

DOES A UNITIVE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AFFECT AUTHENTICITY?

AN INTUITIVE INQUIRY OF ORDINARY PROTESTANTS

by

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

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Palo Alto, California

February 23, 2009

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## **Abstract**

### **Does a Unitive Mystical Experience Affect Authenticity?**

#### **An Intuitive Inquiry of Ordinary Protestants**

**by**

**Allison Perry**

The researcher used the intuitive inquiry method to interview Protestant Christians about their unitive mystical experiences. The *unitive mystical experience* is an experience of being one with God or the universe knowing ultimate love, peace, or truth. Thirteen adult participants described in an interview format whether or not they were living in accordance with the new knowledge received in their experience. This is defined for the purpose of this study as *authenticity*. The researcher transcribed the interviews, verified each transcript with each participant, used thematic analysis to identify themes, and invited outside interview readers to confirm or refute the researcher's identified themes. All participants reported a change in their values and behaviors due to their experiences. Participants also verified the 12 themes that the researcher compiled as the research results. Two important findings are that the participants have an increased connection and feeling of responsibility to Spirit, people, and the world; and participants experience a surrendering of ego and self while opening to the Divine immediately before or during these experiences. *Transpersonal authenticity* is a term coined by the researcher and supported by this research and other literature to describe the relationship between the unitive mystical experience and authenticity. One conclusion of this study is that the unitive mystical experience does affect authenticity, and this path of authenticity is personally unique to each individual.

### Intention

I will follow my path of authenticity with God and myself faithfully during this study  
as I encounter others following their path of authenticity,  
in unity with God, in being one with what is,  
in the delight and awe of discovery.

So help me, God,

Jehovah-Immanuel.

to be nobody but yourself, in a world which is doing its best,  
night and day, to make you everybody else,  
means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight;  
and never stop fighting

(e. e. cummings, 1965, p. 335).

## Acknowledgments

To my brother, David Patrick Perry:

Thank you for supporting me in my endeavor of graduate school, but mostly thank you for believing in me even when you didn't know what I was doing. Your faith in me has helped me believe in me. Thank you for your generosity!

To my ITP friends, cohort, and dissertation office colleagues:

Thank you for sticking beside me in this crazy journey we are on. Thank you for the walks and the talks, sharing the frustration, the laughter, and the tears. I believe now more than ever that simply being open and honest with each other as we travel our path is one of the greatest gifts we have to give. Thank you for sharing this ITP journey with me.

To the ITP librarians and staff:

Katrina Rahn, your insight, support, and brainstorming sessions helped me gain clarity when I had so many ideas. Sharon Hamrick, thank you for your cheerful smile and quick turnaround on all those articles. Yoko Noda, thanks for sharing your tea stash and creativity with all of us. Lucy Erman and Linda Magnusson, thank you for your formatting help and for answering random questions. Bing Zuo-Dittmer, thank you for letting me pop in your office too many times to count and sharing your smile with me.

To the research participants who shared their stories:

I appreciate everything that each of you shared with me whether I was able to use your interview for this study or not. Your stories are sacred, profound, and a gift to be shared. Thank you for being willing to express your sacred experiences with me and to offer them through this research to the world. May you be blessed for this gift.

To my resonance panel members –Maria Elena, Linda, Carolyn,  
Alicia, Myra, Beth, Katrina, and Yoko:

Thank you all for the gift of your perception, time, and energy. I appreciate your willingness to give to my research process and me. May you receive wisdom and insight in return for your efforts. Many thanks to all of you for your hard work on my behalf!

To my committee members, Dwight Judy and James Swan:

Thank you for offering your insights, encouragement, and critique to make this research a more valuable contribution to the world of scholarship.

To my advisor and chairperson, Jan Fisher:

Your friendship, guidance, support, and advice have helped me navigate this school and dissertation experience. Thank you for your encouragement and laughter. Thank you for being willing to give what I asked for and for the delightful frog stickers when I did a good job! I am blessed to have you mentor me. Thanks, Jan Fisher!

To my therapist and confidant, Diana Ford:

Thank you for being rooted and grounded like a beautiful, strong tree and sharing that with me as I journey along. Your loving presence and support has been invaluable to me.

## Preface: My Story of Unity

At first a seed is planted in the soil. It germinates and begins to grow, pushing and breaking through the soil. Stretching and reaching through the underbrush it seeks the light, somehow knowing that light brings life. The young shoots push aside debris to reach higher, giving meaning to the journey not yet known. Then one day, either the light reaches down through the growing branches or the young plant reaches upward, but either way, the plant knows the light throughout every cell of its body almost as if it were made to seek the light, bathe in the light, and be a vessel of transformation for the light to nourish the world around it. The young plant twisted and replete with thorns has but one authentic path: to continue to seek the light whether or not it ever produces a rose.

I first oriented to God because someone told me God was there and I believed that. I then put that knowledge to a test and experienced God's peace and joy. I was content for about 6 years with the state of this relationship until my life became more complex. I began to ask questions, argue with the answers, and at the same time follow more closely what I understood God to want of me. This lasted about 3 or 4 years until I hit a snag. I realized that what I had trusted to be true of the world was not true at all, and so my view of God in relationship to my new worldview changed as well. There was a long wrestling match at the end of which I surrendered to God's will and design. The resulting surrender saved me from self-defeat. For the next 8 to 10 years, I chose to trust and believe in something that I could not see in order to make sense of, and survive with meaning, this world that I could see but hadn't experienced as very positive or very meaningful. All during this time, I had indications in my life from God that I was following the path God wanted me to follow.

What I had still never experienced in my life was a feeling of safety, security, and love although I had these experiences with God. I had experienced many callings in my life: to follow a specific journey, take this job, go to that place, do a certain task, go meet a particular person. My first experience of really feeling God's immense goodness was being engulfed in divine love. This first experience happened when I was almost 30 years old. My personal boundaries dissolved and melted, and I merged as one with love and light. My soul was fed simply by my resting and trusting. I was love; God was love; all was one. This experience happened twice during a 5-year span. It gave me hope to know love and to seek love in myself, in others, and in God. It broadened my outlook as only experience can. I started to live life looking for reflections of this love in people around me and clumsily refusing to pretend love in relationships, sometimes causing pain for others and myself by choosing to be authentic.

My other unitive experience, which falls chronologically between the other two experiences, I feel most able to talk about, interact with, and observe. This experience of knowing Ultimate Truth was on an ordinary day when I was walking across campus enjoying the blueness of the sky, the sound of the birds, and the stature of the trees. Suddenly, while I was still walking, everything became transparent, like clear, silvery mercury in a liquid to gaseous state, which was the common substance of all things, alive and fluid. I had no thoughts in the moment or any feelings. The experience lasted for a moment and ended as soon as I began to observe what was taking place, instead of simply being in the experience. Afterward, I felt a sense of peace, enormity, and profound awe. It was only later when I began to choose words to explain this experience that I labeled this substance that I saw and experienced as Logos, the creative potential behind



all things that enables them to become so. It was the lack of feeling or connection that was overwhelming in this experience. I was amazed, and afterwards terrified, by my inability to connect with thoughts, feelings, or anything, probably because all was one. Sound was muffled and time stood still. One outcome of this experience has been my growing openness and awareness of life energy, which I now label as God, Logos, the Word that becomes flesh, at work in the world around me.

I am searching every day for ways to connect to God's perfect love in being and light and in truth through experiences with others. I desire to live in connection with what I know now about love and being and ultimate reality, although I often fail. I feel like the little plant who has not only sought the light through difficulty but also who has felt and known the light, ever so briefly enabling me to have the courage to grow toward that light, no matter the difficulties, simply because I know deep within me Greater Truth, which is my hope. This choice is both gloriously exhilarating and sometimes heart-wrenchingly painful. Yet, deep within, I have no other choice, no greater desire, for I love the Light. It is my calling. It is Life.

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Figure 1. Researcher's beginning collage of authentic path.



*Figure 2.* Picture of staves from phase one.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Although spiritual seekers have had many different types of experiences throughout the centuries, this study looks at the experience of unity between the spiritual seeker and the Divine and seeks to determine what effect, if any, this experience has on authenticity. I believe that each person, religious or not, is given many opportunities to know the Great Mystery, God, or the nature of the universe throughout his or her lifetime. Some of these experiences might be labeled mystical experiences. A few of these mystical experiences that reveal the nature of the universe or the nature of God through direct knowing might then be labeled a unitive experience by the individual. Some people may interpret these experiences as an opportunity to live more in tune with this new knowing, which may in turn lead to a change in worldview, which may in turn lead to internal and external changes in living. This change in behavior that stems from a change in knowledge and the alignment of the two is what I will call authenticity.

This study looks at the response of authenticity in people who have had one or more unitive mystical experiences. I am choosing the unitive mystical experience because this experience seems to have an internal reference of truth rather than an external reference of interpretation. This dissertation reviews the literature on mystical unitive experiences and authenticity, defines the research design, gives the results of the study, and discusses the findings.

### *My Study Design: One Transparent Voice*

During this study using the intuitive inquiry method, I hold my own unitive mystical experience and its effect on authenticity in my life as a valid place to start. First, I identify my own original assumptions and views of this experience. Second, in finding

literature and research that address this topic, I use my own understanding of this experience and resonance as a basis of making decisions in the process of choosing literature and research for the literature review. In this step, I summarize any expanded or new views or assumptions that I have identified from the research. Third, I interview others about their unitive mystical experience, transcribe these interviews, and check these transcripts with the participants to ensure an accurate representation of their experience. Fourth, I compile a list of themes after looking at all the interview data. Fifth, I ask selected outside readers to look at the interview transcripts and identify themes to verify my findings. Sixth, I send a compiled summary of themes to the participants to check for internal validity. Finally, I look at the results of the research and compare it to my own original views and those from the literature review. I discuss how my assumptions have changed through the course of this study and suggest how this research adds to the current body of research.

I came to this topic through a process of looking at my own calling to simply *be* in this world. By the word *be*, I mean the idea of living by being more my essential self and not anything superfluous, and I mean living through sharing who I *am* rather than what I can *do*. From my research on this topic, I realized that there were several experiences that I had which contributed to this drive and desire to simply *be*. Illustrated by my story in the Preface, a few of these experiences were what I would now call unitive mystical experiences. At the time, I had no such language for them; but because of these experiences, I was driven to simply *be* more in my life and relationships. Now, I would say that this was a change in who I saw myself to be, as well as a change in my behavior and how I engaged with life and others. In other words, the unitive mystical experiences

that I had affected my authenticity. I chose this dissertation topic and study in an effort to determine if others who have had unitive mystical experiences are similarly affected and to discover how that manifests in their lives.

Unitive mystical experiences may be put into words and described in as many different ways as there are cultures and individuals; therefore, I have researched using terms that coincide with my own languaging of these experiences. There is no universal language that I know of to describe these experiences. The term *unitive mystical experience* has been used for the past century and still is not used widely outside academic circles. The difficulty in finding language to describe these experiences may be partly due to the nature of these experiences and partly due to an inability to integrate these experiences fully into other aspects of life. By *integrate*, I mean taking one's knowledge and learning and putting it into everyday practice. I incorporated creative expression into this study in hopes to help bridge these ineffable experiences so that they could be better articulated. Creative expression pieces are included throughout this document to give a visual representation of the participants' unitive mystical experiences and the researcher's experience during this dissertation process. Hopefully, this research offers some clarity to the many descriptions of these experiences.

I articulate my beginning research assumptions here, so that you as the reader may enter into this research process with disclosure of my beliefs and suppositions. I feel like it is my responsibility as a researcher on this topic of authenticity and this method of intuitive inquiry to be almost harshly transparent so that you as the reader are always given the option of following my train of thought or following your own. In this way I hope to enhance the validity of my research simply by being one transparent voice.

For the purpose of this research, a lens is defined as an intentional focusing of perspective from which to see a greater experience. Rosemarie Anderson (1998) introduced the idea of using lenses in research in her work on intuitive inquiry. Just as photographers can capture a different picture by using different lenses, researchers can come to different understandings of the research through viewing the research through different lenses. What I have described in the above paragraphs as my views, assumptions, and beliefs, I will now refer to as lenses. Although I intentionally put on the lenses of different cycles later in this research, below are some of my initial lenses from understanding my own unitive mystical experiences. I am not saying that these views or lenses are correct, but rather that this is where I begin, and it is what drives my desire and design for this study.

1. God or Spirit desires for us all to know Truth more fully.
2. Unitive experiences as well as other mystical experiences occur in order that we might live in greater accordance with this Truth.
3. Experiences that reveal God or Spirit happen to all people multiple times throughout their lifetimes.
4. There is no way for any one person to know God, Spirit, or Truth completely.
5. The only way that any one of us can truly know anything deeply about the Ultimate is through a personal experience of internal, deep knowing.
6. From this very limited and personal experience of knowing and living comes a valuable contribution to the greater field of knowledge regarding God, Spirit, or Truth.



This last lens is the reason that I have chosen the qualitative research approach of intuitive inquiry. In trying to embody authenticity throughout my research process, I wanted a method that would incorporate and reflect my own process of knowing and making decisions. After researching several different research methods, I chose to use a method of semistructured interviews and thematic analysis to gather data. I use these in the context and design of intuitive inquiry, which was developed for topics like this in transpersonal psychology. Through using an approach of inquiry and disclosure of internal processes, I believe that I contribute to research simply by *being* myself and encouraging this same disclosure and awareness in those I interview. Through hearing and experiencing my process of continual opening and articulation of my engagement process, I believe those who read this study will have the opportunity to know where they agree or disagree with my understanding of this topic, and thus, have a better awareness of their own thinking on this topic.

If I help my readers gain clarity of insight and awareness of their own understanding of this topic, I have made a contribution to readers and researchers. If I clearly articulate my own inner experience through this dissertation and how my understanding of God, of the world, of life, and of myself has changed and been informed through this experience and the stories of others, then I have contributed to the body of research in transpersonal psychology.

### *Definitions*

#### *Mystical Experience*

Unlike Evelyn Underhill (1910/1990), who suggested that the *mystic* is one who attains union with the absolute, I define the *mystic* as one who seeks to know the

Absolute Mystery through direct personal experience or seeking. Still, Underhill's definition for the mystic as attaining union with the absolute fits very well with the definition of unitive experience. Daniel Merkur (1999) noted the reason for this distinction is that all mystical experiences are not unitive in nature. Therefore, mystics may sometimes have unitive experiences and at other times have other types of spiritual experiences, all of which will subsequently inform their spiritual paths. Imants Baruss (1996) described the mystical experience as "an experience characterized by enlightenment and exceptional emotional well-being" (p. 157). Robert Elwood (1980) described the mystical experience as an "experience in a religious context that is immediately or subsequently interpreted by the experiencer as encounter with ultimate divine reality in a direct non-rational way that engenders a deep sense of unity" (p. 29). There are different ways of describing the mystical experience within the literature. Like Merkur (1999), I am choosing to make a distinction between the unitive mystical experience and all the other types of mystical experiences.

### *Unitive Experience*

The following quote from a collection of self-reports compiled by the Religious Experience of Oxford (Cohen & Phipps, 1992) gives us a first person report of a unitive experience:

It was as if the cocoon had burst and my eyes were opened and I saw. The world was infinitely beautiful, full of light as if from an inner radiance. Everything was alive and God was present in all things; in fact, the earth, all plants and animals and people seemed to be made of God. All things were one, and I was one with all creation and held safe within a deep love. I was filled with peace and joy and with deep humility, and could only bow down in the holiness of the presence of God. (p. 21)



From looking at experiences like the one described above, Martin Riccardo (1977) outlined 11 characteristics of the mystical experience. Three of these characteristics he has taken from Bertrand Russell (1925): (a) a greater reality that is not perceived through the senses though with deeply felt emotion, (b) the total unity of all things, and (c) loss of space-time awareness. Two more of these characteristics he has taken from William James (1902/1997): (d) the noetic quality of a deep sense of knowledge, and (e) alleged ineffability or the inability to adequately capture the experience in words. The other seven characteristics are named by Riccardo (1977) himself and are as follows: (f) a sense of awe or sacredness, (g) paradoxicality, (h) impermanent duration, (i) continuing positive aftereffects, (j) a shift in identity, and (k) a sense of freedom. Riccardo purposefully left out mention of union with God explaining that an individual cannot know that this union was with the Divine, even if mystics report their experience in these terms. For the purposes of this study, I will use the term *union* or *unity* with God because I am working with a population that, like the mystics, may label their experiences in these terms. The participants have the option of describing their experiences in their own terms and not using the term God.

### *Authenticity*

*Authenticity* describes one who is living in accordance with what he knows to be true, having honesty and integrity. In the words of Baruss (1996), “*Authenticity* is the effort to act on the basis of one’s own understanding,” while *authentic* is described as “that which is true to its own nature” (p. 152). The choice of responding authentically with what we know and understand or responding inauthentically may be what sets humans apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. The human struggle is personified in a

well-known children's story, *The Ugly Duckling*, by Hans Christian Andersen (1844).

The ugly duckling's character and very right of being is questioned by everyone around him and he is found lacking in each animal's evaluation until after many tries, he sees some beautiful swans and experiences an inner calling to be like them.

“I will fly to those royal birds,” he exclaimed, “and they will kill me, because I am so ugly, and dare to approach them; but it does not matter: better be killed by them than pecked by the ducks, beaten by the hens, pushed about by the maiden who feeds the poultry, or starved with hunger in the winter.” (Andersen, 1844)

This choice to live from an inner compass, as depicted in this story, and how that compass is affected by the unitive experience with the Divine, is the crux of this research study.

### *Purpose of Research*

Chapter 2, the literature review, brings together research on authenticity in positive and transpersonal psychology with research on the unitive experiences of mystics and saints in humanistic and transpersonal psychology. The literature suggests that the response of authenticity to a unitive mystical experience could be a viable response on the spiritual path. However, I found no direct, primary research on the unitive experience and its effect on authenticity, even though there is anecdotal evidence and theory on the subject included. The purpose of this dissertation research is to provide a beginning for exploring the question of how, if at all, the unitive mystical experience affects authenticity.

With this research I hope to make an important contribution to both transpersonal literature and literature in religious studies on spiritual formation. This study will serve as a bridge in transpersonal psychology between spiritual formation through unitive experiences and studies of authenticity, as well as fill a current gap in research and lend

direction to further research studies. Also, this study may be helpful to those who are having or have had unitive mystical experiences and to those working with this population.

### *Hypothesis*

This study looks at the transformative response of authenticity to the transcendent experience of unity. My initial hypothesis is that a person who has experienced a unitive mystical experience and has been able to integrate that experience into daily life has come to a greater understanding of authentic self or created essence and has a greater passion to live authentically in all relationships. I expect that this new understanding of authentic self is reflected in choices, interactions, and relationships. This study explores the unitive mystical experience and how people change their actions in life to reflect a greater understanding of themselves in response to their experience.

In this study, I expect that participants have had a moment of being in the essence of the substance of all things, where all is one. I expect that participants who experienced a loss of self also experienced a moment of clarity. I also expect to find that ordinary people have experienced these unitive mystical experiences and have subsequently altered their interactions to reflect a greater sense of alignment with this new knowledge or greater authenticity. These statements will be listed as research lenses at the end of Chapter 2.

### *Participants*

The selection of participants is the narrowing criterion of this study. Although eventually I would like to study varied populations with different spiritual affiliations, this research study looks at adult men and women who have chosen to affiliate with a

Protestant Christian church. Although the religious backgrounds of the participants vary, their present or past choice of worship in a Protestant church congregation is a common denominator. The group is made up of ordinary Protestant Christian church attendees who self-identify as having had a mystical unitive experience. The way that I have defined *Protestant Christian* is simply one way of defining this population. Some people may refer to themselves as Protestant Christian and not fit the criteria outlined below. I give this definition in order to be specific with the parameters of this study's population.

*Protestant Christians.* People who identify themselves as believers in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord or are seriously engaged with understanding this relationship and who are seeking to live in relationship to God through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and who are worshipping with a body of fellow believers in a Protestant denomination are called Protestant Christians for the purpose of this study. Individuals who fit this criterion at the time of their unitive experience but now no longer fit this criterion are considered. Also those who now fit this criterion, but did not at the time of their unitive mystical experience, are considered for this study.

*Mystical.* The term mystical applies to experiences that have a transcendent aspect to the encounter with God or experiences that go beyond the bounds of the material universe. People who are intentionally seeking to gain a greater knowledge and experience of God, the Divine, or Spirit are identified as mystics for the purpose of this study.

*Ordinary.* I use the term ordinary to refer to people who have typical jobs in the world and are currently not in full-time service to the church, spiritual, or religious

organizations. Individuals who were in ordinary jobs at the time of their unitive experience, but are now in full-time ministry are considered eligible for this study.

In Chapter 3, I explain the method that I am using for this study as well as offering research supporting this approach. Also in this chapter, I describe my own process of investigation during each phase of the research process. Any minor changes that I made in the research design or process are also included here. In Chapter 4, I give the results of the interviews. In Chapter 5, I look at my initial lenses in light of the interview results. I also discuss how these findings relate to the existing writing on the subject from Chapter 2, offer suggestions for future research, and suggest implications of this foundational study.



Anna's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 3.* Creative expression pieces from Anna's interview.





Bethany's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 4.* Creative expression pieces from Bethany's interview.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

A comprehensive search reveals that there are no studies that directly address the impact of the unitive mystical experience upon authenticity, although a few sources support this possibility. The literature included in this review is to provide the reader with a conceptual framework for this subject and to support the significance of this research study. The two main categories covered in this review will be the unitive experience in many of its expressions and authenticity in its various facets. There is very little empirical or primary research in these areas. A third section within the literature review is devoted to covering the few studies that cover authenticity as a response to spiritual experiences. The process of choosing the research to include in this chapter is explained fully in at the end of Chapter 3 in the section, Research Process. For a summary of the research found in this literature review, please see Appendix F.

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet” (Shakespeare, 1595/1974, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Jul.* 2.2. 43-44). This quote could well be applied to the unitive mystical experience of the Divine in any culture, in any language. One dimension of transpersonal psychology attempts to study and understand the psychological aspects of mystical experiences. What effect does a unitive experience have on a person’s life? Can a person choose the impact it has on his or her life? This study will be a starting point to begin studies that can better answer these questions. Until we are able to answer these questions, I want to appreciate Shakespeare’s rose in honoring the unitive mystical experience no matter where it is found or whatever its name.



“The mystical state as it is actually experienced is universal,” says Riccardo (1977, p. 5). All people do not acknowledge this experience if it is indeed universal. However, experiencing God in union of being, two becoming one, is a memorable experience for many people. If the unitive experience with God is acknowledged and internalized by the individual, it creates an opportunity for a greater authenticity of the self, a life that better reflects the truth of the unitive experience in the attitudes, beliefs, and the behaviors of that person. Often gradually, the individual begins to choose greater purposes than those of the self in everyday life while concurrently remaining faithful to the tasks of everyday life. Frances Vaughan (1995) says it this way:

The people I know whose lives have been transformed by deep inner work have usually made persistent and sustained effort to live in accordance with what they have learned about themselves and the nature of consciousness. They are usually open to deep experiences, but do not seek them as ends in themselves. If a person becomes addicted to them these powerful experiences can become the golden chains that prevent freedom of the soul. (pp. 22-23)

This path of transformation might very well be the path of authenticity that was simply given a catalyst by a powerful experience of union with God or ultimate consciousness. The next three sections of this chapter will address research that relates to the unitive experience, authenticity, and authenticity on the spiritual path.

### *Unitive Experience*

Robert M. Anderson, Jr. (1977) described two types of consciousness—personal and transpersonal. The personal consciousness or individual consciousness is an experience of multiplicity and separation (R. M. Anderson, 1977). One dimension of transpersonal consciousness is an experience of complete oneness very similar to the description of the unitive experience (R. M. Anderson, 1977; Tart, 1972). John Welwood (1977) described the experience as transcending what we normally articulate as focal

attention. In this state of consciousness, boundaries are dissolved and separate entities merge into one and separation no longer exists. This experience of merging, where two become one, constitutes the unitive experience. Although transpersonal consciousness looks at many internal states of consciousness, this study looks at just this single state of unity.

When people report transpersonal experiences, they often have a hard time explaining the experience in words (R. M. Anderson, 1977; Welwood, 1977). Even people who are well known for their ability to explain complex experiences have a hard time talking about unitive mystical experiences. Here is such an account by Alfred Lord Tennyson as cited in James:

I have never had any revelations through anaesthetics, but a kind of waking trance—this for lack of a better word—I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has come upon me, as it were out of intensity of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state but the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words—where death was an almost laughable impossibility—the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life. I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words? (James, 1902/1997, p. 302)

This experience is hard to capture through focused attention and is better understood through an unfocused all-encompassing attention (Welwood, 1977). “It is like taking pictures of Mt. Fuji from every possible angle, yet none of the pictures, nor even the whole series, truly expresses the presence of the mountain” (Welwood, 1977, p. 8). One cannot fully explain a three-dimensional experience in a two-dimensional medium. Perhaps one cannot even make sense of the experience in a mindset that has been programmed by this world of educational linearity. Riccardo (1977) says it this way:

Explanations are often not meaningful to the mystic himself, for the experience validates itself while at the same time it transcends any explanation. Explanations

no longer serve to satisfy the mystic's search for truth, for he feels as though his very soul has reached the highest understanding. He says he cannot convey the essence of his experience with words. That will remain an impenetrable barrier as long as the rest of us have to rely on mere explanations. (p. 5)

Therefore, when researchers attempt to understand this ineffable experience, they must use methods to study the experience that help the researcher and the participants to understand the experience before using words. The highest understanding that the mystic intrinsically knows is what the researcher must attempt to reach through the research design and method.

Keith Haartman (2001) stated that the ego plays a prominent role in the transformative potential of these unitive experiences. Ideally, the sense of God's omnipresence provides "an intensification of conscience and empathy; a reduction in narcissistic or egocentric values; a massive decrease in anxiety and depression; and an upsurge in self-esteem, hope, and initiative" (Haartman, 2001, p. 813). Haartman's main point is that sometimes the unitive experience does not transform the person positively, as the ideal suggests, but rather the ego uses the experience to defend the ego in many different ways. For example, the experience of understanding mortality might become an obsession with wanting to die, the experience of being loved, or having self-esteem being turned into a sense of grandiosity. These experiences Haartman called unitive distortions. Unitive experiences are not transformative in and of themselves but do provide a catalyst for the person who is ready for change (Haartman, 2001).

