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We Are One: Grief, Weeping, and Other Deep Emotions in Response to Nature as a Path Toward Wholeness

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ABSTRACT: Using his own experience of grief in nature as a starting point, the researcher conducted an intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2004) into experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to the natural world. Written stories of 40 people, told in the style of embodied writing (Anderson, 2001), were gathered and studied. The primary interpretation framed by the researcher was that experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature represent moments in a process of psycho-spiritual transformation capable of healing the splits between mind and body, and between humanity and nature, that are prevalent in contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies. Additional interpretations, focusing on the role of the body and embodiment, grief and weeping, and nature and spirituality, are offered. Interpretations are fleshed out with excerpts from participants' stories.

Subjective researchers often feel we do not choose the research topics that are most meaningful to us: they choose us. (Anderson, 2000). This research did not begin with a consciously chosen question, but with an experience.

Early one morning several years ago, I sit to meditate. It happened to be raining. As I direct attention to my breath

and try to quiet the chatter in my mind, I begin to hear the rain in a new way. I can feel thousands of raindrops contacting the wood shingles above me. As I notice this, I began to weep. The weeping feels like an easing open, an accessing, even a remembering. As I begin to think about what is happening, I lose the experience, and return to what feels like thoughts in my head. A few moments later, I ease out of my thoughts and back into the rain, and the weeping returns, now with more force, with a sense of grief, longing and loss. I later describe this experience as over-determined, full of many different strands of emotion and thought, some relatively distinct, most feeling inter-connected. My desire to understand this experience in all its aspects and more importantly to follow the experience becomes my research.

Intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000) was the natural method for the research. Having studied with Rosemarie Anderson in various contexts at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, I understood intuitive inquiry as a means to pursue knowledge emerging from the body, where the origin was not within the realm of words or concepts, but inside sensations, emotions, intuition. Because I wanted to follow the experience personally as well as study it academically, I was drawn to intuitive inquiry as a body-centered, creative, potentiating process that seemed psychologically and spiritually transformative while it was also a disciplined means to better understand particular topics. Indeed, without understanding that a research method existed to investigate not-well-understood human experiences, I am not sure I would have recognized my inchoate experience in the rain as a viable research topic. The topic I eventually recognized was: how does one understand experiences of grief, weeping and other deep emotions felt in response to connection with the natural world?

With intuitive inquiry, I was not only permitted, but also required, to proceed through my own subjective experience, which allowed me to prioritize my embodied, lived experience as the primary hermeneutic for understand-

ing the topic. Unlike some more traditional research methods, intuitive inquiry suggested that I move ever more fully into those experiences, that I allow them to unfold and reveal themselves ever more fully. In this sense, intuitive inquiry fosters a blending or simultaneity of the researcher's life, the subject of research, and the very process of research: all of us part of an emergent, transformative process whereby experience arises from the inside out and works itself toward conscious, verbal, analytical understandings.

From the beginning, I knew the study would involve the stories of other people who had experienced grief, weeping or other deep emotions in response to nature. Consistent with my hermeneutic of embodiment, I intended to solicit embodied descriptions of experiences in nature. Part of my work with Rosemarie Anderson (2001, 2002a, 2002b) had involved the development of embodied writing as a means to invite resonance with lived experience. As Anderson explains, embodied writing speaks from the perspective of the body, entwining in words our senses with the senses of the world. In relaying human experience from the inside out and attuned to nuance and detail, it acknowledges human life as embedded in and of the world in which we live (Anderson, 2001, p. 83). Developed as an alternative to scientific and professional writing that seems parched of the body's lived experience, embodied writing attempts to presence' the embodied experience of the writer for readers as they read (Anderson, 2002a, p. 40). The goal of embodied writing is to allow the reader to lean into the experiences described, even if those experiences are unfamiliar, to permit knowledge based in embodied experience rather than simply cognitive understanding.

