

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING DEEPLY MOVED: AN INTUITIVE INQUIRY

by

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A dissertation submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Transpersonal Psychology

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Palo Alto, California

April 27th, 2006

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UMI Number: 3221764

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Abstract

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This study explored the experience of being deeply moved, which was defined as being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life, resulting in a deeper sense of connection to oneself, others, or the sacred. The method used was intuitive inquiry, a form of hermeneutics which employs cycles of interpretation in which the researcher refines his or her understanding of the topic through self-inquiry, published literature, and formal study of the experiences of others. The researcher's perspectives are articulated early in the research endeavor as a set of *lenses* which are modified and developed to reflect the literature review and the results of the research. This study acquired and presented subjective written accounts of the experience of being deeply moved from 14 participants—9 women and 5 men, 25-60 years of age, 7% ethnically-diverse; 50% from California, 36% from other states, 1 from Israel, and 1 living in India. Participants were encouraged to write in an embodied manner, rich in sensory and emotional detail, to convey the lived-quality of their experiences. Thirteen interpretive lenses emerged that described the psychospiritual qualities, triggers, and transformative impacts. Summarized, these included: (a) physical and emotional opening; (b) transpersonal knowing; (c) connection with the heart, including feelings of love and meaning; (d) apprehension and integration of the polarities of life; (e) gratitude; (f) awareness that the shared reality of the human condition is a vehicle for connection, meaning, and reverence for life; (g) the emergence or renewal of faith and

spirituality; and (h) access to personal strengths. The relationship between psychospiritual health and the experience of being deeply moved is discussed, including clinical applications. The results of this study extend the literature on transpersonal knowing, human potential, disclosure and assimilation of exceptional human experiences, intuitive inquiry, and embodied writing.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply moved and profoundly grateful for the support I received while writing this dissertation. I would like to thank the following people for their contributions to my life and this project:

Genie Palmer, my committee Chairperson, for believing in me from the beginning and encouraging me to write about this topic. Her invaluable guidance, expertise, generosity, and heartfelt inquiry during this project brought grace and enjoyment to my dissertation experience.

Kirk Schneider and Dwight Judy, my committee members, who offered their wisdom, encouragement, and constructive guidance at critical stages in this project.

The participants in this study, each of whom profoundly shaped this dissertation with their words and hearts. Their narratives continue to inspire and move me.

Rosemarie Anderson, for creating the intuitive inquiry method and for teaching me the art of embodied writing.

Jay Dufrechou and Vipassana Esbjörn-Hargens, who, unbeknownst to them, provided powerful guidance for this project through the examples of their own outstanding intuitive inquiry dissertations.

Vera Lind, for her superb editing and great sense of humor.

Michael and Sydney Shepperd, my parents, for their unconditional love, support, and generosity. I feel blessed to have parents that honor the ways of the heart as well as the mind. They gave me a wonderful start to life and inspired my first love of psychology.

Whitney Shepperd, my sister, for being my tireless cheerleader, confidante, and best friend.

Sidney and Rae Shepperd, my grandparents, for their outstanding and continuous support of my education.

Seth Bregman, Sameer Gupta, Meghan Berberet, and Eve Libertone, my housemates, for creating a quiet and supportive home for me to work in, and for celebrating my progress at each step in this journey.

My remarkable circle of friends at AuthenticSF and the Arete Center for Excellence—the people with whom I work and play and grow. I am deeply moved by their extraordinary commitment to humanity. I want to especially honor Travis Decker, Bryan Bayer, Jerry Candelaria, and Guy Sengstock for holding a truly beautiful vision for the world and for creating opportunities for all of us to do the work we love.

There are a number of other people who have offered their encouragement, support, and love during this process. I particularly want to acknowledge: Erin Waklee and family, Kurt Foeller, Shana Weinstein, Anna Liisa Wjinen, Aaron Pava, Nicole Starbuck, Jennifer Malika Rani Freedman, and my grandparents, Trixie and Jack Brown. I am grateful for their presence in my life.

Finally, I want to express deep gratitude for Bryan Bayer, my beloved and partner during this journey. His constant love and encouragement, remarkable patience, and tireless delight in me as a human being sustained me throughout this project. *Thank you for your heart and your commitment to truth. It never fails to move me.*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is an inquiry into the experience of *being deeply moved*. This colloquial phrase is commonly used and understood by most people, yet it has received little academic attention. Because there was no formal definition of the experience of being deeply moved at the outset of this study, I created the following initial definition as an entry point for myself and the participants in this study: The experience of being deeply moved may involve being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life and may result in a deeper sense of connection to oneself, others, or the sacred. I also noted that it may include emotional, cognitive, physical, spiritual, and/or transformational components.

While this preliminary definition has remained an accurate description of the experience of being deeply moved over the course of the study, my understanding has deepened in many ways, and the initial definition I posited evolved into the following: The experience of being deeply moved involves being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life and results in a deeper sense of connection to oneself, others, or the sacred. It can also be characterized as an experience of the heart, by which I mean that the experience elicits love, serves as an internal barometer of meaning and value, and can result in personal transformation and caring action. This understanding will be explored in the following five chapters that constitute this dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the lived experience of being deeply moved. Understanding this phenomenon as it is *lived* rather than as an

abstract concept required exploring it on the many layers of human experience. These included the *felt* or immediate dimension of experience and the shifts in being that occur when one is deeply moved; the ways in which this experience is meaningful to people, particularly in the dynamic relationship between self and world; and the transformative and healing dimensions, or lasting impacts of the experience of being deeply moved. In order to accomplish this task, I acquired and presented subjective written accounts of experiences of being deeply moved from the perspective of the participants. These narratives included descriptions of their feelings, thoughts, and sensations, the greater situational context in which these experiences arose, and the effect these experiences had on the participants' lives. Interpretations and understandings of this experience are offered based on the results of this research and my perspective as the researcher.

Significance of the Study

Any inquiry is contextualized by the time and place in which it occurs. This study occurred in the context of modern Western society—the United States in the 21st century—a society that can be simultaneously described as technologically sophisticated and advanced, and as alienating and dissatisfying to many (Macy & Brown, 1998). Globally, this is a time of great strife, which is reflected in the pandemic of violence, war, environmental degradation, and economic, health, and human rights issues around the world. Many argue that there is a direct relationship between the state of the world and contemporary mental health issues, which Glendinning (1994) described as “the screaming link between pervasive personal dysfunction and the ecological crisis” (p. ix). Moore (1992), a psychotherapist and popular writer, noted: “The emotional complaints of our time, complaints we therapists hear every day in our

practice, include emptiness, meaninglessness, vague depression, disillusionment about marriage, family, and relationship, a loss of values, yearning for personal fulfillment [and] a hunger for spirituality” (p. xvi). Moore (1992) further described this as the *loss of soul*: “When soul is neglected, it doesn’t just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning” (p. xi). Perhaps an even more pervasive symptom of the *loss of soul* is the tendency to become numb, complacent, indifferent, and adjusted (Schneider, 2004; Kornfield, 1993). Given the many challenges in the world at the present time, the cost of being desensitized to suffering and disconnected from our passion and compassion is both personal and communal.

The field of transpersonal psychology has approached these societal and mental health concerns in a variety of ways, particularly by considering the role of consciousness in these issues. One premise of transpersonal psychology is that the state of consciousness that is considered to be *normal* by mainstream society is often defensively contracted. This state of consciousness mediates contact and distorts perception of reality, and can produce any of a range of symptoms, including the qualities of depression and numbness described previously. In addition, transpersonal psychology holds that more optimal states of consciousness are available which allow a clearer and unadulterated perception of reality and of oneself. According to Walsh and Vaughan (1993), editors of *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, “there exists within us, however, latent but unexplored creative capacities, depths of psyche, states of consciousness, and stages of development undreamed of by most people” (p. 1).

The experience of being deeply moved is one such capacity of consciousness. Allowing ourselves to be fully impacted by the suffering and joys of the world can

break open the protective shell around the heart that isolates us not only from the depths of our own experience, but also from other people and the possibility of being connected to and nourished by life. Being deeply moved can wake us up, shake off numbness and complacency, and can even motivate us to take action in the world. Mack (1993) noted: “Through a deeper exploration of ourselves and the worlds in which we participate, transpersonal psychology enables human beings to discover their inseparability from all life and their appropriate place in the great chain of being” (p. xii). The experience of being deeply moved speaks to that transpersonal vision of discovering our inseparability from life through the depths of our own experience. It is, I believe, one response to the soul’s requirement that we encounter and experience life fully.

According to Hart, Nelson and Puhakka (2000), editors of the book *Transpersonal Knowing*, the literature in the field has thus far addressed transpersonal knowing in a few, limited ways, including

broad characterizations of ‘postconventional’ or ‘transrational’ consciousness (e.g. Walsh, Washburn, Wilber), largely drawn from mystical literature. Some detailed empirical studies are also available on the developmental shifts toward the ‘postconventional’ (e.g., Kegan, Loevinger, Cook-Greuter). What is lacking, however, are first-hand investigations of the phenomena of this type of knowing. (p. 3)

By gathering first-hand, subjective accounts of experiences of being deeply moved, this study addresses the call for descriptions of transpersonal knowing from primary sources. Understanding the experience of being deeply moved thusly contributes to the field of transpersonal psychology and furthers the study of what makes everyday life rich and fulfilling.

Definition of Terms

The word *move* has a host of different meanings. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003) defines the verb “to move” in a number of different ways, including:

... to change position or posture ... to take action ... to depart ... to change one’s residence or location ... to make a formal request, application, or appeal ... to change hands by being sold or rented ... to evacuate ... to stir emotions feelings or passions of ... to affect in such a way to lead to an indicated show of emotions. (p. 812)

When the word ‘moving’ is referring to emotions, the dictionary offers the synonyms “impressive ... poignant ... affecting ... touching ... pathetic” (p. 813).

These dictionary definitions indicate that being *moved*, in the sense of this study, relates in some way to the excitation and expression of emotions. However, these definitions fail to articulate the nuances of how the expression is used. When someone says they are deeply moved, they may be experiencing a variety of emotions—and possibly several emotions simultaneously. In addition, this study posits that when people use the phrase “being moved,” they are indicating something more complex either than the experience of heightened emotions or than can be found in the description of any specific emotion. The full range of the felt dimension of this experience, as well as the meaningful and transformational dimensions, are explored throughout this study.

In reflecting on the range of dictionary definitions of the word “move,” what is also revealed is that the word refers to change or transformation in a variety of contexts. I believe that all experiences of being moved hold the seeds of personal transformation. For some people, these experiences lead to profound alterations in the course of their lives. For others, it results in smaller changes, such as a freshness of perception or a sudden appreciation. However, I also believe that the transformative potential of these

experiences often remains veiled and overlooked when people do not pay attention to them. Because of this, my hope was that the process of reflecting on experiences of being deeply moved during the course of this study would allow these seeds of transformation to germinate—for the participants, for myself as the researcher, and for the readers of this research. In that regard, I invite you, as the reader, to reflect on your own experiences of being deeply moved, and to encounter the stories and reflections contained within this dissertation through the lens of your own life.

My understanding of the word *experience* was guided by the words of both Rogers (1959, 1961) and Gendlin (1962). Rogers (1959) defined experience in the following manner:

All that is going on within the envelope of the organism at any given moment which is potentially available to awareness. It includes the influence of memory and past experience, as these are active in the moment, in restricting or broadening the meaning given to various stimuli. It also includes all that is present to immediate awareness or consciousness. It does not include such events as neuron discharges or changes in blood sugar, because these are not directly available to awareness. It is thus a psychological, not a physiological definition. (p. 197)

Gendlin (1962) understood *experience* in a similar fashion, describing it as “that partly unformed stream of feeling that we have every moment” (p. 3). He continued:

It is something so simple, so easily available to every person, that at first its very simplicity makes it hard to point to. Another term for it is ‘felt meaning,’ or ‘feeling.’ However, ‘feeling’ is a word usually used for specific contents—for this or that feeling, emotion, or tone, for feeling good, or bad, or blue, or pretty fair. But regardless of the many changes in *what* we feel—that is to say, really, *how* we feel—there always is the concretely present flow of feeling. (p. 11)

Rogers (1961) so highly valued experience that he stated:

Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person’s ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must

return again and again to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me. Neither the Bible nor the prophets—neither Freud nor research—neither the revelations of God nor man—can take precedence over my own direct experience. (pp. 23-24) (*Italics in original.*)

Mack (1993) noted the importance of subjective experience in the transpersonal endeavor:

In the transpersonal universe or universes, we seek to know our worlds close up, relying on feeling and contemplation, as well as observation and reason, to gain information about a range of possible realities. In this universe we take subjectivity for granted and depend on direct experience, intuition, and imagination for discoveries about the inner and outer worlds. (p. xii)

These perspectives informed my focus on the subjective experiences of the participants as authoritative data unto themselves and are consistent with my intention to understand the phenomenon of being deeply moved as a lived experience.

Lastly, I want to define the word *heart*. Although this word did not figure prominently in my original conception of this project, my understanding has evolved throughout this study such that I now consider the experience of being deeply moved to be an experience of the heart. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003) defined the word *heart* in a number of ways, including: “the emotional or moral as distinguished from the intellectual nature; one’s innermost character, feelings, or inclinations; the central or innermost part; [and] the essential or most vital part of something” (p. 575). The heart has long been used as a symbol to refer to the spiritual, emotional, and moral core of the human being. It is based on these broad understandings that I employ the word heart, both literally and poetically, in my final analysis of the experience of being deeply moved. I will further elaborate on my use and understanding of the word heart in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Method Overview

The design of this research was based on the principles of intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004), an approach to research that seeks to integrate objective and subjective ways of knowing. Unlike some approaches that require the researcher to bracket and set aside their assumptions (e.g., phenomenology [Giorgi, 1975]), intuitive inquiry encourages the use of the researcher's personal perspective and experience as the means to understanding a topic. Intuitive inquiry is a form of hermeneutics, a philosophical perspective that contextualizes knowledge within the subjectivity of individual and cultural points of view. It does not assume the existence of or seek to define "objective" reality, but instead presents ways of understanding experience. As a hermeneutical approach, intuitive inquiry has cycles of interpretation in which the researcher refines his or her understanding of the topic through self-inquiry, published literature, and formal study of the experiences of others. The researcher's personal perspectives are articulated early in the research endeavor as a set of *lenses* which will be modified and developed to reflect the results of the research.

Thirty-two people inquired about contributing in this study, fourteen of which ultimately completed the study. These included 5 men and 9 women between the ages of 25 and 60. Participants were recruited through flyers and notices posted on various internet lists and at community locations throughout the San Francisco Bay area. Consistent with the intuitive inquiry approach, the primary criterion that I used to screen participants was whether or not their experiences of being deeply moved resonated with me and deepened my understanding of the topic.

The participants were asked to compile a list of situations in which they have been deeply moved. My hope was that this process would provide useful information and would stimulate an awareness of the variety of moments in which they have had this experience—perhaps moments that might not readily come to mind unless they were sought. These lists contributed significantly to the development of my interpretive lenses, both in terms of understanding the varieties of deeply moving experiences, and in discerning the underlying threads that connect the diversity of experiences into one coherent phenomenon.

Participants were also asked to provide a written description of one experience of being deeply moved, and were encouraged to write in an embodied fashion. Embodied writing (Anderson, 2001, 2002) is a style of writing that is rich in sensory and emotional detail. It is attuned to the living body as inhabiting the living world, and is written from an experiential, first-person perspective. This heuristically informed approach is designed to allow the uniqueness of each person and each experience to speak for itself as data. In this style of writing, the individual and the unique are given license for expression, which paradoxically makes the writing more accessible to others and explicates something universal about the experience. “Far from making everyone sound alike by employing a particular style of writing, embodied writing seems to bring forth the particular or unique qualities of the writer” (Anderson, 2001, p. 86). In academic writing, this style enhances the possibility that the reader will have an inner experience of that which is being described, and therefore, have the opportunity to understand the experience subjectively. I instructed the participants in the embodied writing style and posed a series of questions to guide the participants in their writing.

For most participants, this involved a written dialogue process before both the participants and I felt that the essence of the story had been conveyed. Their stories of experiences of being deeply moved, along with their lists, constitute the results of this study.

The following chapters describe this study in greater detail. Chapter 2 provides a literature review that offers ways of understanding experiences of being deeply moved, beginning with an exploration of the varieties and qualities of transpersonal experiences. In addition, this chapter includes an analysis of states and experiences that are related to the experience of being deeply moved, and culminates in an exploration of the existential dimensions of experiences of being deeply moved. This literature review contributed to the development of the preliminary interpretive lenses articulated in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 describes the research method in detail and explains intuitive inquiry and embodied writing in greater depth. This chapter also describes the exact procedures I used for data collection and the specific ways I worked with the narratives and reports as data. In Chapter 4 the participants' stories are presented intact, along with 2 examples of the lists generated by participants. In Chapter 5, the final chapter of this dissertation, I offer a thematic analysis of the data and refine the themes, or *interpretive lenses*, of the experience of being deeply moved that I developed prior to collecting the data. By comparing my subjective impressions with a comprehensive review of related literature and the original data that was gathered from participants in this study, I provide an integrated and holistic understanding of the experience of being deeply moved.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to present various ways that the experience of being deeply moved can be understood in terms of the available published literature.

The experience of being deeply moved, as I have defined it in this study, involves being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life in a way that results in a deeper sense of connection to oneself, others, or the sacred. Because it is a complex phenomenon, many different perspectives have contributed to my understanding of the topic. The theories and research that most informed this study arose from within three seemingly distinct perspectives and bodies of literature within psychology:

Transpersonal psychology, positive psychology, and existential psychology. The literature reflecting transpersonal, positive, and existential perspectives on the experience of being deeply moved has much overlap and exhibits only nuances of difference. However, these nuances, coupled with the fact that the majority of the theory and research presented in this literature review is positioned in the field to represent one of these schools of thought, justifies the differentiation of these respective orientations in this dissertation. The literature reviewed in this chapter is thusly presented in three corresponding sections.

The first section and body of literature arises from transpersonal studies of experiences that are considered beyond the realm of ordinary human experience. This section explores the descriptions of peak, plateau, and exceptional human experience (EHE), and identifies the ways in which the experience of being deeply moved can be understood as a type of EHE. The second section of this literature review explores research and theory about experiences that are similar or related to the experience of

being deeply moved. This body of literature is gathered from a variety of perspectives and contexts, including transpersonal, humanistic, and positive psychology research journals, yet it collectively represents a growing interest in the psychology of the positive. It is largely comprised of empirical research about discrete phenomena that the researchers often categorized as *emotions*, although in each case the researchers go on to describe the physical, meaningful, transcendent, or spiritual dimensions of the experience. The empirical research presented in this section is complemented with theoretical perspectives of other distinct phenomena that are related to the experience of being deeply moved. A comparative analysis is offered which identifies common threads and distinguishes some of the unique qualities of each experience in relation to the experiences of being deeply moved. In the third and final section, the experience of being deeply moved is explored from the perspective of existential psychology as the result of a meaningful and genuine encounter with life.

Transpersonal Experiences

According to Walsh and Vaughan (1993), *transpersonal experiences* are experiences in which “the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal or encompasses wider aspects of humankind, life, *psyche* or cosmos” (p. 3). This section of literature explores the ways in which the present study is contextualized within the existing literature about transpersonal experiences.

Peak and Plateau Experiences. Maslow (1962, 1964, 1968, 1971) was one of the first contemporary psychologists to study a type of transpersonal experience, which he called a peak experience. His reports of peak experiences introduced a new lexicon

into mainstream psychology and paved the road for the humanistic and transpersonal movements. Maslow (1962) defined the term peak experience as

moments of great awe, moments of the most intense happiness or even rapture, ecstasy or bliss. . . . These moments were of pure positive happiness when all doubts, all fears, all inhibitions, all tensions, all weaknesses, were left behind. (p. 9)

Maslow (1968) also described peak experiences as

the mystic, or oceanic, or nature experience, the aesthetic perception, the creative moment, the therapeutic or intellectual insight, the orgasmic experience, certain forms of athletic fulfillment, etc. These and other moments of highest happiness and fulfillment I shall call the peak-experiences. (p. 73)

He studied reports of these experiences and discerned several consistent qualities among them. He stated that they are natural, normal experiences, not religious in nature, and can be elicited by many stimuli and situations in everyday life. According to Maslow, peak experiences are available to everyone, healthy and sick, though the healthy have a greater tendency to have peak experiences. They can also be therapeutic and can transform one's whole outlook on life.

Maslow's work was also instrumental in terms of redefining psychological health and pathology. According to Maslow, once basic psychological needs have been met, the drive for growth takes precedence—what he called *self-actualization*. He defined self-actualization as the

ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents, as fulfillment of mission (or call, fate, destiny, or vocation), as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature, as an unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy within the person. (1968, p. 25)

Self-actualizing people are motivated to joyfully explore and utilize their capabilities and potentials, relatively uninhibited by fear and neurosis. Characteristics of this

motivation include greater creativity, spontaneity, success in one's chosen tasks, altruism, and a general love of life. Maslow described it as "experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly" (1971, p. 44) and "daring to listen" to oneself (p. 46). He lists thirteen qualities of self-actualized people:

1. Superior perception of reality.
2. Increased acceptance of self, others and of nature.
3. Increased spontaneity.
4. Increase in problem-centering.
5. Increased detachment and desire for privacy.
6. Increased autonomy, and resistance to enculturation.
7. Greater freshness of appreciation, and richness of emotional reaction.
8. Higher frequency of peak experiences.
9. Increased identification with the human species.
10. Changed [or improved] interpersonal relations.
11. More democratic character structure.
12. Greatly increased creativeness.
13. Certain changes in the value system. (1968, p. 26)

Maslow observed that persons having peak experiences temporarily take on many characteristics of self-actualizing people. "Not only are these his happiest and most thrilling moments, but they are also moments of greatest maturity, individuation, fulfillment—in a word his healthiest moments" (Maslow, 1968, p. 97).

Several empirical studies examined Maslow's theory of peak experiences, usually focusing on one of two dimensions. One group of studies focused on classifying

peak experiences according to either qualitative categories or triggering events (e.g. Allen, R. M., Haupt, T. D., & Jones, R. W., 1964; Hallaq, 1977; Panzarella, 1980; Ravizza, 1977; Thorne, 1963). Studies that attempted to create a taxonomy of peak experiences rarely reached agreement across studies; however, a variety of personality characteristics and triggering events have been substantiated across studies.

The other group of studies explored the possible enduring effects of peak experiences, particularly regarding psychological well-being, personal meaning, and self-actualization (Margoshes & Litt, 1966; McCain & Andrews, 1969; Panzarella, 1980; Wuthnow, 1978). Most research suggested a positive relationship between peak experiences and psychological well-being, though some research (Ebersole 1970, 1972; Ravizza, 1977) found that peak experiences may have no lasting effects.

Mathes, Zevon, Roter & Joerger (1982) conducted 5 questionnaire studies with 833 undergraduates that focused both on the qualitative dimensions of peak experiences and on the relationship of these experiences with psychological well-being. The first two studies were part of the process of devising and validating a measure of the tendency to have peak experiences called the *Peak Scale* that focused not only on the affective dimensions of the experience, but more centrally on the perception of Being. This measure ultimately consisted of 70 true-false items that frequently used Maslow's own descriptions of peak experiences. The remaining three studies used the Peak Scale to explore several of Maslow's theories regarding the affective, cognitive and transcendent dimension of peak experiences and the relationships between peak experiences, Being-values, and self-actualization.

These studies found a significant correlation between reports of peak experiences and reports of intense happiness, which supported Maslow's definition of peak experiences as "moments of highest happiness and fulfillment" (1968, p. 73). These studies also found an even stronger correlation between peak experiences and cognitive experiences of a transcendent and mystical nature, an aspect that Mathes et al. (1982) argued is often overlooked in other studies. The results of these studies also indicated a significant correlation between reports of living in terms of "Being" values (such as truth, beauty, and justice) and the tendency to have peak experiences. However, in one study, the correlations between peak experiences and self-actualization as measured by scores on the Peak Scale and scores on the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (Shostrom, 1965) were positive, but not strong. This finding indicates that self-actualizing individuals are more likely to have peak experiences than non-self-actualizing individuals, but the occurrence of peak experiences is not necessarily determined by an individual's psychological health or growth.

Lanier, Privette, Vodanovich, and Bundrick, (1996) devised a study that explored several dimensions of peak experiences, which they operationally defined as moments of highest happiness. Specifically, they tested Maslow's hypothesis that although peak experiences may have many triggers, they are universal and easily identifiable. They also tested the hypothesis that although peak experiences are transitory, they may have lasting effects, including the experience of personal significance and fulfillment. The Experience Questionnaire (Privette, 1984) was offered to 30 realtors and compared the results to previously collected data from 29 artists and 123 university students. The Experience Questionnaire begins with the question "Will

you describe one incident in your life characterized by highest happiness, using this page and the back. Tell me what happened and your inner experience” (Lanier et al., 1996, p. 784). It is followed by 42 statements with Likert scales and five scaled descriptions of the peak experience. In the development of the questionnaire, retest reliability of questionnaire items was .70 and questionnaire scores were determined to have construct and content validity (Privette & Bundrick, 1987; Privette & Sherry, 1986). Two independent raters analyzed the narratives to identify triggers, and multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were performed on Experience Questionnaire factor scores.

While the realtors, university students, and artists differed in terms of age, gender composition, educational level, and job interests, the results of the study conducted by Lanier et al. (1996) indicated no significant overall effect or difference in responses among groups. All groups characterized their peak experiences as turning points in their lives. Four factors were cited by the realtors as being positively correlated to peak experiences: significance and personal meaning of the experience; fulfillment, positive feelings and the sense of intrinsic reward; spirituality, particularly that the peak experience was beyond words; and full focus, or the sense of being absorbed in the immediacy of the moment. The results of the study conducted by Lanier et al. (1996) support the hypotheses that peak experiences are universally recognized and are potentially beneficial and transformative.

Many of the qualities of peak experiences may also be attributed to the experience of being deeply moved, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably when describing certain types of experiences—particularly deeply moving experiences

that are blissful in nature. However, the quality of intense happiness or bliss that is essential in the description of peak experiences is not present in all experiences of being moved. The word *peak* refers to that which is highest, best, or ultimate, and thus the phrase *peak experience* implies the leaving behind of the aspects of experience that fall short, such as weaknesses or fears. Part of my inspiration for studying the experience of being deeply moved was that it did not seem to refer to moments in which we have necessarily transcended our weaknesses and fears, but instead have included them in a deepened embrace of being human. Even though I initially posited that the two experiences were distinct from one another, the correlation between peak experiences and self-actualization suggested to me that the experience of being deeply moved could also have psychological and spiritual benefits, an inquiry that was borne out in my final interpretive lenses in Chapter 5 of this study.

My initial understandings of the experience of being deeply moved were also influenced by another experience described by Maslow. As he got older, Maslow (in Krippner, 1972) noticed that the frequency and intensity of his peak experiences diminished and were replaced by a more constant state, which he termed a “high plateau experience” (p. 114). The elements in common with peak experiences include a sense of awe and mystery. However, the plateau experience includes more serenity than emotionality, and, in contrast to the peak experience, an essentially cognitive perspective, like a “witnessing” (p. 115) of life. He described a sense of unitive consciousness that included a simultaneous perception of the miraculous and the ordinary. “. . . it is to take rather casually the poignancy and the preciousness and the beauty of things, but not to make a big deal out of it because it’s happening every hour

. . . all the time” (p. 114). It is also more voluntary than the peak experience; Maslow described being able to induce the plateau experience through exposure to art or nature. He commented: “I think you can teach plateau experiences; you could hold classes in miraculousness” (p. 114).

The plateau experience is a state of being that requires a certain level of development and is sustained over time. Although this may be the case for the rare individual, the experience of being deeply moved is usually more transient; and while development may play a role in the aptitude for being deeply moved, it is an experience that is available to people at all levels of development. In addition, the experience of being deeply moved is often characterized by the presence of strong emotion. However, like the plateau experience, many experiences of being deeply moved are predicated on the ability to perceive the miraculous within the ordinary.

Exceptional Human Experiences. More recently, White (1992) further developed the concepts of peak and plateau experiences by coining the term exceptional human experience (EHE). The term EHE is technically broader than other terms, encompassing all experiences that lie outside what is traditionally considered ordinary. It is historically based on many other terms, including the general term *anomalous experience*. Cardena, Lynn, and Krippner (2000) defined anomalous experience as

an uncommon experience . . . or one that, although it may be experienced by a substantial amount of the population (e.g., experiences interpreted as telepathic), is believed to deviate from ordinary experience or from the usually accepted explanations of reality. (p. 4)

According to White (1992), one purpose of using the term *EHE* rather than *anomalous experience* is to highlight and explore similarities and connections between experiences instead of viewing them as isolated phenomena. White (1992) noted:

In the past we have tended to think of various EHEs as separate. I suggest we view them as connected in ways we must discover. We should explore the possibility that there is a continuum involved, or at least a pattern of interconnections. (p. 46)

White further suggested that this perspective might serve to shed more light on individual EHEs and EHEs in general as these patterns emerge.

White (1993) described ten characteristics of EHEs, which are summarized below:

1. They are spontaneous.
2. They offer an experience of transcendence.
3. They offer a new experience of self as more than we previously assumed.
4. They provide connection to self, others, the universe and the sacred.
5. They open us to the direct experience of a different internal and external reality, which predisposes us to future EHEs.
6. One's state is physiologically, psychologically and spiritually heightened, including a sense of mind-body unity or wholeness of self.
7. They are aspects of a growth process that invite our cooperation and participation.
8. They are potentially life changing.
9. They can be a link between daily life and the sacred through meaning-making and identity formation.
10. People have a desire to share experience; doing so heightens and affects the meaning of the experiences.

These experiences fall into nine main categories: Death-Related, Desolation/Nadir, Dissociative, Encounter, Exceptional Human Performance/Feats, Healing, Mystical, Peak, and Psychical Experiences (White & Brown, 2001).

Palmer (1999) conducted a study that explored the impacts of the disclosure and assimilation of EHEs. The study was particularly focused on the psychospiritual benefits that can result from sharing EHEs with other people, especially as these experiences are not typically shared. Her study assigned 70 participants who had previously experienced an EHE to 5 different groups. One group worked independently on an EHE autobiography, two groups wrote the autobiography in tandem with educational group work, one group engaged in EHE unrelated activities, and one control group only completed the pre- and postassessments. Palmer used qualitative thematic analyses and multiple quantitative assessments to ascertain significance on six dimensions. These dimensions included indications of EHE occurrences, disclosure, assimilation, meaning, spiritual aspects, and transformative changes. The results showed a significant relationship among the variables, suggesting that disclosure of EHEs can enhance the potential for meaningful interpretation of these experiences and psychospiritual wellbeing. In particular, disclosure of EHEs was found to be related to the qualities of openness and interconnectedness. The results of Palmer's study indicate that the disclosure of EHEs benefits individuals in numerous ways; that sharing about these experiences is often essential for the assimilation and integration of these experiences; and that disclosing EHEs may significantly contribute to their potential for personal transformation.

Palmer's (1999) research supports the present study in a variety of ways. By having several groups of her participants disclose their EHEs through writing, Palmer's study supports the validity and potential benefits of the methods I chose for the present study. Palmer's study was also unique in that rather than research a particular type of experience, such as a peak, encounter, or death-related experience, it included participants who reported any of the wide range of possible EHEs, thus lending validity to the concept of EHEs and the characteristics described by White (1993) above. Because of the breadth of the concept, the experience of being deeply moved may be understood as a type of EHE and the ten characteristics of EHEs described above can be attributed to the experience of being deeply moved. These characteristics are further explored in Chapter 5 in relation to the findings of this study.

Theory and empirical research related to EHEs suggest that a characteristic of these experiences is that they are spontaneous, yet they can be elicited by a variety of commonly reported situations. Laski (1961) described circumstances that elicit EHEs ("ecstatic experiences" in her words), naming them particularly as "triggers." She noted:

Obviously in choosing such a name as *trigger*, I am supposing that these circumstances can in some way act as a release mechanism in inducing ecstatic experiences. I am not suggesting that encounter with a trigger provides a sufficient cause for an ecstasy, only that encounter with a trigger is, as the material shows, almost always a necessary precondition for ecstasy. (p. 16) (*Italics in original.*)

White and Brown (2000) compiled an extensive list of triggers of potential EHEs that is available on their website. The list includes religious, aesthetic, and a variety of daily secular activities as well as forms of movement, play, and sports. It also includes

situations that one might avoid—such as danger, illness or loss—which might serve to interrupt daily life and “surprise” one into an EHE.

Empirical studies of EHEs are often conducted in relation to a particular trigger. For example, Hill (2004) examined mountain climbing as an opportunity for EHEs and personal transformation. He researched the experiences of 19 participants through a variety of standard assessments and custom questionnaires in tandem with verbal interviews, written stories, the researcher’s own experiences, and accounts from third parties. Wade (2000) researched the nature of nonordinary, transcendent experiences during sex through phenomenological inquiry of 86 interviews. Dowdall (1998) investigated the relationship between nature-related EHEs, spirituality, well-being, and ecological actions and attitudes through quantitative assessments of 126 people, and interviews of 6 participants. These studies provide empirical support for the concept of EHEs and continue to shape our understanding of exceptional human experiences. The present study contributes to this field by exploring experiences of being deeply moved as a type of EHE, including the dynamic configuration of situations that trigger the experience of being deeply moved.

Positive Psychology and Other Related Phenomena

Although the experience of being deeply moved is not uncommon, it has never, to my knowledge, specifically been the subject of empirical research. In order to further my understanding of this experience and situate this study within the field of psychology, I explored related phenomena that had received study. This section includes research and theory regarding experiences of the numinous, awe, inspiration, elevation, and tears of wonder-joy. These experiences have been understood in different

ways in the literature—as emotions, as spiritual experiences, and as ways of transpersonal or authentic knowing. Although each piece of research focuses on different dimensions of the experience studied, where there is sufficient information I highlight the affective, cognitive, somatic, and motivational dimensions, as well as shifts in the way that “self” and “other” are known, in addition to discussing the perspective offered by the researchers themselves. The process of analyzing each of these experiences early on in my research allowed me to clarify my understanding of the experience of being deeply moved and helped me shape my preliminary lenses, which are articulated in Chapter 3. These experiences are revisited in Chapter 5 and compared to the findings of this study along the same dimensions.

The numinous and awe. One of the earliest and most pivotal treatments of exceptional experiences was offered by Otto (1970) in his book *The Idea of the Holy*. Otto described two forms of religious awareness. The first was a rational dimension comprised of religious thought and practice. The second dimension related to religious feeling, which he called the *numinous*. This is the incommunicable experience of awe, which is accompanied by a distinct sense of self that he termed *creature consciousness*. Otto stated: “It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures” (p. 10). His statement describes the feeling of experiencing one’s smallness in the face of an unfamiliar, extraordinary, immense other. One is attracted to and fascinated by this mysterious other, yet uniquely aware of being separate from it. The *other* which is beheld in numinous consciousness is the “mysterium tremendum” (p. 23). Otto stated:

Taken in the religious sense, that which is ‘mysterious’ is . . . the ‘wholly other’ . . . that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the

intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny,' and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment. (p. 26)

The experience of the numinous is characterized by awfulness or dread, which he said is distinct from a normal feeling of fear. It has an overpowering majesty and fascination, and a sense of energy or urgency: "vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus" (p. 23). Otto further noted:

In mysticism, too, this element of 'energy' is a very living and vigorous factor, at any rate in the 'voluntaristic' mysticism, the mysticism of love, where it is very forcibly seen in that 'consuming fire' of love whose burning strength the mystic can hardly bear, but begs that the heat that has scorched him may be mitigated, lest he be himself destroyed by it. . . . 'Love,' says one of the mystics, 'is nothing else than quenched wrath.' (p. 24)

Otto believed that there is a developmental component to one's experience of the numinous. In early developmental stages, the numinous is experienced as "terrifying;" in later stages, fear gives way to the experience of holy awe and goodness. Otto's developmental perspective of the numinous relates to Maslow's observations that as one developmentally matures, the intensity of peak experiences may translate into the steadiness of plateau experiences.

Andresen (1999) explored these experiences, which he referred to as experiences of awe, from the perspective of a psychoanalyst. He did not engage in formal research on the topic, but rather offered clinical observations that largely support the descriptions offered by Otto (1970). He noted that some of his clients had experiences that included "creature consciousness, wonderment, being deeply moved, experiencing something as profoundly good, the discovery that there is more to other people than ever before imagined, and deep gratitude" (p. 516). Andreson's work focused particularly on what he described as a developmentally advanced form of awe

that arises in human relationships, in which the “wholly other” (a reference from Otto, 1970, p. 26) is another person. He stated that this form of awe arises with the

new or recovered experiencing of the object’s otherness or separateness from subject. This comes with the quality of a revelation. The experience also involves distinct senses of the self, and it is because of this that awe offers the opportunity for enlarging reflective self-awareness. (p. 507)

He asserted that this experience of awe changes awareness through deeper recognition of the other and a rediscovery of the self—an experience often accompanied by tears.

Andresen addressed the role of tears in experiences that do not primarily concern grief:

This puzzling identical response, crying, in apparently disparate states may be explained by the fact that in awe one experiences complete separateness from that wholly other that is something surpassingly good. Loss is therefore intrinsic to the realization that with its surpassing goodness, the object is also wholly apart. . . . It is as though it moves away, even as we are realizing its goodness. (p. 518)

According to Andresen, the connection between crying from grief and crying in states of awe seems to be that the sharp distinctions between self and other in awe produce a sense of loss. There is both a love of the other and an acute awareness of being separate from that loved one.

Research psychologists Keltner and Haidt (2003) offered a conceptual analysis of awe by employing prototype approach to understanding emotions. A prototype perspective posits that there are specific elements or features that are essential identifiers of discrete emotional experiences. There are also variants of the prototype in which some elements are missing or other elements are added. The authors utilized this approach to identify the core features and possible variants of awe based on an analysis of a cross-disciplinary literature review. The authors noted that the subject of awe is largely absent from the field of psychology, but they cited McDougall’s (1910) exploration of admiration and Maslow’s (1964) studies of peak experiences—many

studies which include experiences of awe—as relevant. The authors neglected to cite Otto (1970) in their literature review, which is surprising because many of their conclusions about awe were similar to those offered by Otto about the numinous. Because descriptions of awe and the numinous are similar, I consider them together in this analysis and when comparing them to the experience of being deeply moved in Chapter 5.

According to Keltner and Haidt (2003), their literature review revealed commonalities across disciplines. Descriptions of awe consistently included the experience of power and feelings of submission, much like Otto’s creature consciousness. It also involved a difficulty in comprehending the object of the awe, which led to experiences of surprise, wonder and confusion. Keltner and Haidt (2003) named these qualities “vastness” (p. 303) and a need for “accommodation” (p. 303) and identified them as the two central features of awe. Vastness refers to anything perceived as larger than the self, either physically or psychologically. The term accommodation is borrowed from Piagetian developmental psychology and refers to the need to mentally adjust in order to comprehend new experiences. The quality of accommodation addresses experiences of confusion, disorientation and sometimes fear that are commonly cited in awe experiences. According to Keltner and Haidt (2003), awe may also involve feelings of “enlightenment and even rebirth when mental structures expand to accommodate truths never before known” (p. 304).

Keltner and Haidt (2003) offered five additional themes that describe varieties of the awe prototype: threat, beauty, ability, virtue, and supernatural causality. According to their model, the prototype of awe is necessarily characterized by the

qualities of vastness and the need for accommodation, but may be elaborated to include any combination of these five themes to produce different “flavors” of awe or awe-related states, which, according to the authors, may be found in “religious encounters, charismatic political leaders, natural objects, and even patterns of darkness and light” (p. 303).

The literature on awe and the numinous referenced in this section describes the sense of self as small, insignificant or submissive in the face of something vast, powerful, and beyond cognitive comprehension—engendering feelings of love and devotion, and at other times, fear. While several elements of awe and the numinous overlap with the experience of being deeply moved, in Chapter 5 of this dissertation I compare the results of the present study with the prototypical picture of awe to illustrate the distinct nature of these phenomena.

Inspiration. Inspiration, another state related to the experience of being deeply moved, was studied by Hart (1993) as part of his dissertation research. He and a team of undergraduate students conducted 1 to 2 hour in-depth interviews of 70 participants (33 men, 37 women) from a range of socioeconomic classes and professions about their experiences of inspiration. Participants were asked to recall and describe specific moments of being inspired in detail, including the environmental and psychological triggers, lasting effects, and the significance of these experiences in their lives. The participants were also asked to describe the absence or opposite of inspiration and to contrast it with characteristics of similar experiences such as motivation and intuition. The interviewers wrote descriptive summaries of the responses to each question, and then met as a group to produce a thematic content analysis. According to Hart, the

participant responses were highly consistent, even though the participants experienced inspiration in a variety of situations and the responses included a range of descriptions from the profoundly mystical to the almost mundane.

In later publications, Hart (1998, 2000a) extended the analysis of his research and discerned three general phenomenological characteristics of inspiration: “contact and connection,” “openness and receiving,” and “vibrancy and clarity” (2000a, p. 33). According to Hart, *contact and connection* refers to the subjective experience of feeling connected to an idea, another person or something larger than oneself, which requires an expansion or alteration in personal boundaries. Hart noted:

Rather than remaining apart from or in distant observation of an ‘other,’ our boundaries are altered as we experience a connection that we may express as empathy . . . and compassion. We move from categorizing to contact and in so doing practice ‘accommodation’ . . . as we meet the other openly. Love, acceptance, trust, and appreciation are often the outcome of inspiration and appear to have ties to this degree of connectedness. (p. 35)

The second characteristic identified by Hart (2000a), *openness and receiving*, relates to the experience of awareness opening beyond the parameters of normal consciousness into directness and immediacy. Examples of openness in participant responses included being “available,” “letting go,” “flowed through,” “a channel,” “not in my control,” “everything in my body just opened up” (1998, p. 15). Qualities of *clarity* and *vibrancy* appeared when participants reported heightened sensory experience, a feeling of aliveness, and the experience of awareness as a flash of clarity. The participants reported experiencing, “juices flowing; an inner push; a flowering” (2000a, p. 38), and a spontaneously expanded perspective. One participant stated: “There is a grasping of unexpected connections or seeing a kind of hidden layer of order of reality” (2000a, p. 39).

The context in which he considered these characteristics is primarily epistemological; he described inspiration as an activity of knowing that allows direct and intimate contact beyond the parameters of normal waking consciousness, a state that is dominated by constant thinking. Hart explained:

The possibility of participation in the event [while in a normal state of consciousness] is often thwarted by the expectation of evaluation of it and deep contact is prohibited by chronic categorization of the other. (2000a, p. 31)

The openness, clarity and contact that Hart identified as the characteristics of inspiration involve a shift in self-other boundaries to allow a deep *knowing* of the other. He compared inspiration to intuition, which he said may come with a flash of clarity, but does not require a shift of self-other boundaries or offer the experience of being *enlivened*. He also compared it to motivation, describing motivation as involving perseverance to a goal, often the pragmatic consequence of inspiration, whereas inspiration itself is more a moment of heightened energy and insight and a deepened experience of knowing and being.

Hart's research also addressed the relationship between inspiration and mental illness. Participants were asked to describe the opposite of inspiration, which they reported as, "flat, boring, lifeless, ordinary, plodding, stagnant, stuck, and empty" (2000a, p. 41). They described a heightened sense of separateness and isolation instead of connection, feeling shut down and tight instead of open, and an awareness pervaded by worry and doubt, instead of the open awareness of clarity. The results of this study indicated that lack of inspiration may play a role in mental health issues, including depression, hopelessness and meaninglessness, and that cultivating inspiration may offer possibilities for psychological treatment.

Hart's research showed that the experience of inspiration might lead to a specific form or action in the world, such as the solution to a problem or the creation of a piece of art. However, he argued that inspiration does not always lead to a specific form but may instead result in a shift in "Being"—what Hart described as "an uplifting emotional-perceptual shift" (2000a, p. 40) that results in hope, meaning, value, and a sense of clarity about life. He used the following quote from a participant to illustrate this shift in being:

My sixteen month old learned how to kiss me the other day, she did this so tenderly that I was inspired; it reminded me of the loving tenderness, of the pure love that I want to express to others. (p. 40)

The participant in this example clearly experienced an uplifting emotional shift that did not result in a particular form. However, the distinction of *Being* versus *form* offered by Hart does not distinguish the specific element of this response that relates to inspiration rather than other uplifting experiences, such as happiness, love, or excitement. I assert that this participant described her experience as *inspiring* because it included a motivation toward an exalted way of being, in this case, her desire to express love to others, much in the way her child did.

The Oxford English Dictionary (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) defined inspiration as "the suggestion, awakening, or creation of some feeling or impulse, especially of an exalted kind" (p. 1036). This definition is supported in Hart's (2000a) analysis where he referenced Laski (1961) who described inspiration as "a breathing in or infusion of some idea, purpose, etc. into the mind" (p. 280-281). Although, as Hart distinguished, inspiration may or may not result in a specific behavior or tangible product, these definitions suggest that inspiration necessarily includes the *impulse toward* a behavior, purpose, or goal—particularly an exalted, noble or ideal one. The *object* of the impulse

might be related to form, such as the inspiration to create a work of art, or to being, such as the inspiration to be a better person (much like elevation). However, Hart's analysis neglected to distinguish the element of connection to and motivation toward an exalted idea—a distinction that is essential in developing a comparative understanding of inspiration.

While Hart's research identified many elements of inspiration, his conceptualization is too broad to accurately define it. My purpose in describing this conceptualization as broad is that the phenomenological characteristics Hart identified—*contact* and *connection*, *openness* and *receiving*, *clarity* and *vibrancy*, and *form* versus *Being*—could apply to many EHEs, including the experience of being deeply moved.

Researchers Thrash and Elliot (2003) also explored inspiration. They developed a psychological construct of inspiration based on a literature review and a series of four empirical studies. In the first study, the authors developed a trait measure of inspiration called the *Inspiration Scale* (IS) which they found to be internally consistent. The construct parameters and individual differences were found to be stable and invariant across time. The second study attempted to develop a “nomological network” (p. 876) of inspiration by examining the relationship between the authors' conceptualization of inspiration and several different theoretical frameworks. The authors offered questionnaire packets that included the IS and a selection of different measures in 3 sub-studies to 412 undergraduate students. Ten variables were found to have a positive correlation (above .30) with the overall inspiration index: Intrinsic motivation, openness

to experience, absorption, positive affect, self-esteem, optimism and self-determinism, work mastery, perceived competence and creativity.

The third study examined inspiration in 199 patent holders—a group likely to be inspired—to establish IS construct validity. The fourth study looked at inspiration in daily experience. The researcher's hoped to establish a relationship between the IS trait index of inspiration and the variance of daily state experiences of inspiration, and to document antecedents and consequences of inspiration across time. In this study, 150 undergraduate students recorded responses to a set of questions that corresponded to the ten variables noted in the second study and rated them on a 6-point scale daily for 2 weeks. The fourth study found that the daily or state experience corresponded to the trait index. According to Thrash and Elliot (2003):

These findings suggest that inspiration is facilitated by receptiveness and that it does not represent the active assertion of the self. Other antecedents included positive affect and two of the resource variables, optimism and self-esteem. . . . Work mastery emerged as a consequence, which indicates that inspiration has an enduring motivational impact. Absorption also emerged as a consequence, which suggests that inspiration focuses attention on object qualities such as beauty rather than promoting diffuse or unfocused arousal. Inspiration was also found to lead to creativity and to enhanced levels of all three resource variables (perceived competence, self-esteem, and optimism), which suggests that inspiration facilitates transcendence of constraints and enhances the self. Inspiration also led to increased self-determinism; thus, inspiration appears to involve discovery rather than assertion of the self. Finally, Openness to Experience also emerged as a consequence. Even though inspiration involves a focusing of attention, it appears not to involve the rigidity of focus that might be expected in the pursuit of lower gratifications. (p. 884)

The authors compared the results of their studies to a cross-disciplinary literature review. Their analysis revealed several common themes of inspiration, which the authors distilled as “motivation,” “evocation,” and “transcendence.” Thrash and Elliot (2003) noted:

Inspiration implies *motivation*, which is to say that it involves the energization and direction of behavior; inspiration is *evoked* rather than initiated directly through an act of will or arising without apparent cause; and inspiration involves *transcendence* of the ordinary preoccupations or limitations of human agency. (p. 871) [Italics in original.]

The characteristic *evocation* corresponds with Hart's (2000a) observation that inspiration, "cannot be willed, but can be wooed or welcomed" (p. 44). The element of *transcendence* is also explored in Hart's discussion of the epistemological shift that occurs with inspiration that transcends normal self-other boundaries. However, the themes cited by Thrash and Elliot (2003) differ from Hart's work in that Hart did not distinguish a motivational component of inspiration, what I argued for above as the infusion of an uplifting idea that motivates one to action.