Why do some unitive experiences lead to integrative change and others to unitive distortions? The answer lies in the person's readiness for change. John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist movement that gave rise to the Wesleyan denominations, including British and American Methodism. He endorsed a method of spiritual

development by which one is perfected by God's love over time. Haartman (2001), in studying Wesley, found that Wesley encouraged his followers to actively remember the unitive experience again and again to "practice the presence" (p. 818). This gradual integration of the transformative experience by reexperiencing God's presence in all things and knowing God's complete acceptance and mercy in all things allowed people to investigate their own psychological responses to this knowledge and to transform (Haartman, 2001). This integration of experience is on the affective as well as the cognitive level, which seems to suggest the possibility for greater authenticity in Wesley's followers.

The ecstasy experience as researched by Marghanita Laski (1961) includes but is not limited to the unitive mystical experience. The experience of ecstasy seems to focus more on positive feelings defining the mystical experience than on the unitive mystical experience. Some of the descriptions in Laski's interviews do seem to be unitive in nature. From the descriptions given by Laski's research participants, I chose to combine descriptions that seemed to describe the unitive experience, as follows:

A sort of merging into the experience—the hard lines around one's individuality are gone, one flows over them—essentially a moment of complete peace—the ultimate trademark is a feeling that this does touch reality—allied to this thing of completeness, wholeness, other forms of so-called reality are not wholly real, only particles of reality . . . extreme clarity . . . sensation of absolute oneness, rightness, the same thing—the whole world falls into place, matches, fits . . . . All creation comes into harmony . . . . complete satisfaction, sense of touching reality . . . a feeling for the first time you're seeing things in proper proportion—time seems to stop, no, not matter—you're not anywhere, and despite not feeling anywhere in particular, feeling in unity with everything—no, not with everything, with nature . . . a complete absence of a sense of specific time and place, complete involvement of one's whole being, at the same time a loss of the sense of being yourself . . . a feeling of oneness with the totality of nature . . . complete suspension of time, sudden sense of certitude about nothing I can define . . . away from yourself, you feel nothing—you don't feel yourself, away from yourself—it sort of overwhelms

you, it hits you, and it's all powerful . . . an unbearable knowledge of the reality of things. (Laski, 1961, pp. 375-6, 380, 383, 386-7, 389, 390, 395, 397-8)

Although my study looks at a group of people who are or were Protestant Christians at the time of their unitive experience, I am not suggesting that the phenomenon of the unitive experience is limited to any group. Reported experiences have many similarities in common, yet each experience has been given meaning through the individual's spiritual values and belief system. James (1902/1997) described some experiences as ineffable which were self-reported to be beyond words. The words and phrases individuals used to describe their experiences were from their own spiritual backgrounds and life experiences.

Unitive mystical experiences happen to people from many different cultures and spiritual backgrounds. Below is a quote shared by Agehananda Bharati, a Viennese-born Hindu tantric monk, about his experience that is framed in a cognitive state but was lacking completely of any cognitive content according to his own report, as follows:

One night when I was about twelve, it happened for the first time. I was falling asleep, when the whole world turned into one: one entity, one indivisible certainty. No euphoria, no colors, just a deadeningly sure oneness of which I was the center—and everything else was just this, and nothing else. For a fraction of a minute, perhaps, I saw nothing, but was that oneness, empty of content and feeling. Then for another five minutes or so the wall with the kitschy flowers reappeared, and the fire crackled in the large brick stove. But I knew that this was the meaning of what I had been reading for a year or so—the Upanisadic dictum of oneness, and the literature around and about it. I did not think in terms of God, atman, Brahman, nor strangely enough, in terms of having found fulfillment—I was just struck by the fact that I had not known this oneness before, and that I had kept reading about it very much as I read about Gaul being divided into three parts, or elementary Sanskrit grammar. Then after some time, no longer than half an hour I would think, things returned to whatever had been normal before. (As cited in Merkur, 1999, p. 4-5)

It is evident from this description that cultural context has an impact on the language used to describe the experience. However, it is equally evident that aspects of this man's experience are very similar to previously cited experiences within other cultural contexts.

Other people who have had unitive experiences report ecstatic feelings of joy and love. The unitive experience in these cases is in the all-encompassing bond of love but not necessarily a feeling of total merger of oneness of all things. A study by Susan Carlock (2003) researched the unitive experience of joy in mystics. Her intuitive inquiry study focused on eight of the world's greatest Christian mystics. She found that "true [enduring] joy is found in a mystical perception of the universe beyond the ordinary experiences of joy and suffering . . . by forsaking the hollow pleasures of the world and turning to God" (Carlock, 2003, p. iv).

A study of Christian mystical experiences by Bernard Spilka, George A. Brown, and Stephen A. Cassidy (1992) found that feelings of unity and completeness were not strongly present in the mystical experience for many of their participants but that there was an overwhelming *presence of God* reported by them. They gave true/false and Likert scale questionnaires to 96 men and 96 women who were an average age of 28.4 years old who reported a Christian mystical experience. Some other results of this study showed that the participants' experience contained (a) strong components of awe and reverence, (b) a gaining of new knowledge, (c) positive emotional aspects such as joy and bliss, (d) extreme sensory simulation, and (e) positive changes in behavior. There was a stronger feeling of *one with the absolute* as a result of the experience. Therefore, there may be many Christian mystics who experience God's presence to a high degree and do not

normally experience feelings of unity at the time when they are experiencing God's presence.

However, as a critique of this study, I would say that the assumptions of the researchers were that those who experienced mystical experiences were psychologically unhealthy in some way. Although, they found this not to be the case, the questionnaires were based along these lines of thinking. *Unity and completeness* on the experience scale was combined with the experience of *physical healing* and could have had an impact on the results of finding unity within the mystical experience. These seem like two very different aspects of experience to me. Since I am not fully supportive of their study design, I am not sure that their statistical analysis with the Pearson product-moment correlations and the principal components analysis with Varimax rotation is particularly meaningful, even though it appears to be statistically relevant with  $p < .01$  and  $p < .05$  values for many of its findings, and even though it seems reliable with a Kuder-Richardson 20 coefficient of .72 - .84. I hold these findings lightly, but it is important to note that though all 196 participants reported having had at least one mystical experience, less than half of them reported the experience of unity (Spilka et al., 1992).

### *Authenticity*

What does it mean to be truly authentic? What impacts authenticity? How does one become more authentic in life? How does one determine "what is so"? What motivates an authentic response or an inauthentic response? These are some questions that a discussion of authenticity raises as we look at the literature and studies of this subject.

In an organic research study of 9 participants, William Kueppers (2004) found that authenticity is discerned by assessing internal feelings and body cues. He interviewed 8 people, one from each of the nine enneagram types except for the fourth type. Kueppers, himself, was type four and wrote about his own experience in this organic research study. Kueppers also interviewed a friend of each of the 9 primary participants about their authenticity. He discovered that both internal and external pressures enabled people to overcome fears of acting authentically. Long-term outcomes of authentic behavior were perceived as strongly life-enhancing by both the primary and secondary participants studied. Inauthentic behaviors were reported to be life-diminishing in the short-term but life-promoting over the long-term because the participants generally reported growth from these experiences.

Brian Goldman and Michael Kernis (2002) did a study of 79 university students. Using four scales that looked at self-esteem and life satisfaction and one inventory on authenticity, they found several correlations that are informative to this study: (a) greater self-reported authenticity related to higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction, (b) greater behavioral authenticity related to higher levels of self-esteem and less contingent self-esteem, and (c) greater relational authenticity related to higher life satisfaction and less negative affect. Kernis (2003) defined authenticity as the “unobstructed operation of one’s true self in one’s daily enterprise” (p. 13). Some components of authenticity were as follows: self-awareness, unbiased processing of positive and negative aspects of self, acting in accordance with one’s own values, and valuing and achieving openness and truthfulness in one’s close relationships (Goldman & Kernis, 2002).



Deborah Rahilly (1993) did a phenomenological study of authentic experience interviewing 14 members of a psychotherapist-training group, 11 women and 3 men between the ages of 35 and 55. They were each asked the question, “What is authentic experience?” She found 14 constituents of the authentic experience as reported by 7 or more of the participants, as quoted below:

1. Intensity, hyperbole
2. Heightened awareness of somatic experience, total embodiment
3. Fully present and aware of experience
4. Cognitive processes stop, elimination of judgments, ego dissolution
5. Ineffability, use of metaphor
6. Expressive behavior
7. Reverence, awe
8. Heightened awareness of interpersonal relationships
9. Precipitated by honest, candid communication
10. Sense of moving in and out of the experience
11. Timelessness
12. Important or peak experience
13. A shift, a breakthrough or a culmination of an awaited experience
14. Otherworldliness, ethereal, dreamlike quality (Rahilly, 1993, p. 62)

One important finding that Rahilly iterated, which is not in the list of 14, is that the authentic experience is no less authentic for being negative in its nature. Some of her participants related authentic experiences that occurred in abusive relationships. Rahilly found that the four qualities of the “becoming person” as described by Carl Rogers (1965) would include both positively and negatively interpreted authentic experiences, while Abraham Maslow’s (1964/1994) list of qualities of the peak experience would describe only those experiences interpreted as positive. Rogers’ qualities are an openness to experience, trust in one’s organism, an internal locus of evaluation, and the willingness to be a process (Rogers, 1965).

James F. T. Bugental (1965) suggested that the experience of unity and the living out of that experience are both authenticity, as stated below:

A person is authentic in that degree to which his being in the world is unqualifiedly in accord with the givenness of his own nature and of the world. . . . Authenticity is the term I will use to characterize both a hypothesized ultimate state of at-oneness with the cosmos and the immense continuum leading to that ultimate ideal. (pp. 31, 32)

Below, Bugental has given us an existential-analytic perspective of authenticity and suggested how it manifests in the psychotherapy room between client and therapist.

While his perspective is not wholly on topic, he does give several key elements of authenticity from the existential perspective that do apply:

1. The authentic person is broadly aware of himself, his relationships, and his world in all dimensions.
2. The authentic person accepts and seems to go to meet the fact that he is constantly in the process of making choices, that decisions are the very stuff of living.
3. The authentic person takes full responsibility of his decisions, including full recognition of their consequences. (Bugental, 1965, pp. 102-103)

Susan Harter (2002) wrote a chapter in the *Handbook of Positive Psychology* summarizing the research on authenticity. According to Harter, the ancient Greeks in their well-known philosophical musings such as “Know thyself” and “To thine own self be true” captured the concept of authenticity. However, she noted that far more research has been done on the lack of authentic behavior than on authenticity itself and that the research is very unconnected and “addresses different aspects of authenticity in rather piecemeal fashion” (Harter, 2002, p. 382). The developmental research has looked at how authenticity emerges during adolescence and how parents can validate their child’s experience and improve the likelihood that once the child reaches adolescence, he or she will be able to engage authentically in all areas of life. Other studies looking at adolescents discovered that teens correlate being able to voice their true thoughts, feelings, and opinions with being authentic and having higher self-esteem. In adult

relationships, studies show that being both autonomous and connected to the other is associated with greater authenticity than either being solely autonomous or solely connected. Another body of research addressed the development of multiple selves and whether or not one could operate authentically from many positions. Researchers concluded that emphasis on multiplicity could be both authentic and liberating. Harter (2002) traced this healthy idea of multiplicity back to William James' work in 1892.

### *Authenticity on the Spiritual Path*

Patricia Moorehead (2001) did a qualitative study using grounded theory and semistructured interviews of the experience of transformation in Christian mysticism with 9 Roman Catholics aged 40 to 60. Of her participants, 3 were lay persons, 3 were vowed members of religious congregations, and 3 were priests. Some of her findings related to the process of authenticity although she was looking at transformation. Major common themes of the transformation experience were (a) an emphasis on community, (b) experiences of interior and exterior suffering, (c) a search for life's meaning and purpose, (d) the value of solitude and silence, (e) the integration experienced in embodiment, and (f) an aesthetic sensitivity to beauty. One other theme that was mentioned more indirectly was the experience of the holy in ordinary events and in day-to-day activities of life. Moorehead commented that all of her coresearchers "viewed their lives and spiritual journeys as one" (p. 320). Moorehead also named three themes of the experience of the Divine: (a) call-response, (b) inner authority, and (c) surrender to the Divine.

The *call-response* in Moorehead's (2001) study directly supports my current study as coresearchers recalled experiences of being called to the transcendent and responding. Several of these accounts were unitive mystical experiences during the childhood or

teenage years of participants. *Inner authority* addresses something very close to what I describe as authenticity. Moorehead (2001) said that this inner authority is in response to a call, to an inner voice of direction, and is an integrity of self that carries over into other areas of life, as described below:

With each authentic response, the deeper Self within the co-researcher achieved more prominence. Facing external opposition, the co-researchers exhibited at times almost a tolerance for scorn. It was more important for them to be true to themselves than to external authority, although they frequently walked a delicate path of acceding to authority while questioning themselves. (p. 348)

Surrender to the Divine as seen by Moorehead's coresearchers was an active surrender, a moving forward and a letting go of the results.

Marsha Sinetar (1986) interviewed 40 individuals over the age of 35 who were what she considered to be either monks or mystics. *Monks* were those who chose to intentionally to live separate from society but in service of society, and *mystics* were those who had experienced the divine and sought to live their life as a calling. She interviewed them about their conscious choice to pull away from society and to live a contemplative life. She found in her case study over a period of 6 years that ordinary people who are on mystical paths grow in self-awareness. Also over time they become more and more directed by inner truths with greater discernment for what is real and what is dishonest. She looked at actualizing personalities as a result in the lives of these ordinary mystics and came up with four noticeable themes from the interviews, as described below:

These people are autonomous and authentic persons who are adaptable to making life changes and illustrate what it means to be intuitive or capable of listening to their inner voice. Each has at least a high enough degree of self-esteem that he is willing to act on behalf of what is, for him, real and worthwhile. Each also has the self-trust and self-reliance to know what he is about as a person, to identify—

perhaps even speak up for and act out—what is valuable, what he aspires to, what is meaningful. (Sinetar, 1986, p. 137)

Inauthenticity or not acting in accordance with one's nature is due at least in part to social valuing. All socialized beings have some sense of what it means to act in accordance with social expectations. The struggle for the truly authentic person is to shift the locus of control from the external social sphere back towards the internal self (Baruss, 1996). Only if one truly trusts the outside influence to have one's best interests in mind, can one act authentically and in accord with social expectations. But in order for one to act in agreement with one's inner nature, one must have an understanding of who one is, beyond the primal emotions and the expectations of others.

The unitive experience might be an experience that gives people intrinsic knowledge of who they are in harmony with the universe that supersedes emotions and social expectations, therefore allowing for an authenticity aligned with Greater Truth. So I am going to add this as one of my lenses that I will review in Chapter 5: Discussion and summarize at the end of this current chapter.

The practice of authenticity requires deliberate, persistent effort (Baruss, 1996). Synthesizing and creating harmony between elements of the self that are not acting in accord with one's self-knowledge is the consistent practice. Many mystical traditions and practices help a follower of the Great Mystery to act more and more in accordance with the follower's true nature, whether or not the follower has had a direct unitive mystical experience of knowing Truth. Baruss (1996) said that unless we are willing to trust the intentions of those guiding us, we must shift control to our own inner guidance, away from the social sphere back to the individual.

The integration of the unitive mystical experience is not always positive. One example of a profound mystical experience causing a crisis of identity and action within an individual is given below. It shows that although the person identified the experience as being from God, he had a very difficult time integrating the experience into everyday life:

With the irreversible finality of an earthquake's shifting plates, a profound shift in my consciousness occurred in early 1977 and the old Richard Moss, M.D. disappeared forever. Gradually I learned to exist with a new sense of self. This kind of change has no clear model in traditional Western medicine or psychology. At the time I considered and rejected all the familiar models, including psychosis, neurological seizures and that perennial catchall, the nervous breakdown. Yet the new me felt like an atomic reactor powered by energies so great that I could not have conceived them before. For awhile I even considered the possibility of possession, but there was also the love and inexpressibly uplifting joy when I realized that I was nothing and existed only by God's grace. Gradually I recognized that a fundamental transformation of my nature was taking place. (Moss, 1981, p. 1)

There is tension in what Moss is expressing. How is he to incorporate what he has learned that is out of the ordinary into his everyday life? Others who have had this experience have their own way of describing this tension or pull.

It seems to me that it is the experience of integration within the individual that addresses aspects of authenticity. To come to an understanding of this experience, we must keep in mind that the person has a body, mind, and spirit from which to understand spiritual experiences and to grow or atrophy. "One way of thinking about the difference between these aspects of personhood is to understand the spiritual as pointing us toward our need for the transcendent and the psychological as pointing us toward our need for groundedness" (Benner, 2002, p. 359). Benner added that these seemingly different pulls are one and the same as *ground of being* and surrender to ultimate transcendence (Benner, 2002; Huxley, 1945). This surrender to ultimate transcendence then takes a

person to the place where there is no divide. This is where the Divine informs the inner knowing. The internal ground of being is in connection with the Divine, and this may strengthen a person's internal locus of control. What does this mean in terms of the Christian seeking God? According to Maria Jaoudi (1998), "The Christian West and East, through containing distinct emphases on methods of prayer, both focus on the ultimate goal of coming into God's presence and eventually entering the experience of union with God" (p. 5). Jaoudi went on to say more about the experience of union with God:

The ultimate aim of entering the cloud of unknowing is to be one with God. This oneness through forgetting helps one to completely re-enter the demands of life, not with the eyes of past ego patterns, but living spontaneously, creatively, through the freedom of the Holy Spirit. (p. 13)

In addition to these vertical pulls that Benner (2002) described and Jaoudi (1998) depicted, there is the horizontal pull of the individual within society. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (1993) described this experience of the mystic as living in two worlds or having a foot in two different worlds—one in the transcendent spiritual dimension and one in the common everyday world. Here is another personal example from the life of Richard Moss (1981):

Two dominant forces were operating. First, there was the radical change in my own consciousness—recognized as both an awakening and a death process—which generated enormous "highs" as well as fear, and which my previous motives and philosophies were inadequate to resolve. Second, there was a sense of integrity that demanded that I be the living representative of what I taught others or else neither truth nor true healing was being offered. It became a journey of almost brutal self-honesty, one of opening the heart and discovering a quality of love that is not housed in the dreams and ideas of the personal me. The love emerged as the old me fell away. It was and is a love that demands a new quality of awareness not based on an egocentric selection process that wants to allow only the ego-sustaining forces into the foreground of awareness. (pp. 3-4)

Moss outlined his spiritual experience as including a change in consciousness causing a momentary confusion of worldview. Following this, there was a sense of integrity that

demanding him to be a living representation of what he was teaching others. From this place of brutal self-honesty emerged a love based on a new quality of awareness.

In the Christian tradition, like many other traditions, the community is involved in helping the individual's soul connect to God. Not every encounter with God is corporate, but the support of the community is integral in helping the individual along the path, though not all communities are able to do this. Some mystical experiences are interpreted through a corporate understanding of the phenomenon along with group encouragement to the individual towards living in accordance with this new mystical understanding or experience. The unitive experience is one mystical experience in which the individual uses an intrinsic frame of reference more than an external frame of reference in determining the meaning of the experience, even if the response of authenticity is to be lived out collectively within the community. Tillich (1952) shares the joy of living authentically before God and man below:

Joy accompanies the self-affirmation of our essential being in spite of the inhibitions coming from the accidental elements in us. Joy is the emotional expression of the courageous "Yes" to one's own true being. . . . In the ontological act of the self-affirmation of one's essential being, courage and joy coincide. . . . The soul of the wise man is similar to God. The God who is indicated here is the divine Logos in unity with whom the courage of wisdom conquers fate and transcends the gods. It is the "God above god." (pp. 14-15)

Richard N. Potter (2004) speaks of authentic behavior in regards to spiritual experience in what he terms a direct path. A *direct path* is "a spiritual path which eventually pulls the aspirant out of all cultural religious forms. The person on the direct path must then integrate a noncultural transcendent realization into their everyday cultural existence" (Potter, 2004, p. 215). In comparison, a *balanced path* is "a spiritual path that seeks truth along traditional lines and stays within the wide parameters of a



religious tradition” (Potter, 2004, p. 215). It seems as if Potter is simply noticing that there is more than one type of spiritual path people choose to follow. From the Christian tradition, the quote below illustrates how a person can completely open to God as a life practice. “God’s true nature is unknowable, transcendent, beyond human intelligence to comprehend. The only way to experience the living God is to open oneself to the invisible” (Jaoudi, 1998, p. 83). With this focus, a person could choose to go outside the bounds of an organized religious path or choose to listen to God’s inner voice while staying within an organized path.

Jaoudi (1998) goes on to talk about relating to God in all everyday experiences that could be framed as the direct path or the balanced path:

We encounter God’s Beingness. We come face to face ontologically with “Being Itself” as the “first and last,” the “eternal and most present.” We have come to experience the image and likeness of God in all creation, including our own body and mind, as well as diaphanous being translucent in flowers, birds, and the cosmos. We have been transformed through God’s grace, recognizing our individual identity in a new role grounded in mirroring reverential values and goals . . . . We are ready to recognize God’s Being “whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.” (pp. 99-100)

Whether or not the unitive mystical experience pulls the individual out of any religious path, it is an experience that requires that person to integrate the realization of the experience into everyday life. According to Frances Vaughan (2002), “Spiritual intelligence calls for multiple ways of knowing and for the integration of the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of work in the world” (p. 16). Although this path might not be easy and may require a great deal of courage, many suggest that there are benefits to choosing to live authentically—aligning the inner life of mind and spirit through actions in the world. Andersen’s age-old story of the ugly duckling gives us one example

that suggests a time of happiness and fulfillment after a period of struggle to live authentically, as shown below:

“There is another swan come; a new one has arrived.” Then they threw more bread and cake into the water, and said, “The new one is the most beautiful of all; he is so young and pretty.” And the old swans bowed their heads before him. Then he felt quite ashamed and hid his head under his wing; for he did not know what to do, he was so happy, and yet not at all proud. He had been persecuted and despised for his ugliness, and now he heard them say he was the most beautiful of all the birds. Even the elder-tree bent down its bows into the water before him, and the sun shone warm and bright. Then he rustled his feathers, curved his slender neck, and cried joyfully, from the depths of his heart, “I never dreamed of such happiness as this, while I was an ugly duckling.” (Andersen, 1844)

### *Final Lens and a Summary of Research Lenses*

This final lens is a synopsis of the literature review findings rather than a listing of research lenses so that there might be an overall understanding of the research themes. I will discuss how and why I did my research summary as a final lens in the following paragraphs. At the end of this section, I will list all nine of the lenses that I have previously shared within these first two chapters. In Chapter 5, I look at these lenses in light of the findings from the participant interviews. For a more comprehensive look at the research themes that have been addressed in the lenses below, see Appendix F, which lists all of the research citations and quotes from this chapter. For the process of coming to this lens, see Chapter 3 and the *Research Process and Design* section.

After looking at all of the research discussed in this literature review, I use it to further inform my study’s research hypothesis. Some of the qualities of a unitive mystical experience given by Riccardo (1977) seem to be similar to those of an authentic experience as seen in Rahilly (1993). Other research findings were primarily about either authenticity or the unitive mystical experience and there was no apparent overlap in these subjects as seen in Haartman’s (2001) beautiful descriptions of the unitive experience and

in Bugental's (1965) final two characteristics of the authentic person. However, as I continued to reread the research, something more began to emerge. The qualities that Rogers (1965) used to describe authenticity seemed to coincide with Jaoudi's (1998) description of acting from a place of knowing God's Beingness and Bugental's (1965) description of authenticity as a state of oneness with the cosmos. I felt like there was a third understanding that was trying to arise in my own consciousness concerning a more holistic view of what was being said. I could not have come to this understanding without the contribution of all the research of others listed in this study.

This more holistic view, I am going to call transpersonal authenticity. I am going to describe how I understand it, and then I am going to give it a more formal definition. In transpersonal authenticity, the person has a different concept of self. This self-concept is informed by a consciousness of being connected with others, with nature, with the universe, and with the Divine. Whether or not the individual terms this as an inner knowing or a call from God is not important because the self-concept is based on a fundamental connection with this knowing whether it is seen as internal or external. For example, doing God's will consciously and connectedly is being transpersonally authentic in the same way as someone who has a deep inner knowing of the path they need to follow and chooses to follow it.

In transpersonal authenticity, a person has an awareness of both autonomy and connectedness. It is from the consciousness of autonomy that the person has an awareness of the connectedness and is able to make decisions. It is from the consciousness of connectedness that the person is able to come to a new knowledge of the universe in harmony and act in such a way to create that reality and flow in daily life. Transpersonal

authenticity is not static but ever changing, flowing to exist fully present in the moment. In transpersonal authenticity, a person has the potential to tap into boundless creativity because the limitations of self are not the same. In transpersonal authenticity, there is a sense of freedom in operating from a sense of self that is always beyond present understanding and a willingness to move in response to a greater understanding of self, at any time, no matter the path. Transpersonal authenticity is a fully embodied active and empty readiness to respond in any present moment to a greater consciousness, which is fundamentally understood and informs one's sense of self.

I would like to add another personal lens as I am going into the research interview stage. I became aware of this lens as I was writing and later interacting with the definition of transpersonal authenticity. In my personal experience, I have noticed a feeling of tremendous power, confidence, and surety that comes when I am responding from a place of integrity and alignment as a conduit for a greater knowing. I believe the research implies this when it talks about being connected with all that is, but I wanted to make this part of my experience and my understanding explicit. If the research interviews give evidence of this feeling of power and confidence, I plan to add it to my definition of transpersonal authenticity. The participant interviews will give evidence to support or refute this lens, which I will discuss more in Chapter 5.

This is a compilation of 14 lenses that I have listed so far in this study: 1-6 are bracketed beliefs of mine that I shared in the introduction, 7-11 are excerpts from my hypothesis, and 12-14 arose from the literature review directly or from the process of engaging with that material. These 14 lenses are reviewed again in light of the new

knowledge gained from the participant interviews in Chapter 5. In the following chapter, I will discuss the research method of these participant interviews in greater detail.