The following reports what I learned through cycles of intuitive inquiry. The first cycle involved my rumination on the depths, meanings, and ramifications of my own experiences of grief in response to nature. The second cycle involved contact with literature I deemed relevant to the inquiry, culminating in the draft of interpretive lenses. In Cy-

cle 3, I gathered and interpreted other people's stories. I found my participants (30 women and 10 men, residing in 17 of the United States and four other countries) through networking, particularly Internet networking with members of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, based on the question: Have you ever felt really connected with nature and found yourself weeping, or feeling grief, loss or other deep emotions welling up in your body? In retrospect, I feel astoundingly fortunate to have found 40 people who even knew what I was talking about. Cycle 4 reports stories and interpretive lenses, while Cycle 5 returns briefly to the literature.

Cycle 1: What Claimed Me

As Anderson (2000, 2004) explains, the first cycle of intuitive inquiry involves the claim of the text, in my case my own initial experience. When I began the research as such, my understandings were general and in most ways amorphous. In retrospect, an honest way to frame my initial understandings and I would recommend this to other intuitive researchers was in terms of what interests me about this topic, or why am I doing this, or what is it that I think I already know in relation to want to know? In Anderson's phrasing, these questions suggest why the topic claimed me. From the outset, I understood five areas or pulls of the research. These can be considered my initial lenses into the topic:

1. The experience of grief and weeping in response to nature seems to be part of a compelling and ongoing process that seems transformative and healing; such experiences seem to be pulling me somewhere that would help me psychologically, spiritually, and physically.
2. The experiences contain an intriguing jumble of possibly inter-related, possibly distinct, not-well-understood, emotions, yearnings, causes, and meanings; not under-

standing the distinctions and relationships is intellectually puzzling, slightly disconcerting, and pulls me toward figuring out the relationships and deeper meanings within the experience.

3. While these experiences are personal, they also seem global; the experiences seem at least partially the result of my fast-paced, predominantly urban-suburban, lifestyle, which is also the dominant lifestyle of our culture, probably also spreading around the planet.
4. The experience is visceral, of the body, and not immediately well-mediated by thought, yet I wanted to understand it analytically.
5. The experience feels spiritual.

Cycle 2: Reviewing the Literature and Stating Lenses

In the framework of intuitive inquiry, the second cycle begins when the researcher re-engages the research topic through a different text (or set of texts) to identify the structure and accompanying values the researcher brings to the topic (Anderson, 2000, p. 36). The texts used at this stage might include literature relevant to the topic, such as theoretical writings or peer reviewed psychological literature, allowing this cycle to correspond in some ways to the literature review undertaken in many studies. In my study, I began gathering and considering academic literature and drafting the literature review section for my dissertation proposal. The scope of the present article permits only very brief reference to the literature impacting my understandings: that of the philosophical phenomenologists, whose understandings allowed me to conceptualize the body (and its sensations and emotions) (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) as the seat of preconceptual experience (Husserl, 1936/1970) and transformative, transpersonal potential (Levin, 1988), offering resurrection of sensory and emotional participation with na-

ture (Abram, 1996); that of psychologists pointing toward embodiment theory, in which recovery of conscious presence in one's physicality, with fluid access to sensations and emotions, and a sense of being in the world through one's physicality (Toombs, 1993), both facilitates and evidences psychological and spiritual growth; that of the ecological and deep ecology movements, which understand alienation from nature to contribute to human suffering or grief (Glenndinning, 1994; Macy, 1983), and return to nature as facilitating well-being, wholeness, and spirituality (Clinebell, 1996; DeMares & Krycka, 1998; Dowdall, 1998; Ruffing, 1997); that portraying grief as a multi-layered, body-based process involving loss of the libido in relation to a cherished object, perhaps layered over an original loss of unconditional caretaking (Klein, 1940) or undiated presence (Milloff, 1997); and that suggesting people weep, cry, or shed tears for myriad reasons, some understood as cathartic (Breuer & Freud, 1895/1955, spiritual (Van Heukelem, 1979), wonder-full (Braud, 2001) or sacred (Anderson, 1996).

