt, and how he did not know what to say to his brother, how he provided no comfort, so locked into his fear. He did not attack the boy, but watched as some of his brother’s friends rushed in and wrestled the boy to the ground, grabbed the knife—and then started kicking the assailant in the face.

As I listen to Arrow's story, I cannot help wondering if he, too, had been "stabbed"—not physically, but by life itself, in its most sprawling, violent aspect. I wondered if he had not been initiated that night, not into a gang (which he was already flirting with) but into the unmistakable fact that life can change in a single second—forever, irrevocably.

Arrow has painted the picture of that night so vividly, his emotion so raw and clear, I feel as if I, too, am leaning over his brother's barely breathing body, suspended, terrified, yet awake to each breath, as if the universe is offering it up one breath at a time, leaving me suspended in the balance.

At a certain point in his story, Arrow's speech slows. He describes arriving at the hospital, seeing his mother frozen in shock. Arrow said his mother "looked like she had been stabbed, too," all the blood drained from her face, fearing the loss of her son. Arrow described thinking about his father. He was surprised by how—all of a sudden, it seemed—present his father was in his thoughts. He kept thinking how his father should be there with his brother. Telling this, he relives the moment, and then Arrow starts weeping, quietly, head bowed.

His brother made it through the night, and Arrow started his long road of healing. It is clear to me that he was suffering from some level of posttraumatic stress, though he has never been diagnosed or, obviously, treated. Arrow's entire identity, previously, had hinged on being tough, being able to stand tall, even to the death. That night had shown him something else, and mostly what he felt was shame.

I speak to Arrow about warriors, and the warrior's heart; how caring for his brother, and realizing that without those he loved his life was nothing, was a gift that came out of the wound. I believe that Arrow is constructing a new warrior identity for himself—one that includes deep caring. Before, it was mostly bravado, powered by fear. But trying to really mentor Arrow in

spaces that I, a white, middle-class, Jewish scholar, have never been in, is challenging. It brings up an almost ultimate question: What is worth fighting for, and what does it really *mean* “to fight” for something? What is honor? Somehow, I think I will have more to offer Arrow, and all the boys, if I dig deep into myself, put the question to the force that mentors the Mentor; perhaps I will have some sort of answer for Arrow.

Afternote (written 2 days later): In our meeting, I asked Arrow if I could speak with his mother again. (She had been at the introductory meeting: a quiet, severe looking woman). I try and reach her several times by phone, leaving a message each time, simply saying that I work with her son and reminding her that we had met at the beginning of the semester. When she finally returns my call, I tell her how much I believe Arrow would benefit from some counseling. I ask if she would be willing for Arrow to see a therapist friend of mine who works with teens and who has a particular gift in working with trauma—free of charge. She is extremely grateful.

Arrow’s “Meeting With Mentor Write.” This is what he offered.

My mentor is my father.

What? Sure, anyone who knows me knows that I have never even met my father. He’s a big zero in my life. So, how can he be my mentor?

Not long ago, a really smart person told me that sometimes you get mentored by what is missing. I didn’t really understand this at first. Maybe I still don’t. I kept bugging this smart man about this one thing: How can you be mentored by what isn’t there? I couldn’t get my head around that weird idea!

He explained that when something really, really important is missing, we want it even more. We feel it missing, more and more. It can even become super painful. It’s like a big hole inside us. But then, because it is missing, we go looking for it. We look for it everywhere. He said that while we are searching, we are thinking about what we’re missing. It’s like it is calling to us.

When he said that stuff, it was like a bomb exploded in my head. My dad was never there. He’s a big zero. But “he” taught me a lot by not being there.

He taught me that I’ll be a father who is ALWAYS there.

He taught me that love is the most important thing.

He taught me that sons need fathers.

He MADE me be a man.

I can't end this by writing "I love you, Dad" (I just did) since I don't know who he is. He is the Dad That Never Was. I guess I can thank him for all that I have to find BECAUSE he's missing.

Thanks, "Dad!"

Mentoring moments, week 12 (from Mentor's Journal). I tell Arrow that it took "a quiet Warrior's courage" to write his Mentor essay. "You spoke to your father—but also to the father inside of you. That is real courage, speaking to your own vulnerability."

Arrow warns me that his final essay on compassion is going to be "short, but not sweet." He wants to write about his brother, but does not think he can find the words. He says, "Writing a lot would just hurt too much, so I'm not going to do it."

Although the assignment is to write a full essay, I feel that Arrow's willingness to write about compassion and thus to face, through writing, an experience that remains so critical to his own rite of passage, his transformation even, is invaluable. I repeat what I keep telling all the boys, throughout our work together: "Write from the heart, edit from the head."

Arrow's "Compassion Write." This is what he offered.

Eyes open and eyes close, but you always expect them to open again. I stood over you, and my eyes saw this isn't always true. I didn't know if yours would open again. Ever.

Even though I always looked up to you, the truth is, we fought a lot. Stupid stuff. I think sometimes you were ashamed of me even, because I'm not confident like you.

None of that mattered when I didn't know if your eyes would open again. I thought of all the stupid-ass stuff I'd said to you over the years. I thought of your eyes never opening. Ever. I thought of Mom trying to live through this. I wondered what God might be doing.

When your eyes closed, mine opened. But not just my eyes. My mind. My heart. I had to admit that without you, always walking ahead of me in life, my life was over. I knew I'd have to go on, for Mom and for you.

I lived and died a thousand times while you lay there with eyes closed.

But then they opened. God heard.

Brother.

Closing mentoring moments, week 15 (from Mentor's Journal). Arrow's essay is one of the more powerful ones. The rewriting that he had to do was mostly grammatical. Watching

Arrow work on his essay, one thing struck me forcefully: This boy was incredibly focused as he wrote. So often, throughout the course, he would fall prey to the temptation to become distracted, especially while writing. Now, he was writing as if his life depended on it, reliving a moment that had opened his heart.

What could I suggest that would improve this exquisitely vulnerable yet ultimately strong writing? His writing truly spoke of an opening of the heart, albeit through what I can only describe as acute trauma.

During this final mentoring session, Arrow asks me if I will be on campus next semester. I tell him that I hope to be, but there are some “issues” with the program, funding, et cetera.

“You need to be here, Mr. Shefa. We need you to be here!” Arrow explains that “we” includes himself, Merlin, Beat, and several of the other boys. “We haven’t finished. You’re stuck with us!” he tries to joke.

I am touched by Arrow’s appreciation, especially because he actually looks me in the eye when he says it. I try simultaneously to affirm his courage for speaking so clearly and directly, let him know I will be here, but also somehow intimate that this is what life is about: the intensity and depth of true meeting and, then, a letting go. Inside of that, though, is the fact that, as with the mentor writing, we carry the mentor inside of us.

To gauge his journey toward empathy and compassion, I again ask Arrow the three questions.

Question 1: *When you think about all the different parts that make up who you are, what part do your feelings play in the overall picture?*

Arrow says that what he called “feelings” before his brother was stabbed were really “just me showing off, acting tough most of the times.” About his feelings, he believes, “They were

stuffed way down inside me, because of the life my brother and I were living,” always waiting for something to happen, which eventually did, the night his brother was stabbed.

Arrow said, “I think my main feeling was fear, almost all the time, even with my girlfriend, expecting her to leave me.”

Question 2: *What, if any, importance do the feelings of others have in your life?*

Arrow says that when he and his brother were little, they always said, “I love you,” when they said goodbye, just like they did with their mom. Somewhere, around the age of 8 or 9, they stopped doing it. Now, they both say that each time they are leaving.

“We don’t give a f**k what anyone thinks. That doesn’t mean I don’t still drive him crazy. It doesn’t mean I don’t get mad at him. But something has changed, big time.”

Question 3: *When you, or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about it?*

Arrow says that he’s not ready to do it now, but someday, he might want to talk to other kids about what happened. “I see how kids screw up their lives, thinking they have to prove something, to be the bad-ass gangbanger. It’s all bullshit. I don’t want some little kid having to go through what I did: standing over your big brother, watching blood pour out through his shirt onto the ground. No one should have to go through that.”

Arrow’s experience with his brother is a searing illustration of what I have told the boys all through our odyssey: Sometimes you find your values, you find your heart, when you are truly up against it, when you are down in the pit, even. I see how the act of writing has been a rite of remembrance and a healing for Arrow. He has begun to emerge, like the phoenix, from the ashes.

Mentor's Odyssey, Part Two

Comment. The next event in my own life took place approximately 1 week after I finished working with the boys. Throughout the period of the research window, from the beginning of September 2010 to the end of January 2011, I continually recommitted myself to show up and to assume the function of Mentor, even as the circumstances of my life were increasingly testing me, and my energy was often sapped. For in addition to the reverberations of grief of a son in the months after my father's death and the anguish around the breakup of my marriage, I was witnessing the rapid decline of my mother as she struggled with severe diabetes, necessitating several emergency trips to the ER, with her on the verge of death.

It soon became no longer wise for her to live alone in her home. In early November of 2010, I moved into my mother's house in order to care for her, overseeing, then administering insulin and medications, and making sure that the final months of her life would be comfortable. The fact that it coincided so closely with my wife asking for a separation was what one might call a "meaningful coincidence."

On several occasions, I watched my mother being taken by ambulance. On two occasions, she said "Goodbye" to me just before getting into the ambulance. I followed in my car.

Although I did not want to admit it at first, I began to develop symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, triggered chiefly by the sound of ambulances and fire trucks, sometimes even by just the sight of these vehicles. I would freeze, my heart pounding, when faced with these triggers. (These symptoms worsened in the months that followed her death, and only began to recede at the end of 2011.)

Yet throughout this period of personal trauma and breakdown, something extraordinary was also breaking through in my heart, while something equally powerful was happening with my ability to tune into an intuitive level of awareness. I felt enormous gratitude for this process.

It seemed that these breakdown experiences that had rendered me so vulnerable—my father’s death, my marriage collapsing, and my mother’s rapid decline toward death—had also begun to break me *open*, at least in part. I became more conscious of what I can only call the sacredness of each breathing moment and found myself more attuned to the moment-to-moment shifts in the energetic field when interacting with my mentees. My ability to find just the right word at the right moment seemed to be sharpening. I made a conscious decision or, better said, repeatedly made the decision to stay open, to continue to break open, to allow the process. I felt as if I were seeing with the eye of the heart and was increasingly less inclined to stand back and comment with detachment or irony, as had been my main persona for years.

More than anything, it was the many experiences of helping my mother in her rapidly increasing descent into total frailty that opened my heart. Here was the person who had brought me into this world, now hovering between life and death. No detachment, no irony, just naked witnessing, breathing in pain, breathing out relief, as I practiced mindfulness and *tonglen* as well as the Jewish mystical practice of *Tehora-he*, which, again, means “the soul is pure.” Simply showing up for my mentees and attending to my mother were my staff and strength. Seeing my 12-year-old son every day was my source of joy, even while dealings with my wife remained turbulent and exceedingly painful.

My overall sense of surrendering, of continually saying yes to the process of breaking open was also aided by my commitment to two processes: continually writing in my *Mentor’s Journal* and my daily Wise Elder/Mentor Meditation. Writing had always been my bastion, a

lifeline in even the most difficult times. During my decade in the field with at-risk teens, I had repeatedly told students that “writing can save your life.” Now it *was* saving mine. Even in the throes of grief, sorrow, and tempests of loss, I turned to my journal, for release, for perspective, for realignment, and for harnessing my will to move forward. The Wise Elder/Mentor Meditation provided a heartbeat of alignment to the mentor within—what one might call reaching for, or allowing the presence of Athena. These intuitive practices sustained me, yet nothing can fully prepare us for the initiation of death.

Mentor’s Journal, evening, February 8, 2011. My mother died several hours ago. I was right beside her as she took her last breath. A quiet unlike any I have known, even in the deepest meditation, followed. It was a quiet that filled the room, and seemed to spill out into the universe, enveloping me in a sort of womb of compassion. “She” was there—and then something infinitesimal, yet of the utmost essence, vanished, leaving an animal-body that had given its last breath back to Life.

What could render a man more vulnerable than to sit next to his dying mother, breathing in rhythm with her, until such a point as her breathing stops—and his goes on? In following my mother’s last, shallow breaths, I thought of the Great Mother, of what cradles and contains us, of all that holds us in empathy, all that reaches out to our suffering with compassion. What greater gift of renewal can there be than the one that says, “You must become Mother unto yourself now, my child?”

Less than an hour later, the house was filled with emergency workers, police. They even tried to revive her, a legal requirement, though she had died over a half-hour before. The whole mechanism of modern medicine swinging into action on a corpse. Afterwards, I was not allowed to go into the room for over an hour until the funeral home people came. This was a long hour.

Men in dark suits in their dark van, coming in the dead of night. Every gesture had a sense of ritual about it, yet abstract, bloodless, for what was their connection to this . . . corpse?

This is truth, this is now, this is the feeling when your heart swings open and the universe breathes inside. We are so utterly fragile, we human beings, held in an embrace that we cannot fathom, here for the briefest of breath-cycles, then vanished back into the great mystery. I cannot wrap my mind around the core fact that the woman who gave birth to me, who nursed and raised me, has come and gone. Brief images of loving acts from different phases of my life unfold in my soul, lit by the presence of death.

Caring for my mother in the final months of her life has been another stage, a further initiation into the mysteries of empathy and compassion. Somehow, as impossible as it sounds, I have become used to the fourfold process of carrying forward with my research, grieving my father, accepting the end of my marriage, and bearing witness to my mother's vanishing from this world. It is more than just "used to it," though; it seems part of a sacred rite of putting one foot in front of another, heart open, eyes open, saying "yes" to life.

It is now exactly 1 week after finishing my research-gathering phase with the 12 boys. Like the Native American Storyteller Doll holding the small children in her lap, I hold each of the boys' stories next to my heart as well as the saga of our odyssey together into empathy and compassion through mentoring and writing. The scroll of our journey has unwound, and in turning, has inducted onto this breathing moment both suffering and joy—and the beginnings, perhaps, of transformation.

Mentor has begun to be transformed by the forces that bring about a renewal of the heart. The words *empathy* and *compassion* are now living forms, story vessels filled with tears and

transformation. This research has become the next stage of my own transpersonal education, even while I have striven to deliver the goods to others.

This process, this odyssey I have been on to become a mentor worthy of mentoring these boys, calls to mind two quotes from Meade (2010). As a fitting conclusion, I will end my field work notes with his words. The first quote speaks of the poignant promise I saw, at various times, in each and every one of my 12 coresearchers, even the most challenging.

During youth a blossoming and budding forth tries to happen from inside out as each young person encounters what is seeded in them and gifted in their soul. The inner garden of the soul sends forth shoots of imagination intended to take root in the world and become an anchor for the soul throughout life. The beauty of youth exists in those blossoming moments when the inner gifts become revealed and they become able to bring more life to life. (Meade, 2010, p. 34)

Finally, I am beginning to see that my own “blossoming” as Mentor is part of a still larger, emergent calling: to begin to inhabit the function of elder.

In becoming weird and wise the elders become more able to stand where this world and the otherworld meet, where the temporary and the eternal converse and exchange. . . . They become natural healers because they have seen the wounds of life; they have learned how things fall apart and how they might come back together. Having survived their own troubles the elders are not shocked or overwhelmed by the mistakes and dilemmas of others. . . . Awakened elders are necessary if youth are to awaken to the inner dream of their lives. (Meade, 2010, pp. 88-90)

Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusion

This research investigated the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys through the medium of mentoring and writing. Twelve ninth-grade students, the majority of whom had resistance to the process of writing, were invited to become coresearchers on a 16-week, mentored odyssey—a *write* of passage. Each boy's developing relationship with a transpersonally based mentor served as a container for the process of awakening these qualities. Thick, rich data was gathered from the writings of each coresearcher, as well as from a *Mentor's Journal*. These writings illuminated the subtle and sometimes dramatic ways in which empathy and/or compassion awakened.

In Chapter 4, a largely narrative strategy was employed, in order to capture most accurately the data of an organic process, the storied unfolding of each boy's journey. Now, in presenting my findings, I have sought to strike a balance, retaining the *spirit* of that narrative strategy while submitting the data to a type of thematic analysis that emphasizes empathy and compassion turning points, both in the mentoring relationship and in the boys' writings. Throughout these analyses, I refer to myself as Mentor, in order to accentuate the critical function.

Anderson (1998b) advised that “in intuitive inquiry, data analysis should accommodate the data that present themselves, rather than being immutably established at the outset of the study” (p. 91). She also counseled intuitive inquirers to “stay as close as possible to the voice of the person(s) describing the pain, joy, grief, sadness, sorrow, and all other especially rich human experiences” (p. 82). This chapter presents a systematic analysis of the developmental turning points for the mentees and for Mentor, honoring the unique voice of each student. Staying close to the boys' voices has required that even these analyses retain a semi-narrative quality. To have

sacrificed the storied quality of the boys' odyssey in the name of objectivity would have been to risk minimizing the unique essence of each boy's journey that lay at the heart of this research study. It is also congruent with the ways of an intuitive inquiry analysis, where, "if interview data resulted in long narrative or storytelling sessions, narrative and discourse analysis applies" (Anderson, 1998b, p. 91).

The first section of this chapter presents an analysis of turning points toward empathy and compassion for each of 4 boys as well as for Mentor in his interactions with his coresearchers. The choice to include only 4 students was made in order to depict, in as full a manner as possible, the many subtle turnings that occurred, both in the boys' writing and in their interactions with Mentor throughout the mentoring cycle.

Continuing my Cycle 4 process, I next present a second set of lenses—my *refined* lenses. As discussed in Chapter 3, in crafting my first set of *preliminary* lenses, I had preconceived a spiritual origin for the qualities of empathy and compassion as well as for the acts of mentoring and writing. In addition, placing a strong focus on the spiritual and literary in the construction of these preliminary lenses reflected the etiology of my own call to mentorship, which had been discovered originally through spiritual literature and myth. To begin to embody and articulate the 4 months of highly intense fieldwork required *letting go entirely* of my preliminary lenses. The refined lenses that were then crafted in light of this fieldwork proved to be just as concise, down-to-earth, and direct as my initial preliminary lenses were expansive, spiritual, and allusive. The full release of all of the preliminary lenses was a direct reflection of my transformation as researcher, as these early lenses no longer matched my lived-experience, post fieldwork. In order to illuminate this transformation for the reader, however, I have chosen to include a lens-to-lens comparison of two of the lenses.

In effect, the process of crafting the second set of lenses marked the beginnings of my making conscious and concise what I had been doing instinctively and intuitively as a mentor and writing guide for a number of years. At first, these lenses seemed to reflect a narrowing-down process, and I mourned the seeming loss of the expansive spiritual views seen through the preliminary lenses. Gradually, though, I realized that what I was mourning was the loss of my old, more ethereal mentor-self. The process of composing my refined lenses thus became an unfolding metaphor for my development into a more grounded mentor with a more fundamental understanding of the dynamics behind the awakening of empathy and compassion. Regarding the necessity of loss and mourning for the wounded researcher, Romanyshyn (2007) suggested,

In research that keeps soul in mind, this phase of mourning has to do with the ego letting go of its hold upon the work. This invitation into mourning is the beginning of a transformation of the ego's complex ties to the work. (p. 65)

After discussing my refined lens, I present in this chapter a third and final set of lenses: my *transformed* lenses. I also combine the presentation of these lenses with a move into Cycle 5 of my intuitive inquiry, revisiting the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 to illustrate how others' ideas, experience, and theories support and are perhaps enhanced by these final lenses which represent the summit of the study. These transformed lenses synthesized my findings into a concise template, which I named the *9 Gates of Mentoring*, illuminating the centrality of empathy and compassion in mentoring, as well as the importance of those same qualities to the writing process. Just as Campbell (1991) concluded that the summit of the hero's journey was the *grail of compassion*, my experience in the field, further strengthened by reviewing the literature anew in light of this experience, caused me to consider a mentoring counterpart to Campbell's observation that "the key to the Grail is compassion, suffering with, feeling another's sorrow as if it were your own. The one who finds the dynamo of compassion is the one who has

found the Grail” (p. 53): *The grail of mentoring is the awakening of empathy and compassion—in mentee and mentor.* The image of nine gates, each opening into a deeper understanding and a more fully embodied experience of the mentoring process, describes the sense of expanded awareness that arrived as my transformed lenses—the *9 Gates* template—took shape.