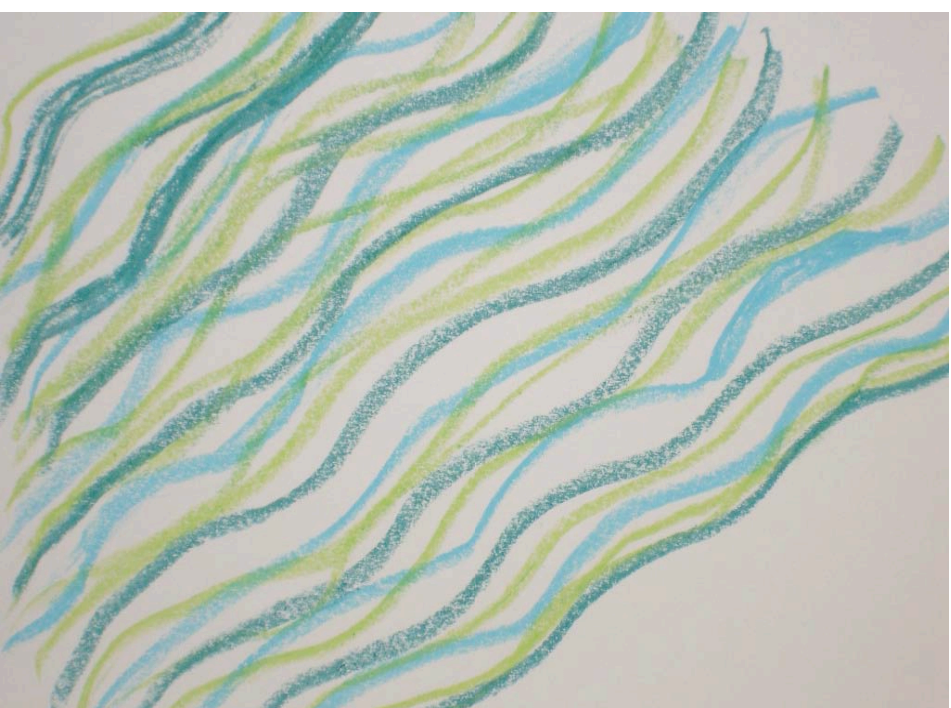
1. God or Spirit desires for us all to know Truth more fully.
2. Unitive experiences as well as other mystical experiences occur in order that we might live in greater accordance with this Truth.
3. Experiences that reveal God or Spirit happen to all people multiple times throughout their lives.
4. There is no way for any person to know God, Spirit, or Truth completely.
5. The only way that any one of us can truly know anything deeply about the ultimate is through a personal experience of internal, deep knowing.
6. From this very limited and personal experience of knowing and living comes a valuable contribution to the greater field of knowledge regarding God, Spirit, or Truth.
7. Participants will have had a moment of being in the essence of the substance of all things, where all is one.
8. Participants who experienced a loss of self also experienced a moment of clarity.
9. Someone who has experienced a unitive mystical experience and has been able to integrate that experience into daily life has come to a greater understanding of authentic self or created essence and has a greater passion to live authentically in all relationships.
10. This new understanding of authentic self will be reflected in choices, interactions, and relationships.
11. I also expect to find that ordinary people have experienced these unitive mystical experiences and have subsequently altered their interactions to reflect a greater sense of alignment with this new knowledge or greater authenticity.
12. The unitive experience is an experience that gives people intrinsic knowledge of who they are in harmony with the universe that supersedes emotions and social expectations as they align with this Greater Truth.
13. Transpersonal authenticity is a fully embodied active and empty readiness to respond to a greater consciousness in any present moment, which is fundamentally understood and informs one's sense of self.

14. There is a feeling of tremendous power, confidence, and surety that comes from responding from a place of integrity and alignment as a conduit for a greater knowing.



Carlos's Creative Expression

*Figure 5.* Creative expression pieces from Carlos's interview.



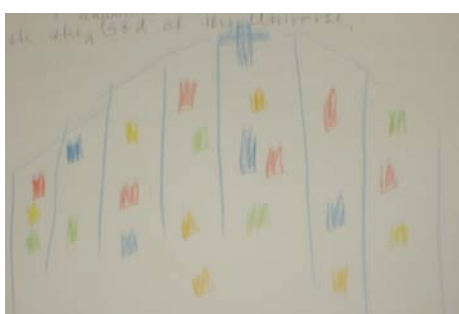
Researcher's Creative Expression



Dixon's Creative Expression (A)



Dixon's Creative Expression (B)



Dixon's Creative Expression (C)



Dixon's Creative Expression (D)



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 6.* Creative expression pieces from Dixon's interview.



### Chapter 3: Method of Research

My intent in choosing the method is to honor my own path of authenticity as I study an experience that is very personal, although perhaps universal, and to honor each individual's intrinsic understanding of this unitive mystical experience through my choice of research method. Baruss (1996) suggested that the transparent voice of the individual and the scientific exploration of experiences might be very similar in authentic process, as follows:

Knowledge is the currency of science, and when it is freed from the black-and-white constraints of its inauthentic aspects, science can be opened up to a colorful exploration of consciousness and the ultimate nature of reality. Then a more open, possibly introspective scientific venture may be indistinguishable from the efforts of a spiritual aspirant seeking to deepen her understanding of reality. . . . Having looked underneath the surface of both science and spiritual aspiration, we have found the same thing: the need for authentic knowing. (Baruss, 1996, p. 150)

Transpersonal psychology was created to provide “a new and proper area of psychological inquiry . . . that went beyond the usual range of humanistic investigation . . . its main emphasis was on the experiencing individual rather than on the human race as a whole” (Sutich, 1969, p. 15). The experience of unity with God or the universe is a phenomenon that falls into the range of transpersonal psychological studies because it is an experience of something transcendent within the individual. Therefore, transpersonal psychology seems a perfect arena for this study. The primary method of research chosen for this study is intuitive inquiry. Transpersonal research psychologists developed the method of intuitive inquiry for studies similar to this one (R. Anderson, 1998).

Donald Rothberg (1994) is a proponent of the use of what he calls spiritual inquiry to look at mystical experiences. “To use the concept of inquiry rather than that of ‘knowledge’ as a focus is to stress the activity and process that lead to knowledge, rather

than the completed and abstracted result” (Rothberg, 1994, p. 3). Like spiritual inquiry, this study design honors both our ability to more fully understand the nature and impact of the unitive mystical experience, and simultaneously our inability to ever fully grasp this ineffable experience. This method honors the personal, intrinsic nature of the unitive mystical experience. In using intuitive inquiry, I am better able to explicitly recognize my biases and use them to further the research, not inhibit it. In a study on authenticity and healthy psychological functioning, authenticity was recognized as an internally validated experience (Kernis & Goldman, 2005). Therefore, the only way I know to study such an experience is to hear from people who have acknowledged such experiences and to honor what they have to say.

As researcher, my intent is to create an atmosphere that facilitates participants’ remembering their unitive experiences and becoming conscious of any relationship between their experiences and their subsequent behaviors before they were interviewed and asked to describe their experiences. The research data is based on participant self-reports and interviews. “In a very real sense, neither meditation nor non dualistic experiences can ever be completely understood objectively, with the tools and categories of thinking mind, precisely because their nature is to transcend these categories” (Welwood, 1977, p. 2). Therefore, I use methods that honor the nonverbal experience prior to the verbal inquiry of the study. Towards this end, I incorporate a visualization exercise and a creative expression opportunity to support the nonverbal experience before I ask the participants to verbally describe their unitive mystical experiences and the effect those experiences have had on their lives.

Because nondualistic experiences cannot be understood by strict objectivity, I am using a qualitative research model for this research study. Using intuitive inquiry seems to consider and address the ineffable quality of the unitive experience, and perhaps, the implicit or tacit response of authenticity.

### *Intuitive Inquiry*

#### *Overview*

Intuitive inquiry was originally developed by Rosemarie Anderson (1998) and further developed by others such as Vipassana Esbjorn-Hargen (2004). This method incorporates aspects of the heuristic method developed by Clark Moustakas (1990) and the phenomenological method as well as hermeneutics. Instead of relying solely on mental reasoning and logic for information, intuitive inquiry supports analysis with compassion, imagination, intuition, and altered states of consciousness. Intuitive inquiry allows the researcher to tune in to many ways of knowing and consider all research variables before tailoring the study design to fit the subject being studied. “If the data appear to be organized in key concepts and themes, qualitative content or thematic analysis applies. If the design allowed for focused descriptions of the constituents of one particular experience, phenomenological analysis applies” (R. Anderson, 1998, p. 91). My research design is the thematic analysis of primarily a phenomenological interview. Using intuitive inquiry as my research method allows me this type of flexibility in my research design. This flexibility also helps the researcher and research honor the complexity of the phenomenon being studied. Anderson discussed the importance of compassionate intention in research and how research that is informed by compassion is different from research that is emotionally detached, explained as follows:

Compassion allows us to ask the most significant questions and guides our hypotheses and speculations toward rich and expansive theories regarding the nature of the human experience. Compassionate listening allows our research participants to speak to us freely and honestly about the depth and value of their human experiences. . . . Finally, as we report our findings, compassionate writing is heartfelt, a vessel for others to hear ideas and theories already formed of compassionate listening, analysis, and synthesis of findings. (R. Anderson, 1998, p. 71)

Anderson specifically developed intuitive inquiry for the purpose of studying transformative experiences (Esbjorn-Hargen, 2004).

### *Phases of Research*

According to Anderson (1998), there are seven phases of intuitive inquiry. Each phase is briefly described here:

1. *Selecting and focusing the topic of inquiry* includes the researcher's process of choosing a topic and making it manageable for research. A further discussion of this is in Chapter 4: Research Process under cycle one.
2. *Collecting the data* includes letting the research method drive the research study and letting the study topic define how the data is collected as well as collecting the data. Chapter 4 describes the actual practice of this although this method chapter describes the theory of the process.
3. *Incubating the data* refers to the process of intentionally relaxing and focusing on something besides the research for a scheduled period of time. This phase is employed forming the last lens in the literature review and again during the final red hawk cycle.
4. *Analyzing the data* is when the researcher uses multiple intuitive research skills in a method respectful of the material being studied to allow a deep

understanding of the data to be revealed. The resonance panel is such an example in this study.

5. *Breakthrough and synthesizing the findings* has a two-part nature.

*Breakthrough* occurs throughout all phases of the research and denotes any sudden insight that the researcher has and subsequently acts upon. My lenses reflect such breakthroughs as well as small changes in the research process that are discussed in Chapter 4. *Synthesizing the findings* describes the procedure that the researcher uses to fit the data and is most often a procedure recommended by heuristic or phenomenological methods. This is described in Chapter 4 and the results of this phase are given in Chapter 5.

6. *Communicating the findings through sympathetic resonance* describes a process by which the researcher presents the results of the study in a way that seeks to create resonance for the reader. The transparent writing style of this entire study is an example of this phase.
7. *Honorable closure* is the final phase of the process in which the researcher acknowledges all of the contributions made by individuals to the research project and expresses gratitude for new understandings during the study. This phase is honored in notes of appreciation to both participants and resonance panel members.

These seven phases have evolved and been combined into research cycles by researchers who have advanced this method and tailored the method to their topic. Esbjorn-Hargen (2004) combines the seven phases into four cycles: (a) clarifying the research topic, (b) developing the primary lenses, (c) collecting the data and preparing summary reports, and

(d) transforming and refining lenses. Cortney Phelon (2004) described her five cycles in these terms: (a) the claim of the text, (b) initial lenses and model of healing presence, (c) engaging the claim of others, (d) resonance panels of exemplar psychotherapists, and (e) a theoretical model for healing presence. Both of these studies show that the method is not a static force but rather an interactive, fluid concept that can be molded to the phenomenon being studied.

### *Cycles of Research*

In the latest publication on intuitive inquiry (Esbjorn-Hargen & Anderson, 2006) five cycles are listed. The first four are exactly as Esbjorn-Hargen (2004) listed them in the above paragraph plus a new fifth cycle of integration composed of cycle four lenses and the literature review. In order to work in a more engaged way with each of the five cycles in this study, I renamed each of the cycles as an animal in action. The full process of my engagement with these five cycles is described in Chapter 4. Each of these five cycles conceptually taken from Esbjorn-Hargen and Anderson (2006) and then renamed by me is briefly listed below:

1. *The Hummingbird resting in contemplation*, cycle one—symbolizes a process of engaging in many different ways with the reoccurring attraction of a subject and then observing the nuances of that attraction from a place of stillness in order to articulate a research question and describe clearly the research project.
2. *The Bat hanging upside down in the cave*, cycle two—symbolizes a process of looking at things from a new position in order to clarify one's own ideas and lenses. This stage also supplies partial illumination through the research

literature, which is more like moonlight than the daylight illumination of original research interviews that come in cycle three. This stage requires an honest reevaluation of one's beginning assumptions prior to the research interviews, and a process of reflective engagement with research texts.

3. *The Squirrel gathering nuts*, cycle three—symbolizes the stage of energetically gathering and valuing research information from participants. Ideally, the collection of information is gathered in a consistently patterned and planned way so that all data is allowed to give illumination to stage four. However, this process might take several interactions with the research participants to gain a full understanding of each participant's experience.
4. *The Raccoon washing his lunch*, cycle four—symbolizes the continual clarifying and transforming process of the researcher's understanding of the topic. The first part of this cycle in this study was clarifying the themes from the interviews. The end result of this cycle should be clear, concise statements regarding the new lenses of the researcher in light of the research. The prior lenses of cycle two will often be changed, modified, or eliminated during this cycle. Often intuitive breakthroughs will occur at this point as new patterns arise.
5. *The Red-Tailed Hawk circling*, cycle five—symbolizes the process during which the research takes into consideration the entire research process as well as the research results. By looking at each stage of the research process, the researcher evaluates the findings in light of the literature, the intuitive inquiry process, and an honest critique of the researcher's own hermeneutic process.

Here researchers must tell not only what they have learned, but also what they still feel is yet undiscovered about their topic.

### *Intuitive Research Skills*

Intuitive research skills are used throughout many different phases of the research study as needed. I mention these skills here but will go into greater detail in Chapter 4: Research Process as I use each of these techniques in this study. There are seven skills mentioned by R. Anderson (1998):

1. *Reflective listening* describes a process by which the researcher reflects upon her own experience to gain awareness in order to listen more fully to similar experiences in others.
2. *Indwelling* comes from the heuristic method (Moustakas, 1990). The researcher seeks to gain greater insights and a deeper understanding of the human experience of the studied phenomenon by being open to answers in all kinds of forms. Indwelling attempts to breakdown prior understanding and allow new insight to take place.
3. *Trickstering*, similar to the later part of indwelling, refers to the ability to learn from confusion and bewilderment and to gain renewed insight.
4. *Varying the focal depth* describes the process of the researcher looking at the phenomenon from various depths to gain a greater understanding and to see both the big picture and the subtle details of the subject.
5. *Ritualizing the intention* is when the researcher makes her intentions explicit to the reader in order to bring greater focus, clarity, and consciousness to the study.



6. *Intersubjectivity of researcher, participants, and the audience* refers to the importance of making the subjectivity of the research known to the reader in a conscious way to invite the possibility of transformation.
7. *Alternative states of consciousness, imagination, and intuition* honors other modes of knowing through all the senses of the person and through transcendent insights.

Esbjorn-Hargen and Anderson (2006) emphasized a few other characteristics of intuitive inquiry besides the seven listed above. According to these developers of this method, intuitive inquiry requires telling the truth no matter what, avoiding circularity or simplistic and self-confirming arguments, favoring the particular and the personal, imagining the possible, and risking personal change and transformation. The following chapter gives a step by step account of the research process during each research cycle. It is the transparent journey of the researcher into illumination and transformation.

### *Research Process and Design*

The remainder of Chapter 3 I have written in past tense to discuss both what my original research design was, and what my actual research design and process ended up being. My research cycles and my research process are both included in this section. This section serves to give the reader a more detailed process of my own interaction with this study in order to show how I am working with the intuitive method. It is important to include this section on the research design and process because I want to make explicit how this research is conducted. Furthermore, the process of this study has been important to me in following my own path of authenticity while being engaged in dissertation research. This revelation of my own process is an important step of the intuitive inquiry

method and listed previously as the sixth intuitive research skill, *intersubjectivity of researcher*.

### *Choosing My Method*

I chose intuitive inquiry as my method after exploring several other good methods that I had initially used in my first draft attempts. For one draft, I chose the heuristic method to look at this material. For another, I chose organic inquiry. It was not until the first draft of my proposal that I chose intuitive inquiry. I believe that my engagement with this material was made richer and fuller by my experiences with these initial methods. For example, during organic inquiry, I identified my own path of authenticity and gained an appreciation for other paths of authenticity that were different from my own. So by the time I came to intuitive inquiry, I had chosen: my topic, my study direction, and the semistructured interview process, and I was well-engaged in my authentic process.

Engaging with the different cycles and phases of intuitive inquiry seemed quite awkward to me at first. I was trying to follow the first cycle of intuitive inquiry as set out by R. Anderson (1998, 2004), Esbjorn-Hargen (2004), and Esbjorn-Hargen and R. Anderson (2006). I tried to create an intention and sit with meaningful passages waiting for some message to rise to the surface. What felt most awkward to me was that it seemed like I was going backward in my study instead of forward in my authentic process. Because my intention was to follow my authentic process, I chose to keep moving forward following what intuitive inquiry offered that seemed to resonate with me as I continued my engagement with the topic of research.

However, as I look back over my initial engagement with my topic, I believe there were several experiences that qualify for cycle one of the intuitive inquiry method. One

of the ways that I have chosen to engage with decisions that I make in everyday life and at particularly pivotal moments has been to pray. During this dissertation process, I have prayed in spontaneous moments, and I have set up special blocks of time to bring dilemmas and expectations before God. There are two answers to those prayers that I would like to share with you. The first is a dream and my response to that dream, and the second is an experience in nature that I had and interpreted as an answer to my prayer.

While I was researching organic inquiry through a course I was taking, one class project was to symbolize my authentic path through the use of creative expression. For this project, I created a collage representing my authentic path and how I wanted to engage with my research project. This is represented in Figure 1. Around this same time, I had a dream about connecting with God through joy and delight in nature by playing in fields of golden grain and visiting with some quail friends who communicated clearly with me and I with them. From that dream and its sequel, I felt compelled to make two staffs for my creative project to depict my authentic path, shown in Figure 2. The staff for me represents the straight connection between heaven and earth and a steady help over difficult terrain. Just as it once served for travelers or shepherds, for me it serves as a reminder of my journey, my calling, and my purpose. I went on a 4-hour hike and asked for a piece of wood for my staff. I was shown a beautiful piece of bay laurel for one of my staves, a piece of eucalyptus for the other, and a red-tailed hawk left me a stunning tail feather. I decorated one staff with the hawk feather, and other representations of my dream like the feathers of my quail friends, golden grains from the field, and red bells to signify the delight and joy that were present in the dream. The other staff was sanded and smoothed but left unadorned because in the dream it looked simple but had the

extraordinary powers of helping me move extremely fast and shoot fire to fight those of the dark. Through this creative project, I not only became clearer about my own authentic path, but I became clearer on what I saw authenticity to be—a manifestation of the reality of Spirit through the life of a responsive individual.

The second answer to prayer took place after I set aside a time to pray about how to write this dissertation. I was struggling to find a consistent voice from which to write. After 30 minutes of prayer and quiet receptivity, I went for a walk in nature. On that walk, I saw a hummingbird sitting very still in the top of a tree at three different times and places. I understood inside me that these three hummingbirds were an answer to my prayer. I was to write from the place of complete stillness of the resting hummingbird. My thoughts and ideas could flutter all over the place or hover at different heights, but my voice for writing would come from the place of stillness. I also considered this experience to be a part of cycle one.

### *Creating Intention*

In writing my intention (this document, p. iv) for this dissertation, I wanted to make a sacred space for my path of authenticity and the paths of my participants, and I wanted to include a prayer for God's strength and grace. My intention evolved throughout the writing process as I became clearer on what it was I wanted. For example, "the delight and awe of discovery" was added when I realized that I wanted my research study to reflect the connection that is found in play and wonder. "Jehovah-Immanuel" became a new addition when we were studying the names of God at church. *Jehovah* means I AM and is found in Exodus 3:14-15 (New International Version [NIV]). *Immanuel* or Emmanuel means "God with us" as found in Matthew 1:23, NIV. I wanted

to show that the complete authenticity that exists in God, I AM that I AM and the reality of God being with us as in Immanuel can be my own authenticity as I let myself open to align with God in me.

Reading my intention (this document, p. iv) often throughout the writing and research process has encouraged me to continue to follow my authentic path and reminded me to hold this work sacred. It encouraged me to pray for those parts of the research process that were unknown. For example at the beginning of my process, I began to pray for my research participants, that they might remember a unitive experience and be able to articulate their process around that experience. I prayed that they might gain new insight, clarity, and focus through being a part of this research. I prayed for my resonance panel members that they would enjoy reading the transcripts for themes and be energized through their contribution to this study. The intention also reminds me to give God the glory for it is by God's grace and power that all of this research and writing is accomplished.

The quote by e. e. cummings (1965, this document, p. iv) was one of many beautiful quotes on authenticity that particularly resonated with my own experience of trying to live authentically in this world. I chose to include it right after the intention to balance my feeling of calling and joy on this path with the constant challenge that living authentically also brings.

I prayed for my research participants before they became a part of this research and for those who would become a part of my resonance panel that the appropriate people would be drawn to participate. I prayed for clarity in my ability to express myself and for insight to see a greater vision than my own when writing. I prayed that this

research would serve as a catalyst of transformation and encouragement in the lives of others and that it would become a bridge for understanding differences and seeing similarities. I prayed for the future research projects that will be done to further understand the unitive mystical experience and its affect on authenticity. For all of the readers of this study, I prayed that they might have a greater understanding of themselves and a greater appreciation and awareness of authenticity at work within themselves after reading this study.

### *Writing My Story*

My story, which I included in the preface (this document, p. vi-viii), is in part what I wrote when I was exploring my authentic path through the organic method, and in part what I wrote about my unitive mystical experiences when I was exploring the heuristic method. I wanted to include my story because I felt like it was important for the reader to understand how I came to my topic and designed my study.

### *Designing the Research*

I tried to follow my authentic process in designing a study that would reflect my own path of transparent thinking in its design, as well as honor the paths and experiences of my participants, readers, and resonance panel members. The study design has grown and changed as I have engaged with this topic, process, and method. It is organic, informed, alive, and growing. It originated in me through my studies, has been informed by my research, and is malleable enough to incorporate new ideas and discoveries as they arise in the research process. These changes are discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter



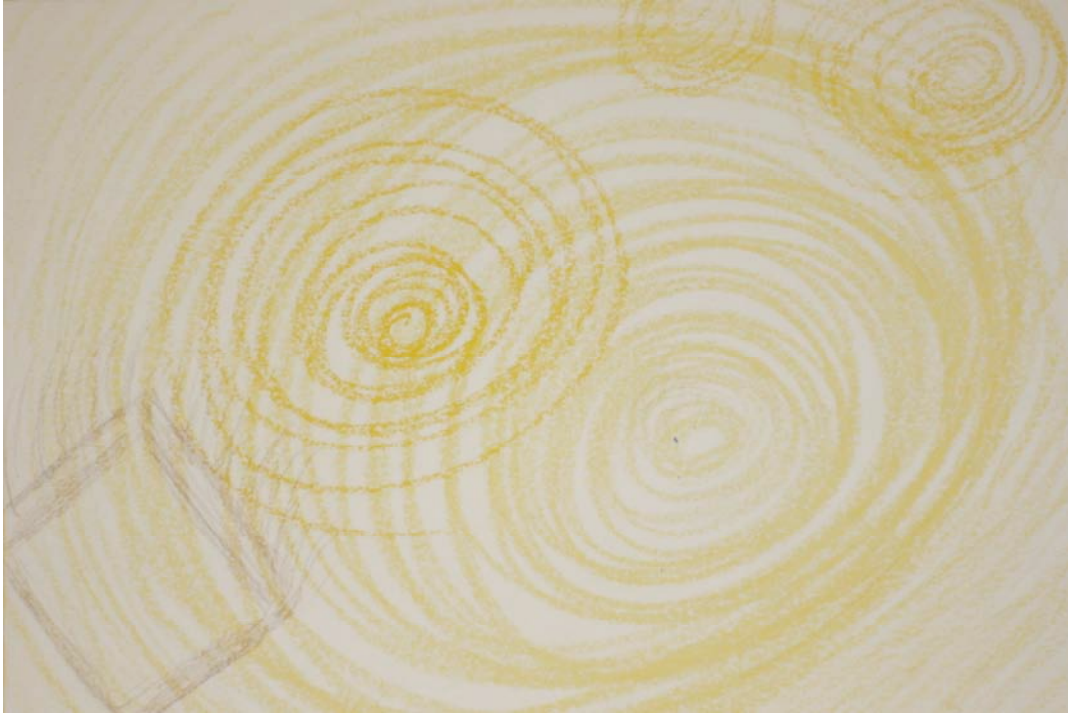
Ellie's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 7.* Creative expression pieces from Ellie's interview.





Freya's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 8.* Creative expression pieces from Freya's interview.



*Engaging With the Literature Review*

I researched every avenue I could find for material on the unitive experience, unity, mystical experiences, transcendent experiences, authenticity, genuineness, calling, and so forth. After finding many articles and books, I read them and highlighted passages that stood out to me as being particularly relevant or informative. I then took all these articles and separated them into piles: methods, unitive experience, authenticity, definitions, and so forth. Then I chose some filters to help me decide what material to include in my literature review.

For my first filter, I drew a picture of an ant on a post-it to represent my aunt. I wanted her to be able to read, understand, and enjoy my dissertation once I was finished. I took my ant through all of the articles as well as all of my writing to help me keep in mind an audience that demanded a clarity in my writing as well as a streamlining of my research material into an understandable argument. I decided to write in the present tense during my literature review to help engage my aunt and other readers as well as to show my own process of engaging with the research. This led me to my second filter, which was a circle that represented holes in the research around my topic. I intentionally wanted to look for areas that needed more research, and I wanted to look for sections of my paper that assumed prior understanding from the reader. My third filter was a picture of a glass full of water representing clarity. Research articles that were unable to clearly articulate findings often did not make the selection. Similarly, if a paragraph of my paper only muddled the waters of understanding, it was cut. My fourth filter was a picture of an arrow that built on the idea of clarity and represented a straight path. Therefore, any research that was tangentially related but really led the reader to a different topic than the

stated purpose of this study was not included. My final filter for processing the research literature was a picture of a wave, which represented flow. This filter was more for my writing than for choosing research. I wanted to present the information in such a way that the reader could feel a flow from one topic to the next. My motto throughout the research filtering process and writing the literature review was “Don’t lose the ant!” as I moved my yellow post-it from one page to the next.

I felt like my process of engaging with the literature was consistent with my philosophy of authenticity as set forth in my intention statement. These filters enabled me to engage with the research in a way that incorporated all of my values: readable expression for my aunt, good coverage of the topic, limited tangential material, transparent writing and the inclusion of clear research, as well as continuity of thought and argument through the flow of writing. Having these filters helped me to stay focused in the literature review section, just like my intention statement helped me stay focused on the project as a whole.