The wealth of research on inspiration highlights the similarities between inspiration and both my early and current impressions of the experience of being deeply moved. In particular, Hart's (2000a) themes of *contact* and *connection*, *openness* and *receiving*, *clarity* and *vibrancy*, and *form* versus *Being*, and Thrash and Elliot's (2003) themes of *evocation* and *transcendence* are applicable to the experience of being deeply moved. Despite the similarities, my own experiences of inspiration and of being deeply moved spoke of differences, some of which were elucidated by my review of this literature and the resulting distinction of inspiration as the connection to uplifting possibility. These similarities and distinctions were further clarified by the present study, the details of which are included in Chapter 5.

Elevation. Haidt (2003a), a researcher of positive emotions who also co-authored the research on awe cited above, studied an experience that he termed *elevation*, which is elicited by observing compassionate or courageous acts.

Unfortunately, specific details of the studies described here are only available in an

unpublished manuscript, which I was unable to obtain. Although I could not personally assess the details of the methods used in Haidt's studies, the fact that he has published several articles reporting the results and implications of these studies in several respectable journals substantiated my conviction that the research on elevation is both widely accepted and deeply relevant to the present study.

In one study, he asked college students to recall and write about situations when they had experienced each of four positive emotions. In one of the four conditions, the emotional prompt associated with elevation was, "Think of a specific time when you saw a manifestation of humanity's higher or better nature" (p. 282). In a second study, participants in the experimental group watched a ten minute video clip of Mother Teresa; participants in the control group viewed a ten minute clip of "America's funniest home videos," which the author considered an "emotionally neutral but interesting documentary" (p. 282). According to Haidt, both studies indicated that participants in the experimental elevation condition experienced a positive affect, a warm, pleasant, tingling feeling in the chest, and most notably, a desire to become a better person and to help others.

In the analysis of his research, Haidt (2003b) described elevation as a moral emotion, which he defined as "those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (p. 853). The features that he used to identify moral emotions are that they are elicited by situations that do not directly affect the self and result in a motivation toward prosocial behavior. When compared with the feeling of happiness, defined in his studies as making good progress toward a goal, Haidt (2003a) found that while happiness led to

self-interested pursuits, the experience of elevation opened people to others and motivated them to be more virtuous.

In the discussion of his findings, Haidt (2003a) related the moral dimension of elevation to a distinction regarding relative social and spiritual purity. He argued that certain behaviors, places, and people are considered more or less purifying or polluting as determined by either subtle or explicit cultural understandings of behaving “more like the gods” (p. 277). Haidt explained:

. . . people vary in level of spiritual purity as a trait (some are high, such as priests and saints; others are low, such as prostitutes or those who work in "dirty" jobs) and as a state (one is high after bathing and meditating; one is low after defecating or when in a state of anger).
(p. 277)

Whereas disgust is the emotion related to moral degradation and spiritual pollution, elevation is the emotion related to moral and spiritual purity.

According to Haidt, the experience of elevation signifies an implicit spiritual morality functioning in every culture. However, he also asserted that elevation is a dimension of social cognition and described the spiritual and moral elements of this experience as socially and culturally relative. Another perspective can be found in transpersonal studies, which suggests that it is possible to have direct contact with reality beyond socially constructed values. From this perspective, it is important to consider that some components of morality and spirituality may not be relative, and that experiences like elevation may offer authentic contact with reality. While elevation undoubtedly concerns moral and spiritual dimensions that serve social functions, it may also include transpersonal dimensions not explored by Haidt.

The research on elevation reveals an experience that is similar in many ways to experiences of being deeply moved. However, elevation is specifically triggered by

witnessing virtuous acts and specifically results in the motivation toward virtuous behavior. Prior to data collection, my personal experiences informed me that the experience of being deeply moved was not limited as to eliciting situation or resulting motivation; thus I structured my methods in as broad a manner as possible to elicit responses that would reflect the wide variety of ways in which people are deeply moved. As I argue in Chapter 5, the results of this study indicate that elevation is one way that people are deeply moved, and that there are other dimensions of the experience of being moved that are not accounted for in the current research on elevation.

Wonder-joy tears. A common way that the phrase *being moved* is used is in the expression, *being moved to tears*. Braud (2001) described a related experience involving tears, which he called “tears of wonder-joy” (p. 100). He offered a description and interpretation of the experience based on personal reflection and informal first-hand accounts from an unspecified number of other people. I came across Braud’s work after developing many of my ideas about experiences of being deeply moved and found that his observations were strikingly similar to my own, with the exception that Braud’s experience is clearly identified by the presence of tears. Although Braud’s observations lack the scientific rigor of a formal study, they are the closest reported experience to that of being deeply moved and therefore inform the current study. Braud described wonder-joy tears as

experiences of grace—as body signals, signs, or indicators of encounters with the numinous; as my body’s way of letting me know I am having an unplanned, unavoidable encounter with the Real. . . . The tears and chills are, to me, my body’s way of indicating that the eye of my heart is open and functioning and encountering something of vast importance and meaning. (p. 100)

The physical component of wonder-joy tears is significant and seems to define the experience. Braud stated that it may include gooseflesh, chills, the feeling of having the breath taken away and warmth throughout the body, especially in the chest: “pulsing, expanding, aliveness in the chest area and extending for three to four feet” (p. 102). According to Braud, the respondent’s experiences *always* included tears; however, the uniformity of this response may be due to the way he defined the experience for others (which is unclear given that Braud did not describe the specific questions he posed during his interviews).

The emotional affect of wonder-joy tears is generally positive; others reported a range of experiences, including love, compassion, joy, gratitude, poignancy, intensity, and peace. Some respondents also reported feelings of immersion, connection and unity of life, feelings of safety and fulfillment, and a sense of being deeply known, loved and seen. Some people experienced feeling cleansed and renewed, while others experienced lightness, spaciousness, expansion, and a feeling of being uplifted or free. However, Braud noted that the emotional experience was not uniformly joyous. Sometimes people reported a “paradoxical appreciation, a holding of opposites: joy/sadness, bitter/sweet, tragic/beautiful, confused/clear, amazed/normal” (p. 102). In particular, towards the end or after the experience there may be a sadness or yearning for a beauty or goodness that is “intimated, but which is not significantly present” (p. 107). Braud elaborated:

These moments await us, are latent, under the surface. Why are these not more frequent? Why are these often absent? Why are these exceptions, rather than the norm? Life can be messy/tragic and exquisite. This is what really matters; we have gone astray. (p. 102)

According to Braud, thoughts usually occur after the experience. Thoughts and attention during the experience seem largely directed toward the trigger of the experience and towards the feeling itself; everything else fades away.

Braud cited multiple triggers of wonder-joy tears, including observing virtuous or beautiful acts or human qualities (like elevation); experiencing empathy or connection with other people, nature, or the sacred; being, rather than doing, thinking, or planning; and hearing or reading about others' accounts of this experience or their expressions of what is most meaningful or important to them. One respondent elaborated on the connection between these triggers and wonder-joy tears:

Central to all of these experiences is the sense that the human beings involved have achieved what they were somehow meant to be. They behave in exalted ways that demonstrate their divine, transcendent potential. It's as if the distance separating the Absolute and the human has been overcome, like God touching Man on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. (p. 105)

These experiences offered the respondents a greater appreciation of the miracle of life and a restoration of faith. These experiences also serve to orient people more to the knowing that arises from bodily sensations and emotions. Ultimately, wonder-joy tears are perceived as a gift; they come with an experience of grace, humility, gratitude and awe.

Each of the experiences explored in this section contributed to the development of my understanding of the experience of being deeply moved, in terms of both the methods of study and the resulting thematic analyses. This literature will be reviewed again and compared to the results of this study in Chapter 5.

The Existential Perspective: A Genuine and Courageous Encounter with Life

Throughout this study, I have conceived of experiences of being deeply moved as moments when we are open to being profoundly affected by life. Real life is full of uncertainties; we never fully know when we will experience joy and success or be confronted by suffering and tragedy. It is part of the human journey to discover how to live in a way that is meaningful and genuine in the face of this uncertainty. Questions concerning genuine engagement with life and the discovery of meaning are addressed within existential psychology.

The existential condition was summarized by Shaffer (1978) in the following four themes:

1. [The] unavoidable uncertainty when confronted on the one hand by a universe devoid of any clear-cut or easily fixed meaning, and on the other hand by the inevitability of his own eventual nothingness, or death
2. [The] inherent freedom to choose the attitudes and actions that [one] takes in the face of the potentially meaningless situation
3. The omnipresent constraints, or limits, that the person's situation places upon his or her freedom
4. The impossibility of successfully evading responsibility for whatever choices [one] makes. (p. 19)

Existential philosophers and psychologists have approached these conditions with a variety of perspectives. For Tillich (1952), the sense of anxiety that can arise in the face of meaninglessness and emptiness was considered to be the result of the loss of the spiritual center in the self. He observed: "Anxiety is the existential awareness of nonbeing . . . the awareness that nonbeing is a part of one's own being" (p. 35). Tillich argued that we cannot overcome this sense of loss and nonbeing, but we can have the *courage to be*. He wrote: "Courage is the power of life to affirm itself in spite of the

ambiguity” (p. 27), and “self-affirmation is the affirmation of life and of the death which belongs to life” (p. 28).

According to Tillich, the courage to affirm oneself and affirm life in spite of ambiguity and death consists in participating in the larger sphere of life of which one is a part, including one’s community, while simultaneously existing as an authentic being, or having “the courage to be as oneself” (p. 123). For Tillich, the center of a meaningful and genuine life culminated in an existential spirituality, which involves affirming and identifying with the largest spheres of existence. He elaborated:

Enthusiasm for the universe, in knowing as well as in creating, also answers the question of doubt and meaninglessness. Doubt is the necessary tool of knowledge. And meaninglessness is no threat so long as enthusiasm for the universe and for man as its center is alive. (p. 121)

Frankl (1984), an existential psychologist, developed a perspective and method of working with people based on his experiences in and survival of Nazi concentration camps. According to Frankl, the primary motivation in life is the search for meaning. When this is not fulfilled, he argued that people experience existential frustration. Frankl described the “tragic triad” (p. 139) of the human condition as pain, guilt, and death, and inquired into the potential for life to retain its meaning despite inevitable tragedy. According to Frankl, meaning in life can be found in three different ways: “by creating a work or doing a deed; by experiencing something or encountering someone; and by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering” (p. 115). The first way of finding meaning cited by Frankl is less relevant to the present discussion, but the second and third deserve further elaboration.

According to Frankl, the second way of finding meaning in life occurs “by experiencing something—such as goodness, truth and beauty—by experiencing nature

and culture or, last but not least, by experiencing another human being in his very uniqueness—by loving him” (p. 115). As I discuss more fully in Chapter 5, the way we encounter life, particularly the quality of awareness that would have us notice and value “another human being in his very uniqueness,” determines whether or not the encounter is either meaningful or deeply moving.

Frankl’s third way of finding meaning developed into the notion of “tragic optimism,” or how it is possible to “say yes to life in spite of everything” (p. 139). According to Frankl, tragic optimism refers to “the human capacity to creatively turn life’s negative aspects into something positive or constructive” (p. 139). The quality of encountering suffering or tragedy in a way that opens the heart is a hallmark of the experience of being deeply moved.

Bugental (1981), a contemporary existential-humanistic psychologist, also discussed the need to genuinely encounter and affirm life. He concurred with Tillich when he wrote:

Courage consists in a confronting of our limitedness within the unlimitedness of being. Courage consists in the exercising of our choice and the taking of our responsibility while recognizing that contingency can overthrow our decision and reverse our best efforts. Courage finds its finest expression in the choice to be. (p. 26)

Bugental explored “authenticity,” which he described as “a term used to characterize a way of being in the world in which one’s being is in harmony with the being of the world itself” (p. 33). For Bugental, the fulfillment of a sense of meaning involves authenticity, the full awareness of life, and creative and responsible choice.

In later writings, Bugental (1981) emphasized that being in harmony with the world is predicated on our willingness to experience the world as it is, particularly the oft avoided aspect of tragedy. He continued:

Our repression of existential reality has obscured our recognition of this basic human experience. Tragedy is a part of living. . . . Our attempt to distort that reality to eliminate tragedy is very much at the root of our experience of neurotic anxiety. (p. 25)

For Bugental, true optimism is the “optimism of reality confronted and incorporated” (p. 26).

Schneider and May (1995), existential psychologists and editors of a textbook on existential psychology, summarized the three central understandings of the human psyche in the existential worldview:

1. Human being is suspended between freedom and limitation. Freedom is characterized by will, creativity, and expressiveness; and the limitation is signified by natural and social restraints, vulnerability, and death.
2. Dread of either freedom or limitation (due generally to past trauma) promotes dysfunctional or extreme counterreactions to either polarity (e.g. oppressiveness or impulsivity).
3. Confrontation with or integration of the polarities promotes a more vibrant, invigorating life-design. This life-design is exemplified by increased sensitivity, flexibility, and choice. (p. 6)

Greening (1992), a contemporary existential psychologist, discussed 3 possible responses to existential challenges:

- 1) Simplistic over-emphasis on the positive, and false triumph over the difficulties presented by the challenge, 2) simplistic over-emphasis on the negative aspect of the paradox and fatalistic surrender, and 3) confrontation, creative response, and transcendence of the challenge. (p. 112)

The first two responses are expressions of the dread of freedom and limitation, and an avoidance of the existential task of genuinely encountering life and its challenges. The third response includes “celebration of life with all its phases and stages, knowing that they form a story with an end, not afraid or depressed, but aware and choosing life in the face of death, acceptance and transcendence of mortality” (Greening, 1992, p. 112).

According to Schneider (2004), the third response, or the answer to the existential challenge, lies in the “fluid center” (p. 10), which he described as

any sphere of human consciousness which has as its concern the widest possible relationships to existence; or to put it another way, it is structured inclusiveness—the richest possible range of experience within the most suitable parameters of support. (p. 10)

Schneider described fluidity as the “capacity (and need) to be expansive—flexible, versatile—when called for” and centeredness as the “capacity (and need) to be constrained—where appropriate” (p. xvi-xvii). Schneider (2004) continued:

The fluid center begins and unfolds through awe, the humility and wonder of living. It is precisely through awe that we come to know how daunting life is, and how readily our presumptions crumble; and yet, conversely, it is precisely through awe that we are awakened to life’s majesty, and how dramatically our despair is misplaced. Somewhere in that dynamism is vivacity—the heart, soul, and core of which is both fluid and central. (p. 10-11)

Schneider argued that it is precisely by confronting our existential realities that we can rediscover the awe of simply being alive, which is the foundation of the development of an authentic and fulfilling life.

Although the existential worldview is one of uncertainty, in other writings Schneider (1996) argued that “an indefinite worldview does not automatically imply anxiety toward our condition. It does, however, imply a humility toward and fundamental puzzlement about ourselves” (p. 146). Throughout his work, Schneider argued that an awe-based life leads to a kind of existential spirituality, which he described as “enchanted agnosticism” (2004, p. 175). This spirituality derives its sense of the sacred from the wonder and mystery of existence itself, precisely because it can never be fully known. “I am moved by life precisely because it is a radical puzzlement to me. I am moved by birth, death, love, and nature precisely because they cannot be

completely assimilated; and when they are—momentarily—it is marvelous” (Schneider, 1996, pp. 146-147). While Schneider’s use of the phrase *being moved* is not identical to its usage in this study—particularly in terms of his interchangeable use with the word *awe*—his articulation of the possibility of profound appreciation of the inherent polarities and mysteries of life is extremely pertinent in understanding the experience of being deeply moved.

Existential psychology posits that it takes courage and creativity to reconcile our freedoms and limitations, embrace the ambiguities of life, and find meaning. The courage to open to and affirm life, despite—and sometimes because of—suffering and uncertainty, is a central component of the experience of being deeply moved. According to existential psychology, the willingness to live fully and deeply is the path to creating a meaningful, vibrant and authentic life.

Conclusion

This literature review weaves together ways of understanding the experience of being deeply moved that allude to the complexity of the human condition and our inherent existential and transpersonal concerns. The literature on peak, plateau, and exceptional human experiences situated the experience of being deeply moved within transpersonal psychology and clarified it as a type of EHE. The next section of literature offered an analysis of states and experiences that are similar to the experience of being deeply moved and contextualized this study in terms of contemporary research and the perspective of positive psychology. The final body of literature highlighted the significance of this study from the viewpoint of existential psychology by exploring the

challenges and possibilities of genuinely encountering life in a way that is both courageous and meaningful.

The complex picture of the experience of being deeply moved that has been developed in this literature review was also explored through the original research of this study. In the following chapter, the research method and procedures that were used in this study are described in detail.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This purpose of this study was to explore the felt, meaningful, and transformative aspects of the experience of being deeply moved, which I have defined as being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life in a way that results in a deeper sense of connection to oneself, others, or the sacred. The method I used in this study is Anderson's (1998, 2000, 2004) *intuitive inquiry*, an approach to research which utilizes both objective and subjective sources of knowledge, particularly the perspective of the researcher, to more fully understand a topic. Because the researcher's subjective perspective is essential in this method, I have included sections in this chapter that describe my initial understanding of experiences of being deeply moved prior to data collection. This chapter also elaborates on the intuitive inquiry method and provides detailed descriptions of the procedures I used to collect and interpret original data for this study.

Intuitive Inquiry

In the intuitive inquiry approach to research (Anderson, 1998, 2000, 2004), topic choice, data collection, analysis, and reporting of data are informed by the rational and the intuitive, the academic and the personal. Anderson (2000) defined intuition as “novel thoughts and ideas” (p. 31), which include

insights derived from nonrational processes such as dream images, visions, kinesthetic impressions, a felt (or proprioceptive) sense, an inner sense or taste accompanying contemplative practices and prayer, and spontaneous creative expressions in dance, sound, improvisation, writing and visual art. (pp. 31-32)

Based on her own observations in research and in life, Anderson (2004) identifies five types of intuition that manifest in the creative process:

1. Unconscious or symbolic processes.

2. Psychic or parapsychological experiences—including, for example, telepathy, clairvoyance, precognitive experiences.
3. Sensory modes that can convey “subtle forms of information typically unavailable to the thinking mind” (p. 311). These sensory modes include sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, proprioception (inner body senses), and kinesthesia (sense of movement).
4. Empathetic identification, or compassionate knowing of the other. Anderson illustrates this type of intuition by citing its presence in other disciplines: “Writers, actors, psychotherapists, or scientists inhabit the lived world of another person or object of study” (p. 312).
5. Wounds in the personality. Anderson notes that “an individual’s intuitive style tends to settle along the fault lines or wounds in the personality in a manner akin to the concept of the wounded healer . . .” (p. 312-313). Anderson notes that these wounds can, at times, be sites of information for the intuitive inquiry researcher.

The purpose of intuitive inquiry is to honor and integrate both objective and subjective sources of knowledge through cycles of interpretation. Intuitive inquiry seeks to make the researcher’s personal perspective explicit; rather than distancing from personal insights and understandings, these perspectives become the lenses through which research is conducted. These lenses may be termed *understandings*, *interpretations*, *perspectives*, *characteristics*, *themes*, or *lenses*; I use these terms interchangeably to describe the essential findings of this study.

According to Anderson, the theoretical basis of intuitive inquiry can be found in hermeneutics. Bruns (1992), author of *Hermeneutics Ancient & Modern*, described hermeneutics:

The simplest answer is that hermeneutics is a tradition of thinking or of philosophical reflection that tries to clarify the concept of *verstehen*, that is, understanding. What is it to make sense of anything, whether a poem, a legal text, a human action, a language, an alien culture, or oneself? (p. 1)

A hermeneutical approach posits that the process of understanding arises through personal perspective. Hermeneutics asks researchers to identify their assumptions and values through active engagement with the subject in their own experience. Anderson (2000) stated:

The hermeneutical perspective, from which intuitive inquiry originates, assumes that we are continually influencing our environments anyway and therefore interpreting our experiences regardless of how objective we may appear to be. . . . Rather than discarding and bracketing our experience as researchers, intuitive inquiry consciously and adroitly positions the researcher and his or her experience at the core of the research endeavor. (p. 34)

Intuitive inquiry does not assume that an essential nature of an experience can be found and asserts that by understanding a topic from within the depth of one's personal experience, something universal is revealed.

Aspects of heuristics also inform the intuitive inquiry approach to research.

Heuristic means *to discover or find*, and “refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). Moustakas described the process in this way:

Essentially, in the heuristic process, I am creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings and essences of universally unique experiences. Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to

explore and accept what is, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully. The initial data is within me; the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature. In the process, I am not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self. . . . The story of a crucial human experience must be told in such a way that in itself it enables self-transformation. (p. 13)

Similar to the heuristic approach, intuitive inquiry emphasizes inward searching as an important element in research and acknowledges that the process of self-inquiry may lead to personal transformation. In addition, one principle of intuitive inquiry is that “the personal is universal” (Anderson, 1998, p. 75), meaning that unique descriptions of personal experiences may be the most effective way to convey aspects of human life.

Anderson (1998) stated:

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. We are at the same threshold: a threshold of appreciating, knowing, and acknowledging an aspect of life we all may share. In this process, it also happens that we see more clearly how we are different. (p. 75)

The experience of being deeply moved lends itself well to a heuristic process like intuitive inquiry because experiences of being deeply moved are often highly subtle and personal. In light of the emphasis intuitive inquiry places on inward searching and personal descriptions, it is appropriate to explore the unique experiences of being moved in the participants’ own voices. Using my own experiences, articulated as interpretive lenses, as a template for this investigation is also helpful in this study because there are no formal definitions of the experience of being moved, therefore no external constructs on which to rely. Finally, as a hermeneutical and heuristic method of research, intuitive inquiry allows me as the researcher to intimately engage with the research and to potentially be transformed by the inquiry.

Anderson (2004) acknowledged the challenges involved in doing intuitive inquiry research well and articulated nine characteristics that the researcher must incorporate into the process. These characteristics are as follows:

1. Being rigorously subjective. This characteristic involves ongoing awareness and scrupulous documentation of one's internal processes and perspectives.
2. Telling the truth no matter what. The intuitive inquiry researcher must include descriptions of "(a) mistakes made, (b) procedures and plans that did not work, (c) the researcher's apprehensions and puzzlements, (d) the process and content of intuitive interpretation, and (e) what remains unresolved or problematic about the topic or the method" (p. 325).

Documenting and revealing all aspects of the research endeavor is essential, both in terms of the researcher's ability to provide comprehensive interpretations of the data and in terms of the reader's ability to assess the research for themselves—an aspect of validity that is elaborated below.

3. Avoiding circularity. This characteristic encourages researchers to seek data that might challenge their original assumptions. The evolution of the researcher's initial perspectives is rigorously documented in the transformation of the lenses from Cycle 2 to Cycle 4.
4. Trickstering and auspicious bewilderment. Anderson alludes to the role of the trickster throughout indigenous cultures as a metaphor for the playfulness, mischievousness, or paradox that can be a gateway into wisdom in intuitive inquiry research. The process of intuitive inquiry requires the researcher to give up fixed ways of understanding, which often results in

periods of bewilderment and confusion followed by deepened understanding. “The nature of transformative experience often demands periods of confusion to be more fully understood” (p. 327).

5. Maintaining a process-oriented and inclusive perspective. Intuitive inquiry views conventional reality as a construction of contextualized human perspective and acknowledges human subjectivity as a source of knowledge. “[Conventional] reality does not exist apart from the embodied participation of being a specific human being with a particular physiology, history, personality, and culture but is interpretive and intersubjective . . .” (p. 328).
6. Writing in your own voice. This principle invites the researcher to write in an engaging and compassionate manner that easily lends itself to interpretation by the reader—an essential aspect of validity in intuitive inquiry. (See the section on validity below.)
7. Favoring the particular and the personal. Because the hermeneutical perspective acknowledges and actively utilizes the personal nature of understanding, unique expressions from individual people are highly valued in intuitive inquiry.
8. Imagining the possible. Intuitive inquiry seeks not only to provide detailed descriptions of phenomena, but also to “speculate about the possibilities implicit in the data” (p. 330). Anderson describes this aspect of intuitive inquiry as “both practical and visionary, allowing that research findings can provide new options for the world that is changing and manifesting anew in every moment” (p. 330).

9. Risking personal transformation. The hermeneutical process of cycling from self-inquiry to world-inquiry can be personally transformative for intuitive inquiry researchers.

The process of intuitive inquiry has at least five cycles of interpretation in which the researcher's perspective informs and is informed by contact with literature and others' experiences. These five cycles create what has been traditionally called a *hermeneutical circle*. The *forward arc* of the hermeneutical circle involves explicating the researcher's preliminary understanding of the topic; the *return arc* involves modifying and expanding this understanding through engagement with the experience of others. In intuitive inquiry, Cycles 1 and 2 constitute the forward arc; Cycles 3, 4, 5, and any subsequent cycles comprise the return arc.

The first cycle concerns clarifying the research topic and has been described as "claim of the text," (Anderson, 2000, p. 35). To claim the text means to make it one's own, to allow oneself to be affected by it and to understand its personal meaning. Often, the intuitive inquiry researcher chooses a topic based on intuition and personal experience. According to Anderson (2000), the concept of "text" in intuitive inquiry is construed broadly, and can be a written document or the researcher's own experience. In this early phase, Anderson recommends engaging with the text daily and recording subjective and objective impressions. She further explained:

Thoughts, ideas, daydreams, conversations, impressions, visions, and intuitions occurring during sessions are recorded in a noninvasive manner, to least disrupt the stream of consciousness typically accompanying intuitive insight. (p. 36)

All information is considered potential data, and Anderson encourages researchers to "live the question" (1998, p. 91).

Cycle 2 involves identifying preliminary lenses. At this stage, the researcher “re-engages the research topic through a different text (or set of texts) to identify the structure and accompanying values the researcher brings to the topic” (Anderson, 2000, p. 36). The texts that inform these preliminary lenses include theoretical, research, literary, and historical literature, and the researcher often concurrently writes a review of the literature. According to Anderson, the “researcher’s initial structure and accompanying values become the preliminary lenses of interpretation, requisite for engaging with the text of others and interpreting their understanding of the topic” (p. 36). The researcher must engage in a rigorous process of articulating and clarifying these lenses in order to be aware of assumptions and preconceptions that might otherwise unconsciously shape the research. By engaging in this process, the lenses can be consciously utilized as the researcher’s subjective doorway into the experience.

Cycle 3 of intuitive inquiry involves collecting original data from research participants—or in some cases, specific texts—and preparing summary reports of this data. The researcher identifies the target population, creates specific procedures to recruit participants from this population, and defines selection criteria that “speak directly and articulately to the research topic and dismisses participants or texts that detract from a clear understanding of the topic” (Anderson, 2004, pp. 319-320). Intuitive inquiry does not specify the design of the study or the procedures of data collection in order to allow the researcher the freedom to generate a design most suited to the topic and to the researcher’s experience. “...intuitive inquiry invites the researcher to structure the research method, procedures, setting, and context to maximize (rather than minimize) the very gateway through which the researcher

understands or is inspired by the experience studied” (2000, p. 34). The experiences of others become the new text through which the researcher comes to understand the topic being studied.

Once data collection is complete, the researcher prepares summaries of the data through descriptions, conventional thematic content analysis, portraits (Moustakas, 1990), or stories. Depending on the needs and intention of the study, data can be presented with or without analysis. Anderson (2004) elaborated:

Often, interviews generate stories. Sometimes stories must remain as a unit and not subjected to analysis because analysis breaks up the integrity of the story. If a researcher wishes to use intuitive inquiry, the written portraits or stories in outline form should be presented intact in Cycle 3 *without* analyses. (p. 320) (*Italics in original*)

Cycle 4 is devoted to transforming and refining lenses. Through discovery and presentation of original data in Cycle 3, the researcher may reflect upon the inner understanding developed in Cycle 1 and refine the lenses explicated in Cycle 2. According to Anderson, “the most important feature of interpreting data is intuitive breakthroughs, those illuminating moments when the data begin to shape themselves before the researcher. Patterns seem to reveal themselves with each fresh set of information” (2004, p. 321). Anderson noted that it is important to highlight refinements in the lenses from Cycle 2 to Cycle 4 so that both the researcher and the readers may understand the progression and impact of the study.

Cycle 5, the completion of the hermeneutical circle and final phase of the return arc, is termed “integration of findings and literature review” (2004, p. 323). In this cycle, the researcher takes a fresh and holistic look at all aspects of the study and presents an integrated understanding of the research topic. Like conventional empirical studies, this involves an appraisal of the previously reviewed literature in relation to the

results of the study. However, in intuitive inquiry, the researcher is also involved in a process of evaluation and discernment regarding the study itself. According to

Anderson:

The researcher must determine what is valuable about the study and what is not, sorting through the assets and liability of the forward and return arcs and their own understanding of the research topic. In Cycle 5, intuitive researchers must honestly evaluate and tell what they have learned and what they feel is still undisclosed about the topic. In intuitive inquiry, the researcher's final opinion matters. (2004, p. 323).

Cycles 1 and 2 are presented in this chapter, Cycle 3 is presented in Chapter 4 as the results section of this study, and Cycles 4 and 5 are presented in Chapter 5, the discussion section.

Validity. In intuitive inquiry, research validity is determined by the value of the findings to the readers rather than their generalizability. Anderson elaborated:

Traditionally, findings are considered most valuable if they contribute to understanding a topic and related theory. However, the value of an intuitive inquiry—and perhaps any study—may rest more in its capacity to help readers ask good questions of their own lives or of experiences they wish to understand. (2004, p. 331)

The level of detail required in reporting the process of intuitive inquiry research enables the readers to directly assess the conclusions of the researcher, thereby allowing the validity of the research to be communicated and determined subjectively. The basis for determining this value is found in two principles: resonance validity and efficacy validity.

The principle of resonance validity is described by Anderson as “akin to the use of acoustic resonance in music and physics” (2001, p. 84) in that someone else's narrative may “strike a chord” (p. 85) such that you feel “in tune” (p. 85) with the author. Anderson further elaborated:

The principle suggests that research can function more like poetry in its capacity for the immediate apprehension and recognition of an experience spoken by another and yet (surprisingly and refreshingly, perhaps) be true for oneself, as well. Research methods may begin to approach the borders of understanding and communication, which seem more like poetry than like conventional empirical science as we have known it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Describing the richness and fullness of human experience may require the use of metaphors, similes, and symbols. (p. 33)

The reader begins to recognize the truth or validity of findings through an internal feeling of resonance. Anderson suggested the possible use of a resonance panel as a supplemental cycle in intuitive inquiry. The resonance panel is comprised of a group of people—often exemplars—who are asked to respond to research findings in terms of the degree to which they resonate with them. “The validity of findings is thus formed through consensus building that notes consonance, dissonance, or neutrality by participants representing different cultures or subgroups” (2000, p. 33). While a formal resonance panel was not used in this study, I requested feedback from the participants about the interpretive lenses I developed, thus using the participants themselves to check the validity of my findings through sympathetic resonance.

The principle of efficacy validity speaks to the potential of research to incite transformation in its readers. This principle holds that the validity of research concerning human experience may be measured in part by its ability to be meaningful and useful in people’s lives. Anderson asserts: “research that inspires, delights, and prods us to insight and action is at least as valuable to the scientific enterprise as more technical reports that will inevitably follow” (2000, p. 28).

Embodied writing. A primary way that sympathetic resonance may be engaged in intuitive inquiry is through the use of Anderson's (2001, 2002) embodied writing.

Anderson describes the intention of embodied writing:

Seeking to relay the living experience of the human body, embodied writing portrays experience from the point of view of the lived body, *Lieb* rather than *Koerper* in Edmund Husserl's (1952/1989) sense. The researcher collects, analyzes, and reports findings, fully intending to invite readers to encounter the narrative accounts for themselves and from within their own bodies through a form of sympathetic resonance. Ultimately, as a research tool, the efficacy of embodied writing depends on its capacity to engender a quality of resonance between the written text and the senses of the readers that allows readers to more fully experience the phenomena described. The readers' perceptual, visceral, sensorimotor, kinesthetic, and imaginal senses are invited to come alive to the words and images as though the experience were their own, akin to the way we might read fine poetry or fiction. Embodied writing tries to let the body speak. (2001, p. 84)

The efficacy and validity of embodied writing is much like the sympathetic resonance experienced from poetry. Anderson describes: "Meaning somehow passes directly from the writer to the reader or listener, seemingly by pointing to an inchoate experience already shared by both of us" (2000, p. 33).

Anderson describes seven distinct features of embodied writing. The first is "true-to-life, vivid depictions intended to invite sympathetic resonance in the readers or audience" (2001, p. 87). This distinction is the most salient to embodied writing because it speaks not only to the style of writing, but to its theoretical underpinnings in hermeneutics. Anderson explains:

In retaining the whole and unbroken nature of the experience without any reductive or reflective analysis, embodied writing is distinguished from phenomenological (e.g. Colaizzi, 1973; Giorgi, 1985; Valle, 1998; van Kaam, 1966; von Eckartsberg, 1986) and hermeneutical phenomenological (e.g. Van Manen, 1990) descriptions of experience. In particular, embodied writing does not assume that there is any essential nature of the experience to be found or reported . . . There may be an essential nature to experience, but embodied writing does not assume so.

No objective, external world is posited in the positivistic sense. What can be known is interpretive, ever changing, and creative. (p. 87)

Without the presumption of an “essential nature” of any experience, data are not the product of analysis or reduction. Rather, lived-experience speaks for itself, and the lived understanding of others is its validation. Anderson stated: “The experience of one person is sufficient to itself, worthy of itself, particularly if he or she says it is so. It is real or valid enough for him or her” (2001, p. 87).

The second feature of embodied writing is that it “includes internal and external data as essential to relaying the experience” (p. 87). Most scientific endeavors have a positivistic perspective that assumes validity of experience solely through external data—that which can be observed by another. Embodied writing values both internal data, which includes “imaginal, perceptual, kinesthetic, and visceral data usually known only by the experiencer” (p. 87), and external data, which is “sometimes observable to others, but not always, such as sensorimotor reactions and context” (p. 87). Third, it is “written specifically from the inside out. Embodied writing drops the external-witness perspective customary in conventional, ‘objective’ science. The body speaks for itself through the vehicle of words” (p. 88).

The fourth quality of embodied writing is that it is “richly concrete and specific, descriptive of all sensory modalities, and often slowed down to capture nuance. Embodied writing invites a lively sense of living here and now by attending rigorously to minor external and internal details as they arise in experience . . .” (p. 88). Fifth, “embodied writing is attuned to the living body Living in a body is to live fully attuned to the sensual matrix of the world” (p. 88). While embodied writing invites descriptions of the physical senses, it is in service of lived, embodied experience, which

is far richer than mere sensation. Anderson notes that “embodiment is not commensurate with our physical senses” (p. 88).

Sixth, it is comprised of “narratives embedded in experience, often first-person narratives” (2001, p. 88). This heuristically informed approach is designed to allow the uniqueness of each person and each experience to speak for itself as data. “Embodied writing is based on personal experience even if a writer or researcher is summarizing the collective experiences of many” (p. 88). In this style of writing, the unique voice of the individual is given license for expression, which paradoxically makes the writing more accessible to others and explicates something universal about the experience. “Far from making everyone sound alike by employing a particular style of writing, embodied writing seems to bring forth the particular or unique qualities of the writer” (p. 86). Seventh, “poetic images, literary style, and cadence serve embodied depictions and not the other way around. Embodied writing values vivid accounts of lived experience over literary artfulness” (p. 88). Anderson notes that these features are interrelated and invites writers to emphasize the features that most serve their topic or natural writing style.

I learned this style of writing in a ten-week course on the subject of embodied writing taught by Rosemarie Anderson at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. In the first session, we explored the principles and possible applications of this style of writing. In all subsequent sessions, we arrived with short vignettes that we had written in an embodied fashion and read them to one another. This oriented our awareness to the moments when we resonated with a piece of writing, and we came to recognize what it felt like in our bodies to read and listen to embodied writing. We discussed each

piece of writing in detail and explored the components that seemed particularly embodied or particularly discordant or difficult to understand. This process both attuned our ears and fine-honed our own writing skills. The opportunity to read our writing out-loud also helped us move through the vulnerability of exposing our creative voices and receiving feedback.

The class also explored the process of teaching this method to others for its possible application in our future research and we each had the opportunity to coach another person through the process. Before my participant's first attempt at writing in an embodied style, I talked about my experience as both an embodied writer and reader and read him several pieces I had written for the class. I instructed him on the embodied writing style and particularly encouraged him to allow his own unique voice to speak through these principles. My participant was very willing and interested but a bit nervous about his writing ability. His nervousness made me both appropriately sensitive and a bit too tentative with my feedback because I was concerned he would perceive it as criticism. Through this experience, I saw that the process of receiving feedback about one's embodied writing is integral to deepening the writing, especially in new writers. I also realized that it would be important to create a structure for future participants that includes the expectation of receiving feedback and rewriting, regardless of the quality of their first draft. This practice session gave me a sense of what it would be like to coach others through this process and "whet my appetite" for some of the riches that emerged in this study.

Several other doctoral students have used intuitive inquiry in their dissertations. These include Dufrechou's (2002) dissertation, *Coming home to nature through the*

body: An intuitive inquiry into experiences of grief, weeping and other deep emotions in response to nature, Phelon's (2001) dissertation, *Healing presence: An intuitive inquiry into the presence of the psychotherapist*, and Coleman's (1999) dissertation entitled *Women, weight & embodiment: An intuitive inquiry into women's psychospiritual process of healing obesity*. Aspects of intuitive inquiry, particularly embodied writing, have been used in other dissertations (Heery, 2000; Riordan, 2000).

Cycle 1: Clarifying the Research Topic

The process of choosing a topic in intuitive inquiry is often motivated by personal experience or interest. My own experiences of being deeply moved provided the initial "texts" for my inquiry and motivated me to study them in the context of formal research. However, it was a slow and subtle process to realize the claim that these experiences had in my life. This process began with open-ended inquiry regarding the potential topic of my dissertation. I knew that only a topic that was deeply meaningful and relevant to my life would be able to keep me engaged for the entire duration of the dissertation process. So, for a period of several months, I repeatedly asked myself what I most wanted to know about life. This inquiry stayed with me like a secret, whispering from hidden places inside myself. I allowed it to arise during my daily activities, and I began to take notice of the subtleties of my experience in relation to it. Certain moments began to stand out for me as being imbued with an aliveness, vibrancy, or love that called for my attention.

One of these moments occurred when I was sitting in a café. I had been immersed in personal thoughts when I noticed an elderly woman sitting at a nearby table. I found myself suddenly captivated by her silhouette, her distant gaze and

wrinkled face registering time and a world of experiences. I felt a kinship to her—to the fullness of the human being sitting near me—and through her, a profound connection to the cycles of life, to the pain and beauty of aging and the mortality that we all must face. I remember the moment clearly: the way the sunlight struck the metal tables outside and the vibrant green of the trees. I felt grateful for their beauty and for my place on this earth. On another day—a day when I had been feeling particularly harrowed by the speed and ugliness of city life—I stepped out of my apartment door and saw a tiny purple flower peaking out of a crack in the concrete. The contrast of the vibrant purple against the drab gray surroundings stopped me in my tracks. I was filled with wonder at the miraculous power of life to thrive and blossom in even the most inhospitable places, and it seemed to call forth the part of me that was vibrant and beautiful under the surface of my hurry and fatigue. I also felt profoundly grateful—like the appearance of that flower signified a mysterious order in the universe that had offered me a gift just when I needed it. It felt to me like an expression of love.

I had many experiences like this—too many to count. One evening during this process of inquiry, I was in a group of peers, and one man in the group was sharing. He was talking about recent developments in his personal life and changes that he was making in his career. He became increasingly passionate as he talked about his life's purpose and began weeping. I listened with rapt attention as he declared his life devoted to global transformation and the service of humanity. When he said this, I felt a rush in my heart and an upsurge of my passion and commitment to the world. Not only was I aware of my own deepest convictions, but *his* passion and commitment struck me as heart-wrenchingly beautiful. I was profoundly moved.

I realized that there was something special about this moment that had been present in the other moments I had noticed during this process of inquiry. In all of these experiences I felt more alive, more connected to other people, and more connected to the Essence or Spirit that was animating life all around me. I experienced everything as directly and profoundly meaningful, and I felt as if I were allowed a glimpse into a deeper slice of reality where all things inherently glittered with beauty and import. And the love! These experiences seemed to open my heart in a way that connected me to the rest of the world. In each experience, I became tremendously aware of the immense beauty and suffering in the world, and I felt called to love without restraint. These experiences were profoundly nourishing and healing, and I often walked away inspired to bring this feeling into my daily life. However, it struck me that despite their magnificence, many experiences of being moved were simultaneously ordinary enough and a regular enough occurrence in my life that when the moment passed I might forget about them. It was this complexity and richness that drew me to study experiences of being deeply moved.

When deciding to undertake this topic as a course of study, developing a cognitive understanding of experiences of being deeply moved seemed interesting, but only peripherally valuable to my life and to the lives that this research might touch. To me, it seemed much more valuable to crawl inside these experiences: To feel them and live them myself; to allow my participants to lavish in them and explore them in ways they perhaps never had; and to convey the richness of these experiences in a way that the readers of this study might find themselves in a state of being moved while reading. In doing so, I hoped to facilitate a deeper connection for the readers to these experiences

in their own lives. In response to these considerations, I was drawn to intuitive inquiry as a method and embodied writing as a tool to facilitate my research of experiences of being deeply moved.

Cycle 2: Identifying Preliminary Lenses

My initial lenses or perspectives of the topic were developed prior to data collection and presented in two categories: substantive and procedural. The substantive lenses expressed my understanding of the experience of being deeply moved. The procedural lenses related to the ways that I believed the method of this study would be particularly well suited to the topic. The initial lenses were as follows:

Substantive lenses.

1. *Complexity*: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003), the word *move* can imply the excitation or expression of emotions. However, this study posits that when people use the phrase “being deeply moved,” they are indicating something more complex either than the experience of heightened emotions or than can be found in the description of any specific emotion.
2. *Opening*: In experiences of being deeply moved, there is a relaxation of physical and psychological armoring or boundaries. There is an experience of “opening” that may come with a feeling of softening or melting. With this opening, there is the sense of being “touched” or “penetrated” by the world.
3. *Allowing*: In experiences of being deeply moved, there is often a sense of allowing and embracing rather than resisting experience, including characteristically uncomfortable experiences such as fear or uncertainty.

4. *Unconditional Love*: Love and appreciation for others and for life, just as they are, is the underlying context for the variety of emotions, cognitions and eliciting situations that may be present in experiences of being deeply moved.
5. *Affectivity*: Because one is open to being “affected” by life, being deeply moved may include an experience of seemingly paradoxical emotions—such as joy and sadness—simultaneously.
6. *Embodiment*: Being deeply moved is an embodied, physical experience. The physical component may include sensation in the chest, chills, tears, or the sense of being physically or energetically opened.
7. *Clear Perception of Reality*: The experience of being deeply moved offers a subjectively clearer perception of reality that may be contrasted to the haziness of one’s normal state of consciousness. This does not preclude the experience of mystery or wonderment.
8. *Connection*: The experience of being deeply moved involves a feeling of connection to something larger than oneself. There may be a feeling of intimacy and a sense that individual events or people are intimately connected with the whole of life. For most people, this is experienced as a deeper connection to specific other persons, humanity in general, nature, the cycles of life, the sacred, or God.
9. *Dialectical Relationship*: Being deeply moved is an experience of connection in terms of a dialectical relationship between the personal self

and something greater—rather than the experience of duality and disconnection or the experience of nonduality and union.

10. *Experience of the Sacred*: For many people, being deeply moved is perceived as a spiritual or sacred experience. Being moved may arise as an experience of the miraculous within mundane, ordinary life.
11. *Awareness of Suffering*: The experience of being deeply moved may include an awareness and appreciation of the complexity and polarity of life. There may be a sense of life as beautiful and sacred, but also as painful, mysterious, and at times, unjust.
12. *Beauty*: Being deeply moved has an aesthetic component that involves appreciation of beauty. This appreciation may be of physical beauty or of inner beauty—for example, appreciation of beauty in the human spirit or in the power of nature during a storm.
13. *Meaning*: The experience of being moved is meaningful to people. There is a sense during the experience that what is occurring is more real and significant than normal ways of being.
14. *Healing and Wholeness*: For some people, the experience of being moved may feel healing and may bring a sense of wholeness.
15. *Grace*: The experience includes a sense of being graced or gifted.
16. *Remembrance*: The experience of being deeply moved offers a remembrance of what is truly important in oneself and in life. Ordinary personal concerns are seen in a new light, often as trivial.

17. *Virtue*: For some people, the experience of being moved may result in the inspiration to live according to their values. There may be a set of values inherent in the experience, particularly in terms of making a contribution in the world, slowing down to appreciate life, and expressing love to others.
18. *Transformation*: For some people, the experience of being deeply moved leads to major life choices and the sense of inner transformation.
19. *Self-transcendent emotions*: The experience of being deeply moved may belong to a larger category of experiences that can be described as moral, spiritual, aesthetic, and transcendent emotions.

Procedural lenses.

1. *Understanding and Validity through Resonance and Interpretations*: The experience of being deeply moved may be understood through sympathetic resonance with descriptions of the experience and through cognitive interpretations of elements or meanings of the experience.
2. *Embodied Writing Maximizes Resonance Validity*: Writing about the experience of being moved with sensory and emotional detail in the embodied writing style may convey the nuances and depth of the experience in a way that maximizes the potential for sympathetic resonance—hence understanding and internal validity—for myself as the researcher and for the readers.
3. *Embodied Writing Maximizes Efficacy Validity*: Writing and reading embodied descriptions may increase the potential for this research to be meaningful, useful, and possibly transformative in the lives of the

participants and readers, thereby enhancing the efficacy validity of this research.

Cycle 3: Collecting Original Data and Preparing Summary Reports

Embodied writing as data. The third cycle of this study involved soliciting written reflections, in the style of embodied writing, of the experience of being deeply moved. I chose this format instead of conducting interviews for several reasons. The opportunity to write narratives gave people more time to explore their experiences, which seemed appropriate for this study. Participants could return to their stories several times if they chose and allow the nuances to unfold in a way that best expressed their experience. In addition, intuitive inquiry allows the researcher to choose research methods and procedures that will “maximize (rather than minimize) the very gateway through which the researcher understands or is inspired by the experience studied” (Anderson, 2000, p. 34). I believed that as the researcher, I would be able to most effectively understand and resonate with the experiences of the participants through embodied writing.

The potential limitations of this approach are that some people may have been able to more clearly express themselves verbally or may have preferred to share their experiences by speaking with another person rather than in writing. Writing may also have intimidated people who were not confident in their writing skills and the recruiting process may not have drawn participants from that faction of the population. However, when I chose this approach, I believed that writing would produce richer stories than interviews. Because the participants themselves were the authors and their unique

voices were expressed in the writing, I had hoped that the stories would be more embodied and accessible to the readers (Anderson, 2000).

Research and theory suggests that writing may be a powerful method for understanding significant personal experiences and integrating them into a coherent life narrative. Inherent in the process of understanding and integrating experience is the task of *meaning-making*. According to Baumeister and Vohs (2002), meaning-making involves a reappraisal of an event in which individuals look for a positive aspect in a negative event (the *benefit-finding* function of meaning-making), make attributions in order to understand an event (the *sense-making* function of meaning-making), or create belief systems or long-term goals that allow the event to make sense in a particular context (the *search for significance*). Making meaning of events “allows a person to establish his or her identity and affirm self-worth” (p. 614), presumably by creating narratives that weave events into a coherent and meaningful understanding of one’s life. The process of finding meaning in life also has significant physical and psychological health benefits. Baumeister and Vohs assert that the processes of writing, and to a lesser degree, talking, are primary ways that meaning is made, and that writing “forces structure onto thoughts and feelings that previously had not been clearly organized” (p. 615).

White’s (1992) concept of exceptional human experiences (EHEs) is particularly concerned with the process of meaning-making. When defining the term EHE, she distinguished that most anomalous experiences may be called simply *exceptional experiences (EEs)*, and that they only become exceptional *human* experiences (EHEs) when the personal meaning of the experience is unfolded for the experiencer. White’s

approach is a marked contrast from the traditional parapsychological approach that attempts to validate the existence of these experiences with empirical evidence. By focusing on human relevance, White encouraged the exploration of EHEs as meaningful in the larger context of one's life. She asserted that by identifying with and exploring these experiences, they might contribute to personal transformation. White (1998) stated:

These experiences . . . can touch the experiencer in personal and significant ways that cannot be dismissed as ideas of reference. Rather, they seem to catalyze a process that eventually can lead to the realization of the person's higher human potential. Lives, worldviews, and even identities can be transformed. When this process of transformation is initiated, the EE becomes an exceptional *human* experience. Thus all EHEs are exceptional experiences, but not all exceptional experiences are EHEs. EEs, in themselves, point the way to new possibilities of human knowledge. EHEs occur when the experiencer relates to and is connected with that knowledge and its source in a transformative way. EEs spotlight new areas of the unknown to be explored. EHEs are experiences of dynamic interaction and connection with that unknown. (p. 129) [Italics in original.]