Furthering this final, fifth cycle of my intuitive inquiry, the chapter then presents the findings of a resonance panel. The panel was convened in March of 2013. Participants reviewed Chapter 4 of the study as well as Chapter 1 and reported on their findings in writing and by phone conversation.

Last, I review the study overall, considering its implications and applications, limitations and delimitations, as well as further study indicators that arose from the research. I examine the study’s relevance, as well as its potential applications for transpersonal psychology. A conclusion section draws together the threads of the research for a final summation, and a reflection section completes the dissertation by summarizing my journey as Mentor.

Analyses of Individual Awakenings to Empathy and Compassion

At the heart of this study has been the investigation of the unique, individual mentoring relationship as it pertains to the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys. The entirety of my fieldwork confirmed the validity of an observation offered by Somé:

There is no way you can generically apply mentoring. Because if you do that, only a few are going to be lucky. . . . The specificity of each human being walking into this life requires as many specific approaches to them. (Meade et al., 2002, track 2)

The following is an analysis of significant movements of awakening empathy and compassion—or *challenges* to those movements—in 4 of the boys. These awakenings of empathy and self-empathy, or the ability to attune affectively to or *feel into* the feelings of oneself or another, and compassion and self-compassion—being moved by the suffering of

oneself or another, wishing to relieve suffering in self or another, and actively alleviating suffering in self or another—are revealed through turning point moments in the mentoring dynamic. Also included in the analyses are significant empathy and compassion-focused turning points as expressed through the boys' writing. My aim in these analyses was to capture the most salient points of awakening in these 4 boys—and, to some extent, in Mentor—in as clear a manner as possible. A total and complete exposition of every subtle turn made toward empathy and compassion, even for only these 4, would have necessitated a much lengthier exposition; likewise with Mentor.

The choice to include these specific 4 boys in this analysis was made on the basis of their being both unique *and* reasonably representational of the whole. Leif was included in order to examine the way that an effective mentoring relationship can then give rise to the passion to mentor *in the mentee* and because his experience demonstrates the way that a mentee's relationship to the writing process can move from reluctance to willingness. Merlin was chosen in order to examine the ways in which compassion can be practiced with demonstrable effect by at-risk students as well as to examine how the mentoring relationship can challenge and catalyze development, even in areas where the mentee already excelled—which, in Merlin's case, was in writing. Osiris was chosen in order to analyze the strategic decisions applied by Mentor to a highly challenging, apparently unsuccessful mentoring relationship. Finally, Arrow was chosen in order to examine the efficacy of mentoring and writing in addressing trauma in at-risk boys. Taken together, the choice of these particular 4 boys to serve as representative of the 12 coresearchers was made by virtue of their embodiment of key themes found in the group as a whole: resistance to the writing process, the struggle to express inner feelings, definite turning points in the awakening of empathy and compassion, and healing from trauma through

mentoring and writing. Three of these analyses show significant gains in the awakening of empathy and compassion. The other analysis reveals a wealth of data derived from a difficult mentoring relationship.

In order to illustrate the subtle nature of the mentoring relationship, the moment-to-moment calibrations of Mentor in adapting to his coresearchers, as well as the unfolding of each boys' movement or awakening to empathy and compassion, I have adopted the use of distinct headings for most of these findings. This format intentionally contrasts with the expansive narrative depictions in the results chapter. All quotes reflecting Mentor's views, unless otherwise indicated, are from *Mentor's Journal*.

Leif. Leif's odyssey to empathy and compassion revealed significant progress, both through the mentoring relationship and through his writing. Leif was a somewhat withdrawn boy who had been burned in a fire when he was 6 years old, leaving his face severely scarred. A reticent though ultimately willing writer, he progressed from a boy who literally hid himself inside his sweatshirt hood to a young man who was willing to face his pain and even find a passion for mentoring others. The following data depicts salient turns toward empathy and compassion.

Mentee's initial resistance to discussing feelings. Leif began the mentoring process with a resistance to speaking about his feelings: "Why would I want to talk about my feelings?"

Empathetic connection of mentee. In responding to the question regarding the importance of others' feelings, Mentor observed that Leif made note of the fact that he really cared about the kids at the Burn Camp he attended for burn survivors.

Mentor amplification of mentee's empathetic connection. Leif's shift from a resistance or refusal to connect with his feelings to his obvious care and fondness for younger burn victims

was strongly noted by Mentor, who later invited Leif to write about a particular young boy for whom Leif expressed special care.

Mentor affirmation of mentee's empathy. In underscoring Leif's care toward this young boy, Mentor affirmed Leif's empathy toward the young burn victim.

Mentor amplification of mentee's self-empathy. In highlighting Leif's care, Mentor was also affirming Leif's attunement to Leif's own feelings.

Mentor notation of mentee's empathy; mentee opening to happiness. In his recording of the session, Mentor noted that Leif "laughs deeply" when remembering a moment with the young burn victim at the camp, another sign of opening to feeling and connection.

Mentor's empathetic connection to and compassion for mentee causes restraint of inquiry in order to build trust. In their first meeting, Mentor purposefully did not ask Leif the final of three prepared questions (When you or another is suffering, what is your basic attitude about their suffering, and what, if anything, do you feel called to do about that suffering?). The omission of this question regarding Leif's attitude toward suffering reveals Mentor's sensitivity to and calibration of how much opening would be tolerated by Leif, a boy who had been deeply wounded. Mentor's decision, so early in the mentoring relationship, was to focus on trust.

Mentee self-empathy and self-compassion through writing. In Leif's *Tonglen* poem, he showed a willingness to move closer into the heart of his experience, writing about breathing "in fire," and breathing "out cool," and breathing in "scared and scarred."

Mentee's deepening self-empathy and self-compassion through writing. Leif's *Tonglen* poem even showed him facing deeper, more uncontrollable feelings: "Breathe in anger, breathe out total peace. Breathe in death. Breathe out lightning."

Mentor compassion for mentee's vulnerability. From the beginning of the mentoring relationship, Mentor made the decision to allow Leif to wear his hood in the class, even though it was against school policy. Mentor's genuine compassion for his mentee strategically served the development of the mentoring relationship, through trust-building.

Mentor's compassion in the context of fostering mentee development. It was later revealed that Mentor's long-term mentoring strategy would be to invite and even *challenge* Leif, to take off his hood, and be proud of who he was.

Mentee, through writing, extends empathetic embrace to include depiction of archetypal Self. In Leif's "Meeting With Mentor" writing, he wrote about an archetypal old man, also a burn victim, full of wild energy. The old man can be seen as a version of the archetypal Self—whole, uninhibited, celebratory.

Writing about an archetypal image extends mentee self-definition to include transformative character traits. The archetypal figure—"The Man Who Lived Through Fire," as he is called in Leif's writing—embodied qualities of self-acceptance, celebration, and energy.

Mentee's increased self-acceptance embodied. In the final weeks of the program, Leif came to class without his hood. Like his archetypal Mentor figure, "The Man Who Lived Through Fire," Leif demonstrated greater self-acceptance.

Compassion for mentee inspires Mentor to offer mentee other portraits of masculine beauty and strength. When Leif and Mentor perused the Native American photos by Edward Curtis, he helped Leif to connect with other unique depictions of masculine beauty and strength.

Mentor compassionately articulates connection between mentee's self-crafted archetype and mentee's own self-confidence. When Mentor reflected to Leif that the Man Who

Lived Through Fire mentor-figure was laughing, “because he didn’t give a damn what anyone on Earth thought of him,” he reflected that he saw a similar strength in Leif.

Mentee finds meaning through the writing process. In Leif’s Compassion essay, he expressed a sense of meaning and purpose in regard to his own mentoring of a young burn victim.

Mentee’s empathetic identification and compassion for another. In the same writing, Leif showed compassion for Isaac, the little boy who was burned and who had become attached to Leif. Leif wrote, “I feel like I understood what Isaac was going through.” Leif connected his own experience to Isaac’s (*self-empathy/empathy*). He sought to relieve suffering in Isaac (*compassion*) by sharing his experiences as a survivor and giving him practical advice about loving his parents and focusing his attention on his real friends.

Mentee’s compassion for another leads to commitment to service. Leif told the young burn victim, Isaac, that he would be there at the camp next year for him and that Isaac could contact him anytime.

Significant mentee progress. Mentor observed that Leif had

gone on an odyssey to empathy and compassion, connected with his inner mentor, engaged with his outer mentor, and even found himself in a lineage, so to speak, of mentoring, in that he has harvested meaning and purpose . . . from his own ability to bring hope to a young burn survivor.

Mentor compassionately seeds the idea of self-compassion in mentee. Having developed a relationship based on trust and mutual experience, Mentor felt secure enough in their bond to suggest to Leif that he no longer think of himself as a burn *victim*.

Mentor cites mentee’s writing to advocate self-compassion and empowerment of mentee. Mentor planted the seed of a new self-image: “The *Boy Who Came Through the Fire*.”

Embrace of mentee's empathy and compassion expanded. Leif empathetically identified himself with burn survivors everywhere, saying that he wished to “show these guys they are warriors.”

Merlin. Merlin's odyssey to empathy and compassion encompassed a wide arc of development, with several distinct turning points. Merlin was a highly articulate, yet extremely reserved and emotionally guarded boy whose life was marked by a singular tragedy: the loss of his parents in a car accident when Merlin was 11 years of age. His love of writing marked him as unique within this group of reluctant writers.

Both in the unfolding relationship with Mentor and in his writings, Merlin revealed a willingness to face his own wounding, including what one might call his *primal* wound, the tragic loss of his parents at a young age. As noted throughout the section on Merlin in Chapter 4, Mentor struggled with and finally embraced the similarities between himself and Merlin, seeing how the principle of resonance played a potentially potent role in the mentoring dynamic. The following data depict salient turns toward empathy and compassion.

Self-empathy of Mentor. Mentor recognized that mentoring Merlin might involve opening his own wounds. “Will mentoring Merlin bring my own wounds forward at a time when I am so raw, following the death of my own father?”

Mentor's empathetic recognition of Merlin's reserve and his willingness to trust; Mentor's compassionate determination to foster Merlin's gifts. Mentor decided, “Right from the beginning . . . I will honor Merlin's great reserve,” seeing this reserve as resulting largely from Merlin's “premature initiation” into death. Mentor sought to radiate compassionate presence and support for Merlin, while allowing his mentee to trust, according to Merlin's timing. Mentor simultaneously recognized Merlin's advanced maturity and gift for language as

well as his resiliency and made note that within the arc of the mentoring relationship, he would likely challenge Merlin to emerge from his veil of aloofness (a persona that mentor, *self-empathetically*, recognized in himself and *self-compassionately* was also fostering into greater self-revealing).

Self-compassion of Mentor. Mentor questioned his fitness to serve as mentor: “How can I mentor these boys in the face of so many wounds, when I am wrestling with my own brokenness, my father gone, my mother’s health unraveling, my marriage in crisis?” Yet he also resolved to persevere: “I’ve never felt more inadequate—and more determined.”

Self-empathy of Mentor, moving to empathy for mentees. In struggling to meet Merlin with a fully attentive presence, Mentor recognized a willingness in himself to embrace the “very flaws” that left him “porous, open at the heart to these boys in their trauma and potential triumph.” He recognized that “a fundamental willingness” to meet himself exactly as he is “could translate or transfer into a willingness” on the part of his mentees to be themselves and to practice self-empathy.

Mentor self-disclosure as a bridge to empathy, building trust. Mentor decided to tell Merlin about some of his own struggles (although not his marriage), within which he encoded the message that acceptance of pain and grief *can* open oneself to greater sensitivity and strength—“a person can break open, rather than down.”

Mentee’s writing reveals self-empathy, willingness to enter the heart of grief. In Merlin’s *Tonglen* poem, he wrote, “Breathe in death,” perhaps alluding to his primal trauma, the loss of his parents; yet he also revealed the potentially transformative power of his writing to “breathe in screams/breathe out poetry.”

Mentee awakening to self-compassion. Although Mentor expressed reservations about his mentees practicing *tonglen* other than through the writing of the *Tonglen* poem, Merlin, habituated to pain and suffering from an early age, reached for the practice on his own, saying, “I think it would help me.”

Mentor’s empathy for mentee, in witnessing mentee reaching for self-compassion. After expressing caution about Merlin undertaking a beginning *tonglen* practice, Mentor recognized “that of all the students, Merlin probably could handle the *tonglen*,” and found himself “secretly thrilled that the writing of a simple poem whose format was inspired by the practice, has shown up in Merlin’s consciousness as a mentoring, a beckoning presence.” Mentor recognized, additionally, that a degree of self-mentoring was unfolding in Merlin, as if the boy’s inner mentor were guiding him toward a practice that might offer a new relationship to and experience of suffering and its potential for becoming an agency of transformation.

Challenging mentee as an expression of compassion. When Merlin submitted his first “Meeting With Mentor” writing, Mentor challenged Merlin about the ornate flourishes in the writing, touching on Merlin’s tendency to hide behind gothic language. Mentor reflected to himself on Somé’s (Meade et al., 2002) counsel about what one might call the functionality of deliberate irritation in the mentoring relationship, which, in this case, was challenging Merlin, at the risk of irritating him, to come forward with a more authentic expression of self: “Yes, challenging Merlin, now that there is some degree of relationship, of trust even, seems more important than having him even like me.”

Mentor acceptance of the need to respect mentee’s openness to self-disclosure. Throughout their mentoring journey together, Mentor continually adapted to a relationship that “had a strange rhythm, one of openings and closings, silent intervals, mystery moments.” As he

wrote in his journal, Mentor was willing to leave the question open, not come to fixed conclusions, as to whether Merlin's

love of mystery is an act of bravado, pretending he is content with not having things explained or even illuminated, or if it is a byproduct, at least in part, of the aftermath of his profound loss, the fact that nothing will ever feel "complete," be solved, or bring closure.

Mentor empathy. The need to embody and radiate unconditional acceptance to Merlin was more important to Mentor than coming to a conclusion as to the ultimate motivations for Merlin's elusive persona. Mentor reflected in his journal:

There is something wild about Merlin. I intuit that his evolution, if I could call it that, as a writer, and as a soul, depends on honoring that wildness, but maybe giving it a container in which it can unfold.

Mentor empathy for plight of mentee. As the mentoring relationship progressed, Mentor recognized a desperation in Merlin to transcend "his distancing, his irony, his iron-guard around his feelings." In considering Merlin's *second* version of his "Meeting With Mentor" writing, Mentor, comparing it to Merlin's first, apocalyptic-flavored draft, noted in his journal:

I sense, rather, that he is feeling the end of an identity, a mask that he has adopted in the face of unbelievable loss, one that has served him the past few years, but is now outwearing its welcome, imprisoning him even, a "world ending." All of this is in the runes of his writing, at least to me as his mentor, whispering through the veils.

Mentee's self-empathy, self-compassion quickened through the writing process. In Merlin's final Compassion essay, he emboldened himself to (a) directly address the heart of his grief-story, the loss of his parents and his subsequent life; and (b) to write about this in a clear, unadorned, direct fashion. Merlin proclaimed in the piece, "I didn't want to write a fancy essay or creative writing for this last piece of Odyssey. I've been 'found out' as the guy who sometimes hides behind words: guilty! I wanted to write something from my heart." Merlin's writing pointed toward a maturation process that simultaneously accepted his need for speaking

and writing indirectly, stemming from his core wounds, as well as seeing the positive value in writing and embodying a more heart-centered self-carriage. *Self-empathetically*, in his writing, Merlin recognized that at some level he would “always be sad.” This recognition of sadness embodied self-empathy—a basic attunement to his own emotions. Deepening his *self-empathy*, Merlin recognized, “[Sadness] is my black anchor, sometimes pulling me down.” Moving from the self-empathy cited above, Merlin’s writing showed him moving even closer inside his feelings, increasing self-empathy. *Empathetically*, Merlin, addressing his deceased parents through his writing, affirmed, “I’ve found lots to keep me going. Mostly, it’s that I know that you guys want me to keep going, to really have a life, not just looking back in tears.” Merlin’s empathetic connection with his parents, beyond the grave, brought a sense of meaning and purpose to his suffering. His empathetic connection to the spirit of his parents empowered his resolve “to do something in this world to make you really proud.” By the end of his “Compassion” writing, Merlin affirmed a deep sense of empathy that transcended the boundaries of life itself, as he envisioned his parents witnessing his emergence into life. He wrote, “You’ll be watching, you’ll be there. We’ll be together, like we were always meant to be together. I feel you and love you.”

Mentor compassionately affirms mentee’s strength within his vulnerability. *Mentor’s Journal* revealed a thought that, in their final meeting, Mentor shared with Merlin: “What impressed me so much about his final essay, what touched me, is the fact that it is so simple, so directly written from the heart.” Although respectfully communicating his opinion of the value of Merlin’s former, more ornate writing style, even with its “layers of deliberate enigma,” Mentor underscored that for Merlin, “it is a huge thing that he has written so . . . nakedly, so directly to his parents.”

Empathetic resonance between Mentor and mentee. In reflecting back on the arc of the mentoring relationship, Mentor theorized that the developmental steps as mentor could resonantly affect his mentee's progression through similar areas in life: "My ability, if that's what you want to call it, to be in loss, day-by-day at this time, and to accept it, to breathe it in, perhaps gave permission to Merlin to breathe in his own loss, do *tonglen*, . . . spiraling into the heart of the most central loss of his life, accepting, opening up space, moving forward." Mentor further investigated one of the core mysteries at the heart of mentoring—how essential wounds could transform into existential blessings—and recorded, that he and Merlin "together . . . have gone deeper into the mystery of the wound and the blessing, this mentoring field, this timeless moment in time."

Mentee's self-empathetic embrace at resolution of mentoring intervention. In the final interview, Merlin had moved from a boy who often hid behind irony and a spell of ornate language to one who has opened his heart, acknowledging that, in the overall picture of himself, feelings are "at least half of me, and probably more."

Mentee's empathetic connection to parents, shared with Mentor. Having gone through a *write* of passage, wherein he connected to his parents in his final compassion writing, Merlin said, "I felt like they were sitting right there with me; like I could feel them next to me. It was a good feeling."

Mentee's commitment to ongoing self-compassion and compassion. Having done his own living research into the efficacy of the compassion practice of *tonglen*, Merlin affirmed to Mentor that he would continue this practice as an ongoing address to suffering—in himself and in the world.

Mentor's final affirmation of transformative power of compassionate acceptance of mentee. Reflecting in his journal, Mentor once again recognized that perhaps any success with Merlin came “from him feeling an unwavering acceptance from me. So many have tried to change his sorrow, push him out of it; whereas I’ve allowed him a space in which his sorrow and grief can, themselves, mentor him.”