### *Summarizing the Research From Chapter 2*

At the end of the literature review chapter when I began to summarize the research, I thought that I would just summarize the themes from each section. I began by pulling out every quote and citation from the introduction and literature review and compiling them into one document (see Appendix F). For a week, I continued to reread those five pages of research, highlighting and coding different themes or doing a thematic analysis. What I noticed happening in the beginning of this process was that I had three distinct sections of themes as in the literature review: the unitive experience, authenticity, and authenticity in spiritual experiences. It seemed to be a problem to me to take three

different groups of themes or lenses into the discussion section to compare to the interview transcript themes, which might or might not have these same categories. It seemed like too many variables to me. As I continued to read over Appendix F, I started to see something else rising up out of the research material. As I attempted to articulate what I was finding, I discovered some connections among all three sections of research but especially the unitive experience and authenticity. I took these similarities that were standing out to me and discovered a phenomenon that I called transpersonal authenticity. After I coined the term, I wrote a description of it as well as a definition in the summary of lenses section of the literature review at the end of Chapter 2. The techniques and skills of the intuitive inquiry method that I used during this weeklong process were indwelling, trickstering, and varying focal depth. However, I used them before identifying that I was using them. This discovery was important to me, because it meant the difference between following an intuitive inquiry method protocol and following my own authentic process of intuitive inquiry. I was happy and excited to find that my own authentic process was very closely aligned with the process of intuitive inquiry. Summarizing the research into a definition of transpersonal authenticity constituted a full forward and return arc of cycle two and hopefully offers a rich summary of lenses that will offer a good start for discussion in cycles four and five.

### *Creatively Naming My Intuitive Cycles*

One thing that intuitive inquiry encouraged that other methods did not was the open revelation by the researcher of the difficulties as well as the discoveries happening during the research. One hurdle for me in this research journey was simultaneously following my own authentic research process and following the cycles of the intuitive

inquiry method, but this difference was very minimal. My interaction with the method has been similar to an illustration of a person wearing a coat. There is a difference between simply holding a coat to interact with it and the act of wearing it. Both ways, one knows all about the coat, but if one decides to wear the coat, it becomes part of one's being somehow or at least is accepted as comfortable apparel that is called "mine." I had trouble putting on the coat of the intuitive inquiry method in some ways, and in another way, I have had it on since the beginning and did not recognize it for a while. Yet, in order to help my process of putting on the method, I decided to give names to the numbered cycles.

I kept getting the purpose of each cycle confused, so I gave each cycle an animal symbol and action to help supplement the number. As I imagined myself being the animal in each cycle, I was able to more fully embody the process and research task of that cycle and find the best voice from which to write. Cycle one became the hummingbird at rest. I chose to write with an attitude of stillness and focus after busily researching much literature. Cycle two became the bat—upside down in the cave. I consciously chose to turn my perceptions upside down to see other truths that might be hiding from me. Cycle three became a squirrel collecting nuts—intelligent, aware, and nutritious nuts—where I sought to find qualified research participants and gather their stories of unity. Cycle four became a raccoon thoroughly washing his lunch, to depict the process of going through the interview transcripts again and again, winnowing down my findings to clean morsels or themes. Cycle five became a circling red-tailed hawk to show the process of reengaging with the research process from both the overall perspective and a closer circle back through of the literature review and earlier chapters.

This was my creative attempt at making the process of engaging in the cycles more fully experienced, attractive, and fun. The naming of these research cycles into animals in action served a purpose for me like my beginning intention that centered my effort on one visually clear objective. I was better able to embody and focus in each cycle.

### *Criteria of Research Participants*

My original plan to recruit participants was fairly straightforward. I outline it in these following two paragraphs. In order to help communicate consistent information to the possible participants, I would hand out the Research Participant Invitation (Appendix A). This was to ensure that the prospective participants had a good understanding of what was being asked of them before they decided to participate and to offer contact information if they had questions about the study. This invitation letter also served to help participants remember and reflect upon their unitive experiences and what they wished to communicate during the interview. I was not looking for a particular diversity set when I recruited participants; rather I was looking for individuals who met the study criteria and were articulate in their description of their unitive experiences as well as their description of the impact those experiences had in their lives.

I was looking for participants, 18 years or older, who were Protestant Christians with ordinary jobs, and who were not only aware of having a unitive experience, but also articulate and able to describe how this experience had affected them. However, I did not want to prematurely eliminate potential participants. Therefore, I planned to interview all self-qualified, interested participants before deciding if the individuals indeed met the study qualifications and if I could use the information that they had given me. I wanted to use all participants whose experience fit the definition of unitive mystical experience as

set forth in this study, and fit the other qualifications of the study based on the participants' responses to the questionnaire (Appendix C). Portions of this plan worked smoothly and other parts of the process did not go as planned.

### *Process of Recruiting Participants*

The process of recruiting was unlike anything that I anticipated for several reasons. One unexpected happening was my father's crossing over from this world to the next, which happened the day after my committee approved my proposal. It took me 4 or 5 months to be able to reengage and make much progress on my dissertation after that. For whatever reason, I did not plan to let this slow me down with my interviews and research, but it did. Another unexpected happening was that I thought I would be able to gather several participants from my own church and several participants from other churches in the area as I visited each congregation and shared about my research. However, this is not how I connected with most of my participants. I thought I would have more control over this part of the process than I did. But, I made more contacts with interview participants when I let go of finding people than I did when I made more focused recruiting efforts. Each of these unexpected happenings served me in the greater dissertation process of research through intuitive inquiry.

I went home after my father's crossing to help my mother pack and move. During the packing, I found a digital voice recorder that my father had recently ordered to use on one of his projects. My mother gave it to me, and I used it on several of my dissertation interviews. I felt like my father was helping in his own way. I also recruited two participants during my time in Arkansas, but I was not in a space where I felt ready to do the interviews at that time, and I did not make it back to Arkansas during this squirrel

gathering nuts cycle to interview these two willing participants. However, their willingness to participate in my research helped me stay motivated during a difficult time.

Several months later, I made it back to my home in California. I had a feeling of being disconnected from my space, my work, and my focus. I took a job at my school in the dissertation office so that I would not be completely disengaged and forget to focus on finishing my dissertation. I was also feeling pulled at the time to get away from it all and find a space to just *be* with God and find the middle of myself again. So, I took a month off from work and drove north. I stopped to talk to churches about my study but did not find any research participants on the trip. However, many people were encouraging and supportive of the study and of me. There were times during my experience where I did not know where to go or stay. During those times, I would pray and seek that place inside of me where God gives me a sense of knowing. In the course of my journey, there were times of following God's leading that led me to practical places like a laundry mat or a good place to camp for the night, or a job at a lily farm planting lilies. There were also times that God led me to a church, or to a man who gave me free roses, or to a teacher who offered her hospitality to me for a few nights. There were three constants that existed during this time: me, my connection with God, and my car. I opened to meet new people, do new things, and explore places that I had never been. Even though I got no research participants during my journey, I feel like this experience really helped my research by helping me connect again to this place of knowing inside of me where I can act in accordance with God's leading. I got to bring this to my research again in a new way.

When I got back from my journey, I asked God what church I could go to where I could find people who had experienced the unitive experience. In the next few days, I had received three messages from different people suggesting that I try the Friends Meeting of the local Quaker community. I attended their meetings a couple of Sundays and offered my research participant invitation letter. Six people volunteered to be interviewed. I was so excited that I was making more visible progress on my dissertation. The interviews were rich and the people were terrific. However, I learned during the interviews that five of the six did not want to be considered Protestant or to talk about Jesus as being Savior or Lord. So, I felt like at that point, I could either change the direction of my study to be more inclusive or I could count one interview and recruit participants elsewhere. I chose the later route and made some beautiful flyers to pass out, one of which is included as Appendix H.

I posted flyers on church information boards around town, but I got no response. I also emailed the flyer to people I knew who might know someone who would be interested. I got more responses this way. I also posted my flyer at school in the student lounge. This helped other students be aware of my research so when I talked to them about helping me recruit, many times they had already read the flyer, thought about it, and had someone they knew in mind. This was how I got the majority of my participants. I would have a conversation with someone at work and they would volunteer to send out my information to someone they knew. Some potential participants dropped out after they had expressed interest. Other potential participants were leery of the word mystical or of my ability to honor the participant's experiences. There were also no participant referrals, which surprised me. It seemed like God was directing the timing and selecting



the participants who came to me. There was a lull after I got 10 participants, but eventually, I interviewed 13 participants. All of the participants talked about how much they appreciated the chance to remember and share about their unitive experience. Many talked about how much the creative expression piece helped them connect with experience more profoundly.

Though this cycle of a squirrel gathering nuts was not at all what I had expected, I was able to connect to God's divine leading in a new way throughout this cycle. I was able to let go of the dissertation itself and see it as a project that I get to help with and assist in but not completely direct or control. Also, I was able to open to the people who came forward as interview participants with a sense of expectancy and curiosity and a sense of "not knowing." The delay and focus on my father's crossing also served to help me forget what I had written up as my expectations for the interviews and the research findings and enter into the process freshly present.

### *The Interview Design*

I did all my interviews before transcribing any of them or looking for themes. I created a meeting space for the interviews that would encourage relaxation and comfort without distraction for the participants. I wanted to create an environment that supported each participant's full engagement in the interview experience.

In my research interview, I used three different ways to help the participants gain access to information about their own unitive experience: (a) a silent remembering exercise like guided meditation, (b) a creative expression exercise to nonverbally express the experience, and (c) semistructured interview questions to help the participants tell their experiences in their own ways. After a meditative experience, a person has the

impossible task of reducing into words an experience of the extraordinary just like in a unitive mystical experience. “The awareness developed in meditation must always encompass more than one could ever say about it, since any way of describing it, from one of the innumerable vantage points of focal articulation, must always be partial” (Welwood, 1977, p. 8). Similarly, the silent remembering exercise, which is guided meditation, was intended to help the research participants sharpen their perception of their unitive experiences.

The creative expression exercise following the silent remembering exercise was designed to help the participants connect with their experiences in more concrete yet nonverbal terms before the verbal interview begins. Creative expression has been used to bridge a gap between such experiences and the verbal as illustrated in this passage:

How can a linear flow of ideas communicate a quality of awareness that is not in linear time, but simultaneous? This is the realm of poetry and mysticism. If communication of these dimensions is to happen, an energy must ride on the words. Learning to hold both the energy and the word-making mind at the same time is a tremendous challenge. It was for this reason that no attempt could be made to write about my experience in the initial period without putting undue strain on my rational faculties. Nevertheless, once I had matured in the energies and attained balance, I began the commitment of communicating these areas. (Moss, 1981, p. 5)

Once the creative piece had been made, I gave each participant a time for sharing verbally about the piece they designed in order to help each participant speak about the nonverbal in extemporaneous form and to begin finding words to express a multidimensional experience.

The interview was designed to help the researcher understand the participants’ unitive mystical experiences and any effects these experiences had on the participants’ behavior of authenticity. The interview was specifically designed to help the participants

connect with and express an ineffable, multifaceted experience and its effect. The interview questions were designed to ask participants about their experience and its effect on their behaviors and daily life. The word authenticity was not used in the interview questions so that any indication of a relationship between the unitive mystical experience and authenticity would come from the participants and not from the researcher. At the beginning of the meeting with each participant, I answered any questions the participants had about the study and interview process before asking them to sign a Participation Agreement (Appendix B) and to complete the Participant Information questions (Appendix C). After looking over the forms to make sure that the participants answered all of the questions to self-qualify for the study, I led each participant in an exercise of Silent Remembering and Creative Expression (Appendix D). After the 10 to 15 minute guided remembering of their unitive experience(s), I asked the participants to nonverbally express their experience through various modes of creative expression. They could also choose not to participate in the creative expression exercise if they wished. I then asked the participants to share about their creative expression pieces. Next, I asked semistructured interview questions (Appendix E) to better understand both their unitive mystical experiences and how those experiences changed the participants' views and everyday choices.

During the creative expression part of the interview experience, I noticed that sometimes there were similarities between the picture that I would create as the researcher and the picture that the interview participant would create. Since nothing had been shared verbally at this point in the interview about the participant's experience, it seemed like this might have been an intuitive connection or knowing. This might indicate

that an intuitive connection relayed knowledge about the interview experience prior to the participant verbally telling information about their unitive experience. The details of this would be better explored in a study designed about creative expression and intuition, but I included the pictures of the researcher and the participant from each interview so they can be used in support of such a study in the future. However, I did not include any explanation of these similarities in this document.

### *Documenting the Interviews*

With permission from the participants, I taped the entire interview of each participant on a digital voice recorder. Afterwards, I transcribed each of the interviews on my computer using E-Scribe. I did not transcribe the five interviews that I knew I could not use in this study. With the permission of the participants, I took a digital picture of the photographable creative expression pieces and included them as figures throughout this document. Each piece stands without description as a nonverbal representation of the unitive mystical experience. For brief explanations of the participants' pieces, see the first question on each interview transcript in Appendix I.

After the interviews had been completed and the information collected, I transcribed each participant's interview and sent a transcript to each participant asking them to check for accuracy, make additions, omissions, or clarifications. This step helped increase the validity of the study. As I typed each transcription, I changed the name of each participant to a name starting with the letter that corresponded to the order I transcribed it. For example, Anna is the name that I gave to the first transcript I typed, and Bethany's was the second. This was done to insure the confidentiality of each participant. After I transcribed each interview, I sent each participant his or her transcript

for correction and verification. Most of the changes were minor, and none of the changes affected the finding of the overall themes. I had planned to check to make sure each transcript described an experience of unity as set forth in the study definitions. However, after listening to the participant stories during the interviews, I chose not to put myself in the position of judge to determine if each participant had an experience of unity. I wanted to honor the participants' internal frame of reference over my external frame of reference in this study. I saw a difference in the descriptions of the unitive experience in my participants even though all of them reported having had a similar experience of unity with the Divine. Instead of discounting the stories that were not as vivid or dramatic in their description as others, I chose to hold them all as equally valid. I also began to question whether learning style or personality type made any significant difference in how each person recalled and related their experiences. Maybe future research will look at these possibilities.

### *Working With the Transcripts*

I read the interview transcripts three times before I began thematic analysis: first, as I transcribed each recording; second, as I checked each transcript for mistakes; and third, as I made corrections generated by the participant. During these readings, I had planned to make notes on what stood out to me at the time, my thoughts and impressions. However, once I was in the process of transcribing or editing, I noticed that I was not in a space of simple observation. So, I did not make my observations of the interviews until I was pulling themes. Once I had all of the returned and corrected transcripts, I set aside an intentional space and time to read through the transcripts and make notes of themes. I had at first planned to read through all of the transcripts in one sitting and make notes of

overarching themes. I had planned to repeat this process each day for 7 days. However, since some transcripts were 8 to 10 pages long, I was not able to read and work with all 13 interviews at one sitting. I did set aside a 7-day period to work with the information and compiled a list of the themes from the experiences of the participants.

Once it was time to work with the interview transcripts and pull themes, I researched a bit about raccoons, their habits, and theories about why they wash their food. I also asked my friends about their encounters with raccoons and for their insights about raccoon behavior and habits. From these conversations and my own research on raccoons, I decided to start working with my transcripts at nighttime. For the first several nights I would work both late at night, and early in the morning, sleeping a bit in between. A couple of nights I woke up around 2 o'clock and worked for a couple of hours before sleeping some more. I tried to honor the transcripts and the pulling of themes as well as my own need for rest and rejuvenation before engaging in the process again. I realized the first day that there was no way that I could read through all of the interviews each day and take in all of that information. My proposal plan had been a little grandiose in that respect. So for the first few nights, I pulled individual themes out of each interview. Then I compiled a list of all the themes; it was 10 pages single-spaced. Once I had this list, I looked for themes that just applied to just one participant and did not seem to be repeated by other participants, and I tossed those out. This narrowed the document to an eight page, single-spaced document.

I took the eight pages of themes that I found from all the interviews and color coded those themes that seemed to be repeated throughout the interviews and attempted to summarize these themes in short phrases. The process was one of reading and

highlighting and reading again. It was a process of focusing at different levels to understand both the individual themes and the overall themes. When I had all eight pages highlighted, I all of a sudden lost touch with the meaning of the colors and themes. It was a brief but unsettling experience of the existential void. After a bit of a break, I began to once again build meaning from each highlighted color to form meaning, then words, and then succinct informational nuggets or themes. Once I had narrowed these down to 13, I sent these themes out to my resonance panel members to review and note whether or not these themes seemed consistent with their own evaluation of the interviews asking for their additions and comments. With this information and with the resonance panel's additional theme, I began to frame the final themes from this study.

#### *Contributions of the Resonance Panel*

I originally thought that I would choose three people who were not interview participants to read through selected interview transcripts to find themes as my resonance panel. I wanted one member to be a Protestant Christian who was not part of the church that most participants attend. Since there was no church that most of the participants attended, this resonance panel member was just a self-identified Protestant Christian. I wanted another resonance panel member to be from the field of transpersonal psychology. I wanted the third member to have no familiarity with the field of psychology and no affiliation with a Protestant Christian group. I wanted all three individuals to be intelligent, reflective, and capable of reading transcripts and articulating themes. My plan was that the diversity of these three individuals would allow room for new insights on the thematic analysis review, as well as for the identification of nuances in participants' experiences. I ended up choosing eight resonance panel members and at

least three of them met the above criteria. One was a Protestant Christian but did not consider herself knowledgeable in psychology or transpersonal psychology. One considered herself to be knowledgeable in transpersonal psychology but had never been a part of Protestant Christianity. One declared that she had no working knowledge of Protestant Christianity, psychology, or transpersonal psychology. The other five resonance panel members were combinations of the above, but sometimes identified in more than one area. I chose eight instead of three because the amount of information was too great to only have three. I made this adjustment after I had worked with the transcripts to find themes, better understanding the time needed for this stage of the process.

I let each of the resonance panel members define their own process for working with the transcripts and finding themes. I asked that they hold the process and material as sacred when they searched for the themes. Appendix G has the complete instructions to the resonance panel members. I divided up my interviews into subsets that were representative of all 13 participants and gave them to resonance panel members. I divided them into four sets of three, three, three, and four. I recruited eight resonance panel members, and I gave each member one set. Each interview was sent out to exactly two resonance panel members. In this way, I as researcher had the input of at least two other people on finding the themes in the individual interviews. However, I was the only one to read all 13 interviews and attempt to address the overall themes from all the participants' stories.

One notable happening during this process was that the resonance panel members, as well as the interview participants, reported being inspired, encouraged, and challenged



by engaging with this material. The interview participants reported being encouraged by telling their stories and having a set space for remembering their unitive experiences. Some participants also reported being encouraged yet again by seeing their story in writing and getting to read it in print. Several participants reported that the timing of the interview experience or of the transcript verification of their interview was important in reminding them of that place of peace and calmness that they could connect to. The resonance panel members just read three or four interviews, but most of them reported being encouraged and inspired or challenged in their own lives by reading and interacting with the interviews. One resonance panel member reported being challenged to remember her own calling and subsequently decided to once again do her healing practice with others because of this inspiration.

### *Working With the Themes*

After working with the responses from the resonance panel, I created a list of 14 themes. All of the themes were supported by a majority of the resonance panel and many themes had unanimous support. When this list of themes was confirmed by the resonance panel, I sent it out to the research participants asking them to what extent each theme was a part of their unitive experiences. Although there were 14 themes that the resonance panel had agreed were present, the interview participants were only strongly supportive of 12 of these themes. The two that I omitted from the list of 14 to get the final 12 themes were (a) questioning of cultural and religious norms and (b) multiple experiences affecting awakening and awareness. These two themes were strongly supported by about half the interview participants, see Table 1. In this table, I compiled the participant's answers from the survey. Two of the participants did not respond to the survey. The

Table 1

*Fourteen Proposed Themes*

Themes from Researcher and Resonance Panel Sent to Participants	Participants*												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Unitive experience was during or following worship, prayer, ceremony or meditation	4	4	5	5	4	1	5	5	1			4	5
Longing to recreate, find, or remember this connected experience	5	5	3	4	2	4	3	4	5			1	5
Major life crisis, decision, or changes occurring at the time of your experience	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	5	5			1	1
Unitive experience was spontaneous (not personally controlled)	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	5	3			5	5
Surrendering of ego and self and opening to the Divine occurred	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	3			4	5
Questioning of cultural and religious norms prior to experience	5	2	5	5	3	4	2	3	1			1	4
Multiple unitive experiences affected awakening and awareness	5	4	5	4	3	5	1	1	3			3	5
Unitive experience raised positive feelings													
Calinness	5	3	3	5	5	5	4	5	1			5	4
Energized	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	1			4	5
Expanded	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	1			4	5
Loved	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1			5	5
Joyful	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	1			5	5
Grounded	4	3	3	5	5	5	4	5	1			4	5
Grateful	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5			5	5
Unitive experience created a sensitivity to the connected to Spirit, people, & world	5	5	3	5	5	5	3	5	5			1	5
Now have a new sense of internal purpose or calling	5	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	5			3	5
Sense of active responsibility towards a greater community	3	5	3	4	5	3	5	5	5			1	5
Difficulty sharing or talking about the experience with others	2	3	1	5	5	5	4	5	3			4	3
Heightened sensory perception during or after experience	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5			1	5
Experience gave knowledge of a greater reality	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5			5	5

*Note.* Two participants did not respond to the survey. 1 = does not really describe my experience, 2 = might describe my experience, 3 = somewhat describes my experience, 4 = mostly describes my experience, 5 = very much describes my experience

\*Participants are indicated by the first initial of their name: e.g., A = Anna, B = Bethany, C = Carlos, and so forth.

Participants ranked the 14 themes from 1 to 5 indicating to what extent each theme characterized their experiences. The rating of 1 indicated that the theme did not really describe their experience and a rating of 5 indicated that the theme very much described their experiences. Participants were indicated by on Table 1 by the first initial of their name. The next step of this process was stating and giving examples of each theme, which has been detailed in Chapter 4.

### *Revisiting Each Part of the Study*

In the cycle of the red-tailed hawk circling, I looked back over the entire research process to see what had changed in me as researcher as well as what changed in the research. At the beginning of this cycle, I went out in nature to the top of a hill where I could see for miles in every direction. I prayed and asked the Creator of the universe to guide me in seeing each of the stages of this research process clearly and summarizing the overall findings in a way that was both concise and direct. After this experience, I was able to see the overview of the study, but the task of going back to through each step and cycle of the research was a little more difficult for me. The hardest part for me was merging the research plan and the research process. As long as each step of this process was separate, I dealt with that part of the process as outlined in each cycle. Becoming the red-tailed hawk circling, I had to find a way to engage with each part of the process of rewriting the first three chapters besides simply observing the research at each stage. Revisiting each chapter making adjustments definitely helped the overall product; but since I had understood the red-tailed hawk cycle as simply observing, evaluating, and noting changes, I did not know how to engage with the adjustments and for what purpose. Basically, I had to somewhat redefine this last cycle for myself so that I could do the

tasks required to have a good final paper. If I had this to do over, I would have rewritten the first three chapters during the raccoon washing his lunch cycle, as that action better fits the rewriting process than that of the red-tailed hawk circling. Once I had embodied the stage of the red-tailed hawk circling, it was hard to reframe my process to do this step, but I did. The combination of my observations from this cycle, I included in the discussion chapter. As a conclusion to this cycle, I made another collage representing this entire dissertation process. A picture of it is included as Figure 16.



Gina's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 9.* Creative expression pieces from Gina's interview.





Holly's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 10.* Creative expression pieces from Holly's interview.

## Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I give an overview of who the interview participants are and discuss the 12 themes that characterize the 13 interviews. The participant data is gathered from the questionnaire that each participant filled out prior to the interview experience, see Appendix C. Next, I list all 12 themes and then discuss each one including examples from the interview transcripts to insure clarity for the reader. At least two examples from each participant are included to show that the themes came from all 13 interviews and not just a selected few. Each theme is characteristic of the overall group of interviews.

### *Participant Data*

In the following section I summarize the data of the thirteen participants whose interviews I included in this research. Ten of the 13 participants are between the ages of 51-62, and the other 3 are 30-38. Eleven participants are female; 2 are male. Eleven participants are Caucasian or partially so; and of the other 2, 1 is Asian and 1 Italian. Twelve of the participants have attended at least some college, while 9 of them have some graduate school education and 4 have Ph.D. or J.D. degrees. The other 1 has completed high school. Church background and current church affiliation ranges widely from Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and Evangelical to Native American, Episcopal, Gnostic, Southern Baptist, Unity, and Methodist. There seems to be no discernable pattern to church affiliation, past or present. Nine of the participants are married, 2 are partnered, and 2 are single. Eight of the participants have children, all of whom are 17 or older. Four have no children. Eleven of the 13 participants state that they believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord at least somewhat. Two do not identify themselves in this way. At the time of their unitive mystical experience, only 7 of the 13

participants believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, but 4 participants were questioning this at the time, and 1 did not believe at that time. All of the participants at the time of the study stated that they were seeking to live in relationship to God through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. At the time of their unitive mystical experience, only 10 were positive that they were seeking to live in this relationship with the Holy Spirit. The other 3 were not. All participants at the time of the study were seeking to follow a path to know God better and to experience God more in their lives. There was no discernable pattern to prior or current worship patterns. Six participants reported worshipping with a body of Protestant Christians at the time of their experience as well as currently. Five participants were worshipping with a body of Protestant Christians at the time of their unitive mystical experience and do not currently do so. Two others reported now meeting regularly with a body of Protestant Christians although they were not doing so at the time of their experience. All 13 participants self-identified as having had a unitive mystical experience as described by the researcher in Appendix A, and all reported having multiple experiences anywhere from 3-50. Eleven of the participants shared an experience of unity that happened over 10 years ago. Of the other 2, 1 was 4 years and the other was only 9 months from the time of the study. All 13 participants reported that this experience had affected their self-perception as well as affected their daily lives.

The 12 final interview themes, which were strongly present for over half of the participants, are listed in Table 2 and then in the following section along with discussion and examples from the interviews. Some of the participants did not respond to the survey confirmation of the themes (shown in Table 1) with the same certainty that they discussed



the same themes within their interview. For example, Carlos talked about the dual nature of his experience saying, “It gave me more self-confidence. It put me in a deeper state of self-understanding. It also had the effect of alienation because I thought that no one will understand this or is too heavy for most people to grasp.” However, in his survey he did not answer that he had difficulty sharing the experience. I marked the Table 2 with a *P* in the column for his response to that theme because of his statement in the interview, because Carlos did not mark it as a 4 or 5 on the survey. Similarly, Iris stated many positive feelings from her experience when asked to describe her experience of oneness.