A different understanding is possible if EHEs are viewed as part of an underlying process in an individual's life rather than as anomalous events. EHEs may be calls to "transcendence of the boundaries one has set in life" (White, 1992, p. 46). White went on to say

I do not think these experiences will be able to aid us in realizing our human potential until we first learn how to cooperate with the process involved. Without the key element of cooperation, these experiences will occur only sporadically, momentarily providing a spark that can only go out if we do not tend it. (1998, p. 130)

She said the first step in cooperating with this process is to honor, welcome and explore these experiences. Consciously engaging with them may be a process of both discovering and uncovering their meaning and import.

According to White, one way to consciously engage with this process is to write an EHE autobiography. She described the process as

a record of the highlights of your subjective life—of your exceptional experiences: of places, people, events, visions, dreams, and encounters that profoundly affected you, often in unaccountable ways. An EHE autobiography is about the *wonder side* of your life—the experiences associated with wonder and awe—and those that made you question the adequacy of the Western worldview to account for EEs. (1998, p. 136) (Italics in original)

The instructions for writing an EHE autobiography are to record all EEs in chronological order, the contexts in which they occurred, and how they were subjectively experienced—at the time and currently—and then attempt to establish connections between the events. White went on to say “it is important that you then try to act on some of these new possibilities” (p. 137) or to at least share them with others. Taking action or sharing these new possibilities with another will continue to deepen the meaning and significance of the experience in a person’s life.

Another element that allows EHEs to become transformative is the act of disclosure—either through talking or sharing one’s writing. Maslow (1968) discovered that once people began to describe peak experiences and to listen to those of others, they started having regular peak experiences of their own. According to Maslow, just the act of focusing on peak experiences and regarding them as a normal and necessary part of life was sufficient to induce them. This is supported by Palmer’s (1999) study, which cites many psychological and spiritual benefits of disclosing EHEs, both verbally and in writing (discussed in Chapter 2).

The power of disclosure and writing does not only pertain to EHEs. Pennebaker (1989, 1997; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002) did extensive research on the disclosure of significant traumatic and emotional experiences, particularly through the

act of writing. In numerous studies, Pennebaker found significant positive relationships between the disclosive writing of traumatic emotional experiences and physical health, overt behaviors, and self-reports of well-being. Niederhoffer and Pennebaker (2002) cited several theoretical views to explain the benefits of disclosing and writing about important personal events, including the release of emotional inhibition, the cognitive processes of meaning-making, and the activity of building one's social network through seeking support.

The research cited above suggests that writing is a powerful tool for understanding and integrating EHEs and significant emotional experiences, and may contribute to personal transformation. Because the experience of being deeply moved was considered in the present study to be an EHE and often a significant personal event, I determined that writing would be an effective method for the participants in this study to articulate the full range of meanings and possible implications of the experience of being deeply moved in their lives.

The decision to use written responses from participants was also inspired by the work of Dufrechou (2002) in his dissertation exploring experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature. He used the intuitive inquiry research method and obtained stories from 40 participants written in an embodied style as his data. He did not perform a reduction or content analysis of the stories; rather, he let the stories speak for themselves and grouped them into the themes that emerged through his interpretations. The stories were beautiful accounts of human experience and I was moved while reading many of them. The effectiveness of his research lay not in reductively defining the essence or qualities of the experiences he was studying, but

rather in conveying the fullness of the lived-experience of a topic that had previously received little attention. Dufrechou's dissertation also inspired my intention to present the participant's stories intact and as the results of my research.

Soliciting and selecting participants. From the beginning of this project, it was clear that the most difficult part of gathering data would be describing the experience of being deeply moved well enough to elicit the kind of responses that this study was seeking without overly influencing the participants with my ideas. I imagine that this is an issue in many research projects; however it was particularly relevant here because this study was somewhat exploratory—it aimed to discover what people mean when they say that they are “moved.” I drafted a flyer (Appendix A) that asks: “Have you ever had an experience of being deeply moved?” in bold letters. The flyer then states my original definition: “Experiences of being deeply moved may involve being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life and may result in a deeper sense of connection to yourself, others, or the sacred.” My intention in crafting this definition was to be specific enough that it clearly described the topic without defining it so narrowly that participants in this study only reported experiences that fit into my preexisting notions. My hope was that this definition was broad enough to elicit a variety of responses to contribute to this study.

When planning this study, I anticipated that there would be between 14 to 20 participants recruited, in part because the minimum number of participants for qualitative research at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology is twelve. I also based the desired number of participants for this study on the work of others who have used embodied writing from participants as the data for their research: Dufrechou (2002) had

40 participants and Riordan (2002) had 12 participants. Because I anticipated that each participant would generate a significant amount of data, I limited the possible number of participants to 20. However, I chose to accept as many participants as expressed avid interest in this study up to this maximum number, largely based on the intuition that if they were called to contribute, they would have something valuable to offer my study. Accepting more than 12 participants also left a margin for possible attrition.

Participants for this study were recruited through a number of means. I distributed my flyers through the internet to two private email lists, both of which have several hundred subscribers that comprise large, loosely connected communities in the San Francisco Bay area. My relationships to the people on these lists varied from being close personal friends, to casual acquaintances, to complete strangers. Because of this, I drafted an introduction that invited interested strangers to contact me, and all others to distribute my flyer to their friends and families who might be interested in participating. I sent a similar introductory email along with my flyer to my family and other personal friends, asking for their help in distributing my flyer to persons beyond my reach.

I also sent my flyer through the internet to the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP) and to an electronic “chat-board” on the website of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS). In the past, IONS had produced a significant number of participants for dissertation studies that were transpersonal in nature, including Dufrechou’s (2002) and Palmer’s (1999). I also distributed flyers locally on notice boards in grocery stores, cafes, and on street poles where flyers for events are often posted in San Francisco. In addition, I handed out flyers on the street at a parade and music event in the city.

I screened participants through a brief interview, in person when possible or by telephone (see screening interview questions, Appendix B). The in-person interviews were to be conducted at neutral locations, so in each instance, we met in a café. However, most interviews were conducted by telephone, either because the participant lived out of the area, or because it was more convenient and therefore preferred by the participant. The screening interview assessed for basic physical and psychological health, the ability to articulate subtleties of inner experience, and a willingness to complete the requirements of the study. Because I considered that the experience of being deeply moved may at times involve an awareness or experience of suffering, potential participants with major illnesses or psychological diagnoses were considered if I determined that their condition would not likely interfere with their full participation in the study (see inclusion/exclusion criteria, Appendix C).

It was my hope that participants would represent a diverse cultural pool, a range of ages (age 18 or older), differing levels of education, and an equal balance of men and women to reflect a variety of experiences. However, I did not formally engage in random sampling and did not choose participants with the aim that they collectively comprise a representative sample of a particular population. Because my perspective as an intuitive inquiry researcher was the medium through which the study was conducted, the most significant criterion I assessed in the screening interview was whether or not the experiences of potential participants resonated with me and contributed to my understanding of experiences of being deeply moved. I anticipated that descriptions of experience that matched the lenses I developed in Cycle 2 would naturally resonate with me. Because of this, I kept in mind the range of lenses I had articulated in the hopes of

selecting participants that would report a range of aspects of the experience of being deeply moved. However, I held the perspective that the participants that would likely contribute the most to my understanding of the topic would be those with views and experiences that differed from my own. Participants were screened to ensure that they were, in fact, referring to the topic explored in this research; however, the intention was to select participants that allowed me to explore what was not obvious about experiences of being deeply moved.

Gathering the data. After participants expressed interest in participating in the study, I sent them a consent form and an introductory letter that provided instructions for participation and a place for signature consent (see Appendix D). In the consent form, I asked participants to choose a pseudonym to be used in the study. In addition, I included a questionnaire to gather demographic information (see Appendix E). The consent form, introductory letter, and the demographic questionnaire were exchanged through the regular postal service. However, in the screening interview and consent form, I requested that participants submit their data to me via email. I also engaged in most communications, including requests for revisions and clarifications of their stories, through email, although I was available to participants by telephone. I allowed for the possibility of making exceptions for people who I determined would be assets to the study but who did not have internet access or chose not to participate via email; this was not necessary as all potential participants had email access. I had an anonymous P.O. Box, phone number, and email address, all of which were used solely for the purpose of communicating with participants in this study.

While no risk was anticipated, I considered that the disclosure of experiences studied in this project could cause anxiety for some people because these experiences are often personal in nature and may not be readily shared with others. In the introductory letter, I informed participants that if at any time they had concerns or questions, I would make every effort to discuss these concerns or questions with them and inform them of options for resolving their concerns.

In the introductory letter, I first asked participants to compile a list of moments or situations when they have been deeply moved. I encouraged them to recall both their most important moments of being moved as well as less significant moments that might occur during the course of everyday life. The purpose of creating this list was to observe the breadth of situations and ways this experience occurred in their lives. This process was also intended to encourage the exploration of deeply moving moments that may otherwise be overlooked. I invited the participants to continue to add to their list until they submitted their materials to me.

In the introductory letter, I also asked them to choose one experience to describe in writing. They had the option to choose their most profoundly moving experience to write about or to choose a less significant moment as long as it was personally meaningful. However, I requested that the experience that they write about needed to be a specific moment in their recollection rather than a composite of experiences they had had. I invited the participants to use either a description they had already written or to write from their memory of the experience. When conducting the screening interviews, I found that the majority of participants had a specific experience of being deeply moved in mind, often their most profound experience, when they contacted me about

participating in the study. Other participants conceived of the topic more broadly across their lives, and in the screening interview, tended to report general qualities of their experiences of being deeply moved. However, individuals from both groups of participants informally reported that the exercise of creating the list before writing about one experience in detail was valuable because it expanded their understanding of their experiences.

In both the screening interview and introductory letter, I informed participants that I would like them to write about their experiences in an embodied fashion. I provided a brief description of embodied writing in the introductory letter, which stated: “An embodied style of writing is rich in sensory and emotional detail in order to convey how it felt to have the experience. Embodied writing is concrete and specific, and often slowed down to capture nuance” (see Appendix D). I also provided the participants with three examples of embodied writing, including one example from me and two examples from former students who both used embodied writing in their doctoral dissertations (see Appendix F).

In the same letter, I asked the participants to consider the following specific questions when writing about their experiences:

1. What happened in your experience? What emotions, thoughts and sensations arose?
Please be specific and detailed as if you were leading someone through the experience, moment by moment.
2. What was the context of the experience? What seemed to cause the experience?
What else was going on in your life?
3. Does this experience have any meaning for you? If so, what does it mean to you?

4. How, if at all, did this experience impact your life? Did you take any specific action as a result of this experience?
5. Please include anything else that seems important and related to this experience.

I informed the participants that after I received their initial descriptions, I might respond with written questions and request that the participants enhance or clarify what they had written. The type of questions I posed during this process were akin to questions that might be asked in a semi structured interview (e.g., “Can you tell me more about this aspect of your experience?”). For most participants, this process took one to three rounds of feedback and revising until both the participant and I felt that the story was complete. Much as I anticipated, the comments and questions I offered were addressed at varying degrees, and the sense of what constituted a “complete” story varied among participants. However, I ultimately sought a balance between eliciting the essence of the participants’ experiences and retaining the unique voice of the author.

Based on my experience of learning the embodied writing style and the reflections of its originator, Rosemarie Anderson, I determined that this approach would be sufficient to elicit rich and embodied stories from participants. Anderson (2002) noted:

Embodied writing seems so attuned to the culture of our times that those new to the process catch on quite easily. All I have to do now is give some modest instruction about the distinctive features of embodied writing and a few key examples. After one to two rounds of feedback, most people have begun to write in distinctively embodied voices all their own. (p. 42)

Dufrechou (2002) also found that he needed only one to two rounds of rewrites by his participants to obtain the quality of embodied writing needed for dissertation-level data.

Once the process of revising stories was complete and both the participants and I were satisfied that the essence of the experience had been conveyed, in some cases I did some minor editing for grammar, punctuation, and flow as needed. My intention was to both preserve the unique voice of the author and make the reading as accessible as possible. I returned the edited stories to the author for comments and approval before use in the dissertation.

Pilot study. I intended to conduct a pilot study of the first three participants to assess the clarity of the definition used in the flyer and the instructions for participation, both in the screening interview and the introductory letter, and the ability of the definition and instructions to elicit the kind of responses that this study was seeking. The first two inquiries about my flyer were not fruitful: during the screening interview, I determined that both individuals were describing experiences that were not what I was seeking, as one involved an issue of unresolved trauma, and the second, a precognitive dream that, after deeper inquiry, the individual ultimately did not feel was an experience of being deeply moved. I questioned if the definition I used on the flyer needed to be altered, but ultimately I concluded that some people were likely to respond more to the question in bold (“Have you ever had an experience of being deeply moved?”) with an example of their most important or emotional experience, than to the subtleties offered in the definition (“Experiences of being deeply moved may involve being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life and may result in a deeper sense of connection to yourself, others, or the sacred.”).

I realized that the screening interviews were the best way to determine if people were referring to the experience I wanted to study. In order to determine this without

defining the experience for them, in some cases I repeatedly asked potential participants to describe what was deeply moving about the experience that they were sharing with me beyond the situational context of their story. I found this process to not only be sufficient to determine which potential participants were a “good fit” for this study, in many cases it seemed to be a helpful step for participants to be able to later generate the embodied, detailed data I requested. More importantly, this process of inquiring with potential participants during the screening interview emphasized that they were to write specifically about the deeply moving aspects of their experience rather than important aspects in general.

The first three individuals that I invited to be participants were not the first to submit their data to me. However, because potential participants described experiences of being deeply moved during the screening interviews that would make fine written data for this study, I determined that the definition, instructions for participation, and screening interview combined were sound methods for this research. The first three participants to submit their data to me—Shoshana, Bird, and Josh—formally comprised the pilot of this study and confirmed my methods. Since there were no procedural changes made as a result of the pilot study, the data from these participants are included with the others as part of the total results of this study.

Presenting the data. The participants’ written reflections of their experiences constitute the research findings for this study. Each story is an expression of a specific experience, flavored by time, place, and personal character, and can be understood as glimpses into subjective experiences of specific people. This approach is aligned with the principles of intuitive inquiry that assert that the experience of one person is

sufficient for study. It is also aligned with the perspective that the expression of the personal and unique may be the most effective method to convey universal principles and experiences (Anderson, 1998). My choice to present the stories intact in Chapter 4 was inspired by my desire to offer research that could be easily understood and have a significant impact on the lives of the readers, thus enhancing the resonance validity and efficacy validity of this study. It was also inspired by the dissertations of Dufrechou (2002) and Esbjorn (2003), both of whom used intuitive inquiry and presented their participants' stories intact in Chapter 4 as the research findings of their studies. My hope is that the presentation of the participants' complete stories, written in the embodied writing style, will effectively convey the depth and nuances of experiences of being deeply moved and maximize the potential for this study to have a transformative impact in the world. I also present two of the participants' lists intact in Chapter 4 to give a sense of the experience of being deeply moved across the lives of several individuals.

Cycles 4 and 5: Transforming, Integrating and Discussing the Data

The final chapter of the dissertation—Chapter 5, the discussion section—includes Cycles 4 and 5 of the intuitive inquiry process. In Cycle 4 of intuitive inquiry, the data gathered in Cycle 3 is “spiral[ed] in” (Anderson, 2000, p. 37) to deepen the researcher's understanding of the topic of inquiry. After I completed the process of data collection, I worked with each story individually, the group of stories as a collective, and the participants' lists of situations or ways in which they had been deeply moved across their lives, to identify themes of the experience of being deeply moved. I read their stories and lists several times, noting my personal responses and the initial themes

that called for my attention. The stories and lists offered by participants did not produce an equivalent set of data, but rather varied in terms of the length, detail, and fullness with which each dimension of their experience was addressed. This format did not lend itself well to a formal content analysis or phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1975). Instead, I conducted a thematic analysis by reviewing each set of data through the perspective of the preliminary interpretive lenses I developed in Cycle 2, while simultaneously remaining alert to emergent lenses. In this thematic analysis, I also looked for the dimensions of experience that had emerged in the comparative analysis of related phenomena that I presented in Chapter 2. These dimensions included physical, mental and emotional characteristics, triggers and situational contexts, and the epistemological, meaningful, spiritual, and transformative aspects of the experience of being deeply moved. Noting these different dimensions contributed to my understanding of the complexity of the experience and allowed me to understand it in relation to other experiences.

I then organized the refined lenses of Cycle 4 of this study into the following three categories that reflect the phenomenological levels of my understanding of the experience of being deeply moved: The qualities of the felt experience; the existential and transpersonal triggers; and the transformative and healing dimensions. Once I completed this process, I shared these lenses with all participants through email and invited interested participants to comment. In Cycle 5 of this study, I discussed my new lenses in relation to literature previously reviewed in Chapter 2 and introduced new theory and research that related to my new understandings. The final interpretive lenses

and related literature were interwoven in Chapter 5 to present a holistic and integrated perspective of this study and the experience of being deeply moved.

The following chapter presents the results of this study. This chapter includes the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study, two examples of the participants' lists of experiences of being deeply moved, and the stories from all 14 participants.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings of this study are presented in this chapter in three sections. The first section offers a summary of participant characteristics gathered from the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). The second section includes two examples of the lists that participants generated of the situations or ways in which they had been deeply moved across the breadth of their lives. The third section includes each participant's story of an experience of being deeply moved written in an embodied fashion.

Participant Characteristics

Thirty-two people inquired about contributing to this study, fourteen of which ultimately completed the study. Of the remaining 18 people who inquired but did not participate in the study, two were accepted into the study and then declined: one submitted the first draft of a story and then became too busy to continue; another did not want to write in an embodied fashion after receiving the instructions for participation in the mail. Two people who inquired did not meet the study criteria and were not asked to participate; during the screening interview, I determined that they were describing experiences that were not related to the topic of this study. Six people who inquired decided not to participate prior to the screening interview: 2 were too busy to participate, 1 declined without offering a reason, and 3 never responded to my further inquiries. Two people responded to the study flyer after I completed the data collection process and were not invited to participate. Six additional people were excluded from participation because they were close personal acquaintances of mine.

Fourteen people participated in this study, ranging in ages from 25 to 60. These included 9 women (ages 25, 31, 36, 40, 48, 51, 56, 56, 60) and 5 men (ages 28, 31, 37, 45, 52). The majority (79%) were Caucasian or of European ancestry, 14% were Eastern European Jewish, and 7% were of mixed Chinese and Russian ancestry. Fifty percent of the participants were from California, 36% were from other states, 1 was from Israel, and 1 lived in India. Six of the participants were single, 4 were married, 3 were divorced or separated, and 1 was widowed. Five of the participants had children.

The participants were highly educated; all of the participants had completed college, and 12 of the 14 had completed at least some graduate school. There were 2 artists, 1 engineer, 1 personal assistant, 1 teacher, 1 licensed art therapist and writer, and 1 holistic health practitioner. Three of the participants had nursing backgrounds, one of whom was unemployed at the time of this study, and one who identified as a healer. Two of the participants were professional writers, and one of these was also a drug rehabilitation counselor. Two of the participants were graduate students, one of whom was also a consultant and a yoga teacher.

In the demographic questionnaire, I also asked the participants to share their religious or spiritual background and current practices. These included 42% with Christian backgrounds, 14% with Jewish backgrounds, 14% with Buddhist backgrounds, and 29% who reported no religious or spiritual background. In terms of current spiritual practices and religious affiliations, 14% reported being Christian, 14% were Jewish, 21% were Buddhist, and 7% reported no current spiritual or religious practices. Forty-three percent of the participants reported that their current spirituality

was self-defined and was influenced by a variety of religious traditions, spiritual practices, and activities, such as time spent in nature.

Of the 14 participants who completed the study, I had met 2 prior to this study: One was a casual acquaintance whom I rarely saw; another was an acquaintance from college with whom I had lost contact. Neither participant heard about my study directly from me, so it was a surprise when they each contacted me. Because my relationships with each of these participants was fairly remote, I determined that it would not pose a conflict of interest or unduly influence the findings of this study to include them as participants.

All of the participants are referred to throughout the dissertation by pseudonyms. Three participants declined to choose a pseudonym and asked that I choose for them; the other participants chose their own pseudonyms. The names of the people referred to in their stories, specific locations, or other identifying information have also been changed by either the participant or myself to protect confidentiality.

Participant Lists

In this section, I present two of the lists generated by participants of situations or ways in which they have been deeply moved across the breadth of their lives. (See Appendix G for the lists generated by each participant.) I received lists from all participants except Amy; I also excluded the list submitted by Christine because she later informed me that she misunderstood the instructions and wrote a list of embodied experiences rather than deeply moving experiences. I made minor grammatical changes to a few of the participants' lists, but unlike the process of collecting the stories, I did not ask the participants to alter their lists in any way.

When conceiving of this aspect of data collection, I anticipated that the lists would consist of simple phrases that referred to both specific and general triggers of the experience of being deeply moved, and I initially intended to compile a comprehensive list of triggers. While many participants produced this type of list, several participants generated lists that consisted of a series of specific and richly described moments in their lives—stories unto themselves. These lists contained much more information than the simple triggers I had anticipated, both about the individual participants and about their experience of being deeply moved. This type of list is similar to White’s (1998) description of exceptional human experience (EHE) autobiographies, in which people recall EHEs throughout their lives, attempt to understand the connections between these experiences, and thereby develop a more comprehensive understanding of each experience and the relevance of these experiences to their lives. For the participants that generated this kind of list, the list functioned much like the initial step in an EHE autobiography, though it specifically focused on experiences of being deeply moved rather than EHEs in general. While all of the lists generated by participants informed my understanding of the experience of being deeply moved, I chose to present two of these lists intact in this chapter to give a sense of the experience of being deeply moved as it occurred across the lives of several individuals.

Elizabeth.

- My now nearly 12-year-old niece curled up in the first week of her life on my waterbed
- A helicopter flight over Kauai, Hawaii
- My mother’s momentary and rare tears following major surgery when she told me, despite earlier protests about my taking off work, that she was glad I was there

- Hearing that my sister had been sexually molested by my brother as a teenager
- Poems written by 14-year-old students in a poetry class I teach—the depth of thought and beauty of words has often stirred me to tears
- My last visit with a long-time friend five days before he died
- Emails that were sent by the same friend an hour before he died
- The beauty of Thanksgiving morning, 2004, after a snowstorm
- Seeing the sculptures of Michelangelo, especially *The Pieta*, in Rome
- A ‘reunion’ dinner meeting with my high school senior English teacher thirty years after I became an English teacher largely because of her influence
- Reading *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
- My mother’s ‘social worker stance’ when she came to a therapy session to hear about my sexual abuse
- Making it to the hospital before my grandfather, my favorite person who ever roamed the planet, died on December 30, 1971
- A 50-mile hike taken on Easter Sunday when I lost two toenails, rubbed raw by new J C Penney plastic shoes, feeling dejected about being last
- Retirement dinner for principal of 19 years
- Surprise anniversary party for my parents’ 60th wedding anniversary
- Hearing Elie Wiesel speak about his personal Holocaust experience

Katherine.

- I awaken to the sound of construction and things moving in a strange room—the guest room my brother and his girlfriend share. Though my body is still reeling from living and working in [city in California] for five months, I feel a renewed sense of belonging and purpose. The sunlight reflects off the leaves of the trees outside my window and I breathe a deep sigh of relief. (I can breathe!) No more smog, no more pollution, no more news. I’ve washed up on the shores of what feel like paradise where moving truck parts sounds

like music to my ears. The wheel of my life has just completed a turn. I am reborn.

- I meet up with a friend of a friend in the middle of a town in New Hampshire. It's warm out with very little humidity and the sky is a deep shade of blue. I am filled with the knowledge of receiving a good grade in a summer fiction writing class at the University of New Hampshire. I am happy and am overjoyed to have met up with an acquaintance and his friend to talk easily about things that have nothing to do with school or fiction writing. Little did I know that my acquaintance's friend is a man I will end up dating for seven years. At the moment, I am completely caught up with a story he's telling me about his brother who ended up dying of AIDS. So enthralled am I by his story that my surroundings, the little awning overhead, the French-café styled chairs we're sitting on, the coffee, even the man before me seem to disappear. His deep, calming voice mesmerizes me. I take in every word. He is telling me about how his friends and family staged a healing circle to save his brother's life during a critical time in his illness. Their prayers not only helped his brother divert death but he ended up living for two more years. Suddenly my excitement over my hard-earned grade feels petty. A stronger undercurrent takes its place.
- It's a beautiful summer day in May and my parents and I are sitting on the bleachers overlooking the football field at my brother's high school in Michigan. Below us, the 400 graduates dressed in white and maroon, form a rectangle against the green oval of the field below them. I can't remember if I was hot or bothered or exhausted. All I can remember is the image of my brother—little more than a speck of a person—standing before his graduating class. Suddenly, I feel emotion rising from my bowels like a wave. In what seems like a single second I have an image of my brother's life and all its mismatched pieces as he confidently addresses the Class of '85. I weep.
- It's a gorgeous day in late July and I'm sitting on the steps of a church in New Hampshire. It's late afternoon and a tree the size of the church itself filters the rich sunlight overhead. I am facing the love of my life, the man I've come to know over the past seven years, the man with whom I've spent the better part of my young adult life. It's over and there's no consolation. I'm left with sadness and connection to everything we've shared over the past seven years. I break off the relationship.
- I'm sitting in the square near a coffee shop in northern California, at night with a man whom I've dated for two years. I've just arrived late and he's angry. His expression is overcast, body language restrained.

I'm not particularly moved but will be when we start to talk about the last two years, the difficulties we've had and the possibility of ending the relationship altogether. I am acutely aware of a softness and flexibility in my body. I sit cross-legged and it doesn't hurt. After nine months of competitive cycling, I finally hung it up at the summer's end and started doing yoga. My body feels reborn. Later, tears will flow from my insides like a balm as we talk about how much we've meant to each other while the possibility of ending the relationship looms overhead.

- I am walking through a park with my brother's girlfriend's Golden Retriever. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, the grass green. I'm relaxed and overjoyed not to be working on a weekday. Marley, the dog, is my only responsibility. I notice a man in beggar's clothes lying on the ground. He's not the only one around. There are others in the park as well: Dog-walkers, walkers, joggers, children and moms. But it occurs to me as our shadows run over him like a reckless sports car that Marley probably will be more comfortable on the couch in our apartment than the beggar will be on the dewy grass when night falls. Compassion makes my body go limp.
- It's the summer of 1990 and I'm climbing up the side of a hill on a moped in Greece with my friend. White Mediterranean light douses the endless sky and ocean below. There isn't much to see, just an all-white church and the brown road ahead. I have the feeling of being on the edge of the earth, the fringes of civilization. I am filled with life's benevolence and a deep sense of letting go of all that has come before this moment in my 20 years of existence. I am enveloped in a spiritual presence and a sense of fearlessness. I feel deeply rooted in life's meaning and feel a sudden comfort with the idea of death. Its okay, I think. In this one moment, I've fulfilled my entire life's purpose: To experience God.
- It's an ordinary day for me in Avignon, France. I am a student and my life consists of a few hours of class a day, a run, time spent chatting in the square over a beer and a bike ride home. It's a heavenly existence although even my life here has felt mundane at times. Today feels like a regular day with one exception. I have an unexplained connection with God and a deep sense of knowing. Storm clouds gather in the distance over the Rhone River but there's nothing threatening about them. Rather, they feel like a message from God. A psychic energy sweeps over me: God exists. I can feel Him.
- Clouds form in the distance against the Boston skyline. Something isn't right I tell myself. Though I know in my mind that there's nothing wrong other than my rather disappointing interview at The

Boston Globe, something else sees nuclear mushroom clouds. Something feels intensely threatening. I am still a bit shook up from being at the *Boston Globe* where the news staff discussed a possible anthrax attack on one of their editors. They weren't the only ones shaking. Terror shot through my body like a piece of ice slicing all organs in its wake. I held my breath as I tiptoed through the mailroom on my way out. There isn't a single ounce of salvation in those clouds, stark and meticulously defined against the skyline.

- I open up the *Boston Globe* two weeks after dreaded 9/11. Photos of all the people who died in the airplanes are displayed in a special section and for the first time since the event occurred I begin to weep. I feel the magnitude of it all and my own grief. A great sense of relief washes over me; my body feels soft and supple.
- I am sitting in front of a rock in the lot between our house and the neighbor's, the 'witch' we called Mrs. Kelly. I am just seven years old. It's a mid-summer's day and the sun is shining, the birds are singing and I can smell the rich aroma of earth rising from the baking field. I knew that lot by heart. It was vaguely reminiscent of Mrs. Kelly's hair, a mess of powdery white tangles. There were the unpruned trees between our house, the meadow next to hers and the stone deer that guarded her overgrown garden closer to her house. The sun warms my skin and bakes the six-inch fronds of grass below me. It's still and I can distinguish the call of dozens of different birds. The smell of fresh earth rises from the ground. I feel free, happy and deeply connected. I am this field.
- 'I haven't felt this way in so long,' my mother says, as she lies prostrate on the couch in the small den in the house where I grew up in Michigan. 'Like what?' I ask. 'I haven't felt anyone care for me like this in so long, to feel loved and protected.' Instantly, my mind starts working. What about my father? How long has it been since she's felt 'cared for'? I feel a sudden sense of grief. Not mine, but hers. A sense of intimacy settles in.
- My brother is furious with me. Its several months after my mother's death and I've just forced him to make a rather long trip out of his way to bring me back to my father's new house. He angrily drops me off at the front stoop and I burst into tears. All the anger I've felt up to this point is dissipating. I'm not really angry with him for taking me to a work-related event and not getting me back at a decent hour, I'm really sad about our mom. 'Work related' events are simply not jiving with my emotions. I need my brother to show up though I couldn't have articulated this in words. Tears worked and despite all the angry words that have passed between us during the past 45 minutes in the car, he hugs me powerfully. I can't remember ever

hugging my brother like this; I've always avoided looking to him for emotional support. But now something in me completely releases and is filled with love. My body unwinds; my anger cools. I feel like a sun-baked frog jumping into a pond of skin-cooling water.

- Over a period of five months while living in [city in California], I come to this stunning realization and feel my life will never be the same. Beggars on the street anywhere but here—where the smog levels are the worst in the country—would be better off than a well-to-do person living in the Inland Empire. Never have I experienced anything like this. I think of my mother who died of lung cancer, my mother's sister who has lung cancer and their mother who also died of lung cancer and suddenly I am connected to the people living in this town because I live here too. When I walk through the streets of this town, I see how we're all in one big fish bowl of pollution. I feel a deep sense of compassion for everyone—the beggar collapsed under his own weight in a doorway, the young man at the coffee shop whose hair is already beginning to thin, my overweight boss with his asthma, a young professional walking briskly through the street, healthy now but for how long? There isn't a single person I resent or feel envy towards. We all suffer, I conclude, and my body softens to that certainty.
- Alex and I are sitting on a dock in a no-name town near Puget Sound. I feel a deep sense of connection in the solitude of this place. We don't know each other very well and neither one of us has ever been here but I feel a deep sense of home. Alex is the former boyfriend of one of my best high school friends. Interestingly, they met and dated in Washington D.C., a world away from *this* Washington. We talk gently about our ideas surrounding family. Kids. No kids. A home. We've been talking hungrily all day, like two people coming off of a silent retreat. But eventually all this talk gives way to this beautiful silent lake, cranes skimming its surface. I love Alex but detach with all the humanly needs that might be associated with that love like getting married, having children or even seeing him again. This moment is enough.

Participant Stories

This section includes the stories submitted by all fourteen of the participants of an important or meaningful experience of being deeply moved written in an embodied manner. The stories presented here are entirely in the participants' own words, though in most cases they evolved following one to three rounds of written feedback or

questions from me that guided the participants in elaborating or clarifying certain aspects of their stories. In four cases the stories did not alter significantly from the original submitted by the participant.

According to Anderson, embodied writing can be described as, “true-to-life, vivid depictions intended to invite sympathetic resonance in the readers or audience” (2001, p. 87). Because the embodied writing is integral to the method of this study, I invite you as the reader to encounter these stories in an embodied way. What thoughts, feelings and sensations arise in you as you read? Which moments in these stories resonate with you? What aspects are meaningful or useful in your life?

Josh.

Standing in the busy airport, a giant grid of mirrors refracting our reflection, I have to tell him. I know it won't be enough. It never is. I try though. I try to tell him how much I appreciate him. I often do.

‘Thank you for being my Dad, for being such a great Dad. I can't tell you how much you mean to me.’

It is always the same. I don't know what else to say. I know it doesn't convey the detonation of my heart. I have to say something. There is just obliteration. Exploding inside. Bursting bright, bringing me to tears. I try not to cry, but there is no stopping it. Who he is for me and how much he cares. I can't help it.

An ocean of feeling filling the thimble of my heart cracks open as I drowned in a warm brightness. It is all I can say: ‘Thank you for being my Dad.’

I wish there were some ocean size words I could use, some super powered words that could contain the blast and communicate this enormous feeling force. But there are not. There is only this grateful explosion moving me to tears. Even now, sitting in the corner of my room at my little desk typing, I'm a soggy mess. Trying to capture the particles of feeling as they explode, my eyes blurry with tears, holding a damp tissue, wiping my runny nose.

He tells me what a wonderful son I am. I tell him what a great Dad he is. My heart explodes. It is always the same. I know he knows.

He knows I know. I tell him anyway. I have to. He is my Dad and I love him.

Leigh.

My brother. His name is Tommy. Recently we had a big fight. Never have been too good at intimacy with my brother. We know well how to do a delicate dance around one another. For years we have said our 'hellos' and 'how are yous,' feigned interest for brief spells over salmon, steak, glasses of good wine. Then hopped swiftly into our cars, off into our separate worlds with a feeling of having met a duty. Having touched in.

Funny, the other day when I mentioned my brother, my hairdresser and good friend actually said to me 'I never knew you had a brother. You've never mentioned him. Not once.' She has been doing my hair for at least eight years.

Great love muddled with great transition will do strange things to the system. On this particularly messy day, Tommy chose me as his perpetrator. And with words, he nailed me to a cross. Kept drawing blood. His pain became visceral inside me. I could not move, I could not leave. We were in the car. He was the driver.

Maybe you could scratch it all up to divorcing parents. Stress of turning thirty and working full time. A lifelong buildup of mental debris in the family arena. No more Brady Bunch. We sit divided today, front seat, back seat, driving our mother around town hoping to find her a temporary place to live. She has been kicked out by our Dad.

Tommy must have hit his boiling point. He lit in and kept firing. I was the target. He was hateful, terrible, mean. He was so mad.

I am the big sister. I know a thing or two about my brother. He has held it together for 29 years with seamlessness. We all felt how much he wanted to stoically complete his mission today. 'Save mom.' 'Be the hero,' then run for the hills. With a father-knows-best kind of helpfulness, he looks imprisoned to me. Certainly he must be the only one wearing such a beast of an albatross round his proud neck. We were all in this together and in a moment, he decided it was too much for him. And that he was alone. He started yelling at me, telling me I was doing nothing but making his job more difficult.

I saw him through my filter. It seemed that to him, we were all pirates out to get him. He felt alone. He felt doomed, helpless and discouraged. Those feelings lead to anger in us all.

Flashback: he is telling me I am not doing anything to help, that I am pitching Mom against Dad and Dad against Mom and that I am making it worse by everything I say and do and I am doing it on purpose for some reason he cannot understand and he hates me for it. He is telling me that I am making a mess he feels obligated to clean up. He is telling me he is furious and cannot see why I am acting the way I am acting and I am stupid and a troublemaker with my own problems and can do nothing right.

His anger blindsides me. I am not prepared for his attack. The words burn and I am shocked by his level of aggression. As he tells me I am wrong, and have ruined things. What I hear is 'you are worthless.' He knows which buttons to push.

I am sitting still and I am shaking. It is beautiful and it is painful. It hurts me and it opens me. He is raging; he keeps going; he is not stopping; he keeps yelling. I sit and I shake and I sit and he drives. Reality feels like this: now we are feeling pain and we are sitting in it not running from it. His anger, his rage has cracked the ice and we are melting and it is bittersweet. I have lost the part of my mind that sticks to stories and righteousness. I am full, empty, blank, torn, weak and breathing slowly. I feel scared that he will hit me and aware that he will not. The car has stopped and we are standing next to it and he is still yelling and he will not look at me and me not at him and he storms away and I get into my own car and I take a drive and I think and I drive and I think. I shake and I think and I drive.

How perfectly we display the choicelessness of fate. The inevitability of being them. Our Mom, our Dad. Their hell and ours, the same red place. We desperately talk, act in ways we hope will be unlike them, and we practically fall into their tracks and walk robotically toward the same places. He is raging and he looks the way Dad does. He is yelling and he says things Dad said. He is angry and his anger is Dad's. I am victim and I sit still like Mom did. I am angry and I keep it to myself the way she does. I am hurt and I don't tell him the way she didn't. He is perpetrator, I am perpetrated. He is finding a way to express; I am finding a way to bury. We are carrying out what we know and it hurts and our ways of carrying perpetuate the cycle of abuse, pain, hurt, denial, abuse, pain, hurt, denial.

I don't drive far. I stop the car a block away and turn it off. My heart is beating from head to toe and I want to eat, I want to drink, I want to take it away, I want to hit something, and hurt something and rewind time and be different than I am and make him change and take back his words and make him see and make it all go away and be saved and be fixed and stop feeling this feeling right now. I want it to stop now.

But there is no answer so I sit and I feel and I sit and I feel. My head is racing as I sit with discomfort, in silence. And I pray for help and I pray hard. And time slowly passes. Time. Slowly. Passes. It is like pushing open a door that is jammed shut by a big heavy couch. I push and I push and I push and the weight of the couch begins to ease up some and so I push some more and I sweat and I push and I push until I open that door. The door is inside of me and the opening is too. I feel space and I feel something else. I feel ok.

And I begin to find that breathing is easier and I begin to feel that something inside is shifting. When this kind of shift happens I like to think God takes over. I have asked for help and I begin to feel a sense of calm. My thoughts slow to a pace I can enjoy. I am thinking but my mind is no longer an enemy but a resource instead.

‘You are, he is, we are: breaking down. Breaking free. Creating a thick wall and at the same time desperately slamming our heads against it in an effort to somehow be a miracle and knock it down. You are, he is, we are; everyone is bruised beaten. Crying ‘help me’ in our strangely fucked up ways. Remember. Every action is either love or a cry for love.’

‘And you are felt here, Tommy. Loved here. Accepted here. Seen here. You are dawn and compassion has risen. You are so deeply loved and so full of the sun. It is all just our feelings and it all comes down to love. I know underneath your anger you are just aching to give and receive love. I am the same as you and as other human beings who long to let go, reach out, and feel we are in it together.’

I visualize hugging my brother and loving him and telling him so and telling him ‘its ok and I am here for you and I will always be.’ I don't have to do it; I just have to imagine it. I am calming down and I start the car.

I go home, I walk in the front door and he is sitting at a table looking right into my eyes and he apologizes and he keeps looking into my eyes and he does not look away. I feel free of hurt and anger. I feel grief at what we are losing, together, losing our parent's marriage, and the home in which we were raised.

Now we are listening to one another. I am standing in front of him as he is sitting looking at me and now we are having a conversation and we are not alone. I begin telling him that recently I have been binging and purging in Safeway bathrooms in the Tenderloin and I moved home to deal with my own addiction and because I could not keep a job and I could not pay my rent. And he is listening and then he is telling me that he will never understand what I am going through and

there is no way he can fix it and that that kills him. 'You don't ever have to do that again, Leigh. When you want to or you feel unsafe, you can come to our house. We have a really comfortable couch. I will always be here for you. You can always count on that.'

He has never given me an invitation until now. He has never said 'I am here for you' until now. I hear it and I like it. It feels good. I take it in. My eyes well up, full and wet. My stomach feels queasy with fast heartbeats still going inside it. I take hold of the kitchen counter with both hands and stand feeling how deeply moved I am in this moment. Being moved feels painful yet ecstatic, sad yet celebratory, stunted and vastly opened. I am at the mercy of something great.

It takes strength just to stand and breathe into this sensation that is burning and twisting around inside me. I am parched and water helps moisten my throat. The calm is still here, and I am breathing. I want to ask him to talk about his feelings but I don't sense he is ready to. I want to let him open up to me but instead I just allow him to by being silent. He says nothing more.

These are long moments. So I speak. I speak with gentleness to my brother. I don't know whether my eyes blurred or not, I was just aware I was looking right into Tommy's eyes and saying, 'It just hurts a lot for all of us. I know. I know.'

In these moments of love our whole life seems to make sense to me. Past and future dissolve; only now. He is still silent but I feel him speaking to me with love. I feel him hurting with extreme pain and I feel him knowing that it is ok.

I turn away to break the eye contact's intensity. Perhaps decrease the sensation. I am sliding down inside. Tensions easing slow relief, belly calming, a feeling of going in the right direction. A kind of new meeting one another. Free of vengeance, doors open to infinity. When moments later he again apologizes for his outburst, I tell my younger brother something straight: 'You don't ever have to say you are sorry twice. I heard you. And it's over. And you can count on that.'

Aliza.

It is Friday, late afternoon in June 2005. I have arranged to go away for two nights during the weekend, leaving my daughter at home with her own plans. Every Friday evening for the last year or so, after lighting the Sabbath candles, I give my daughter a blessing:

*May God make you as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.
May He bless you and guard you.*

*May He shine His light on you and be gracious to you.
May He lift up his face to you and give you peace.*

This Friday, I am leaving before the Sabbath and it is too early to light candles. I say goodbye, then suddenly realize that I cannot leave her without blessing her, even though the candles aren't lit.

I have had, for a long time, difficulty in feeling close to my daughter—a sense of alienation between us, a sense that she doesn't want touch, that there is a wall separating us.

Something changes on this particular evening. I turn back from the door and enter her bedroom, saying that I simply cannot leave without the blessing. She smiles. I put my hands on her head, sitting next to her on her bed. We are both relaxed and peaceful.

As I say the blessing I can feel a warmth spreading through me and a feeling of lightness, as if we are both being held by an invisible being. I lose the sense of being separate from God which accompanies me most of the time and for those couple of minutes I am accepting God's love, just as I am giving love to my daughter. This time I sense her allowing the touch and the love to reach her. There are tears of gratitude in my eyes; a thank you to God for helping us. She is giving herself to me in trust, allowing a closeness that I have not sensed before.

Shoshana.

I'd known Betsy since 1993, when I joined the staff of an in-vitro fertilization clinic. Betsy had been working there as the sole nurse since the facility opened and the two of us immediately formed a close bond. So close, in fact, that we intuitively seemed to know what the other was doing when preparing for a case in the operating room—we established such a rapport I jokingly referred to her as my wife. Our friendship extended outside of work and it wasn't unusual for us to spend hours on the phone together. It was with mixed emotions when I left to pursue another job opportunity, knowing I'd no longer see Betsy on a regular basis.

One and a half years later, on a cloudy April morning, I drove—with a myriad of emotions—to Betsy's home on the day of her funeral. She'd been diagnosed the previous March with metastatic cancer. Despite a valiant struggle, the two months prior to her death were difficult for her as I could hear the will to live drain from her voice. So it was almost a peaceful relief I felt for her when her suffering ended. Her husband Rick called to inform me of the funeral arrangements but I found myself telling him that as much as I want to pay my respects, Betsy had taught me never to overlook the smallest details—and that I

felt I may be better served if I were to stay at their house the morning of the mass to help prepare for the family and friends who would be returning afterwards. Rick readily accepted my offer and I assured him I would arrive at the house, about an hour's drive from my own, shortly after 9 a.m. as the mass was scheduled for 10. Rick said that would be fine, as the food was to be delivered mid-morning, but just in case I wasn't there in time, he'd leave the front door unlocked.

I pride myself on my punctuality, so didn't think for a moment I'd be late. However, as fate would have it, the day of Betsy's funeral there was a major accident on one of the thoroughfares to get to her home. The news reports even made mention of all the ancillary roads being backed up as a result. Even with my early start, I wound up being delayed as I sat through miles of slow moving traffic. Adding to the situation was the fact I was driving a car we'd just bought for my son the night before. I had to stop off for gas along the route and was only able to program in one radio station, which I'd been counting on to keep my mind occupied and prevent me from crying while grieving for my friend. I struggled to keep my spirits up, thinking about the many conversations we'd had – our future plans, but hers cut short by this tragedy, when she'd been looking forward to stopping work now that the youngest of her two daughters was about to complete college. Betsy's oldest daughter had just completed grad school and secured a job in Philadelphia when Bets had been diagnosed, and had turned down the job to move back home and care for her ailing mother. As sadness washed over me, I couldn't help but think of how blessed I was to have gotten to know Betsy, and how blessed my dear friend Betsy was to have such a devoted family. I sat in my car, inching along, impatience taking a back seat to reflecting back over the happy moments I'd had the opportunity to share with my co-worker, my mentor, my friend.

I was a block away from her home, when at precisely 9:57, just three minutes before the start of her funeral mass, the clouds parted to allow a ray of sunshine to come down. At that precise moment, the song that had started to play on the radio abruptly stopped after just a few bars resulting in momentary silence before a different song came on. That song was by Bette Midler, '*My One True Friend*,' the title track from a little known movie '*My One True Thing*.' I felt an immediate chill—my senses were filled with Betsy: the ray and warmth of sunlight, the very literal moment of silence, the sweet lyrics of gratitude for friendship that transcends time, the goose bumps that arose on my skin as I was filled with wonder and awe and *knowing* . . . knowing beyond all doubt that it was she who was there, choreographing the events that had occurred and were transpiring. I literally gasped, then smiled, as I felt her undeniable influence and said aloud, '*That's Betsy*.'

I can recall the moment this happened with such clarity, as if it was only yesterday and not years ago. It's that feeling of an indelible imprint having been made—although there was no thunderclap announcing God's presence, I felt that in my body—I truly *felt* that thunderclap surge through me. I don't know how one describes a moment of enlightenment. It's as if energizing light permeated my soul in a way that spread love, knowledge, peace; an overwhelming sense of just *knowing*. I don't think I can describe the sensations in more tangible way, at least not with adjectives we have available to us. It's like when I've read of people who have experienced NDEs [near death experiences] and the colors they encountered—beautiful, magnificent colors not in the spectrum we see, therefore indescribable. How does one describe what love feels like? All I can say is I felt a warmth radiating through me—touching my energy centers, my *chakras*, although I didn't know about them at the time. Like someone sitting in a dimly lit room and then, all of a sudden, someone else turning the lights higher so allowing the barely visible things *that were there all along* to be seen more clearly. Like I put on rose colored glasses and could grasp a better view of not just this world, but a world beyond, a different dimension.

That moment was a defining one for me, as it helped to spark a spiritual journey that intensified since the death of my mother in 2002. Through a series of remarkable coincidences, or synchronicities as I've come to learn they're called, I have come to believe wholeheartedly in the afterlife. My own experiences, as well as those I've read about and learned about by some truly amazing people who have come into my life, has underscored to me there's a greater force 'out there'—that we are so truly connected to one another, that there is a power so much greater than ourselves. I have undertaken studies within my own religion, including a course in Kabbalah, Jewish beliefs of the afterlife (which I was surprised to learn strongly believes in reincarnation) and near-death experiences as led by a Jewish professor from McGill University. I have also studied eastern philosophy and am amazed again by the commonalities of teachings, further supporting my belief of how united we are as humankind.

On a personal level, having been 'touched' by Betsy helped me provide a further source of comfort to her family, when I related the story weeks later. But the story doesn't end here . . .

On a Sunday evening the end of December 2003 right after Christmas, I happened to turn on the TV in the family room and saw that the movie, *My One True Thing* was on, the one I'd seen in the theater five years earlier right before leaving my job at the first IVF facility. Naturally, I thought about Betsy, to whom I'd 'spoken' a few weeks earlier while out on my deck, as I now occasionally look up to the night sky and talk to my mother, my aunt and Betsy and tell them I would

welcome more signs, as I've come to identify and delight in them. As I was watching the movie, based on an Anna Quinden novel about a dedicated wife and mother who is dying of cancer and the daughter who comes home to care for her, the similarities to Betsy's situation once again struck me.

I happened to open a cabinet in the wall unit to put something away when I came upon a box of notes and letters I've saved over the years. I found one that had been written by a favorite patient at the IVF clinic. Mary sent me a beautiful card and 6-page letter when she decided to leave our facility after several failed attempts at pregnancy. Since I'd jotted down her address on an inner corner of the card, I searched for her phone number on the internet. I did find a listing, under her husband's name, and tucked it away to possibly call the next day. Shortly after 9 Monday morning, I decided to give her a try, but I was apprehensive; I know the strains of infertility can adversely affect a marriage and I wasn't even sure if Mary and her husband were still together after all this time—5 years.

A man picked up on the third ring and I asked to speak to Mary. He hesitated and asked who was calling. Now I was really filled with dread, thinking, 'Oh, no—they're separated and I feel like a fool.' I asked if he was Stephen, which he confirmed and went on to say Mary couldn't come to the phone right now, so I continued that he may not remember me, but I was a nurse at the IVF facility. As soon as I said my name, I heard a welcome note of acknowledgement and recollection, but he said, 'Shoshana, how did you know to call?' I asked what he meant and he explained, 'I can't believe you're calling now. The reason Mary can't come to the phone is because she's sleeping. The reason she's sleeping is because I'm holding our new 2 week-old son in my arms.' Well, the goose bumps were immediately upon me once again! He went on to say that Mary had just been talking about me . . . and Betsy . . . and how much she wanted to let us know about her baby, but hadn't wanted to call the office in case we weren't there. He kept repeating, 'I can't believe this,' but I had to tell him, 'I believe it . . . things like this seem to be happening with regularity.' I went on to tell him about Betsy's death and how circumstances led to my calling.