Osiris. The following analysis underscores the fact that there are no *guarantees* in mentoring. Osiris had a rare illness since childhood and was thus frequently absent from school. He also suffered from a general state of apathy—a state which Mentor identified as one of his own personal nemeses. Only later in their relationship, when Mentor discovered Osiris’s love of The Beatles, did he find threads of passion and interest within his challenging mentee.

Both the mentoring relationship with Osiris and Osiris’s engagement with the writing process were fraught with difficulties. I include the data below in order to analyze the mentoring strategies employed in the face of challenging circumstances as well as to depict the ways that empathy and compassion within the mentor can continually inform and guide the relationship. The following data chronicles these adaptations and small movements toward empathy and compassion.

Mentor acknowledgment of significant challenges. From the beginning of their encounter, Mentor recognized that apathy was Osiris’s chief attitudinal posture. In seeking to find an effective inner alignment toward Osiris’s apathy, move the mentoring relationship forward, and possibly even inspire attempts at writing in a highly reluctant student, Mentor noted the temptation, born of his uncertainty, to try and “jump start” the process, and, as he wrote, “shock my students ‘awake.’” He acknowledged the fact that such techniques would not work with Osiris and accepted that his first task was to attune empathetically to Osiris.

Increased Mentor empathy. In his journal, Mentor noted an increase in his ability to attune empathetically to his mentees, literally to *feel into* how they felt. He speculated that this increased ability might be a byproduct of being broken open as a result of the traumas in his own life and his surrender to the process of awakening empathy and compassion in himself. As perhaps a shadow side to this increased empathy, Mentor noted experiencing a sense of exhaustion and weariness, even reflected in a shift in his own posture, as he opened himself to his mentee.

Accessing a mythic sensibility to mythologize rather than pathologize the challenges of mentee. Reflecting on the intuitive process of assigning an essence name to each student, Mentor considered that the name *Osiris* perhaps encoded a mentoring imperative for one seeking to gather this mentee's attention: Just as in the myth, Isis gathered the scattered, dismembered parts of her brother Osiris, so Mentor would endeavor to divine some sense of interest or even passion in his mentee, thus drawing into singular focus the attention of his mentee, Osiris, and rousing him from his torpor.

Mentor realignment. In encountering the density of Osiris's apathy, Mentor made a conscious choice: "When I am getting to know and attuning to Osiris . . . to not buy into the fountain of apathy that flows so abundantly around him." Mentor's challenge was to attune empathetically to the extent of sensing what Osiris's apathy might feel like in himself, while not allowing himself to give in to despair.

Persistence of Mentor in the face of resistance. When Mentor asked Osiris about his relationship to his own feelings, Osiris insisted that he had no feelings and that he was "just . . . here." Mentor responded by provocatively stating that Osiris's latter comment was "very Zen,"

to which Osiris responded, sarcastically, that he was “freakin’ Buddha.” Undeterred, Mentor sought at least to plant the notion in Osiris that “the seed of the Buddha” is in everyone.

Empathetic resonance and acceptance of obstacles; being “stuck.” In this initial encounter, when Osiris laid his head down, saying, “I’m tired,” Mentor responded in kind, stating that he, too, was tired.

Mentor empathy for mentee, and attempts to see beyond resistant behaviors. Mentor recognized that Osiris “loves to push it to the limit, and then when people give up on him, it confirms to him that (a) he’s impossible, (b) no one cares, and (c) he/they [the SWAS students] really are the ‘retards.’”

Practice of mindfulness on the spot, as a method for inviting present-centered awareness rather than history-saturated behaviors. In seeking to break the stalemate of resistance on Osiris’s part, as well as to derail his own “attempt to get some sort of a result” from the three questions, Mentor invited Osiris to take three mindful breaths. Mentor also acknowledged that his insistence on persisting with the three questions might have been taking him out of the present moment. Mentor also noted to himself how a “mindless momentum” toward a fixed result was influenced by the “no child left behind,” “race to the top” mentality that governs public school education and by the way in which, “with such a momentum, [moment-to-moment] presence goes into exile.” When Osiris fell asleep while Mentor *thought* they were meditating together, Mentor accepted that they had reached an impasse. Although he persisted with the other two questions, about how Osiris held the feelings of others in importance, and about Osiris’s attitude toward suffering, Mentor surrendered to the moment. Mentor was left with *self*-instruction: “Breathe, Mentor—breathe.”

Mentee's initial writing accurately portrays his state of apathy. Osiris' *Tonglen* poem, with its oscillating refrain of "nothing . . ." "something . . ." "nothing . . ." matched his underlying attitude of apathy and his bare-"minimum-itus."

Mentor notes a seemingly complete absence of motivation in mentee, seeks strategy: Mentor's strategic response to Osiris's apathy was to "find the scattered pieces of his motivation, to bring him back to life even," again evoking the mythic arc of his namesake.

Danger of matching frequencies with mentee's blocked motivation. Mentor also acknowledged to himself that in seeking to unlock motivation in Osiris, he felt a "pull downwards, a lassitude, exhaustion." Mentor's attunement to his *own* state, indicating self-empathy, at that moment allowed him to recognize that his personal nemesis, apathy, was appearing within the mentoring relationship.

Mentor attempts to introduce a shock in order to catalyze motivation or at least interest in mentee. Finding no stirring of motivation in Osiris, Mentor challenged his mentee, saying, "You have a big 'I Don't Give A Fuck' sign waving over your head. But there has to be something that you care about, something that you enjoy, or even love." In allowing himself to become desperate within (though only revealing a semblance of this desperation to his mentee), Mentor was drawing on the counsel of Bishop, participant in the "The Genius of Mentoring" symposium, who said, "You have to become just as desperate as they are in order to have mentoring moments" (Meade et al., 2002, track 5). In his desperation to connect with his mentee, Mentor felt compelled to administer a Trickster-like shock toward catalyzing a mentoring moment. Mentor's desperation to reach his mentee pushed him to make the choice of breaking school rules (use of profanity) in order to connect with his mentee. From that point, Osiris gave his first straightforward answer to Mentor's inquiries.

Mentee reveals source of passion, strongly noted by Mentor as possible motivational entry-point. In revealing his love for The Beatles, and their importance as “The soundtrack of my life,” Osiris stepped into authenticity and interest for the first time in the relationship. Mentor began to see that all the work, the waiting, even the administration of a shock through the deliberate use of profanity, had served to lead to this moment. He noted, “The difference between Osiris’s affect when talking about his cherished Beatles, especially George, and his usual somnolent demeanor is remarkable. It’s like The Beatles are his Isis-factor, their magical musical motifs fanning his slumbering soul awake.”

Mentor’s conflict between celebrating mentee’s passion and seeing its practical (i.e., educational) utility. Mentor restrained his initial reaction to wanting to make practical “use” of Osiris’s passion, asking himself, “Has there ever, in the history of Osiris, been an adult, an elder who has just sat with him in his love of the Beatles, the one thing, apparently, that seems to bring him a sense of joy and light, helixing out of the misery of childhood illness, the torpor of school and its tormentors?” Mentor planted the seed in Osiris of writing about George Harrison, his favorite Beatle, in his “Meeting With Mentor” writing, but applied no pressure, proffering the notion as a potentially inspiring or enjoyable exercise for his mentee.

Mentee’s interest and passion applied to writing. Having identified a core—perhaps the only—passion in his life, with his mentor’s support, Osiris wrote an imaginative essay about meeting George Harrison of The Beatles. In the essay, Osiris addressed a core dilemma in his life—his fatigue, asking his mentor figure, George Harrison, “Why am I so tired all the time?” Enigmatically, he was told, three times, “You forgot,” with no further explanation.

Mentor impasse. As Osiris spiraled down into disengagement with school and with *Odyssey*, Mentor self-empathetically encountered his own impasse, and wrote, “The pain I feel

about Osiris is a quiet torment. I have absolutely no vision of how to go forward.” Articulating this impasse and seeking not to impose an agenda artificially, Mentor at least remained true to his mentoring alignment to place authenticity of relationship before external goals, recognizing that “there is nothing to be gained whatsoever in trying to force Osiris to do the writing.”

Acceptance of “failure” as an acquired fatality of some mentoring relationships.

Mentor’s perception of failure came from considering the ways that Osiris’s apathy seemed to engulf the boy in the final weeks of the relationship, as well as through witnessing Osiris’s unwillingness to write the Compassion essay. These impasses caused Mentor to feel as if he had failed his mentee. While self-compassionately allowing himself to grieve the apparent “failure” of the mentoring relationship—“I feel as if I have failed with Osiris, mostly”—Mentor noted, “At least Osiris knows that I am here for him.” Mentor speculated that one facet of mentoring is simply “this meeting, without any agenda” and, moreover, resolved that he not place on Osiris “the burden” of what he wanted to get done with him.

Mentoring as seed-planting. In their closing meeting, Mentor gave Osiris a card with the definition of *mindfulness* on it, to help Osiris to find connection to a sense of present-time awareness.

Arrow. Chronicled below are findings on Arrow’s turns toward empathy and compassion. Arrow moved toward the embodiment of these qualities from a state of residual trauma resulting largely from his witnessing the stabbing of his brother less than a year before entering *Odyssey Writes of Passage*. As with Leif, Merlin, and Osiris, the following analysis represents a distillation of a much wider body of findings regarding the numerous, often subtle moments when a significant move toward empathy and compassion was clearly indicated.

Mentor's initial empathetic observation of mentee's state. In meeting Arrow, Mentor took strong note of the fact that (a) this young man had witnessed a deeply traumatic life event, the near death of his brother from a stab wound; and (b) Arrow had not received any clinical help for possible posttraumatic stress.

Mentor notates place of mentee vulnerability as a possible future place of opening to feeling and thus to empathy and compassion. In going over the three questions regarding the mentee's own feelings, the feelings of others, and the mentee's response to suffering, Mentor noted that Arrow stated that his girlfriend was "the one who can get to him."

Mentee's early revelation of empathetic opening to divinity in the face of trauma. Asked about his basic attitude toward suffering, Arrow connected back to the moment when his life was ripped open: standing over his fallen brother, praying for his survival. This almost ritualistic opening to empathy and compassion revealed a wider field of response to Arrow's suffering: God. Arrow acknowledged that the need to pray remained with him after the traumatic event. Affirming his sense of connection, Arrow distilled a credo of faith and belief, proclaiming, "My brother lived because of all the prayers that were coming to him."

Self-empathy as mentee attunes to the felt-experience of the traumatic moment. In creating his *Tonglen* poem, Arrow utilized the writing process to travel, in a sense, to the site of the wound, reliving, through his sparse words, the moment when trauma struck his life. He wrote, "Breathe in—remembering./ Breathe out—peace./ Breathe in—fear./ Breathe out—peace." The writing process created a space wherein the mentee could touch base with his experience.

Self-compassion through writing. Arrow's choice to "breathe out—peace" was a first step toward his assuming a locus of control as to how he contextualized his experience. It

allowed him to envision self-generated (or self-petitioned) healing being inducted, addressing his afflicted state.

Rhythms of opening. At the end of his *Tonglen* poem, Arrow, having moved toward healing through the writing process, wrote, “Breathe in a knife. Breathe out—never happened.” Such a denial or retreat in his writing, as if further openness, at least at this point in the journey, was not safe for the mentee, was noted and respected by Mentor.

Attempts at empathetic attunement on the part of the mentor. In meeting with Arrow after the composition of his *tonglen* poem, Mentor tracked the restlessness of his mentee as they walked together. In seeking to understand and therefore empathetically attune to his mentee, Mentor speculated on possible causes, beginning with the trauma Arrow had experienced, but also recognizing that boredom with school or possibly the mentee’s internalization of the erratic, sometime harsh rhythms of video games could be factors.

Further empathetic attunement: Mentor notes mentee’s readiness to address his wounds through telling his trauma-story. Although he possessed some knowledge of what had happened to Arrow, Mentor adopted the mentoring strategy of being present but with no expectations. Sensing Arrow’s wish to reveal and heal but also his reticence to relive the experience, Mentor took his direction from his mentee, noting, “I can clearly sense Arrow’s retreat, his drawing a sacred circle around this memory, this scar.”

Mentor’s moment-to-moment research into the etiology of empathy and compassion’s awakening in mentee. As Mentor began to listen to Arrow recount his tale, he postulated that Arrow’s experience of trauma, witnessing his brother being stabbed, functioned as a sort of liminal experience ushering him out of the stoicism of boy-culture, where feelings are mostly kept under wraps or suppressed, into a dramatic opening of empathy and compassion.

Mentoring containment allows mentee to both reexperience and reflect upon his trauma. In recounting his trauma story, Arrow recalled his sense of abstraction at the time, while, in present time, allowing himself to feel and absorb what happened.

Mentor's compassion for mentee. In recognizing his mentee's movement toward guilt and self-blame, a sort of survivor guilt (although his brother lived), Mentor compassionately reassured Arrow that there was no way he could have known what was going to happen to his brother.

Deepening empathetic attunement of Mentor to mentee's trauma. As Arrow continued to spiral deeper into his trauma story, Mentor experienced an opening of empathetic identification with his mentee and a deep sense of compassion in the face of Arrow's and his brother's suffering: "I feel as if I, too, am leaning over his brother's barely breathing body, suspended, terrified, yet awake to each breath, as if the universe is offering it up one breath at a time, leaving me suspended in the balance."

Mentee's empathetic opening through trauma allows him to reconnect to a lack of nurturance and to grieve that loss as well in the presence of Mentor. In retelling his story of the night of the stabbing, Arrow recalls how, as he waited to hear his brother's prognosis, he found himself thinking about his father, who had been absent most of Arrow's life. Mentor noted that Arrow then began to weep, as if opening himself to tell the story had also opened the wound of his missing father.

Mentor affirms the awakening of the compassionate warrior in mentee. In honoring Arrow's courage and vulnerability, Mentor vividly underscored for his mentee "how caring for his brother, realizing that without those he loved, his life was nothing, was a gift that came out of the wound." Strengthening his thesis of the compassionate warrior being a young man who feels

deeply and in doing so finds strength, Mentor further reflected that Arrow was “constructing a new warrior identity for himself—one that includes deep caring.”

Mentee’s self-empathy compels him to write about his missing father. In the wake of telling his story, Arrow’s writing for “Meeting With Mentor” furthered the healing work of examining his relationship with his missing father and, in a sense, his relationship *with* that absence. Through this writing, Arrow was now able to consider the possibility that the formerly buried frustration he had always felt regarding his missing father now inspired him to formulate an intention regarding his own future as a father. He acknowledged his need for a father through his writing, a further opening. Implicit in Arrow’s Mentor writing was acceptance, empathy, and the beginnings of compassion for his missing father. He even wrote,

I can’t end this by writing “I love you, dad” (I just did) since I don’t know who he is. He is the Dad That Never Was. I guess I can thank him for all that I have to find BECAUSE he’s missing. Thanks, Dad!”

Mentor affirmed that in writing his Mentor essay, Arrow had gone deeper into self-empathy and self-compassion as well as compassion for his missing father, suggesting, “You spoke to your father—but also to the father inside of you. That is real courage, speaking to your own vulnerability.” Mentor reinforced the potential warrior’s strength in daring to be vulnerable to the affective life.

Mentee uses final writing process to move deeper into empathy and compassion. In composing his Compassion essay, Arrow wrote simply and directly about his pain, his fear of losing his brother, and his discovery of how deeply he cared about and loved his brother. Arrow’s writing also memorialized his compassion for his mother in the face of potentially losing her son: “I thought of your [his brother’s] eyes never opening. Ever. I thought of Mom trying to live through this.”

Mentee deepens writing process to articulate his own awakening. Through the writing process, Arrow was able to articulate a quietly dramatic awakening to empathy and compassion. His writing described an almost mystical sense of renewal, as he proclaimed to his brother, “When your eyes closed, mine opened. But not just my eyes. My mind. My heart.” With self-compassion and compassion for his loved ones, he faced the possibility of losing his brother and declared, “I knew I’d have to go on, for Mom and for you.”

Mentee acknowledges there was an absence in his feeling life. Having travelled his odyssey to empathy and compassion through mentoring and writing, Arrow reflected that what he formerly called “feelings” were more “bravado” and that he, in fact, lived mostly in fear.

Mentee expresses integration of emotional authenticity and even vulnerability as part of a newly forming identity. In expressing the importance of the feelings of others in his life at the present time, Arrow emphasized the fact that “something has changed, big time,” citing the simple fact that he and his brother now always say “I love you” when they say goodbye, an emotional honesty born of his breaking-open experience.

Mentee’s compassion widens to embrace mentoring younger generation. Having come through his ordeal and having opened to experience his story with Mentor and through his writing, Arrow expressed a strong wish to mentor youngsters tempted by the gang life that had destroyed his brother’s life and nearly his own and his family’s. He firmly stated, “I don’t want some little kid having to go through what I did: standing over your big brother, watching blood pour out through his shirt onto the ground. No one should have to go through that.”

Cycle 4: From Preliminary to Refined Lenses

Regarding the process of moving from preliminary to refined lenses, Anderson (2011) wrote,

In Cycle 4, the intuitive inquirer refines and transforms the preliminary interpretive lenses developed in Cycle 2 in light of his engagement with the data gathered in Cycle 3. Cycle 2 lenses are modified, removed, rewritten, expanded, etc.—reflecting the researcher’s more developed and nuanced understanding of the topic at the conclusion of the study. (p. 53)

My approach to crafting a second set of lenses was informed by my experience in the field. The vast sweep of my preliminary lenses had served the purpose of synthesizing my pre-fieldwork understandings and experiences regarding my subject, yet the living encounter with 12 unique boys and their stories, coupled with the refinement of my own mentorship, had radically changed and refined my perspective on the entire endeavor. Anderson (2011) emphasized that “the degree of change between Cycle 2 and Cycle 4 lenses is in part a measure of the researcher’s willingness to be influenced by the data and to modify his understanding of a topic” (p. 53). Although I had worked in the field of mentoring for many years, doing this work inside the crucible of a doctoral-level intuitive inquiry had, in effect, brought what I had done for so long instinctively and intuitively to a greater level of conscious awareness. In regard to my own development, crafting these lenses began to transform me into a more grounded, steady researcher—and mentor. Still more pertinent to this study was Mentor’s own awakenings to empathy and compassion.

At the conclusion of fieldwork with my coresearchers, I felt some discontentment with my preliminary lenses; they now seemed too diffuse, too general, and too spiritual. I was experiencing an incongruity between my predominantly *literary and spirituality-based scholarly* endeavor of crafting the preliminary lenses and what one might call the *Survivor of the Fieldwork Self* that was emerging. Anderson (2011) counseled that during this period, “generally speaking, feelings of confusion and bewilderment are indications that a researcher is

encountering what he does not know and yet seeks to understand. There is no need to worry as patterns will reveal themselves with time and reflection” (p. 55).

Refined lenses. Releasing the preliminary lenses mirrored the process of refinement and transformation in which I was involved, even at the level of language, both as a mentor and as one undergoing his own awakening to new levels of empathy and compassion. The preliminary lenses were literary and ornate. In composing them, it was as if I had had to go back beyond my last few years in the field to the origins of my own call to mentor, which came chiefly through my studies in literature and devotion to spiritual writings from around the world. The refined lenses that next emerged were more succinct and direct.