Oh, gosh! I didn’t want to leave. . . . It is this sense of peacefulness but it is more than that. . . . I guess when an infant cries and someone picks them up and they know it is going to be OK. . . . In that place I didn’t have to DO anything, everything was taken care of. I was just totally content, totally, totally content.

I put a *P* in column for Iris’s answer on positive emotions even though she had indicated many *I*’s for the positive emotions that I had listed. The overall theme of *unitive experience raised positive feelings* seems to be congruent with her experience. Therefore, using both the data from the participants’ surveys as well as researcher’s recognition from the interview, all 12 themes still occur in the experiences of at least 8 of the 13 participants. Below, I go through each of the 12 themes and give examples from a few of the participants’ experiences to illustrate each theme. I do not attempt to include or discuss every example of any given theme but rather strive to support and give a depth of understanding for each of the 12 themes. The themes come from the experiences of all the participants combined and not from simply compiling answers to the interview questions. The entire interview transcripts of all 13 participants are included in Appendix I for further reading of these vivid, expanding experiences.

Table 2

*Twelve Final Themes*

Themes Occurring Strongly in at Least Half of the Participants' Experiences	Participants*												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1. Unitive experience was during or following worship, prayer, ceremony or meditation	X	X	X	X	X	P	X	X		P	P	X	X
2. Longing to recreate, find again, or remember this connected experience	X	X		X		X		X	X	P			X
3. Major decisions, changes, or crisis occurring at the time of your experience	X	P	X	X	X	X	P	X	X	P	P	P	
4. Unitive experience was spontaneous (not personally controlled)	X	X	P	X	X	X	X	X		P	P	X	X
5. Surrendering of ego and self and opening to the Divine occurred	X	P	X	X	X	X	X	X		P		X	X
6. Unitive experience raised positive feelings (Calm, Energized, Expanded, Loved, Joyful, Grounded, and Grateful)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	P	P	P	X	X
7. Unitive experience created a sensitivity to the connectedness to Spirit, people, and the world	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	P	P		X
8. Now have a new sense of internal purpose or calling	X	P	P	X	X	X	X	X	X	P	P	P	X
9. Sense of active responsibility towards a greater community	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	P			X
10. Difficulty sharing or talking about the experience with others		P	P	X	X	X	X	X	P		P	X	P
11. Heightened sensory perception during or after experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	P	P	P	X
12. Experience gave knowledge of a greater reality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	P		X	X

*Note.* X = strongly describes the experience indicated by a 4 or 5 rating on Table 1, P = researcher's indication that theme was present based on the interviews (see Appendix I for complete interview transcripts). Two participants did not respond to the survey.

\*Participants are indicated by the first initial of their name. For example: A = Anna, B = Bethany, C = Carlos, and so forth.

*Twelve Interview Themes*

1. Unitive experience was during or following worship, prayer, ceremony, or meditation
2. Longing to recreate, find again, or remember this connected experience
3. Major life decisions, changes or crisis occurring at the time of the experience
4. Unitive experience was spontaneous (not personally controlled)
5. Surrendering of ego and self and opening to the Divine occurred
6. Unitive experience raised positive feelings (Calm, Energized, Expanded, Loved, Joyful, Grounded, and Grateful)
7. Unitive experience created a sensitivity to the connectedness of Spirit, people, and the world
8. Experienced a new sense of internal purpose or calling
9. Resulting sense of active responsibility towards a greater community
10. Difficulty sharing or talking about the experience with others
11. Heightened sensory perception during or after experience
12. Experience gave knowledge of a greater reality

*Unitive Experience Was During or Following Worship, Prayer, Ceremony, or Meditation*

Eight of the participants were praying at the time of their unitive mystical experience. Four of them were in nature. Three of them were in a room of corporate prayer, meditation, or worship with their church congregation at the time of their experience. Bethany's experiences of unity tended to happen when she was with large groups of people or in nature. She gave one example that happened during a church service when everyone was singing. Julian had an experience outside when she was letting go of all her preconceived notions about God and opening to the Mother. One of Liam's experiences happened at church when he was praying with a group of other men.

*Example from Bethany's interview:* A lot of my early experiences happened fairly close together when I was a teen. The one that I think of most commonly was in the sanctuary of my church. Generally when the church is full of people, during some service, generally when the congregation is all singing . . . It doesn't always happen in church, but it did many times.

*Example from Julian's interview:* So basically, I went outside and prayed to Creator. And I said that, basically, I need to let go of everything every single thing that is going on so that it can occur. And I said that it is feeling uncomfortable for me not having a Mother in the picture. And again, being Protestant, there was no Mary for me whatsoever. I mean, she's a nice girl who died and was buried in England. So, I told Creator, and it was scary, I am giving up everything I know except for the name of Jesus that I won't release.

*Example from Liam's interview:* But that night, before this filling happened, the three of us had been to a men's prayer service, then the pastor, me, and this other guy had moved to the pastors' study for conversation and prayer. For weeks, I had been asking God to cleanse me of my past because I had been having this sense of my sinfulness, not in a condemning way but an awareness. This is probably a huge part of it and I forgot to tell you. I was beginning to have a consciousness of my sinfulness. I had begun to pray, "God please Clean me up. Make me authentic. Make me real."

### *Longing to Recreate, Find Again, or Remember This Connected Experience*

All of the participants express an appreciation of getting to remember their experience during the 2-hour interview process, but only 8 of the 13 participants reported a theme of trying to find again, remember, or recreate their experience. Iris told of how she had traveled the world to find the place she had seen in her experience. Freya said that she tries to go back to this place of connection often, and Dixon found this place of connection through opening to learning from books that she has read. Other participants expressed that they reconnected to their experience through meditation, prayer, or simply opening to the greater flow of knowledge.

*Example from Iris's interview:* Later, I was a flight attendant for 14 years. I went all over the world looking for this place that I had seen in my dream. It was my quest. There had to be a place like this, but I never did find it.

*Example from Freya's interview:* I only have one step and that is to return during the day to that inner life and bring it out, to return to that unitive place, to return to my relationship with God, to return to my true self. And whatever happens, I'll be guided from that place . . . It is about just returning to this place. If I make a lot of money or not, it doesn't matter. If I get old, it doesn't matter because nothing can be greater than living in this connected place. It is all that there is.

*Example from Dixon's interview:* Now I know God is in everything. I used to try to explain it with words but now I know it. The book *Sarah* by Esther and Jerry Hicks explains that energy will come and flow through you if your "valve" is open. Mine is open and has been most of my life. God stays there completely. When Peter was "wide open" he walked on water. When fear came and he "closed his valve" he began to sink. Now, I stay in that connection.

### *Major Life Decisions, Changes or Crisis Occurring at the Time of the Experience*

This was something that was easier to see looking at the whole group of interviews, although 12 of the 13 participants stated they were in a place of life change, major decision, or crisis. Some of the life decisions were that of deciding whether or not to move, finding a new community, exploring a new job, or getting adjusted to living alone again. Below are some crises easier to spot.

*Example from Anna's interview:* My waters broke and I gave birth to a stillborn child. (Pointing to her picture) These are little tiny fingers and little tiny fingernails. At this time I saw earth and creation and all the things that birth was. This perfection that came out of my body, but at the same time she was so imperfect that she couldn't survive. I knew then in a way that I hadn't known before that life and death, that perfection and imperfection was part of a single whole that all fit together.

*Example from Holly's interview:* When this experience was happening, it was in a time when I was in a lot of personal despair. A lot was happening in my family . . . both of my daughters . . . one of my daughters is a recovering meth addict and my other daughter had a suicide attempt somewhat related to her sister's drug addiction. I decided at that same time to leave my career and stop working completely. Kind of everything at one time to deal with this crisis, so I was pretty ripe for an experience.

*Example from Ellie's interview:* Well, I was very sick. I was paralyzed completely from the waist down at the age of 13. We were not Christians at that time. Somebody else told me about Jesus and God's call and the creation story and things like that. We have many prayer mountains in my native country. I was a

junior high school student and somehow I gradually became paralyzed from the waist down. The doctors all gave up as to why it happened. They did not know at that time and I was discharged. Because they did not know why it happened everyone gave up. They just advised me to take vitamins and acupuncture, but nothing worked. So we all gave up.

*Example from Dixon's interview:* Six months before my experience, I left my teaching job that I was good at but tired of. I believe that God was looking out for my greater life. Retirement has been working at Wal-Mart, reading, reading, and thinking. I was not having to evaluate anyone anymore. And I remember being mad at my husband for a series of things.

*Example from Katarina's interview:* It was a time of profound change in my life. What had happened just before was that my daughter was about 11 or 12. I was starting to get a sense of her moving on with her life and I was questioning how I would move on with my life. There was a sense of unlived potential building up in me, spiritually, academically especially. I didn't know what was going to unfold in that regard at all. Within my marriage, I was comfortable but there was something big that was lacking in it. But the big thing that had happened before that was that my mother had had a psychotic break. I as the eldest of four children was responsible or took the initiative to facilitate her being committed.

#### *Unitive Experience Was Spontaneous (Not Personally Controlled)*

None of the participants reported that they expected their experiences to happen, and many reported an opening or a surrendering to the Divine. Mei reported being skeptical of one of her own experiences for a period of time before it became real. Another of her experiences started as soon as she put on a cougar mask for a ceremony. Freya told of her experience of just "popping" into a different realm "like walking through a cat door." Carlos was simply sitting on his floor in his apartment when he entered one of his experiences and suddenly saw stars surrounded him.

*Example from Mei's interview:* This is the actual skin of the cougar. When I put it on, I was standing outside the wheel. When I stepped into the wheel my job was to bring the cougar energy to the wheel. When I came into the wheel and followed its path around the wheel. I became the cougar and everything changed and all of a sudden I realized that I was seeing things through the eyes of the cougar. It was an incredible moment of being one with everything there. The way the trees moved, the way I could see the wind . . . It was just an incredible experience. The word that keeps coming up is *one, one, one* and *Leone*. Le one.

*Example from Freya's interview:* I had been meditating before my experience happened, and maybe I was meditating that day. It was a time in my life where I was starting to open up, but I don't think it was a cause and effect. I think we do these things and then the spirit just moves. I just popped into the experience. It was like walking through a cat door. There was nothing really that led up to it. I think it is just the way the Spirit works. I don't know how it works."

*Example from Carlos's interview:* This was about 6 years after the first experience. I had just gotten back from a family visit in Pennsylvania. At the time, I did not like traveling on planes, trains, or any of it. It was a really big deal when I made it home to my apartment. It was my first time to ever have my own place by myself. Before that I was living an outdoor life or living in my music studio. So when I got home, I had a total removal of the visual perception of the walls and floor. I was sitting on the floor but I was also at the same moment I could see myself suspended in space. I could see through the walls of the apartment with stars all around. I seemed as if I was floating in the ether. I knew I was sitting inside but I couldn't really see inside. I was surrounded by stars all around me.

#### *Surrendering of Ego and Self and Opening to the Divine Occurred*

In each participant's story, there was a time of letting go and opening to a greater consciousness of knowing from God, Goddess, the Divine, the Universe, or the Creator. These ranged from the fumbling prayers of a 13-year-old girl who did not know how to pray to the anguished crying out to the Creator for answers, alone on a mountain at night. Four participants surrendered to the Divine working in and through other people. Others felt like they were in such an impossible situation that there was nothing left to do but surrender to the greater Universe.

*Example from Gina's interview:* I was standing and they started to pray. One man was praying out loud and the other two were whispering softly. No one was touching me. No one was physically touching me they were just kind of surrounding me. I had my eyes closed and I felt myself starting to spin. I noticed my body swaying and sensed heaviness and very gently it kind of came down on top of me. I knew at that point that I had a choice to either push back and resist it and shake it off or that I could choose to surrender to it and just go with whatever was happening and I chose to go with it in that moment and surrendered. The next thing that I knew I was on the ground. Someone had caught me. I had fallen back like a dead weight. I was lying on the floor. I felt like my body was part of the floor. I was so heavy and so relaxed and so melted. It was like my body was

melted into the floor. I was consciously thinking. My mind is a little bit chattering saying, “This is interesting.” I could still hear everything going on outside of me. I could still feel a profound sense of peace. But I had this consciousness still. And I always knew I had free will. I knew that even at this point I could get up and shake this off if I wanted to. There was no imposition on me. It was a dance. It was “Here I am. Are you willing? And if your not, that is ok, we can end this now. But if you are, then let’s dance.”

*Example from Mei’s interview:* All my senses were changed. Somehow when that happened there was suddenly a feeling of being incorporated into something much bigger than myself but I didn’t feel diminished. I felt magnified. But it separated me from my present surroundings, that total oneness. It was like I knew things were there around me but they weren’t important because there was something, much bigger that was there. It was almost like being in two universes at the same time. One was so much more inclusive that it just enveloped the other.

*Example from Carlos’s interview:* There is a certain fear factor that requires a letting go of the parameters of understanding or the egotistical view of the experience that has to drop off. That was a common thread of the two experiences. I felt like in the letting go, I could be a part of the oneness. There was a resonance that was self-sustaining that I became aware of . . . There is a link between that experience of losing myself in physical place with the experience of finding myself within part of a pure tone of life-force energy of everything on the mountain. I had an experience of feeling my own ego dropping away in both of the experiences. These experiences pushed my intellectual edge in being able to grasp what I was experiencing.

*Unitive Experience Raised Positive Feelings (Calm, Energized, Expanded, Loved, Joyful, Grounded, and Grateful)*

All 13 of the participants associated positive feelings with the experience, although there were also other feeling reported. Carlos spoke of a feeling of alienation that came with the experience. Katarina reported a sense of longing and suffering that she tries to remain in as she see this as her path of growth to atonement that she likens to Christ on the Cross. Iris reported both positive feelings, as well as a sense of longing and of being called back from a place she longed to be. However, all participants generally shared the positive emotions. Gina shared about the incredible energy she felt after her experience. Ellie acknowledged a change in feelings from despair before the experience



to happiness afterwards. Liam reported a feeling of “liquid love,” intoxication, and gratitude. Holly also shared about her feelings of gratitude and a sense of relief as she let her burden be released to God.

*Example from Gina’s interview:* The energizing experience that I walked away with when this experience was done for me literally felt like that if I flicked my fingertips then lightning bolts would come out, if I wanted to. It was so electrical, so tangible, that I would be like Zeus just throwing lightning bolts if I wanted to.

*Example from Ellie’s interview:* We sang and prayed and nothing happened until Thursday. Then Thursday evening I wanted to pray honestly and I really wanted to reach God if God is real. So while everybody slept, I began to pray by myself. And before I knew it I had prayed for a couple of hours. I heard the bell ringing for the five o’clock Morning Prayer meeting. I was really surprised. What did I do? I felt caught by something. I opened my eyes and the world was colored differently and I began to see these trees and the leaves were individually bright. Things just looked different. Everything was just colored different. I was very happy. I was so happy.

*Example from Liam’s interview:* I felt bathed in this experience. I call it liquid love. I knew intuitively that I had experienced God because I felt this sense of love. The fact is that I new intuitively it was Jesus. He was saying to me “You are loved and you are accepted in me.” The love was so strong that it was literally sweeping over me. I felt a sense of being intoxicated. [I knew] because in college I had done cocaine, peyote, and hallucinogens. While this experience of God’s presence in no way was to be compared with a drug, I only use the drug issue to make the point that I was under the influence totally of something...this presence of God was pure, clean, not like a drug...so there are similarities yet differences.

*Example from Liam’s interview:* Then I got into bed, and I just lay there in the bed feeling very goofy but good. I knew it was Jesus. So I said, “Jesus, I love you.” I felt his presence and his peace. The feeling of being intoxicated and in the presence of God had dissipated by the next morning. But I know I couldn’t sleep much through that night. It was a feeling of “God, thank you that you exist. Thank you that you love me. Thank you that you are real.”

*Example from Holly’s interview:* Well, in this instance the experience of oneness was this sense that the people and problem that I was turning over was that it was not gone but shared. And that being in this holy light that it was not any longer just me, with it. Since this first experience, because I’ve certainly had others, through accessing this experience I have been reminded that this particular set of burdens was shared. It was a sense of relief. The word that I took away from this remembering experience was *gratitude*.

*Unitive Experience Created a Sensitivity to the Connectedness of Spirit, People, and the World*

This theme speaks to the fact that participants reported taking the experience of unity and recognizing it in a new way in the world around them in their everyday life.

Bethany reported a sense of greater common purpose through her sense of connectedness to all things. Dixon reported making decisions based on the connection and in “concert with the universe.” Katarina shared about losing her sense of boundary and separateness from her community. Anna talked about being more aware of the needs of others around her and that she no longer feels completely separate from those around her.

*Example from Bethany’s interview:* It is a culmination of things. It is a feeling of being connected to all things. I can also get the feeling in nature, but it almost always happens with other people, when there is a feeling of connectedness with a group that is meaningful to me and I feel like we have some sort of common purpose that is greater.

*Example from Dixon’s interview:* I do things for different reasons. I make decisions based on this connection and in concert with the universe—continuity. I worry less about what people think. I understand more about “rejoice and be glad.” The staying open and choosing to stay there is different now.

*Example from Katarina’s interview:* Most of all I would lose a sense of boundary and separateness. I also had a feeling of oneness with that small community. It was a sense of Us, a subjective sense of merging. Something that I would normally feel cut off from in myself and outside of myself, beyond myself, but also with this small group of people with them being separate from me and separate from each other.

*Example from Anna’s interview:* I don’t see these as separate as I did before. It varies from day to day. But when I’m in touch with the inward guide that might be called Holy Spirit or the Inward Christ, if I am in touch with that part of me which is in direct connection with God, I am less anxious. I am more honest. I am pretty honest all the time, sometimes uncomfortably so. Different things are important to me. I want to live my life in right relationship with the world. This includes environmental issues, the people who make my clothes whether they are children and ill-treated, or with people who are suffering from war, the people who have AIDS. It is hard for me to stay isolated.

*Experienced a New Sense of Internal Purpose or Calling*

All of the 13 participants had a new sense of internal calling or purpose to some extent, although only eight marked it strongly on their survey. Some participants sensed an internal sense of knowing and purpose, while others expressed a sense of external relationship with God and an external call or knowing what they needed to do. However, all participants expressed a desire to be connected with this sense of knowing and to live from this connected place on their initial questionnaire. Also, all reported have a new understanding of themselves regarding this sense of purpose, direction, or calling in life. This illumination of the self within was described in different ways. Ellie and Liam chose a path of sharing the reality of God that they knew so deeply from their experiences with others through ministry. Iris said she feels like she was saved for a reason, and therefore wants to live her life doing good for others. Bethany has been led by this new sense of direction in her career and passions, helping her merge those two aspects of her life into one. Katarina reported discovering potential within herself that she had always been afraid of but that she suddenly wanted to own and apply in her life.

*Example from Iris's interview:* I don't want to be a waste. I was spared and that was a Great gift and that put a burden on my soul that I have been saved for a reason so I must live for a purpose. It is not to sit and watch TV and eat Bonbons all day. I feel like this is why I do a lot of the things I do. I want to do good for other people.

*Example from Bethany's interview:* So sometimes there are a lot of questions. But, it definitely led me towards a path of constant seeking of spirituality in my life. I majored in psychology in college, but the longer I was there I knew I wanted to learn more about religion and spirituality. I took a lot of religion classes, and then I went on the journey that eventually led me here to a school that embraces the study of spirituality and psychology. This is a place where spirituality has a place in my psyche and I can look at how that affects other's psyche. It is what I'm interested in thinking about. It is hard thinking about how spirituality has affected me. It affects everything to one degree or another.

*Example from Katarina:* I felt an expansiveness after coming back and I felt equipped to take on things that surprised me both in terms of relating to other people, an interpersonal capacity that I did not have before for whatever reason before, but also as far as exploring and acting on potential that I had always feared that I had. But through this I discovered that I did have and owned up to the responsibility of doing something with that.

### *Resulting Sense of Active Responsibility Towards a Greater Community*

How each participant expressed this active responsibility towards a greater community was different. Eight participants noted this theme in their experience.

Bethany spoke of social and political actions as well as environmental choices that were affected by her experience. Iris talked about a daily feeling of responsibility and accountability to and for the people around her, while Julian described living her calling through her art and teaching.

*Example from Bethany's interview:* It inspires my social and political actions because of feeling connected to other human beings, that sense of us all being part of one family, the environmental crisis, just that scientifically we are all a part of the same thing. It inspires a lot of the energy and action that I do.

*Example from Iris's interview:* I feel a responsibility and accountability. I don't want to waste any of my life. I don't have to be a CEO of a company but I would never want to be cruel to someone or hurt someone intentionally. There is so much of that in the world. I have so much of a difficulty understanding people who are selfish and cruel. I don't think it bothered me before, but now it really, really bothers me when I see that. I ask for help a lot more when I need that strength of God right with me. I pray a lot more.

*Example from Julian's interview:* Everything I do is an offering for others. Ultimately, everything I do for myself I do for others. But everything I do is an offering. In terms of my inner practice, most of the time, I practice through my painting and my teaching. I don't have a super active prayer and meditation life although I fancy myself that I would like to do that more. But I am having so much spiritual experience all the time that I probably have more than others on a calm day anyway. It permeates everything. There is nothing that is not included. The fact that I am here to fulfill work that Jesus and Mary has given to me and everything that I do has to be in alignment with that or I have to say No to it. It affects all of my inner and outer daily life all my money, my body, my relationships, everything.

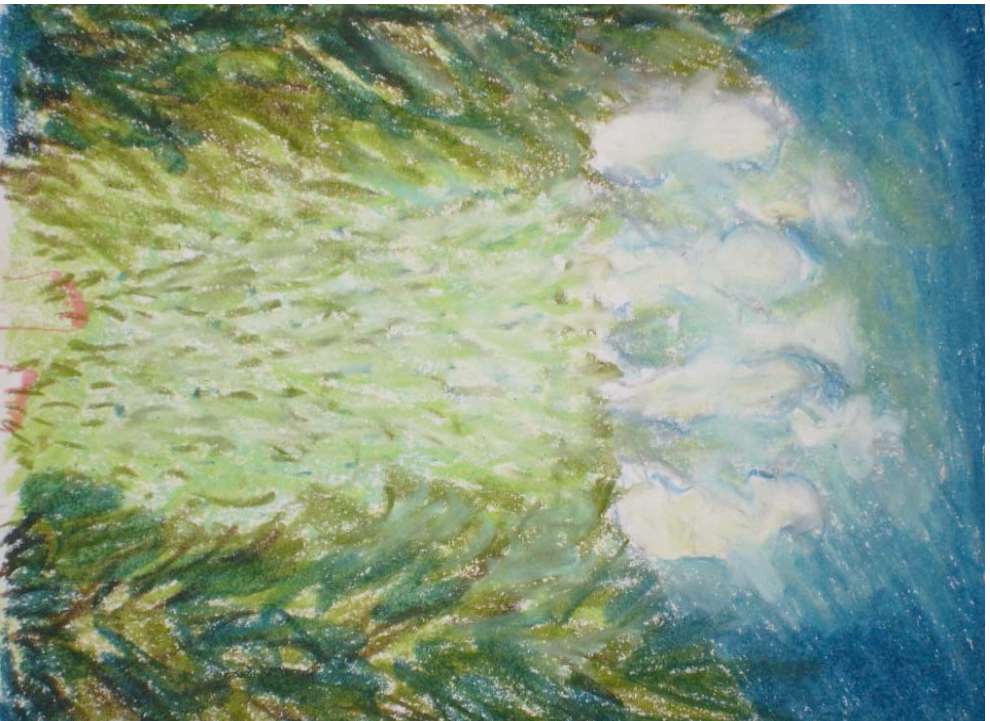
*Difficulty Sharing or Talking About the Experience With Others*

Ten participants said that they had a hard time talking about their experience. The difficulty was not mainly with the inability to put the experience in words, although some reported that. Some difficulties that were reported included a fear that the experience made them different from others in their church group, an experience of being ridiculed and judged wrongly, and a feeling that others could not understand these experiences and be supportive of them. Others just did not feel comfortable sharing such an intimate experience with most people.

*Example from Holly's interview:* Well, like I said, I'm pretty rooted to the earth. So I am very practical. I don't talk about it much. I've found that I can share my spiritual self just by being. And I can't talk to people about it. But, I didn't feel inclined to become a contemplative and live on a mountain somewhere. That's just not me. So in that sense I haven't changed. I'm just a little more informed, I guess.

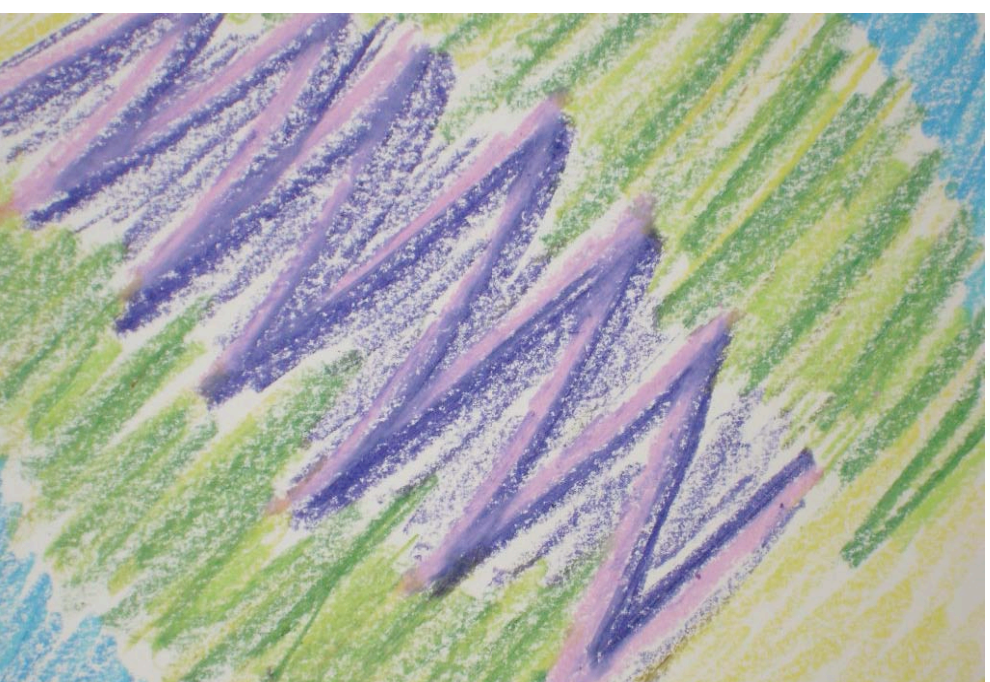
*Example from Ellie's interview:* At my age I wanted to live and learn. It wasn't for the degree. It was also because I had this sort of mystical experiences that I wanted to learn more about. And all the sudden I spoke tongues. These kinds of experiences and images that I shared with others and they could not understand, and they laughed at me! In seminary when we studied for ordination, the teacher asked me "Why do you want to be a pastor?" I said that through mystical experiences I really met God. And they just laughed at me. I decided I wanted to know more about these experiences. I wanted to share with others who had these experiences.