What some may merely label as coincidence is, I feel, profoundly so much more. Again, I recall this particular morning and telephone conversation clearly. By the time I had it, I have to say, I'd experienced many events that truly were synchronistic and had deep meaning to me. But when I'm moved by something such as this, I've come to learn I feel it in my heart. It's as if it's another sense or the ability to feel things without the tactile stimulation, like my heart starts to glow just as ET's had in the movie! I feel a radiation outward, a confirmation or a stamp of affirmation placed directly over my heart. And again, a sense of what I

can only describe as *knowing*. An incredible sense of awe washes over me and though I'm reluctant to admit it, I feel, in a way, special. Like God or this higher power has chosen to take this moment to allow me a glimpse of something more, a peak at what some may refer to as the hereafter or greater cosmos. Viscerally, I suppose I react the way anyone does at a moment of excitement: quickened heartbeat, increased awareness or arousal. But it transcends that. It's a like a silent *eureka* moment. Words can be inadequate to express that succinctly. Maybe the best way to describe it is how I felt each time after giving birth—the burst of endorphins just produces such an overwhelming feeling of triumph and joy.

At the time, what I was thinking was, '*What are the chances of this happening?*' The series of events that unfolded were uncanny in timing: happening to turn on the television when I had and seeing that movie was on; at the same time, happening to come across the box of cards I'd saved and coming upon Mary's; then deciding to call her after 5 years of having no contact with her only to learn she'd just had the baby she'd yearned to have for years AND that she'd just been talking about me—and Betsy—to her husband! It's too coincidental to *be* coincidental! Coupled with the fact that 'coincidences' had been occurring with greater and greater frequency in my life all added to up to something *more*. Whether that 'more' is a consciousness, a greater force, the Divine or God, I couldn't say. But whatever it is, the presence appears to be undeniable.

As to *why* it occurred as it had, I wondered this, too. Was it Betsy's way of showing me she was watching over us? Or did I somehow serve as a link to let Betsy know others were thinking of her, too? I pondered that question, but of course, there's no way of determining the answer.

In a later email communication, she wrote:

Basically, the way I would summarize how my experience helped to change me was to allow me to open up, not only to the universe, but to *myself* as well. I have gained such extraordinary insights and have been able to release some negative emotions—for example, anger; I truly cannot recall the last time I felt the emotion. . . . I feel a tremendous capacity toward forgiveness and have been fairly successful in letting go of past grudges and resentments. I've come to believe in karma (and the fact that I possess some of the very qualities as fanciful *Dakini's*) as well as a sense of connectedness to the cosmos at large. I've experienced what I call *cosmic exclamation points* that frequently seem to reinforce a lesson I've learned, be it a rainbow that appeared once (after my Kundalini awakening experience) or the frequency with which street lamps go out as I pass by. Never would I have thought I'd be subscribing

to such ways of thinking—my education is based on science and this is all so metaphysical—but I do now.

In general, I've found to view such synchronicities like the way a psychologist with whom I've become friendly in Arizona describes as 'pointing fingers.' They're like signposts on the road indicating I'm headed on the right path, moving toward the correct but, as of yet, unknown destination. It appears the path is helping to bring me closer to a higher level of understanding, or consciousness. I've learned to recognize, welcome and embrace each synchronistic event as they manifest. Each event has contributed to my feeling grounded and secure, tolerant and compassionate. It would be hard to not be moved by situations such as these that have had such an impact on the way I look at, and live, life.

Katherine.

The skin on my mother's face is yellow, like parchment paper. It started to look that the way in the emergency room after she broke her hip. But now none of that matters: the broken hip, lymphoma, lung cancer. Only a shell remains and even that seems empty.

My brother snaps pictures of her tiny figure lying on the bed she and my father shared for 33 years. It's actually two beds, two singles pushed together creating the necessary space between them. My brother snaps photos as I look hard at my mother's dead body. 'She would hate him for that,' I think, too fogged to criticize.

She is terribly small, shrunken to the size of a root. She's hardly recognizable and now her body is lacking even the slightest essence of what it meant to be Joyce: fire, beauty and wit. 'Where'd she go?' I wonder.

Suddenly the light looks stranger and harsher than I ever remember it being. It's like the lights have just been dimmed or like we're all under some an invisible body of water. It's her, I think. She's everywhere. She's the water. And suddenly I feel buoyed up by this feeling of connectedness, of emotional warmth. The wall between us dissolves, floating my body on a sea of okay-ness. Suddenly death doesn't seem so separating. I realize my mom's still with me, just transformed, and that one day, I will join her essence—not in some skyward paradise—but in this womb-like spirituality.

In a later email communication, Katherine wrote:

My mother's death did connect me—the moment, my mother's new spirit body and the critical notion that we all die and are part of this

grand scheme called life of which death is a part. I felt deeply connected afterwards to not only the world but my place in the world as someone who helped my mother make the journey from life into death. I realized that dying isn't this lonely thing; rather it's one of those things that connects us all. . . . I felt okay with death afterwards but I can't say that feeling lasted. It did, however, open me to the possibility that death isn't something to be feared.

Amy.

It was spring and we were hiking with a Sierra Club group, but we'd isolated ourselves from the others. I'd not seen Ann, my niece, in a while. I really didn't know how she'd be these days. I was surprised when she accepted my invitation to our hike on Mt. Diablo; my husband was the leader.

The winter rains had washed the hillsides leaving emerald green vegetation. California pinions clung to their places while the junipers' superficial root system forced them to tumble down the precipice. The trail was uneven and filled with rocks. We often looked at the rocky terrain between our glances at each other. Frequent rains in previous months changed the landscape very little. I stumbled against larger rocks, which had torn from their perches. Ann leaned over with arms extended to balance me. Each time I stumbled, I managed to regain my footing before falling. Our age difference became noticeable and a sense of clumsiness triggered a racing heart. Suddenly I saw her mother and my brother (her father) in her face. Or was it the mere connection of family that I saw in her? Her eyes were sky blue like her mother's.

We peeled back the years like an onion, piecing together our stories, our perspectives. As we climbed higher the wind picked up and swirled against our chests. We needed wind breakers to face the wind. We finally reached the top of East Peak, the highest, steepest and least used by hikers. On a clear winter day the views west sometimes reveal the snow-capped Sierra.

There at the top, a belt of wind came down with an iron fist; I leaned forward to counteract the wind's tight embrace. A few of the hikers lost their footing. Then my eyes filled with tears so quickly they were streaming before I realized it wasn't the cold or the strong winds that caused the tears. It was my sudden open heart. My legs tingled while chills spread down my back and along the backs of my arms.

I'd not felt that connection with a family member before. I didn't understand why until I later pieced together the puzzle. I must have put the entire clan, whether a direct descendant, cousin, sibling or parent, into one category sealed against emotion. Maybe it was a sense of

protection, as though I were her mother. Did that make me vulnerable if I were to expose an open heart to her? I asked myself if perhaps I had not been able to allow such feelings for a family member to emerge lest I'd become open to the criticism I experienced when young. Mother easily recognized an open heart into which she plunged her weapon, filled with hate, jealousy and revenge, in attempt to extinguish her own pain and sorrow. She believed, I then realized, that if she suffers you must too. I had seen this attitude toward her acquaintances as well. Her hostility never diminished. Thus I learned it was safer to stay clear of emotional encounters, especially with family members. I told Ann I had run from them all; I saw no other way. I had to seek asylum as far away as I could.

At a water break I leaned against a tree, commenting on the pristine views. 'I held you in my arms,' I told her. 'You were five and so happy, twirling your long blonde hair with your index finger.' She said she didn't remember her grandparents having a house in Duxbury and didn't recall anything said of me.

Hearing that was like a bulky sack of rocks pressing downward in my belly. I could feel the heat of regret. Sadness blackened the sky as it closed down hard. I no longer felt that vastness of land and the freedom of movement. A lightening rod cut through the air, all jagged. A turkey vulture circled above us. Branches cracked all around and scattered in every direction. I bent down and pulled up an Indian paintbrush. The entire plant came out; I only wanted to take a piece. We noticed its red blossoms, 'Such a contrast,' I said. Ann took the small plant from my hand and laid it on the side of the trail. The plant's roots grieved against the wind, rubbing the earth as we began our descent.

I noticed how sore my shoulders had become. I'd been scrunching them inward, hunching them toward my jaw. Then the rain brought ice crystals that melted on our jackets. We kept the same speed, she a serious bicyclist and me an addicted hiker. I wore shorts that day, how silly. The weatherman said it would storm in the East Bay.

I began to realize through distant clouds how I had vanished from her and my extended family. I now understood the origin of my closed heart in relation to my family. Suddenly I saw such familiarity of her eyes to my brother's, her father and her mother's hair and cheekbones. A tight grip held my chest from expanding and my heart swelled. I took a deep breath, surprised at my reaction, an inner sense of warmth, to her. At this moment my mind allowed me to feel the love for her I had longed to experience; I felt unexposed, invulnerable for the first time, and deeply moved. It was a mixture of all the good and the bad of my past, but mostly it was one of joy at my discovery.

The negative melted away with the clouds, warmed against the cold chill of an approaching storm. I lifted myself out from the quagmire I had coveted in self-flagellation and back to our surroundings, staying in the moment. The distant mountains had their soft rounded peaks and even the dark clouds were white and puffy-gray. The serpentine rock was greener than ever before and the rocks skipped down the hillside, released by the 14 brisk hikers as we moved down the trail. We reflected on the anticipation that the rains would soon stop and the sun would indeed come out.

How light my body felt when the harness from decades of weight fell away. The heat of my face warmed tears that were once two rivers of watery grief, while hope silenced the dark voice of the past.

A red tail hawk hovered just above us, turning her head from side to side. She suddenly pulled her black striped wings in and missed downward into a thicket of Huckleberry. A moment later she arose silently, a mouse dangling from her bill. The animal could not move inside her steel talons. Suddenly she released the small animal over a patch of moss.

With the wind gone I had to peel off a layer of clothes; it was as though the rains never came and the blackened sky no longer inscribed the words of remorse.

Mark.

It was an unseasonably warm April morning. The sun was beaming and I had the day off from work. I really did not have any plans, but knew I was going to have a good time doing whatever. I had experienced a hard week at work and needed a break—something fun and not too taxing. Then the phone rang!

An acquaintance of mine (we'll call Rich) was on the line. He said he had to go to his uncle's burial in [a city in California] and asked if I would support him there. He claimed he had to be around old relatives and family members he had not seen in quite a while and was uncomfortable about that.

Spending my day off at a burial for someone I did not know seemed pretty much like a bummer to me. Added to that, Rich was kind of a 'dorky' dude with very little social skills. He could present himself as being quite irritating at times and because of that I knew he did not have very many friends. There was something I liked about him, though.

Somewhere in the back of my mind I had remembered that I had promised myself to practice being more unselfish in such matters.

Previous experiences in life had taught me that ‘giving’ had its own rewards.

I reluctantly agreed to accompany him. Little did I know what was in store for me that day.

We met up a short time later and after a quick cup of java we headed to the train for our ride to [a city in California]. Rich was quiet and to avoid any awkwardness I felt compelled to initiate a conversation about the weather, of all things. After a while, he explained to me that he was unsure of our destination. He said we would probably have to walk a bit after getting off the subway. ‘Great!’ I thought to myself, picturing the two of us wondering aimlessly through the seemingly endless rows of graveyards and flower shops that line the [city in California] streets.

We walked for about a mile and a half, shooting the breeze about everything and nothing. The sun was getting high and it was getting quite warm, but I really did not mind the walk that day. It was kind of relaxing, as I look back.

Finally we came upon the site, and at the gates of the cemetery waited Rich’s entourage of friends and family members. That calm feeling was quickly replaced by the uneasiness of meeting people for the first time. A bunch of people, at that. One by one I approached each individual, introducing myself as a friend of Rich. Everyone was short but cordial—what you would expect from those waiting to plant someone whom they had known personally at various levels of life’s intimacies.

After a short wait, we proceeded to the burial site where I joined Rich and everyone else in a close semi-circle around the open grave. A Catholic priest began the final words and I remember feeling sort of nervous so I exited to the back of the crowd. I leaned myself irreverently against a cross that was serving as a head stone for the resting place of another dearly departed.

Then it happened. I was suddenly overcome with a flood of emotions, as if I was hit by a lightning bolt. The onset was so sudden, I began to sob uncontrollably. The sobs turned to tears and before I knew what was happening, tears were streaming down my face.

I noticed a few of Richard’s family members staring at me. They seemed to be saying, ‘Why is this guy crying?’ After all, I had never met Rich’s uncle. With all the other emotions that seemed to be flowing through my being, I also felt extremely embarrassed. Men don’t cry—let alone in public. Least that was what I was taught. I tried without success to hide my grief. The tears turned into streams and snot began pouring

out my nose, and that made things worse. I was overcome so quickly, I began floundering to get out of the way.

Then I began to understand. I was burying my mom.

Three years earlier my mother had died near her home in Florida. Because of my own life's unmanageability, I could not be by her side. I was detoxing from a high dosage of methadone at a rehab center in San Francisco, and I was physically sick. I wanted to make the trip back to my mother's funeral and burial, but did not have the money. Beside that, I could barely walk, my body weak from not having the opiates it was so accustomed to.

Counselors had advised me to stay put and do for me what my mother had wished that I be doing—getting my life back in order. They said I was vulnerable at that point in my life and if I was to stay clean and sober I should remain where I was most stable. I was on the fencepost with that, but I decided to stay. I regret that decision to this day, because I was always close to my mother.

I remember that phone call to her years earlier, after years of opiate addiction. I remember finally admitting to her that I had become a heroin addict, and how that must have hurt her.

That day in the cemetery, I was taking care of some unfinished business. I had not planned it that way. It just happened, like being hit by lightning. It was bitter, but it was sweet.

As I tried to make my way from the burial site that day, one of the family members there handed me a rose to place in the uncle's grave. My first inclination was to run, but I did not. I told myself the man in the grave that day would understand if I tossed that rose into my mother's grave that day, not his.

After that I felt like I had to be alone. As I struggled to gain my composure, still sobbing, I walked across the road to the other side of cemetery. I found some space on the far side of the parked cars and began wiping my face. I looked up and there standing before me was the Catholic priest who had moments earlier been giving the burial ceremony. I felt compelled to tell him what I had just experienced.

I'll never forget the look on his face that day after I told him. His face lit up and he looked in my eyes. 'You are being blessed, my son,' he said. 'This is a gift from your creator.' After a few moments of consolation, the priest told me to talk to a woman he had pointed out that had been standing in the crowd of family members.

I reluctantly approached the woman and told her about my experience. She smiled and with a thick British accent she told me she had been the hospice worker for Rich's uncle and had spent the man's final days with him. She told me the man would have been happy to know he had participated in my 'gift.' She proceeded to tell me how that man in the grave had also had a substance abuse issue in his life, but had spent the last 27 years in recovery giving back to the community.

'People ask me how I can spend my time with the dying without getting any money and I tell them, this is the pay I get when I hear stories,' like mine, she said. 'Some things money just cannot buy.'

'Don't you see? You selflessly gave to your friend Richard who was reaching out for help and this is what was given to you for your help,' she said. Those words reverberated through me. After a short time, she gave me a hug and we parted ways.

That experience at that graveyard that day will always live deep inside of me. It was deeper than just coming to terms with my mother's death, it was a reaffirmation that there is a purpose to this thing we call life.

Tom.

What can Burning Man, mushrooms, and art do for your soul? This story is about how heat, desert, and fire peeled back all my emotional layers, and then brought me to a better emotional place that would have otherwise taken a psychotherapist years to find.

First, a little background. My wife and I had split up after 4 years of marriage. Now, I loved my wife and still do. I can now admit that I was in some major pain, under those ego covers, over the way that it ended. Intellectually, I think that the two star characters in a romance are the main players, and anyone else is just playing a bit part. But my wife started immediately seeing the guy who she cheated on me with just before we separated. I never liked this guy. He's a sexual predator that has preyed on his therapy patients for years, cheating on his wife and 2 children, and was just an ugly human being (in my opinion).

Despite the freshness of my separation of two months on hand going into Burning Man, I felt like I was doing pretty well with our parting ways. I told myself (and others) that this guy was just the separating wedge she used to help us part. People often use cheating as a catalyst to end a romantic situation, and the emotional risks for her with this other guy are lower as he can't hurt her like I could (she has a serious 'abandonment by loved ones' issue originating from her childhood). All this is a longer story to explain and you'd have to hear her side of the

story to get a chance to know if any of this is even true. But the story is true enough for me, and along with a lot of help from my friends, I thought that I was doing pretty well. I truly and deeply wanted the best for my wife, and if that meant for us to not be together, then so be it.

But Burning Man is the place where I go in search of truth, and to crack myself wide open—biologically, chemically, and emotionally. Friday afternoon I left on a solo psychedelic journey with no particular intention in mind. I made a little sage ceremony before dipping my psilocybin stems into honey (best to remind my subconscious that it's also going into an altered state). Upon leaving my camp and before the magic mushrooms had time to take effect, I thought that I'd pop into that thumping club—The Deep End—to visit a friend who might be there. But alas, I instead ran into my wife sitting in the lap of the devil. I couldn't acknowledge his presence, lest I took a swing to remove his head from its body. I spoke in a tense but amicable (i.e. emotionally bottled up way) with my wife and shortly hightailed it out into the heat and dust storms of the playa.

I sat out there searching for beauty in the dusty sand, but felt only pain reaching physically deep into my heart as I looked down to my shadow. I felt incredibly alone and unable to understand why I was having such a hard time with the situation. Wasn't I okay with our separation? What was buried out there in the desert that was tearing at my heart so badly? Without epiphany, time passed, my normal state of consciousness came back from visualizing the pain of mind connecting to my physical body. Letting the matter rest, it was another day before the issue raised its vague head again.

The next evening, Mars wheeled brightly into the sky and the collective energy of the people of Black Rock City became a little tense in anticipation of the burning of the Man. The manic masses, all feeling like emotional werewolves heading into a full-moonlit night, all headed to the center of the playa. To get a little peace and contemplation while watching the Man burn, I headed out to the Temple of Tears (a tall wood structure, tagged with people's prayers—to be burned the next day). I settled down to watch, this time sober, and my thoughts drifted back to the angst over seeing my wife with the new detested boyfriend. My feelings of distaste returned, as the Man standing on a large geodesic dome burst into fireworks. A faint roar of the crowd could be heard, but no sounds from the people scattered around me were audible.

'How could she be with him?' I asked myself as the Man disappeared in flame. 'I'm happy to let her go, for whatever reason. But this predator isn't good for her; she should be alone to learn what she needs to learn, if anything.'

A flaming outline of the Man reappeared as the fire began to subside. I projected my thoughts of the new boyfriend onto the burning figure. The Man smoldered like this for a little while, and suddenly I realized how much I was holding onto what *I* thought my wife *should* be doing, not what *she* wanted or needed from that relationship. I realized that she was just doing the best that she could, just like everyone else.

And at that moment, without a sound, the Man dropped straight down into the smoldering ashes. A wave of relief filled my body and I suddenly began to sob. Tears streamed down my face with the realization that I was holding onto something that had nothing to do with me. I felt exhausted, but I no longer had that physical pain reaching deep into my heart.

Elizabeth.

‘Twas the day before Thanksgiving, and the cloud gods had decided to serve up some white dressing with old Tom Turkey. I wasn’t sad about the snowfall, though I am a summer lover to the core. The snow as it fell seemed purposeful, even inviting, particularly because I had nowhere to drive, always a happy happenstance when it snows in Chicago.

These days I wasn’t feeling particularly thankful. My mom was to begin her third round of chemotherapy soon, merely to prolong her life, perhaps only by months, while it zapped her of energy and scrambled her thoughts. Ovarian cancer takes, rarely giving back.

The self-inflicted pressure to compose a Christmas letter was growing, and I wanted it to sound more optimistic than I felt. Though I eventually am pleased with my writing, I often felt it as a weight, not unlike the old days when I had an essay or research paper hanging over my head in college. Words and thoughts swim in a thick soup, until, mercifully, the soup spills onto the paper.

That Thursday morning after the storm, I decided to head out with my recently-acquired and quickly-beloved Canon Elph S410 digital camera. I am a lifetime photographer, but the world of digital was unexpectedly amazing. The landscape that morning could not have been more wondrous. All was dipped in snow crystallized by the sun, undeniably one of the most beautiful snows in years. I snapped away—the Canadian geese and mallards collected on the pond, a patch of virgin snow clung to its space, tree limbs bowed with the snow’s weight, lime green leaves and blue clustered berries clung to snow-draped branches, and blue sky and bright sunlight, the backdrop to it all.

Thoughts tumbled while I was walking effortlessly in the snow, but the troublesome Christmas letter kept popping up—at last, though, it

was being written in my mind. It occurred to me that it had been not so much a year of events, but of moments—a collage of snapshots, if you will. A morning walk, a daily telephone talk with my mom, a weekend neighborhood walk with my dad, a dinner with friends, a welcoming visit to the home of a friend or relative, a book happily matched to an eager adolescent reader, a day when my body sang, scribbled words in a flicker of inspiration, a passing conversation with someone who shares my school day, maybe nothing more than a laugh or a cry, a hello or goodbye. The year had been just that—an artist's collection of snapshots, a gathering of moments to be sifted through, some discarded, some saved and savored.

Natural beauty is a 'mover' for me. Even in the suburbs of Chicago, and no matter where I go, I am taken, by a glimpse of something that, in an instant, appears so beautiful—I am taken off guard. I often say aloud, a soft and gentle, 'Oooh!' The moment that happens, I am given a remedy for my body, my mind, and my heart simultaneously.

The snow and the cold warmed by the sun took away for just that moment, and in memory and writing, the heaviness that sometimes comes with living and the grief that comes with losing someone dearly loved. In that moment, pain that inhabits my body daily, twenty-four years of chronic muscle pain linked with fibromyalgia, and all the psychic pain that goes with chronic pain, disappear. No need for drugs, no massage, no worry, no need to spur myself to do that which I may not have energy or time to do. In that moment, I am free of pain in all its forms.

Natural beauty is a reminder of all that is good in my life. It lets me remember friends, family, students, books, photography, poetry, all the things that save me, all the things that mend my spirit.

Not unlike the lyrics of a song, the phrase 'saved by beauty' had been rattling around in my head for days. From whence it came, I'm not sure. I just woke up one morning, and it was there, but it wouldn't go away. I was truly saved by beauty on that Thanksgiving morning. I headed home. I'm sure the scale said the same thing, but my heart was as light as the snow that healed it.

Elizabeth offered a poem she wrote, entitled: Saved by Beauty

My eyes sip flowers
flavored with color nectar.
My heart is drawn to faces
lined with compassion and mirth.
My mind is washed
by showers of strength.

My spirit is soothed and blessed by beauty.
Some days, I am saved by beauty.

James.

One instance of feeling deeply moved presents itself as a flash of recognition while looking into Maya's eyes. We have been lovers for several weeks and our sexual chemistry consistently results in unsurpassed desire, passion and satisfaction.

My eyes are closed, Maya is beneath me and I am inside her. I open my eyes and immediately sense something 'different' about Maya's eyes and face. It is Maya, but not Maya. Something is different about her, but at the same time, I recognize the new her. The flash of recognition is similar to the 'aha moment' I experience when the solution to a puzzle or the punch line to a joke triggers a cognitive shift and a mental smile.

Maya appears younger. Her eyes are locked on mine with a beaming brightness accompanied by a peaceful, loving smile. I feel that smile and I give her mine. Then the smiles merge and become one smile . . . a circular, encapsulating energy; a safe, happy cocoon.

'What's going on?' I ask myself. Then the room seems to dissolve. I see only Maya's face and I am drawn deep into large, brown eyes filled with tears. Emotions of deep love, deep connection, fill my chest. My own tears of joy join hers.

'I love you,' she says to me for the first time. But I know the words are coming before she speaks them. The same words and emotions are inside me . . . and I express them as well . . .

Our reverie is interrupted, and we rush to dress and part.

My rational, down-to-earth mind struggles to make sense of what occurred. The face I had seen was Maya's, but not Maya's. And it was a face that was somehow even more familiar than Maya's.

Later, we talk, and Maya's description of the experience duplicates mine. But she is confident and comfortable in the 'knowing' that she and I were together in another lifetime. That we had somehow separated and made a promise to reunite. That the look and the smile we now share is a celebration of our souls reuniting.

A few weeks later Maya is beneath me again as I open my eyes and see 'the face' and the recognition in her eyes. She, too, sees 'the other me.'

‘There you are,’ I say, the words coming spontaneously. She beams the knowing smile. ‘Where have you been?’ She does not answer and we are drawn deeper into the gaze accompanied by dissipation of time and space.

Maya says words cannot adequately describe the experience and may even cheapen it. I agree with the former viewpoint, but not the latter. After coaxing, she finds these words: ‘It’s like I am being sucked into a whirlpool, spinning to another place and time, another dimension, carried by our eye connection. It is another reality to which we are transported and there is a knowing, a wow! Joy and awe. We are floating in space and connecting deeply. When I connect with you we are touching God, the source. It is God’s touch, God’s breath, God’s love.’

As of this writing, this experience has enveloped us on five occasions. Each time it comes while we are making love with me on top. I do not intentionally seek the experience, but my rational mind does strive to understand it. The questions arise: ‘Why does Maya appear younger? What triggers the experience? I know it is the eye connection . . . but why sometimes and not others? Why does it scare me? Is this really a merging of our souls? By merging with Maya, will I lose my self?’

William.

Chief Little Summer connecting and sitting in counsel with me.

As I near his home, foot eagerly thrusting the accelerator after interminable red lights, I forget all the pressing questions I have; they filter out of my ears and trickle into the viscous sultry summer sky of Sarasota. They weighed so thickly on me, morassy molasses of emotions I had been wading through . . . gone. I want to remember them, impedances, and yet, here I am, with them replaced by a giddy feeling, tickling its way up my thorax, until I almost laugh aloud.

I was going to see ‘the Chief’ because a friend kept insisting I visit him. I was in my late teens, feeling a little lost and uncertain of direction in my life, such as where I should be living, what I should be doing, my destiny—little questions. All this disappeared as I neared this man’s house.

Chief Little Summer’s ample arms receive me at the threshold. I feel enfolded by a mountain, warm smile at its granite sculpted peak. His resonant thunder voice welcomes me, and though I am trying to reenter my body, I vibrate right through the transparent membrane of skin I once found so sound. I rise above myself, awash in sizzling energy, bursting through. Awareness of self moves beyond the boundaries of my physical

body and lifts above and around it. I experience myself in the air around me.

I sit across from Chief Little Summer on a soft chocolate couch cushion, locked onto his presence. Between us I feel each chakra system subtly align and balance as it draws me to upright. Gazing at each other, he asks to begin our counsel session with a question from me. I ask, 'What is that that my higher self wants to communicate to me?' Momentarily thrown back on myself, waves of force wash through me and return, as internal organs bathe in undulant movement. Birds in the backyard behind me form a living sound barrier, as the walls no longer contain me.

Chief introduces me to the guides behind him. I can only feel them, compassionate wisdom-filled quiet strength, a backdrop for him, like the birds behind me.

Chief begins to speak and his body soon disappears, trailing only wakes of shimmering gold. In the center of scintillating streaks perches a huge golden eye, fierce as an eagle, as if atop a living effervescent pyramid. At once its clarity penetrates me, yet at the same time remains centered, noninvasive. Chief's body pulses in and out of my vision as he continues speaking. I no longer sense where he begins and I end. I am aware only of the eye and the sound of his voice, booming with laughter oftentimes, richly resonant with warmth and wisdom. Vision gives way to perception of energy in movement.

I feel infused with a warm feeling of gratitude for him, and for the intelligence radiating through him. I feel held by a presence firmly, but aware that I could release its hold by simply looking away with my eyes, which are fixed on the Chief. I understand with my brain and all over my body that this presence is palpable, real, and ultimately beyond verbal comprehension. I relax into its warmth and gentle magnetic pressure, as the electric surging continues between us.

I want to remain here forever; I feel a sadness to know this experience may end soon. I feel amazement to feel this close to a person I have only just met, and to feel this close to the unseen world behind him, behind us. I know in this moment that the rest of my life will be strengthened, is already strengthened, because of this moment, and I feel I can relax into my past, since it led me to this moment.

And all of this takes only a moment. The sound of clattering dishes far in the distance grows gradually nearer. Unhurried, body boundaries coagulate around me again. The sound grows nearer. It is Warm Night Rain, his wife, clinking dishes to call us back. She is ten feet away in the kitchen. Two hours have passed, inside a twinkling of an

eye; counsel has gone overtime. I lie down in a palm grove behind the little house. Firm red earth presses into the wings of my back. Rich dank smell of iron floods my nostrils. The birds above me sing down to sound out where I am.

Gratitude fills my whole body. I can relax into the earth, feeling deep joy to be alive, to feel my chest rise and fall, the space behind my eyes soften. I feel connected with myself and with the world. A tiny voice inside asks 'Is this real?' a tinge of doubt. Another voice inside answers with calm assurance, 'yes,' and the feeling of relaxation grows deeper.

After 20 years, the reverberation of Chief's voice, and the words he shared with me, remain crystal clear, and enlighten my life profoundly, including marriage, children, vocation, and spiritual destiny. He remains with me in dreamtime and daydream, as beloved teacher, lover of humanity, and seeker of wisdom.

Chief's words were certain, reassuring, and positive without being Pollyannaish. He had an ability to share even the most challenging aspects of my personality with me, while leaving me with the feeling that these things are totally fine, are as they should be, and will change when necessary, when I choose to change them. Above all, he reiterated the freedom I have in all actions. In response to my yearning to know about my destiny, he laughed lightheartedly and said that certain things are kept from me: 'If you saw your future right now it would probably blow your mind, literally.' That allowed me to relax and explore the present moment with him; that thought continues to relax me when I begin to feel anxiety about my future.

Whenever I feel depressed or anxious, I remember this experience, and it gives me strength to face these difficult feelings, and circumspectness; then space is created around the constriction in my chest. I feel more effective in dealing with myself and the world, and I can laugh at myself with the same love in the laugh that I heard so often from him.

From my interaction with the Chief I feel empowered, smart, and capable. I trust that I have all I need to handle what I meet in the world. I live in eternal gratitude to the Chief, and even that gratitude he in his humble nature returns to me, so I can feel gratitude for myself. What Chief imparted to me in that moment was an infusion of love filled wisdom that I have not experienced prior or since. His words always feel present to me, clear, warm, inviting me to become more of myself.

He suggested that none of what I teach to my students is ever lost, that their souls absorb every bit of it, even if the personality does

not. This is a heartening thought, and gives me hope. He suggested it is my task to understand others, and not necessarily fair to expect them to understand me. I still use the prayer of protection he shared with me, especially when I feel frightened.

The more I write of it, the more I recognize the profound change that occurred in me at that moment. I am no longer able to view myself, other people, or the world around me in the same manner. In experiencing this deep connection with another human being, I realize this is possible with all human beings, and with plants, animals, and the earth. I have an example, a model. I felt catalyzed into accepting my own ability to connect with my higher self, and to inform my life accordingly. Because I have benefited so greatly, I can only hope to impart to others the rich blessings I have received.

Bird.

Driving for home, it is late and I am tired. My heart tells me something is about to happen. Then, my headlights illuminate a large bird lying in the road. His wing is pointing straight up at the moon, signaling to me like a flag. Did the wind move his wing as I passed by or is he still alive? I stop to see.

Standing over him now, I feel a warm current of chi across my chest. The bird is unconscious. I pick him up and weigh the situation. He's a barred owl about the size of a cat. Hollow bones and feathers make him look big, but he is very light. Nothing appears to be broken, however, he isn't out of the woods yet. I gently set him through the window of my camper top.

At home, my dog welcomes us with his usual song and dance. Halfway to the house, his barking spurs the owl to heroic effort. It wakes the raptor up. Holy cow! This is the biggest bird I've ever held. And he's a predator! Isn't this a very dangerous position to be in? Reason sets up a chain reaction in my body that splinters my focus.

Fragmented and paralyzed, I am suspended between all I know about birds and all I don't know about owls. If this bird is strong enough to put up a fight, I am his most immediate obstacle. I must be super sensitive to know where my boundaries are with him. If I give up on him and let him go before he can hurt me, chances are my dog will finish him off.

Holding a frightened wild animal that's equipped with its own daggers sends a surge of adrenaline up my spine. Intuition becomes a tumultuous, heart-pounding intensity. Time contracts as thoughts race at light speed. My mind flashes through a hundred possibilities. Working

backwards through a decade of experience with birds and forwards calculating near-futures by grasping for direction from this bird's nonverbal signals. I do not let him see that I do not know how to be with him.

Amidst the calamity of mental and physical noise, my spirit begins to rise. Breathing deeply quiets and centers my intentions. I let the emotion I'm feeling make me more sensitive to what I'm doing with this creature—not keep me from doing it. I listen to the silence between us. All the things that are not happening fade away. As I become single minded, I hush the dog gently and settle on the future I want to create.

The owl responds by hiding in my arms, not by trying to convince me to let him go. Clearly, this bird is frightened, but he's not defending himself against me. I gently press him close to my chest to comfort and contain him.

Time expands again.

Inside a safe space, I shut the door and become a steady perch by supporting my elbows on the floor. He sits on my wrist now. There's no time for formal introductions. His back is to me. This tells a lot about him. No parrot I know would be that brave. Parrots are prey animals. Owls are hunters.

I follow his lead. He's treating me like an old friend, a confidante. I do the same. My face is very close to his head. I let him sit this close to my eyes because it reinforces a very strong nonverbal message about our mutual trustworthiness and intimacy.

I watch the way he holds his body, the condition of his feathers, and the shape of his eyes to gauge how badly he is hurt. If he trusts me he will show me the truth about what is going on inside him. If he doesn't, he'll use all his energy to fool me into believing he is strong and well. He'll dominate our conversation. If he feels threatened, he may even attack me. I've seen large birds take control of a situation by becoming rough and aggressive to mask their fear. Should I avoid looking directly into his eyes?

Judging by the grip he has on my wrist, my owl is not as calm as he looks. He begins turning his head around to face me just as I reach this conclusion. Time speeds up again. I watch his beak coming around. The moment of truth is here. Will I be wearing this mistake on my face for the rest of my life if I am wrong?

I seek the path of least resistance and rely on my discipline. I have spent many years working with birds every day. That gives me the certainty to know that if I don't have the courage to hold him now, I will

only be giving him a taste of my fear and a definite reason to defend himself against me. That won't serve either of us.

When he looks at me the first time, he must see through my intentions instantly. There is no time for translation. He must agree to what I'm asking him without question. Do owls and parrots go by the same handbook? I'm about to find out.

As his head swings around, I close my eyes to show him that I am as vulnerable as he is. I maintain my calm openness despite the new adrenaline rush. His talons dig into my skin as he braces himself for what he's about to see. He's in a totally unnatural situation, eye to eye with a human for the first time. I open my heart up as wide as I can and focus all my attention on surrender.

Behind my closed lids I sit in nothingness and feel my heart fluttering. I have given up trying to control what happens, but now opening my eyes will undoubtedly take all the courage I have left. Slowly, ever so slowly, I open them again and almost laugh out loud. My owl's reply is impeccable. He speaks to me softly in the same language I am using. His eyes are closed too.

That is totally beyond my experience. His response is completely unexpected. The sudden release of all that tension catapults me into a state of heightened awareness. Intensity and detachment strike a balance. Complexity melts into simplicity. Timelessness blankets us. It feels like the moment of making love when I forget my lover's body is separate from mine. My heart pounds through my chest as if I'm empty, but I've never been more full. I'm deeply grateful for all the perfect synchronicity that has already occurred throughout time to allow this miracle to happen to me. Something inside me blossoms. Dancing with this owl gives me a glimpse of the infinite. I watch that single moment expand until all the moments of my life line up behind it making sense in a new way. Then, timelessness melts back into linear time.

I'm acutely aware that asking my owl to shift his weight will end our love affair, but it's necessary. My wrist pulses with pain. The pressure of his grip and razor sharp claws hurts me. I hold my breath and try to simply reposition him.

He lets me know my compassion might be weightless, but my willpower is not. The slightest force of my will turns him into a wild creature again. He takes his cue—leaping out of my hands, falling into the corner, flapping against the wall, and losing a few feathers.

I scrutinize his body and watch his wings work. He's breathing well. No broken bones, no blood, bright eyes. Everything I know about birds tells me this one hit a car, not the other way around.

Scooping him up again in my arms, I walk out into the moonlight. Somewhere between boldness and reckless abandon, I take a final liberty and kiss his wild, symbolic wings. I can feel the electricity in my fingertips. I can feel it in the wind moving my hair. I am much bigger now than I could ever be by myself.

He slips back into the dark.

All summer long I listen to a barred owl in the woods behind my house. Low and sweet, he calls, reminding me how to surrender. I am listening with every nerve, every pore to a language I've always wanted to hear. What he taught me in a few moments, I'll never forget.

American Indians wore feathers in their hair as a sign of their brave deeds. On special occasions, I wear the ones that barred owl gave me on a chain that dangles from my ear. They may look like feathers, but they feel like wings in my heart. Those feathers remind me how I can affect the world. In a moment of grace, I saw it for myself on many levels. What gift could be more precious? The one I give or the one I take? Now, I see, they are both the same.

'A bit of fragrance always clings to the hand that gives roses.' ~ Chinese proverb

In a later email communication, Bird wrote:

This event was truly a gift in my life. It opens my heart instantaneously. Whether I'm thinking about it, feeling it empathetically in the responses of the people I share it with, or connecting to another bird in the forest or pet store, something BIG happens. Although I don't always know what to do with the energy from it, I always know where to find the magic . . .

Christine.

I am running my first marathon. It amazed me to realize that even after all the hours and miles of training, I found it rather absurd that I was now going to run 26.2 miles. So I tricked myself and said, 'You are just going on a 5 hour training run.'

The first two-thirds of the run I am careful to self-regulate. A mantra for long-distance runners is 'Drink before thirst, eat before hunger.' I kept a conversation pace up the Pacific crest coastline into the

woods. I can tell that my muscles are relaxed but beginning to undo themselves because of the duration of activity.

Miles twelve to twenty-three is an out-and-back section that is psychologically challenging. On the way out, you know that every step you will have to ultimately retrace to get to the finish line. Around mile sixteen I am beginning to need a sign. Where was the turn-around point? At the next bend, I get my answer: I see my coach and she yells, 'Looking good, Christine! The pig-gate is less than two miles away!' I reach an aid station and grab a chunk of banana. At this point, my body is so ready for this food. I maintain my focus and keep positive self-talk to maintain my energy level.

Finally I reach the gate, which is this underrated stick of rebar poking out of the trail. I turn around, determined to make my goal of finishing. Now even slight inclines make me feel a burn. There is nothing around me but native grasses, trees, the ocean vista, and a few other runners spread along the trail. The sun is not shy but I am hydrated and making progress.

I look at my watch. Four hours, nine minutes. Good job, Christine. You're looking strong. Yet, the body is intuitive; it knows when it goes to a place it has never gone. At four hours, eleven minutes, I break my composure. At this moment, I am running farther than I have ever before. I start crying, the sort of sob that is part self-pity but mostly relief. I have physically stripped down my guards and am now moving into my core feelings. My muscles have completely broken down and have no reason to be doing what they're doing. (Why are you still running, Christine?!)

I'm not running from my mind or because someone told me to. I'm running because I have to, because my soul desires me to be bold. I have to follow my heart, and I'm doing exactly that. I am in my instinct and that is the force pushing me forward. I have no external resistance; no one to please or thank except for this ferocious will to live. (Where does it come from?)

These are tears for having been such a warrior the past few months. I am crying for my broken heart that became vigilantly protective after a painful breakup. I am crying because I've been so strong. I'm crying because I'm doing what I set myself out to do. These are salty tears of appreciation for having the strength to do what I love.

My heart is now incorporated into my entire being. My heart is not this vital organ located in my chest, it is in every cell and intention of my direction. I'm running with my body, and I'm running with my heart. There is little, if any, distinction between the two. It still hurts to run, but

I have no reason to hold back any longer. Either way, whether I think about the pain or not, I am running. I focus on relaxing even deeper, to streamline my movement to make my journey to the finish as effective as possible.

Hannah.

Life has been full of deeply moving experiences, but after reflecting about my Grandmother and our profound relationship, including the last six years of taking care of her and the whole, profound process of her dying . . . well, it gives full definition to the term ‘deeply moving.’

When I was born, my Grandmother was 55 years old. She became my spiritual mentor and a friend and guide as we traversed different life stages. When she would take me when I was a child to her church right across the street from where she lived, I would sit next to her in the adult church and I would feel such peace and awe. There was an organ with huge gold pipes and the whole experience of sitting next to her, of hear the lectures and feeling the music was deeply moving.

I felt a sense of peace and a sense of closeness to her, as if she respected me enough to let me come into the ‘adult world,’ and on some level I understood what was being imparted. The Christian Science religion is based on humanity as being good, not sinful, and while I never joined her church, I always felt as if she respected me and my own spiritual journey, which she helped to initiate. She was a quiet, spiritual mentor in her modeling, her sense of integrity, her morning study of spiritual writings, and just her presence. I felt most moved by her presence, which was calm, amused, and quietly centered all at once.

Some of the most deeply moving experiences came in those last years of her life. After age 86 she began to change and needed more help because she was having strokes. After a bit of time in a nursing home, she and I decided to live together while I finished my master’s degree. For two years I helped take care of her while I went to school. I easily accepted her changing mental and physical ability because I loved her so profoundly that I would do anything to be there for her. That first year was one of the best years of my life, still is, and we laughed a lot together, even though her mental and physical abilities kept changing. We always laughed and shared a sense of humor. It did not take much to amuse us.

As she changed and needed more and more care, I was less able to lift her and finally I had to get her into a wonderful board and care home, and then later into a good nursing home. I visited as often as I could, with a demanding job in social services, but I watched over her

care closely. We remained close, and despite the effects of strokes, we still shared a special rapport, one I have had with few people.

One of the most deeply moving experiences I had with her involves the last months of her life, when she was slowing and dying, leaving this world like an autumn leaf slowly changes, its radiant and beautiful colors altering slowly. During this time I would go to the nursing home and sit with her and hold her hand. It was so simple, just to sit and be with her and hold her hand. I remember her skin felt like silk. I recall her skin felt like the smoothest velvet I had ever touched. It is as if I can still feel it now 20 years later. She did not talk much at that time but she knew it was me and she would smile the sweetest smile.

Each time I visited her I would read to her of her favorite passage from the Bible, the 23rd Psalm, because I knew she liked it, and while I consider myself to draw from many religions (Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Mystical Judaism, Sufism, New Age), I also took comfort in reciting the passage to her. Maybe it was the repeating of it, or my holding her hand, or just that she was in this altered state of transition from life on Earth while touching in to another realm, a dimension I could sense with her.

As we were together, I felt such a sense of peace and of grace. I felt calm and still, as if I was tapping into another world, the place where she was going. I felt in a profound spiritual place, in that nursing home, with my dearest Grandmother, as she lay dying those last few months. At times I would feel sad or wish she did not have to suffer at all, but mostly I felt at peace and even a quiet joy, and a lovely reverence . . . for her, for life, and for the process of death.

She told me a number of times over the years, that death is a transition, another journey. While she was dying slowly I felt I was experiencing some of that journey with her, as if I was moving through a doorway into another world which she was close to and sometimes in and that I could intuit that other dimension because I was with her and close to her. It was such a profound experience that words do not do it justice. I love words and writing, but this experience was beyond words.

On July 19, 1990, my Grandmother started breathing very heavily, which the nurse told me is common when someone is dying, for them to breathe heavily and for a period of time. I was at home when they called, so I went to be with my dear Grandmother, as I so wanted to be with her at the very end when she died.

As we drove to see her, I was so moved by the sunset softly blazing in front of me as we drove westward to be with her. I recall when my husband and I came through a mountain pass we then saw an orange

and incredibly beautiful sunset, in a quiet way. I felt so connected to nature, as if the quiet beauty was marking this day of my Grandmother leaving the earth. It was as if the setting sun was a very real symbol signifying her dying. It was profoundly moving, as if I felt a oneness with nature in the process of her death. I felt it in my body, as if I became one with the sun and that unique moment in time, which helped me to feel more at peace with the loss of my Grandmother in my daily life. Even as I write about it now I can see and feel that sunset and its beauty and awe. Again words cannot do the feelings justice.

I had the same sense about a soft hushed rainfall once when driving home after I had witnessed the birth of a friend's daughter. It was the middle of the night and after spending some hours at the hospital with the newborn, I drove home to the most gentle and quietest rain, and I felt awed by the beginning of life, just as I have by the ending of life. The life cycle seems to link me with nature and its beauty and the natural world is more deeply moving at such times.

My Grandmother died just before midnight. I was with her just two hours before the end, but then had gone home at 10 p.m. since there was no way to know when she would finally pass on. I then returned just after midnight after they called to tell me she had died. At the time I was sorry I was not there at the very end. My husband had wanted to leave at 10 p.m. because of work the next day and I think because it was hard for him to deal with death. I have at times wished he would have supported me in staying. But now I have made peace with how it ended, because I was there for her for the six years she needed help, and those last months while she was dying, I was also there, holding her hand. And maybe it was her way to finally die without me there in the final end, because she did not like a fuss, and she always felt the body was just a shell, and that what mattered was the spirit.

What happened after her death was also moving and I still don't know how to explain it in any logical way. I only have my experience of it. The following day we went to the funeral home to see my Grandmother's body, and to say our final goodbye, as it was her wish to be cremated. When I entered the room with my husband, I sat for awhile quietly, and while naturally sad, I also felt as if she wanted me to be happy and not sad.

Then the most unusual thing happened to me. It was as if a part of my Grandmother's spirit entered inside my body, right into my torso and especially in my tummy area. I felt a swirling of energy and then so at peace, like a quality I imagined she would feel. Its as if her way of experiencing peace, or just the feel of her energy as a person, had entered my body, and I felt as if we were sharing and blending, and as if she was becoming all the more a part of me. It felt as if she was leaving me a gift

of peace. I recall at the time really hoping I would always feel this peace of hers within myself, and while the intensity is very different over the years, I do feel as if a part of her was left with me on a visceral level, as well as an emotional and spiritual level. It was a very unusual experience and one I have never had before or since.

The relationship with my special mentor and guide, and lucky for me, with my Grandmother, has been profound from the very beginning and through to the end. We always had a unique bond, all our lives together, from my birth until her death, and beyond. I feel my Grandmother lives on in many ways, whether through the work I have done as an art therapist in counseling children, as she helped children through education, or through the values I pass on to my own daughter. I also feel as if Grandmother is still watching over me and helping me.

Life is tenuous and fleeting in so many ways, as it is also resilient. Her death reminds me of the preciousness of our time upon the Earth, and of the profound process of the life cycle of birth to death that is too easily forgotten in daily life. I hope in this writing I have honored her by sharing some of what has touched me deeply in knowing my dearest Grandmother.

Hannah also offered two poems that she wrote after her Grandmother died.

Mirth

Was it a butterfly
that caught the corner of my eye
or was it a leaf?
Sailing on with gravity
the vicissitudes of time
as with the wind
or soil, or mirth
giving birth.
The wings move forward in graciousness
doubting not their rightness.
The tree knows too its timing,
and in new life
so there is the passing of life.
The leaf transforms the earth,
there is richness.
And life is not ending,
only beginning anew
for the butterfly
that caught my eye,
or was it a leaf?

Grandmere

The sweet stinging in the eyes
of a memory feeling of you,
memorized because you have left,
evaporated from this earth sphere
yet here you are with me now
handprints on my heart.

I wrote a poem upon your death,
words gifted to me then
unknowingly from you,
‘vicissitudes’
like the beatitudes
you rose from my body.

Gifts, ever so small gifts
enormous in their eternity
from you, sweet you
with your aged, velvet
softest hands
that I loved to sooth.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to present a holistic and integrated perspective of the experience of being deeply moved. I begin this discussion section by briefly reviewing the purpose and goals of this study, followed by a summary of my essential interpretations of the experience of being deeply moved. I then present the new interpretive lenses of Cycle 4 and discuss the transformation of lenses from Cycle 2 to Cycle 4. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to articulating and exploring these new lenses, each of which is illustrated by the words of the participants and contextualized in terms of related literature. In the final sections, I will offer reflections on the method used, limitations, implications, and applications of this research, and possibilities for future research.

I engaged in this study in order to explore and understand the lived experience of being deeply moved. I chose to accomplish this through the process of intuitive inquiry—specifically, cycles of hermeneutical inquiry that included heuristically-informed self-searching, formal literature review, original research in which I gathered and explored subjective, written accounts of others' experiences of being deeply moved, and my own intuitive and cognitive processes as the researcher to weave the material together. I inquired particularly into the embodied and felt dimensions of the experience, the triggers or situations in which this experience arose, and the meaningful and transformative effects this experience had on the participants' lives. My hope was to not only distinguish this phenomenon through a summation of its attributes, but also to understand and convey the texture and richness of the experience throughout this dissertation.