Regarding the second set of lenses that one composes after the data have been gathered, Anderson (2011) wrote,

Throughout an intuitive inquiry, the most important feature of interpreting data is intuitive breakthroughs, illuminating moments when the data begin to shape themselves in the eyes of the researcher. . . . When the researcher begins to see patterns in the data, interpretation in the form of Cycle 4 lenses has begun. (p. 55)

After a month spent reflecting on my experience in the field, while continuing to write about my findings in *Mentor’s Journal*, I found that when they finally appeared, these second set of lenses revealed themselves with astonishing clarity and focus. Within an hour, I had written all 12 of the refined lenses, listed below.

Refined Lens 1. Transformative mentoring is connected to the transformation of the mentor. Mentor development can be catalytic to mentee development, just as can mentee development be catalytic to mentor development.

Refined Lens 2. Mentoring has two faces: purely receptive, “mother mentoring,” based on acceptance and unconditional love; and decisively active “father mentoring,” based on will

and challenge. The terms “mother” and “father” are expressions of function rather than gender, and a synthesis of these two faces of mentoring is the most effective.

Refined Lens 3. Awakening empathy and compassion in at-risk adolescent boys can be powerfully fostered through the media of mentoring.

Refined Lens 4. A writing process that invites at-risk adolescent boys to write from the heart can help to catalyze a flow of empathy for self and others as well as stir compassion for self and others.

Refined Lens 5. Embracing moments of auspicious bewilderment, signifying the arrival of the trickster-element into the mentoring relationship, increases flexibility of mentoring response, while promoting humility in the mentor—a moment-to-moment adaptation to what is unfolding.

Refined Lens 6. Impasses or “failures” in the mentoring process, if accepted with compassion for mentor and mentee, can illuminate the way ahead. In this process, accepting and breathing into the obstacles can reopen the dynamic for new insights and new strategies to appear.

Refined Lens 7. Inspiration about writing can be a contagious property, in which the writing mentor, also deeply engaged in the process of writing, may inspire mentees into an equally powerful process by the principal of resonance.

Refined Lens 8. Humor, by virtue of the release and compassionate insights it confers, is a key mentoring tool and strategy.

Refined Lens 9. There is a mentoring art to *becoming-desperate-without-becoming desperate-about-being-desperate*. Such an acceptance of the mentoring burden of holding steady while bearing witness to a mentee’s travails, can draw in new insights and strategies.

Refined Lens 10. When adolescents write about painful or traumatic experiences, they are, self-empathetically, revisiting the site of a wound. In supporting this exploration, the mentor can provide encouragement and insight, which may result in the mentees being able to find meaning within their suffering.

Refined Lens 11. The grail, or summit, of the mentoring endeavor is the awakening of empathy and compassion in both mentor and mentee.

Refined Lens 12. The *9 Gates of Mentoring*—Emptiness, Empathy Mirror, Bearing Compassionate Witness to Gifts and Wounds, Encouragement, In-Visioning, Abyss, Inner Mentor, Blessing, and Celebration—encode a vision that links the primordial lineage of mentoring to a future societal vision of transformational elders and initiated youth.

Two preliminary lenses compared to two refined lenses. The emergent design of the study intuitively called for a complete “release” of the preliminary lenses in order to reflect the transformation of the researcher from a more literary and spiritual orientation to a much more grounded approach to mentoring and to research itself. In order to honor the traditional intuitive inquiry practice of lens comparison, I present two preliminary and refined lenses, in comparison.

Preliminary Lens 1. *Both ancient myths and world literature have imaginatively portrayed the awakening of empathy and compassion as central to the education of the heart and the rite of passage to manhood.* This preliminary lens was released in recognition of its largely literary origins. The intensive focus in the construction of the refined lenses, such as the one below, was on what was required, in the here and now, to mentor students successfully toward the awakening of empathy and compassion.

Refined Lens 1. *Transformative mentoring is connected to the transformation of the mentor him/herself. Mentor development can be catalytic to mentee development; as can mentee*

development be catalytic to mentor development. Because of the transformation between the preliminary and refined lenses, it is difficult to find a second set that might lend to a direct lens-to-lens comparison; however, by regarding a preliminary and refined lens in which, although numbered differently, each focused on empathy and compassion and writing, the radical change that emerged post fieldwork is revealed.

Preliminary Lens 6. *Empathy and compassion are master keys to the writing process, granting potential access to the emotional and soul lives of self and others. The writing process can catalyze, awaken, strengthen, and stabilize the qualities of empathy and compassion by helping boys attune to the inner lives of self and others. When at-risk boys find their story and connect to others' stories, utilizing these master keys of empathy and compassion, their writing becomes vibrant and compelling, and these qualities spill over into their lives.* In this preliminary lens, the very style of the writing lacks concision and focus. To employ a metaphor: To try and “see” in the field through these preliminary lenses would be to minimize clarity, and to risk not perceiving what was truly being called for by my mentees.

Refined Lens 4. *A writing process that invites at-risk adolescent boys to write from the heart can help to catalyze a flow of empathy for self and others as well as stir compassion for self and others.* In this refined lens, the concise focus is on the actual process of empathy, linked to a *mentored* writing process that emphasizes writing from the heart. Again, the refined lens was based in practical application, as contrasted with the more spacious, somewhat conjectural, literary tone of the preliminary lens. All of the refined lenses reflected the discovery that the more precise lenses portray a more accurate vision of the mentoring dynamic, hence a greater possibility for mentoring success.

From Cycle 4 to Cycle 5

Transformed lenses / 9 Gates of Mentoring. In Anderson's (2011) update of the intuitive inquiry process, she cited the different approaches to successive lens construction that have been utilized by various intuitive inquirers subsequent to her original formulation of the method (p. 53). In seeking ways to portray their emergent data most accurately as well as to depict the transformation of the researcher, some intuitive inquirers have seen the need to construct two or three sets of lenses subsequent to their original, preliminary lenses. Vipassana Esbjörn (2003), for example, expressed emergent insights through the creation of new, change, and seed lenses, and Robert Wood (2010) proffered a model of strengthened, expanded, changed, and new lenses.

Following the precedents of Esbjörn (2003) and Wood (2010), I was compelled by the emergent shape of the data to construct, first, the greatly simplified refined lenses presented above and then a final set of *transformed* lenses to take the inferences from the research a step further. The following presents an original template for the *9 Gates of Mentoring*. This template functions as my final, transformed lenses. These *9 Gates* are also interwoven with the introduction of a return to consideration of the literature of Chapter 2, in order to contextualize this template in the light of the work of scholars in the field.

In discussing Cycle 4 of the intuitive inquiry, Anderson (2011) wrote,

Perhaps more than in any of the other cycles of intuitive inquiry, the researcher's familiarity with his own intuitive style is key to the success of Cycle 4. Knowing how one's intuitive process works makes it easier to cultivate and invite breakthrough insights. (p. 54)

Earlier, Romanyshyn (2007) had posited that "the work that the researcher is called to do makes sense of the researcher as much as he or she makes sense of it" (p. 113). In light of both authors' insights, my desire to adopt a more critical tone throughout my final chapter wrestled with the

internal imperative to honor the voice that was emerging through the construction of my final set of lenses, the *9 Gates*. Continuing the emergent design of consolidation and synthesis, these final lenses proved to be more concise even than my refined lenses. My final, transformed lenses also further articulated the findings on the firm relationship between mentoring and the awakening of empathy and compassion—in both the mentees and their mentor.

The term *gates* evoked the sense of *opening*, integral to an in-depth mentoring relationship. My understanding from the field had revealed that access to the realm inside of each of the nine gates was granted according to a resonant alignment that combined inner attitude and outer action.

Revisiting the literature review. As discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, much of the modern mentoring literature focused on the programmatic, professional, goal-setting aspect of mentoring; therefore, to uncover theoretical and empirical examples of the *inner* dynamics at play in mentoring, transpersonal scholars such as Bache (2008), Hillman (1996), Meade (2010), and Palmer (2007), whose works honor this deeper dimension of mentoring are brought into revisiting the literature. Also by tracing the very origins of the word, Mentor, to Homer's (1998) *Odyssey*, I have offered a mythically encoded picture of an in-depth mentoring relationship that proved to be strongly resonant with my experience in the field. Making this ancient connection to the origins of mentoring brought me, as Mentor, a developing sense of operating within a sacred lineage that stretched across time and even touched the timeless. The insights and counsels of these transpersonal scholars and practitioners coupled with the teachings encoded in the ancient myth broadened the perspective or what one might call the *horizon* of the mentoring intervention in this study, while grounding this intervention within a durable lineage.

The literature review considered primordial rites-of-passage models and the Hero's Journey. These models proved to be enduring journey guides for these times, as my coresearchers were invited to and did embrace the notion of regarding their lives as unfolding odysseys, a *rite* of passage. Drawing on the wisdom of these models, Mentor was able to recast the adolescent passage his coresearchers were undergoing into an inspiring framework, as a counterpoint to the state of boredom that had so often shadowed their educational journey. Hillman's (1996) acorn theory of the soul also found resonance and application with my coresearchers as they field-tested the theory, through their writings and through a new outlook on their lives that moved toward meaning and purpose.

For Mentor himself, the works of Meade (2010, 2012; Meade et al., 2002), Fox (2006), Bache (2008), and Palmer (2007) located mentoring and pedagogy within a spiritual, yet deeply embodied context, while inviting a steady watchfulness as to the interrelationship between Mentor's own opening to empathy and compassion and that of his mentees. The in-depth mentoring insights of these transpersonal scholars further powerfully affirmed my sense, as Mentor, of participating in a living lineage that extended from the original Mentor to its most modern practitioners.

When I began this research, the voices of these and other scholars in the field were, in a sense, outside of myself, gathered around me, but not yet internalized—just as the qualities of empathy and compassion were also, at that point in my research, largely theoretical, in spite of a near-decade in the field. Over the course of the study, these voices of wisdom had become internalized—mentoring Mentor, so to speak. A moment such as the one Mentor experienced when, while sitting with Metta, where both mentor and mentee compassionately contemplated the plight of Metta's mother, seeing how it had wounded and gifted the boy, brought a sense of

radiant stillness and illumination that filled the room. In that moment, a connection was made between the 2nd-century mentoring “data” of Nagarjuna, praising compassionate radiation from deity (Thurman, 2006), encountered in my Cycle 1 study of texts, and a modern Mentor and his mentee. Entering into such a connection created a resonant, grounded sense of writing a new chapter in a sacred lineage. This sense of connection and joining a rich mentoring lineage informed the composition of my transformed lenses, the *9 Gates of Mentoring* template. As the template was revealed, I experienced both the feeling of original discovery *and* the sense of becoming part of a community of researchers and scholars that stretched from ancient mythmakers to modern researchers.

As I moved through this research, it became increasingly clear to me that the art of mentoring could be viewed as having nine distinct turning points, which are salient passages from one state or stage to another. Each of these stages underscored the numinous, life-transforming connections possible through deep mentoring. As Bache (2008) had discovered, there is a “subtle mind-to-mind and heart-to-heart connection that springs up between teachers and students in the classroom, unbidden but too frequent and too pointed to be accidental” (p. 1). Palmer (2007) had echoed this by writing, “As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together” (p. 2), and Meade (2010) offered that “genuine teachers represent the inner qualities lived out, the potentials actualized, the purpose of the soul being truly embodied” (p. 112). Each of these scholars and practitioners wrote of what is possible when the gates of mentoring open widely, the atmosphere radically deepens, and a sense of sacredness attends the process. My field experience confirmed their findings.

In the spirit of intuitive inquiry’s invitation to honor and include the researcher’s focused awareness on his or her own processes, often at crucial points of cultivating and receiving

insight, I recount the following: Testament to the blending of experiential synthesis, intuitive knowing, and cognitive analysis at play in the construction of my final lenses, the entire *9 Gates* grid and a series of lengthy commentaries recorded in *Mentor's Journal*, came to me in a spontaneous burst of writing, over a period of less than 4 hours. Only gradually was I able to comprehend the fuller meaning and implications of each gate and realize how the work with my coresearchers had made distinct something that had been forming in me for almost a decade.

In reflection, I saw how my second set of refined lenses depicted a transition to a more succinct, less literary, and more grounded approach to mentoring and researching. The completion of my Cycle 4 process, documented below, consisted of my composing my final lenses. Simultaneous with the presentation of these final lenses, the *9 Gates of Mentoring*, I also continue my Cycle 5 process, weaving together the threads that connected the birth of the transformed lenses to the literature.

Finally, in considering the *9 Gates* as a whole, it is important to note that these gates do not always open sequentially. In retrospect, I see that, during the course of the program's 16 weeks, according to the ever-shifting needs of the mentoring relationship, I sometimes experienced the opening of an earlier gate and, at other times, a later gate would open, seemingly out of sequence. Similarly, on many occasions, several gates seemed to open at once in the accelerated process of mentoring moments.

Cycle 5 Begun: Revisiting the Literature in Relation to the *9 Gates*

Taken as a whole, the *9 Gates* represents a complete mentoring cycle. The gates are divided into sets of three, with each set emphasizing the receptive, active, and integrating aspects of the cycle of mentoring.

Gates 1 (Emptiness), 2 (Empathy Mirror), and 3 (Bearing Compassionate Witness to Gifts and Wounds) focus on the *receptive, inner alignments* of the mentor. Gates 4 (Encouragement), 5 (In-Visioning), and 6 (Abyss) focus on the *active intervention* of the mentor (while beginning to attune the mentee to a source of inner guidance). Gates 7 (Inner Mentor), 8 (Blessing), and 9 (Celebration) *integrate* the inner alignments and outer actions in propelling the mentee toward the community—and into life. Lastly, each of the sets of three gates correspond to the classical phases of the rite of passage (van Gennep, 1908/2004) in that Gates 1-3 constitute a *separation*, in which the mentee enters into the intimate, one might even say, sacred enclosure of the mentoring relationship; Gates 4-6 provide an arena for the mentee's active *transitions and trials*, and Gates 7-9 mark the mentee's *incorporation and integration* into the *community*.

The 9 Gates of Mentoring related to transformed lenses. Details of this process follow.

Gates 1, 2, and 3. The first three gates indicate the essential inner alignments for successful mentoring. As each gate is opened, through mentor alignment, it becomes possible for the mentee to experience these realms, through mentor role-modeling, and the principle of resonance.

Gate 1—Emptiness. The first gate of mentoring is opened by the mentor's state of mindful receptivity. The mentor meets his/her mentee with an open, mindful presence.

In preparation for this study, Mentor imaged a blank scroll upon which the essence name for each boy would appear. When inside Gate 1, this empty scroll became a metaphor, for Mentor, of the state of radical openness, bringing to bear as little assumption or preconception about the mentee as possible.

Mentor's first alignment task was seen as one of receiving or apprehending the living presence of the mentee in as pure and direct a way as possible, embracing the idea—as in

Hillman's (1996) acorn theory and Meade's (2010) invocations of the unique calling of each soul—that no one on earth, now or historically, had this mentee's fingerprints and, by inference, what one might call his *soulprint*.

The state of radical openness at the heart of mindfulness that was explored in the literature review was revealed in the field to be a sound and steady foundational alignment for the mentoring relationship. In effect, the open-ended state of mindfulness, in which one “pays attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally, as if your life depends on it” (Kabat-Zinn, 2006, p. 14), was shown to be the ideal state for this primary stage of the mentoring process.

Gate 2—Empathy Mirror. Gate 2 opens as the foundational state of mindfulness becomes a clear-seeing, empathetic mirror in which the mentee is beheld. Here, the mentee's hunger to be seen meets the willingness of the mentor to see, without judgment. In this connection, empathy begins to flow from the mentor to the mentee, and, by principle of resonance, a process of self-empathy may also begin in the mentee.

In the literature review, mentor attunement was shown to be the most efficacious state—and skill—for successful mentoring (Pryce, 2012). In mentoring his coresearchers, it was within this state of attunement that the flow of empathy began in Mentor, and, by principle of resonance, mentee empathy could begin to awaken. As Eckman (Dalai Lama & Eckman, 2008) pointed out, empathy is dual faceted, being cognitive and affective; in addition, Barasch (2005) poetically evoked the mirroring effect of empathy. In the field, Mentor increasingly became an empathetic receptor for the cognitive and affective aspects of the lived-reality of his mentees, whether joyful or painful, which provided a sense of increasing connection, even when this attunement caused the discomfort and/or pain of *feeling the way the mentee himself felt*.

Correspondingly, the mentees experienced self-empathy and empathy for others through both the mentoring relationship and through the writing process.

The literature had revealed the many dimensions of empathy: from empathy for self and other—both cognitive and affective—to a sense of spiritual empathy within healing relationships, and even a global awakening of empathy, seen as critical to our very planetary survival (Adler, 1957; Firman & Gila, 2010; Rifkin, 2009; Rogers, 1980). Within the crucible of the mentoring relationship, such an expanded view of empathy was realized repeatedly with the 12 boys, as in the moment when Mentor, in empathetic attunement with Arrow, felt as if he were himself leaning over Arrow's fallen brother. Such empathetic moments brought a vibrant sense of connection between Mentor and his mentees that was the embodiment of an experience of I and Thou (Buber, 1923/1970), in which the individual mentoring relationship opened to a wider sense of connection.

In the field, these positive and expansive views of empathetic possibility that were explored in the literature review served as encouraging beacons for Mentor when facing in his mentees the often glaring empathy deficits that were illuminated in the works of Winnicott (1965, 1986), Kohut (1977), Balint (1968), Kipnis (1999), and Garbarino (1999). As in Hutchins's (2002) Gnosis model of diagnosis, the very real threats to empathy's awakening were balanced by a compelling view of each mentee's "core gifts and abilities" (p. 103).

Gate 3—Bearing Compassionate Witness to Gifts and Wounds. Gate 3 opens as the inner alignment of a mindful, breath-by-breath, receptive emptiness—referred to in the literature review as the state Buddhists identify as *shunyata* (Chodron, 1994)—becomes the empathetic mirror of clear seeing. This clear seeing, in turn, activates the compassionate state of the mentor,

who now may bear witness to the mentee's wounds and potential gifts. The mentees may experience the awakening of self-compassion themselves, in resonance with their mentor.

In his fieldwork with his coresearchers, Mentor bore witness to Leif's lifelong emotional pain resulting from his burns; Merlin's suffering stemming from the early, tragic loss of his parents; and Beat and Archer's wounds from their painful relationships with their fathers. In the connective radiance of compassion of the mentor, the mentee, himself, was able to bear witness to his own suffering, as well.

Practicing self-compassion, as Neff (2011) and other researchers (e.g., Germer, 2009) had advised in their work, proved to be a practical and durable method for Mentor and then, by example and contagion, for his coresearchers. This practice involved accepting and experiencing pain and, in doing so, finding the seeds of transformation within themselves. The research on self-compassion cited in the literature review was validated in the field and found to be an essential practice for both Mentor and his at-risk students. The pairing of self-compassion and mentoring had not, prior to the present study, been articulated. To do so added an essential practice to the Mentor's toolkit, useful both for the Mentor and for his mentees.