After beginning consideration of the literature, I wrote interpretive lenses as part of my research proposal. Condensed for present purposes, they are as follows:

1. The experience of grief in response to nature is produced by sensory connection with a specific manifestation of nature (e.g., a tree, a deer).
2. The experience is of the body, beginning with physical sensations, such as warmth in the heart or weeping, and heightening connection with one's physicality.
3. People who weep in response to nature feel part of an inter-related web of nature.
4. Cognitive awareness of loss of connection with nature can be involved.

5. Crying in response to nature is a relief, feeling like release from physiological tension.
6. Weeping in response to nature feels like coming home to a lost (and better) way of experiencing the world.
7. The experience includes feelings of reverence, love, awe, comfort, and being held, feelings associated with spiritual or religious experience.
8. While weeping in response to nature starts with physical sensations, insight follows, that is, new cognitive understanding or meaning.
9. Cognitive understanding of the experience feels familiar and restorative of connections between mind, body, and spirit.
10. Cognitive understanding of the experience can deepen or extend the experience.
11. With reflection, the experience can produce shifts in understanding of one's role on earth.
12. With reflection, the experience can produce an ordered sense of relationship to what is beyond oneself, perhaps yielding an earth-based theology.
13. Among some people, the experience of grief in response to nature leads to changes in life circumstances, for example, a move closer to nature, or a change in political views.
14. The experience may deconstruct previously held understandings or habits.

15. Examination of the experience may yield insight into the relationship of sensations, emotions, and thought in a process of human change.
16. The experience may be understood through resonance with descriptions of similar experiences.
17. Understanding of the experience is facilitated by focus on sensory and emotional aspects and on individual and personal details.
18. Meditation, quiet reflection time, and/or writing about the experience, enhances understanding and continuation of the experience.

Cycle 3: Gathering Stories

In the third cycle of intuitive inquiry, which corresponds to the data-gathering stage of more traditional research projects, the researcher collects original texts bearing on the topic (Anderson, 2000, 2004). While many cycle 3 texts arise from interviews with research participants, mine were the forty written stories (ranging from a few sentences to several pages) contributed by participants, most involving some back and forth with me in which I encouraged writing rich with sensation, emotions, setting, lived experience. Reading the stories was a deeply moving, transformative experience for me. Some stories highlighted or deepened particular aspects of my own experience, while others reflected experiences that initially seemed new and different, though almost always reverberated with my own experience.

From one perspective, I came to understand the stories, including my own, as representing a range of distinguishable, but related experiences. In order to provide some structure to the overwhelming amount of data, I grouped the stories into the following thematic categories: ecological grief; healing; feelings of insignificance; sustenance; long-

ing for deep sensory connection or harmony with nature; experience of God through deep sensory connection with nature; awareness of brokenness or loss of source; and return to experiencing oneself as part of nature. This was never completely satisfying as most of the stories contained elements suggesting their inclusion under multiple thematic headings. More importantly, intuitive inquiry called for understandings, not simply thematic categorization.

Over time, I came to understand very deeply, in an embodied sense, that there is a fundamental unity among the experiences gathered for this project. The stories all speak that we are one. In this sense, while I could separate experiences of grief, weeping or other deep emotions in response to nature into different forms of experience, illustrative of various themes or understandings, the more deeply I understood these experiences, the more they seemed to reflect a unified whole.

From the outset of the study, I intended the stories to become part of the research results, conveying a lived, embodied sense of the topic. As I moved through various iterations of interpretive lenses, I realized that each of my interpretations simply represented one viewpoint into the whole, like a snapshot taken from a particular angle and focus. I realized that the stories themselves seemed better able to suggest the whole, perhaps because they speak directly to the reader's sensory, emotional, transformational self, which grasps wholeness better than the separation-oriented analytical mind. On the other hand, I also realized that interpretations facilitated conscious grasping of meaning, including relationships among parts and between parts and the whole.