Asking participants to write about an experience of being deeply moved produced stories with an incredible array of situations and inner experiences. Discovering the threads that connected these disparate stories was a confusing task at first, yet it was intuitively clear that each story was an expression of the experience of being deeply moved. It was particularly interesting to read the participants' lists since most participants reported a wide range of triggers and inner experiences—everything from simple joys, to profound personal losses, to moments of transcendent ecstasy. This clearly illustrated that the variety I was seeing was not due to individual variation between participants, but rather could be seen as central to the experience of being deeply moved itself. This also confirmed my suspicion that experiences of being deeply moved are complex and over determined, with several sources and meanings all at once.

Given the complexity of the topic, the essential way I have come to understand the experience of being deeply moved is that it is the deeply felt response to the heart's knowing and recognition of what is real, important, good, beautiful, or sacred. It includes the array of emotions, sensations, and thoughts that occur when we are affected by the beauty, joy, or suffering within and around us in a way that elicits the depth of our caring and our willingness to open to being touched and transformed by life. This way of engaging with life creates the possibility of embracing the full spectrum of being human and of life itself, which often lends a profound sense of meaning and deep connection to ourselves, others and the sacred. The experience of being deeply moved also serves as a reminder of what is truly important in life and can spark profound spiritual experiences and personal transformations.

These statements have many dimensions, each of which is represented by a distinct interpretive lens that was developed in Cycle 4 of the intuitive inquiry process.

These lenses are presented below.

Cycle 4: Transforming and Refining Lenses

The process of transforming and refining my lenses was quite organic. However, at one point in the process I discovered that the lenses naturally fell into categories according to what is phenomenologically primary, and that my understanding of the experience of being deeply moved was layered accordingly. The structure of these categories can be imagined as three concentric circles: The inner circle is composed of the qualities of the individual felt experience and the shifts in feeling, knowing, and relating that occur during the experience of being deeply moved; the middle circle pertains to the dynamic relationship between the self and different situations in the world that trigger or contextualize the experience of being deeply moved; and the outer circle speaks to the ways that the self is transformed through this interaction. In a sense, these lenses mirror the intuitive inquiry process in that they can be seen as spiraling out from the center of the subjective, extending into the world, and returning to and transforming the subjective.

The transformed and refined lenses of Cycle 4 are presented in Table 1 in the three phenomenological categories described above: The felt dimension; existential and transpersonal triggers; and the transformative and healing dimension.

Table 1

Cycle 4 Lenses

Dimension	Lenses
<p>The Felt Dimension:</p> <p>Psychospiritual Qualities and Shifts in Being</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heart opening: Feeling and letting go <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical and psychological armoring relax and there is a physical and emotional experience of opening Sensation and emotion is heightened, including a greater sense of aliveness and access to the natural vitality of the living body. • Allowing and embracing rather than resisting experience, including characteristically uncomfortable experiences such as fear or uncertainty. • Boundaries of the self become more permeable and one is open to being touched and affected by the world. 2. Heart knowing: The authentic knowing of the heart is the foundation of meaning, inner guidance, and the feeling of connection to something larger than oneself 3. Heart breaking: Apprehension and integration of the polarities of life 4. Grace, gratitude, and the experience of being loved

(table continues)

Table 1 (*continued*)

Dimension	Lenses
Existential and Transpersonal Triggers: The Wondrous Beauty, Inescapable Suffering, and Ordinary Moments that Move People	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beauty opens the heart and stirs the soul. 2. Personal suffering strips the identity and reminds us of what is essential. 3. . Encountering the best qualities of the human spirit 4. Simple human connections 5. The shared reality of the human condition is a vehicle for connection and reverence for life.
Transformative and Healing Dimension	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spiritual and transpersonal experiences offer a glimpse beyond the veil and connection to a loving universe 2. Spiritual and transpersonal experiences offer a glimpse beyond the veil and connection to a loving universe 3. Emergence or renewal of faith, spiritual path, or spiritual beliefs 4. Resolution and healing in relationships 5. Self-acceptance and access to personal strengths

To assist the reader in understanding the transformation of lenses from Cycle 2 to Cycle 4, the following is a reprint of the lenses of Cycle 2 as presented in Chapter 3.

1. *Complexity*: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003), the word *move* can imply the excitation or expression of emotions. However, this study posits that when people use the phrase “being deeply moved,” they are indicating something more complex either than the experience of heightened emotions or than can be found in the description of any specific emotion.
2. *Opening*: In experiences of being deeply moved, there is a relaxation of physical and psychological armoring or boundaries. There is an experience of “opening” that may come with a feeling of softening or melting. With this opening, there is the sense of being “touched” or “penetrated” by the world.
3. *Allowing*: In experiences of being deeply moved, there is often a sense of allowing and embracing rather than resisting experience, including characteristically uncomfortable experiences such as fear or uncertainty.
4. *Unconditional Love*: Love and appreciation for others and for life, just as they are, is the underlying context for the variety of emotions, cognitions and eliciting situations that may be present in experiences of being deeply moved.
5. *Affectivity*: Because one is open to being “affected” by life, being deeply moved may include an experience of seemingly paradoxical emotions—such as joy and sadness—simultaneously.
6. *Embodiment*: Being deeply moved is an embodied, physical experience. The physical component may include sensation in the chest, chills, tears, or the sense of being physically or energetically opened.
7. *Clear Perception of Reality*: The experience of being deeply moved offers a subjectively clearer perception of reality that may be contrasted to the haziness of one’s normal state of consciousness. This does not preclude the experience of mystery or wonderment.
8. *Connection*: The experience of being deeply moved involves a feeling of connection to something larger than oneself. There may be a feeling of intimacy and a sense that individual events or people are intimately connected with the whole of life. For most people, this is experienced as a deeper connection to specific other persons, humanity in general, nature, the cycles of life, the sacred, or God.
9. *Dialectical Relationship*: Being deeply moved is an experience of connection in terms of a dialectical relationship between the personal self and something

greater—rather than the experience of duality and disconnection or the experience of nonduality and union.

10. *Experience of the Sacred*: For many people, being deeply moved is perceived as a spiritual or sacred experience. Being moved may arise as an experience of the miraculous within mundane, ordinary life.
11. *Awareness of Suffering*: The experience of being deeply moved may include an awareness and appreciation of the complexity and polarity of life. There may be a sense of life as beautiful and sacred, but also as painful, mysterious, and at times, unjust.
12. *Beauty*: Being deeply moved has an aesthetic component that involves appreciation of beauty. This appreciation may be of physical beauty or of inner beauty—for example, appreciation of beauty in the human spirit or in the power of nature during a storm.
13. *Meaning*: The experience of being moved is meaningful to people. There is a sense during the experience that what is occurring is more real and significant than normal ways of being.
14. *Healing and Wholeness*: For some people, the experience of being moved may feel healing and may bring a sense of wholeness.
15. *Grace*: The experience includes a sense of being graced or gifted.
16. *Remembrance*: The experience of being deeply moved offers a remembrance of what is truly important in oneself and in life. Ordinary personal concerns are seen in a new light, often as trivial.
17. *Virtue*: For some people, the experience of being moved may result in the inspiration to live according to their values. There may be a set of values inherent in the experience, particularly in terms of making a contribution in the world, slowing down to appreciate life, and expressing love to others.
18. *Transformation*: For some people, the experience of being deeply moved leads to major life choices and the sense of inner transformation.
19. *Self-transcendent emotions*: The experience of being deeply moved may belong to a larger category of experiences that can be described as moral, spiritual, aesthetic, and transcendent emotions.

When comparing my preliminary lenses to my present understandings of the experience of being deeply moved, I find that most have not changed, but instead have

deepened, expanded, and become more specific. Many preliminary lenses identified broad dimensions of experience that I anticipated finding, such as the meaningful, spiritual, or transformative dimensions. With regard to those lenses, the findings of this study identified the specific ways these dimensions manifested. Other preliminary lenses were an attempt to articulate an aspect of the experience that I did not yet fully understand, and in these cases, the primary discovery of the study was a more precise and articulate understanding of this dimension, such as identifying the experience of being deeply moved as a transpersonal knowing of the heart.

Participants tended to describe their experiences in a holistic manner, with many themes present in a single articulation. In order to capture the nuances of the experience of being deeply moved for the purpose of this study, I have chosen to create distinct lenses for each of these themes. Because of this intention, the reader may notice some overlap in the lenses, and a few quotes from participants are presented more than once to illustrate multiple themes. However, my hope is that the detail with which I have offered these lenses will assist the reader in comprehending the nature of this complex experience. In addition, some of my original lenses were termed *procedural*, which referred to my understandings about an appropriate and effective method to use in this study. I discuss these lenses in the section of this chapter in which I reflect on intuitive inquiry and embodied writing as the methods of this study.

The Felt Dimension: Psychospiritual Qualities and Shifts in Being

The purpose of this section is to explore the subjective experience of being deeply moved and ways of understanding this experience. Welwood (2000) noted:

Human experiencing is a rich, complex tapestry, consisting of many interwoven strands of feeling, sensing, and knowing. At every moment

we are processing much more information, sensing many more levels of meaning and deeper qualities of existence than we are explicitly aware of at the time. (pp. 87-88)

In this section, I group several lenses together to discuss the various feeling, sensing, and knowing dimensions that comprise the felt experience of being moved. As I described above, these lenses are broadly conceptualized in terms of *heart opening*, *heart knowing*, *heart breaking*, and the experience of *gratitude*.

Heart opening: Feeling and letting go. At the outset of this study, it was clear that the experience of being deeply moved often, if not always, included a powerful emotional component. However, other factors seemed just as relevant to the experience, and categorizing the experience of being deeply moved as an emotion seemed unnecessarily limiting. I had several lively discussions with the chair of my committee in which we debated whether or not the experience of being deeply moved should be categorized as an emotion. I struggled to reconcile the fact that experiences which I regarded as similar to the experience of being deeply moved—such as awe and elevation—were considered by other theorists to be emotions. This quandary was compounded by the fact that I anticipated finding not just one emotion in participants' experiences of being deeply moved, such as joy or awe, but a variety of emotions. In addition, I felt that the range and prominence of the emotional dimension of being deeply moved connected to both the strong somatic dimension of the experience and to a permeability of the self such that one might truly experience and therefore be affected by the world. Ultimately, this led me to the perspective that the experience of being deeply moved was more complex than could be accounted for solely in terms of emotion. I articulated this perspective in the following preliminary lens: (#1)

Complexity: According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003), the word move can

imply the excitation or expression of emotions. However, this study posits that when people use the phrase “being deeply moved,” they are indicating something more complex either than the experience of heightened emotions or than can be found in the description of any specific emotion.

I conceived of the related dimensions of experiences of being deeply moved in several lenses: (#2) *Opening: In experiences of being deeply moved, there is a relaxation of physical and psychological armoring or boundaries. There is an experience of “opening” that may come with a feeling of softening or melting. With this opening, there is the sense of being “touched” or “penetrated” by the world.* (#3) *Allowing: In experiences of being deeply moved, there is often a sense of allowing and embracing rather than resisting experience, including characteristically uncomfortable experiences such as fear or uncertainty.* (#5) *Affectivity: Because one is open to being “affected” by life, being deeply moved may include an experience of seemingly paradoxical emotions—such as joy and sadness—simultaneously.* (#6) *Embodiment: Being deeply moved is an embodied, physical experience. The physical component may include sensation in the chest, chills, tears or the sense of being physically or energetically opened.*

These interpretations have largely remained intact but have deepened throughout the course of this study. After reflecting on the participants’ experiences of being deeply moved and developing an integrated understanding of this phenomenon, I now view the majority of physical sensations and emotions that occur in experiences of being deeply moved as expressions of the opening or expansion of the body and the psyche. I also see that this somatic and emotional opening corresponds or co-arises with the inner

orientation of allowing and embracing rather than resisting one's experience. This allowing and embracing includes both intrapsychic, internal experiences, and one's interrelationship with the world, such that there is an openness to being touched and affected by the world. All of these aspects of openness provide access to the vitality of the living body and a natural experience of the living world.

The most significant evolution of my understanding of these lenses is that I now view all of the dimensions of the experience of being deeply moved that are articulated in this section as expressions of the opening of the heart. As I noted in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the word heart as I am using it in this context does not literally refer only to the physiological heart. Rather, the heart can be understood as a metaphor for that which is central, basic or essential, particularly in the human experience, and which often manifests in a bodily felt experience. I will continue to elaborate on the concepts of heart and heart opening further in this section, but will instead begin my analysis with the opening of the body.

Throughout the participants' stories, the somatic dimension of the experience of being deeply moved reflects the quality of opening in a variety of ways. Participants reported a range of physical sensations and experiences, such as a warm, tingling feeling in the chest or warmth throughout the body, chills and goose bumps, sudden gasping or the sense of having the breath taken away, tears or sobbing, heart pounding, smiling, feelings of lightness and aliveness, and the freedom from physical pain.

Shoshana offered many examples of the heightening of her sensory experience:

I felt an immediate chill . . . the ray and warmth of sunlight, the very literal moment of silence . . . the goose bumps that arose on my skin . . . I literally gasped, then smiled . . . I felt a warmth radiating through me—touching my energy centers, my *chakras* . . . quickened heartbeat,

increased awareness or arousal. . . . Maybe the best way to describe it is how I felt each time after giving birth—the burst of endorphins just produces such an overwhelming feeling of triumph and joy.

Although my context for understanding these experiences is quite broad, I also understand these sensations as expressions of opening in a physiological sense, such as warmth resulting from the dilation of capillaries.

Bird noted that heightened physical sensations came with a heightened sense of awareness:

The sudden release of all that tension catapults me into a state of heightened awareness. Intensity and detachment strike a balance. Complexity melts into simplicity. . . . My heart pounds through my chest as if I'm empty, but I've never been more full.

She continued: "I can feel the electricity in my fingertips. I can feel it in the wind moving my hair. I am much bigger now than I could ever be by myself." The release of physical tension brings a sense of both emptiness and fullness and sparks a sense of inner opening. Bird further reflected: "Something inside me blossoms."

Several participants reported this sense of the release or relaxation of tensions during their experiences of being deeply moved. Throughout his story, William wrote about a sense of relaxation—into the past, into his body and into the earth, both during the experience of being deeply moved and when recalling it. He noted that even now, when he remembers this powerful experience, it continues to bring a sense of ease, such as "space is created around the constriction in my chest." Katherine also wrote about a sense of softening and opening in the body:

Though my body is still reeling from living and working in [city in California] for five months, I feel a renewed sense of belonging and purpose. . . . I breathe a deep sigh of relief. . . . I am reborn.

Elsewhere, she reflects: “We all suffer, I conclude, and my body softens to that certainty.” Overall, the somatic dimension of the experience of being deeply moved can be characterized by expansion, release of tension, heightened sensation, and the feeling of aliveness.

The opening or softening of chronic tensions in the body is central to many forms of somatic psychology. Reich (1976), grandfather of somatic psychology and pioneer in the field, describes the body as the primary expression of the psyche—both the conscious dimension and the unconscious dimension within which it is embedded. Instead of focusing on symptoms, he treated patients by interpreting their *character*, or integrated ego structure, which consists of habitual attitudes, styles of behavior such as shyness or aggressiveness, and physical postures and movements. Reich described character armor as the chronic patterns of psychological and physical repressive defenses. According to Reich, patterns of character defense correspond with postural habits and physical gestures; in this way, body armor and psychological armor have the same psychic function and cannot be separated. From this perspective, the body can be seen as a medium that both directly expresses the psyche and is organized as a defense against intrapsychic conflict and unresolved emotions. In reflecting on this issue in the therapeutic endeavor, Green (2001), a psychoanalyst, stated: “Over the years the body becomes a repository of psychic conflict and affect-laden events that cannot be integrated or resolved” (p. 568). In the average person, the body defends against the anxiety associated with the conscious experience of these inner conflicts by storing and expressing them.

According to this understanding of character armor, bodily tensions and habits can act as a defense and not only dampen our experience of anxiety, but the natural vitality and spontaneity available in the psyche and body. However, in the present study, participants reported the concurrent release of physical and emotional tensions, which suggests that experiences of being deeply moved seem to offer a reprieve from the physical and psychological armoring found in the average person. For example, for many participants the experience of being deeply moved occurred when there was a shift from a closure or emotional contraction such as anger, sadness, or fear, to a sense of letting go, both physically and emotionally. Leigh described the pain and contraction she experienced after a fight with her brother, and the physical and emotional opening that ensued:

My head is racing as I sit with discomfort, in silence. . . . It is like pushing open a door that is jammed shut by a big heavy couch. I push and I push and I push and the weight of the couch begins to ease up some and so I push some more and I sweat and I push and I push until I open that door. The door is inside of me and the opening is too. I feel space and I feel something else. I feel ok. And I begin to find that breathing is easier . . .

Katherine also wrote in her list about being deeply moved after a fight with her brother: “Something in me completely releases and is filled with love. My body unwinds; my anger cools.” In her list, Katherine wrote of experiencing a sense of relief and ease in her body when she allowed herself to be deeply moved by the deaths that occurred during the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001:

I open up the Boston Globe two weeks after dreaded 9/11. Photos of all the people who died in the airplanes are displayed in a special section and for the first time since the event occurred I begin to weep. I feel the magnitude of it all and my own grief. A great sense of relief washes over me; my body feels soft and supple.

Amy reflected on an acute sense of emotional and physical contraction that preceded her experience of being deeply moved:

[It was] like a bulky sack of rocks pressing downward in my belly. I could feel the heat of regret. Sadness blackened the sky as it closed down hard. I no longer felt that vastness of land and the freedom of movement.

Her experience of being deeply moved occurred when she was able to let go of the pain and transform her perspective about the past. “How light my body felt when the harness from decades of weight fell away. The heat of my face warmed tears that were once two rivers of watery grief, while hope silenced the dark voice of the past.”

Tom’s story involved a dramatic shift from holding a fixed point of view about a painful situation to psychologically and physically letting go. For him, the experience of being deeply moved involved the release of both emotional and physical pain:

A wave of relief filled my body and I suddenly began to sob. Tears streamed down my face with the realization that I was holding onto something that had nothing to do with me. I felt exhausted, but I no longer had that physical pain reaching deep into my heart.

Another participant, Elizabeth, reported the relief of chronic physical pain during an experience of being deeply moved:

The snow and the cold warmed by the sun took away for just that moment, and in memory and writing, the heaviness that sometimes comes with living and the grief that comes with losing someone dearly loved. In that moment, pain that inhabits my body daily, twenty-four years of chronic muscle pain linked with fibromyalgia, and all the psychic pain that goes with chronic pain, disappear. No need for drugs, no massage, no worry, no need to spur myself to do that which I may not have energy or time to do. In that moment, I am free of pain in all its forms.

These examples reflect that as the body and psyche open, we often experience relief from physical and emotional pain, and gain access to the natural flow of energy in the body and the freedom of emotional expression.

The participants' narratives also reflected a variety of subjective or emotional responses: From joy to grief; awe and wonder to profound peace; freedom to a sense of comfort and ease; deep humility to a sense of being renewed and reborn. Although there was a range of emotional responses, the participants almost universally reflected on their experiences of being deeply moved as positive. The physical and emotional experience was often intertwined in the participants' reports; this gives the sense that the whole being—body, mind, and heart—opens at once in the experience of being deeply moved.

The emotional component of the experience of being deeply moved can be gentle and may spread a sense of calm and well-being. For example, Aliza's experience of being deeply moved while saying a blessing for her daughter was quite gentle: "We are both relaxed and peaceful. As I say the blessing I can feel a warmth spreading through me and a feeling of lightness . . ." Hannah also reflected on her feelings of peace and quiet joy in the days when her grandmother was dying:

I felt such a sense of peace and of grace. I felt calm and still, as if I was tapping into another world, the place where she was going. . . . At times I would feel sad or wish she did not have to suffer at all, but mostly I felt at peace and even a quiet joy.

However, for many participants, the emotional dimensions of the experience of being deeply moved were quite powerful. For instance, Katherine wrote: "Suddenly, I feel emotion rising from my bowels like a wave." Mark had a similar experience of being overwhelmed by emotion and sobbing uncontrollably:

Then it happened. I was suddenly overcome with a flood of emotions, as if I was hit by a lightning bolt. The onset was so sudden, I began to sob uncontrollably. The sobs turned to tears and before I knew what was happening, tears were streaming down my face.

Amy also experienced strong emotion, tears, and a variety of physical sensations including heat, chills, and lightness in her body:

Then my eyes filled with tears so quickly they were streaming before I realized it wasn't the cold or the strong winds that caused the tears. It was my *sudden open heart*. My legs tingled while chills spread down my back and along the backs of my arms. [Italics added]

For Leigh, the powerful emotion she experienced resulted not only in tears, but a whole variety of sensations that she described as both painful and positive:

My eyes well up, full and wet. My stomach feels queasy with fast heartbeats still going inside it. I take hold of the kitchen counter with both hands and stand feeling how deeply moved I am in this moment. Being moved feels painful yet ecstatic, sad yet celebratory, stunted and vastly opened. I am at the mercy of something great. It takes strength just to stand and breathe into this sensation that is burning and twisting around inside me.

In all of these experiences, it is as if the depth of feeling that is suddenly available in the experience of being deeply moved is more vast than what the body can contain, so one either relaxes open or bursts open and there is a subsequent outpouring of emotion. Josh wrote of bursting and exploding with feeling and tears:

There is just obliteration. Exploding inside. Bursting bright, bringing me to tears. I try not to cry, but there is no stopping it. . . . An ocean of feeling filling the thimble of my heart cracks open as I drowned in a warm brightness. . . . There is only this grateful explosion moving me to tears. Even now, sitting in the corner of my room at my little desk typing, I'm a soggy mess. Trying to capture the particles of feeling as they explode, my eyes blurry with tears, holding a damp tissue, wiping my runny nose.

Another texture of opening found in the experience of being deeply moved is the release of resistance—be it to a particular situation, to an emotion, or even to death. Allowing—rather than resisting—transforms what would otherwise be considered a “bad” experience into an opportunity to open. In Christine’s story of running a marathon, she wrote:

At this moment, I am running farther than I have ever before. I start crying, the sort of sob that is part self-pity but mostly relief. I have physically stripped down my guards and am now moving into my core feelings. My muscles have completely broken down and have no reason to be doing what they're doing. . . . I have no external resistance.

Mark wrote about his attempt to resist his spontaneous outburst of tears, but the fact that he was unable to hide his grief provided the opportunity for deep healing.

I also felt extremely embarrassed. Men don't cry—let alone in public. Least that was what I was taught. I tried without success to hide my grief. . . . It just happened, like being hit by lightning. It was bitter, but it was sweet.

Katherine reported a similar experience of “a deep sense of letting go of all that has come before this moment in my 20 years of existence.”

Pema Chodron (1997), an American Tibetan Buddhist nun and author of many books on Buddhist wisdom for everyday life, has written extensively about the art of allowing and embracing, particularly when life feels difficult or one feels resistance. In her book, *When things fall apart: Heart advice for difficult times*, she wrote:

Each day, we're given many opportunities to open up or shut down. The most precious opportunity presents itself when we come to the place where we think we can't handle whatever is happening. . . . That's being nailed by life, the place where you have no choice except to embrace what's happening or push it away. (p. 12-13)

According to Chodron, whenever we encounter something challenging in the world or in ourselves, particularly intense emotions such as fear or anger, it tends to trigger our resistance: We don't want to feel what we are feeling; we don't want to have the experience we are having. Throughout her books, she offers practices wherein one learns to remain open to intense emotion, which allows it to pass through. The willingness to feel what is actually occurring can transform what would otherwise be an

unwanted experience into an opening to deeper consciousness and well-being. She continued:

Rather than indulge or reject our experience, we can somehow let the energy of the emotion, the quality of what we're feeling, *pierce us to the heart*. This is easier said than done, but it's a noble way to live. It's definitely the path of compassion—the path of cultivating human bravery and kindheartedness. (p. 15) [Italics added]

Throughout these accounts, participants wrote about the experience of heart opening, or being pierced to the heart. This phenomenon of heart opening does not refer only to the physical heart or a sensation in the chest, but rather involves one's entire being—body, mind, emotion, and some would say spirit. As I noted previously, the heart often refers to that which is essential or central, and has almost universally been used as a symbol for the spiritual, emotional, and moral core of the human being. The terms *heart* and *heart opening* are in the common vernacular, and are often used poetically to refer to one's innermost feelings and inclinations, and sometimes passion and strong emotion. In the context of this study and in light of the participants' stories, I understand heart opening to mean the access, often suddenly, to this spiritual, emotional and moral core, which is often experienced as access to love and to the sense of things as intrinsically meaningful.

My understanding of the interrelationship between heart opening and emotional expression in the experience of being deeply moved is beautifully informed by Welwood (2000) in his advice on “making friends with emotion” (p. 181). He wrote:

Emotions, we could say, are the blood shed by the ego—they start to flow whenever we are touched, whenever the defensive shell around the heart is pierced. Trying to control them is an attempt to keep this shell from cracking. Letting ego bleed, on the other hand, opens the heart. Then we rediscover ourselves as living beings who are exposed to the world, interconnected with all other beings. Letting go of judgments and

story lines and feeling this naked quality of being alive wakes us up and nurtures compassion for ourselves and others. (p. 189)

This sentiment echoes the words of Chodron (1997) and is central to my understanding of the experience of being deeply moved. Although the emotional component of the experience of being deeply moved is considerable, describing it as an emotion or as simply the state of heightened emotion misses the most significant aspect of the experience. More to the point is that the experience of being deeply moved involves opening to—or being opened by—the energy or emotion of the experience we are having and allowing it to open the heart, which provides access, often suddenly, to this spiritual, emotional and moral core. As White (1998) noted, opening and accepting one's experience, particularly EHEs, “seem to catalyze a process that eventually can lead to the realization of the person's higher human potential. Lives, worldviews, and even identities can be transformed” (p. 129). These are themes that I will return to in following lenses; for now, what is apparent in the participants' responses is that the body and psyche open up and flood with feeling and sensation in response to the opening of the heart.

When I contemplate this dimension of the experience of being deeply moved in a personal way, what emerges is an inner voice that declares my willingness or surrender—my *Yes*—to life, despite of its obstacles. This voice says: “Yes . . . even in the face of *this*, this thing that I thought was unbearable, I am willing to open, I am willing to soften, to feel, to care. Even to this I say yes.” This sentiment was reflected by Bird, who wrote: “I open my heart up as wide as I can and focus all my attention on surrender.”

It was beyond the scope of this study to assess for openness as a quality of personality in relation to experiences of being deeply moved; however, the substantial literature on trait openness can lend greater understanding to the activity of opening described by the participants. ‘Openness to experience’ is conventionally recognized as a basic dimension of personality in the widely used five-factor model, the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992). In this construct, 30 personality traits are organized into five dimensions, which include: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C). Costa and McCrae (1992) offer the following description of trait openness: “Although open individuals are indeed intellectually curious, they are also aesthetically sensitive, high in need for variety, and liberal in their value systems” (pp. 659-660).

Mittelman (1991) extended the concept of trait openness, which he defined in a similar fashion as is used in systems theory. Mittelman stated: “An open system takes in matter, energy, and information from its environment and actively makes use of this input, often in novel and creative ways” (p. 117). He examined Maslow’s studies of self-actualizing people in light of this perspective and asserted that Maslow’s individuals were not distinguishable from others by their self-actualization but rather by their ability to live openly. Mittelman (1991) argued:

And to say of Maslow’s subjects that they are distinguished from others by their openness is to say that they are, to a greater degree than ordinary, both receptive and responsive to information from the world (and from themselves). They do not repress or ignore uncomfortable facts and problems, and their view of these facts and problems is not distorted by wishes, fears, past experiences, or prejudices. Receptiveness to information includes not only an ability to see things clearly, but also an interest in, respect for and appreciation of the world. (p. 117)

According to Mittelman, openness involves receptiveness and sensitivity to new information about one's self and the world, and the ability to respond in a way that actively uses the information. He asserted that characteristics of truly open people include curiosity and interest in the world, creativity, autonomous thinking, the ability to integrate discrepancies in information and hold paradoxical ways of thinking, and the acceptance and enjoyment of reality, including the uncertain aspects. According to Maslow's (1970) observations of self-actualizing people, "This tendency to enjoy rather than be frightened of the unknown means that very open people have 'more comfortable relations' with reality than the average person" (pp. 153-154). Several of these qualities, such as the ability to hold paradoxical ways of thinking, are elaborated more fully in the lens *Heart breaking*. Here, my intention is to highlight Mittelman's concept of openness as receptiveness and responsiveness corresponds with the qualities of allowing and embracing that I have noted in the participants' stories: Allowing is essentially a receptive stance, while embracing experience involves being able to respond creatively and openly.

Another way to understand the phenomenon of becoming more open to and affected by the world is in terms of *boundaries*. Hartmann (1991), a psychoanalyst, therapist and researcher in sleep and sleep disorders, proposed the concept of boundaries as a new dimension of personality. While researching nightmares, he discovered that those who suffer from nightmares had many characteristics in common with one another. These characteristics included a high degree of openness, vulnerability, and sensitivity—both emotionally and perceptually—and the tendencies to be unguarded, highly trusting, and artistic, all of which were largely unrelated to

childhood trauma or pathology. According to Hartmann, the nightmare sufferers could be characterized by “thin or permeable boundaries, by fluidity, by merging, in a number of different psychological senses” (p. 17). He elaborated:

Whatever two entities in our minds or our worlds we are talking about, they can be conceptualized as relatively separate (having a thick boundary between them) or in closer communication (with a thinner boundary between them). Similarly, most of us feel or think of some kind of boundary around ourselves, between us and the world; again this can be a firm or solid separation (thick), like a wall or coat of armor, or less firm and easily penetrable (thin). (p. 21)

To examine this concept, Hartmann developed an assessment called the “Boundary Questionnaire” (p. 18), which is a 145-item, 5-point, self-report scale that measures the relative thickness or thinness of a variety of intra- and interpersonal boundaries. More than two thousand people have been administered this questionnaire, and the scale has been found to have good internal consistency and validity (MacDonald, LeClair, Holland, Alter, & Friedman, 1995).

According to Hartmann, “boundaries in a broad sense include protection against the world” (p. 171). He discussed types of boundaries, including those related to perception, thoughts, feelings, the body, and states of awareness, including the boundaries between sleeping, dreaming, and waking. Among other topics, he also explored interpersonal and intrapsychic boundaries, and the way in which defense mechanisms can be understood as boundaries. Although becoming too psychologically permeable can be associated with instability or mental illness, so too can a rigid, closed, or inflexible psyche be prone to character disorders or a sense of being dissociated from life. Hartman (1991) continued:

We have seen that thin boundaries clearly have adaptive aspects—openness, certain creative abilities, and so on—and also maladaptive aspects, such as vulnerability, and the tendency to become lost in fantasy

or to be hurt too easily. Thick boundaries are adaptive in making one well organized, punctual, reliable, responsible, and efficient but may be maladaptive insofar as they lead to rigidity and inability to change. (pp. 188-189)

Hartmann's position clearly does not prize either thin or thick boundaries, but recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of each.

The experience of being deeply moved seems to occur with the thinning of one's normal boundaries—sometimes regarding a particular function, and sometimes in a global fashion. For instance, William described his body as being more permeable, and his sense of self as extending beyond the body:

though I am trying to reenter my body, I vibrate right through the transparent membrane of skin I once found so sound. I rise above myself, awash in sizzling energy, bursting through. Awareness of self moves beyond the boundaries of my physical body and lifts above and around it. I experience myself in the air around me. . . . the walls no longer contain me. . . . I no longer sense where he begins and I end.

James wrote of the sense of dissolving into his lover and into the experience of being deeply moved:

Then the room seems to dissolve. I see only Maya's face and I am drawn deep into large, brown eyes filled with tears. Emotions of deep love, deep connection, fill my chest. My own tears of joy join hers.

In her list, Katherine wrote: "I feel free, happy and deeply connected. I am this field."

The thinning of boundaries that occurs in the experience of being deeply moved predominantly occurs in the interpersonal domain, such that there is a greater sense of empathy and connection with others, and a greater propensity to be affected by encounters with others. It also can include the thinning of bodily and intrapsychic boundaries; defense mechanisms relax, and the sense of identity becomes more permeable and can widen to encompass larger spheres of consciousness. In addition, the experience of being deeply moved may include the thinning of other boundaries, for

example between states of awareness, as is seen in participants who reported being deeply moved during altered states of consciousness. Although boundaries were thinner than normal in the experience of being deeply moved, participants did not report a corresponding instability or inappropriate vulnerability that can be associated with thin boundaries. Rather, the experience of being deeply moved seemed to offer an opportunity to temporarily access the gifts of the state of greater openness, which I believe might offer a lasting sense of flexibility and strength of character. Some of these possible enduring strengths are explored in the section of lenses that address the transformative and healing dimensions of the experience of being deeply moved.

The findings of the present study are also supported by Palmer and Braud's (2002) research on the disclosure and assimilation of EHEs. Hartmann's Boundary Questionnaire was among the standardized assessments analyzed in a postassessment phase of their study. The results of this analysis indicated a significant correlation between self-reported frequent or profound EHEs and thin boundaries, which suggested that a variety of EHEs are associated with increased openness.

If the concept of character or body armoring is considered again, it can also be understood as a kind of thickened boundary that acts as a defense against one's intrapsychic experience and against the direct or immediate perception of the environment. From this perspective, chronic physical and emotional tensions or closures can be seen as a way of mediating contact with oneself and the world. Kepner (1999), a gestalt and somatic psychologist who wrote extensively about the embodiment of experience and its implications for psychotherapy, noted the loss in functioning that occurs when contact with the environment is limited by inner defenses:

Those aspects of one's functioning that are disowned—that is, not experienced as self—are not fully available for contact with the environment. The more limited one's capabilities for contact, the more one's experience of self and of the environment becomes fragmentary, disorganized, and subject to resistance. (p. 11)

This perspective can be more deeply understood in light of the philosophy of phenomenology. According to Sokolowski (2000), a contemporary phenomenologist, “phenomenology is the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (p. 2). Husserl (1936/1970), who is considered to be the founder of phenomenology, introduced the concept of *Lieb* to mean the *lived-body*, in contrast and as an alternative to *Korper*, the purely physical body. He also discussed the *lebenswelt*, which translates in English to mean the *life world*. Husserl argued that the world of immediate experience is the fundamental basis of human reality, and that thoughts and conceptualizations can separate us from the direct lived experience of the world. Because the experience of being deeply moved can be considered to include a general opening of the body and psyche, a softening of defenses, and a thinning of boundaries, it can also be considered a moment in which there is greater access to the life world—to the fullness of subjective experience and contact with the world as it is.

Heart knowing: The authentic knowing of the heart is the foundation of meaning, inner guidance, and the feeling of connection to something larger than oneself. In my own life, the experience of being deeply moved has been one of the keys to an experience of inner richness. My capacity to be moved has made such a profound difference in the quality of my everyday life; I marvel at the moments when I am deeply moved by even the smallest things, such as a tiny flower peaking out of a crack in the

concrete. However, I might just as easily encounter the same situation and leave the moment untouched and unmoved, and somehow starving for a kind of soul-nourishment that was potentially available had I encountered the moment differently. What happens in the moments when we are deeply moved by the wondrous beauty, inescapable suffering, and ordinary details of life—rather than numb to them, unaffected by them, and disconnected from them? What accounts for the opening, allowing and embracing discussed in the previous lens?

The clearest way I have found to account for this phenomenon is found in literature regarding *transpersonal knowing*. Puhakka (2000), a psychologist, Zen practitioner, and one of the editors and contributors to the book *Transpersonal Knowing*, defined authentic knowing as “knowing by and for oneself” (p. 5). The activity of knowing can be understood as distinct from *having knowledge*, which “consists of descriptive or interpretive claims to the effect that ‘such-and-such is the case’” (p. 15). Puhakka elaborated: “‘Knowing’ is the moment of awareness in which contact occurs between the knower and the known. This contact is nonconceptual, nonimaginal, nondiscursive, and often extremely brief” (pp. 15-16). Authentic knowing is a natural quality of awareness and is available to everyone, though the experience of it is limited by the pervasiveness of coping mechanisms and incessant thinking. Because of this, the normal or “everyday” awareness of most people can be characterized by a distinct separation between a subject who knows and an object that is known. However, according to Puhakka, when knowing is direct and authentic, the distinctions between subjectivity and objectivity transform and begin to merge: “The coming together of the

subject and object, or the knower and the known, in the act of knowing obliterates their distinction in the moment of contact” (p. 18).

Knowing can thusly be understood as the vehicle of *relationship*—that is, the activity of consciousness that connects two seemingly separate entities. This harkens back to one of my original lenses: (#9) *Dialectical Relationship: Being deeply moved is an experience of connection in terms of a dialectical relationship between the personal self and something greater—rather than the experience of duality and disconnection or the experience of nonduality and union*. Drawing upon Walsh and Vaughan’s (1993) definition of *transpersonal* cited in Chapter 2, the term *transpersonal knowing* then refers to any activity of consciousness that offers (to varying degrees) immediate and direct apperception of and relationship to what is known in such a way that the sense of identity or self extends beyond the individual to connect with wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche, or cosmos.

Participants in this study reported a sense of connection with the object of their knowing in a variety of ways. For example, Bird wrote that the deep sense of contact she experienced was like merging: “It feels like the moment of making love when I forget my lover’s body is separate from mine.” Other participants specifically used the word *knowing* in their descriptions. Shoshana most clearly and repeatedly described her experience of authentic knowing throughout her accounts of being deeply moved:

It’s as if energizing light permeated my soul in a way that spread love, knowledge, peace; an overwhelming sense of just *knowing*.

I was filled with wonder and awe and *knowing* . . . knowing beyond all doubt that it was she who was there, choreographing the events that had occurred and were transpiring.

A few participants reported a suddenness to their knowing, which often included a sense of deep recognition or insight, as if something important was remembered or discovered. James reflected on this sense of discovery during his extraordinary sexual encounter:

I open my eyes and immediately sense something ‘different’ about Maya’s eyes and face. It is Maya, but not Maya. Something is different about her, but at the same time, I recognize the new her. The flash of recognition is similar to the ‘aha moment’ I experience when the solution to a puzzle or the punch line to a joke triggers a cognitive shift and a mental smile.

Shoshana described this sense of knowing as a “silent *eureka* moment.”

In some stories, the intuitive insights that became available with the deepened sense of knowing were pivotal in the experience of being deeply moved. In her list, Hannah wrote:

Some of my most moving experiences come from doing what I call my intuitive writing. I can write about anything and I tap an inner wisdom which always, always helps me. I come away from the writing moved and refreshed and with life much more in perspective. This type of writing I have been doing since 1988 and it never fails to be a deeply moving experience.

In Mark’s story, he initially does not understand why he is deeply moved, but the nature of the experience begins to reveal itself to him: “Then I began to understand. I was burying my mom. . . . I had not planned it that way. It just happened, like being hit by lightning.”

According to Hart et al. (2000), there are many modes of transpersonal knowing—such as inspiration, deep presence and mystical knowing—and many contexts that provide openings to transpersonal knowing—such as psychotherapy, service, and sexual experiences. The editors identify the qualities that distinguish transpersonal knowing across modes and contexts:

Authenticity—that this is one’s own knowing; immediacy—there is little or no conceptual mediation; connectedness—the boundaries that separate and create the sense of an isolated self seem to dissolve; and transformative capacity—the knower is changed by the knowing and at the same time, openness to change in one’s sense of identity opens one to the knowing. (p. 5)

I initially conceived of some of these aspects of the experience of being deeply moved in the following preliminary lenses: (#7) *Clear Perception of Reality: The experience of being deeply moved offers a subjectively clearer perception of reality that may be contrasted to the haziness of one’s normal state of consciousness. This does not preclude the experience of mystery or wonderment;* (#8) *Connection: The experience of being deeply moved involves a feeling of connection to something larger than oneself. There may be a feeling of intimacy and a sense that individual events or people are intimately connected with the whole of life. For most people, this is experienced as a deeper connection to specific other persons, humanity in general, nature, the cycles of life, the sacred, or God.* (#18) *Transformation: For some people, the experience of being deeply moved leads to major life choices and the sense of inner transformation.* The qualities of *connectedness* and *transformative capacity* are clearly represented here; I also now see that the lens *clearer perception of reality* is better articulated by the qualities *authenticity* and *immediacy* offered by Hart et al. (2000).

While I had not initially conceived of the experience of being deeply moved as epistemological in nature, there is clearly a shift in being, perception, and relationship that takes place which allows one to be deeply moved in a given situation rather than remain unaffected. In the experience of being deeply moved, the normal boundaries that define our relationship with ourselves, others, and the world at large, shift in such a way that life is understood and experienced more directly and intimately. This naturally

leads to a sense of connection to something larger than oneself, and depending on the depth of contact, can radically alter the ordinary sense of self. As I explore later in this chapter, the alteration in the experience of oneself can lead to lasting transformations in one's life and relationships.

While there may be many modes of transpersonal or authentic knowing that have these qualities, the unique dynamic that characterizes the experience of being deeply moved is that the knowing arises from the heart, or in other words, our spiritual, emotional, and moral core. When the heart is the lens through which the world is seen and understood, the relationship between subject and object is essentially one of love. I initially posited this theme in the following preliminary lens: (#4) *Unconditional Love: Love and appreciation for others and for life, just as they are, is the underlying context for the variety of emotions, cognitions and eliciting situations that may be present in experiences of being deeply moved.*

Many participants described the heart as the domain of knowing in their experiences of being deeply moved. For instance, just before Bird found the owl in the road, she wrote: "My heart tells me something is about to happen." In reflecting on her experience, Shoshana wrote:

When I'm moved by something such as this, I've come to learn I feel it in my heart. It's as if it's another sense or the ability to feel things without the tactile stimulation, like my heart starts to glow just as ET's had in the movie! I feel a radiation outward, a confirmation or a stamp of affirmation placed directly over my heart. And again, a sense of what I can only describe as *knowing*.

Christine wrote about being deeply moved during a marathon and crying while running. She described the knowing of her heart as the "force pushing me forward." "I

have to follow my heart, and I'm doing exactly that. I am in my instinct . . ." She then wrote:

My heart is now incorporated into my entire being. My heart is not this vital organ located in my chest, it is in every cell and intention of my direction. I'm running with my body, and I'm running with my heart. There is little, if any, distinction between the two. It still hurts to run, but I have no reason to hold back any longer.

Here, her heart is considered both the foundation of her inner guidance and as a unifying force that harmonizes body, mind and emotion.

For some participants, knowing through the heart gave rise to insights that facilitated a shift to openness in a painful situation. For instance, in a moment of deepened awareness, Tom suddenly realized how tightly he was holding onto his perspective and pain, and in the same moment was able to perceive his wife in a fresh and loving way, which was deeply moving for him. Leigh reported a similar experience after a fight with her brother in which her contracted state of awareness was transformed by seeing with love. She wrote: "My thoughts slow to a pace I can enjoy. I am thinking but my mind is no longer an enemy but a resource instead. . . . Remember. Every action is either love or a cry for love." I elaborate on this type of transformative impact of the experience of being deeply moved further in this chapter in the corresponding section of lenses; here I simply want to emphasize that knowing through the heart during the experience of being deeply moved can give rise to new, loving, and potentially transformative ways of understanding experience.

Maslow (1971) offered an in-depth exploration of the perspective and knowledge that becomes available when the mode of knowing is through love. He proposed that "love knowledge" (p. 17) or "taoist objectivity" (p. 15) as he termed it, is

in fact more accurate, objective and noninterfering than the classically objective modes of knowing that are found in the traditional scientific method. According to Maslow:

If we love or are fascinated or are profoundly interested, we are less tempted to interfere, to control, to change, to improve. . . . In other words . . . we do not wish it to be other than it is. We can be passive and receptive before it. Which is to say that we can see it more truly as it is in its own nature rather than as we would like it to be or fear it to be or hope it will be. Approving of its existence, approving of the way it is, *as it is*, permits us to be nonintrusive, nonmanipulating, nonabstracting, noninterfering perceivers. (p. 17)

Maslow's theory of love-knowledge suggests that knowing through the love—or through the various flavors of love, such as interest, appreciation, and delight—offers a clearer perception of reality than is available without love. Such an attitude produces openness or dropping of defenses on the part of the subject, which allows a perception of the other that is more direct and less mediated by concepts. This is well articulated by Shoshana, who remarked on the clarity of her perception during an experience of being deeply moved:

Like someone sitting in a dimly lit room and then, all of a sudden, someone else turning the lights higher so allowing the barely visible things *that were there all along* to be seen more clearly. Like I put on rose colored glasses and could grasp a better view of not just this world, but a world beyond, a different dimension. [Italics in original]

Although Maslow does not distinguish between *knowledge* and *knowing*, his use of the term 'love-knowledge' is more consistent with the concept of knowing, and thus could be considered *love-knowing*.

According to Puhakka (2000), authentic or transpersonal knowing is itself an act of love. "The coming together of object and subject is an act of love that involves an ontological shift from isolated being to expanded interbeing" (p. 27). This idea reminds me of a spiritual teaching I once heard, the essence of which is that there are only two

emotions—love and fear—and only two actions—moving toward and moving away. From that perspective, all forms of transpersonal knowing are forms of love, and forms of moving-toward. However, the flavor of transpersonal knowing that runs throughout the diverse experiences that are described as deeply moving is that the heart is the center of relating with life, and the knowing that occurs in this experience is of and through the heart. By this, I mean that the epistemological shift that occurs in the experience of being deeply moved is such that the subject is perceiving and knowing from the essence of what he or she truly cares about, which elicits feelings of love and the sense of things as intrinsically meaningful.

The experience of being deeply moved also offers the direct experience of the profundity of life, and is therefore often considered more real and significant than normal ways of being and knowing. Unlike the process of meaning-making that was discussed in Chapter 3, this quality of meaning is self-evident rather than unfolding over time. As is reflected in the participants' responses, this component can also assist in understanding and affirming life and can contribute to the ongoing process of assimilating and integrating the experience of being deeply moved. In my initial lenses, I wrote about this in terms of *meaning* and *remembrance*: (#13) *Meaning: The experience of being moved is meaningful to people. There is a sense during the experience that what is occurring is more real and significant than normal ways of being.* (#16) *Remembrance: The experience of being deeply moved offers a remembrance of what is truly important in oneself and in life. Ordinary personal concerns are seen in a new light, often as trivial.*

For some participants, the experience of being deeply moved served as a reminder of the goodness in life. Katherine wrote: “I am filled with life’s benevolence and a deep sense of letting go of all that has come before this moment in my 20 years of existence.” Elizabeth wrote in a similar vein: “Natural beauty is a reminder of all that is good in my life. It lets me remember friends, family, students, books, photography, poetry, all the things that save me, all the things that mend my spirit.”

Other participants expressed that an experience of being deeply moved helped them make sense of life. For instance, Bird wrote: “I watch that single moment expand until all the moments of my life line up behind it making sense in a new way.” Leigh also wrote: “In these moments of love our whole life seems to make sense to me.”

For Mark, the experience of being deeply moved reaffirmed the purpose and meaning of life:

That experience at that graveyard that day will always live deep inside of me. It was deeper than just coming to terms with my mother’s death, it was a reaffirmation that there is a purpose to this thing we call life.

Katherine had a similar experience of being deeply moved that included a sense of being connected to what is truly meaningful, which she described as a “stronger undercurrent.”

He is telling me about how his friends and family staged a healing circle to save his brother’s life during a critical time in his illness. Their prayers not only helped his brother divert death but he ended up living for two more years. Suddenly my excitement over my hard-earned grade feels petty. A stronger undercurrent takes its place.

In these examples, the participants were not referring to the cognitive activity of making sense of life or the development of a philosophy about life, but rather a deep sense of understanding that can be considered a quality of the transpersonal knowing of the heart.

The experience of being deeply moved not only offers the perception of life as meaningful, but also the inner recognition that what is being experienced is real, important, good, beautiful, or sacred. This inner experience corresponds to the major philosophical categories: Metaphysics and epistemology, which inquire into the nature of what is real and authentic; ethics and politics, which inquire into the nature of what is good and important; and aesthetics, which inquires into the nature of what is beautiful and sacred. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer a treatise on the real, the good, and the beautiful, the fact that the participants in this study consistently had a felt experience of these dimensions may actually be a function of our ability to discern, and may have implications beyond the subjective when examined from a phenomenological and transpersonal perspective.

Phenomenology posits that consciousness and the world arrive at a true meeting place in the act of perception. This perspective acknowledges the filters and distortions we bring to perception and accounts for this in its methodology. However, phenomenology posits that appearances are truly based on the nature or identity of objects, and that it is both the nature of objects to allow themselves to be known and the nature of consciousness to perceive. According to Sokolowski (2000):

Phenomenology insists that identity and intelligibility are available in things, and that we ourselves are defined as the ones to whom such identities and intelligibilities are given. We can evidence the way things are; when we do so, we discover objects, but we also discover ourselves, precisely as datives of disclosure, as those to whom things appear. (p. 4)

From a phenomenological perspective, the way objects reveal themselves to us is real; their manifest appearance is an aspect of their being and an expression of their identity. Our ability to accurately perceive objects is a function of the relative clarity or

distortion of our consciousness. This is consistent with the literature on transpersonal knowing, which suggests that through shifts in consciousness, it is possible to have an immediate and direct perception of the *object* of our knowing beyond conceptual mediation. This perception is further supported by Braud (2001), who described wonder-joy tears in a similar manner, “as a sort of fixed-action pattern that occurs in response to specific releasing stimuli. The tears may serve as signals or tools, if we heed them, for discerning what is right, good, important, and authentic in a non-egoic sense” (p. 106). The experience of being deeply moved can thusly be understood as the heart’s knowing and recognition of what is real, important, good, beautiful, or sacred.