The compassion practice of *tonglen* that was introduced in the literature review was found to be of abiding utility in empowering Mentor to hold a steady presence in the face of mentee challenges, triumphs, and self-sabotaging behaviors. In terms of the progression of the 9 *Gates*, this researcher discovered that by always preceding the application of *tonglen* with a preliminary grounding in the state of mindfulness and an unconditional acceptance of whatever presented itself to empathy's mirror, a way was found to anchor the practice of *tonglen* in the universal, or what might be called *Buddha*, self rather than in the personal self. This became another discovered mentoring strategy for being able to stand in the midst of suffering and

trauma without personally identifying with or becoming engulfed by that suffering. Meade's (2002) twofold observation, that (a) "the gifts lie close to the wound" and (b) "to mentor is to open one's wounds" (Meade et al., 2002, track 1) was also experienced as accurate, when Mentor and his coresearchers excavated gifts of healing insight in the ruins and runes of often painful, sometimes tragic events. These insights were then woven into the writings of the mentees, as they developed the fortitude to bear witness to their own suffering, while wrestling forth understanding and meaning from their life stories.

Hutchins's (2002) Gnosis model, with its emphasis on gifts and assets, allowed Mentor to hold a dynamic alignment to his mentees that did not flinch from bearing witness to affliction, while always striving to attune to the positive assets within. In holding this alignment, Mentor role-modeled a way for his mentees to balance their own perceptions and experiences of their gifts and wounds. Furthermore, Meade's (2010, 2012; Meade et al., 2002) insights about the interrelationship between one's wounds and one's potential gifts provided ballast for bearing witness. In recognizing that "to mentor is to open one's wounds" (Meade et al., 2002, track 1), and in regarding the painful aspects of his own journey, Mentor drew upon the resources of *tonglen*, self-compassion, the hopeful theoretical constructs of logotherapy and psychosynthesis, and the Gnosis model for perspective and fortification as he bore witness to his *own* wounds and gifts. Throughout the research, Mentor witnessed how his embodiment of these principles radiated to his mentees, catalyzing their own development. What began as theory in the literature review thus became tested in the alchemy of suffering and proved to be of maximum utility for Mentor and his coresearchers.

Gates 4, 5, and 6. As the first three gates are primarily receptive and pertain, first, to the inner alignments of the mentor, so the second set, Gates 4, 5, and 6, shift the emphasis to an

active and interactive phase. Without the threefold foundation of mindful presence, empathetic attunement, and compassionate witnessing of Gates 1, 2, and 3, however, these next gates could not open.

Gate 4—Encouragement. As Gate 4 opens, an encouraging aspect of the mentoring relationship becomes activated. As the mentor encourages the mentee to step forward, to face challenges, to open the heart, and to move toward the premise and promise of his life, the gate opens widely. The mentee also begins to touch a source of encouragement from within him- or herself.

In composing this lens/gate, I was re-minded of the fact that the word *encouragement* has its root in *coeur*, which is French for *heart*. In reflection, those mentoring moments of most potent resonance throughout the study were characterized by an empathy and compassion-based, heart-to-heart connection, as when Mentor spoke authentically to Metta about his own struggles, and Metta responded in kind, revealing the pain of his mother's mental illness. Furthermore, the sense of being always in the wrong, as "the bad kids" or "the dumb kids," which so haunted my mentees, found a necessary healing counterpart in the experience of encouragement that flowed from Mentor, which, in turn, encouraged the mentee to be encouraging with himself. As Cousineau (2001) wrote, "The true mentor, the soul guide, sends his or her pupil in search of the story that will reach the heart" (p. 125). By continually encouraging each of his 12 mentees to search for and then to express the stories of their hearts, Mentor and his coresearchers discovered the fertile nexus where mentoring and writing could create healing and transformation.

An example of this encouragement in the field was when Mentor met Perceval again, after the boy's suspension following his bust for marijuana. Perceval's dejection was met by a robust encouragement from Mentor, an impassioned reminder that "Your life begins from now."

Mentor who encouraged his mentee to utilize the always available resource of mindfulness in order to be able, next time, to make wiser decisions. This encouragement, offered at a critical juncture in the mentee's life, propelled Perceval forward, even to the point of the boy's being able to envision a positive future for himself, as depicted in his final Compassion writing.

Gate 5—In-Visioning. The term *in-vision* was inspired by a saying often attributed to the Native American wisdom-figure, Black Elk: "A vision without a task is a dream. A task without a vision is drudgery. But a task with vision can change the world." The fourth gate of mentoring opens when a steady flow of encouragement emanates from the mentor into the life of the mentee; it is *inside* this flow of encouragement that the mentor's vision of the mentee's higher possibility begins to form. In sharing this vision with his mentee, being *in-vision* together, mentor and mentee both see the higher possibilities for the life of the mentee.

As Gate 5 opens, the mentor and the mentee both begin to see the possibilities of advancement and development for the mentee. A spirit of hope begins to permeate the mentoring encounter, as it did with Mentor and Beat, as the boy, under Mentor's guidance, discovered a higher purpose to his love of punk-rock music, seeing how it merged with social justice and a Buddhism that engaged social issues. Beat's later experience of walking through the local mall while practicing mindfulness opened a vision of interconnection for the boy that transformed his outlook on life.

In the process of writing, a majority of the mentees were able to conceive and articulate an encounter with a mentor figure. A chief characteristic of most of the mentor figures the mentees wrote about was the way these imaginal figures expressed encouragement toward the mentees' lives. The significance of the Meeting With Mentor writing was that it put the mentee in touch with a source of guidance and wisdom from within. As this gate opened, a shift began to

pervade the mentoring relationship as well, a chief ingredient of which was that the mentee began to draw from resources of encouragement within himself.

Stephenson's (2006) developmental metaphor of adolescence as a period of moving from the lost, confounded state of the maze to the patterned, harmonious unfolding of the labyrinth was repeatedly validated as the at-risk boys in this study found inner stability and direction through mentoring and writing. Taking up their *write* of passage, each of the mentees, even if only in moments within mentoring or on the page, moved from the chaos of the maze to the sense of journeying into the heart of the labyrinth.

Throughout this research, when the experience of the fifth gate opening was registered by Mentor, and he began to glimpse possibilities of healing for his mentees, he made a conscious note to ensure that this vision of mentee success would never become a burden to the mentee. Many of the coresearchers were already lumbered with a sense of failure—personally, and academically. In this more active stage of the mentoring journey, midway through the opening of all nine gates, it took compassionate calibration on the part of Mentor to determine the balance between strategic challenge to embody this vision and simply allowing things to unfold in the life of the mentee.

The fifth gate is called *In-Visioning*. A crucial part of Gate 5 became the *sharing* of this vision of what Mentor beheld as potential for his mentee: for example, with Archer, when Mentor encouraged his mentee to view his father more empathetically and to speak with his father about the quality of their communication. Embodying this vision of a young man acting from an alignment of empathy created a small breakthrough between the boy and his father.

Finally, in the field, Mentor frequently reflected to his mentees on their embodiment of the *compassionate warrior*. This specific *in-vision-ment* was a thickening definition that emerged

as the research unfolded, one that honored the awakening of empathy and compassion as integral to a new vision of masculine strength. Each time Mentor reflected to his mentees their successful steps toward embodying the compassionate warrior, he was inviting them to be *in-vision* with him in birthing a renewed definition of adolescent masculinity.

Gate 6—Abyss. The sixth gate of mentoring swings open onto the abyss. This sixth gate can open at any time, reminding one who comes to mentor of the serious stakes at play in mentoring today's at-risk youth.

Both Osiris and Futuro, my coresearchers, proved unable to break free completely from the abyss—at least not yet, in that moment or with this particular inner or outer mentor. Leif, Merlin, Sereno, Milarepa, Beat, Perceval, Rimbaud, Metta, and Arrow had each crossed the abyss and emerged with emotional scars. To mentor these boys with empathy attuned and a compassionate heart was to encounter the ever-present gravity of the abyss in their young lives.

Hillman's (1996) soul's code hypothesis regarding each life having a calling or a fate at its core brought depth and urgency to Mentor's engagement with his mentees. Hillman's inspiring notion, however, even when resonating strongly with Mentor's experience in the field, contrasted with the ongoing, often painful discovery that if there is a calling at the core of every life, there is also that which *oppresses* that call, in other words, the abyss—whether that came from within the mentee's own psychology (self-sabotaging), his family system, or the educational system.

The sixth gate was where Mentor was most challenged. If the enterprise of mentoring could be said to be teleological, purpose driven, and meaning centered, he discovered that the wise mentor—he or she who is symbolically *in-formed* by Athena, or Wisdom—accepts the reality of the abyss, recognizing that one aspect of in-depth mentoring is to encounter the

mentee's nemesis directly, along with all that might be pulling the youth in the opposite direction to what Mentor, mentee, or both might sense as his better destiny. Mentor continually encountered his own relative helplessness in the face of the larger network of forces that oppressed his mentees, as in his struggles with Osiris and Futuro as well as with each of his coresearchers at some point in their work together. To offset this sense of helplessness, Mentor drew on the practical wisdom of Bishop (2002), who stated,

In a moment when you are really desperate, because you have to become just as desperate as they are in order to have mentoring moments. . . . You have to say "I don't know." . . . Not relying on knowledge to get through it, but relying on a desperate situation to show up . . . for something to happen that would not otherwise happen unless you *were* desperate. (Meade et al., 2002, track 5)

The abyss, however, was also seen to be a potential source for a phoenix-like emergence. In the literature review, desperation was contextualized as a potentially positive state, a point of fertile desperation. The literature on the Buddhist compassion practice of *tonglen*, and youthworker Bishop's counsel about the utility of desperation for the mentor were verified in the field to be actual mentoring alignment strategies for meeting—and navigating—the abyss. Mentor's most practical tool for facing the abyss, both in himself and in his mentees, and for discovering gifts within the abyss was his continual practice of self-compassion. Overall, the research journey revealed that in mentoring at-risk teens, one must learn to reawaken compassion continually in the face of the abyss.

Gates 7-9: Integration. The first three gates opened due to Mentor's inner alignment to a state of mindful presence, empathetic attunement, and compassionate witnessing. The second three gates opened through heartfelt encouragement, the reception of an *in-visioned* blueprint of possibility for the mentee, and a rite-of-passage-like encounter with the abyss. The final three gates, however, open outward into community. A critical aspect of these final three gates

opening entails the Mentor's active role beginning to recede as the mentee connects with a source of guidance from within—his inner mentor. As the inner mentor strengthens, the mentee begins to see for himself the developmental tasks that beckon. With the opening of the final two gates, Mentor's function moves into one of offering a culminating blessing and of participation in the celebration of the mentee's movement toward maturity.

Gate 7—Inner Mentor. The opening of the seventh gate represents a process of transition for the mentoring relationship. In a musical scale, the seventh note is the completion of an octave. In the *9 Gates* model, the opening of the seventh gate of mentoring coincides with a shift in power and focus, as the external mentor is joined, increasingly, by the mentee's inner mentor.

The present study revealed that the process of writing, even for the most reluctant writer, was a powerful tool for attuning to and expressing the insights and counsels of this inner mentor. Pennebaker's (1990) researches on the relationship between writing about trauma and healing were extended, through this research, to give a voice to this source of healing, in the form of the inner mentor, as in Sereno's "Meeting With Mentor" writing revealing, to himself, the need for self-compassion. In honoring this voice within the container of the writing, Sereno articulated a source of encouragement, reflection, and wisdom about his next developmental steps.

Throughout their joint odyssey, Mentor served as a steady, proximal role-model for the mentees' gradually increasing connection to their own inner mentors. This process, as chronicled in the analysis section of this chapter, happened in turning-point moments: for example, when Perceval imagined his skateboarding hero, Tony Hawk, as offering counsel about accepting each moment; or when Milarepa encountered his inner mentor through a form of dialogic writing, in which he wrestled with the need for forgiving his tormentors. Recognizing that such connections to an inner mentor were beginning steps, Mentor regarded such potent and poignant moments as

being seeds for the future, which might flower into a fullness of connection between the mentee and his inner mentor.

Gate 8—Blessing. With the opening of the eighth gate, that which was witnessed and begun to be enacted with the opening of the seventh gate—the mentee’s connection to his inner mentor—is recognized, reflected, honored, and blessed.

In the *Genius of Mentoring* symposium cited throughout this study, Meade (2002) stated, “To mentor is to seek to actively acknowledge and *bless* [emphasis added] the gifts in a younger person” (Meade et al., 2002, track 1). Because of the secular public school setting in which the study was conducted, the fullness of what is possible in a more formal blessing was only touched on in mentoring moments during this study. It would be antithetical to the spirit of this research and the significant results obtained to fail to underscore the critical importance of these blessing, mentoring moments, as they embodied some of the farthest reaches of what is possible within an in-depth mentoring relationship. At the “Closing Mentoring Moments” sessions with each mentee, Mentor’s intention was, as Meade (2002) said, to “acknowledge and bless” (track 1) both the gifts that he had witnessed emerge in their joint odyssey as well as the developmental steps that the mentee had taken toward connecting to and acting from an inner source of empathy and compassion. When Mentor acknowledged Leif’s courage in showing his true face and the boy’s compassion in mentoring the young burn victim, whom he called “Isaac,” the purpose of that acknowledgment *was* to bless these breakthroughs in his mentee.

Nagarjuna’s mentor devotions, mentioned in the literature review as dating back to the 2nd century, gave a mythic, grand vision of the inner life of the mentor in the act of blessing (Thurman 2005, p. 245). Nagarjuna wrote,

Through the great bliss state,
I myself become the mentor deity.

From my luminous body,
 Light rays shine all around,
 Massively blessing beings and things,
 Making the universe pure and fabulous,
 Perfection in its every quality.

Although pitched at an exalted level, such a sense of being a powerful, radiating conduit for connection, light, and healing inspired Mentor, in the battered meeting room at the school library, to similarly bless his mentee, again confirming the durability and utility of the mentoring lineage. Mentor's understanding and experience of this state was most aptly described by Spangler (2001): "Like life, all blessings come from a single source: the soulfire of an intelligent love and compassion willing to give of itself" (p. 23).

According to Anderson (1998b, 2011), each person may have his or her own ways of intuiting what occurs at subtle levels, such as occurred between Mentor and Leif. In Mentor's case, the state of blessing began with his gradual awareness of the atmosphere in the room becoming deeply still and yet utterly vibrant. At that moment, Mentor had a powerful sense of fullness and of wishing, affirming that his mentee would find a sense of meaning and purpose in his life. Although he could not confirm this, Mentor felt strongly that, at some level, Leif was able to receive this blessing. Although it is extremely challenging to depict this state, an attempt is being made here in order to include these moments of deep stillness and seeming confirmation as part of the subtler dynamics at play in mentoring.

Finally, one other aspect to the opening of the eighth gate is absolutely critical. From the perspective of the *9 Gates of Mentoring*, the blessing that takes place *works both ways*. This is why Mentor frequently thanked his mentees, articulating his profound gratitude for what he was learning from them on their odyssey together and also to express his thankfulness to the sources

of mentoring for his having been able to be *in the function* of Mentor. In blessing, Mentor became blessed—again and again.

Gate 9—Celebration. The cycle of the *9 Gates* is completed in celebration. The celebration is threefold: (a) The unique essence of the mentee is celebrated; (b) the accomplishments of the mentee are also celebrated, be they large, small, or still only latent potential; and (c) the journey of the mentoring relationship is celebrated. Celebration, joyfully welcoming the mentee forward into the next stages of his or her life, can occur in a timeless mentoring moment or in a formalized ceremony. This spirit of celebration welcomes the property of joy into the educational odyssey.

The final group meeting with the 12 boys was a celebration. After feasting on some delicious food, Mentor and his coresearchers gathered for their final council circle and reflected on their individual and collective journey. The eating of food was accompanied by laughter and a hearty measure of adolescent male horseplay and humor; yet throughout the council, after the meal, a sense of quiet joy and a subtle thread of grief were interlaced, as Mentor and the boys, with virtually uninterrupted attention, reflected on their odysseys.

Holding the talking stick that had been used in all their councils, Mentor shared with his coresearchers the importance for this celebration as a ritual marking the completion of a cycle but also as a bold mark of joy in a public school setting where this quality seemed so rare. He shared how fortunate he felt to have known at least one moment of joy with each and every one of the mentees. He joked about how he had counted 12 new gray hairs, one for each of his coresearchers, and how he was “proud to wear them.” Before passing the talking stick, Mentor asked the boys to excuse him one last time as he wrote in *Mentor’s Journal* while they spoke, explaining that he did not want to miss anything.

Merlin said that the practice of *tonglen* was something that he would take with him from the class. He said that he now had “an answer to all the pain and suffering.” He also thanked Mentor for, he said, “kicking my ass” about writing.

Archer offered that he remembered thinking, at first, that “this class is pretty weird,” a comment which brought some laughter. He said, however, that when he found that it was truly helping him to talk to his dad, he began to think it was “pretty cool.” He said that “the breathing stuff” helped him to “chill and not get so mad.”

Milarepa agreed with Archer about mindfulness. He said that there was some “deeper stuff” that happened which had made him look hard at his life, but said, “That was between me and Mr. Shefa.” Mentor understood this to mean Milarepa’s ongoing struggle to forgive his early tormentors. Mentor noted to himself that no one challenged Milarepa to say more, assuming that they were respecting the boundaries he had drawn, but also, perhaps, because no one messed with Milarepa.

Taking the talking stick again, Mentor made mention of the fact that although neither Osiris nor Futuro were present at this celebration, he wanted to make a strong note that they, too, were part of this odyssey. The others knew of these two boys’ struggles in school and, to some extent, their struggles in *Odyssey*, though Mentor held firm with the principle of only speaking positively about students in their absence. Holding up the talking stick, Mentor said, “We wish both of them well.” It was then that something extraordinary happened—at least in the witnessing perception of Mentor. After the phrase “We wish both of them well” held in the air for a moment, Sereno, seated next to Mentor, took the talking stick and said, “I wish them well.” Half-comically, he raised up the talking stick. In a matter of moments, the talking stick had passed to each of Mentor’s coresearchers, as each wished Osiris and Futuro “well.”

This was just a moment, but it brought tears to Mentor's eyes. Some of these boys had had conflicts with Osiris *and* Futuro, others resented their "half-assed" participation in a class they themselves had come to value, yet something about the spirit of the occasion had allowed a place for empathy and generosity of spirit to arise, in concert, with no dissenters. What had so moved Mentor was the briefest of glimpses he had as, in turn, the talking stick was passed, and each wished their troubled companions well; it was as if the boys were participating in a modern version of a ceremony from long ago. Mentor could almost imagine them as knights, seated at the round table, sending stout good wishes to departed comrades. The perception held for just a moment; the air seemed to shimmer with it. Mentor had the strong sense that his coresearchers registered the specialness of the moment as well, at some level of their consciousness.

With just a few moments left in the class, Beat, Rimbaud, and Metta each expressed their gratitude for the writing journey they had taken. Metta said, "I didn't know my imagination was like this whole world." Beat said that he was "going to write a book," a memoir, in poetic form, about his "crazy-assed life." Rimbaud offered that he saw how "doing different kinds of writing" would make him a better rapper. At the boys' invitation, he offered up a spontaneous rap, which, unfortunately, Mentor failed to write down, as he, like the boys, was laughing so hard.

Perceval simply said, "Thank you, Mr. Shefa; this has been awesome." Leif, too, spoke little, simply saying, "Thank you." Sereno asked, yet again, if we would have *Odyssey* again the following year, and Mentor had to say, "I don't know," while reminding the boys, "You have my number!"

Last, Arrow received the talking stick and held it for a moment. He could not seem to find any words. There were tears in his eyes as he passed it back to Mentor. A moment later, the bell rang. Like an exquisite sand painting that had shimmered into manifestation, the moment

dissolved, nevertheless leaving in Mentor an indelible trace of the power of ceremony and celebration.