*Example from Bethany's interview:* But my early experiences in my teens a lot of my peers were with me in my youth group. We were allowed to ask a lot of questions about spirituality and religion. The youth director allowed a lot of that. I felt that where other people were really questioning it and not really feeling it that part of me was happy and felt special that I was experiencing these things. At the same time there were no peers or anyone really that I could share my experiences with. I felt silly, was labeled overly emotional or sappy and told that there was no actual deeper experience.



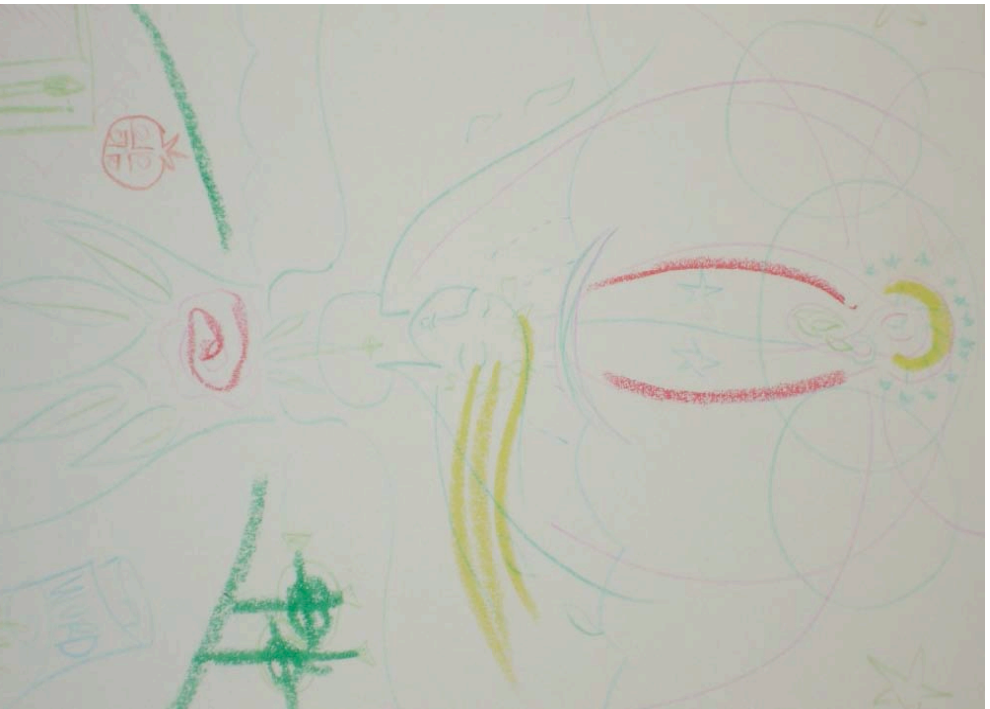
Iris's Creative Expression

*Figure 11.* Creative expression pieces from Iris's interview.



Researcher's Creative Expression





Julian's Creative Expression

*Figure 12. Creative expression pieces from Julian's interview.*



Researcher's Creative Expression

### *Heightened Sensory Perception During or After Experience*

The sensory perception of the participants was heightened for all 13 participants during or after their unitive experience. A visual shift was the most commonly reported change in sensory modality; although sensate feeling, smells, and an acute sense of smell were also stated frequently. Gina talked about a shimmering clarity to everything she saw, and Anna talked about the smell of fresh cut grass. Carlos shared about a feeling of freedom and buoyancy and the sound of a clear, pure tone. Many modalities including intense smells, sounds, and spectacular colors were reported by Freya.

*Example from Gina's interview:* Then the other quality of coming out of the experience was almost a shimmering kind of quality. Everything that I looked at had a new clarity, a visual clarity—almost shimmering. That is what those little stars are just a sparkling kind of visual effect that happened when the experience was over. In the last 18 years, this has not diminished. I had difficulty remembering a lot of the details that led up to the experience, but the experience itself and the body experience was very profound and has always stayed with me, and the aftereffects.

*Example from Anna's interview:* I smelled the fresh cut grass in a way that I had never smelled before, and I thought, “My child will never smell fresh-cut grass.” I also felt textures and thought that she would never feel these textures. I saw a rainbow, and it made me cry because I saw it with new eyes and I knew that she would never see it. Life was more vivid.

*Example from Carlos's interview:* When I got to a place of understanding, my energy that had a damn on it was just gone. I was in a place of no anxiousness or nervousness, no conflicting energies inside of me. It felt like flow and freedom. When I think of freedom, I think of zero gravity this real buoyancy. That is kind of what this starburst of energy represents. It is a burst of energy that moves out equally in all directions. It is both within me and outside of me. That had something to do with the sound that was not a part of the earth matrix. The sound was on a different plane. It was a tone, a pure tone like a high-pitched bell, like a wine glass hum. It reminds me of a crystal vibrating like a crystal bowl singing. This purity of tone was throughout the air, throughout the earth, and throughout my being, it was all unified in this same tonal experience. There was also this earthy, dry, sandy smell or dried grass. The aspects of all the worlds were there in that experience. It was a unity of sensory stimuli that my awareness was able to dissolve away from myself and into this experience of oneness.



*Example from Freya's interview:* The fragrances were intense. I didn't know things could smell so strong. My senses were acute. My mind felt very quiet. My sensory perception was at its height. The birds, I could hear them as if they were sitting on my shoulder. I was like I was having this unitive experience with the birds, the plants, and the songs of the birds were as if I'd never heard them before. The one bird was singing to me as if he were following me around. The colors almost remind me of twilight, as the sun was setting. They were intense as if someone took the crayons and put this lavender color over my geraniums. The colors were Spectacular.

### *Experience Gave Knowledge of a Greater Reality*

The knowledge of a greater reality came through in different ways for each participant but there were some similarities for the 12 participants reporting this theme. Julian reported a downloading of files of information she called the "collective women's soul." Freya also reported having knowledge coming to her where she knew all things for a period of time, and Mei talked about an inner knowing of transformation that only comes from experience that cannot come from theories or dogma.

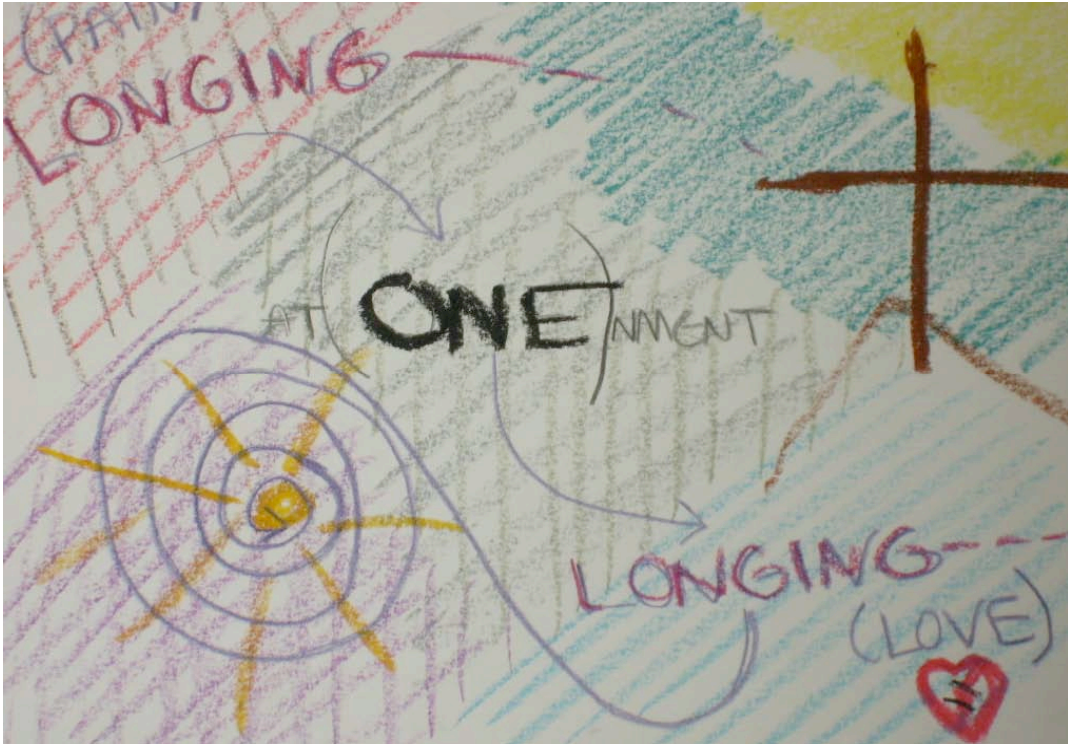
*Example from Julian's interview:* I felt that between the mountain top experience and the drawing and this other experience of feeling like there was a downloading of these files of what I call the collective women's soul. This is who I actually work for. I work for Her. Some unnamed unnumbered, check out girl in the middle of nowhere. That is basically who I work for. There is a whole way of how they inform me of what I do and why I do what I do and why I'm inspired and able to do what I do based on the circumstances of life. So I feel like I work for Her, whoever Her is. This is the really big part.

*Example from Mei's interview:* It is the Christ energy that I connect with. Yes, this was transformation, because by having an experience like this, what it does for me is that it strengthens in me the theories that I had about these things. Because it is not the kind of knowing that you can have by the stuff you can gather about these things, it is the kind of knowing that comes from having the experience, which is very different from learning in a book or taking notes. Nobody can take this away from me now because it is part of my experience. And this type of learning is very different from learning some church principle or some dogma. That is outside of me and this is my own inner knowing. That cannot be taken away from me. You can't make me deny what I know that I know that I know. So when I have these experiences, it helps me connect with that inner source of who I am and that inner resource and the vastness of my inner world. It is about how I connect to the great cosmos inside of myself. In a sense, I am this

tiny spec in the cosmos and I am the whole cosmos in those moments. It is a moment when I am everything. So yes, it changes my life.

*Example from Freya's interview:* It was the softest yellow. I went into the light, and it was the only thing you could see. I was like a light shining on me. I was not merging with God. I didn't have a relationship with God. I was God. So this isn't God and the other me, it's neither. It was not a merging of two. I was God. Myself and the Divine is one. I realized that I had had it wrong all along. This book in the corner represents knowledge. It was flying out at me rapidly. There wasn't anything I didn't know. I understood everything. There wasn't anything that I didn't understand. There was no mystery. There was no doubt.

For more illustrations of each of these themes see Appendix I. There, I have included the complete interview transcript and engaging story of each participant. In the following chapter, I will use these 12 themes to illuminate the research literature from Chapter 2, as well as my own research lenses.



Katarina's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 13.* Creative expression pieces from Katarina's interview.



#### Researcher's Creative Expression

Liam chose not to participate in this exercise.

*Figure 14.* Creative expression piece from Liam's interview.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

I use the themes listed in the Results Chapter as a light with which to illuminate the findings from other researchers in Chapter 2. I also present in this chapter a review of my lenses from Chapter 2 in light of these thematic results. Finally, I discuss conclusions, limitations, implications, and validity of this study. These are not all distinct categories of discussion since they interrelate, but this is an overview of what is included in this chapter.

### *Revisiting the Research*

After going through the research that I include in Chapter 2, some of it I want to review in light of the results of Chapter 4. Two themes that both the resonance panel and I included in the list of overall themes were not strongly supported by the participants (see Table 1). One of these themes was *multiple experiences affecting awakening and awareness*. This was not a direct question posited in the interview or in the questionnaire. However, in the questionnaire, all participants reported having had more than one unitive mystical experience. I want to look at possibilities for explaining why the resonance panel and I thought that the multiple unitive experiences of the participants affected participants' awareness and why at least 5 of the participants who had multiple experiences felt otherwise. Riccardo (1977) talked about the mystical experience and the fullness of that experience.

Explanations are often not meaningful to the mystic himself, for the experience validates itself while at the same time it transcends any explanation. Explanations no longer serve to satisfy the mystic's search for truth, for he feels as though his very soul has reached the highest understanding. He says he cannot convey the essence of his experience with words. That will remain an impenetrable barrier as long as the rest of us have to rely on mere explanations. (p. 5)



Riccardo's (1977) point that the experience validates itself while transcending any explanation could be one reason why some of the participants did not feel that having multiple unitive experiences contributed to awakening and awareness. Perhaps during the unitive mystical experience, a person becomes aware of an immense amount of information that takes a lifetime to fully understand. Maybe this is why some participants responded that more experiences did not equate to greater awakening and awareness of the Divine. Perhaps, just one unitive mystical experience can affect awakening and awareness, which I propose as one explanation for the discrepancy.

The other theme that was part of the original 14 themes that the resonance panel and I listed but which not all of the participants corroborated was *questioning of cultural and religious norms*. Again, the resonance panel and I found this theme present in a majority of the interviews, but it was not similarly recognized in the participants' own view of their experiences as indicated on the survey (see Table 1). It was also not present in every participant's experiences. This willingness to go against the grain of society and question norms supports the aspect of authenticity that aligns with an internal locus of control rather than aligning with external criteria to determine action. Moorehead (2001) called this *inner authority*, a response to a call or to an inner voice of direction, which is an integrity of self that carries over into other areas of life.

Haartman (2001) discussed a phenomenon he called *unitive distortions* that occurred when a person's ego used the unitive experience to defend the ego. My research did not support or refute his idea of unitive distortions. Since the word *distortion* implies judgment, and my research was based on honoring each participant and his or her story as valid, I was not in a position to judge the experiences. It seems like the participants

processed their own unitive experiences in a way that supported their own growth and chosen path in the world. All of the participants supported their own path and their own choices in response to their unitive mystical experience. Haartman (2001) might call this “the narcissistically gratifying sense of being harmoniously aligned with the dictates of one’s conscience, of being ‘at one’ with the internal love object” (p. 815). So here are some of my questions to this line of thinking. If we can experience and know the potential that exists in all things through a unitive mystical experience, and if we can know our own ultimate potential, does that necessarily mean that we are grandiose or narcissistic in our view of ourselves? Haartman (2001) sees the experience of cosmic unity as a projection of the unconscious fantasies of merger stemming from early infancy. Since this research honors others’ ability to know themselves and honors an engaged presence of the Divine, I see no way to fully engage with the framework of Haartman as a speaker for this research.

Kevin Fauteux (1995) stated that in order for a unitive experience to be healthy, that it could not be the final stage of a religious experience, but rather it must be followed by a state of nonattachment. In an earlier article, he states, “While religious experience has been viewed as beginning with purgation of self and resulting in unity or communion with God, I suggest that a truly healthy religious experience involves a subsequent stage of ‘acting on’ the unitive experience” (Fauteux, 1995, p. 58). This “acting on” would be one aspect of the authentic response that I am looking at in this study. All of my participants chose to respond to their unitive mystical experience. Fauteux (1995) went on to explain that the mystic must return to the world and take back with him some of the

experience to express, and in doing this, creatively contributes to society. This unique contribution is yet one more attribute of authenticity.

Another explanation for Haartman's unitive distortions might be found from other research that I included in the literature review. Merkur (1964/1999) cites the story of a Hindu tantric monk. During the monk's unitive experience, he recognizes that he is experiencing the very state that he has been studying and reading about. So he already had an existing framework for his experience cognitively before he had the experience of oneness bodily. Moss (1981) discussed his unitive mystical experience as being disorienting to the point that he thought he might be having a nervous breakdown. He says that he had no framework, model, or rationale for the experience at the time of his experience and had to create one afterwards. Therefore, what Moss describes could be considered temporarily one of Haartman's unitive distortions.

The path of Wesley, as discussed by Haartman (2001) in Chapter 2, which supports church members through many ways of engaging with their mystical experiences would be a good path for today's churches to follow. Many of my participants reported that they were not fully supported by their churches at the time of their experience or afterwards. Wesley led his followers through a gradual integration of their transformative experiences by reexperiencing God's presence in all things and knowing God's complete acceptance, thus allowing people to investigate their own psychological responses to their experiences and this new knowledge, and to transform (Haartman, 2001). The 10th theme listed in Chapter 4 was a *difficulty sharing or talking about the experience with others*. If more of the participants' churches had adopted



Wesley's approach to transformative experiences, more of the research participants may have felt comfortable sharing about their unitive mystical experiences within that setting.

Some of my research participants, after their unitive mystical experiences, decided to remain within the lines and structure of traditional Protestant churches, others decided to seek less traditional congregations to be a part of, others left the church to follow their own authentic path with God, and still others became a part of a Protestant church for the first time following their experience of unity. Potter (2004) described these options in what he called the *direct path* and the *balanced path*. The *direct path* he described as a "spiritual path, which eventually pulls the aspirant out of all cultural and religious forms," and the *balanced path* was "a spiritual path where the aspirant seeks truth along traditional lines and stays within the wide parameters of a religious tradition" (Potter, 2004, p. 215). My interview participants seemed to fall into both of these categories. All my participants saw themselves on a spiritual path because they answered affirmatively to the question, "Are you seeking to follow a path to know God better and to experience God more in your life?" These two categories of Potter help explain the phenomenon of why some chose to stay in their church after their unitive mystical experiences and why others chose another path.

Karen Starr (2008), through case-study research, studied the point of psychic change in both psychoanalysis and Jewish Mysticism and concluded that it was faith. "In faith, one opens to the possibility of the *transcendent Third*, an experience of union with a larger whole from which one emerges with a sharper sense of one's authentic truth" (Star, 2008, p. 203). Sharon Chirban (2000), through research review and case study,

found that healthy people emerge from the unitive experience or what she terms the oneness experience with a new sense of self.

These experiences provide opportunities to transcend the experience of the separate self and join in a sense of oneness with another. The loosening of the borders of the self's barrier to the boundless experience of unity with an "other," resulting in the reemergence of a self enhanced by increased vitality and more intricate integration is characteristic of the oneness experience. (Chirban, 2000, p. 247)

These two accounts support what my participants reported from their experiences. The eighth theme that I listed in Chapter 4 was *experienced a new sense of internal purpose or calling*. This is what Chirban (2000) called a healthy response to the experience and what Star (2008) pointed out is the result of faith in the transcendent. There are many spiritual paths that people could choose. For example, when Saul was stuck blind on the road to Damascus he yielded himself to God in following God's instructions to him on how to be healed. If this were a unitive mystical experience and Saul had chosen to be Paul but not start a church and simply be a witness throughout the world, then such a path would be a direct path outside of the bounds of the church. In future studies, it would be interesting to study the specific spiritual paths of people before and after a unitive mystical experience.

Vaughan (2002) pointed out that a new sense of self-awareness is not the end of the process for the spiritually intelligent. "Spiritual intelligence goes beyond conventional psychological development. In addition to self-awareness, it implies awareness of our relationship to the transcendent, to each other, to the earth and all beings" (Vaughan, 2002, p.19). She went on to say that "spiritual maturity implies connecting the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of action and service in the world" (p. 22). Two interview themes point to Vaughan's ideas of spiritual intelligence and maturity. The

seventh theme listed was the *unitive experience created a sensitivity to the connectedness of Spirit, people, and the world*. Therefore, the unitive mystical experience seems to promote the relationship to the transcendent that Vaughan is calling spiritual intelligence. The ninth theme, *resulting sense of active responsibility towards a greater community*, seems to suggest that the unitive mystical experience also promotes spiritual maturity.

I noticed that many of the themes listed in Chapter 4 are characteristic of not only the unitive mystical experience but are also characteristics of the authentic experience as described by Rahilly (1993) and listed in Chapter 2. Some of the overlapping themes that are present in this study, that are also listed in Rahilly's study, are a heightened awareness of somatic experiences and others, a dissolving of the ego state, an expression of reverence and awe about the experience, and participants having a shift or breakthrough in their lives as a result of their experience. I would like to reiterate something that I shared in Chapter 2 from Bugental (1965), which he wrote about authenticity stemming from a state of being one with the ultimate.

A person is authentic in that degree to which his being in the world is unqualifiedly in accord with the givenness of his own nature and of the world . . . Authenticity is the term I will use to characterize both a hypothesized ultimate state of at-oneness with the cosmos and the immense continuum leading to that ultimate ideal. (pp. 31-32)

Because of research that I have discussed above and because of the statements that my participants made about how the unitive mystical experience caused them to see themselves in a new way with a new purpose and to relate to the world around them with a new sense of connection and service, I conclude that the unitive mystical experience does affect authenticity. I will explain more about the relationship between the two in the next section when I discuss the phenomenon of transpersonal authenticity.

*Reviewing Initial Lenses*

Here is a list of my initial lenses from Chapter 2 for reference.

1. God or Spirit desires for us all to know Truth more fully.
2. Unitive experiences as well as other mystical experiences occur in order that we might live in greater accordance with this Truth.
3. Experiences that reveal God or Spirit happen to all people multiple times throughout their lives.
4. There is no way for any person to know God, Spirit, or Truth completely.
5. The only way that any one of us can truly know anything deeply about the ultimate is through a personal experience of internal, deep knowing.
6. From this very limited and personal experience of knowing and living comes a valuable contribution to the greater field of knowledge regarding God, Spirit, or Truth.
7. Participants will have had a moment of being in the essence of the substance of all things, where all is one.
8. Participants who experienced a loss of self also experienced a moment of clarity.
9. Someone who has experienced a unitive mystical experience and has been able to integrate that experience into daily life has come to a greater understanding of authentic self or created essence and has a greater passion to live authentically in all relationships.
10. This new understanding of authentic self will be reflected in choices, interactions, and relationships.
11. I also expect to find that ordinary people have experienced these unitive mystical experiences and have subsequently altered their interactions to reflect a greater sense of alignment with this new knowledge or greater authenticity.
12. The unitive experience is an experience that gives people intrinsic knowledge of who they are in harmony with the universe that supersedes emotions and social expectations as they align with this Greater Truth.
13. Transpersonal authenticity is a fully embodied active and empty readiness to respond to a greater consciousness in any present moment, which is fundamentally understood and informs one's sense of self.

14. There is a feeling of tremendous power, confidence, and surety that comes from responding from a place of integrity and alignment as a conduit for a greater knowing.

My first five initial lenses were ideas that I needed to state so that the reader knew my preconceptions about the material, but they were not points that were directly researched by this study. I also have not changed my view on these lenses after the research. The sixth lens I have not yet tested and only time and others will tell the impact of this contribution to the greater field of research. The seventh lens was written into the requirements of the study so that one was substantiated but not changed. My eighth lens was not changed nor fully clarified by the study, although some participants experienced a sense of greater clarity. The 9th and 10th initial lenses were supported by the research and are in line with my conclusion, but I have not really changed them. I just understand the relationship better, which I describe in the discussion of transpersonal authenticity. The 11th lens was about ordinary people having these experiences and was also written into the research criteria and put on the participant questionnaire so it is no surprise to have this corroborated by the participants. Certainly a couple of the participants related an experience that supported the 12th lens, but this would need to be studied in a more specific way to be fully understood. The 13th lens is something I will devote a couple of paragraphs to below, so I will go ahead to the next one. The 14th lens about power and confidence was supported by some of the research participants, although not all of them. Because this was an important part of my own experience, I think that it would be interesting to ask specific questions about this in future studies.



Mei's Creative Expression



Researcher's Creative Expression

*Figure 15.* Creative expression pieces from Mei's interview.

*Final Lenses and Lessons of the Researcher*

I am not sure if this really constitutes as final lenses, but it is what has changed for me looking back over the course of this research project. First, I would reword my first definition of Protestant Christian to be “those who are seeking to live in honest, open, surrendered, and intentional relationship with the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” The original definition was helpful in seeking potential participants, but not very helpful in targeting the most important part of the spiritual relationship with the Divine. Second, although I knew people had different ways of describing their unitive experiences, I never considered that learning modalities or personality types could affect the perception of a unitive experience in the participants. The accounts given by participants like Mei, Carlos, Julian, or Freya are different from those of Dixon, Katarina, and Ellie. Some descriptions from participants were full of emotion and experiential detail, while others were more didactic without much emotion, and still others talked more about a path of suffering and longing rather than one of joy and peace. I did not want to minimize certain experiences and elevate others simply by their descriptive type, but I did start to question whether personality type or learning modality had any impact on their descriptions. There is the possibility that this would account for some of the differences in processing of the participants’ stories.

Third, my understanding of the intuitive inquiry research method deepened and my appreciation grew until I felt very thankful to have been a part of the intuitive inquiry research process and to have a deeper awareness of this topic. Fourth, probably because of this method, I have learned to appreciate my own process of thinking, writing, engaging, and working in a much more respectful and fluid way. Fifth, I have learned to

see value in having good ideas that do not work and value in following different avenues of possibility until I find more productive routes. Sixth, I have learned to appreciate the delicate balance between being out of control and having complete control. I have found that sometimes it is better to surrender and just wait in awareness and openness; and at other times it is better to proceed with focused effort expecting a breakthrough to occur. Seventh, I appreciate more than ever the process of research to inform, birth, change, and give a depth of understanding to greater knowledge.

### *Transpersonal Authenticity*

This research supported my initial 13th lens, the concept of *transpersonal authenticity*, although I will change the definition a little in light of the research results and add it as one of my final lenses. The definition of *transpersonal authenticity* as it was stated in Chapter 2 is “a fully embodied active and empty readiness to respond in any present moment to a greater consciousness, which is fundamentally understood and informs one’s sense of self.” Some of the interview participants described this “greater consciousness” spoken of in the definition, as the Divine, Christ Consciousness, Goddess, God, or Universal Energy. The participants reported changes stemming from the unitive mystical experience that affected how they related to other people, the environment, the Divine, and their everyday choices. One of these choices was striving to reconnect or remember the experience of connection with the Divine in order to be led or informed by this experience as reflected in the second theme listed in the Results.

Maslow (1962) stated that mystical experiences belong not only to priests but to all mankind since he was finding similar experiences in many places that had nothing to do with religion. He started calling these experiences peak-experiences. He said, “Peak-



experiences can be considered to be truly religious experiences in the best and most profound, most universal, and most humanistic sense of that word” (p. 10). However, one difference that he found between the peak-experiences that he was studying and the mystical experience of mystics was that the peak-experiences were transient or temporary and the experiences of Eastern mystics were permanent. Maslow said, “It’s like having been in Heaven for a moment and then remembering it in the dull moments of ordinary life” (1962, p. 14). This statement might characterize some of my participants’ experiences, like Iris and her attempt to find that place again that she sought for 14 years as a flight attendant. Yet overall, what my participants talked about was an ability to reconnect to a sense of oneness that they had first experienced in a unitive mystical experience that they could tap into again in their daily lives. Freya, Katarina, Mei, Julian, and Bethany all talked about going to this place or experience of oneness again and again in daily life. It was more than just “remembering it in the dull moments of everyday life” as Maslow (1962, p. 14) said. It was also short of any permanent state of oneness that the Eastern mystics had talked about. Maslow admitted that the peak experience and the mystical experience were very similar but not exactly the same.