Several participants specifically refer to values, intentions or behaviors that emerged directly from the experiences they reported in this study. Others speak more generally about embodying certain qualities in the moment that they clearly prize and aspire to. During Cycle 2 of this study, I hypothesized that there may be a set of values or motivations inherent in the experience of being deeply moved: (#17) *Virtue: For some people, the experience of being moved may result in the inspiration to live according to their values. There may be a set of values inherent in the experience, particularly in terms of making a contribution in the world, slowing down to appreciate life, and expressing love to others.*

For several participants, becoming aware of what is truly important or essential in life gave rise to specific values or intentions. In his list, Tom wrote about an experience of being deeply moved in which he realized that his normal concerns were trivial: “Taking Ayahuaska for the first time and realizing that my goals, etcetera are not important, but that primary experience and helping other people is more important.”

William also wrote of a desire to help others that emerged from his experience of being deeply moved: “Because I have benefited so greatly, I can only hope to impart to others the rich blessings I have received.” For Hannah, the deeply moving impact of her grandmother’s life and death motivates her—or “lives on”—in many ways. She wrote:

I feel my Grandmother lives on in many ways, whether through the work I have done as an art therapist in counseling children, as she helped children through education, or through the values I pass on to my own daughter.

In an email communication reflecting about the impact of her experiences of being deeply moved, Shoshana wrote: “I feel a tremendous capacity toward forgiveness and have been fairly successful in letting go of past grudges/resentments.”

While not all participants discussed a motivational component to their experience, there was an underlying intention present throughout their stories to value their experience, to live in alignment with what really matters and to continue to open their hearts. From this perspective, the authentic knowing of the heart can be considered both the foundation of inner guidance and a unifying force that harmonizes body, mind, spirit, and action.

Heart breaking: Apprehension and integration of the polarities of life. There was a bittersweet quality in most of the participants’ stories, and although the participants’ experiences can overwhelmingly be characterized as positive, many were tinged with sadness or came on the heels of pain or loss. The juxtaposition of bitterness and sweetness is essential in many experiences of being deeply moved. For instance, Mark considered his experience of profound grief to be a blessing. He wrote:

That day in the cemetery, I was taking care of some unfinished business. I had not planned it that way. It just happened, like being hit by lightning. It was bitter, but it was sweet.

In his list, Tom wrote: “Feeling my dad's love after he yelled at me for 2 hours, then him crying when he told me a story from his childhood.” Elizabeth was deeply moved by her mother’s expression of vulnerability and gratitude, partly because it was so rare: “My mother’s momentary and rare tears following major surgery when she told me, despite earlier protests about my taking off work, that she was glad I was there.” The beauty of this exchange was couched in the pain of the circumstances.

Throughout the participants’ stories, there was an awareness of the polarities of existence—such as life and death, joy and suffering, strength and weakness. In Cycle 2, I described this in the following lens: (*#12*) *Awareness of Suffering: The experience of being deeply moved may include an awareness and appreciation of the complexity and polarity of life. There may be a sense of life as beautiful and sacred, but also as painful, mysterious, and at times, unjust.* This perception has remained throughout this study, though after reading the participants’ stories, this dimension has also taken on the flavor of what Welwood (2000) described as the *broken-open heart*:

In opening to our experience of life as it is, we often find that it does not meet our expectations of what it should be. Perhaps we don’t fit the picture in our mind of who we should be. Perhaps those we love don’t measure up to our ideals. Or we find the state of the world disheartening, even shocking. Reality is continually breaking open our heart by not living up to how we would like it to be . . . If we can also open to our ‘broken-open heart,’ it has a bittersweet quality. Reality never quite fits our fond hopes—that is the bitter taste. The sweetness is that when reality breaks our heart open, we discover a sweet, raw tenderness toward ourselves and the fragile beauty of life as a whole. (p. 146)

In this statement, and in the participants’ stories, there is a sweetness or tenderness toward our own humanity, including our weaknesses and failings. Katherine expressed this sentiment in the following experience of being deeply moved:

All I can remember is the image of my brother—little more than a speck of a person—standing before his graduating class. Suddenly, I feel

emotion rising from my bowels like a wave. In what seems like a single second I have an image of my brother's life and all its mismatched pieces as he confidently addresses the Class of '85. I weep.

Braud (2001) noted a similar quality about the experience of wonder-joy tears, which he described as a “paradoxical appreciation, a holding of opposites: joy/sadness, bitter/sweet, tragic/beautiful, confused/clear, amazed/normal” (p. 102). Anderson (1996) also made similar observations about another experience that she called *sacred weeping*. In her research, she defined sacred weeping as the “‘spilling over of tears’ which is intense, spontaneous and seemingly involuntary, that is not caused by obvious immediate stimuli or set of conditions known to the weeper” (p. 167). Her research consisted of a combination of phenomenological content analysis of historical and contemporary Christian writings on mystical tears and phenomenological and heuristic analysis of three in-depth interviews. She noted that among other traits, sacred weeping included, “holding together the seeming (sometimes bittersweet) polarities of human existence, e.g., life and death, joy and despair” (p. 169), and “an apprehension of the ‘tragic dimension of human existence’ seen as universal rather than uniquely personal” (p. 170).

This lens is reminiscent of the existential literature reviewed in Chapter 2. As I discussed in that chapter, the essence of the existential challenge is to have the courage to encounter life as it is, to confront and embrace our inherent freedoms and limitations, and to develop a meaningful and authentic existence. Schneider (2004) elaborated on the need for *elasticity of being* in order to remain open to life and perceive its complexity:

We are in need of paradoxical wisdom. We need to see the complexity of things, the wholeness of things, which means the incompleteness and simplicity of things at the same time. We need to see that as soon as we

polarize, we partialize our understanding. As soon as we fixate, even if we fixate on what appears to be open and multiple, we lose the vitality of our being, the elasticity of our being, and the poignant predicament of our being. (p. xiii)

The ability to see the complexity of life, retain the elasticity of being, and rise to the existential challenge requires the ability to tolerate the anxiety that can be generated by encountering what is painful or unknown. One way to understand the ability to tolerate anxiety is in terms of the theory of differentiation, which describes the developmental process of defining oneself and reaching psychological maturity. This theory arose from the work of Bowen (1978) and is central to family systems theory. Unlike psychoanalytic theory, which focuses on the individual psychic structure and process, family systems theory sees the nature and development of the individual as arising from within relationship, primarily the family of origin. Family systems theory asserts that there are two instinctually rooted life forces: the need for individuality and autonomy, and the need for connection and communion. There is an inherent tension between the desire for togetherness and the desire for separateness, particularly because others with whom we are in relationship have the same needs for autonomy and communion, and not always in the same moments that we do. If the sense of self is poorly developed, differences between self and others are perceived as threatening, which is described as emotional fusion: Closeness with another can result in anxiety about losing oneself and separateness can create anxiety about losing the other. In contrast, differentiation is the ability to fully be oneself in the face of these tensions while emotionally engaged with important others.

While family systems theory illustrates the way these tensions play out in the development of the self in relationship, this is a perspective that is also applicable to the

ability of the self to tolerate the anxieties of life in general. The theory of differentiation describes the capacity of the self to either tolerate anxiety as fuel for growth or collapse the self and find ways to mitigate the anxiety, a perspective which is fruitful for the present inquiry. In short, the ability to tolerate anxiety can be understood as the developmental capacity to retain one's authentic being in the world in the face of risk and uncertainty. Schneider (2004) further noted the importance of this facet of psychological maturity:

We must recognize that the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, discord, and, strife is one of the hallmarks of maturation and that without such a reserve, there is almost no chance to thrive. (p. 40)

Experiences of being deeply moved are one answer to the existential challenge; they are moments of being spontaneously graced with the capacity to tolerate opposing forces in the self and in life. While these spontaneous moments are not a replacement for the sustained life-practice of the heroic attitude called for by existentialists (Yalom, 1981), nor a substitute for the higher stages of development in which this capacity is matured, they are moments that offer a glimpse of this capacity to individuals at all levels of development. This idea is supported by Maslow (1968) in his discussion of peak experiences:

Any person in any of the peak experiences takes on temporarily many of the characteristics which I found in self-actualizing individuals. That is, for the time they become self-actualizers. We may think of it as a passing characterological change if we wish, and not just as an emotional cognitive-expressive state. Not only are these his happiest and most thrilling moments, but they are also moments of greatest maturity, individuation, fulfillment—in a word, his healthiest moments. (p. 97)

The experience of being deeply moved can likewise be understood as providing what Maslow described above as a “passing characterological change” in which the higher

developmental capacities for tolerating complexity are temporarily revealed and the angst of existence is overcome in an affirmation of life.

Grace, gratitude, and the experience of being loved. One of the most common themes throughout the participants' stories was a sense of gratitude for the situation that elicited their experience of being deeply moved. Because the experience of being deeply moved naturally reminded them of what is truly important, participants also expressed gratitude for the capacity to be deeply moved itself. I captured this broadly in the following preliminary lens: (#15) *Grace: The experience includes a sense of being graced or gifted.*

Elizabeth's story began at a moment in her life when she was having difficulty feeling gratitude:

These days I wasn't feeling particularly thankful. My mom was to begin her third round of chemotherapy soon, merely to prolong her life, perhaps only by months, while it zapped her of energy and scrambled her thoughts. Ovarian cancer takes, rarely giving back.

For Elizabeth, being deeply moved by the beauty of nature offered a welcomed respite from the weariness and grief about her mother's illness. "I was truly saved by beauty on that Thanksgiving morning."

Josh's entire story was an expression of gratitude and appreciation for his father and gratitude for feeling love that deeply. Josh wrote:

An ocean of feeling filling the thimble of my heart cracks open as I drowned in a warm brightness. It is all I can say: 'Thank you for being my Dad.' I wish there were some ocean size words I could use, some super powered words that could contain the blast and communicate this enormous feeling force. But there are not. There is only this grateful explosion moving me to tears. Even now, sitting in the corner of my room at my little desk typing, I'm a soggy mess. Trying to capture the particles of feeling as they explode, my eyes blurry with tears, holding a damp tissue, wiping my runny nose.

For many participants, the situation that triggered their experience of being deeply moved was often considered a gift, blessing or miracle; in these cases, the sense of gratitude was extended to a specific person, to God, or to life in general. William wrote about his gratitude for the Native American spiritual teacher: “I feel infused with a warm feeling of gratitude for him, and for the intelligence radiating through him.” Further in his story, he wrote, “Gratitude fills my whole body.”

Mark shared his experience of spontaneous grief for his mother with a priest, who helped him contextualize his experience as a gift from God. Mark wrote:

I’ll never forget the look on his face that day after I told him. His face lit up and he looked in my eyes. ‘You are being blessed, my son,’ he said. ‘This is a gift from your creator.’

Mark also shared about his experience with another woman present at the funeral who said: ‘Don’t you see? You selflessly gave to your friend Richard who was reaching out for help and this is what was given to you for your help,’ she said. Those words reverberated through me.” These conversations were pivotal for Mark, who initially was embarrassed at his outburst of tears. Being offered the perspective that this experience was a blessing encouraged Mark to perceive this as a spiritual experience for which to be grateful.

Aliza also perceived her experience as gift from God: “There are tears of gratitude in my eyes; a thank you to God for helping us.” Bird considered her experience with the owl to be a miracle made possible by the synchronicities of life: “I’m deeply grateful for all the perfect synchronicity that has already occurred throughout time to allow this miracle to happen to me.” Later, she wrote: “This event was truly a gift in my life. It opens my heart instantaneously.”

Researchers Emmons and Shelton (2002) reviewed the current research on gratitude and offered a comprehensive theoretical perspective. They found that gratitude can be considered both an emotion and a moral attitude, and is characterized by thankfulness, wonder, and appreciation for life. An essential element in the experience of gratitude is the perception of the positive intention of the benefactor. Emmons and Shelton stated: “Although a variety of life experiences can elicit feelings of gratitude, prototypically gratitude stems from the perception of a positive personal outcome that is due to the actions of another person” (pp. 460-461). Regardless of who is perceived to be the benefactor, whether it is God, another person, or life itself, gratitude arises from the recognition of the other’s generosity and the empathic understanding that their intentions were positive. The authors elaborated:

Implicit in the experience of gratitude is the recipient’s theory of mind from which he or she infers another’s well-meaning intention, resulting in one’s feeling loved and esteemed. That is to say we can logically infer that a person feeling grateful might be more inclined to feel loved and cared for by others. (p. 461)

According to this view, feelings of gratitude that arise in the experience of being deeply moved are also connected with feelings of being loved. Regardless of whether a participant specifically articulated the particular way that their experience of being deeply moved connected with their life-philosophy, the activity of being grateful itself indicates a meaningful relationship between self and that which is larger than and loving toward the self. According to Emmons and Shelton, “gratitude provides life meaning, by encapsulating life itself as a gift” (p. 468).

Emmons and Shelton (2002) also noted that gratitude is one of the core characteristics that Maslow found in self-actualizing people. According to Maslow (1970), self-actualizers “appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods

of life with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may have become to others” (p. 136). Maslow, along with Emmons and Shelton, has concurred with folk wisdom by expressing the sentiment that life could be “vastly improved if we could count our blessings as self-actualizing people do” (p. 137).

Existential and Transpersonal Triggers: The Wondrous Beauty, Inescapable Suffering, and Ordinary Moments that Move People

The previous section of lenses explored the psychospiritual qualities and shifts in being that occur in the experience of being deeply moved. This section of lenses speak to the dynamic relationship between self and world in the experience of being deeply moved by introducing the most commonly cited eliciting situations. Rather than a simple list of triggers, these lenses explore the ways in which the qualities of knowing and feeling discussed in the previous section unfold in light of the situations that tend to induce them. In doing so, these lenses contextualize the experience of being deeply moved in a way that is applicable and meaningful to everyday life.

All of the triggers discussed in this section have been documented as triggers for peak experiences and a variety of EHEs (Keutzer, 1978; White and Brown, 2000). However, each of these encounters with the world call forth the experience of being deeply moved in unique and powerful ways. In this section, I discuss encounters with the following situations as triggers for the experience of being deeply moved: beauty and the natural world; personal suffering, including our own weaknesses and failings; encountering what is great or morally inspiring in the human spirit; simple human connections, and how the shared reality of the human condition is a vehicle for connection to each other and the reverence for life; and spiritual and transpersonal

experiences. Since each of these triggers could be the subject of their own study, I will not offer an exhaustive exploration of each. Instead, I provide examples from the participants' narratives to illustrate the patterns of life situations that tend to elicit the experience of being deeply moved and offer interpretations about the nature of these experiences to incite the qualities of heart opening, heart knowing, heart breaking, and gratitude cited in the previous section.

Beauty opens the heart and stirs the soul.

My eyes sip flowers
flavored with color nectar.
My heart is drawn to faces
lined with compassion and mirth.
My mind is washed
by showers of strength.
My spirit is soothed and blessed by beauty.
Some days, I am saved by beauty.

(By Elizabeth, a participant in this study)

The following preliminary lens articulated my initial sense of the aesthetic dimension of the experience of being deeply moved: (#12) *Beauty: Being deeply moved has an aesthetic component that involves appreciation of beauty. This appreciation may be of physical beauty or of inner beauty—for example, appreciation of beauty in the human spirit or in the power of nature during a storm.* This perception has remained, and was borne out in the participants' responses in this study: Participants discussed experiences of being deeply moved in relation to music, poetry, nature, and a general appreciation of the beauty inherent in life. However, inasmuch as I discovered what I anticipated finding, the power of beauty to evoke the experience of being deeply moved remains somewhat of a mystery, at least to my conceptual mind. Many studies have focused on the objects of beauty or standards of aesthetic judgment (e.g., Chen,

German, and Zaidel, 1997; Fechner, 1997). However, this research continues to beg the question of what is beauty? Wherein does it lie? In the subject that perceives beauty, or in the beautiful object itself? While there is an extensive history of philosophical inquiry into the nature of aesthetics, I will not attempt to define beauty, but instead will offer two interpretations about the questions posed above that are pertinent to understanding the experience of being deeply moved. First, the subjective perception of beauty is arguably contingent on the ability to appreciate what one is encountering, and as I discussed in the lens pertaining to the authentic knowing of the heart, Maslow (1971) considered appreciation to be a form of knowing through love. Because the experience of being deeply moved involves knowing and encountering life through the heart, it naturally elicits an appreciation of beauty. My second interpretation is simply that the subjective experience of beauty has the power to open the heart and, as Moore (1992) poetically described, to nourish and to stir the soul:

The soul is nurtured by beauty. What food is to the body, arresting, complex, and pleasing images are to the soul. . . . I will go so far as to say that if we lack beauty in our lives, we will probably suffer familiar disturbances in the soul—depression, paranoia, meaninglessness, and addiction. (p. 278)

Moore continued:

An appreciation for beauty is simply an openness to the power of things to stir the soul. If we can be affected by beauty, then soul is alive and well in us, because the soul's great talent is for being affected. The word passion means basically 'to be affected' and passion is the essential energy of the soul. (p. 280)

Because the understanding of beauty is still perhaps best left to the knowing of the heart rather than the knowing of the mind, my primary aim in this section is to illustrate the ways in which the appreciation of beauty occurred for participants as experiences of being deeply moved.

Several participants cited visual art, music or poetry as deeply moving, though not as many as I expected. This was particularly striking in contrast to the number of participants who wrote about interactions with other people, even arguments, that were deeply moving. It was also striking because music and poetry are often triggers for the experience of being deeply moved in my own life. Elizabeth was one of the few participants who described being moved by several forms of aesthetic triggers, including poetry, fiction and visual art. For example, she wrote: “Poems written by 14-year-old students in a poetry class I teach—the depth of thought and beauty of words has often stirred me to tears.”

Hannah also cited several forms of aesthetic triggers of being deeply moved, including the following regarding music:

It seems music takes me to another place and when I sing I feel moved by the tune and the words and the sharing of music with others. . . . Life without music would be so much less wonderful. When humans sing it’s as if we become songbirds and *celebrate life*. . . . One [song] I recall about forgiveness I sang in a Catholic church with a huge dome in Illinois. I am far from being Catholic in my beliefs but it did not matter; I was in a state of awe, and forgiveness felt so simple and easy as I sang about it. (Italics added)

Hannah’s reflections on music taking her to another place and singing as a celebration of life capture some of the power of these experiences to open the heart and incite the experience of being deeply moved. Josh cited music as deeply moving in a similar way: “Music that somehow touches my heart.” Aliza also described a moment of dancing to music as deeply moving:

Going out for a walk, returning home and putting on the radio. Starting to cook and getting swept up by the music (Yanni) and dancing around to the music, while occasionally stirring the pot. I felt one with the music and the cooking!

A number of studies have focused on art and music as the triggers for peak experiences and EHEs. For instance, Panzarella (1980) analyzed 103 descriptions of peak experiences, which he defined as “intense joyous experiences” (p. 71), in relation to visual art and music. He found that they involved three temporal stages: “starting with cognitive responses and loss of self; climaxing with continued loss of self and motor responses; and subsiding with emotional responses, self-transformation, and stimulus-specific responses” (p. 69). Music is also one of the most commonly cited triggers or antecedents for peak experiences (Hardy, 1979; Greeley, 1974; Lowis, 2002; Keutzer, 1978). Although most previous studies have focused on peak experiences rather than the experience of being deeply moved, the present study contributes to the considerable body of literature that notes the power of music and art to, as Moore (1992) described it, “stir the soul” (p. 280).

In contrast to the limited citations of art and music as deeply moving, the majority of participants wrote about experiences in nature as a trigger for the experience of being deeply moved. Tom wrote about several nature-related experiences, such the following: “Appreciating the Zen of the moment on my motorcycle chasing a gazelle through the skeleton coast.” In another example, he wrote, “Watching the dolphins on a moonless night come through phosphorescent water to my boat and my realizing the beauty of form.”

The following examples of being deeply moved in nature were written by William:

Swimming naked like otters in a lake with my best friend and lying on warm granite boulders shaking from the freezing water, hot from the sun, an Osprey calls and flies overhead between us and the sun.

Fasting on watermelon alone for three weeks and living in the woods of Florida, running across the fields, feeling light as a feather, at one with the earth beneath my bare feet, with the plants I have sown, grown and harvested, feeling inexhaustible strength, sensitivity, and lightness, and feeling deep sadness that so many others are not enjoying this feeling at this moment.

In the second example, his body was experienced as part of nature, and the experience of being deeply moved was connected both to his appreciation of nature and his state of being, and his sadness that others are not having the same experience.

Hannah also wrote about several experiences of being deeply moved in nature, including the following:

I have had many deeply moving experiences sitting by big trees. I have loved trees since I was a child and we had a maple and a willow in our yard. I felt such a kinship with those trees. I have always loved trees and in part moved back to the Midwest because I missed having lots of trees around. I have been deeply moved over and over by trees whether it be the trees from childhood or the giant sequoias in central California, or a huge old maple at the arboretum, or a giant cottonwood next to our old 1920's movie theatre in town here. I love trees and some of my most peaceful moments have been while under their canopy. I have a whole series of tree poems which came from being deeply moved by trees. They are the lungs of the earth and give us so much, be it wood for our homes or paper for our writing and research or a spiritual haven and place of rest. Forests are my favorite places to be.

This example clearly expresses her gratitude for nature, which was central to her experience of being deeply moved. She also wrote about several nature-related experiences of being deeply moved as moments of connecting with God, such as the following:

As a child I recall walking alone outside to the school bus. We lived in the first suburb right next to a big farm so it was almost the country. I can remember looking up at the blue sky and white clouds and thinking about God as everywhere and how profound that was and I felt in awe. I was about seven years old.

Elizabeth wrote specifically about the healing impact of a nature-related experience of being deeply moved: “The snow and the cold warmed by the sun took away for just that moment, and in memory and writing, the heaviness that sometimes comes with living and the grief that comes with losing someone dearly loved.”

Aliza wrote about the following experience of being deeply moved that involved her appreciation of beauty and had her feel connected to the world: “Opening up an avocado for lunch and being so aware of its beauty, and having such a sense of the whole world embodied in this fruit.” In reflecting on her experiences of being moved by beauty, she noted, “These are all connected to a particular state of mind, which allowed these experiences to take place.”

Personal suffering strips the identity and reminds us of what is essential. I expected to see a relationship between suffering and being deeply moved, and in my original definition of experiences of being deeply moved, I wrote that it “may involve being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life.” However, I didn’t expect participants to describe experiences that at first glance appeared to be pure misery, such as experiences of rejection, loneliness, the bitter end to a relationship, death without reprieve, or extreme personal lows that could be described as “hitting bottom.” For instance, Elizabeth cited a moment of being deeply moved as, “A 50-mile hike taken on Easter Sunday when I lost two toenails, rubbed raw by new JC Penney plastic shoes, feeling dejected about being last.” Elizabeth also cited several experiences on her list that related to issues of abuse, including: “Hearing that my sister had been sexually molested by my brother as a teenager,” and “my mother’s ‘social worker stance’ when she came to a therapy session to hear about my sexual abuse.”

The stories that related to personal failure and despair particularly caught my attention. William wrote about the following moment of being deeply moved: “As a teen, the moment I sat on the curb in Anaheim after having everything I owned taken from me, disowned by my parents in Ohio for dealing drugs, 3000 miles from anyone I knew, weeping, as cars fly by without even slowing down.” Tom wrote about a similar experience of weeping during a personal low: “Breaking down to sob when I admitted to myself that I had failed in my life's mission (at the time) and feelings for others who have failed when I had no empathy.” Mark wrote about years of personal despair and the eventual re-emergence of hope as deeply moving: “My battle to overcome opiate addiction following years of homelessness, dealing with all the relationships of the hopelessly addicted, the physical, mental and emotional pain and the re-emergence of hope in my life.”

Why did participants consider these experiences as examples of being deeply moved instead, for instance, examples of unhappiness, bitterness, or regret? How did these experiences relate to my original definition of experiences of being deeply moved that guided the participants in their writing, which included “a deeper sense of connection to themselves, other or the sacred?”

In order to understand these experiences, I chose to contemplate them in a particularly personal way, imagining what it might feel like to be deeply moved by these experiences and recalling similar experiences from my own life. The essential insight that emerged from my own reflections is that *pain has the ability to cut through everything that is not essential*. Pain can highlight the particular ways we have been self-deceptive and have strayed from what is essential and important. This point is

illustrated in some of the examples offered by participants, in which the pain they experienced was related to ways that they had not been loving to others or living according to their values. Finally, pain has the power to incite deep feeling; if one is in enough pain, there is no way to avoid feeling, which can, at times, be a relief in contrast to being numb.

My personal insights were supported by Rubin (2002) in his heuristic study of the experience of tragic optimism for ten individuals who had approached tragic and hopeful circumstances in their lives from an existential-humanistic worldview. His understanding of tragic optimism is derived from Frankl (1984) who, as I noted in Chapter 2 of the present study, described tragic optimism as “the human capacity to creatively turn life’s negative aspects into something positive or constructive” (p. 139).

Based on the results of his study, Rubin (2002) noted:

Tragic experiences circumvent one’s psychological constellation of dreads and permeate one’s being with the reality of chaos and loss. Tragedy cuts through anticipatory dread and one’s defenses against these unwanted experiences. (p. 178)

Pain can cut through our psychological defenses against life and can strip us of our normal identity. Chodron (1997) described this as *groundlessness*:

When things are shaky and nothing is working, we might realize that we are on the verge of something. We might realize that this is a very vulnerable and tender place, and that tenderness can go either way. We can shut down and feel resentful or we can touch in on that throbbing quality. There is definitely something tender and throbbing about groundlessness. (p. 8)

It seems to me that the difference between becoming shut down or resentful due to a painful event and being moved by it lies in our response. Do we open to it or resist it? Do we try to avoid being affected, or relate with life as if it were an enemy because this painful thing is happening that is beyond our control? Or is there a way of being with

painful experiences that opens the spirit and has us feel more connected to humanity and the fragility of life? In my experience, when I am deeply moved by painful experiences, it often has the components of the latter. This perspective is further supported by Rubin (2002), who noted: “Co-researchers discovered the potential for personal change and transmutation of tragic circumstances. The tragedy ceased to be conceptualized as tragic, but rather an essential feature for living a full and conscious existence” (p. 179).

It is not clear from the participants’ brief statements cited in this section that they necessarily or fully transformed their perspective of these deeply moving experiences of suffering from one of misery and tragedy to, as Rubin stated above, “an essential feature for living a full and conscious existence” (p. 179). However, what is clear is that the participants have incorporated these stories into a coherent life narrative in which they are remembered as deeply moving, and thus seen as significant moments capable of reminding one what is most essential in life.

Encountering the best qualities of the human spirit. One dimension of the experience of being deeply moved that has already received considerable theoretical attention is *elevation*. As I discussed in Chapter 2, elevation is elicited by witnessing acts of human kindness, compassion, and courage, and results in the motivation toward the same behaviors. Haidt (2003a, 2003b), the primary researcher of elevation to date, has described it as a *moral emotion*, meaning that it is an emotion that is elicited by situations that do not directly affect the self and result in a motivation toward prosocial behavior. However, as I argued in Chapter 2, I consider elevation to be only one way that the experience of being deeply moved manifests. In this lens, I offer examples from

the present study to illustrate the ways that the participants had experiences of elevation as moments of being deeply moved. Through these examples, I also extend Haidt's fine research on elevation to include not only witnessing compassionate or courageous acts that do not directly affect the self, but also situations in which the self directly benefits from the good deed, and situations in which the self is the benefactor.

Surprisingly, not as many participants offered stories of elevation, as defined by Haidt (2003a), as experiences of being deeply moved as I expected. However, Josh clearly noted this topic in his list in the following two statements: "Watching a scene from a movie that depicts a generous act of kindness;" and "seeing someone selflessly helping another out of love and connection."

Hannah offered several accounts in her list of being moved through witnessing the courage or kindness of others. She wrote:

I was very moved after reading a book about Harriet Tubman. I thought she was so brave and a heroine. I was in sixth grade and reading a biography about her was the most memorable experience I had in all of my grade school and junior high years. I was so moved by her story and what she did on the Underground Railroad helping people to escape slavery.

Katherine's experience of being deeply moved in the following story is one of elevation:

At the moment, I am completely caught up with a story he's telling me about his brother who ended up dying of AIDS. So enthralled am I by his story that my surroundings, the little awning overhead, the French-café styled chairs we're sitting on, the coffee, even the man before me seem to disappear. His deep, calming voice mesmerizes me. I take in every word. He is telling me about how his friends and family staged a healing circle to save his brother's life during a critical time in his illness. Their prayers not only helped his brother divert death but he ended up living for two more years. Suddenly my excitement over my hard-earned grade feels petty. A stronger undercurrent takes its place.

William also reports a moment of elevation as deeply moving:

Moments from many movies, such as *Braveheart* at the moment he calls out *Freedom!* My heart stretches in two directions, craving adventure, and sorrowing the loss of a great life in the world.

William is deeply moved by the courage of the main character in the movie, thus clearly making this an example of elevation. However, he also notes textures of his experience that I have not seen in the literature on elevation, such as grief and the perception of loss.

In Mark's story, the woman who comforts him by the graveside helps him contextualize his experience as deeply moving through her kindness and compassion.

She proceeded to tell me . . . 'People ask me how I can spend my time with the dying without getting any money and I tell them, this is the pay I get when I hear stories,' like mine, she said. 'Some things money just cannot buy.' 'Don't you see? You selflessly gave to your friend who was reaching out for help and this is what was given to you for your help,' she said. Those words reverberated through me. . . . That experience at that graveyard that day will always live deep inside of me.

This part of the story is deeply moving for Mark in a number of ways. This woman is kind to him in a moment when he needed it; she also drew a parallel between her own selfless work in the world and his offering of help to his friend, thus highlighting the same qualities of compassion and kindness in him. Not only does Mark experience elevation by knowing about this woman's great deeds in the world, he is both the recipient of her kindness and comes to see himself as a kind and selfless person.

Hannah offered an example of elevation that also included greater complexity than is articulated in the current research on elevation:

Once with my Grandmother we went to a doctor and my grandmother had such trouble getting on the table—she was very frail and in a wheel chair. The doctor in his mid to late thirties seemed a bit overwhelmed by her frailty but he was very respectful. It was as if the three of us in that moment were sharing something about a respect of life and elders and a shared humanity. I was moved by him and his sensitivity too rare in the medical field and just by that shared time. (I recall he never billed us.)

Hannah was deeply moved by this doctor's kindness and sensitivity toward her grandmother. However, just as important was the sense of connection to one another and all of humanity in a shared reverence of the cycles of life. These qualities are examined further in this chapter; I offer this example here to support the notion of elevation and extend its conceptualization beyond that of a moral emotion.

Aliza referenced a moment of being deeply moved in which she herself embodied the positive qualities:

Being stopped in town by a young lady, who told me that I'd taught her how to take tablets, after she'd been hospitalized after a road traffic accident, and told me she couldn't take tablets. Being remembered like that was/is deeply moving. 'You were the nurse who taught me how to take tablets.'

Although elevation is considered to be elicited by situations that do not directly affect the self and result in a motivation toward prosocial behavior, this example illustrates that elevation may be conceived of in a much broader sense as an experience of being deeply moved.

Simple human connections. While encountering the best qualities of human nature, such as great compassion and courage, tend to elicit the experience of being deeply moved and inspire us to our own greatness, sometimes simple moments of human connection are just as moving. For instance, William wrote: "Holding a fellow student for half an hour in the gymnasium in silent embrace." Katherine also wrote about the deeply moving quality of simple connection with another person:

We've been talking hungrily all day, like two people coming off of a silent retreat. But eventually all this talk gives way to this beautiful silent lake, cranes skimming its surface. I love Alex but detach with all the humanly needs that might be associated with that love like getting married, having children or even seeing him again. *This moment is enough.* [Italics added]

Hannah wrote about the shared connection of laughter as deeply moving:

Laughter may not be the typical moving experience but I recall once in high school with a friend, Holly, that after a long night out we came back to her home and she was admiring a flower, a rose. She said how beautiful it was and then touched in with her fingertip and every single petal dropped to the ground instantly and we could not stop from laughing. It was hysterical and still is funny to me after 22 years. What was so moving was sharing such profound laughter with a good friend in such a spontaneous and unexpected way and after she had been so reverent . . . the joke was on us!

She also wrote about sharing humor and laughter with her grandmother, especially in the years before her death:

Taking care of her for two years but especially the first year when we would be together and laugh so, so much. We always did share humor and some of my most wonderful moments of living have been in laughter with my Grandmother. Great laughs with my husband are moving as well.

Hannah's entire story about her grandmother was about the deeply moving nature of their connection and life-long relationship:

Life has been full of deeply moving experiences, but after reflecting about my Grandmother and our profound relationship, including the last six years of taking care of her and the whole, profound process of her dying . . . well, it gives full definition to the term 'deeply moving.'

Many participants were deeply moved when feeling or expressing love or care for others. Mark wrote about taking care of a kitten when he was a child as a deeply moving experience:

Found a stray sick kitten that was blocking traffic on a busy highway. Took it home and nursed it back to health. At first, my father would not let me keep her, but he finally gave in. After it was healthy, the original owner saw the kitty riding in the back window of our car and came to our house to reclaim it. A week later the kitten turned up at my doorstep. The owner let me keep it after that. It was my first pet.

Simple opportunities to give and receive love can be healing and deeply moving. Josh's entire story is an expression of his overwhelming love and gratitude for his father:

I try to tell him how much I appreciate him. I often do. ‘Thank you for being my Dad, for being such a great Dad. I can’t tell you how much you mean to me.’ . . . I try not to cry, but there is no stopping it. Who he is for me and how much he cares. I can’t help it.

Josh also wrote: “Thinking about what others have done for me, or how much they mean to me.” Feeling love and gratitude for others was a central way that Josh and other participants experience being deeply moved. In a similar manner, James wrote:

Emotions of deep love, deep connection, fill my chest. My own tears of joy join hers. ‘I love you,’ she says to me for the first time. But I know the words are coming before she speaks them. The same words and emotions are inside me . . . and I express them as well.

This is also an apt example of the experience of wonder-joy tears (Braud, 2001), which I discussed in Chapter 2 of this study.

For Amy, feeling love for her niece was deeply moving particularly because she had not allowed herself to feel or express love for a family member in a long time:

I took a deep breath, surprised at my reaction, an inner sense of warmth, to her. At this moment my mind allowed me to feel the love for her I had longed to experience; I felt unexposed, invulnerable for the first time, and deeply moved.

Similar to Amy’s experience of herself as discovering a newfound vulnerability, several participants reported deeply moving moments in which another person uncharacteristically expressed vulnerability or reached out for connection. For instance, Elizabeth wrote: “My mother’s momentary and rare tears following major surgery when she told me, despite earlier protests about my taking off work, that she was glad I was there.” Hannah noted a similar experience with her father:

A day or so before my father was dying in the hospital I was with him but did not realize he was going to die. His eyes were the most incredible blue color; I can never forget the beautiful color blue after 23 years since he passed. I recall also when I was going to leave he asked very gently (which was not like him as he was a former marine) if I could stay a bit longer. I took his hand and said of course I could, and I was moved by

his simple request. I am so grateful I did stay longer as that was the last time I saw him.

William described a similar experience with an acquaintance:

My brother-in-law died of AIDS at 40, with a massive brain aneurysm. We held a service, and before people had even entered our home I found myself weeping in the arms of a woman who was always very guarded, a colleague at my school. I found myself amazed at the oddity of the situation, sobbing uncontrolled in this woman's arms. A witnessing part of me even found it funny. Perhaps death has a way of bringing people together, as after that she was more open with me.

William was deeply moved by not only the experience of taking solace with someone during a time of grief, but also by the fact that *his* vulnerable expression permeated this woman's tendency to be guarded, exposing a glimpse of her vulnerability.

Seeking or offering solace was another way that participants' reported simple human connections as deeply moving, such as this example from Josh, who wrote: "Sharing with a friend about a tough time I'm having." This could be an example of elevation if Josh were deeply moved by his friends' act of kindness and motivated to be a more generous and compassionate person because of it. However, perhaps more central to this experience was the simple feeling of connecting with another in the shared journey of the human experience.

Leigh wrote about a similar experience of being deeply moved when her brother offered his loving support:

He has never said 'I am here for you' until now. I hear it and I like it. It feels good. I take it in. My eyes well up, full and wet. My stomach feels queasy with fast heartbeats still going inside it. I take hold of the kitchen counter with both hands and stand feeling how deeply moved I am in this moment.

There is a sense in this and other examples that the participant was deeply moved in part because they were feeling unconditionally loved by another person, despite their

failings, and despite the ways they have deemed themselves not lovable, such as when Leigh confessed her problem with bulimia to her brother. Leigh offered further examples of this in her list, such as the following: “Being told that I was irreplaceable;” “when my friend cried and told me to sleep in her room for a week;” “a friend asking me about my goals and really listening and smiling; later, getting the thank you letter and flowers from her;” and “when I lost it in my parents driveway and my dad hugged me.” Josh’s story in which he expressed love and gratitude for his father illustrated a similar theme of feeling unconditionally loved by his father.

The shared reality of the human condition is a vehicle for connection and reverence for life. Many participants described being deeply moved by major life events or transitions, such as births and deaths, falling in love, weddings, divorces, and heartbreak. This is supported by Palmer (1999) in her study on disclosure and assimilation of EHEs, in which she found that EHEs “appeared to cluster and/or occur around other important life events, such as births, deaths, marriages, and life traumas . . .” (p. 167). Several participants wrote simple notations of life, love, and loss in their lists, such as the following from Mark: “Age 18: Falling in love for the first time. Age 36: My wife leaving me and the subsequent divorce. Age 49: My mother’s death.”

James wrote important life events in a similar fashion:

Age 12: My first girlfriend broke my heart. Age 17: My father died suddenly of a heart attack. Age 32, 35 and 37: The births of my children. Age 35: My mother succumbed to cancer. Age 45: Divorce.

The experience of being deeply moved, especially by important life events such as these, can offer a deeper sense of connection to others, all of humanity, or life itself through the deepened awareness of our shared existential reality.

A few participants cited births as deeply moving. Elizabeth wrote: “My now-nearly-12-year-old niece curled up in the first week of her life on my waterbed.”

Hannah also wrote about birth as deeply moving:

It was the middle of the night and after spending some hours at the hospital with the newborn, I drove home to the most gentle and quietest rain, and I felt awed by the beginning of life, just as I have by the ending of life. The life cycle seems to link me with nature and its beauty and the natural world is more deeply moving at such times.

After witnessing a birth, Hannah not only felt more connected to the cycle of life, but also to the beauty of nature.

A few participants wrote about being deeply moved at their wedding ceremonies, such as the following by William:

Wedding Day, outside on the shore of the lake, extemporizing my vows to my wife in front of 300 people, speaking from my heart to hers, in the Memorial Day sun, with Guernsey cows grazing above hillside, fleecy clouds softening the day, a golden breeze guiding my words and wispings her blond hair like light waves surrounding sea green eyes.

Hannah also wrote about being deeply moved at her wedding, and of the unexpected spiritual quality of the occasion:

The afternoon when I was married there were rare, exquisite clouds in the Santa Barbara sky during our ceremony and I felt in tune with nature. During and after the ceremony outdoors I felt surprised at how spiritual—and yet that word does not cover it—what a peaceful, lovely quality I had in joining together in partnership. It was as if after all the planning and everything I had heard about weddings that no one told me it would feel like such a spiritual experience in such a private and quiet way.

Elizabeth was deeply moved by honoring and celebrating her parents wedding anniversary: “[A] surprise anniversary party for my parents’ 60th wedding anniversary.”

Several participants cited break-ups, divorces, and heartbreak as deeply moving, including this example from Katherine:

It's a gorgeous day in late July and I'm sitting on the steps of a church in New Hampshire. It's late afternoon and a tree the size of the church itself filters the rich sunlight overhead. I am facing the love of my life, the man I've come to know over the past seven years, the man with whom I've spent the better part of my young adult life. It's over and there's no consolation. I'm left with sadness and connection to everything we've shared over the past seven years. I break off the relationship.

The heartbreak or personal loss that is evident in this type of deeply moving experience not only has the power to strip away everything not essential, as I described in the lens on personal suffering, but also can connect people to the larger cycles of life and the imperative to "let go" as things change.

Many more participants cited moments of death than birth or weddings as deeply moving, particularly if they were present with another during the process of dying or at the moment of death. Unlike the experiences discussed in the section *personal suffering strips the identity and reminds us of what is essential*, most of the experiences that participants offered of being deeply moved by death are not characterized by despair, but rather by being deeply healing and nourishing. Shoshana wrote about being deeply moved just before her mom died:

I had a chance to thank her, and hug and kiss her and say my goodbye. Before I had to leave for the airport to fly back to NJ, she called out, 'Momma? Poppa?' as if she saw them. I walked over to her and asked if she missed her parents. She nodded and I told her, 'its okay. You can go and be with them now.' I'm crying just thinking about it now, but it was actually a very beautiful and peaceful and affirming moment.

Hannah was deeply moved in a similar fashion:

Being with my Grandmother those last few months and sitting with her in a state of peace and even bliss as if we were in another world that is spiritual and loving was deeply moving. This experience helped me to cope with her death and the loss of her and to be at peace with death.

Elizabeth also noted several moments related to death that were deeply moving: "My last visit with a long-time friend five days before he died; emails that were sent by the

same friend an hour before he died;” and “making it to the hospital before my grandfather, my favorite person who ever roamed the planet, died on December 30, 1971.” William was deeply moved by the death of several pets, as were other participants. He wrote: “When my cocker spaniel, Lady died, weeping at the moment her spirit left her body, my hand on her heart, gazing into her eyes as she left them with the finality of a heaving, silent breath.”

There is a sense in these examples of viewing death as a natural, often spiritual, part of life. According to the existential position discussed in Chapter 2, the ability to live fully and authentically requires the willingness to confront and embrace the inevitability of one’s death. This sentiment is expressed by Tillich (1952), who wrote: “Self-affirmation is the affirmation of life and of the death which belongs to life” (p. 28). As these examples from the participants illustrated, encountering death can be a powerful opportunity to connect with one’s reverence for life.

A few participants also cited moments of crisis or “brushes” with death that were deeply moving. James wrote:

I nearly drowned in Puerto Angel, Mexico. Later that same day (Friday, July 13, 1985) I was pulled over by Mexican Police who threatened to take me to jail. In the first instance, my past flashed through my mind. In the second instance, thoughts were of my future.

Hannah wrote about a similar experience:

After a frightening accident on the 101 highway in California when a semi truck ran us onto the shoulder and then hit the whole side of our car with his trailer I was amazed to still be alive and so grateful my daughter was still alive. The next day I wrote a poem about being alive and the beauty of this world, which I almost exited. I felt so moved by life and nature and the wonder of it all, that we forget too often. I was in a state of awe.

As Hannah eloquently noted, this brush with death highlighted her appreciation of life.

These major life events can bring the existential reality of the human condition to the forefront of consciousness. While these occasions may be frightening, sorrowful, or joyous, these examples of being deeply moved by major life events offered the participants an opportunity to remember what is essential in life, to connect with one another, and at times, to reconnect with their reverence for life.

Sometimes the awareness of our existential reality becomes available through connecting with the suffering of others. For instance, Elizabeth was deeply moved when, “hearing Elie Wiesel speak about his personal Holocaust experience.” Aliza wrote: “A number of experiences when I worked as a nurse. Two connected with helping mothers (and a father) cope with neonatal death, by helping them see and hold their baby.”

Tom wrote about an experience of being deeply moved that involved anger: “My first experience with real oppression while coming back from the west bank with feelings of anger over injustice.” While I would not consider all experiences of anger as deeply moving, this example illustrates that anger can be an expression of caring and compassion.

Katherine wrote several accounts of being deeply moved when encountering the suffering of others:

I am walking through a park with my brother’s girlfriend’s Golden Retriever. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, the grass green. I’m relaxed and overjoyed not to be working on a weekday. Marley, the dog, is my only responsibility. I notice a man in beggar’s clothes lying on the ground. He’s not the only one around. There are others in the park as well: Dog-walkers, walkers, joggers, children and moms. But it occurs to me as our shadows run over him like a reckless sports car that Marley probably will be more comfortable on the couch in our apartment than the beggar will be on the dewy grass when night falls. Compassion makes my body go limp.

Beggars on the street anywhere but here—where the smog levels are the worse in the country—would be better off than a well-to-do person living in the Inland Empire. Never have I experienced anything like this. I think of my mother who died of lung cancer, my mother's sister who has lung cancer and their mother who also died of lung cancer and suddenly I am connected to the people living in this town because I live here too. When I walk through the streets of this town, I see how we're all in one big fish bowl of pollution. I feel a deep sense of compassion for everyone . . . There isn't a single person I resent or feel envy towards. We all suffer, I conclude, and my body softens to that certainty.

These experiences of being deeply moved aroused a powerful sense of compassion, not only for the object of her awareness, but for suffering that everyone must face. The sense of compassion and moral beauty that Haidt (2003a) described in relation to elevation arises perhaps most profoundly out of our willingness to see and respond to the suffering of our fellow human beings.

Spiritual and transpersonal experiences offer a glimpse beyond the veil and connection to a loving universe. Many participants—9 of the 14—explicitly described their primary story of an experience of being deeply moved as a spiritual experience. In some cases, the experience was considered spiritual simply because they were grateful to be deeply moved, as I discussed in the lens pertaining to gratitude. In other cases, the situation that elicited the experience of being deeply moved was the perception of or contact with God or a spiritual dimension of life. Participants also reported being deeply moved by discrete exceptional human experiences such as the presence of a loved-one after death, synchronicities, ecstatic sex, meditation, and hallucinogenic drugs, most of which were explicitly described as spiritual experiences.

Some participants felt that the experience which elicited being deeply moved gave them a glimpse or feeling of a larger reality. Bird wrote, "Dancing with this owl gives me a glimpse of the infinite." Leigh similarly noted: "Being moved feels painful

yet ecstatic, sad yet celebratory, stunted and vastly opened. I am at the mercy of something great.” When reflecting on his experience of being deeply moved, James quoted his lover by saying: “We are floating in space and connecting deeply. When I connect with you we are touching God, the source. It is God’s touch, God’s breath, God’s love.”

Several participants made reference to experiencing the presence of God. For instance, Aliza wrote:

As I say the blessing I can feel a warmth spreading through me and a feeling of lightness, as if we are both being held by an invisible being. I lose the sense of being separate from God which accompanies me most of the time and for those couple of minutes I am accepting God’s love, just as I am giving love to my daughter.

Shoshana had a similar experience of God’s presence: “It’s that feeling of an indelible imprint having been made—although there was no thunderclap announcing God’s presence, I felt that in my body—I truly *felt* that thunderclap surge through me.”

Katherine wrote about several instances of experiencing the presence of God, one of which is included below:

It’s an ordinary day for me in Avignon, France. I am a student and my life consists of a few hours of class a day, a run, time spent chatting in the square over a beer and a bike ride home. It’s a heavenly existence although even my life here has felt mundane at times. Today feels like a regular day with one exception. I have an unexplained connection with God and a deep sense of knowing. Storm clouds gather in the distance over the Rhone River but there’s nothing threatening about them. Rather, they feel like a message from God. A psychic energy sweeps over me: God exists. I can feel Him.

A few participants reported being deeply moved by a transpersonal experience which involved contact with a loved-one after their death. Shoshana reported multiple experiences of being deeply moved of this type, such as “several incidents of ‘coincidences’ shortly after Mom passed away, including many involving the phone.”

She also wrote about contact with her friend shortly after her death: “I was filled with wonder and awe and *knowing* . . . knowing beyond all doubt that it was she who was there, choreographing the events that had and were transpiring.”

Katherine also described a transpersonal experience shortly after her mother died:

Suddenly the light looks stranger and harsher than I ever remember it being. It's like the lights have just been dimmed or like we're all under some an invisible body of water. It's her, I think. She's everywhere. She's the water. And suddenly I feel buoyed up by this feeling of connectedness, of emotional warmth. The wall between us dissolves, floating my body on a sea of okay-ness.

Hannah had a similar transpersonal experience of her grandmother's presence after death:

Then the most unusual thing happened to me. It was as if a part of my Grandmother's spirit entered inside my body, right into my torso and especially in my tummy area. I felt a swirling of energy and then so at peace, like a quality I imagined she would feel. Its as if her way of experiencing peace, or just the feel of her energy as a person, had entered my body, and I felt as if we were sharing and blending, and as if she was becoming all the more a part of me. It felt as if she was leaving me a gift of peace. I recall at the time really hoping I would always feel this peace of hers within myself, and while the intensity is very different over the years, I do feel as if a part of her was left with me on a visceral level, as well as an emotional and spiritual level. It was a very unusual experience and one I have never had before or since.