Recognizing both these truths, what I offer as results of this research are interpretative statements, fleshed out with story segments. While I wish I could give you all of the stories, the scope of this article requires me to choose and to edit. While story segments are offered after particular interpretations, please notice the ways in which most stories reverberate with other interpretations, suggesting a whole.

Cycle 4: Interpretive Lenses, Fleshed With Stories

1. Experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature represent moments in a process of psycho-spiritual transformation capable of healing the splits between mind and body, and between humanity and nature, that are prevalent in contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies.

And now there I stood, gazing into the face of a young deer, many years and defensive walls separating me from the barefoot child I had been. I hoped this quite beautiful creature wouldn't dash away. When it continued to calmly look at me with interest and with no fear, I began to sob. In the minute I spent in tears, I recognized how far removed I was from who I was supposed to be...I felt lost far away from some rightful home. As my crying lessened, I tried to take in the beauty and peacefulness. My body felt lighter, as though a release of some sort had occurred.

--- Dana, New Jersey

Walking due west on a cold winter's day in London, along the street where I live, the sight of a winter flowering cherry hit me in the chest. The sudden awareness of the pale pearl-like blooms against the black bark of the trunk came as a physical blow to my body, for the sheer perfect beauty of the tree revealed itself to me not as a mental experience but one of the body. A physical experience. For a single moment, the tree and I shared in its creation. --- Jenny P. Lee, London

2. Deep resonance with nature facilitates healing of personal emotional suffering or wounds, affording an experience of unconditional love and belonging.

There is a small trail that cuts along the side of a mountain and leads into a forest thick with pines and firs. Before me is an outstretch of seeming wilderness. When I am sad, afraid or at a loss for what to do, plodding my feet on the raw earth helps me to hold onto or figure out a next step. I walk for awhile and then the tears come. The woods are a good place to cry. I think what allows me to touch my sadness so deeply is that within this environment, I feel unconditionally loved and accepted; I feel that I belong. Somehow I realize that I am of this same immense mystery as the trees, the rocks, the grasses, the flying ones and the four-leggeds.

--- Jeannette, Helena, Montana

3. Some people grieve, and sometimes cry, in response to awareness of human degradation of nature; these feelings may include pain, sorrow or anger and may point toward action.

During the early 80s, I made a regular practice of running in the green rolling hills of northwestern New Jersey. Around that time, I had been reading some particularly alarming reports of environmental devastation. One gorgeous, sunny, blue sky day, I was running across the golf course, surrounded by lush green trees waving hypnotically in the breeze. Halfway down an open fairway, the grief hit me suddenly. I wept as I ran, not only for the environmental and animal devastation, but also for humanity's immense spiritual vacuum, ignorance and stupidity, which allows the devastation to occur. I kept running as I began feeling more and more released from the repressed sorrow, tears streaming down my face. --- Ralph Litwin, New Jersey

4. Experiences of grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature may involve a deep sense of bodily longing to live in greater resonance with nature, which may lead to changes in life circumstances (moving into nature)

and transformation in experience of self; this may be simultaneously felt as a pull toward God or spirit.

"s we began the ascent up the green hills of Highway 92, I was in awe of the simple beauty previously unknown to me. It was a sunny afternoon, with light playing through the branches of the eucalyptus and cedar trees. I felt that I could breathe for the first time in memory. As my lungs expanded, I felt my body as less cumbersome, as if I were filled with light and air rather than some dense, impermeable material. Then I felt my throat tighten with unexpressible emotion and a sweet longing for something unnameable. Weeks later, I sat in the office of my spiritual director, looking out the window at the sun on the leaves, watching the incessant Santa Clara Valley traffic. I cried as I told him of my deep longing for contact with God. I said I could only find God by the ocean. Months later, we moved into a home by the sea." --- Grace, California Seacoast

5. Deep sensory or emotional connection with nature is sometimes experienced as connection with the wholeness of life, spirit, or God, experienced in the body.