One last word. It must by now be obvious to those who are familiar with the literature of mystical experiences that these peak-experiences are very much like them, and overlap them but are not identical with them. What their true relationship is, I do not know. My best guess is that they are different in degree but not in kind. The total mystical experience, as classically described, is more or less approached by greater or lesser peak-experiences. (Maslow, 1962, p. 18)

I agree with Maslow that the two experiences seem closely related and that they might be on a continuum. I would like to suggest a theory as to what this difference is that Maslow acknowledges. However, first I would like to take one last look at what distinguishes a mystic from other people as described by Sinetar (1986).

Mystics are a definite type of person. They have a distinctive life's course, and their mission—regardless of their country or culture of origin—is always the same: to find their way “back” to that Absolute Reality which they sense is the One True Reality, and from which they believe they've come . . . Because the mystic himself is involved in a life-changing process, transmutating his ordinary self into his higher Self, the way of the mystic—which is to say, his life's journey—and his personal psychology are merged. The mystic's experience gave birth to the whole sphere of transpersonal psychology, which has been described as differing from ordinary therapies . . . [in that it] helps them awaken. (Sinetar, 1986, pp. 75-6)

Perhaps this continuous desire to experience union with the Divine and live from this higher Self is what makes the unitive mystical experience different from the peak experience. The peak-experience might be remembered again and again, but the unitive mystical experience creates an opening that can be reexperienced again and again.

*Transpersonal authenticity* seems to accurately describe this relationship that has not been directly studied before between the unitive mystical experience and authenticity. My final definition of this phenomenon as listed below has been informed by the literature reviewed, by the research results, and by my own personal experience and then adjusted to reflect these changes. *Transpersonal authenticity* is a fully embodied active and empty readiness to respond in any present moment to a greater Universal consciousness, which is fundamentally understood and informs one's sense of self. I added the word *Universal* to denote deity and continuous creative energy. Deity was denoted by the capitalization of the word. By the word *Universal*, I also intended to portray the intentional energy that exists behind all living things as in the concept of *logos* or Christ depicted in 1 John 1:1. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and everything that came into being was through Him and for Him” (NIV). This greater creative consciousness is what I am attempting to describe with the word, *Universal*. The embodied experience of authenticity was

supported by Rahilly's (1993) research. The empty readiness is supported by this study in terms of surrender. The desire for connection and reconnection with the greater Universal consciousness was supported by this research. That this new knowledge is fundamentally understood is also supported by participants' stories in this research. The desire to respond to a new sense of self or understanding of purpose was supported by this research as well.

I hope that this new understanding of the relationship between the unitive mystical experience and authenticity will help more people acknowledge and support these experiences in everyday life. I hope more studies will be done on how to apply this new knowledge so more people can enter into this state of empty and active readiness and respond from a deep sense of self-alignment with Universal consciousness. This alive, in the moment knowing and responding is different from a one time peak-experience. It is the difference between dynamic and static, living and remembering.

#### *Future Studies*

As I look at the themes from the research and my initial lenses, I realize I have further questions about the unitive mystical experience and authenticity. Do individuals have a sense of choice going into and coming out of the experience of unity? Do all people have an understanding of their own free will in this experience? How has the language of God or understanding and framework for God changed for people after this experience? Why do some people after this experience continue to hold tightly to the existing church social structure and dogmas and almost challenge God to expand these concepts while others begin to rewrite the rules, concepts, and frameworks to create new possibilities of understanding the spiritual realm? Does it make a difference if a person

has had one unitive mystical experience or many? Is the knowledge so complete and beyond the bounds of normal perception that it takes a lifetime on this plane to comprehend just one such experience? Do people who access the experience of unity more often throughout their lives have a greater proclivity to sense other phenomenon intuitively? What is it about the relationship of seeking and surrendering that makes these types of experiences possible? Does a person's learning style or personality type affect the description of one's unitive mystical experience or the actual experience? How does transpersonal authenticity differ in felt experience from other types of authenticity? Future research might be able to help answer some of these questions.

#### *Limitations and Delimitations*

The demographics and diversity of this study has been purposefully limited to a small population of adults. The criteria of ordinary, adult, Protestant Christian, and unitive mystical experience are the intentional narrowing qualifiers for the participants. One other qualifier is that 6 months must have passed between the time of their unitive experience and the interview. This population is purposefully homogeneous. A small homogeneous population gives a basis to understand the relationship between the unitive mystical experience and authenticity in one small population. Because I believe religious diversity is honored best by understanding and acknowledging differences as well as similarities, I believe this study could be best replicated in several studies of homogeneous groups in diverse populations. Therefore, this is simply one study to honor one small group of people who have had one type of spiritual experience.

The size of this study is both a strength and a limitation. Thirteen interviews give depth rather than breadth to a groundwork and foundational understanding of the

experience of authenticity in those who have had unitive mystical experiences. The size and design of this study supports a beginning understanding of the experience of one small population even though it may not be generalized to other populations. Future studies can use this work as a foundation to begin to understand this experience in this population of Protestant Christians and use it as a beginning for understanding the relationship between the unitive mystical experience and authenticity.

### *Validity and Reliability*

One strength of the qualitative interview is that it honors the research participants as experts on their own experiences. Similarly, the method of intuitive inquiry honors the subjective experience of the researcher and requires that this experience be disclosed so that others can challenge the researcher's assumptions. The construct of the resonance panel built into this method provides yet one more way to establish the credibility of research and reliability. The panel provides support and clarification for the researcher, and checks and balances to the research process and the findings of the research. The resonance panel enhances this study's external validity. The internal validity of this study was enhanced as participants were asked to verify and correct their interview transcript, and to verify the themes to reflect accuracy in representing their own experiences. The reliability of this study has not been tested. However, I have included the components of this study and the interview transcripts so that others could closely replicate this study if they desire to do so.

### *Implications*

Implications of this study are numerous. Protestant churches could use this study to encourage their congregations to talk about experiences of the Divine that are not in

the normative categories of salvation, rededication, baptism, or calling. Those who write about spiritual development might use this study to support a better understanding of the effect of unitive mystical experiences. Positive psychology researchers who have studied authenticity can now know how the unitive mystical experience affects their subject of study. Hopefully, this research will help to build a bridge of mutual partnership between transpersonal psychology and the greater Protestant Christian Church. More importantly, I hope that those who have had a similar experience to the ones in this study can be supported to tell their own story and live proudly on their path of transpersonal authenticity.

This study offers support for the Protestant Christian Church to encourage their members to begin sharing these and all types of mystical experiences. The life giving presence of the Divine seen in just one person living in transpersonal authenticity could change a church's congregational life, spiritual development approaches, and overall support to those who have had mystical experiences. Church members could learn from these life-giving experiences that are happening among their fellow members by creating an atmosphere of, certainly, permission and, possibly, celebration for people to talk about these experiences within their church family. Such sharing within the congregation might help encourage people's spiritual development by supporting the integration of both big and small spiritual experiences into their daily lives, and therefore supporting people to live with transpersonal authenticity. Such an approach might also help support members who have mystical experiences so that they feel a part of the church community and further their spiritual path within the church.

Defining transpersonal authenticity is important to anyone who is studying authenticity or the unitive mystical experience. This study has identified and clarified a type of authenticity in its identification and description of transpersonal authenticity. It is important foundational work because it defines a concept that can be studied and distinguishes it from other types of authenticity. It helps distinguish a type of authenticity that has not been clarified in prior research studies. This study also serves to define clearly the unitive mystical experience as one type of mystical experience and may help researchers be more specific as they look at the phenomenon of mystical experiences in the future.





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## Appendix A: Research Participant Invitation

You are invited to participate in a dissertation study. I value the unique contribution that you can make to this study and the information that it will provide to the field of transpersonal psychology in general. I am excited about the possibility of your participation and want to tell you about the process of this study and what the expectations of your participation will be.

There are many different types of spiritual experiences a person may encounter during a lifetime. I am studying the powerful, yet often fleeting, experience of Being One with God, or fully experiencing an Ultimate Knowing, which is called a unitive experience. I am interested in how this affects one's authenticity or the choices one makes to act in accordance with what one discovers in these experiences. I am primarily using a method to study this phenomenon that takes into account the many facets of your personal experience.

I am seeking comprehensive descriptions and expressions of your experiences of unity with the Divine. In this way I am hoping to illuminate the answer to my research question: How does the unitive mystical experience affect one's authenticity? This unitive mystical experience can include but is not limited to experiences of merger with light, love, peace, energy, God, Jesus, the universe, all things, or direct knowing. This experience may have happened in church, in nature, in prayer, in worship, in sexual expression, in physical encounters, in dreams, in experiences with music, and so forth. Other people may or may not have been present at the time of your experience. Your experience must include a sense of inner knowing, a sense of receiving direct intrinsic knowledge of something beyond the ordinary through an experience of merging with God, with Joy, with the All that Is.

Through your participation, I hope to understand the essence of your experience to better understand the phenomenon of this experience itself. During a silent remembering exercise designed to help you recreate and reexperience your unitive experience, you will be asked to recall a specific unitive experience. During the interview, you will be asked about this experience and how it has subsequently affected your life choices and path of authenticity. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of your experiences as well as your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in reflecting on the experience, and how it has affected your view of yourself and your actions in the world.

You will be asked some questions to determine if you fit the research criteria as well as asked to voluntarily participate in some form of creative expression to give voice to your experience through movement, poems, artwork, writing, et cetera at the time of the research interview.

Your participation in this research has the potential to create change in your life by bringing a greater awareness of yourself, your experiences, and your life path. Such experiences are often very positive and beneficial. However, if you find yourself in emotional distress and need help with material that arises from your participation in this

study, please call me. You may also contact my chairperson or my school for support or therapist referral.

I value your participation and thank you for your commitment of energy, interest, and time. If you have any questions before signing this form or at any time during this process, please contact me. You are also free to contact my chairperson, Jan Fisher, Ph.D., 650-493-4430 ext. 254 or Genie Palmer, Ph.D., Dissertation Director at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, CA, at 650-493-4430 ext. 255 where I am working on this dissertation as a student and Ph.D. candidate.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Allison Perry

650-xxx-xxxx

[aperriwinkle@yahoo.com](mailto:aperriwinkle@yahoo.com)

Street Address

City, State Zip

I, the participant, sign that I have read and understood the participant letter of invitation.

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

## Appendix B: Participation Agreement

I agree to participate in the research study of mystical unitive experiences as described in the invitation to research participants. I understand the purpose and nature of the study and wish to participate. The researcher has answered all my questions about this study to my satisfaction. I grant permission for the data that is collected in the course of this study to be used in the Ph.D. dissertation process for degree completion, including the dissertation publication and any future publications. I understand that my name, identifying information, and contact information will not be shared with anyone besides the researcher and will be kept in a locked file throughout the duration of the study. At the end of this study, the researcher will use the contact information to reach all the participants to notify them of how to obtain a copy of the results of this study.

I agree to a one and a 1 ½ to 2 hour interview with the researcher to be held at an agreed-upon neutral location with privacy. I also agree to answer additional follow-up questions if needed. I will receive a copy of my interview transcript to verify its accuracy as well as to add any additional comments that I might have. I also grant permission for the tape recording of the interviews and photography of my creative expression. If I decide to participate in this research, I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice.

I have read and understood this form and the Research Participant Invitation Letter and had my questions answered to my satisfaction. There has been no pressure applied to encourage participation. I choose to participate in this study voluntarily. My signature indicates my willingness to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
\*Phone Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
\*Email Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
\*Name (Please Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\*Mailing Address

\*Contact information is provided solely for the purpose of follow-up questions and to provide a way to send the interview transcript for participant verification and correction. It will also be used to send you the results of this study. Pseudonyms will be chosen for each participant by the researcher beginning with the letter *A* for the first participant, *B* for the second, and so forth. Your participation agreement form will be destroyed upon the completion of this study in order to permanently maintain your confidentiality.

***Please bring this form with you at the time of your interview.***

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C: Participant Information

1. Age Now \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age of Unitive Experience(s) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Current Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
4. Occupation at time of Unitive Experience \_\_\_\_\_
5. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
6. Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_
7. Highest Education Level \_\_\_\_\_
8. Current Church Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_
9. Past Church Affiliations \_\_\_\_\_
10. Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_
11. Ages of Children (if any) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Do you identify yourself as a believer in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Did you at the time of your experience(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Are you seeking to live in relationship to God through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Were you at the time of your experience(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Are you seeking to follow a path to know God better and to experience God more in your life? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Are you currently worshipping with a body of fellow believers in a Protestant denomination? \_\_\_\_\_ 17b. Were you at the time of your experience? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Have you had what this study describes as a unitive mystical experience? \_\_\_\_\_
19. How long ago was this experience(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
20. How many unitive mystical experiences have you had? \_\_\_\_\_
21. Has this experience (or these experiences) affected how you see yourself? \_\_\_\_\_
22. Has it (have they) affected how you live day to day? \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D: Silent Remembering and Creative Expression

Please make yourself comfortable so that you can relax and have some memories for the next 15 minutes. Feel free to close your eyes when you are comfortable. Take three long deep breaths, and then let yourself breathe normally. Relax your eyelids and the muscles around your eyes. Relax your forehead, your temples, your mouth, and your jaw. Let your tongue relax. Take another deep breath, and when you breathe out, let your neck and shoulders relax. Notice your chest and heart area, let any tightness there go. Relax your ribs and your stomach. Notice your arms; let any tension drain from them down through your elbows, through your wrists, through your hands and fingers. Feel free to do that another time or two and release all the tension. Continue relaxing down your back, letting the muscles loosen as you go. Let go of any tension surrounding your hips and pelvis, then your thighs, knees, and calves, feeling any tension just drain away down through your feet and toe. Now just let yourself relax. Take another deep breath and be at rest.

Go back to the time just before your experience of unity. Remember the events that have led you to the time and place of this experience. Be aware of your surroundings, and simply observe your experience happening. Let your experience unfold just as it did on that day and simply notice what you see. What do you hear? Are there any physical sensations? Notice your physical surroundings and your body. Observe what emotions arise in you? Note any smells or tastes that you experience. Observe time and space. Be aware of how you come back to yourself from the experience. What is the same and what is different from before your experience. Observe whether you tell others about this experience and why. Become aware of how this experience begins to affect your life,

your relationships, your decisions, and choices. You are free to remember anything else that is important to your experience. Before we leave this experience, see if there is one word or image that you would like to bring back with you to help you recall this experience any time you wish. Be aware of anything you might wish to express in response to this experience before we come back into the present and remember this expression.

Now, prepare yourself to come back to the present in the next 60 seconds. Feel your hands and feet. Wiggle them. Feel your head and neck. Stretch your legs and arms. Take several deep breaths and be aware of your body more fully. When you are ready, open your eyes, roll your shoulders, and come back to this present moment with your whole being.

You are now invited to express anything that you wish through art, song, movement, or writing about your experience for the next 10 to 15 minutes. Please feel free to express yourself however feels right to you in this moment. I will let you know when you have 2 minutes left. Enjoy, explore, discover!

### Appendix E: Semistructured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable to you.
2. Tell me about coming back to yourself after the experience.
3. Did you see yourself differently after this experience? How?
4. In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?
5. In what way does it not affect you?
6. What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?
7. If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you feel is your next step?
8. Is there anything you would like to add?
9. Do you have any comments about this experience today?

## Appendix F: Compiling of Research Literature

### *The Unitive Mystical Experience*

Baruss (1996) describes the mystical experience as “an experience characterized by enlightenment and exceptional emotional well-being” (p. 157).

Bertrand Russell (1925) as follows: 1) a greater reality that is not perceived through the senses though with deep-felt emotion, 2) the total unity of all things, and 3) loss of space-time awareness.

William James (1997): 4) the noetic quality of a deep sense of knowledge and 5) alleged ineffability or the inability to adequately capture the experience in words.

6) sense of awe or sacredness, 7) paradoxicality, 8) impermanent duration, 9) continuing positive aftereffects, 10) a shift in identity, and 11) a sense of freedom (Riccardo, 1977).

“The people I know whose lives have been transformed by deep inner work have usually made persistent and sustained effort to live in accordance with what they have learned about themselves and the nature of consciousness. They are usually open to deep experiences, but do not seek them as ends in themselves” (Vaughan, 1995)

When people report transpersonal experiences, they often have a hard time explaining the experience in words (R. M. Anderson, 1977; Welwood, 1977).

“an intensification of conscience and empathy; a reduction in narcissistic or egocentric values; a massive decrease in anxiety and depression; and an upsurge in self-esteem, hope, and initiative” (Haartman, 2001, p. 813).

Unitive experiences are not transformative in and of themselves but do provide a catalyst for the person who is ready for change (Haartman, 2001).

This gradual integration of the transformative experience over time by re-experiencing God’s presence in all things and knowing God’s complete acceptance and mercy in all things allowed people to investigate their own psychological responses to this knowledge and transform (Haartman, 2001)

ecstasy experience as researched by Laski (1961) includes but is not limited to the mystical unitive experience.

The hard lines around one’s individuality are gone

A feeling that this does touch reality

Allied to this thing of completeness, wholeness, other forms of so-called reality are not wholly real, only particles of reality

All creation comes into harmony

Time seems to stop, no, not matter

You're not anywhere, and despite not feeling anywhere in particular, feeling in unity with everything—no, not with everything, with nature  
 A complete absence of a sense of specific time and place, complete involvement of one's whole being, at the same time a loss of the sense of being yourself  
 Feeling of oneness with the totality of nature  
 Sudden sense of certitude about nothing  
 You don't feel yourself, away from yourself  
 It sort of overwhelms you, it hits you, and it's all powerful . . . An unbearable knowledge of the reality of things

(Merkur, 1999)

The whole world turned into one: one entity  
 No euphoria, no colors, just a deadeningly sure oneness  
 I saw nothing but was that oneness, empty of content and feeling.  
 Did not think in terms of God or fulfillment, but was struck by the fact that I had not known this oneness before.

Ecstatic feelings of joy and love (Carlock, 2003)

### *Authenticity*

William Kueppers (2004)

Authenticity is discerned by assessing internal feelings and body cues  
 Pressure enables people to overcome fears of acting authentically  
 Outcomes of authentic behavior were perceived as strongly life enhancing  
 Inauthentic behaviors were reported to be life diminishing in the short term but life promoting in the long-term because of growth from these experiences.

Kernis (2003)

Greater self-reported authenticity was related to higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction.  
 Greater behavioral authenticity related to higher levels of self-esteem and less contingent self-esteem  
 Greater relational authenticity relates to higher life satisfaction and less negative affect.  
 Components of authenticity are as follows:  
 Self-awareness,  
 Unbiased processing of positive and negative aspects of self,  
 Acting in accordance with one's own values,  
 Valuing and achieving openness and truthfulness in one's relationships.

(Rahilly, 1993)

Intensity, hyperbole  
 Heightened awareness of somatic experience, total embodiment  
 Fully present and aware of experience  
 Cognitive processes stop, elimination of judgments, ego dissolution

Ineffability, use of metaphor  
 Expressive behavior  
 Reverence, awe  
 Heightened awareness of interpersonal relationships  
 Precipitated by honest, candid communication  
 Sense of moving in and out of the experience  
 Timelessness  
 Important or peak experience  
 A shift, a breakthrough or a culmination of an awaited experience  
 Otherworldliness, ethereal, dreamlike quality  
 Authentic experience is no less authentic for being negative in nature

Rogers (1965)

Openness to experience  
 Trust in one's organism,  
 Internal locus of evaluation  
 Willingness to be a process

Bugental (1965)

The authentic person is broadly aware of himself, his relationships, and his world in all dimensions.

The authentic person accepts and seems to go to meet the fact that he is constantly in the process of making choices, that decisions are the very stuff of living.

The authentic person takes full responsibility of his decisions, including full recognition of their consequences.

Susan Harter (2002)

Being able to voice one's true thoughts, feelings, and opinions

Being both autonomous and connected to the other is associated with greater authenticity

### *Authenticity in Spiritual Experiences*

Patricia Moorehead (2001)

an emphasis on community,  
 experiences of interior and exterior suffering,  
 a search for life's meaning and purpose,  
 the value of solitude and silence,  
 the integration experienced in embodiment, and  
 an aesthetic sensitivity to beauty  
 experience of the holy in ordinary events and in day-to-day activities of life  
 (Moorehead, 2001).

Moorehead (2001) says this inner authority is in response to a call, to an inner authority and is an integrity of self that carries over into other areas of life.

With each authentic response, the deeper Self within the coresearcher achieved more prominence. Facing external opposition, the coresearchers exhibited at times almost a tolerance for scorn. It was more important for them to be true to themselves than to external authority

Surrender to the Divine as seen by Moorehead's coresearchers was an active surrender, moving forward and letting go of the results.

Marsha Sinetar (1986)

Ordinary people who were on mystical paths grow in self-awareness and over time they become more and more directed by inner truths with greater discernment for what is real and what is dishonest.

These people are autonomous and authentic persons who are adaptable to making life changes and illustrate what it means to be intuitive or capable of listening to their inner voice. "Each has at least a high enough degree of self esteem that he is willing to act on behalf of what is, for him, real and worthwhile. Each also has the self trust and self reliance to know what he is about as a person, to identify—perhaps even speak up for and act out—what is valuable, what he aspires to, what is meaningful" (Sinetar, 1986, p. 137).

(Baruss, 1996).

The struggle for the truly authentic person is to shift the locus of control from the external social sphere back towards the internal self (Baruss, 1996).

The practice of authenticity requires deliberate, persistent effort (Baruss, 1996). Synthesizing and creating harmony between elements of the self that are not acting in accord with one's self-knowledge is the consistent practice.

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (1993) describes this experience of the mystic as living in two worlds or having a foot in two different worlds—one in the transcendent spiritual dimension and one in the common everyday world.

Richard Moss

Two dominant forces were operating. First, there was the radical change in my own consciousness—recognized as both an awakening and a death process—which generated enormous "highs" as well as fear, and which my previous motives and philosophies were inadequate to resolve. Second, there was a sense of integrity that demanded that I be the living representative of what I taught others or else neither truth nor true healing was being offered. It became a journey of almost brutal self-honesty, one of opening the heart and discovering a quality of love that is not housed in the dreams and ideas of the personal me. The love emerged as the old me fell away. It was and is a love that demands a new quality of awareness not based on an egocentric selection process that wants to allow only the ego-sustaining forces into the foreground of awareness" (Moss, 1981, pp. 3-4).

Tillich (1952) shares the joy of living authentically before God and man:

“Joy accompanies the self-affirmation of our essential being in spite of the inhibitions coming from the accidental elements in us. Joy is the emotional expression of the courageous ‘Yes’ to one’s own true being.”

Potter (2004)

A *direct path* is “a spiritual path which eventually pulls the aspirant out of all cultural religious forms. The person on the direct path must then integrate a noncultural transcendent realization into their everyday cultural existence” (Potter, 2004, p. 215). In comparison, a *balanced path* is “a spiritual path that seeks truth along traditional lines and stays within the wide parameters of a religious tradition.” (Potter, 2004, p. 215)

Jaoudi (1998)

“We encounter God’s Beingness. We come face to face ontologically with Being Itself as the first and last, the eternal and most present. We have come to experience the image and likeness of God in all creation, including our own body and mind, as well as diaphanous being translucent in flowers, birds, and the cosmos. We have been transformed through God’s grace, recognizing our individual identity in a new role grounded in mirroring reverential values and goals . . . . We are ready to recognize God’s Being ‘whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere.’” (Jaoudi, 1998, pp. 99-100)



## Appendix G: Instructions to Resonance Panel

Dear [name of person],

Thank you for agreeing to be a resonance panel member for my dissertation. This project entails three steps: reading the transcripts sent to you (three to five interviews), creating a list of themes that you find in the transcripts, and reviewing the list of themes that I have found to see which of these resonates with you as well as which ones do not.

When I read through the transcripts to look for themes, I set aside a space and time particularly for this purpose and prayed for clarity and insight for my work. I encourage you to set a separate space for this work away from other matters of the world to do this project. It is just fine if your space doesn't look like mine. The intention of holding a committed, interested, and open space is the goal.

I would ask that you not read my list of themes until after you have read through the transcripts and come up with your own set of themes. I am interested in any part of your process or any of your ideas that you would like to share with me. You are one of my checks and balances in this dissertation, and I appreciate your work and input.

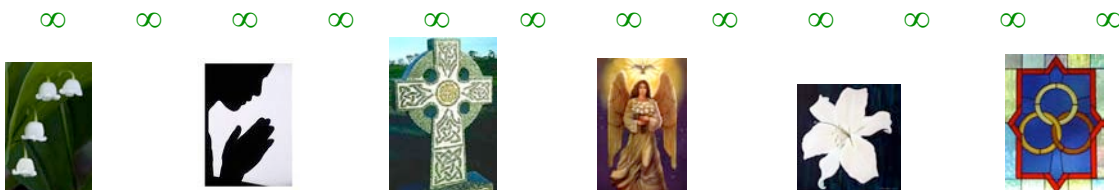
Please do not hesitate to call if you have questions. My number is 650-xxx-xxxx or email at [aperriwinkle@yahoo.com](mailto:aperriwinkle@yahoo.com).

Sincerely,

Allison Perry

## Appendix H: Recruitment Flyer

# CALLING PROTESTANT CHRISTIANS



**HAVE YOU HAD AN EXPERIENCE OF BEING ONE WITH  
GOD FOR JUST A MOMENT OR SENSED THE  
CONNECTION AMONG ALL THINGS?**

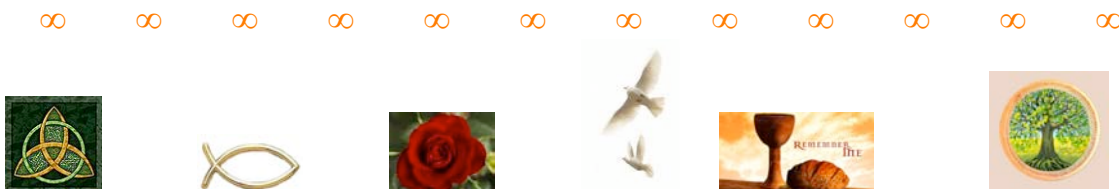
**WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED ABOUT  
THIS EXPERIENCE AND HOW IT HAS AFFECTED YOUR  
LIFE?**

I am a graduate student working on my dissertation and need more participants. My dissertation is titled *Does a Unitive Mystical Experience Affect Authenticity? An intuitive inquiry of ordinary\* protestants*. There are many different kinds of unitive experiences although I have only mentioned two above. Please know that all unitive mystical experiences are accepted in this study. Participants must be Protestant Christians \*who are not in full-time ministry.