In Bird's list, she wrote about being in an altered state of consciousness after caring for her favorite pet—a dying cockatiel—such that at the moment of its death she was “given a glimpse beyond the curtain.”

Several participants were deeply moved by synchronicities, which were considered to be spiritual experiences. For instance, Bird described her encounter with the owl as both synchronistic and a miracle: “I'm deeply grateful for all the perfect synchronicity that has already occurred throughout time to allow this miracle to happen

to me.” The majority of Shoshana’s accounts of being deeply moved were the result of synchronicities, such as the following experience:

Waiting for Dad while he spent a half hour in the hose aisle at Sears (!) so I entertained myself looking at paint chip cards, wondering what color I’d paint my dream home in Arizona (we recently sold a condo we had for 3 years called Canyon View in Tucson where my older two attended school). The one and only selection I picked up had these names for the paints: *Arizona Song*, *Canyon Peach*, and *Tucson Trail*. What a beautiful, touching, synchronistic moment—as if I was being told I’m on the right path!

Shoshana described her understanding of her synchronicities as a deeply moving encounter with God or a higher power:

What some may merely label as coincidence is, I feel, profoundly so much more. . . . An incredible sense of awe washes over me and though I’m reluctant to admit it, I feel, in a way, special. Like God or this higher power has chosen to take this moment to allow me a glimpse of something more, a peak at what some may refer to as the hereafter or greater cosmos. . . . They’re like signposts on the road indicating I’m headed on the right path, moving toward the correct but, as of yet, unknown destination. It appears the path is helping to bring me closer to a higher level of understanding, or consciousness. I’ve learned to recognize, welcome and embrace each synchronistic event as they manifest.

My sense is that the way Shoshana viewed her synchronicities and other deeply moving spiritual experiences may also ring true for others in this study. Implicit in perceiving synchronicities or other transpersonal experiences as evidence of a larger reality or a presence orchestrating the events of one’s life, is the sense that this presence is beneficent. This perception naturally generates a sense of feeling loved by God or this larger reality, and as I have previously noted, a sense of gratitude.

Several participants wrote about experiences of being deeply moved that occurred while in a variety of altered states of consciousness, including during transcendent or extraordinary sexual experiences. For example, William wrote:

“Making love with my wife, moments of climaxing together, chanting;” James wrote: “I experienced on several occasions a deep connection, perhaps metaphysical union, with a lover;” and Tom wrote: “Feeling some kind of ‘energy union’ with another and in myself on many levels during the best sex I'd ever had.”

Tom also wrote about meditation as deeply moving: “Meditating, shedding my ego and feeling ‘energy/light’ in my head and down my spine.” Leigh wrote about Vipassana meditation as deeply moving: “Doing Vipassana all three times. Lying on my back feeling sucked in by gravity on day 9 or 10 of Vipassana; driving back, feeling high.”

Others wrote about experiences of being deeply moved that were induced by hallucinogens. For example, Leigh wrote, “the pot brownie trip sitting on the patio.” Tom offered many examples of being moved while under the influence of a hallucinogen. He wrote:

Taking Ayahuaska for the first time and realizing that my goals, etcetera are not important, but that primary experience and helping other people is more important.

Dancing on 2CB at Burning Man, having a ‘birth experience’ understanding my consciousness as separate from what I perceive in the external universe.

Taking MDMA and mushrooms with a blindfold on, and my experience of understanding who I am, with becoming an octopus, eating my loved ones, and then being in front of the octopus, to be eaten, and then becoming the octopus again.

Mark also wrote about an experience of being deeply moved on a hallucinogen that was personally meaningful and spiritual: “My first experiment with the hallucinogen peyote turned out to be a very spiritual, eye-opening experience surrounding God, who I am, the meaning of life and my place in the universe.”

I struggled to understand and incorporate these experiences into my preexisting notions of the experience of being deeply moved. At times, I wondered if these reports were experiences of being deeply moved at all, or if perhaps they were simply examples of important or exceptional human experiences. However, when I took the perspective in which I assumed that these experiences were deeply moving for the participants who wrote about them, I could perceive all of these experiences as capable of generating the kind of felt experience and shifts in being previously attributed to the experience of being deeply moved, such as heart opening, transpersonal knowing, and connection to love and deep meaning.

Particularly helpful in this inquiry was a distinction offered by Puhakka (2000) in her discussion of authentic knowing. She described authentic knowing as an activity of consciousness rather than a state of consciousness, and that “this direct knowing is not the same as an altered state” (p. 12). She continued:

Certain states of consciousness facilitate knowing (just as others hinder it), but the coming together of knower and known is not itself a state of consciousness. Rather it is an act that can occur in various states, altered or ordinary. (p. 12)

Throughout this chapter, and particularly in this section, I have reviewed examples of experiences of being deeply moved that occurred in different states of consciousness, including different emotional and transcendent states. This variety began to make sense when I employed the distinction offered by Puhakka and considered that, as a form of transpersonal knowing, the experience of being deeply moved can occur *across* states of consciousness. Puhakka further distinguished:

Knowing itself is not essentially state-dependent. More than that, I had come to see that knowing is not a ‘state’ at all but rather an ‘activity.’ This activity provides connectedness across states and affects

transformations more substantial and lasting than fluctuations in states of consciousness. (pp. 12-13)

Regardless of the state of consciousness one is experiencing—whether it is highly emotional or not, transcendent and expanded or quite ordinary—an experience can be deeply moving if there is an immediate and authentic recognition of what is truly important in a way that opens the heart. However, spiritual and transpersonal experiences that involve the sense of encountering what is deeper, larger, and more real than is usually experienced are ripe with the potential to awaken the knowing of the heart.

Reflection on existential and transpersonal triggers. In this study, participants referred to a cluster of experiences which served as triggers for the experience of being deeply moved. Throughout their narratives, there is a sense of the participants' willingness to open to the full spectrum of life and allow these varied moments to pierce them to the heart and stir a profound sense of caring about life. In addition, there is a sense throughout the participants' stories of the *goodness* of life. For some, this goodness was most present in the potential of the human spirit for kindness and courage. For others, experiences such as synchronicities or the feeling of grace surrounding death generated the perception of a good and loving power in the universe. While the specifics of the experience varied greatly, the nature of these experiences were consistently perceived as encounters with what is authentic, important, good, beautiful, or sacred—not as the result of a cognitive evaluation, but as a function of the transpersonal knowing of the heart.

We are moved through genuine encounter with our lives; by opening to both the suffering and the joys, our lives may be enriched and deepened. We are moved when

we witness people display that which is inherently good and virtuous in the human spirit, like courage, integrity, beauty and kindness. The very best of our human qualities seem to connect us with something larger than ourselves; these qualities often appear in the face of our limitations, weaknesses, and suffering and serve to move us beyond them. We are moved in moments of connection with the sacred, during which we are humbled and inspired. We are also moved through the wonderment of existence itself, and taste the sacred in nature's force and in the inevitability of our own death.

Transformative and Healing Dimension

As I remarked in Chapter 1, dictionary definitions of the word *move* indicate that it refers to change or transformation in a variety of contexts. Although I anticipated that some participants would experience healing or transformation in some fashion, I did not envision the particular nature or qualities of these transformations. Because of this, I articulated the transformative and healing dimension broadly in my preliminary lenses:

(#14) Healing and Wholeness: For some people, the experience of being moved may feel healing and may bring a sense of wholeness; and (#18) Transformation: For some people, the experience of being deeply moved leads to major life choices and the sense of inner transformation.

While it was beyond the scope of this study to offer a comprehensive assessment of the transformative dimension of the experience of being deeply moved, three types of lasting impacts were reported by participants in this study: The emergence or renewal of faith, spiritual path, or spiritual beliefs; the resolution of emotional pain and healing in relationships; and self-acceptance and access to personal strengths.

Emergence or renewal of faith, spiritual path, or spiritual beliefs. Because the experience of being deeply moved is often considered to be deeply meaningful and spiritual, it can spark or renew one's faith, spiritual path, or spiritual beliefs. Shoshana wrote extensively about her belief in a greater spiritual force and the development of her spiritual path as the result of her experiences of being deeply moved:

That moment was a defining one for me, as it helped to spark a spiritual journey that intensified since the death of my mother in 2002. . . . The fact that 'coincidences' had been occurring with greater and greater frequency in my life all added to up to something *more*. Whether that 'more' is a consciousness, a greater force, the Divine or God, I couldn't say. But whatever it is, the presence appears to be undeniable. . . . I've come to believe in karma . . . as well as a sense of connectedness to the cosmos at large. . . . Never would I have thought I'd be subscribing to such ways of thinking—my education is based on science and this is all so metaphysical—but I do now.

The experience of being deeply moved also has the potential to transform one's beliefs about death and to embrace death as a part of life. For Hannah, the deeply moving process of her grandmother's death was profoundly affected by her grandmother's perspective about death, which in turn shaped her own beliefs:

She told me a number of times over the years, that death is a transition, another journey. While she was dying slowly I felt I was experiencing some of that journey with her, as if I was moving through a doorway into another world which she was close to and sometimes in and that I could intuit that other dimension because I was with her and close to her.

Katherine was deeply moved by the sense of her mother's presence just after she died, which transformed her understanding and beliefs about death:

Suddenly death doesn't seem so separating. I realize my mom's still with me, just transformed, and that one day, I will join her essence—not in some skyward paradise—but in this womb-like spirituality. . . . I realized that dying isn't this lonely thing; rather it's one of those things that connects us all.

As the result of her experiences, Shoshana remarked: “I have come to believe wholeheartedly in the afterlife.”

The experience of being deeply moved can also lead to belief that we are deeply connected to one another and to all of humankind. William wrote, “In experiencing this deep connection with another human being, I realize this is possible with all human beings, and with plants, animals, and the earth.” Shoshana also reflected on this theme: “I have also studied eastern philosophy and am amazed again by the commonalities of teachings, further supporting my belief of how united we are as humankind.”

Resolution of emotional pain and healing in relationships. Another transformative impact of the experience of being deeply moved involves the resolution of emotional pain and healing in important relationships. This theme was an unexpected discovery, though I found it quite easy to relate with the stories that centered on this topic. It was interesting to note that in some of the stories offered by participants, experiences of being deeply moved were triggered by transformative insights during moments of crisis or pain in relationship, while in other stories, being deeply moved provided a state change to open-heartedness, which was the catalyst for the healing or transformation. It was also surprising that so many of the stories pertained to this theme: Four participants—Leigh, Tom, Amy, and Aliza—offered stories for this study that are predominantly characterized as healing conflict or separation; three additional participants—Mark, Elizabeth, and Katherine, wrote about the experience of being deeply moved as instrumental in healing grief; and several others cited this theme in their lists.

Some experiences of healing or transformation that resulted from being deeply moved emerged in stressful situations or while fighting with a loved one. Tom's story is an apt illustration of this type of transformation. He wrote about struggling with the pain of separating from his wife, and even more devastating, the bitterness of knowing that his wife was with another man. Tom's experience of being deeply moved involved a profound realization that spontaneously released his pain and struggle about this situation. Tom wrote about the sudden relief and heart opening that became available to him:

Suddenly I realized how much I was holding onto what I thought my wife should be doing, not what she wanted or needed from that relationship. I realized that she was just doing the best that she could, just like everyone else. And at that moment, without a sound, The Man dropped straight down into the smoldering ashes. A wave of relief filled my body and I suddenly began to sob. Tears streamed down my face with the realization that I was holding onto something that had nothing to do with me. I felt exhausted, but I no longer had that physical pain reaching deep into my heart.

In his list, Tom also wrote about a deeply moving moment of experiencing conflict, then connection with his father: "Feeling my dad's love after he yelled at me for 2 hours, then him crying when he told me a story from his childhood."

Amy wrote about an experience of reconnecting with her niece, which resulted in a powerful insight about her childhood.

I told Ann I had run from them all; I saw no other way. I had to seek asylum as far away as I could. . . . I began to realize through distant clouds how I had vanished from her and my extended family. I now understood the origin of my closed heart in relation to my family.

This insight and the spontaneous opening of her heart to her niece were deeply moving for Amy. Further in her story, she wrote:

A tight grip held my chest from expanding and my heart swelled. I took a deep breath, surprised at my reaction, an inner sense of warmth, to her.

At this moment my mind allowed me to feel the love for her I had longed to experience; I felt unexposed, invulnerable for the first time, and deeply moved. It was a mixture of all the good and the bad of my past, but mostly it was one of joy at my discovery.

In this situation, the experience of being deeply moved was part of the process of feeling love for her family again and integrating and healing painful aspects of her childhood.

In her list, Katherine wrote about her grief for her mother's death manifesting as an argument with her brother. At the apex of their fight, she bursts into tears, which releases the tension of the fight and the underlying sadness. This transforms their conflict and becomes a powerful invitation for intimacy with her brother.

My brother is furious with me. Its several months after my mother's died and I've just forced him to make a rather long trip out of his way to bring me back to my father's new house. He angrily drops me off at the front stoop and I burst into tears. All the anger I've felt up to this point is dissipating. I'm not really angry with him for taking me to a work-related event and not getting me back at a decent hour, I'm really sad about our mom. "Work related" events are simply not jiving with my emotions. I need my brother to show up though I couldn't have articulated this in words. Tears worked and despite all the angry words that have passed between us during the past 45 minutes in the car, he hugs me powerfully. It can't remember ever hugging my brother like this; I've always avoided looking to him for emotional support. But now something in me completely releases and is filled with love. My body unwinds; my anger cools. I feel like a sun-baked frog jumping into a pond of skin-cooling water.

Leigh also wrote about a fight with her brother, its eventual resolution, and their mutual forgiveness as a deeply moving experience. The fight occurred as their parents' marriage was dissolving, and she wrote about the ways in which she and her brother played out family patterns of conflict.

How perfectly we display the choicelessness of fate. The inevitability of being them. Our Mom, our Dad. Their hell and ours, the same red place. We desperately talk, act in ways we hope will be unlike them, and we practically fall into their tracks and walk robotically toward the same

places. He is raging and he looks the way Dad does. He is yelling and he says things Dad said. He is angry and his anger is Dad's. I am victim and I sit still like Mom did. I am angry and I keep it to myself the way she does. I am hurt and I don't tell him the way she didn't. He is perpetrator, I am perpetrated. He is finding a way to express; I am finding a way to bury. We are carrying out what we know and it hurts and our ways of carrying perpetuate the cycle of abuse, pain, hurt, denial, abuse, pain, hurt, denial.

The power of this generational cycle of pain was broken when Leigh chose to open her heart and act powerfully rather than succumb to her feelings of being a victim. She described in detail how she contemplated the fight with her brother with love and awareness. The result of this contemplation was a powerful moment of mutual forgiveness and connection, and the willingness of both Leigh and her brother to feel the underlying grief over the ending of their parents' marriage. Leigh wrote:

I go home, I walk in the front door and he is sitting at a table looking right into my eyes and he apologizes and he keeps looking into my eyes and he does not look away. I feel free of hurt and anger. I feel grief at what we are losing, together, losing our parent's marriage, and the home in which we were raised. . . . Tensions easing slow relief, belly calming, a feeling of going in the right direction. A kind of new meeting one another. Free of vengeance, doors open to infinity. When moments later he again apologizes for his outburst, I tell my younger brother something straight: 'You don't ever have to say you are sorry twice. I heard you. And it's over. And you can count on that.'

Aliza's story was not about an argument, but rather the subtle pain of feeling separate and alienated from her daughter. In the particular instance that she wrote about, Aliza experiences a shift in her daughter which suddenly allows the intimacy and connection that Aliza has been longing for. "This time I sense her [Aliza's daughter] allowing the touch and the love to reach her. . . . She is giving herself to me in trust, allowing a closeness that I have not sensed before."

The experience of being deeply moved can also be instrumental in resolving grief and letting go of a loved one during the process of dying or after death. In Mark's

story, the experience of being deeply moved occurred as the spontaneous rush of emotion and previously unexpressed grief about his mother's death. However, I believe that he considered this experience as one of being deeply moved rather than simply an "emotional" experience because he understood it to be healing and a blessing. Katherine and Elizabeth also wrote about the easing of pain and grief through the experience of being deeply moved, though Elizabeth did not report on the long-term impacts of the experience. Being deeply moved seems to return a sense of grace and ease to the experience of death.

The movement from separation, pain, or conflict to connection can be deeply moving and offers the potential of transforming relationships, resolving childhood issues and healing emotional pain. In these situations, the experience of being deeply moved is like a fresh rain in an area parched by drought, or like a salve, soothing the tender heart. This salve is the sense of being suddenly graced with one's own open heart and reconnected with the heart of the world. The juxtaposition of the bitterness of separation or conflict and the sweetness of love and healing seems to highlight the bittersweet quality of life and makes the moments of connection even more precious.

Self-acceptance and access to personal strengths. Another transformative impact for some participants of the experience of being deeply moved was a deep sense of self-acceptance and the access to personal strengths such as courage, acceptance, compassion, surrender, and a deeper sense of self. For some participants, these qualities became available during their experience of being deeply moved. For instance, a deeply moving experience for James was "a group, human potential, intensive-role-playing game [that] led to a blissful peak experience of self-acceptance." Another participant,

Christine, wrote about being deeply moved while appreciating her own strength of character during a marathon:

These are tears for having been such a warrior the past few months. I am crying for my broken heart that became vigilantly protective after a painful breakup. I am crying because I've been so strong. I'm crying because I'm doing what I set myself out to do. These are salty tears of appreciation for having the strength to do what I love.

Some participants reported being able to access their personal strengths when remembering their experiences of being deeply moved. In recalling his experience with the Native American spiritual teacher, William wrote: "Whenever I feel depressed or anxious, I remember this experience, and it gives me strength to face these difficult feelings, and circumspectness."

The experience of being deeply moved can also produce powerful and lasting changes beyond the moment or recollection of the moment. Shoshana reflected on her deepened ability to open and connect with herself and the universe, and consequently her personal strengths, as a result of her experiences of being deeply moved:

Basically, the way I would summarize how my experience helped to change me was to allow me to open up, not only to the universe, but to *myself* as well. I have gained such extraordinary insights and have been able to release some negative emotions—for example, anger; I truly cannot recall the last time I felt the emotion. . . . Each event has contributed to my feeling grounded and secure, tolerant and compassionate. It would be hard to not be moved by situations such as these that have had such an impact on the way I look at, and live, life.

Bird wrote about being deeply moved by the power of trust and surrender during her extraordinary encounter with an owl, and the way that her experience continued to teach her:

All summer long I listen to a barred owl in the woods behind my house. Low and sweet, he calls, reminding me how to surrender. . . . What he taught me in a few moments, I'll never forget. . . . Those feathers [from the owl] remind me how I can affect the world.

William also reflected on the long-term psychological impacts of his experience of being deeply moved:

After 20 years, the reverberation of Chief's voice, and the words he shared with me, remain crystal clear, and enlighten my life profoundly, including marriage, children, vocation, and spiritual destiny. . . . From my interaction with the Chief I feel empowered, smart, and capable. I trust that I have all I need to handle what I meet in the world. . . . The more I write of it, the more I recognize the profound change that occurred in me at that moment. . . . I felt catalyzed into accepting my own ability to connect with my higher self, and to inform my life accordingly.

As I discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, Maslow (1968) believed that psychological health and maturity involved the process of self-actualization, which can be described as the expression and development of one's intrinsic nature. Many of the qualities that participants gained access to, both during and after an experience of being deeply moved, are reminiscent of the qualities of psychologically healthy or self-actualizing people discussed in Chapter 2. Among the thirteen qualities noted by Maslow, a few are clearly reflected in the participants' responses, including: (a) "Increased acceptance of self, others and of nature"; (b) "Greater freshness of appreciation, and richness of emotional reaction"; (c) "More democratic character structure;" (d) "Increased identification with the human species"; (e) "Certain changes in the value system;" and (f) "Changed [or improved] interpersonal relations" (p. 26). It is also plausible that other qualities noted by Maslow, such as increased spontaneity and creativeness, higher frequency of peak experiences, and superior perception of reality may also be available during or as the result of the experience of being deeply moved.

The presence of so many qualities attributed to self-actualizing people suggests that we may have greater access to our deepest or intrinsic nature during experiences of being deeply moved. This is supported by the research cited in Chapter 2 that suggested

a positive relationship between peak experiences and psychological well-being, and that although the occurrence of peak experiences is not necessarily determined by an individual's psychological health or growth, self-actualizing individuals are more likely to have peak experiences than non-self-actualizing individuals (Lanier et al., 1996; Margoshes & Litt, 1966; Mathes et al., 1982; McCain & Andrews, 1969; Panzarella, 1980; Wuthnow, 1978). Experiences of being deeply moved may also be moments in a process of self-actualization that can potentially contribute to the development or unfolding of one's inner nature.

Reflection on transformative and healing dimension. Although not all of the participants addressed the transformative dimension of their experience, I believe that all experiences of being moved hold the seeds of personal transformation. This includes both the small transformations of perception that allow us to see with appreciation and openness, as well as transformations that profoundly alter the course of our lives. These seeds sometimes blossom on their own, and at other times require attention and inquiry in order to fully develop and unfold their transformative potential. The process of meaning-making described by Baumeister and Vohs (2002), and emphasized by White (1998) as integral to the unfolding of the transformative potential of EHEs, is undoubtedly an essential component of creating lasting transformations of the experience of being deeply moved. In my reflections on intuitive inquiry in this chapter, I further discuss the meaningful and transformative impacts that some participants experienced from engaging in the process of writing for this study.

Hart (2000b) discussed the process of transformation as a dialectic of *will* and *willingness*. Corresponding with classical notions of the masculine and feminine, Hart

described will as involving agency, intention, direction, and action, and willingness as involving receptivity, openness, allowing, and surrender to the great mystery. He elaborated: “Will defines us as self-separate from our world. . . . Willingness or surrender says ‘yes’ to belonging; it joins life as we give ourselves over to the flow of things and lean toward communion and unity” (p. 158). The experience of being deeply moved necessarily involves *willingness* in many forms—as in the willingness to open to the world while simultaneously opening to the depths of our inner experience, and to join or belong to life, as Hart described above, through our caring for it. However, in order to truly be transformed by the experience of being deeply moved in a meaningful and lasting way, it also requires the *will* or intention to *remain* open, and the conscious choice to be guided by the wisdom of the heart.

Revisiting the Literature of Chapter 2

Part of the challenge of contextualizing this study within the field of psychology was that there are so many ways to understand, categorize, and create context around human experience. Exploring relevant literature in the early stages of this study compounded my dilemma. Awe and elevation were described by researchers as positive emotions, Hart (1993, 1998, 2000a) considered inspiration as a form of transpersonal knowing, and Braud (2001) described the qualities of wonder-joy tears without categorizing the experience. Beyond my initial questions of how to categorize the experience of being deeply moved, I was intrigued by both the similarities and the differences between these related experiences. In this section, I will briefly review the literature on experiences of awe, inspiration, elevation, and wonder-joy tears in light of the results of this study on the experience of being deeply moved.

The numinous and awe. In the literature on awe and the numinous, the sense of self is described as small, insignificant, or submissive in the face of something vast, powerful and possibly spiritual. Andreson's (1999) analysis of tears that are not directly related to grief described a hidden loss that may arise in experiences of awe where boundaries between self and other are more distinct. The distinct boundaries between self and other in the experience of awe leads to feelings of fear, love, passion, devotion, and reverence in relation to the other. The other is also beyond cognitive comprehension in some way, which leads to confusion, surprise, and wonder. Keltner and Haidt (2003) named these qualities "vastness" (p. 303) and a need for "accommodation" (p. 303) and identified them as the two central features of awe.

The experience of being deeply moved differs from awe and the numinous in terms of affect, cognition and shift in boundaries between self and other. Like awe, the experience of being deeply moved may at times include the qualities of vastness or the need for accommodation, particularly in the perception of one's relationship to the immensity and complexity of life to create both suffering and beauty. However, issues of size and power between self and other were not a prominent quality in participants' stories of being moved. Awe also often involves a connection with something separate or "wholly other" (Otto, 1970, p. 26) than oneself. While participants in this study occasionally reported flavors of awe permeating their experience, there was no focus on the perception of something separate or "other." More often, the boundaries between self and other began to merge, which not only produced a sense of deeper connection but at times an experience, as described by Puhakka (2000), of "interbeing" (p. 27). In addition, many experiences of being deeply moved reported in this study came with a

sense of clarity, understanding, or intuitive knowing rather than the sense of being beyond cognitive comprehension that is characteristic of awe. Based on this analysis, the qualities of vastness and accommodation could not be considered essential or prototypical of the experience of being deeply moved. These differences render a distinct picture of the experience of being deeply moved and distinguish it from awe.

Inspiration. In his research on inspiration, Hart (2000a) identified its primary phenomenological characteristics as *contact and connection*, *openness and receiving*, and *vibrancy and clarity*. As I argued in Chapter 2, these characteristics, and the epistemological shifts that produce them, are not limited to or defining of inspiration, but may extend to other deep or exceptional human experiences. The participants' responses in this study clearly indicate that contact and connection, openness and receiving, and vibrancy and clarity are also qualities of the experience of being deeply moved.

Thrash and Elliot (2003) offered a different characterization of inspiration, which included the qualities of *evocation*, *motivation*, and *transcendence*. The experience of being deeply moved can also be described as *evoked* rather than initiated directly through an act of will or arising without apparent cause, and as *transcendent* in that it offers an experience beyond what is considered to be normal. However, the experience of being deeply moved does not *necessarily* imply the motivation of behavior, though it may, at times, be inspirational and motivate one to caring and conscious action. However, and more to the point, I believe that the quality of transpersonal knowing that is *unique* to inspiration is the connection with uplifting possibility, as I discussed in Chapter 2. In contrast, the present research has illustrated

that the quality of transpersonal knowing that is available in the experience of being deeply moved involves a deeper embrace of life *as it is* rather than how it could be.

Elevation. Since I have already addressed the relationship between elevation and the experience of being deeply moved in this chapter in the lens entitled *Encountering the best qualities of the human spirit*, I want to briefly reflect on Haidt's (2003a) interpretations of elevation and contribute a transpersonal developmental perspective. Haidt described elevation as a dimension of social cognition and as an emotional response to encountering moral and spiritual purity. While at one level of human consciousness, assessments of morality are largely determined by social and cultural norms, from a transpersonal perspective, elevation may be less a function of social constructs and more a function of the discernment of consciousness.

Theories of adult development attribute distinct differences to conventional and postconventional processes, and describe postconventional morality as intrinsically motivated and existing beyond ideas of good and evil (Kohlberg, 1981; Kegan, 1982). This can be contrasted to theories of morality that pertain primarily to those at a conventional level of development, such as Haidt and Algoe's (2004) theory of moral amplification, which they defined as "the motivated separation and exaggeration of good and evil in the explanation of behavior" (p. 323). Haidt's assessment of elevation, particularly as the polar opposite to disgust, highlights the distinct separation between that which is good, pure, and spiritual, and that which is evil or dirty. While this assessment is flawless in many respects, it largely pertains to conventional processes and to individuals at conventional levels of development and does not address the nature or function of elevation for those at postconventional levels.

The ability to integrate the polarities of life and transcend conventional notions of good and evil is a hallmark of both the experience of being deeply moved and postconventional moral development. For individuals at a conventional level of development, the experience of being deeply moved may also function as a socially and culturally relative form of social cognition. However, as I have discussed elsewhere in this paper, transpersonal and phenomenological perspectives suggest that the internal recognition that one is experiencing something real, important, good, beautiful, or sacred may actually be a function of our ability to discern rather than a reflection of social norms. While the experience of being deeply moved can occur for individuals at all levels of development, when it occurs with the ability to perceive and hold the paradoxes of life, it provides a glimpse of this postconventional developmental capacity.

Wonder-joy tears. The experience of being deeply moved is very similar to Braud's (2001) description of wonder-joy tears in terms of affect, cognition, triggers, meaning, and potential impact on people's lives. In particular, wonder-joy tears, like the experience of being deeply moved, includes a sense of holding the polarities of life and an appreciation of the tragic dimension of life—an element missing from the other related experiences described in this study. Because my analysis of the experience of being deeply moved emerged as the result of personal inquiry and analysis of the participant's narratives irrespective of Braud's work, our similar conclusions lend validity to one another. However, although the experience of being deeply moved may include tears, crying, or sobbing, not all participants in this study reported tears, and I

do not consider tears to be a necessary and essential characteristic of the experience of being deeply moved.

Reflections on Intuitive Inquiry and Embodied Writing

The use of intuitive inquiry as the methodological context for this study was rich in terms of what it allowed me to explore, both personally and as the researcher. Similar to my interpretation of the experience of being deeply moved as involving the authentic knowing of the heart, Anderson (2004) described intuitive inquiry as “an epistemology of the heart:”

Intuitive inquiry is an epistemology of the heart that joins intuition to intellectual precision in a hermeneutical process of interpretation. From the start, intuitive researchers explore topics that claim their enthusiasm, honor their own life experiences as sources of inspiration, and invite the research process to transform not only their understanding of the topic but their lives. Long claimed as essential to wisdom in indigenous and spiritual traditions worldwide, the subtle ways of the heart nourish and balance analytic ways of knowing. . . . Intuitive inquiry is a search of new understandings through the focused attention of one researcher’s passion and compassion for themselves, others, and the world. (p. 308)

As a method that honors the wisdom of both the mind and the heart, intuitive inquiry asks the researcher to be guided by that which is personal and deeply meaningful. By following this guidance in the context of formal research, not only is the nature of one’s topic explicated, but the researcher has the potential to be transformed through the process. As the researcher of the present study, following the knowing of the heart in both topic and approach profoundly deepened my trust in my own inner knowing. It also highlighted the moments in which I didn’t listen to my heart during this process, and hence lost touch with the experience of being deeply moved. It has been a fruitful challenge for me to maintain the rigor demanded by this project in terms of both process and content while remaining alive to my senses and attuned to my heart.

Consistent with the postmodern perspective, intuitive inquiry views conventional reality as a construction of contextualized human perspective, thus making subjectivity central in any endeavor that attempts to understand or define human experience. Anderson (2006) elaborated on this theme in intuitive inquiry:

Reality does not exist apart from the embodied participation of being a specific human being with a particular physiology, history, personality, and culture but is interpretative and inter-subjective in the way Ken Wilber (2000) is defining intersubjective in his four-quadrant model of human knowing. Human subjectivity is a source of knowing, not just solipsistic expression or opinion. (p. 40)

My own subjective experience, as well as the subjective experiences of my participants, were the primary sources of knowing in this study. The challenge of this approach for me began with the construction of my preliminary lenses in Cycle 2, which I found both confusing and liberating. Systematically incorporating my own perspective as the researcher ran so contrary to my understanding of research that it took many months before I constructed a satisfying set of lenses. Even then, when I returned to the preliminary lenses to refine them in Cycle 4, I was struck by the way I qualified many of the lenses with my choice of words. Using phrases such as “this experience may include . . .” unfortunately made my lenses sound like tentative hypotheses, rather than the articulation of my own perspectives. Only towards the end of the study have I fully appreciated the possibility and power granted by intuitive inquiry for the researcher to boldly own their subjective perspectives as the gateway to understanding.

Because my approach to this study was based on specific understandings about the method and procedures well suited to the topic, I described them in three procedural lenses in Cycle 2. While I will not subject these lenses to a Cycle 4 revision, I will evaluate them here. The first lens articulated my intention to provide both the

participants' narratives and my interpretations as sources of knowing in this study: (#1) *Understanding and Validity through Resonance and Interpretations: The experience of being deeply moved may be understood through sympathetic resonance with descriptions of the experience and through cognitive interpretations of elements or meanings of the experience.* Although in hindsight there are some aspects of this study that I would change, such as a more bold articulation of my preliminary lenses, overall I am quite delighted with the power of this qualitative approach to bring a variety of aspects of the experience of being deeply moved to light. Presenting the combination of the participants' first-hand accounts and my interpretive lenses offers a multimodal approach to understanding the experience of being deeply moved and engaging with this study. Towards the end of this study, I also solicited feedback from the participants about the interpretive lenses I developed in an attempt to test the validity of my findings through their sympathetic resonance with my interpretations. Unfortunately, most participants declined to offer comment on the lenses; the vast majority of the comments I received in response to this inquiry was gratitude for the chance to participate, and interest in reading the stories from the other participants. Leigh's email response exemplified the general sentiments I received. She wrote: "I was deeply moved by your study. You have done a brilliant job from what I have read. Thank you for involving me."

My second lens pertained to my use of embodied writing as an effective tool to maximize resonance validity: (#2) *Embodied Writing Maximizes Resonance Validity: Writing about the experience of being moved with sensory and emotional detail in the embodied writing style may convey the nuances and depth of the experience in a way*

that maximizes the potential for sympathetic resonance—hence understanding and internal validity—for myself as the researcher and for the readers. One of the most interesting and valuable aspects of this study was the participants’ stories. Even though not every participant addressed every question I posed, a tremendous amount of detail and subtlety was conveyed in their stories. As the researcher, I experienced my own sympathetic resonance with the narratives, and was often deeply moved while reading them. I imagine that many readers of this study will also be able to resonate with the participants’ stories, and thus understand the experience of being deeply moved through the context of their own experience.

In intuitive inquiry, research validity is determined by the value of the findings rather than their generalizability. This perspective guided me to posit my third procedural lens: (#3) *Embodied Writing Maximizes Efficacy Validity: Writing and reading embodied descriptions may increase the potential for this research to be meaningful, useful, and possibly transformative in the lives of the participants and readers, thereby enhancing the efficacy validity of this research.* Aligned with my hopes for this project, several participants noted that the process of reflecting on their experience of being deeply moved during the course of this study was personally beneficial. For instance, at the end of his narrative, William noted that the process of writing about his experience of being deeply moved for this study deepened his understanding of its impact. He reflected: “The more I write of it, the more I recognize the profound change that occurred in me at that moment.” Josh noted that the process of reflecting on the experience was itself deeply moving. In his story, he wrote:

Even now, sitting in the corner of my room at my little desk typing, I'm a soggy mess. Trying to capture the particles of feeling as they explode, my eyes blurry with tears, holding a damp tissue, wiping my runny nose.

Several participants found the process of engaging in the embodied writing to be healing or illuminating. Leigh, who wrote in her narrative about her challenges with bulimia, wrote the following email:

Thank you again for allowing me this opportunity to partake in your study. It has been a gift to me. Actually writing for you has been very special. It has encouraged me to write more and I have had almost two weeks of no vomiting! Yeah. It is a blessing to have any days free of it.

Amy noted that the process of writing also deepened her understanding of herself and her ability to express herself. In an email, she wrote: "I have the feelings inside but may not get them out to be understood by others. As I have been working on this I see more and more why I had to keep my emotions locked away."

Many participants expressed gratitude for their participation in the study. In an email, Christine wrote, "Thank you for the opportunity to return to this moment and reflect and feel more." Hannah expressed a similar sentiment regarding her list: "It has been a rewarding experience writing them down and reflecting in this way." Aliza expressed her intention to continue writing: "I've so much enjoyed doing this work, and I'll continue writing about other experiences in the same way."

In a similar vein, I invite the readers to encounter this research with both the mind and the heart, and enter into the dialectic of their own, potentially transformative, intuitive inquiry.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of the study. Limitations are restrictions in the research process that are unavoidable. The following factors are limitations in this study:

1. The level of the participants' education and ability to understand and articulate their experiences, especially in writing, may have presented limitations.
2. Some participants may have had difficulty accurately conveying the subtleties of inner experience in words, especially due to the ineffable nature of transcendent experiences or EHEs.
3. The use of personal stories as data is subject to participants' memory, honesty, level of inner awareness, and the desire to please the researcher, as is any self-reporting measure.

Delimitations of the study. Delimitations are restrictions in the research process that are chosen by the researcher via a cost/benefit analysis. The following factors are delimitations in this study:

1. In order to have the depth of this style of qualitative research, the number of participants was restricted. However, because there were only 14 participants, the findings of this study are limited and not generalizable.
2. Because this study did not actively engage in random sampling, the participants in this study do not represent the general population. Fifty percent of the participants in this study were from California, which may limit the applicability of findings to people in other parts of the country or world. Factors such as age range, gender and ethnic distributions, socioeconomic class, level of education

and exposure to transpersonal concepts was taken into consideration when choosing participants, but represent delimitations.

3. The choice to seek written descriptions is a delimitation. Writing may have intimidated people who were not confident in their writing skills or may have deterred people who would have preferred to express themselves verbally.
4. Communicating through the internet and using written descriptions to gather data offered limited opportunities for me (the researcher) and the participants to have contact in person beyond the screening interview (for some participants). This limited the degree to which I could perceive the embodied elements of the participants' experiences and may have impacted the feedback I offered to participants and my interpretations of the data.
5. Because only one researcher conducted this study, and because the intuitive inquiry method necessitated the presence of my thoughts, feelings, intuitions and experiences to filter and interpret the data, the findings of this study were colored by my presence. The intuitive inquiry approach posits that we are always influencing our research; however, the explicit nature of my presence in this research may be considered both a positive contributing factor and a delimitation.
6. The choice to use email as a form of communication with participants was a potential delimitation of the study. In order to lessen the effects of this delimitation, I was willing to make exceptions for people who I determined would be assets to the study but did not have email access. However, this was

not necessary as all potential participants were willing and able to communicate via email.

Implications and Applications of Research

This study contributes to the field of transpersonal psychology, which has as its primary concern the spectrum and evolution of consciousness and the nature of psychospiritual health and growth. As I noted in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Hart et al. (2000) articulated the need for first-hand investigations of transpersonal knowing. By gathering subjective accounts of being deeply moved written by the participants themselves, this study contributes to the psychospiritual knowledge of a widely influential yet underappreciated human experience and furthers the study of what makes everyday life rich and fulfilling.

Although this study was not clinical in nature, it is aligned with the principles of depth and somatic therapies that encourage clients to more deeply inhabit their own experience and allow the full range of thoughts, feelings, and motivations to arise in order to be incorporated into the totality of the organism. Many psychological models note that the repression of painful feelings and uncomfortable aspects of self can be repressive to the entire organism, resulting in the inhibited ability to experience uplifting feelings and aspects of self (for example, the higher and lower unconscious in Psychosynthesis; Firman and Gila, 1997). Schneider (2004) encouraged the engagement of awe and the “extremes and anxieties of human potential” (p. 65) in the clinical endeavor. He further elaborated:

Healing, from my standpoint, is ‘self reoccupation.’ . . . The more that clients are able to stay present to themselves—particularly their affective and kinesthetic selves—the more they are able to clarify (and hence prioritize) that which deeply matters. (p. 66)

Some research has suggested that the ability to deeply experience sensations and emotions is associated with physical, psychological, and spiritual health (Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, and Oberlander, 1968). The present study contributes to the growing awareness that it is vitally important to be alive to the senses of the body and heart, and to attune oneself to the paradoxes and anxieties of living for psychological and spiritual health and well-being.

This study also contributes to the extensive research on the benefits of disclosing important experiences, including exceptional human experiences (EHEs). Pennebaker's (1989, 1997) research suggests that humans have a natural drive to disclose significant emotional experiences, and several of his studies indicate that disclosure of important traumatic and emotional experiences can result in physiological benefits, including reductions in blood pressure, muscle tension and skin conductance, and increased self-reports of well-being. Palmer's (1999) research on the disclosure and assimilation of EHEs suggests that disclosure through either writing or speaking can enhance the potential for meaningful interpretation of EHEs. Furthermore, her research suggests that sharing about these experiences is often essential for the assimilation and integration of these experiences and can play a significant role in psychospiritual well-being.

The present study gave the participants the opportunity to disclose experiences of being deeply moved, which, as I noted above in my reflections on the method, was beneficial to participants in numerous ways, including deepening their understanding of themselves and the meaning of their experience, enhancing the long-term impact of the experience, and triggering the experience of being deeply moved itself during the process of recalling and writing. These findings support the previous research on the

benefits of disclosure and also suggest that disclosing and working with the experience of being deeply moved in the context of clinical therapy, spiritual guidance, or other helping professions could have beneficial outcomes.

As I discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, research and theory suggests that writing is a powerful method for disclosing and understanding significant personal experiences and integrating them into a coherent life narrative. Using embodied writing as the means of disclosure in this study supports transpersonal methods of conducting research. Because embodied writing is generated from the lived experience of the body, it also provides writers with an opportunity to become more deeply aware of their emotions, sensations, and perceptions, and to value and honor their experiences. The participants' self-reports of the positive psychospiritual impact of embodied writing suggests that writing about experiences of being deeply moved in an embodied manner may be a powerful tool for spiritual practice. In addition, the use of intuitive inquiry in this study provides further support for the use of this method in the research of complex, subtle, or transpersonal human experiences. This dissertation may also act as a guiding example for other students who wish to use embodied writing or the intuitive inquiry method in the future.

Finally, the most profound implications of this research may lie in the larger questions it raises. What are the implications of a life that is informed by the experience of being deeply moved? What are the possible impacts of this experience on the way people treat each other? What specific effects could larger numbers of deeply moved people have on our government, business sectors, economy, and healthcare? What

might this imply about a larger vision of society? These are just a few of the more prominent issues raised by this study.

Suggestions for Future Research

In this study, I inquired into the felt dimension of the experience of being deeply moved through the process of embodied writing. Future studies could further explore the embodied dimension of this experience through in-person interviews. This approach would allow the researcher to both perceive the participants in their bodies as they recalled and recounted their experiences and to use his or her own bodily experience of the interviews more fully as a source of information. Interviews may also draw from people who prefer to express verbally rather than in writing.

Important additional research on this topic might include surveying a larger population regarding their experiences of being deeply moved. I envision a number of possible studies, including the development of a tool that could assess for the frequency and tendency to be deeply moved. The tendency to be deeply moved could then be correlated with demographic data such as age, ethnicity, gender, and education. The results of this inquiry would offer the opportunity to explore new questions, particularly if some populations were found to be more likely to be deeply moved than others. This line of inquiry also raises questions regarding what disposes people to be deeply moved and what dimensions—physical, emotional, or environmental—might play a relevant role. Does therapy, for example, dispose one toward such an experience? If so, what specific kind of therapy? What about loving or creative parenting, early nurturing, body contact, or parental mirroring? What impact does exposure to jarring or traumatic events, or conversely, exposure to great literature, films, or works of art, have on an

individual's tendency to be deeply moved? Future research might also explore the experience of being deeply moved in other cultures. How do people in other cultures understand and respond to these experiences? Do some cultures consider experiences of being deeply moved to be more natural and integral to their way of life than other cultures? If so, what are the larger societal ramifications of this orientation?

Other studies could explore the relationship between the tendency to be deeply moved and corresponding personality traits. Given that the quality of opening was so significant in the present study, it would be particularly interesting to note a possible correlation between the dimension of 'openness to experience' and the tendency to be deeply moved. Participants could be administered a personality assessment such as the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992), which would assess not only for trait openness, but a wide range of personality characteristics. Another related quality that I noted in this study that could be more deeply understood is the thinning of boundaries that occurs in the experience of being deeply moved. While many boundary dimensions temporarily become thinner in the experience of being deeply moved, future studies could assess for a possible correlation between the tendency to be deeply moved and the personality trait of thin boundaries. Participants could be administered Hartmann's (1991) Boundary Questionnaire to assess for boundary dimensions on a number of levels, including the global dimension of boundaries.

One issue that was only briefly addressed in this study pertains to the moral and ethical implications of being deeply moved. The participants in this study reported being deeply moved by situations that had neutral or positive moral implications, such as beauty, friendship, and compassion for the suffering of others. However, people can

arguably be deeply moved by situations with unclear or negative moral implications as well. For instance, how might one differentiate between the swooning, and hence, apparently deeply moved individual at a Nazi party rally and the man I described in Cycle 1 of this dissertation who wept as he articulated his calling to serve humanity? Although it is not the opinion of this researcher, one could argue that because the experience of being deeply moved is often highly emotional, it could start an individual or society down a path without moral hallmarks. There are many perspectives one could take about this issue, and future research could explore the processes involved in situations with positive and negative moral implications in order to determine if the same phenomenon is occurring, and if, in fact, both situations are best described as experiences of being deeply moved.

I previously touched on this complex issue in terms of the role of development in the experience of being deeply moved, and several research possibilities might arise from a developmental perspective. As I discussed in my final review of elevation, theories of adult development attribute distinct differences to conventional and postconventional processes and levels of development, including the process of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Kegan, 1982). Based on this perspective, I offered several interpretations throughout this dissertation that could be powerful opportunities for future research. Summarized, these interpretations include the following: (a) individuals at all levels of development have the capacity to be deeply moved; (b) the experience of being deeply moved can manifest in different ways and may be indicative of different processes depending on an individual's level of development (that is, evaluations based on societal norms versus the authentic knowing and discernment of

consciousness); and (c) the experience of being deeply moved may provide access to higher emotional and moral levels of awareness, self-actualizing qualities, and postconventional developmental capacities, regardless of one's level of development. Future research could address these assertions directly and further clarify the relationship between development and the experience of being deeply moved, particularly regarding the inherent moral implications of this phenomenon.

Some of the transformative impacts of the experience of being deeply moved were documented in this study; further study could include a full assessment of the transformative and healing dimensions of this experience. Exploring the relationship between the tendency to be deeply moved and psychological health, well-being and self-actualization through standardized assessment and further qualitative methods of research would be fruitful. As was noted previously, the experience of being deeply moved often elicits qualities attributed to self-actualizing people, which suggests that they may have greater access to a deeper aspect of their nature during experiences of being deeply moved. Experiences of being deeply moved may also be moments in a process of individuation or self-actualization that can contribute to the unfolding and development of this inner nature. Future research could further explore how the experience of being deeply moved might contribute to psychospiritual development and be translated into a sustained life experience.

Final Reflections

As I reach the end of this project, I find that I am increasingly moved by the experiences in my daily life: A simple moment of laughing with a friend; the hummingbird that danced at my window yesterday; a spontaneous rush of gratitude for

having found my calling—my true work in the world; the ongoing joy of serving others in that capacity. I feel such delight as I take walks in my neighborhood on my brief breaks from writing. The vibrant green of the plants and trees, punctuated by bright yellow and pink flowers, is so beautiful that it seems to break my heart wide open. My walking turns into leaping along the sidewalk. In the midst of these simple joys, there is also pain: Dear friends are divorcing, another friend is in a long and painful battle with cancer, and several people in my community have recently lost their parents. Even my own precious relationship is changing, evolving into something as yet unknown to both of us. This is the way of life. Even so, I find myself weeping and laughing more often and from a deeper place in myself than ever before.

My expanded capacity for deeply moving experiences is undoubtedly the fruit of my necessary contemplations on this topic. However, and more importantly, I believe that it is more the result of my own willingness to sit in the fire of life—in my relationships, work, and spiritual practice—and hence my increasing capacity to vulnerably open to fear, shame, and loss rather than defend against them through the various ways I might close or protect my heart. Opening to be touched by both the pain and joy of life “grows” us as human beings; these experiences are fuel for the fire of development—that subtle inner pull to evolve and be transformed by life.

While some people may be more likely to be deeply moved than others, I believe that most people have a hunger for the depth and meaning that arises from the innate wisdom of the heart. Moments of being deeply moved call us beyond our mundane insecurities, personal desires, and interpersonal battles to an inner recognition of something greater—call it God, Love, or Truth—that is shared amongst everyone.

For me, the essence of the experience of being deeply moved is this connection with one's own heart, and thus the heart of humanity.

In reflecting on the subject of heart and spiritual practice, Kornfield (1993) wrote:

The things that matter most in our lives are not fantastic or grand. They are the moments when we touch one another, when we are there in the most attentive or caring way. This simple and profound intimacy is the love that we all long for. These moments of touching and being touched can become a foundation for a path with heart, and they take place in the most immediate and direct way. (p. 14)

He continued:

Even the most exalted states and the most exceptional spiritual accomplishments are unimportant if we cannot be happy in the most basic and ordinary ways, if we cannot touch one another and the life we have been given with our hearts. (p. 19)

My hope is that this dissertation serves as an invitation for you, the readers, to deeply touch life with the heart, and to embody your own vision of a life inspired by that which most profoundly moves you.

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Appendix A: Flyer

Have you ever had an experience of being deeply moved?

My name is Alexis Shepperd and I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology doing research with people who have had experiences of being deeply moved. Experiences of being deeply moved may involve being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life and may result in a deeper sense of connection to yourself, others, or the sacred.

I am seeking people who are:

- Age 18 and older.
- Willing to write about their experiences for use and publication in this study.
- Willing and able to engage in most communications via email.

As a participant in this study, you will:

- Compile a list of the situations and ways that you have had experiences of being deeply moved.
- Write about one experience of being deeply moved. The writing should include a succinct yet detailed description of the thoughts, emotions, and sensations you had during the experience. It should also include details about the context in which the experience occurred and the meaning and impact that this experience had on your life.