When I was about seven or eight, I had a magical experience that led to an even deeper connection with nature. It was a late summer morning and the sun was rising. The shade from the swaying trees in our neighborhood tall pines, oaks, and a lovely sugar maple cast a lazy chill that spilled onto the yard and into the street. All of my senses were enticed the air smelled deliciously of morning dew and fresh cut grass. The blue sky pierced through the green canopy. The birds - robins, sparrows, bluebirds, cardinals, blackbirds all sang hymns in the delicate branches of the trees. A propellor plane moved through the sky with a soft hum. I looked up, closed my eyes, and breathed the day into my soul. I was aware for the very first time that I was

alive. I was filled with bittersweet joy and a sort of remembrance of the connectedness of everything. The moment was new, and yet ancient. I felt a birth of gentleness inside me. I believe that moment shifted my entire perception of life: my heart broke wide open that day, for that was the day I was introduced to God. --- Jaene Leonard, New York City

6. Nature reminds some people of the imperfection of earthly life or the loss of wholeness and unconditional love associated with God, sometimes triggering tears.

December 29, 2000. I am sitting at White Rock Lake it is a wonderfully bright day, the kind of bright that seems to happen when the air is crisp and cool and the sky is that crystalline lightest blue color with only the occasional billowy cloud passing by and the winter sun shines and everything is just a little bit brighter and more clear. There is a slight breeze, my hands are cold, and I am crying. I think because on days like today, sitting in nature, I can almost feel God's presence and the feeling overwhelms me. A mixture of conflicting emotions seem to rise to the surface all at once wonderment and joy tinged with great sadness and the tears start flowing. I think, for me, the feeling of God's presence in nature leads to tears because in sensing God's absolute love and perfection, I am more acutely aware of my failures and imperfections. It is that opposite thing again in being aware of one part, I am, at the same time, more aware of its opposite. -- Lisa Graiff, Texas

One summer I was walking frequently in a metro park near my home. I often noticed a huge old maple tree near the path and would silently greet the grand old beauty with a Namaste as I passed by. One day, I felt compelled to stand with my back against the wide trunk. I stood there for a time, feeling such peace, con-

tentment and stillness. When I walked away, I felt overcome with tears and a feeling that I can only describe as pure love. The tears were of joy that one only sheds in a divine connection, but I was also experiencing sadness and overwhelming grief. I believe the grief was the feeling of loss one has when one becomes separated from the Divine. -- Elaine Gallovic, Ohio

7. A strong sense of gratitude for life may arise through deep connection with nature; this may or may not be experienced as gratitude toward God.

"Sitting on a cliff in southern central Missouri, I began to cry. These were not tears of sorrow, nor joy, really. As I sat there alone, what was one moment just some trees, pastures, and a small river came together and revealed itself for what it truly is. I was taken aback. The first instant was realization, the second was a complete assessment of everything I had ever done in all my life, which only took the time of one inhalation of breath. After that, the only thing I could feel was gratitude. All my thanks, my tears full to the brimming with the love, fear, anger, sadness, joy, and pain, and with gratitude for all of my life, and the lives of those who made it all possible, from beginning to end fall to the ground. Those seemingly insignificant drops of water then sink into the soil, disappearing from sight, rejoining Nature, that which made it all possible. -- Ryan, Missouri

8. Deep sensory or emotional connection with nature may ease fears of death, perhaps because one's individual life begins to feel, viscerally, indistinguishable from wholeness of all earthly life.