Final comment on the 9 Gates of Mentoring. These nine distinct stages of mentoring have been presented in a sequential manner, yet it would be misleading to imply that they unfold in such a singular or simple manner. Both the mentor and the mentee pass through the nine gates, and it is, above all, their relational journey that opens these gates. The sequential part is the developmental journey of the Mentor, who must, on his or her own journey, develop the ability to (a) be empty, (b) become an empathetic mirror and (c) a compassionate witness, (d) radiate encouragement, (e) function as a holder of a vision of his mentee's higher possibilities, (f) be a warrior in the face of the abyss that threatens the mentee (while empowering him to face that abyss himself), (g) become a bridge to the mentee's own inner mentor, (h) function as a blessing dispenser, and (i) serve as a ceremonial elder who celebrates the initiation of youth. The highest mentor alignment is to hold within the access codes to all nine gates, a transpersonal toolkit always at the ready, shape-shifting into activation according to the unfolding requirements of the mentoring relationship. A key phrase for this mentoring alignment might be, to borrow from Shakespeare's (1992) Hamlet, "the readiness is all" (p. 273).

Cycle 5 Continued: Resonance Panel as Validity Measure

In March of 2013, I convened a three-person resonance panel. In intuitive inquiry, the validity of the research is demonstrated by the way the data is gathered and presented in a human way. More specifically, *efficacy validity* is assessed by the ways that the research interacts deeply with its coresearchers, moves those who read the research, and perhaps transforms the researcher, coresearchers, and, ideally, the world.

Regarding *resonance validity* (Anderson & Braud, 2011b), a resonance panel “provides a systematic, formal procedure for assessing sympathetic resonance” (p. 298), in which the members of the panel “offer qualitative comments about their degree of resonance (or non-resonance) to the findings, and they also should be encouraged to comment about what seemed especially relevant in the study findings and about things that they feel were left out” (p. 300). Because the findings of the resonance panel contribute to the interpretive understanding of the overall study, I have placed selections from panel members’ responses in this chapter, rather than in the chapter on results.

The resonance panel consisted of three members: Jennifer Hill, an Institute of Transpersonal Psychology/Sofia University doctoral graduate, who also teaches psychology at Sofia University and at St. Leo University in Florida; Jan Ryan, an intervention specialist in social and emotional learning programs for middle- and high-school students for the past 30 years; and Jim Rothblatt, a school counselor for 25 years, a marriage and family therapist, and Vietnam veteran who specializes in the treatment of trauma. Each member of the resonance panel closely reviewed my results chapter (as well as my introductory chapter), wrote a summation of their responses, and discussed them with me via email (Ryan and Hill) or in a personal conversation (Rothblatt).

Questions taken from Anderson and Braud’s (2011b) chapter on validity were given to each member of the resonance panel as a general guide for framing their responses. These questions included the following:

- Was the researcher transformed in the course of conducting the study?
- Is the reader transformed in some way as she or he reads or applies research findings to life situations?

- Did the researcher and research participants gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves and the topic in the course of the study?
- In reading the report, do readers gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves, the topic, or the world? (Anderson & Braud, 2011b, pp. 295-296)

Summation of resonance panel responses. The findings of the resonance panel validated the efficacy of the research in three key areas. First, each member of the resonance panel strongly affirmed that the researcher himself was transformed as a result of the study. Second, the three panel members gave strong resonant validity to the ways that the mentoring relationships fostered the awakening of empathy and compassion in my coresearchers. Finally, the panel also confirmed that the process of writing that helped these at-risk students to tell their stories was a vehicle that brought about transformation in the boys.

Panel member Hill offered no negative or “anti-resonant” critique of the study; however, Ryan suggested that the way parts of the mentoring encounters were rendered may have interrupted the flow of presentation. Although I carefully considered her suggestion, I clarified for her my own rationale for keeping the presentations in their particular narrative fullness. Rothblatt voiced a concern that the sustained, in-depth intervention presented in the study could present funding challenges for schools wishing to participate in such a program’s delivery to their students. The complete resonance panel responses are in Appendix G. Below are excerpts from each panel member’s response.

Panel member Jennifer Hill. Resonance reflections and challenges follow.

The mentor was definitely transformed through the course of conducting the study. Given all that the mentor had happening in his life at the time, it is amazing to me that he was able to still bring a compassionate presence to his mentoring encounters with each boy. I . . . opened in reading this research. Usually, reading research, even transpersonal research, is a disembodied thing. In reading Jacob’s work, I was called, pulled, compelled to go far beyond my usual cerebral apperception of the work. I had a great emotional

upwelling of empathy and compassion throughout, to the point where I had to take it in small doses to avoid being completely overwhelmed. I was having very strong physical reactions—full body chills, mostly. A literal physical resonance. No other research that I have read has ever elicited such a strong response in me. (personal communication, April 1, 2013)

As I read Jacob's research, I decided to stay a little more open to the "empathetic channel" so to speak. By doing so, I am finding that I am more mindful, more awake and aware in my day-to-day life. (personal communication, April 1, 2013)

Panel member Jan Ryan. Resonance reflections and challenges follow.

The researcher was transformed over the course of conducting this study; that is clear in the reflections, *Mentor's Journal*, and insights into the youth. Maybe the larger question is, *what* transformed the researcher—his own life changes or the study? The obvious answer is both.

No one escapes writing without some kind of transformation. Writing with mentoring seems to be even more powerful. The questions are an intervention all their own. Leif's compassion essay was stunning. Jacob's experience with him is a good one for thinking about the researcher's motives. This boy's camp experience showed he had experience with compassion; what was new was the writing; so his story is a nice focus on the writing process. He wrote about his own key mentoring experience. He used writing to communicate it, and maybe to save it for himself. This story showed me why writing is the focus of this research on mentoring. Jacob accepts the mentee's history and life experience and hopes for meaningful reflection through writing. It was clear to me that this resistant writer found value in writing his own story and maybe a way to transfer his learning from one part of his life to another. Jacob's concern and respect for him were authentic, his love of writing is infectious even with those resistant to its pull, and his motives are focused in the process—writing. (personal communication, April 8, 2013)

Follow-up communication with panel member Ryan. In my follow-up discussion with Ryan, she expressed a concern about the "flow" of presentation. Her preference was that any Mentor commentary on the three questions asked of each mentee be put at the end of the question section rather than woven in as reflections after each question. I explained to her that my intention had been to depict as accurately as possible the flow of conversation and reflection with each mentee. I expressed my opinion that including Mentor's ongoing and emergent reflections seemed integral to an accurate portrayal of the moment-by-moment shifts and awakenings in the mentoring process.

Panel member Jim Rothblatt. Resonance reflections and challenges follow.

Teaching students the art of writing by way of being able to explore their own stories in the concise way that writing requires is an amazingly time-intensive opportunity that is a gift for each of the participants . . . education at its best.

From my own personal experience as a human being, who has over 30 years of professional experience as an educator and as a therapist, and my personal knowledge of Mr. Shefa's work in schools along with my reading of the dissertation, I can list a number of powerful human connections that have been described. I have no doubt that Mr. Shefa, the "Mentor," is continually transformed by his experience as a teacher who listens carefully to his student mentees, creating two-way dialogue and demonstrating caring and mutual respect. I also have no doubt that because of this process the students have been transformed, some more than others. I don't think it is possible that the students can have the intense human interaction as described without being changed in some transformational way.

Follow-up communication with panel member Rothblatt. In an April 10, 2013

conversation with Rothblatt subsequent to his written reflections, he remarked that the intense demands of the one-on-one mentoring, in terms of time and number of mentees reached, would not be cost-effective in a school setting. As a former administrator of student assistance programs who saw the value of the work, he said that he "wrestled" with how a program such as depicted in the study could be sustained. I remarked to him that he had touched on an ongoing core challenge of the program. In fact, as I told him, I was struggling at this time to continue the program in its new incarnation as *Wisdom Writers*. Two weeks after speaking with Rothblatt, I discovered that I likely would be obtaining the requisite funding to continue the program the next year.

Conclusion. Anderson (1998b, 2011d) succinctly and relevantly comments,

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. (Anderson, 1998b, p. 75)

Epistemologically, intuitive inquiry is a search for new understandings through the focused attention of one researcher's passion and compassion for her- or himself, others, and the world. (Anderson, 2011d, p. 61)

This study investigated the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys through the medium of mentoring and writing. The research also investigated a parallel awakening in the boys' mentor.

A highly intricate and infinitely subtle realm, which one might call the *inner world of mentoring* was uncovered through this intuitive inquiry. The culmination of this search and research was the excavation, distillation, and articulation of the *9 Gates of Mentoring* template. This template contains an entire framework for a complete cycle of mentoring, from the radiant stillness of a mindful receptivity in Gate 1 to the collective celebration of the passage to maturity in Gate 9. This template was attained by experiencing and beholding the exquisitely intricate process of mentoring from the inside out, slowing it down, breaking it down (analysis), and then weaving it into a single tapestry (synthesis). Through careful analysis, I aimed to display the intricacy and subtlety of the mentoring relationship and to reveal how empathy and compassion lie at the heart of this process. By performing this analysis and synthesis, I was able to see and experience—and hopefully, to convey—the way the flow of mentoring moves through both the mentor and the mentee. What I sought to track in the analysis was precisely this moment-by-moment flow of empathy and compassion in the interchange between the mentor and the mentee, each catalyzing, inspiring, and affecting the other in the relational endeavor.

When asked at the beginning of our work together, “Do you like writing?”, a majority of my coresearchers offered a resounding “No,” and some actually described hating the process. Their reactions to this question were not unlike ones I had received from literally thousands of students over the past decade in the field. Witnessing how many of my coresearchers were virtually “allergic” to writing deepened my concern about the ways that writing is taught in public high schools in America, which then put me to wondering if a sort of write-a-side might

be underway. *Writeacide* I hereby define as *the systematic destruction of enjoyment of the writing process due to the methods and ways in which writing is presently being taught in public education.*

As serious as my concerns about a potential writeacide were, I also saw how, given the steady mentoring relationship to instill confidence in the mentees' voices along with the freedom to explore their feelings in an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance and belief, each student, at some point in his odyssey, made the prime discovery that writing from the heart, drawing on his own story, opened the possibility of experiencing a whole new relationship to the process of writing. By including the affective realm in their writing, students found that they had a story to tell and the means to tell it with great depth and power. Several even discovered, with delight, that within the process of writing, deep healing was possible. The kind of writing the boys undertook, which might be termed *mentored writing*, allowed them to embody, on the page, a (w)rite of passage to empathy and compassion as well as to find threads of meaning and purpose, even in their suffering.

From my coresearchers' experiences of moving from strong resistance to the writing process to the creation of compelling "writes of passage," I infer that inclusion of the affective realm might go far with *all* students toward engaging them on the page and, further, to combat writeacide. At the very least, as citizens of the so-called "head" of the developed world, our students should be able to write effectively. Including the heart in teaching writing invites students to awaken and be present within the writing *process* as opposed to turning out a product simply to get a good grade. Additionally, we might even discover, as this study showed, that it is our at-risk students, harvesting wisdom from difficult life passages, who become some of our most compelling writers.

Contemplating the ways to move students from writeaside to effective, affective writing raises larger questions. In the preface to Fox's (2006) book, *The A.W.E. Project: Reinventing Education, Reinventing the Human*, he quoted the Dalai Lama's proclamation that "education is in crisis the world over" (p. 7). Fox went on to herald the theme of his entire transformational manifesto: The crisis is diagnosed by the *absence* of, first, such qualities as compassion; next, the inspirational and healing activities of contemplation and meditation; and finally, the cultivation of awe and wisdom (p. 7).

Implicit throughout this research, resulting from both the present study and more than a decade of fieldwork with at-risk as well as high-performing students, is my deep and growing concern about the state of modern, high-school education in America. When I composed the *9 Gates of Mentoring*, I was struck by how education, viewed from the angle from which I have witnessed and studied it, reveals a near-total *absence* of tools for cultivating mindfulness, empathy, and compassion; a dearth of the spirit of encouragement, envisioning, and resiliency training for navigating personal and societal abysses; and very little instruction on how students might learn (or be *educated*, from *educere*, "to lead out, or draw forth from within") to draw from inner resources, experience the deep confirmation of blessing, or be celebrated as they make their passage to maturity. Naturally, many instances exist when these mentoring qualities and ways are present, but they are not the chief features of high-school education today, and they are especially weak in the lives of at-risk teenage boys.

Throughout this dissertation, I also sought to portray some of the positive threads and themes emerging in public school education: social and emotional learning programs that teach emotional intelligence skills; the growing acceptance of mindfulness and compassion training; and the inclusion of a program such as *Odyssey Writes of Passage* (or its updated version as

Wisdom Writers and *Compassion Council*). I believe that such approaches are emerging in creative response to the current crisis in education. If we have reached an abyss in education, and that is the environment that we are requiring these boys to come to every day in order to find their voices, find their writing, and even discover threads of meaning and purpose, then we are wise to believe that beyond the gate of the abyss lie further domains of regeneration. If so, then education may soar phoenix-like into a new future.

Throughout my decade-long odyssey as a practitioner and researcher of mentoring, I have been haunted by a sole/soul question that, perhaps, cannot be answered—certainly not in a quantitative, or easily articulated empirical manner: *What mentors the mentor?* Threaded through my research journey with the boys, I experienced moments in which the act of mentoring seemed to serve as a conduit for states of acute insight, a welling up of deep empathy and compassion, and a sense of incredibly connected flow between myself as Mentor, my mentee, and something else. At such moments—which I have called, for lack of a more precise term, *I-and-Thou moments* or *mentoring moments*—the space that so often separates teacher and student, mentor and mentee, was opened, revealing a domain rich in wonder, luminosity, and swelling compassion.

What mentors the mentor? Perhaps one cannot directly answer such a question, touching as it does on the enduring quest to divine the ultimate source(s) of mentoring, of empathy and compassion, and, similarly, of writing itself; yet, to neglect to include this “finding” at the conclusion of an intuitive inquiry would be to retreat at what one might call the *10th Gate*—the gate of *Mystery*. Here, the researcher—even one conducting a qualitative, intuitive inquiry—bumps up against the limits of language to express the ineffable, because mystery, fortunately,

forever eludes our attempts at decoding. It is meant to be *lived*, moment-to-moment, on purpose, as if our lives depended on it, in a search and re-search unending.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations of the study. Limitations are restrictions within the research process that were, or proved to be, unavoidable. The limitations for this study were as follows.

This research envisioned and aimed to both achieve and track the awakening of empathy and compassion in each of the coresearchers through the mentoring relationship and through their writing. When students were absent due to illness or even suspension, they proved less likely to do the writings central to the study as well as being less connected to the overall mentoring relationship. Non-completion of the *Odyssey* course, as in the case of Osiris and Futuro, for example, revealed a limitation in confirming the efficacy of the *9 Gates* template, even with this small sample, because the full cycle—the opening of each of the 9 gates—could not be completed due to the mentees’ lack of participation in activities such as writing, which supported the journey.

This study involved a small, very limited population. The *9 Gates* template, which emerged as the final product of the intuitive research journey, awaits substantial future research, including, perhaps, with larger groupings, before it can be further validated.

A further limitation of the research was that the population studied was located in an urban setting. Inclusion of students in a rural setting was not possible for this study.

The length of the fieldwork, 16 weeks, did not allow for assessment of the durability of change or transformation in the mentees. As an adjacent consideration to this limitation though, it must be stated that I, the author of this study, having worked with over 4,000 students across a

decade, *have* met repeatedly with former *Odyssey* journeyers, the majority of whom have attested to the durable impact the program had upon their lives, sometimes even years later.

Delimitations of the study. Delimitations in the research process are restrictions that were actually chosen by the researcher, against a cost/benefit appraisal. The delimitations for this study were as follows.

The first principal delimitation of the study was the fact that my choice of coresearchers was confined to a small grouping of at-risk teens (12) who were involved in a SWAS class. Although I also worked with students in mainstream settings, including students who were flourishing at school, both academically and socially, the at-risk students in SWAS were chosen by virtue of their resistance to writing and their risky behaviors, which made them prime candidates for mentoring.

The second principal delimitation of this study was its inclusion of only one gender. First and foremost, my own passion and compassion for mentoring boys, in their traumas and triumphs, propelled me into this study. The choice to work with reluctant writers was made to test the efficacy of the intervention to inspire a change of mind and heart toward the writing process in these students. To be able to test the validity of the mentoring and writing intervention with at-risk, first-year high-school students was a way of laying a foundation for future research with other grade-levels, thus moving toward confirming transferability.

Implications and Applications of the Research

This dissertation introduced new ways to foster the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys, while also developing a deepened vision of mentoring, the culmination of which was expressed through a new template of mentoring that involved nine distinct “gates.” The purpose of creating this new model was (a) to synthesize the research into a

final, concise set of lenses; and (b) to provide a potentially comprehensive map for mentoring at-risk populations, pending validation of its transferability through future studies. It is important to underscore that although this model emerged as a result of nearly a decade of fieldwork culminating in this study, the fieldwork also was with mainly at-risk students; thus, only through others testing its efficacy with a wide range of populations, can its transferability over a wider range be fully validated.

Much attention in this dissertation was devoted to a consideration of the inner alignments of the Mentor, which became the source of his outer expression in the field with his mentees. This inner alignment was seen to have two central aspects. The first aspect concerned the mentor's ability to establish a steady foundation of enduring traits such as empathy and compassion along with balance, steadiness, mindfulness, and patience. In this study, Mentor proved mostly able to sustain these qualities in his interactions with his coresearchers even as his own life underwent trauma and transformation. The second aspect concerned the corresponding ability of Mentor to adapt his approach, in the face of changing needs and demands that arose within the mentoring relationship, many of which were unpredictable, especially in the auspiciously bewildering world of at-risk teenage boys. Being able to hold and operate from these foundational stability features while remaining fluid and versatile enough to adapt was revealed as critical to successful mentoring.

A parallel operational metaphor that emerges at the close of this research is one borrowed from psychosynthesis, in which successful *counseling* is seen, at core, to have two central faces (Whitmore, 2004, pp. 38-41). First, the force of *love* nourishes the therapeutic endeavor by generating and sustaining an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance. Second, the power of *will* strengthens and tests the relationship between therapist and patient by offering challenge to

assumptions and fixed habits, while also fostering the setting of goals and being accountable. Interestingly, these *mother* and *father* therapies, as they are referred to by psychosynthesis counselor Whitmore (2004), when in balance, create a third force, *synthesis*, a fusion of each that is optimally effective (pp. 38-40). In Mentor's developing relationships with his coresearchers, all three aspects were strongly at play. Adopting the stable/fluid skill-set construct and the mother/father/synthesis mentoring metaphor could be helpful to mentors seeking a practical framework for their interventions.