Share your story with me! If you are interested in participating in this study, please

contact me at: -----

Appendix B: Screening Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences of being deeply moved.
2. Are you willing to write about an experience of being deeply moved?
3. After I receive your writing, I may ask you to revise what you have written. If I make this request, I will provide written feedback to assist you in rewriting your story. The purpose of this would not be to alter the content of your story, but to enhance or clarify what you have already written. Are you willing to revise your story?
4. Most communication will occur online when possible. Do you have email access?
5. Are you over age 18?
6. Are you currently in any kind of medical treatment?
7. Do you currently have a therapist or counselor?
8. Do you have a history of alcohol or drug dependence?
9. How would you rate your overall physical health?
10. (If a woman) Are you pregnant?
11. For what reasons are you interested in participating in this study?
12. Have you participated in research studies in the past?
13. If yes (to number 12), how many studies did you complete?

Appendix C: Criteria for Inclusion/Exclusion for Respondents in the Study

Inclusion Criteria

- adults, 18 years and older (no upper limit)
- current good health; participants with current illness or recent major surgery considered if condition is not likely to interfere with full participation in the study
- self-reported stable psychological condition
- willingness to share experiences in writing
- able to meet time commitment of study
- all ethnic backgrounds encouraged to participate

Exclusion Criteria

- under age 18
- major illness or recent major surgery that could compromise full participation in the study
- current psychological instability
- major psychological diagnosis or history that could compromise full participation in the study
- incomplete attendance in previous research studies
- pregnancy (Federal guidelines for research)

Appendix D: Consent Form and Introductory Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in assisting with my research project. I am a doctoral student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP), Palo Alto, California, and this research study is for my doctoral dissertation. You would be a wonderful asset to this study and are formally invited to be a participant. This letter describes the contribution I am seeking from research participants. Following this letter, I have included a disclosure and consent form required for participation in dissertation research.

You are invited to participate in a study designed to explore experiences of being deeply moved. This term is used frequently in everyday language, yet there has been almost no formal research that has explored this experience. I believe that this is a significant and meaningful experience for some people and worthy of study. The following is the working definition I am using in this study: *The experience of being deeply moved may involve being profoundly affected by the beautiful or painful dimensions of life and thereby more connected to oneself, others, or the sacred. It may include emotional, cognitive, physical, spiritual, or transformational components.* The purpose of this research project is to explore the lived-experience of being moved, the ways people understand this experience, and how it affects people's lives.

As a participant in this study, you will agree to compile a list of moments or situations when you have been deeply moved. I encourage you to recall both your most significant moments of being moved as well as moments of being moved in everyday life that may otherwise be overlooked. The purpose of this is to observe the breadth of situations and ways this experience occurs in your life. You may continue to add to this list until you submit your final materials to me.

Following the completion of the list, you will choose one experience to describe in writing. You may choose the most profoundly moving experience to write about, but you are equally encouraged to choose a less significant moment as long as it is personally meaningful. However, the experience needs to be a specific moment in your recollection rather than a composite of experiences you have had. You may use a description you have already written, such as an entry in a journal or excerpt from a letter, or you may write from your memory of the experience. Supplementing prose descriptions with poetry, art, or recorded music is welcomed.

This study encourages "embodied" descriptions of experience. An embodied style of writing is rich in sensory and emotional detail in order to convey how you felt while having the experience. Embodied writing is concrete and specific, and often slowed down to capture nuance. Following this letter, I have included three examples of embodied writing to help inform your understanding of the embodied writing style. While you may reference these examples to remind yourself how to include sensory and emotional details in your writing, allow yourself to write from your *own* body and

experience. Many people find that writing in an embodied manner will naturally elicit their own unique flavor or personality.

Please consider the following when writing about your experiences:

1. What happened in your experience? What emotions, thoughts and sensations arose? Please be specific and detailed as if you were taking someone through the experience, moment by moment, just as it happened.
2. What was the context of the experience? What seemed to cause it? What else was going on in your life?
3. Does this experience have any meaning for you? If so, what does it mean to you?
4. How, if at all, did this experience impact your life? Did you take any specific action as a result of this experience?
5. Please include anything else that seems important and related to this experience.

The amount of time participants will devote to completing this process will vary. Most participants will spend approximately two to three hours making their lists and writing their initial descriptions. After I receive your description, I may ask you to supplement certain aspects of it. This will likely involve answering a few brief questions designed to enhance what you have already written. The process of revising your writing may take an additional hour of your time. I may also edit your description for punctuation or length with the intention that the editing preserve and enhance your expression of your experience. I will return your story to you for your approval of the final draft to be used in this study.

After I have received stories from all participants, I will develop a set of themes or interpretations about the experience of being deeply moved. I will share these themes with all participants and ask interested participants to offer feedback. I expect this process to take an additional hour or less of time from those interested in this aspect of the project.

For the protection of your privacy, I will not use your real name in publishing, reporting or referencing your experience. At the end of this letter, a place is provided for you to indicate a pseudonym for use in this study. If you do not choose a pseudonym, I will select one for use in the final dissertation.

Your signature below indicates that you are comfortable with my use of any and all details about your experience that you share in this research. If there are details about your experience you are not comfortable sharing, please feel free to disguise those details to protect your privacy, as long as you provide a description of your experience that honors its essence. Your full story will appear in the dissertation.

Your identity will be kept confidential and all information received from you will be kept confidential as to source. I will keep the information in a locked cabinet to which no one other than myself has access.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. Disclosure of experiences as studied in this project may cause anxiety for some people due to their personal nature and as these experiences are not readily shared in public. If, at any time, you have any concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss them with you and inform you of options for resolving your concerns. These options may include referring you to your personal therapist, or if you do not already have a therapist, to the ITP counseling center or to a list of local therapists.

Prior research indicates that the reporting of experiences such as those I am requesting often serves to validate the importance of the experience. Participating in this study may serve to deepen or enhance the personal significance of the experience you describe. However, participating in this study may not necessarily result in personal benefits.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me collect at -----, or email me at ----- . You may also contact Genie Palmer, Ph.D., Chairperson of my committee, or Olga Louchakova, Ph.D., Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee at ITP, at (650) 493-4430. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology assumes no responsibility for psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the conduct of the study and for any reason without penalty or prejudice. Participation is entirely voluntary.

Enclosed you will find a form requesting signature consent and a form for your demographic information. Please complete these and return to me in the envelope provided. Along with these forms, you will also find three examples of embodied writing, which you may keep.

Thank you for your interest in this project. I hope this study will be an enriching experience for you.

Alexis Shepperd, MA
Researcher

I attest that I have read and understood the Consent Form and Introductory Letter and have had any questions about this research answered to my satisfaction. My participation in this research is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage my participation. My signature below indicates my willingness to be a participant in this research project as described above, including publication of my writings submitted to the researcher as described above.

Participant's signature

Date

Participant's printed name

Please use this pseudonym in place of my real name in the study (please print clearly):

I intend to gather your responses and engage in most communications via email. Are you willing and able to participate using this mode of communication?

yes no Email: _____

Participant's Mailing Address:

Telephone: _____

Would you like to receive a summary of the research findings? _____
yes no

Alexis Shepperd, Researcher
[phone number]
[mailing address]

Date

Appendix E: Demographic Data

Please complete this form by clearly printing or typing your responses to the following questions. When given a list of options for any given question, **please circle one**.

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Sex: male / female / transgender / other

4. Marital status:

married / widowed / divorced / separated / single / domestic partner

5. Do you have children? yes / no If so, how many?

6. Ethnic Heritage:

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

some high school / high school / some college / college

some grad school / graduate degree / some postgrad / postgraduate degree

(If applicable): In what field did you earn your degree?

8. Profession/Occupation:

9. What is your religious background?

None / Buddhist / Christian / Hindu / Jewish / Muslim / Other _____

10. What is your current religious or spiritual practice? Please elaborate.

None / Buddhist / Christian / Hindu / Jewish / Muslim / Other _____

Appendix F: Examples of Embodied Writing

Example One

By Alexis Shepperd

A soft itch on my arm arouses me out of a dream. I lazily open my eyes and look down in time to see a tiny ant crawl off my hand and make its way across our dark blue Mexican blanket and back onto the grass. I lift my head and cup a hand at my neck to look around. The park is mostly empty but for two little kids racing around and laughing at the far end of the field. Their voices are faint and mingle with the singing and buzzing of the smaller creatures living around us. The Monterey Pines, now blown at an angle from years of sea winds, seemed to be reaching for the setting sun and the seashore just at the edges of the park. The heat of the day has worn off and a cool breeze lifts the tendrils of my hair.

I roll toward him on my side, my hair trailing across the blanket. His chest is still expanding and contracting with rhythmic breath in the space beside me. “Sleepy guy,” I whisper under my breath. I quietly push aside the book I had been reading before I fell asleep and prop myself up on my elbow to study his face. Long, dark lashes grace his cheeks and his lips rest gently together. Beneath closed eyes his gaze shifts back and forth in daydreams. The creases around his eyes and mouth, now relaxed, are worn by his face like faint memories. I trace the lines with my eyes as if following a map. It makes me think of the ways life marks each of us, claims us as her own, and our laughter and worry become etched into our faces. And how, despite this marking, there is still something untouched in his upturned, relaxed face, his brow and cheeks unhindered and open to the sky. Beyond the lines of emotion and aging is a different kind of freshness.

Suddenly I am pulled out of reverie as the lines in his face begin to deepen and the corners of his mouth turn up in a faint grin. I am caught in the looking, and know that my presence on his skin has awakened him. His sleepy, knowing half-smile washes over me and I watch the way the light breaks unendingly across his face through the veil of my hair.

Example Two

By Brian Heery

Where’s the love in a punch to the head?

My bare feet find comfort in the texture and character of the tatami mat beneath. Thoughts and memories are alive in that intimate relationship of flesh and earth. My breath deepens and I feel the earth’s attraction for the limbs of my body more deeply as the tension in my muscles releases. My feet flatten out and the capillaries in my lower extremities are gorged with blood as my whole being focuses on attacking my Aikido teacher. Blood flows powerfully from my heart and flesh and bones work together in harmony producing a shifting landscape, as the distance to my teacher diminishes. My hand raises to grasp his arm; suddenly my cheek is glued to the heel of his hand. All that exists is his bones melding into the contour of my cheekbone with tremendous

force. Miraculously in the same moment blending with the soft cartilage in my nose. The structure of my body and his body are as one. A resonance permeates down through my organs, cells and atoms. An emptiness opens up and all form dies, even time fails to permeate this infinite universe. Intimacy as never before experienced, atoms older than the sun, unable to distinguish their source, all that exists is one. Time and structure break back into my experience as I feel the force of his blow to my skull whip down my spine and out my tail bone, my legs leave the floor and suddenly the floor is racing towards me at an incredible speed. My flesh is filled with vitality as I take a hard side break fall on the mat as the force of impact is easily dissipated into the ground by these vibrant cells. The resulting vibrations course through my body as my bones and flesh realign. Grateful for the insight gained from this experience I rise and once again attack my Aikido teacher.

Example Three By Vipassana Esbjörn-Hargens

Running along the bay in Tiburon, my bones feel sturdy and muscles sinewy. A quiet vapor-like mist moves through my bloodstream, out to my toes and through each fingertip. I am inspired by the pampas grass that bends in the wind, regally erect yet accommodating to the breeze. A sharp side pain reminds me to breathe all the way to the depths of my *hara*, the energetic center below the belly. Bringing awareness to the discomfort—breathing into it—the pain soon dissolves. With a greater ease of breath, spacious vulnerability rises from my torso. Feet and legs connect to the earth as they pound the forgiving clay path: bone and muscle being lived in. Legs pick up speed, almost with a will of their own. Pumping, my body sprints faster, and then still faster. Blood, flesh, and bone pulsate with life. Joy flashes through my body as a bolt of fierce sweetness. And then stillness descends again, quiet and neutral.

I continue my trek home. Sitting on a shiny bench at the Marina Green, I inhale the panorama before me: Golden Gate, Sausalito, Alcatraz, big sky, and water of the San Francisco Bay. It is late October and the sun blazes in a cloudless sky. The sound of splashing water meeting the rocks and sea wall, before returning back to its great source invites me to return to my source. My breath falls into rhythm with the waves: lapping, breathing, lapping, breathing. My eyelids grow heavy as the sea kisses me into trance; I am being breathed. My nostrils expand, the tiny hairs inside tickled with the salty air. My throat and chest, diaphragm and stomach relax—moving with the song of the tides. The sensation of floating envelops my body, as the subtle obstacles blocking my breath dissolve in laughter.

Note: These stories are used with permission of the authors.

Appendix G: Participants' lists of experiences of being deeply moved

Aliza

- A number of experiences when I worked as a nurse:
 - Two connected with helping mothers (and a father) cope with neonatal death, by helping them see and hold their baby.
 - Being stopped in town by a young lady, who told me that I'd taught her how to take tablets, after she'd been hospitalized after a road traffic accident, and told me she couldn't take tablets. Being remembered like that was/is deeply moving. 'You were the nurse who taught me how to take tablets.'
- Personal relationships.
 - Feeling deeply moved at the way a particular relationship is changing, and how this person feels privileged to have me as a friend. Sensing that our friendship is helping both of us develop and that it is helping her realize that she needs professional help.
 - Watching my daughter do a certain physiotherapy exercise for her arms, turning a long broomstick in her hands, singing along to music, with enormous pleasure and fun and freedom.
- Other instances: These are all connected to a particular state of mind, which allowed these experiences to take place.
 - Going out for a walk, returning home and putting on the radio. Starting to cook and getting swept up by the music (Yanni) and dancing around to the music, while occasionally stirring the pot. I felt one with the music and the cooking!
 - Opening up an avocado for lunch and being so aware of its beauty, and having such a sense of the whole world embodied in this fruit.

Bird

- The veterinarian accidentally aspirated my cockatiel. My favorite pet's life was in a precarious balance. I traveled hundreds of miles seeking the help of other professionals. She teetered on the brink of death hour after hour, day after day. I went to great lengths to tip the scale. After a month of fighting the good fight, waking up every four hours night after night to medicate and feed her put me in an altered state of mind so that when she died, I felt as if I was given a glimpse beyond the curtain. Synchronicities convinced me that it was more than my imagination. The experience galvanized me for understanding that was still to come.
- I am an introvert leading a quiet life. Years after the death of this cockatiel, reading a website inspired me to write a short book to educate other vets on bird nutrition (and wellness practice) for a top avian veterinarian who sells organic bird food worldwide. Soon, many bird food catalogs were using my words verbatim to educate their bird-loving clients. Not only did this relate

directly back to experience the first experience I described, it also led to my marriage.

- When the red-tailed hawk hovered outside my window as I stood beside it. That was the first time I had opened that particular window in my aviary. I've come to recognize a familiar feeling in my chest when a synchronicity is about to happen. I felt it the day I opened a particular window in my aviary. I'd had a tremendous amount of trouble getting that window from the store. It had taken all summer to get it installed correctly. It was almost too cold, by the time I could use it. Anyway, I felt it was more than coincidental that a red-tailed hawk hovered outside it just a few feet away as I stood inside and opened it the first time. Given my experience with owls, I considered it a visitation from my totem animal (since Native Americans view owl as the nighttime version of hawk).
- Along those lines, I had another visit from a marsh hawk while I was standing in my aviary. He was hunting and slammed against the window I was standing behind as he dove in for the kill. For a moment, I forgot it was not my own death I'd escaped. After all, I am not a flock creature, right? I was glad to see the hawk survived the encounter too.
- What are the chances of having two screech owls hit my car traveling on opposite sides of the same hill in less than a week? That was my next experience with an owl. The first one I couldn't catch. The second one I did. I took him home and let him go once I saw that he was strong and well. The proximity to another owl brought all the emotion from the barred owl experience back into focus along with the fascination for totem animals.
- When I found a screech owl with a broken wing and took him to the local bird rehab lady it was significant for me because of the other synchronicities that were occurring at that time. The explanation of which is too complicated for this list. That's the problem with seeing the oneness. All these events are sewn together through it and it's difficult to pick one up without discussing all the others. After this, I stopped calling owls to myself. I can connect with them just fine from afar.

Elizabeth

- My now-nearly-12-year-old niece curled up in the first week of her life on my waterbed.
- A helicopter flight over Kauai, Hawaii.
- My mother's momentary and rare tears following major surgery when she told me, despite earlier protests about my taking off work, that she was glad I was there.
- Hearing that my sister had been sexually molested by my brother as a teenager.
- Poems written by 14-year-old students in a poetry class I teach—the depth of thought and beauty of words has often stirred me to tears.
- My last visit with a long-time friend five days before he died.
- Emails that were sent by the same friend an hour before he died.

- The beauty of Thanksgiving morning 2004 after a snowstorm.
- Seeing the sculptures of Michelangelo, especially The Pieta, in Rome.
- A 'reunion' dinner meeting with my high school senior English teacher thirty years after I became an English teacher largely because of her influence.
- Reading *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini.
- My mother's 'social worker stance' when she came to a therapy session to hear about my sexual abuse.
- Making it to the hospital before my grandfather, my favorite person who ever roamed the planet, died on December 30, 1971.
- A 50-mile hike taken on Easter Sunday when I lost two toenails, rubbed raw by new J C Penney plastic shoes, feeling dejected about being last.
- Retirement dinner for principal of 19 years.
- Surprise anniversary party for my parents' 60th wedding anniversary.
- Hearing Elie Wiesel speak about his personal Holocaust experience.

Hannah

- Watching my daughter in the woods at age five or six be reverent and reflective in a private moment (and then shy when she saw me). I was moved because of her age and her sense of being almost prayerful of her own accord in the forest of a friend we were visiting.
- When my daughter was a baby and just months old I had her in a favorite cotton flowered gown and on a blanket outside. The way she looked up at the sky and trees with such a peaceful look was very moving to me. I have remembered it these last 12 years and also have a photo of her looking so wonderfully peaceful and attuned to nature . . . it's a lovely memory of an incredible moment shared.
- Being with my Grandmother those last few months and sitting with her in a state of peace and even bliss as if we were in another world that is spiritual and loving was deeply moving. This experience helped me to cope with her death and the loss of her and to be at peace with death.
- Taking care of her for two years but especially the first year when we would be together and laugh so, so much. We always did share humor and some of my most wonderful moments of living have been in laughter with my Grandmother. Great laughs with my husband are moving as well.
- The afternoon when I was married there were rare, exquisite clouds in the Santa Barbara sky during our ceremony and I felt in tune with nature. During and after the ceremony outdoors I felt surprised at how spiritual—and yet that word does not cover it—what a peaceful, lovely quality I had in joining together in partnership. It was as if after all the planning and everything I had heard about weddings that no one told me it would feel like such a spiritual experience in such a private and quiet way.

- As a child I recall walking alone outside to the school bus. We lived in the first suburb right next to a big farm so it was almost the country. I can remember looking up at the blue sky and white clouds and thinking about God as everywhere and how profound that was and I felt in awe. I was about seven years old.
- In college I had an apartment with an old, glassed in porch on the second floor with trees outside the windows. I recall laying there watching the tree branches in the wind and feeling at peace and connected to nature while having a sense of the oneness of everything. I have had many times like this.
- Once with my Grandmother we went to a doctor and my grandmother had such trouble getting on the table—she was very frail and in a wheel chair. The doctor in his mid to late thirties seemed a bit overwhelmed by her frailty but he was very respectful. It was as if the three of us in that moment were sharing something about a respect of life and elders and a shared humanity. I was moved by him and his sensitivity too rare in the medical field and just by that shared time. (I recall he never billed us.)
- After a frightening accident on the 101 highway in California when a semi truck ran us onto the shoulder and then hit the whole side of our car with his trailer I was amazed to still be alive and so grateful my daughter was still alive. The next day I wrote a poem about being alive and the beauty of this world, which I almost exited. I felt so moved by life and nature and the wonder of it all, that we forget too often. I was in a state of awe.
- A day or so before my father was dying in the hospital I was with him but did not realize he was going to die. His eyes were the most incredible blue color; I can never forget the beautiful color blue after 23 years since he passed. I recall also when I was going to leave he asked very gently (which was not like him as he was a former marine) if I could stay a bit longer. I took his hand and said of course I could, and I was moved by his simple request. I am so grateful I did stay longer as that was the last time I saw him.
- I was very moved after reading a book about Harriet Tubman. I thought she was so brave and a heroine. I was in sixth grade and reading a biography about her was the most memorable experience I had in all of my grade school and junior high years. I was so moved by her story and what she did on the Underground Railroad helping people to escape slavery.
- At the arboretum full of beautiful trees I was moved by the peace and beauty of nature. I would go there often when I was in high school and feel at peace and reflective. Sometimes my brother would read me some poetry he had written and it was such a sweet experience to be there with him. He is a truck driver now but still a great reader, though I think he has forgotten about writing poetry. I feel grateful we shared those moments when we did.
- I have had many deeply moving experiences sitting by big trees. I have loved trees since I was a child and we had a maple and a willow in our yard. I felt such a kinship with those trees. I have always loved trees and in part moved back to the Midwest because I missed having lots of trees around. I have been deeply moved over and over by trees whether it be the trees from childhood or the giant sequoias in central California, or a huge old maple at

the arboretum, or a giant cottonwood next to our old 1920's movie theatre in town here. I love trees and some of my most peaceful moments have been while under their canopy. I have a whole series of tree poems which came from being deeply moved by trees. They are the lungs of the earth and give us so much, be it wood for our homes or paper for our writing and research or a spiritual haven and place of rest. Forests are my favorite places to be.

- Laughter may not be the typical moving experience but I recall once in high school with a friend, that after a long night out we came back to her home and she was admiring a flower, a rose. She said how beautiful it was and then touched in with her fingertip and every single petal dropped to the ground instantly and we could not stop from laughing. It was hysterical and still is funny to me after 22 years. What was so moving was sharing such profound laughter with a good friend in such a spontaneous and unexpected way and after she had been so reverent . . . the joke was on us!
- Singing folk songs, especially when in my twenties, brought many a moving experience. It seems music takes me to another place and when I sing I feel moved by the tune and the words and the sharing of music with others. Many songs move me but I especially like a Yeats poem that was put to music and sung by Judy Collins with simple piano. I am always deeply moved by this song, and so much music. Life without music would be so much less wonderful. When humans sing it's as if we become songbirds and celebrate life. I have been deeply moved also by taize and the repetition of singing a few spiritual lines over and over with others. One I recall about forgiveness I sang in a Catholic church with a huge dome in Oak Park Illinois. I am far from being Catholic in my beliefs but it did not matter; I was in a state of awe, and forgiveness felt so simple and easy as I sang about it.
- I have been deeply moved by things my daughter has written since the age of eight until her current age of twelve. She is a gifted writer and I have been moved over and over by what she has written in its quality, style, organization, interesting facts, humor and just her overall talent that is unusual for her age. She wrote a poem about Artemis from Greek mythology that has wonderful rhythm and says so much about the myth . . . written in grade five! Her written work I find very moving and she has a future with the written word.
- Writing poetry myself is almost always a deeply moving experience, especially when the poem first comes to me. I love finding words that portray the experience I am having in the moment, so often when in nature or about my daughter who is like a gem gleaming in this world.
- I have been deeply moved by books on various topics . . . books I would have to say are on the top of my list of being connected to deeply moving experiences. I did two memory albums when I turned 50 and two pages in my albums are full of book titles which I found deeply moving and very significant to my life. I have been touched over and over by books . . . fiction, non-fiction . . . just many wonderful books. My top eight if I had to pick would be: 'The Book of Qualities,' by Ruth Gendler; David Spangler's

‘Cooperation with Spirit: Further Conversations with God’; ‘Reading Lolita in Teheran,’ by Nafis Aziz; ‘The Scarlet Letter,’ by Nathaniel Hawthorne; ‘The Artist’s Way,’ by Julia Cameron; ‘Saved by the Light,’ by Dannion Brinkley; ‘The Transparent Self,’ by Sidney Jourard; and ‘Dreamsnakes,’ by Vonna Intyre.

- Some of my most moving experiences come from doing what I call my intuitive writing. I can write about anything and I tap an inner wisdom which always, always helps me. I come away from the writing moved and refreshed and with life much more in perspective. This type of writing I have been doing since 1988 and it never fails to be a deeply moving experience. It is something I can always count on to be deeply moving.

James

- Age 5: I saw a fire consume a neighborhood restaurant/bar of which I was fond. I thought that some people I knew might have been hurt.
- Age 12: My first girlfriend broke my heart.
- Age 17: My father died suddenly of a heart attack.
- Age 22: A group, human potential, intensive-role-playing game led to a blissful peak experience of self-acceptance.
- Age 25: I nearly drowned in Puerto Angel, Mexico. Later that same day (Friday, July 13, 1985) I was pulled over by Mexican Police who threatened to take me to jail. In the first instance, my past flashed through my mind. In the second instance, thoughts were of my future.
- Age 32, 35 and 37: The births of my children.
- Age 35: My mother succumbed to cancer.
- Age 45: Divorce.
- Age 45: I experienced on several occasions a deep connection, perhaps metaphysical union, with a lover.

Josh

- Thinking about how much my family loves me.
- Watching a scene from a movie that depicts a generous act of kindness.
- Seeing someone selflessly helping another out of love and connection.
- Thinking about what others have done for me, or how much they mean to me.
- Music that somehow touches my heart.
- Sharing with a friend about a tough time I’m having.
- Writing/talking about how much my I love my Dad, or my Mom, or my Sister.

Katherine

- I awaken to the sound of construction and things moving in a strange room—the guest room my brother and his girlfriend share. Though my body is still reeling from living and working in [city in California] for five months, I feel a renewed sense of belonging and purpose. The sunlight reflects off the leaves of the trees outside my window and I breathe a deep sigh of relief. (I can breathe!) No more smog, no more pollution, no more news. I've washed up on the shores of what feel like paradise where moving truck parts sounds like music to my ears. The wheel of my life has just completed a turn. I am reborn.
- I meet up with a friend of a friend in the middle of a town in New Hampshire. It's warm out with very little humidity and the sky is a deep shade of blue. I am filled with the knowledge of receiving a good grade in a summer fiction writing class at the University of New Hampshire. I am happy and am overjoyed to have met up with an acquaintance and his friend to talk easily about things that have nothing to do with school or fiction writing. Little did I know that my acquaintance's friend is a man I will end up dating for seven years. At the moment, I am completely caught up with a story he's telling me about his brother who ended up dying of AIDS. So enthralled am I by his story that my surroundings, the little awning overhead, the French-café styled chairs we're sitting on, the coffee, even the man before me seem to disappear. His deep, calming voice mesmerizes me. I take in every word. He is telling me about how his friends and family staged a healing circle to save his brother's life during a critical time in his illness. Their prayers not only helped his brother divert death but he ended up living for two more years. Suddenly my excitement over my hard-earned grade feels petty. A stronger undercurrent takes its place.
- It's a beautiful summer day in May and my parents and I are sitting on the bleachers overlooking the football field at my brother's high school in Michigan. Below us, the 400 graduates dressed in white and maroon, form a rectangle against the green oval of the field below them. I can't remember if I was hot or bothered or exhausted. All I can remember is the image of my brother—little more than a speck of a person—standing before his graduating class. Suddenly, I feel emotion rising from my bowels like a wave. In what seems like a single second I have an image of my brother's life and all its mismatched pieces as he confidently addresses the Class of 85. I weep.
- It's a gorgeous day in late July and I'm sitting on the steps of a church in New Hampshire. It's late afternoon and a tree the size of the church itself filters the rich sunlight overhead. I am facing the love of my life, the man I've come to know over the past seven years, the man with whom I've spent the better part of my young adult life. It's over and there's no consolation. I'm left with sadness and connection to everything we've shared over the past seven years. I break off the relationship.

- I'm sitting in the square near a coffee shop in Northern California, at night with a man whom I've dated for two years. I've just arrived late and he's angry. His expression is overcast, body language restrained. I'm not particularly moved but will be when we start to talk about the last two years, the difficulties we've had and the possibility of ending the relationship altogether. I am acutely aware of a softness and flexibility in my body. I sit cross-legged and it doesn't hurt. After nine months of competitive cycling, I finally hung it up at the summer's end and started doing yoga. My body feels reborn. Later, tears will flow from my insides like a balm as we talk about how much we've meant to each other while the possibility of ending the relationship looms overhead.
- I am walking through a park with my brother's girlfriend's Golden Retriever. The sun is shining, the sky is blue, the grass green. I'm relaxed and overjoyed not to be working on a weekday. Marley, the dog, is my only responsibility. I notice a man in beggar's clothes lying on the ground. He's not the only one around. There are others in the park as well: Dog-walkers, walkers, joggers, children and moms. But it occurs to me as our shadows run over him like a reckless sports car that Marley probably will be more comfortable on the couch in our apartment than the beggar will be on the dewy grass when night falls. Compassion makes my body go limp.
- It's the summer of 1990 and I'm climbing up the side of a hill on a moped in Greece with my friend. White Mediterranean light douses the endless sky and ocean below. There isn't much to see, just an all-white church and the brown road ahead. I have the feeling of being on the edge of the earth, the fringes of civilization. I am filled with life's benevolence and a deep sense of letting go of all that has come before this moment in my 20 years of existence. I am enveloped in a spiritual presence and a sense of fearlessness. I feel deeply rooted in life's meaning and feel a sudden comfort with the idea of death. Its okay, I think. In this one moment, I've fulfilled my entire life's purpose: To experience God.
- It's an ordinary day for me in Avignon, France. I am a student and my life consists of a few hours of class a day, a run, time spent chatting in the square over a beer and a bike ride home. It's a heavenly existence although even my life here has felt mundane at times. Today feels like a regular day with one exception. I have an unexplained connection with God and a deep sense of knowing. Storm clouds gather in the distance over the Rhone River but there's nothing threatening about them. Rather, they feel like a message from God. A psychic energy sweeps over me: God exists. I can feel Him.
- Clouds form in the distance against the Boston skyline. Something isn't right I tell myself. Though I know in my mind that there's nothing wrong other than my rather disappointing interview at The Boston Globe, something else sees nuclear mushroom clouds. Something feels intensely threatening. I am still a bit shook up from being at *The Boston Globe* where the news staff discussed a possible anthrax attack on one of their editors. They weren't the only ones shaking. Terror shot through my body like a piece of ice slicing all organs in its wake. I held my breath as I tiptoed through the mailroom on my

way out. There isn't a single ounce of salvation in those clouds, stark and meticulously defined against the skyline.

- I open up the *Boston Globe* two weeks after dreaded 9/11. Photos of all the people who died in the airplanes are displayed in a special section and for the first time since the event occurred I begin to weep. I feel the magnitude of it all and my own grief. A great sense of relief washes over me; my body feels soft and supple.
- I am sitting in front of a rock in the lot between our house and the neighbor's, the 'witch' we called Mrs. Kelly. I am just seven years old. It's a mid-summer's day and the sun is shining, the birds are singing and I can smell the rich aroma of earth rising from the baking field. I knew that lot by heart. It was vaguely reminiscent of Mrs. Kelly's hair, a mess of powdery white tangles. There were the un-pruned trees between our house, the meadow next to hers and the stone deer that guarded her overgrown garden closer to her house. The sun warms my skin and bakes the six-inch fronds of grass below me. It's still and I can distinguish the call of dozens of different birds. The smell of fresh earth rises from the ground. I feel free, happy and deeply connected. I am this field.
- 'I haven't felt this way in so long,' my mother says, as she lies prostrate on the couch in the small den in the house where I grew up in Michigan. 'Like what?' I ask. 'I haven't felt anyone care for me like this in so long, to feel loved and protected.' Instantly, my mind starts working. What about my father? How long has it been since she's felt 'cared for'? I feel a sudden sense of grief. Not mine, but hers. A sense of intimacy settles in.
- My brother is furious with me. Its several months after my mother's death and I've just forced him to make a rather long trip out of his way to bring me back to my father's new house. He angrily drops me off at the front stoop and I burst into tears. All the anger I've felt up to this point is dissipating. I'm not really angry with him for taking me to a work-related event and not getting me back at a decent hour, I'm really sad about our mom. 'Work related' events are simply not jiving with my emotions. I need my brother to show up though I couldn't have articulated this in words. Tears worked and despite all the angry words that have passed between us during the past 45 minutes in the car, he hugs me powerfully. I can't remember ever hugging my brother like this; I've always avoided looking to him for emotional support. But now something in me completely releases and is filled with love. My body unwinds; my anger cools. I feel like a sun-baked frog jumping into a pond of skin-cooling water.
- Over a period of five months while living in [city in California], I come to this stunning realization and feel my life will never be the same. Beggars on the street anywhere but here—where the smog levels are the worse in the country—would be better off than a well-to-do person living in the Inland Empire. Never have I experienced anything like this. I think of my mother who died of lung cancer, my mother's sister who has lung cancer and their mother who also died of lung cancer and suddenly I am connected to the people living in this town because I live here too. When I walk through the

streets of this town, I see how we're all in one big fish bowl of pollution. I feel a deep sense of compassion for everyone – the beggar collapsed under his own weight in a doorway, the young man at the coffee shop whose hair is already beginning to thin, my overweight boss with his asthma, a young professional walking briskly through the street, healthy now but for how long? There isn't a single person I resent or feel envy towards. We all suffer, I conclude, and my body softens to that certainty.

- Alex and I are sitting on a dock in a no-name town near Puget Sound. I feel a deep sense of connection in the solitude of this place. We don't know each other very well and neither one of us has ever been here but I feel a deep sense of home. Alex is the former boyfriend of one of my best high school friends. Interestingly, they met and dated in Washington D.C., a world away from *this* Washington. We talk gently about our ideas surrounding family. Kids. No kids. A home. We've been talking hungrily all day, like two people coming off of a silent retreat. But eventually all this talk gives way to this beautiful silent lake, cranes skimming its surface. I love Alex but detach with all the humanly needs that might be associated with that love like getting married, having children or even seeing him again. This moment is enough.

Leigh

- Many moments of abstinence.
- Being told that I was irreplaceable.
- The waterfall in the Dominican Republic and the hike.
- The pot brownie trip sitting on the patio.
- Many moments with friends.
- Talking to S. that day about life.
- Many moments with lovers:
 - Sitting on the lap of a lover and having a conversation when he arrived and I messed up big time. Him telling me he loved me.
 - The night with H. in the car.
 - Meeting J. and the first hug; not wanting to let go.
 - J. coming over. Coming home in the wee hours to him waiting and angry.
 - Meeting P. and kissing. The last day he left.
- Doing transformational coursework. Watching my brother go through the same course.
- Garden times.
- Many moments of yoga. Doing bikram yoga for the first time.
- When my friend cried and told me to sleep in her room for a week.
- Watching American Beauty and the aftermath. Talking with a friend about her mom's death.
- Crying with mom about the Four Agreements and the perfection of it all.
- Lying in bed with mom and laughing 'til we cried.
- When a lover told me I was hurting him.

- Watching friends open up.
- Sexual openings.
- In the bathtub when G. was there.
- A friend asking me about my goals and really listening and smiling; later, getting the thank you letter and flowers from her.
- When I confronted my mom in Tucson.
- When my brother told mom that he would not be in her life anymore if she continued to drink. When she agreed to go to treatment.
- When I lost it in my parents driveway and my dad hugged me.
- Sitting with my dad on the porch of the guest house and him telling me that he loved his nest when there were kids in it.
- Telling Dad what I did with his trust fund.
- Fighting with my brother; fighting with Mom.
- Doing Vipassana all three times. Lying on my back feeling sucked in by gravity on day 9 or 10 of Vipassana; driving back, feeling high.
- Moment of looking in the mirror.
- Going with B. to the Palace of Fine Arts at night and doing the hand contact in the car afterwards.
- Dancing at a friend's wedding.
- Seeing a friend at her engagement party.
- When a friend asked for help.
- Telling the truth to my friends and at FA [food-addicts anonymous] meetings.
- Telling friends about my bulimia.
- Letting go with friends after freaking out.
- Mom saying she was just waiting for me to leave; Mom saying she was angry.
- Writing to graduate school about Vipassana meditation and bulimia.

Mark

- Age 9: Found a stray sick kitten that was blocking traffic on a busy highway. Took it home and nursed it back to health. At first, my father would not let me keep her, but he finally gave in. After it was healthy, the original owner saw the kitty riding in the back window of our car and came to our house to reclaim it. A week later the kitten turned up at my doorstep. The owner let me keep it after that. It was my first pet.
- Age 17: Working as an intern at the local newspaper, one of my early morning jobs was writing obituaries. I had to be at work early, around 5 a.m., but started calling funeral homes about 8. One morning, I called a particular funeral home and the director began giving me my grandmother's obituary. She had been living with us and had died during the night without me knowing it. My parents called at the same time to tell me the bad news.
- Age 18: Falling in love for the first time.

- Age 21: My first experiment with the hallucinogen peyote turned out to be a very spiritual, eye-opening experience surrounding God, who I am, the meaning of life and my place in the universe.
- Age 26: The whole experience of packing up and moving from West Virginia to Alaska and working the waters of Southeast Alaska on the decks of commercial fishing vessels. I had left a “comfy” newspaper job near Pittsburgh, Pa., for “spiritual” reasons.
- Age 36: My wife leaving me and the subsequent divorce.
- Age 42: My battle to overcome opiate addiction following years of homelessness, dealing with all the relationships of the hopelessly addicted, the physical, mental and emotional pain and the re-emergence of hope in my life.
- Age 49: My mother’s death.
- Age 52 (just this week): After being diagnosed with Hepatitis C for 20 years and having resigned myself to the misery of another liver biopsy and 12 months of taking interferon, I received a call from my doctor saying the latest blood tests reveal no presence of the virus in my system. The doctor told me the human immune system is able to fight off the chronic illness in only less than one percent of the population. My biopsy and chemo-therapy were canceled.

Shoshana

- Being with Mom shortly after she was admitted to the hospice unit. The first day she was semi-comatose, but the next morning the nurses happily informed Dad and me when we arrived that Mom was responsive and coherent. We had a chance to talk, for her to tell me what to take of hers from their home, and I had a chance to thank her, and hug and kiss her and say my goodbye. Before I had to leave for the airport to fly back to NJ, she called out, ‘Momma? Poppa?’ as if she saw them. I walked over to her and asked if she missed her parents. She nodded and I told her, ‘its okay. You can go and be with them now.’ I’m crying just thinking about it now, but it was actually a very beautiful and peaceful and affirming moment.
- Several incidents of “coincidences” shortly after Mom passed away, including many involving the phone. To this day, it isn’t unusual for me to be talking with my father (it only seems to happen with him although it has happened on an occasion or two with my husband and son), shortly after the conversation starts, it’s as if the line disconnects. It’s similar to a call-waiting interruption, but no phone number comes on display (on a few occasions it’s read ‘Out of Area’) and there’s never anyone on the line. It has happened while my dad lived in two locations on LI and also in FL, hasn’t happened with anyone else except those couple of instances with my sons—never when anyone else in the family has been on the phone. I always feel a jolt, of ‘*It’s Mom!*’ whenever that happens. May sound irrational, but I’ve actually read stories of such instances and it gives me a sense of reassurance.

- Reading an article in the ‘weddings’ section of the NY Times and thinking the accompanying photograph was of the grandfather of the bride but looking at the other photo and realizing he was the groom. I read the inspiring article of how the 78 year old bride and 89 year old groom were reunited after having gone their separate ways (they first met when the woman was 17) but how circumstances brought them together again. As I read the article, I realized I knew the bride—I’d bought some formal wear for happy occasions in my life at her shop and she’d tearfully informed me of two recent losses in her life: her husband and son within 14 months of each other. It warmed my heart so to see her happiness; I clipped the article out of the paper to add it to my journal. It underscored that there truly could be such a thing as b’skert (the Jewish term meaning ‘soul mate’ and/or ‘it’s meant to be’).
- Coming across a palm reader while with a friend in West Palm Beach and saying I’d stop off for a reading on our way back. I’d forgotten about it but when coming back, felt drawn to her. She had the most penetrating, jet black eyes, but they were kind eyes. I felt as if she were able to peer through to my soul, which is what she did. She asked where I lived, but when I replied too generally she pressed on. When I responded with the name of my actual town in NJ, she responded knowingly, ‘My daughter lives there, right off of Route x,’ which is precisely where I live. Her reading was amazingly accurate and moving.
- Waiting for Dad while he spent a half hour in the house aisle at Sears (!) so I entertained myself looking at paint chip cards, wondering what color I’d paint my dream home in Arizona (we recently sold a condo we had for 3 years called Canyon View in Tucson where my older two attended school). The one and only selection I picked up had these names for the paints: *Arizona Song*, *Canyon Peach*, and *Tucson Trail*. What a beautiful, touching, synchronistic moment—as if I was being told I’m on the right path!
- Waking up earlier this past spring, right around Mother’s Day, with a song playing in my head but unable to identify either the name of the song or the group who sang it. I even tried doing an internet search on it with the few lines I could recall. It stayed on my mind all day but I couldn’t place it at all, aside from knowing it was fairly old; even tuned into an oldies station during the car ride down to Princeton on the off-off chance it would come on, but of course it didn’t. That night, my husband and sons rented a cult-following type film I had no interest in watching and was sitting in the kitchen reading the NY Times when the closing credits and song came on. The tune filtered into me and I stood up and actually screamed. It was the song I’d had on my mind all day! I ran in to get the name and promptly completed my search: a one-hit-wonder song by an obscure group *When in Rome* entitled ‘The Promise.’ The lyrics contain the following lines: ‘*If you need a friend, don’t look to a stranger. You know in the end, I’ll always be there. But when you’re in doubt, and when you’re in danger, take a look all around, and I’ll be there.*’ So, not only was I able to identify the song, I also felt as though I had received yet another message from my mother!

- Dreams! So many that move me tremendously and have convinced me there is a greater force surrounding us:
 - An incredible dream that can only be described as an OBE [out-of-body experience]. That day I'd been at the beach, asking my mom for a sign, and that night, I felt a tremendous pulling, spiraling sensation, as if I was being propelled through a tunnel. I came to see the silhouette of my mother, but my mother when she was much younger—so close I could almost reach out and touch her—but I said I was afraid and a voice asking me if I wanted to return. I said 'Yes' and I felt that same propelling but dropping motion as I returned to my bed. I felt scared yet grateful at the same time for having had the opportunity to be reunited with my mother.
 - I had a similar one in which I was transported to my mother's girlhood home, where I'd never been. But this was undoubtedly where I was, the walls a cloudy, dreamy white. I saw my uncle (who died in 1995) pass by and then heard my mother making great effort to call me from a back bedroom (my father later confirmed the bedrooms were indeed in the back of that house) so I called out to her and told her not to cry, everything was okay. I then heard my mother's voice, but with such effort expended on her part, as if she had to slow down her frequency and rate so she could be heard by me. She said, 'How's Dad?' and I told her Dad was doing fine, he was alright. She asked about the house, the home I grew up in and where she'd lived for over 40 years (she and my dad were "snowbirds" dividing their year between LI and NY . . . but she loved that house in NY). I told her the house was in 'loving hands' as my father had just sold it . . . and with that, I felt she had the knowledge she wanted and felt her presence depart.
 - A dream where my mom called on the phone; she reassured me she was okay but kept saying, 'Tell J. thank you for the card.' She repeated it so many times and was quite insistent I tell him. I awoke, as I always do from such dreams, peaceful from having felt close to her but perplexed as to the card. What card? It was my birthday in August . . . she had died in May. So what card was she referring to? It stayed on my mind all morning as I prepared to leave with my husband and Dad to Tucson where we were going to visit my two older sons who were starting back at U of Arizona. While on the plane, it hit me so hard I actually gasped. I realized J. *did* give her a card! As she had died the Monday right before Mother's Day, J. had gotten a Mother's Day card for her in which he wrote a beautiful note. I had my brother put it in her casket the morning of her funeral. But I'd totally forgotten about it. Mom got it though. She was letting me know she had.
 - A dream that was not only visually but viscerally experienced . . . I could feel a female presence hovering near me and was suffused with light a wisdom and *love*—all encompassing love. I asked who this

being was and if I could open my eyes to see her, but she told me firmly 'No.' In fact, when I tried to open my eyes, I could sense her presence recede, but when I allowed myself to go deeper back to sleep she returned. I asked if she could always be with me and she replied in the most poetic way. I asked her to repeat it so I could remember and write it down as soon as I awoke. This is what she said: *'I can be there on an ocean wave, I can be there in a song, I can be there in the beat of a heart. It doesn't take long.'* I'd heard about spirit guides but never really believed it . . . until this dream. I have no doubt that is who she was, and that she is here for me and with me.

Tom

- Circumambulating Mt. Kailash, a holy mountain in western Tibet. Being disassociated from my body and thoughts, speeding me along my quest for spirituality.
- Taking Ayahuaska for the first time and realizing that my goals, etcetera are not important, but that primary experience and helping other people is more important.
- Watching The Man burn and feeling the release of letting my wife go.
- Feeling some kind of 'energy union' with another and in myself on many levels during the best sex I'd ever had.
- Dancing on 2CB at Burning Man, having a 'birth experience' understanding my consciousness as separate from what I perceive in the external universe.
- Meditating, shedding my ego and feeling 'energy/light' in my head and down my spine.
- Taking MDMA and mushrooms with a blindfold on, and my experience of understanding who I am, with becoming an octopus, eating my loved ones, and then being in front of the octopus, to be eaten, and then becoming the octopus again.
- Breaking down to sob when I admitted to myself that I had failed in my life's mission (at the time) and feelings for others who have failed when I had no empathy.
- Appreciating the Zen of the moment on my motorcycle chasing a gazelle through the skeleton coast.
- Watching the dolphins on a moonless night come through phosphorescent water to my boat and my realizing the beauty of form.
- My first experience with real oppression while coming back from the west bank with feelings of anger over injustice.
- Feeling my dad's love after he yelled at me for 2 hours, then him crying when he told me a story from his childhood.

William

- Moments from many movies, such as ‘Braveheart’ at the moment he calls out *Freedom!* My heart stretches in two directions, craving adventure, and sorrowing the loss of a great life in the world.
- As a teen, the moment I sat on the curb in Anaheim after having everything I owned taken from me, disowned by my parents in Ohio for dealing drugs, 3000 miles from anyone I knew, weeping, as cars fly by without even slowing down.
- When my cocker spaniel died, weeping at the moment her spirit left her body, my hand on her heart, gazing into her eyes as she left them with the finality of a heaving, silent breath.
- My cat died, unable to move for days, somehow he bolted out of the bathtub and down two flights of stairs to the basement
- My brother-in-law died of AIDS at 40, with a massive brain aneurysm. We held a service, and before people had even entered our home I found myself weeping in the arms of a woman who was always very guarded, a colleague at my school. I found myself amazed at the oddity of the situation, sobbing uncontrolled in this woman’s arms. A witnessing part of me even found it funny. Perhaps death has a way of bringing people together, as after that she was more open with me.
- When our 15 year old wire haired fox terrier, died.
- Wedding Day, outside on the shore of the lake, extemporizing my vows to my wife in front of 300 people, speaking from my heart to hers, in the Memorial Day sun, with Guernsey cows grazing above hillside, fleecy clouds softening the day, a golden breeze guiding my words and wisping her blond hair like light waves surrounding sea green eyes.
- Making love with my wife, moments of climaxing together, chanting.
- Gazing at Pleiades, feeling it as my home.
- Northern lights in Canada and Alaska.
- Wilderness looking out over Lake Tahoe sunrise from Dick’s Peak with three men from my men’s group after three days together.
- After an hour of pumping, blades slashing through fresh ice, we stop and break icicles from a split maple tree, fallen across the frozen river after an ice storm destroyed half the trees in town, and we discover, I and the little band of middle school students that, to our delight, the icicles taste just like maple syrup! The sugary ice sticks to our mittens. We crack the frozen pinnacles between molars. Chomping, we look down into 18” of river ice. Tiny bubbles frozen in the ice. Beneath them we can just make out a large brown hazy circle. It comes into form and we exhale steamy breath to realize it is a huge momma snapping turtle, motionless, asleep beneath the glassy ice. As if one body, we exhale steamy breath into a whisper. We take another bite from our icicles, a hearty crunch, which crackles across the ice into the hemlock hollow around the bend, and look into each other’s shining eyes, mouths agape, flecks of maple icicle glinting around lower lips. I smile

and nod to each crimson face, unable to say anything that could increase the moment, and we skate off together toward the open lake.

- Gazing into my friends' newborn baby's eyes.
- Swimming naked like otters in a lake with my best friend and lying on warm granite boulders shaking from the freezing water, hot from the sun, an Osprey calls and flies overhead between us and the sun.
- Fasting on watermelon alone for three weeks and living in the woods of Sarasota Florida, running across the fields, feeling light as a feather, at one with the earth beneath my bare feet, with the plants I have sown, grown and harvested, feeling inexhaustible strength, sensitivity, and lightness, and feeling deep sadness that so many others are not enjoying this feeling at this moment.
- Chanting with an old friend newly met at an ITP retreat, reforming a connection we have long shared.
- Chanting with a friend at a potluck for half an hour by the food table as people walked by to get food.
- Holding a fellow student for half an hour in the gymnasium in silent embrace.
- A moment teaching meditative movement to a group of early childhood educators, where the air was positively singing, singed with vibrations of their sacred movement and attentive heart felt interest. I felt my heart expand and settle into the room, my breath deepen and fall open, my shoulders drop, my weight fall through my feet and the floor support me. At once at a loss for words and a flurry of words seizes my vocal cords. Stretched between the two, I look around and rest in the mystery of movement.