My husband and I were driving south along Flathead Lake. It was the time of evening when the sky is light and all other things are black. Our kids were asleep in

the back of the station wagon. We had been listening to classical music on the radio and enjoying the evening. I was not thinking about anything in particular when I looked out the window and saw a V of ducks, perfect silhouettes against a silver sky. I instantly felt that when I die I will fly with the ducks and, somehow, know all that I need to know. That memory has been a great comfort to me during tough times. It has greatly reduced my fear of death. -- Susan Gray, Montana

I have often thought, and said, that I want to die outdoors. Put me under a tree in the sunshine or under the night sky, but get me outside. When I'm in Nature, I feel secure, at home, because I feel how many living things are all around me. Small in nature, most of them, nevertheless, they have LIFE coursing through them. Therefore, we are related; we are the same; I am not alone. I am surrounded by LIFE.... GOD is there in all that life and I am safe because of it.... -- Linda Carroll Hasler, Tennessee

9. Cognition or analysis during an experience of deep emotional connection with nature may halt the experience, but developing meaning and understanding of the process seems part of its natural flow.

I drove in the mountains, being adventurous. I saw a mountain covered in a golden veil and slammed on the brakes. I knelt at the presence of the mountain. Humbled, truly humbled. Awe. Just stared. Then, emotionally, a lot of turmoil again. Unworthy. What have I missed all my life? Angry that I have always been so busy doing instead of enjoying. Sad for all those cars that were rushing by me. I never cried so much in my life...I mourned for myself throughout the day.... I was thankful I did not let the analytical Laura kick in. Later, at my office, I journaled it. Oh my gosh. Oh my

gosh. You've got it, now run with it and don't look back.
 -- Laura Huber, Illinois

10. If we use experiences of deep emotions in response to nature to lead us back to our bodies and to nature, and in so doing lift our repressions against experiencing wholeness, unity and connection, we may recover a humanity capable of preserving rather than destroying the earth and its inhabitants, including ourselves. Such recovery could foster return to a nature-based spirituality, seeping up from the earth through the body, not down through culture, and thus re-turning through us, to culture, the restorative, balancing, equilibriums of nature.

Although the tears are more quiet now, there were times in my life when seeing God in nature produced a torrent of emotion. The sobbing could last for many minutes and seemed to impact me for weeks. This felt like a remembering of God and a remembering that I could live in harmony with God's work, the planet. This memory became a feeling in my body, an orientation that moved from the inside out into the world. It has changed the way I live my life and the way I understand all that happens around me, including the present violence so prevalent in the world."-- Author

Cycle 5: Return to the Literature

The fifth cycle of intuitive inquiry asks the researcher to reevaluate the theoretical and empirical literature in light of the research (Anderson, 2004). Consistent with my understanding that "we are one," I now see the various literatures that I considered to reflect different aspects of one trajectory that is available to humans: returning to experiential wholeness within the matrix of nature through following one's emotional responses to nature, including grief--perhaps the most direct bodily recognition of lost wholeness. The study gives life to the transpersonal framework best articulated by

Levin (1988), through which a preconceptual experiencing subject allows movement toward transpersonal experience, including, "experiences of integration into the natural elements or strong identification with them," leading to "bodily belonging to the earth" (p. 301, 302). Also illustrated are the ways in which some people suffer for lack of connection with nature (Glenninim, 1994) and the sense of well-being and wholeness offered by experiential participation in nature offers (e.g., Clinebell). The process of embodiment as felt-sense of presence through physicality (Toombs, 1993) is suggested. Finally, the study illustrates the idea of Milloff (1997) that all grief reverberates around the experiential "loss of access to an immediacy of experience or being, free from psychological constructs" (p. 5). Experiential access to nature, our original matrix, helps restore that essential immediacy of being.