This research also sought to counter the resistance to the writing process that is growing in public education and is particularly entrenched in at-risk populations. *Results of the study revealed that a student's relationship to writing, even those who were strongly resistant to the writing process, can be . . . rewritten.* The implication of this finding, however, meets the firm edge of state and federal standards, which seem to allow minimal room for the sort of creative, character-formative type of writing that was most effective with my coresearchers (as well as with the more than 4,000 students I worked with over the past decade). This contradiction—between the need to reawaken students' engagement with the writing process and the stringency and rigidity of state and federal standards—is one that urgently awaits resolution.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study investigated the awakening of empathy and compassion in at-risk teenage boys, utilizing the media of mentoring and writing to catalyze and foster this awakening. The research also studied the parallel journey of the boy's mentor. Anderson (1998a) and Anderson and Braud (2011a) alluded to the power of *wonder* and *awe* to propel research into new areas as well as the way a personal call to research can also meet an awakening need in the culture at

large. Of the many potential research studies that could emerge from the present one, several seem particularly promising:

1. *The inner, subtle dynamics of mentoring.* The present study attempted to portray some of the more subtle components at play in the art of mentoring. Articulating additional conscious strategies for drawing forth the transformational moments that can occur in effective, in-depth mentoring merits further and ongoing investigation.
2. *Adolescent girls.* A study parallel to the present one but focused on adolescent *girls* could yield useful data as to the differences and similarities between mentoring boys and mentoring girls.
3. *Attention deficit disorder and orderly attention.* Even as this conclusion is being written, new studies reveal the dramatic uptick in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnoses in teens, with the most extreme increases being with boys—as much as 20% (Pearson, 2013). Several of the boys who participated in this study had struggled greatly with attention throughout their academic careers, yet these same boys were able to participate in short mindfulness meditations with minimal difficulty and were frequently able to write with concentration and focus. Although some studies have addressed the potential for mindfulness to focus attention in ADHD-diagnosed teens, the role of the *arts*—including writing—in driving attention in the same adolescents could provide needed insight into addressing this growing problem.
4. *Meaning.* Interlaced with many of the stories of the boys' empathy and compassion awakenings was the discovery of *a sense of greater meaning* in their lives. The role of meaning and, more specifically, how to catalyze and awaken a sense of meaning in

- adolescents is frequently represented *quantitatively*, but what are the inner dynamics of meaning? Future research could investigate: How does meaning awaken? How is it developed and deepened? What interventions or teaching/mentoring tools specifically awaken a sense of meaning? How do we as educators, or a society, draw forth or lead out the quest for meaning in our youth? How do we shape or mold them to attune to meaning?
5. *Trauma and transformation in adolescents.* Many of the boys who participated in this study moved from trauma to the beginnings of transformation. More research needs to be undertaken as to the biological, physiological, psychological, and spiritual anatomy of trauma in adolescents as well as investigation of how new teaching and mentoring strategies—such as mindfulness, council, and the kinds of creative, values-based writing touched on in this study—can serve this transformation.
 6. *9 Gates of Mentoring.* Finally, having travelled the arc of my dissertation to find something as foundational as the *9 Gates of Mentoring* template at its culmination, I suggest that a research study might be conducted to substantiate and test the validity of these *9 Gates of Mentoring* with other adolescent populations, including specific socioeconomic groupings and older college-age youth.

Relevance of the Study for Transpersonal Psychology

This research study is an endeavor to contribute to transpersonal psychology, which has as its central motive and concern the facilitation of the development of human beings to their fullest possibility, including spiritual aspects. This study has attempted to demonstrate how the art of mentoring, which has its roots in ancient myth and has persisted in various forms throughout the ages, can be a steady vessel for holding and transmitting transpersonal qualities

such as empathy and compassion as well as an attunement to the soulful/mythic aspects of the human journey. It posits that when empathy and compassion are awakened, the transpersonal is invited into the classroom and into the lives of our students. To employ a metaphor: the awakening of empathy and compassion *breathes in* the transpersonal.

This study not only *recognizes* the transpersonal as highly pertinent to adolescent development and specifically to mentoring and writing interventions but also actively advocates *inclusion* of the transpersonal dimension as one that is completely congruent with the original roots of the word *education* in the Latin *educere*, “to draw forth or lead out,” and *educare*, “to shape or to mold.” In this regard, what is being drawn forth or led out includes the affective, imaginal, humanistic, and spiritual domains as well—in other words, the transpersonal dimension. Furthermore, just as transpersonal psychology honors the universal elements in spirituality and religion, a focus on perennial values such as empathy and compassion, in the present study, was able to bypass public school concerns about separation between church and state.

This study, which recognized and honored the unique individuality of each student, referenced Hillman’s (1996) acorn theory of the soul and Meade’s (2010) counsels on calling and meaning and was also congruent with transpersonal psychology’s embrace of the full dimensionality of human beings, within which the uniqueness of each individual life could be considered to be the seed of a call to meaning and purpose. Including the *educare*—shaping, molding—aspect of education, the research is also congruent with a transpersonal alignment in that it recognizes that the developmental/educational *journey* involves character formation, which is referred to as the German word *bildung* in the literature review, in order to balance the *wissenschaft*, or knowledge/data gathering aspect of education.

Closing Reflection

Throughout my research, I kept telling myself that the way forward and the way to truly mentor the boys under my care was to keep opening my heart, while striving to clarify the cognitive lenses through which I perceived and experienced my subject. Near the beginning of the study, I frequently had to overcome the wish simply to give up, overwhelmed as I was with all that was transpiring in my life, even as I struggled daily to be present for the boys. In my bewilderment at this time, I sought mentoring counsel from a wise elder in my doctoral program, Ana Perez-Chisti. With great compassion in her voice, Perez-Chisti told me, “Just keep putting one foot in front of the other, Jacob” (personal communication, November, 2010), advice which I took quite literally by going on long hikes in the mountains surrounding the desert valley where I lived. She then told me something I will remember for the rest of my life: “If you learn to fall, you’ll find your wings” (Perez-Chisti, personal communication, November, 2010). This mentoring wisdom, which could be called *the inner technology of the phoenix*, was a counsel I took to heart and sought to embody in working with my coresearchers.

Upheaval and trauma can be awakeners of empathy and compassion, but this takes an ongoing commitment to keep opening to risk vulnerability and greater connection. Like countless souls before me, all the way back to the mythic figures of Odysseus and Telemachus, I frequently sought counsel with my *own* inner mentor, asking, “What happened? How did this all come about?” much as my students, in their own travails, wondered and were bewildered about *their* lives. Rising out of initial lament—perhaps a necessary stage, but hardly a place to come to rest or stabilization—and firmly deciding to stay the course, I gradually began to break *open* rather than *down* (Lesser, 2004). On rare occasions, I even touched a powerful sense of empathy for human beings in relation to all that they seem to undergo on the journey of awakening as well

as a fierce stirring of compassion to want to facilitate that journey for the boys under my care. This breaking open, as my dissertation journey unfolded, marked the arrival of the wounded researcher (Romanyshyn, 2007), who feels his subject in his bones and flesh and, above all, in his heart, finding new treasures of insight and connection that were locked inside, especially at the wounded places, where blessings began to appear.

Taken as a whole, this research journey grounded and strengthened my ongoing awakening to empathy, while deepening the lived-experience of compassion for self and other. In retrospect, it makes perfect sense to me that my intention to become a mentor worthy of inviting young lives into these radiant qualities required first a painful confrontation with the *absence* of these same qualities within my own life and, only later, a powerful sense of opening. Now, from this place on my odyssey streams a current of gratitude and a sense of awe for the pattern that unfolded, summoning me to awaken empathy and compassion within my own life, while I strove to mentor my 12 coresearchers into their own awakenings.

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Appendix A: Parent/Guardian Informed Consent Form

Parent/Guardian Consent Form for your Child to Participate in the Odyssey Research Project

Parent/Guardian of Research Participant:

The research study your child is being invited to participate in will explore the awakening of empathy and compassion in teenage boys. This study is being undertaken as a doctoral dissertation for the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. Your child's participation may contribute to a greater understanding of the ways empathy and compassion can improve and enhance students' academic and social life experiences, as well as demonstrate the importance of writing as a tool for awakening empathy and compassion while helping with writing improvement. Your child will be instructed and mentored by a teacher-counselor who has over a decade of experience working with at-risk teens, with demonstrable results in improved student performance and behavior. The teacher-counselor providing the instruction and mentoring is also the author of this study.

The once-weekly *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class and individual mentoring sessions will be held at XXXXXXXXXXXX High School during the course of the regular school day in the first semester of the 2010-2011 school year, as part of the School-Within-A-School Program (SWAS). Each *Odyssey* class lasts for one period; approximately 54 minutes. (SWAS actually covers two class periods each day.) Please note that your child's participation in the SWAS Program is already guaranteed by the school; by signing this agreement you are consenting to your child's participation in this research project which involves no extra work for your child other than the weekly *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class that is part of the SWAS Program. It is also possible for your child to fully participate in the SWAS Program without participating in this study.

If you decide to allow your child to be part of the study, their participation will consist of weekly class sessions of the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* Character Education and Writing Improvement Program, as well as at least four mentoring sessions with the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* Program Director/Facilitator and author of this study, Jacob Shefa. Please note that as the Director/Facilitator, Jacob Shefa's sole focus is on ensuring that your child receive the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* curriculum on a weekly basis, as well as receive individual mentoring. As the author of the study, Jacob Shefa's main focus is on accurately chronicling the successes and challenges of delivering the curriculum and mentoring service, rather than predetermining a specific result, while always preserving the anonymity of each child. Thus, there is no conflict between the roles of director/facilitator and author of this study.

To assure your child's privacy and the confidentiality of his responses, he will be assigned a different name in all written material that will be used in the final research study. Your signed consent form, the information collected during mentoring sessions, or any other material (i.e., journals, writings, art, etc.) will remain strictly confidential and kept in a locked cabinet. The author of this study also plans to be the transcriptionist (the person who types up all the material) for all his interviews, adding to the confidentiality of the project. Selections from your child's written work will be part of the final dissertation resulting from this study. In the unlikely event

that it is later decided to utilize an outside transcriptionist for any part of this project, the Transcriptionist would need to complete and sign a Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement.

Before signing this consent form and participating in the interview, please consider the possibility that attending the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class sessions and individual mentoring sessions, as well as engaging in the ongoing writing activities, may bring up memories or uncomfortable feelings for your child. Please note though that over the past decade, such reactions have been extremely rare. If at any time you have concerns, I will make every effort to discuss them with you and inform you of various options to resolve your concerns, including, should you choose, referral to a licensed counselor. It is also important to point out that even temporary discomforts can often lead to new insights for the student as they develop greater self-understanding and self-control. Finally, your child may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or prejudice.

If you have any questions regarding your child's rights and participation as a research subject, please contact Dr. Judy Schavrien, Chair of this dissertation committee at XXXX XXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXX XXXX, XX XXXXX; via email at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX; or by phone at XXXXXXXXXXXX; or contact Fred Luskin, Ph.D., Chair of the Research and Ethics Committee at XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX; via email at XXXXXXXXXXXX; or by phone at XXXXXXXXXXXX.

If you want more information regarding the *Odyssey* Program, social and emotional learning, empathy and compassion, or writing as a tool for adolescent development, the method of this research, or a copy of a written summary of the research findings, contact me at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX; or by email at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX; or by phone at XXXXXXXXXXXX. Please note that the written summary of the research findings will be a general overview of the study; no results for a specific child will be included in this summary.

This research study is additional to your child's participation in the SWAS Program, even though the focus of the work is the same. Your child's participation in this research study is totally voluntary, and no pressure has been applied to encourage their participation. If you wish, your child can withdraw from participating in the study at any time throughout the process without penalty or prejudice. Also, withdrawal from the research study will in no way effect your child's placement and ongoing participation in the SWAS Program.

As the study moves toward completion in January and February of 2011, your child may be invited to participate in a public reading of portions of his written work. At no time will such readings occur without the explicit and specific permission of both you, as his guardian, and your child. Such participation is totally voluntary and nonmandatory for the purposes of this study. Participation or nonparticipation in any possible public readings of student work will in no way effect his participation in the study.

I, _____ voluntarily consent for my child to attend weekly *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class sessions and individual mentoring sessions for the purposes of the study conducted by Jacob Shefa. I understand that some of my child's written work will be used in the final study. I have received and read the consent form and understand

that my child's participation in this study is voluntary, and that my child's confidentiality will be protected. The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me, and any questions I asked about this study were answered to my satisfaction. I hereby confirm my willingness to allow my child to participate in this study.

Parent/Guardian of Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

If you would like to receive a written summary of the research findings of this study, please provide your mailing address below:

Appendix B: Consent Form for Student

Consent Form for Student to Participate in the Odyssey Research Project

Dear Research Participant:

The research study you are being invited to participate in will explore the awakening of empathy and compassion. This study is being undertaken as a doctoral dissertation for the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. Your participation may contribute to a greater understanding of the ways empathy and compassion can improve and enhance students' academic and social life experiences, as well as demonstrate the importance of writing as a tool for awakening empathy and compassion while helping with writing improvement. You will be instructed and mentored by a teacher-counselor who has over a decade of experience working with teens, with demonstrated results in improved student performance and behavior. The teacher-counselor providing the instruction is also the author of this study.

The once-weekly *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class and individual mentoring sessions will be held at XXXXXXXXXXXX High School during the course of the regular school day in the first semester of the 2010-2011 school year. Each class lasts for one period (approximately 54 minutes). Please note that your participation in the SWAS Program is already guaranteed by the school; by signing this agreement you are consenting to participate in this research project which involves no extra work other than the weekly *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class that is part of the SWAS Program. It is also possible to fully participate in the SWAS Program without participating in this study.

If you decide to become part of the study, your participation will consist of weekly class sessions of the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* Character Education and Writing Improvement Program, as well as at least four mentoring sessions with the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* Program Director and author of this study, Jacob Shefa. Please note that as the Director/Facilitator, my sole focus is on making sure that you receive the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* curriculum on a weekly basis, as well as receive individual mentoring. As the author of the study, my main focus is on accurately chronicling the successes and challenges of delivering the curriculum and mentoring service, rather than predetermining a specific result, while always preserving your anonymity. Thus there is no conflict between the roles of director/facilitator and author of this study.

To assure your privacy and the confidentiality of your responses, you will be assigned a different name in all written material that will be used in the final research study. Your signed consent form, the information collected during an interviews, or any other material (i.e., journals, art, etc.) will remain strictly confidential and kept in a locked cabinet. Selections from your written work will be part of the final dissertation resulting from this study. In the unlikely event that it is later decided to utilize an outside transcriptionist for any part of this project, the Transcriptionist would need to complete and sign a Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement.

This research study is additional to your participation in the SWAS Program, even though the focus of the work is the same. Your participation in this research study is totally voluntary, and no pressure has been applied to encourage your participation. If you wish, you can withdraw

from participating in the study at any time throughout the process without penalty or prejudice. Also, withdrawal from the research study will in no way effect your placement and ongoing participation in the SWAS Program.

Before signing this consent form and participating in the interview, please consider the possibility that attending the *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class sessions and individual mentoring sessions, as well as engaging in the ongoing writing activities may bring up memories or uncomfortable feelings. Please note though that over the past decade, such reactions have been extremely rare. If at any time you have concerns, I will make every effort to discuss them with you and inform you of various options to resolve your concerns. In addition, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice.

If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, you or your parent/guardian may contact Dr. Judy Schavrien, Chair of this dissertation committee at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX; via email at XXXXXXXXXXXX; or by phone at XXXXXXXXXXX; or contact Fred Luskin, Ph.D., Chair of the Research and Ethics Committee at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX; via email at XXXXXXXXXXXX; or by phone at XXXXXXXXXXX.

If you want more information regarding the *Odyssey* Program, social and emotional learning, empathy and compassion, or writing as a tool for adolescent development, the method of this research, or a copy of a written summary of the research findings, contact me at XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX; or by email at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX; or by phone at XXXXXXXXXXX.

As the study moves toward completion in January and February of 2011, you may be invited to participate in a public reading of portions of your written work. At no time will such readings occur without your permission, as well as the permission of your parent or guardian. Such participation is totally voluntary and nonmandatory for the purposes of this study. Participation or nonparticipation in any possible public readings of student work will in no way effect your participation in the study.

I, _____ voluntarily consent to attend weekly *Odyssey Writes of Passage* class sessions and individual mentoring sessions for the purposes of the study conducted by Jacob Shefa. I have received and read the consent form and understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and that my confidentiality will be protected. I understand that parts of my written work will be used as part of the final research study. The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me, and any questions I asked about this study were answered to my satisfaction. I hereby confirm my willingness to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Date

If you would like to receive a written summary of the research findings of this study, please provide your mailing address below:

Appendix C: The Mentor Meditation

A mentor is a wise and trusted guide. Someone who has a deep understanding of your life—and a deep understanding and wisdom about life itself.

Later in our odyssey, you will be meeting your own mentor—through writing. For now, we are going to go on a journey using our minds and our feelings, to imagine we are meeting this wise mentor. This is a completely safe process, but if at any time you feel uncomfortable in any way, you can just open your eyes and sit quietly until we finish. (You can quietly write or read a book, also.)

We'll begin with simple mindfulness breathing, as we've done before. Let your body just be relaxed in the chair, no big effort. Don't even make a big deal about relaxing. Just *let yourself* relax. After I ring the bell, we'll take a few minutes to follow our breathing, not forcing anything, just paying attention, *riding the breath*, as I explained before, in and out. I'm now going to ring the bell. [Ring bell]

[After 3-5 minutes] Okay, now that we're settled in, I want you to imagine that you are walking in a valley on a really beautiful day. There's a cool breeze in the air. You can see a large mountain in the distance. As you walk through the valley, you might feel like you are moving towards something very special, a meeting perhaps. You feel relaxed, but a quiet excitement is building.

Now you are at the foot of a mountain, and you slowly begin to climb. As you ascend, go up, you see lots of beautiful rocks, even some brightly colored ones. It begins to occur to you that this is some kind of very special place you have found. The climb is getting steeper, but you also feel great strength beginning to fill you.

Somehow, almost without noticing the time passing, you realize you have climbed quite a bit. The atmosphere is a bit thicker, and you can even see clouds around you. Now you are moving through the clouds, climbing higher, 'till you come through them. The sky is a brilliant shade of sapphire blue.

The top of the mountain is in sight. Somehow your climbing has gotten easier as you move towards the summit, the top of the mountain. There you are; you've reached the top. You can look all around you at the valley below.

Without even fully understanding how, as you stand there you begin to sense, to feel that your mentor, this wise person who deeply understands you, is actually present up here at the top of the mountain. Somehow, just thinking about him or her makes you feel both peaceful and excited.

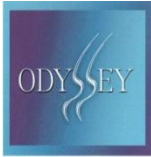
As you keep walking at the top of the mountain, you see your mentor in the distance. Then, almost before you realize it's happened, you are standing right in front of your mentor. Wisdom and kindness come from the mentor's eyes. They see you, understand you, and wish to help.

Now is the time, you realize, to ask your mentor that question, or those questions that you've always wanted to know—about your life, maybe about life itself. Please take all the time you need to ask, to listen, and to feel how great it feels to be in the presence of such a wise and loving being. They're pretty cool, too! They are relaxed, easy to be around; and yet, there is a sense of great power, mystery even, about your mentor.

Take a few more moments to be with your mentor. When you feel like you've finished, you can thank your mentor, bowing even, if you choose to, and then head back down the mountain, and into the valley. Take your time. Think about what you've received. When you are done, open your eyes, quietly just tap your feet on the ground a few times, and come back to this room, this time.

Appendix D: *Tonglen Poem*

ODYSSEY WRITES OF PASSAGE



TONGLEN POEM



INSTRUCTIONS:

You are going to write a poem: simple and short—but potentially very powerful. The poem has a format. The first line begins with “Breathe in,” and the next line begins with “Breathe out.” You will repeat this format at least three times (you may do more), each time beginning with “Breathe in,” and then, “Breathe out.”

After you write, “Breathe in,” I want you to imagine something that is unwanted in your life. It could be something personal, like, “Breathe in my anger,” or “Breathe in my girlfriend leaving,” or it could be something more to do with the world; like, “Breathe in war,” or “Breathe in global warming.”

Next, on the “Breathe out” part, I want you to imagine something brings relief to what you breathed in. For example, “Breathe in my anger, Breathe out a cool, calm breeze.” Or, “Breathe in my girlfriend leaving, Breathe out happiness for all she gave to me.”

Your final poem, which you will write on the back of this sheet, should look something like:

Breathe in _____,

Breathe out _____.

Breathe in _____,

Breathe out _____.

Breathe in _____,

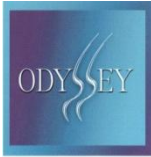
Breathe out _____.

Breathe in _____,

Breathe out _____.

Appendix E: Meeting With Mentor Write

ODYSSEY WRITES OF PASSAGE



MEETING WITH MENTOR



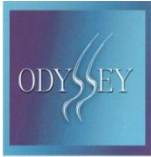
A mentor is someone who has understanding, insight, and even wisdom to share. The word mentor has an ancient, mythic origin. It comes from Homer's *Odyssey*. In that great story, Odysseus has been away for nearly two decades, fighting war, and going through a series of trials as he sought to return home. His young son, Telemachus is sad and discouraged, finding little purpose in his life. Mentor is an older man whom Odysseus had asked to oversee Telemachus' development while Odysseus was gone. In the story, amazingly, we learn that sometimes the Goddess Athena, who is the Goddess of Wisdom, disguises herself *as* Mentor.

Mentors are found in lots of stories, such as Gandalf in *Lord of the Rings*, or Obi-Wan Kenobi or Yoda, in the "Star Wars Movies." In the original "Karate Kid" movie, Mr. Miyagi was a mentor to the young karate student, Daniel.

INSTRUCTIONS:

In the following writing, which should be at least four paragraphs, imagine that you are meeting your own mentor. This mentor has something very important to communicate to you—what is it? He—or she—has great understanding, insight, and wisdom about your life situation. Perhaps this mentor understands you better than anyone else.

Describe a meeting with this mentor. You can use dialogue, description, however best expresses what really is going on at this meeting. Take your time. Let the mentor . . . mentor you.

Appendix F: Compassion Write***ODYSSEY WRITES OF PASSAGE*****COMPASSION WRITE**

The word compassion means “to suffer with.” Compassion also has to do with the wish to lessen or even remove suffering—whether that be for a person, a family, animals, people everywhere, or even the Earth itself. You can also feel these feelings towards yourself; self-compassion.

Everyone has moments in their life when compassion is present. It might be *just* a moment, but a lot of times the memory of it stays with you, as you remember how your world expanded, got bigger, as your heart opened.

In the following essay, which should be at least four paragraphs, tell your compassion story. It could be about a time when you showed compassion to another, or when someone showed it to you. It could describe something you only observed, but somehow it made a deep impression on you.

If you cannot remember any such instance, you could even *imagine* what a moment of compassion might feel like. Describe it as if it really happened. Who knows; perhaps by writing about it, you will later experience it “in real time!”

As you write, try and slow down and actually feel what compassion feels like. Pay attention to the details. Tell your compassion story.

Appendix G: Resonance Panel Responses

Jennifer Hill, Ph.D.

Was the researcher transformed in the course of conducting the study?

Yes, the mentor was definitely transformed through the course of conducting the study. Given all that the mentor had happening in his life at the time, it is amazing to me that he was able to still bring a compassionate presence to his mentoring encounters with each boy. One overarching theme I picked up on in reading the mentoring encounters and the Mentor's Odyssey was the ability to know oneself, to be mindful of one's own inner feelings, dialogue, and so on, in order to truly be reflective to each individual mentee. In addition to this, the ability to see, own, and accept one's own flaws, and thereby accept the fallibility and humanness of another person is a very transformative, transpersonal quality. Jacob demonstrated this strongly as illustrated in the following paragraph:

I decide, as we sit down, that what matters, in terms of my effectiveness as a mentor, is my willingness to work on these qualities. A fundamental willingness to meet myself exactly as I am could translate, or transfer, into a willingness on the part of my mentees, to be themselves--or at least to be or allow more of themselves.

And,

In mentoring Sereno, I've been continually reminded of self-compassion; his gift to me. What strikes me now, in closing our sessions, is that our mentoring encounters have not really changed Sereno at all, not in any essential way. If anything, they have created an atmosphere in which Sereno feels more permission simply to be himself, with all his glorious flaws. I certainly have been upfront with him about my own flaws, even sharing some of my present struggles, though careful not to dramatize them, or to put any of the burden of them on him or any of the boys. But I see now that our work together has been as much about allowing our weaknesses, accepting them, as it has been about brandishing our so-called strengths.

As I read this, I was yelling out loud, "yes, yes, yes!" What a fantastic way to model self-compassion for these boys, a quality that I think is at the heart of what they most needed. Jacob embodies this quality in a lived, day-to-day manner. This sends the message, "It is ok to be human. You are lovable." And in doing so, I think deep down, despite all he was going through, Jacob was able to take this to heart, as well.

Is the reader transformed in some way as she or he reads or applies research findings to life situations?

Yes, in many ways, reading this research reminded me to also practice self-compassion. I . . . opened in reading this research. Usually, reading research, even transpersonal research, is a disembodied thing. In reading Jacob's work, I was called, pulled, compelled to go far beyond my usual cerebral apperception of the work. I had a great emotional upwelling of empathy and

compassion throughout, to the point where I had to take it in small doses to avoid being completely overwhelmed. I was having very strong physical reactions—full body chills, mostly. A literal physical resonance. No other research that I have read has ever elicited such a strong response in me. As this process continued, I began to worry that I was going overboard. I was regularly crying, laughing, and generally feeling very strong emotional responses, both to the boys' individual writing and life stories, and to Jacob's careful and thoughtful notes.

Many times, throughout the reading of the work, I was also reminded to stay a little more open in my day-to-day life. I work with adult and young adult students in a university setting, and often encounter people with very big problems happening in their lives. While I am always kind and caring with these situations, I realized that I had begun to withdraw a little (probably in order to avoid that overwhelm that can sometimes happen to me). As I read Jacob's research, I decided to stay a little more open to the "empathetic channel" so to speak. By doing so, I am finding that I am more mindful, more awake and aware in my day-to-day life. I still have to be careful, however . . . again, to strike a balance between empathetic, compassionate presence and drowning in the tidal wave of empathetic emotion. This research taught me that this is where I need to focus in my own development.

Did the researcher and research participants gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves and the topic in the course of the study?

Yes, absolutely. I think for the researcher, the answer to this question is summed up in my answer to number 1, above. For the research participants (the ones I was able to read: Leif, Sereno, Merlin, Archer), I think that overall, the answer is yes. Each boy, in his own way, brought some resistance to the process, but were able to overcome that resistance and really learn both self-compassion and compassion for others. This was a matter of degree, though. Archer learned to compassionately ask his father to stop being so cruel to him; Merlin began a Tonglen practice, and was able to feel his parents' presence in his writing; Sereno was able to learn self-compassion (I think he came to this study with a great deal of empathy and compassion in general) by figuring out that he could not help other people without having the inner resources to do so; and Leif's story was awe-inspiring in so many ways. He was able to reveal himself, a tremendous act of courage and compassion; and he was able to recognize his impact on another burn victim, using compassion to help the other boy.

In reading the report, do readers gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves, the topic, or the world?

Yes, and I think my answer to number 2 sums this up :)

Is the research report written with such clarity and authenticity that readers feel that they know the researcher's motives for the study and, therefore, can better evaluate the study's relevance to their lives?

Without a doubt. Although, to be fair, I know Jacob, and never had any doubt about his authenticity or motives.

Does the study provide a new vision for the future that helps readers ask new questions about their lives and the world?

Yes; I want to see this program in as many schools as possible, and I want to begin a campaign to clone Jacob Shefa so every teen can have a Mr. Shefa to mentor them! Could we possibly develop a mentor-training program, so that other caring, self-aware, and compassionate adults can begin this journey, and bring this program to other places?

Are readers inspired by the findings and the vision provided by the study?

Very much so.

Are readers moved toward action and service in the world?

Yes, as I mentioned in number two--staying open, being aware, balancing the emotional response to others' suffering.

Jan Ryan, M.A.

Was the researcher transformed in the course of conducting the study?

The researcher was transformed over the course of conducting this study; that is clear in the reflections, mentor's journal, and insights into the youth. Maybe the larger question is what transformed the researcher—his own life changes or the study? The obvious answer is both. The study seems to have offered a structure for engaging with the youth, building their skills, and bringing meaning to their struggles and your own suffering as you also carry their stories. Had your life faced not change (as if that is possible), you might be able to isolate the impact of the study. But, as you wrote, your own personal losses seemed to open you up in ways that might not have been possible otherwise. I believe changes like you experienced put people in a rarified state where we understand time differently, see with a new clarity, and maybe just breathe differently. I love how the structure you used for your study gave you the opportunity to grow as both a researcher and a living, breathing person. The passion you have for both your learning and your living comes through in your writing.

Sereno's Story:

You acknowledge the gift of "self compassion" and I believe this is S's biggest change. He admits that he understood compassion and knew he felt it for others, grandpa and Rachel, but that feeling it for himself is new. Self compassion is an essential change.

So I know from this story and Leif's, that you are transformed in the moment by what happens, and even what doesn't happen, since I see it in your reflections. I wonder what happens to the power of the moment or moments when it comes to the summary statement. Something changes. Or maybe in this specific mentoring experience (Sereno), the self-compassion Sereno gifted to you is a difficult one to hold on to in your heart. Maybe your head writes the Summary.

Is the reader transformed in some way as she or he reads or applies research findings to life situations?

I am impressed by *Tonglen* and how you use it to create a structure for poems—a simple way to form it, capture it. All those I have read so far, Leif, Merlin, Sereno, are haunting. Like Merlin, I am inspired to learn more and found the same first source he did. I need to know lots of ways to experience suffering, my own and others, and carry it more gracefully; otherwise I shy away from being vulnerable to it. Thanks for this tool. This is just one way reading your work has transformed me, opened me up to experiencing more.

Agenda-less is sometimes a temporary strategy and sometimes a final acceptance. Either way it seems particularly difficult for teacher/mentors than for mentors who might teach through the process. My own growth is to feel more comfortable with agenda-less living even as I make to do lists every day. I find this reading is challenging why I choose to solve problems the way I do. And I also see such diversity in the lives of the youth and the power of mentoring to make sense of their experience that I hope to keep looking intentionally for mentors in my life. It is an effort I had forgotten to do, on purpose.

Did the researcher and research participants gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves and the topic in the course of the study?

Research, Jacob: you write a summary of the ways the wounds of the youth remind you of yourself. I wonder if the process of mentoring for you can only grow one way—that is, that you would always gain in compassion and depth of understanding. And it is more than the process, because this summary is a very personal list of wounds you share. You would grow in any work you pursue, but mentoring is ideally suited to your talents.

Coresearchers I read, Leif, Sereno, Osiris, Merlin: report change or show change you can see. No one escapes writing without some kind of transformation. Writing with mentoring seems to be even more powerful. The questions are an intervention all their own.

In reading the report, do readers gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves, the topic, or the world?

Yes, reading is clarifying for me the areas where compassion comes more easily than others.

Osiris: Apathy? I don't know. Planting seeds is a good way to move forward and stay sane as a counselor. I have used that strategy and believe in it. My gut feeling comes from contrasting the stories about loss. After reading about Merlin, Leif, and Sereno, I wonder if their losses are ones they are living with vs. O's is living loss every day. Physical loss is so pervasive like a leak in our energy or a hole in the boat. Life just drains out while we sit. Even doing the best we can to live our loss gracefully, it is happening. As I read this story of a young boy living in a constant state of physical loss, I wondered if he is saving his energy to make sure he can choose when he wants to die rather than just leave it to others or to suffer even longer. I can't imagine the kind of fatigue he seems to feel. I cannot separate my physical self from my mental self. I think this is a problem, as I grow older; one I am dealing with slowly as I lose some every day. But it also

inspires me to move through pain, fatigue so I don't just sit down and let it happen. Move like my life depends on it.

Is the research report written with such clarity and authenticity that readers feel that they know the researcher's motives for the study and, therefore, can better evaluate the study's relevance to their lives?

Leif: In terms of a small note on format, the flow was somewhat interrupted during the 3 Questions by your own reflections; I would have preferred them to be after. Leif's *Tonglen* poem was stunning. Your experience with him is a good one for thinking about the researcher's motives. This boy's camp experience showed he had experience with compassion; what was new was the writing so his story is a nice focus on the writing process. He wrote about his own key mentoring experience. He used writing to communicate it to you and maybe to save it for himself. This story showed me why writing is the focus of your work. You accept the mentee's history and life experience and hope for meaningful reflection through writing. It was clear to me that this resistant writer found value in writing his own story and maybe a way to transfer his learning from one part of his life to another. Your concern and respect for him are authentic, your love of writing is infectious even with those resistant to its pull, and your motives are focused in your process—writing.

Does the study provide a new vision for the future that helps readers ask new questions about their lives and the world?

Mentoring is shown to be possible in such small moments and longer engagements. If our culture could reframe mentoring to fit into a continuum of time, then maybe we could give mentoring a role all of us can make part of our lives. But I am frustrated by the part of the field that says it must look a certain way. My hope for my future is the same I hope for anyone's and our culture. My hope is to keep open to mentoring moments and be intentional about finding moments and longer relationships to find the mentoring I need.

Are readers inspired by the findings and the vision provided by the study?

I am inspired by this reading to make mentoring more present in my life. I see how it has enriched Jacob and his mentees. He has introduced to me that mentoring is not something to make a project of but it is a way to live more fully awake and available to self and others.

Final Note: I often feel guilty about choosing to work when my time to live without work is now, yet I still keep working. I do it because of the stories I heard. I know the way we work is different and now people are more attracted to it than ever before. But I am not listening to young people anymore; I listen to the adults I train. This reading gave me an opportunity to listen to young people with an informed, insightful guide. It strikes me that you are helping each young person to find that "inner" guide. Your singular gift is that your conversations do not travel ahead of the youth, but somehow side by side with them. Because of this, I think they may find their inner guide sooner.

Jim Rothblatt, M.A., MFT

I have been asked by Jacob Shefa to be part of a “Resonance Panel” whose task is to read and respond to his dissertation.

Mr. Shefa’s hypothesis, as I understand it, is to show through his own personal experience along with an extensive review of literature on the subject of self-exploratory writing, that it can be a transformative experience for both student and teacher. Mr. Shefa has managed to create a means of delivering an intense creative writing, a.k.a. personalized story telling experience, within a public middle school for a group of male students. Teaching students the art of writing by way of being able to explore their own stories in the concise way that writing requires is an amazing time intensive opportunity that is a gift for each of the participants . . . education at its best.

From my own personal experience as a human being, who has over 30 years of professional experience as an educator and as a therapist, and my personal knowledge of Mr. Shefa’s work in schools along with my reading of the dissertation, I can list a number of powerful human connections that have been described. I have no doubt that Mr. Shefa, the “Mentor,” is continually transformed by his experience as a teacher who listens carefully to his student mentees, creating two-way dialogue and demonstrating caring and mutual respect. I also have no doubt that because of this process the students have been transformed, some more than others. I don’t think it is possible that the students can have the intense human interaction as described without being changed in some transformational way.

I first met Mr. Shefa when I was working as student support staff in a school district. At that time Mr. Shefa wanted to put a very similar writing program in some of the local schools to work with “at risk” students. I believe I may have been instrumental in helping to make that happen. I made that effort, because even at that time, I believed, because of my own experience, that the aforementioned hypothesis was true. I think that Mr. Shefa has now provided evidence that this idea has significant merit. Structured time between a mentor/teacher and mentees/students in a small group educational setting with a goal of self-awareness through writing, dialogue, respect, and storytelling, seems intuitively to offer no outcomes that could be anything less than positive. I once heard an interview of the Dalai Lama and I think he would describe this process as “God in search of God.” On another occasion I took a CEU course about Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis and I think that Freud might have described this process as a being a “soul to soul” search between human beings.

As a final note, I was struck once again, in the personal struggles described by mentor and mentees as they met and worked together, that just showing up leads to hope and lessons learned.

With regard to the questions that follow, “yes” is my answer to all.

Was the researcher transformed in the course of conducting the study?

Is the reader transformed in some way as she or he reads or applies research findings to life situations?

Did the researcher and research participants gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves and the topic in the course of the study?

In reading the report, do readers gain in compassion and depth of understanding about themselves, the topic, or the world?

Is the research report written with such clarity and authenticity that readers feel that they know the researcher's motives for the study and, therefore, can better evaluate the study's relevance to their lives?

Does the study provide a new vision for the future that helps readers ask new questions about their lives and the world?

Are readers inspired by the findings and the vision provided by the study?

Are readers moved toward action and service in the world?

Appendix H: Three Textual Touchstones for First Cycle of Intuitive Inquiry

From *Evolution's End*, by Joseph Chilton Pearce (1992),

Starting at around age eleven, an idealistic image of life grows in intensity throughout the middle teens. Second, somewhere around age fourteen or fifteen a great expectation arises that "something tremendous is supposed to happen." Third, adolescents sense a secret, unique greatness in themselves that seeks expression. They gesture toward the heart when trying to express any of this, a significant clue to the whole affair. (p. 190)

From *The A.W.E. Project: Reinventing Education, Reinventing the Human*, by Matthew Fox, (2006),

- Education is a spiritual act, an essential work of compassion. (p. 34)
- All the spiritual traditions of the world honor education, considering it a spiritual practice for learner and teacher alike. (p. 34)
- I believe wisdom is what young people and adult want. Unfortunately, neither young people nor adults are acquiring wisdom from most school systems. (p. 9)
- Traditionally, in both the Western biblical tradition and in Hinduism and the East, education has been understood as a "work of mercy or compassion," that is to say, as an avenue to relieving ignorance and lifting the veil of distorted relationships with reality. We might question whether education is lifting such veils of distortion today or actually contributing to them. (p. 19)
- Do schools educate for meaning or for meaninglessness? (p. 23)
- Is our education mindful or mindless? Does it contribute to filling the person with wonder, confidence, and empowerment? Or to alienating the learner and disempowering him or her? (27)
- There is universal agreement from all the world's wisdom traditions that the best humankind has to offer is compassion and that compassion is not beyond our capabilities. (p. 121)

From *The Mentor Devotion* by Nagarjuna, 2nd century CE, in *The Jewel Tree of Tibet*, by Robert Thurman (2005),

Through the great bliss state,
I myself become the mentor deity.
From my luminous body,
Light rays shine all around,
Massively blessing beings and things,
Making the universe pure and fabulous,
Perfection in its every quality. (p. 245)

Appendix I: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

As a transcriber, I agree to maintain confidentiality with regard to all participant information including written materials, audio recordings, video recordings, and any other materials associated with the transcription. All materials will be securely stored by the transcriber, and strict confidentiality will be maintained. I will also help to aid the researcher in protecting the identity of participants to ensure anonymity.

Transcriber Name: _____

Transcriber Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Name: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: For this research project, Jacob Shefa, the author of this study, will also serve as the transcriber, having trained in this practice for many years. In the unlikely event that an outside transcriptionist is brought into the project at some point, this paragraph will be removed, and he/she will complete and sign this Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement minus this explanatory paragraph.