Contributions And Challenges Of Intuitive Inquiry

Conducting a research project with intuitive inquiry feels both extremely honest and extremely risky. The risk involves the honesty. Because this is subjective research, the main thing I have offered is my own projection into the subject. While projection in this fashion risks not being useful for much more than a case study of the researcher, it offers the possibility of renewing the range of human experience from the ground (body, earth) upwards. There are many important areas of human experience about which we, in certain traditions (such as academic psychology, even the humanistic varieties), do not have much collective consciousness. Perhaps we have merely forgotten. An intuitive inquiry allows us to start anew, from within ourselves, from those sensations, emotions, intuitions, and instincts lying beneath enculturation. Particularly in ages when enculturation is so powerful, intuition may be our thread to our past, from which we can weave our future. Regarding this particular study, intuitive inquiry allowed me to reinvent, from the inside out, a way of experiencing ourselves as part of the

earth, not dominant over it. I happen to believe this may be the single best way out of many, if not most, current world problems: and the solution is more a felt sense from which action naturally emerges than any form of analytical resolution to specific problems as such.

As I worked on this project, I sometimes asked myself if I could have achieved the same results with a method that attempted to remove the subjective. Even assuming it is possible to remove subjectivity, I believe I could not have ventured so far into what I needed to learn without the freedom to intuit. Many of my understandings were formed between the cracks of the stories and the literature. It was as if the texts brought into play an unformed field, introduced me to it, gave me tastes and textures and angles, but my own particular humanity was required to convey the wholeness suggested, rather than the pieces. Objectivity, perhaps, is better suited to pulling things apart, with subjectivity needed to restore connection and wholeness.

While I have enjoyed this subjective endeavor, the process of subjectivity was often difficult. Like many in the United States in the last century, I grew up in the context of presumed objective truth, where claims of reality must be justified with evidence, typically rational analysis that tends to reduce and separate. Countless times I found myself looking for themes in a way that reduced reality to separate, supposedly objective statements, supported in the data but which omitted the tendency to wholeness that emerges if we free our body-based, intuitive subjectivity that is unique to each of us, yet our common birthright. The subjective process is one that I am learning little by little and tentatively, perhaps because of the breathtaking, and somewhat frightening, nature of personal and spiritual freedom.

In the realm of intuitive inquiry, the personal and academic are both fueled by our human capacity for unfolding, for transformation toward wholeness if we get out of our own way. Through an intuitive inquiry, your life just might change. In my case, what I learned combined with various

other life events and contributed to a move from Silicon Valley, California, to the mountains of Montana. While each of our paths are different, I hope you let your questions rise up of their own accord and let them push you toward those places you want to go. Most importantly, I hope you go after things you don't understand, but that you know, deep down, even dimly and with no assurance, just might heal some part of you. Anderson (2004) notes that our wounds can occasion new vision. As I followed my own grief in response to nature, I came upon ways of being in the world that transformed how and where I live my life. And now, having finished this article, and with the warm summer evening beckoning, I'm going out to hang with my horses.

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Living Stories: Modern Storytelling as a Call for Connection

Sharon Hoffman

ABSTRACT: This article presents an intuitive inquiry into storytelling using creative arts and media within the context of modern culture. Taken from a relational and transpersonal perspective, the Living Stories style of personal storytelling is explored and developed in response to the need for connection expressed in the culture-at-large and to create opportunities for transformation. The research questions, What makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection? The researcher engages in a creative and collaborative storytelling process with 1 storyteller who shares her breast cancer experience over the course of several years. The resulting story is presented to 95 participants via an interactive mixed media gallery exhibition featuring photography, poetry, and music, and stations where feedback is invited. Data includes questionnaire and creative expression responses from participants and researcher observation. Key findings include (a) participant reports of participatory knowing and transpersonal phenomena, including the experience of interconnection; (b) emotional narrative as an essential storytelling feature; (c) photography as a visual anchor; and (d) the story as inseparable from the act of storytelling. Study findings expand the storytelling definition to include modern forms whereby the storyteller is not present and suggest applications in television, film, digital storytelling, and community.

During graduate school, I sensed the cultural need to share our meaningful, true stories to create connections and trans-