I am currently doing interviews, so please contact me if you are interested. I will gladly email you more information on this intriguing study. All information will be held as confidential.

**Allison Perry**

Contact Info



## Appendix I: Interview Transcripts

### *Anna's Interview*

Anna: In January 1982 the world changed, and you can only tell about the moment of change by describing the before and after. The line between the arm and the hand is the wrist. The wrist isn't anything in and of itself except for the demarcation of the line for what went before and after. So this moment was a profound experience, that on the surface of it, is a big deal, but underneath the surface, what is important is what is happened before and after.

I have always wanted to have a child, and I agreed to marry my husband because he wouldn't have a child with me unless we were married. He is a Zen Buddhist priest and he had gone off to Japan to complete his training so that he would be back when the baby came. So here I am pregnant and in Hawaii and very happy. I am doing my exercises and being careful about what I eat. I gloried in being pregnant. And then I noticed that I wasn't feeling as many sensations and I got worried. Finally they did an ultrasound. The technician wouldn't tell me what was going on. I asked if it were good news or bad news. But he wouldn't tell and said something like well that is up for you and your doctor to decide. And I thought "twins"! My husband had only wanted one child but I had wanted two. I thought if I had twins I would only have one pregnancy and have two kids, what could be better?! All along the midwife had told me that the condition of my baby was incompatible with life, which a strange way to say, "Your baby is going to die." I had someone who spoke Japanese call my husband at his Zen monastery in Japan. Actually, we reached him just in time before a week long retreat for him to return to the U.S., and we decided to let nature take its course. It did, my waters broke, and I gave birth to a stillborn child. (Pointing to her picture) These are little tiny fingers and little tiny fingernails. At this time I saw earth and creation and all the things that birth was. This perfection that came out of my body, but at the same time she was so imperfect that she couldn't survive. I knew then in a way that I hadn't known before that life and death, perfection and imperfection was part of a single whole that all fit together. They weren't separate, I saw that my perfect and imperfect child could be both at the same time, that life and death could happen instantaneously. So that was *before*.

Afterwards, I smelled the fresh cut grass in a way that I had never smelled before, and I thought, "My child will never smell fresh cut grass." I also felt textures and thought that she would never feel these textures. I saw a rainbow, and it made me cry because I saw it with new eyes, and I knew that she would never see it. Life was more vivid.

This is representative of my daughter's grave, which is a mass grave for babies that were dissected after death to see if they can figure out what went wrong. There's no cross on it. Death became a part of life at that point for me. It was no longer a separate thing. There was no longer a line between life and death or perfect and imperfect. It was before and after. At this time, I would never have known that this vividness would lead me on a religious path. I didn't at first call the moment a religious experience; I had no words for it. But I did find a religious home and I became a Christian and now understand the Cross

as being that perfection and imperfection, life and death, part of the whole. I describe this “*after*” experience as walking with God. When things didn’t seem to go together, I would always look for the bigger truth where it did all come together. That is the mystical experience for me. When things like life and death that seem pretty incompatible become part of a single whole.

So I told my story even though I was just supposed to talk about my picture.

Me: That’s ok. I now have a few questions that I’m going to ask. If you feel like you have already answered a question, please feel free to say so, but I will just go through all of them and let you answer or add more to your story as you wish.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable.

Anna: I don’t think I understood when I experienced it, that the oneness was about God and me. I saw it as a oneness--life and death, perfect and imperfect. This was the reconciliation of opposites into a singular bigger truth--something that could hold all of it. I began to describe it as walking with God. I didn’t then describe it as being one with God, but as I met others who spoke the language of mysticism and who were able to describe my experiences, I came to see it as not just in terms of unity of opposites. I have a math and science background and I was thinking in terms of logic. The logic of the opposites come together and makes a bigger truth. It was more personal and more universal. The divisions between me and other people and God were as arbitrary as the divisions of life and death, between before and after. Of course I still do it, but that is beside the point. It would be much later that I would describe it in that kind of oneness language that I think you are getting at.

Me: Did you have an experience of coming back to yourself and if so, what was that?

Anna: I didn’t come back to myself, I found myself. I never have gone back to being who I was before. My habits, ways of thinking, ways of acting in the world fall back into old habits, but I’m not that person anymore. So, no, I have not come back to my old self, I have come into my new self.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience and how?

Anna: I saw the whole world differently. The difference that I saw in myself was that I was awake to it. I have a disability and not feeling my body has been a way to deal with chronic pain for me. I felt myself differently. I experienced scents in a heightened way. People told me that it could not have been fresh cut grass in the middle of winter, but I know it was. I think someone was trying to sell their house and tidied up or something. The colors were different. I mean I thought my life was in full color, but I was changed and I saw it as an awareness change. Ultimately, it was a gradual process through a series of mystical experiences all of which I’d love to tell you about. I learned trust. I learned self forgiveness. I learned to change my mind and not try to defend who I used to be.

There have been so many changes over the last 25 years. Did they all happen that moment? No. But, they all started that moment.

Me: In what way does this effect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Anna: I don't see these as separate as I did before. It varies from day to day. But when I'm in touch with the inward guide that might be called Holy Spirit or the Inward Christ, if I am in touch with that part of me which is in direct connection with God, I am less anxious. I am more honest. I am pretty honest all the time sometimes uncomfortably so. Different things are important to me. I want to live my life in right relationship with the world. This includes environmental issues, the people who make my clothes whether they are children and ill treated, or with people who are suffering from war, the people who have AIDS. It is hard for me to stay isolated. And yet on a day to day basis, the most significant question that I ask myself is about love. "What is the loving thing to do in this situation? What can love do to this situation? How can I express love in the here and now?" Sometimes I ask myself this question, "Does this come from fear or from love?" Overall, I am bold and fearless, though this is only sometimes true.

Me: In what way does this experience not affect you?

Anna: It hasn't changed who I am in terms of personality, preferences, and strengths and weaknesses. I am still disabled. I still get grouchy. I still think very logically. I still problem-solve in a mathematical way. I am still very maternal, which is where all of this began. To people who are children, I have a maternal instinct. I am still an introvert. I am still very human. That hasn't changed.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Anna: I think that I have answered this some, but I would like to add. The conflict between my husband and I at that time was about politics and religion. We were both political but he was also very religious and I was not. In our relationship, I constantly asked, "If you feel a conflict between your religion and your politics where will you go?" I knew, whether he would admit it or not, that he would go to his religion. And since the religion was not what we shared but the politics was, that was not very reassuring to me. I was very anxious about that. And he chose very specifically to marry me prior to his ordination as a Zen Buddhist priest. So I went through this experience with his beliefs as a door into things that I didn't understand. I could have cited to you some of the Zen beliefs but they didn't mean anything to me. When he was in Japan, he had a dream where the child that I was going to have appeared to him as a 4-year-old child and told him "I am going to die." So when he received the phone call, he already knew. The fact that he knew--that was something that helped draw me across the boundary of believing in religious experiences. I did not use to believe that you could know things like that. I didn't get that. Looking back all of the people that I fell in love with were more religious than I was. Well, not all, but a lot. I think it was God's way of making me ready for this opportunity when it came around.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you see as your next step?

Anna: Sure. Life is about spiritual growth. My theme this year was love. “Let us see what love can do.” I feel like that has become a solid part of my life, so the next theme is going to be something different. I spend a lot of time doing care giving—taking care of my mother, my nephew for my brother is widowed, my wife who is mentally ill, and the people in meeting, and so on. It is not that those things are wrong. They feel solid to me. I don’t know if I have an answer about the next step, maybe more of the same. I have started meeting with a group of spiritual friends and we hold one another accountable for our spiritual lives. I sometimes teach spiritual things. I write spiritual things. I might take up writing again. I used to write a lot, but I stopped. I wrote a daily devotional and wrote about 48 weeks out of 52 weeks of the year of this daily journal that people could read, discuss, and answer questions. I got to the editing point and I stopped. When I had to go back through the editing process, I stopped because I realized that it was more important to me to be writing because it was part of my spiritual practice. I may never pull that thing back together. I thought that is what I was working on, but I was really just working on myself. But I have had an article published this month and one last month. I may write more. I don’t know yet. I have been asked to write more by this publication, *Friends Journal*. So I may write more. I just don’t know yet. As the Spirit leads, we say.

Me: Is there anything that you would like to add?

Anna: I want to talk about my other experiences. I had an experience in meeting for worship. I had had an experience where I had done something wrong. I was fretting about something and feeling very vulnerable. I believed that God loved me but how? Why? And someone spoke in meeting about her experience. She was dying of cancer and spoke of the love she was feeling from the people who were giving care to her. Then we sang this song . . . “More Love:” *Alone by its power, the world we shall conquer*. I don’t have the words right but nonetheless we sang. And that folded into my meditations. I was thinking about Christ on the cross and what was the Jesus part of God’s unconditional love? In a human sense, Jesus was a complete failure. His disciples didn’t get what he was trying to teach. He ends up dying. On the face of things, he was a failure. At the same time, he was perfect. This goes back to the imperfect and the perfect of the first experience that I talked about. And I started thinking about forgiveness and how forgiveness makes one loveable. This is the dance that takes you from a fallible human to an experience of unconditional love. And I had this experience. This tingly feeling came over me of unconditional love that encompassed me. I wanted to describe it, but couldn’t find words. I thought back to a time we were gathered 4 to 5 months before with another branch of Quakers where they were singing a song about being “washed in the blood of the Lamb.” I thought at the time, “I can’t sing this. It’s gory and sticky.” But I stood up in meeting on that day of my experience and said, “I’ve been washed in the blood of the Lamb.” This was the experience that I had had. They thought I had gone crazy. They didn’t say that, but that is what they thought. They love me, but they think that I’m a little nutty. That is an example of another experience.

Another experience that I had was a dream. I had a child that was born after the first one died. I adored her, of course, and I still do. I gave up my career as a lawyer to stay home with her. And later, when I went back to work, I became a teacher, teaching math, which I had always loved. But in my dream, my daughter was 3 or 4 and I put her on a city bus. The bus goes off and I panic. I had not told her where she is going, and I had made no arrangements for anyone to get her. I panic, and my car won't start. I can't get the right phone number. And all those terrible things that happen in dreams . . . Finally, I get to the bus and the doors open and I get to my daughter. I say, "Were you terribly worried because you didn't know where to get off?!" And she said, "No, Mommy, you put me on the bus, I knew you would make arrangements to get me off. I wasn't worried." And when I woke, I came to me that this was a dream that was a message to me. I had had this leading or urge to have weekly potlucks in my home to gather community together. My husband said, "Why, what do you want to accomplish?" And I didn't know. I didn't have a goal in mind. I just wanted to do it. The dream told me that the kind of faith that my daughter had in me in the dream was the kind of faith that I could have in God. That if God said, "Start the potlucks" that I could get on the bus and start having the potlucks and when I got to where I needed to be, God would make arrangements for me to get off the bus, and I would know. So I started the potlucks. They went on every Tuesday night for over a year. I would make a main dish and everyone else would bring something. Some people were regular and others just dropped in periodically. There came a time when I knew it was done. I still didn't know why—why it had started or why it was done. My husband left me. I joined a new subgroup of Quakers that were forming a meeting and helped start that. A year later, at a Quaker sharing session, someone asked, "What drew you to this meeting?" And ten out of twelve people said something about me and those potlucks having formed a sense of community and wanting to be more a part of that. The Meeting grew out of that, and I had no way of knowing that at the time of the leading to get on the bus (start the potlucks). So that is the trust. It changed my life. So I don't always understand the leadings, but I just need to be obedient.

The teaching experience is one where I went through a discernment process where I decided to become a math teacher. It was something that I had always wanted to do, but a woman couldn't get into graduate school in those days because I couldn't get a recommendation. The department people said that there were too many men who needed that recommendation. So I became a lawyer because I was mad. But when I decided to become a teacher, it was awful. It was really hard. I was not a good teacher. It was not natural to me. I had to really work at it. I would have quit if it were not for the discernment process and feeling like God had put me on this path of a teacher. So, I kept working at it, and I became a very good teacher. More than half of the people who become teachers quit within 5 years. But it was my religious sense that God had called me to this that kept me from going this route. I stuck with it and became a really good teacher.

In a Quaker's women's group, we were discussing a passage that essentially said that God is more important than the family. Essentially what I understood was that Jesus said, "Leave your family and follow me." I had lost a child and it was just so horrible to me that this passage was saying that I should abandon my family to follow God. Who

thought that I would put God before my child? One woman who was Catholic said to me that “Jesus could have been wrong.” I knew that I was a Christian in that moment. Because it wasn’t an option to me that Jesus was wrong. I didn’t know that I believed in that way. I knew that there was something here for me to learn. It was not about rejecting it. I knew that I couldn’t pick and choose pieces of religion. I had to struggle with the hard parts to get the whole lesson. Not long after that, my beautiful baby girl age 4 was helping me to decorate the house for her birthday party. My husband, her dad, had just left me. She said that she didn’t want to help because her knees were hurting. I was pissed at her because we were doing this big deal. Then I looked at her knees and they were swollen and stiff, and I knew that she wasn’t well. She really hurt, so I took her in to the doctor. The doctor started asking questions. Does she bruise easily? I didn’t realize it at the time that they thought she had leukemia. They said that would like to keep her overnight for some more tests. So, I had to cancel her birthday party for the next day. So she spent her birthday in the hospital with her joints all swollen up. She had some bruises and she was quite sick. Driving home from the hospital I prayed and I said, “Oh God, I get it. She is of the world. She isn’t forever. You don’t have to take her away from me. I understand. I will put you first.” And she got better. There’s a part of me that says that was all hogwash, that I didn’t really make a bargain with God. But I do put God first. I came to understand that God is reliable and that human beings are not forever. They’ll not always be there. So that was a transition in my life.

The spring after the incident with my daughter, I went in for a routine pelvic exam. The doctor said, “Gee, your ovary is enlarged, we should have that checked out. Well, get a specialist to look at it, but it’s probably nothing. Are you having [this symptom or that symptom]? No? Well, it’s probably nothing, but we should schedule surgery 2 months out anyway.” I talked to my mother and she said, “Don’t wait.” My father, her husband, died of cancer. “Don’t wait.” So I called them back and said, “I can’t wait. It makes my mother too anxious.” They said, “Your doctor’s not available to do the surgery.” I said, “I don’t care. I’ll take who ever is available. I can’t wait.” So they put me on the schedule. I went to a meeting for worship before I went in. Everyone was talking about what kind of cut the doctor’s were going to make—whether I could wear a bikini or not. My friend Leah said, “Let’s not talk about that. Let’s talk about what if it is cancer.” It turns out that during the meditation that she had an image of this cancer growth pushing out of me. She was pushing back at it. She thought that I had cancer. And indeed it turned out that I had cancer. I had a fast growing kind of ovarian cancer that, had they waited, it would have been too late. They ended up having to do two surgeries. At first they thought it was a secondary site and went looking for the primary site. Then they determined it was the primary site, and they went back in to take both my ovaries and my omentum, and all this junk out. That ended any hope of having a second child and the children that I had always wanted that I talked about in the beginning of the interview. I had an experience of being *held* during recovery, of being held in community that made God’s love very real. It made it real enough that it made me diligent in building true community where you don’t rely on money and other things but you rely on one another. So I was cured of cancer and live to tell the story. So I wrote about community at that time and it fit into my ability to confront the not-inclusive Quaker community. I identified as bisexual and I had always identified as bisexual even when I was married to my husband. But there was the feeling



of “What are those bisexuals doing at our Lesbian and Gay gathering?” kind of going around. So I became a real advocate for including bisexuals and others however they identified sexually into the broader Quaker community. It was my leadership in this area, which made it safe eventually for a transgendered person to come out to our group, who we had not known about. Radical inclusion in community is what Jesus called us to.

Me: Do you have any comments about the experience today?

Anna: The starting meditation helped. At first, I thought, “Ok, hurry up; I know how to center.” But it was helpful. If you had let me talk first and done a picture second, I would not have done a picture. There was a real temptation to write rather than draw. But because you talked about it and showed me the colors and mentioned you would be doing it at the same time, it made it an invitation.

### *Bethany's Interview*

Me: Is there anything that you would like to share about your picture?

Bethany: The experience for me is very much a bodily, somatic experience. So this line sort of represents my skin, my body. There feels like a sort of energy emanating out from a core and then going out beyond my actual body. But it is connected and all the same. As I was writing, I was realizing that there are a lot of paradoxes. It is expansive. There is definitely a feeling of being connected to all. The feeling of the energy inside of me is continuing out and it is everything, and at the same time it makes me very aware of myself. Because there is so much energy, my body also feels very full, so I am very aware of my body and where my body is and the boundaries of it. At the same time, it is both energizing and inspiring, and calming. It feels like it is happening inside of me but it all around me.

Me: So tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable.

Bethany: It is hard to think back on just one experience. A lot of my early experiences happened fairly close together when I was a teen. The one that I think of most commonly was in the sanctuary of my church. It happened generally when the church is full of people during some service and generally when the congregation is all singing. It is a culmination of things. It is a feeling of being connected to all things. I can also get the feeling in nature, but it almost always happens with other people, when there is a feeling of connectedness with a group that is meaningful to me and I feel like we have some sort of common purpose that is greater. It doesn't always happen in church, but it did many times. Again, these are my earlier experiences in my church. There is not a distinct beginning and ending for me. I know what it is like when I am not in it but it is more like a building of energy that comes to a clear experience and then it slowly fades away. There are times I am in it more fully and more powerfully and other times when I am a bit tapped in but it is not the same as a really full experience. I think that for the most part describes the oneness.

Me: Is there any correlation between the music and the beauty in nature or the group energy in church or being alone in nature?

Bethany: Music is big for me and continues to be whether or not it is spiritual music. It invokes a certain energy in me that takes me to that space if I allow it, it can take me to that place. Then with people or alone in nature—When I am with people, I am more than me. When I am with nature, I feel like I am a part of this. So all three things, the music, groups of people that are congregated for a meaningful purpose, and nature are all cues into me about something greater than myself.

Me: Tell me about coming back to yourself after the experience.

Bethany: It is gradual, but generally it is up to several hours or days after the experience. The experience can be from just moments to half an hour. A couple of times it has lasted a day or two. Depending on the experience it can take more or less time to come out of it. I feel inspired. I feel more cued in to my connection to Spirit, the world, and nature. Even after I feel more Spiritually conscious. That can slowly dissipate and come and go for the rest of my life. It definitely has that effect for a while whether it is hours or days afterwards.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience? If so, how?

Bethany: Yeah, now, I've had enough of these experiences that they influence me maybe more subtly now except for some of the big experiences. But my early experiences in my teens a lot of my peers were with me in my youth group. We were allowed to ask a lot of questions about spirituality and religion. The youth director allowed a lot of that. I felt that where other people were really questioning it and not really feeling it that part of me was happy and felt special that I was experiencing these things. At the same time there was no peers or anyone really that I could share my experiences with. I felt silly, was labeled overly emotional or sappy and told that there was no actual deeper experience. So sometimes there are a lot of questions. But, it definitely led me towards a path of constant seeking of spirituality in my life. I majored in psychology in college, but the longer I was there I knew I wanted to learn more about religion and spirituality. I took a lot of religion classes, and then I went on the journey that eventually led me here to a school that embraces the study of spirituality and psychology. This is a place where spirituality has a place in my psyche and I can look at how that affects other's psyche. It is what I'm interested in thinking about. It is hard thinking about how spirituality has affected me. It affects everything to one degree or another.

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Bethany: It inspires my social and political actions because of feeling connected to other human beings, that sense of us all being part of one family. The environmental crisis, just that scientifically we are all a part of the same thing. It inspires a lot of the energy and action that I do. I think it helps me to have a place that I can relax into if I am feeling

stressed or overwhelmed or feeling negative emotion to be able to ground myself in a sense that everything is ok that there is a sense of something much larger here. It provides a very grounding function for me. I go through a lot of confusion or struggle around balancing wanting to be more in that space more of that time and getting very much caught up with the mundane day to day life. I feel torn and pulled to differing ways of how to bring things together and find meaning and purpose in mundane life.

Me: In what way does it not affect you?

Bethany: I think that the only way that it doesn't affect me is when I'm really disconnected from it when I am immersed in mundane life and not tapping into that part of me. Other than that it is a part of my career as a transpersonal psychologist. It is part of my interactions with human beings, my friends and family, my partner. It absolutely affects my everyday life—sometimes conscious and sometimes not, but it is definitely a part of who I am.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Bethany: It was not just one particular experience, but in my teen years basically 15-17, my parents were going through a lot of marital struggles. At 15, my father was diagnosed with bipolar disorder so that was a big event. Those were two big challenges in my life. There were also lots of positive things. I was coming from a middle class background. I had a good church community that was stable in my life. It was like an extended family to me. I went to the same church from when I was 5 and was always involved in children's and youth things. I was taking more leadership roles in the church and becoming more involved. I was beginning to own my leadership skills.

Me: If you feel like you are on a path of spiritual growth, what do you feel like is your next step?

Bethany: I have wanted to do this for a while but have been procrastinating-- some small sort of spiritual practice. Whether it is 10 minutes of meditation or sitting in nature or just picking something as a way to more consistently tune into that place inside of me.

Me: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Bethany: I turned in a reflection paper yesterday for a class. Coming to this school, I thought that was an automatic way to combine my spirituality with being an academic. I thought I would be surrounded by like-minded people and it would just happen and I would have all these options and things to explore. Honestly, I feel like over the last 4 years that I have gotten less and less and less involved with regular spiritual activities.

Me: Do you have any comments about this experience today?

Bethany: It was positive. I haven't really thought about or talked about these experiences. It becomes a bridge for myself . . . that sense of being connected and how it has

influenced me now. The core of it is still the same for me. Also doing the creative expression was good. I notice in my picture that this is a common theme in my creative expression. It is interesting. I wonder how much tapping into my creativity is also tapping into this same thing, this experience, and this feeling.

*Carlos's Interview*

Me: Would you like to tell me about your picture?

Carlos: This represents two unitive experiences that happened within a year of one another. This represents a piece of mother earth and the matrix of the rock. I was praying down on the earth. There were these moss and lichens down on the ground. I tried to show the color spectrum that shows the earth energy of that experience. This other picture is when I heard the audible voice of God. These lines show how the energy was coming through the rocks and the moss. My perception of physical reality seemed to be enhanced--a dropping of my comprehension of my physical surroundings into a spiritual matrix. Rather than seeing a rock as a rock, I saw it as a life form that it is and the oneness of the physical realm and how the energetic realm is contained in the physical realm. The way that we understand energy by the spiritual connection to all that is around us. This is a stream of a flow that I felt like I was in--it had a freedom when I got to this place of understanding. I was praying and asking specific questions about Jesus Christ being the Savior or just a historic character. When I got to a place of understanding, my energy that had a damn on it was just gone. I was in a place of no anxiousness or nervousness, no conflicting energies inside of me. It felt like flow and freedom. When I think of freedom, I think of zero gravity, this real buoyancy. That is kind of what this starburst of energy represents. It is a burst of energy that moves out equally in all directions. It is both within me and outside of me. That had something to do with the sound that was not a part of the earth matrix. The sound was on a different plane. It was a tone. A pure tone like a high-pitched bell, like a wine glass hum. It reminds me of a crystal vibrating like a crystal bowl singing. This purity of tone was throughout the air, throughout the earth, and throughout my being, it was all unified in this same tonal experience. There was also this earthy, dry, sandy smell or dried grass. The aspects of all the worlds were there in that experience. It was a unity of sensory stimuli that my awareness was able to dissolve away from myself and into this experience of oneness.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable to you.

Carlos: So I was asking questions and praying about Christian dogma and wondering about spiritual link up with the divine and how to do that. I felt like I wasn't getting the connection that I was seeking from my Christian experience at the time. The interesting thing that happened was that I was specifically praying to Jesus Christ saying that "I feel like I get this understanding of communing and praying directly to the source of creation not necessarily directly to you. But I don't want to be disrespectful to you or who you are, so am I looking at this right? Am I supposed to pray to you or the source to link up in a spiritual way?" In my heart, I felt like I should pray to the Almighty Being. In my own

interpretation, it was my understanding that what Jesus is sometimes speaking is that we should not credit him but that he is simply pointing the way. He is saying my way is the way in Hebrew not I am the way. A voice came to me saying, "You are on the right track." Then out of nowhere silence. All the plants and animals stilled for a moment in total silence. Out of that silence, I heard the voice.

The other experience happened after the first. It was indoors and has to do with the starburst of energy that I drew. This was about 6 years after the first experience. I had just gotten back from a family visit in Pennsylvania. At the time, I did not like traveling on planes, trains, or any of it. It was a really big deal when I made it home to my apartment. It was my first time to ever have my own place by myself. Before that I was living an outdoor life or living in my music studio. So when I got home, I had a total removal of the visual perception of the walls and floor. I was sitting on the floor but I was also at the same moment I could see myself suspended in space. I could see through the walls of the apartment with stars all around. I seemed as if I was floating in the ether. I knew I was sitting inside but I couldn't really see inside. I was surrounded by stars all around me. There is a link between that experience of losing myself in physical place, with the experience of finding myself within part of a pure tone of life-force energy of everything on the mountain. I had an experience of feeling my own ego dropping away in both of the experiences. These experiences pushed my intellectual edge in being able to grasp what I was experiencing. There is a certain fear factor that requires a letting go of the parameters of understanding or the egotistical view of the experience that has to drop off. That was a common thread of the two experiences. I felt like in the letting go, I could be a part of the oneness. There was a resonance that was self-sustaining that I became aware of.

Me: Tell me about coming back to yourself after the experience.

Carlos: In the mountain experience, what I felt going through the meditation was this feeling of sheer joy. Yes! I can just be free in this. It was this blissful freedom, this lack of attachment, stress, or distraction. In the room experience, it was a little scary and intense. I first realized that I am here physically where I am, but I am also everywhere expanding out from here. There is the possibility of traveling through time and space that with intentional affection my perception and outlook that I can choose where I am in that expansion and how I see myself as part of that expansion. The scary thing was having awareness of a totally different set of rules on reality or parameters on reality. It felt like I could just flip over and become a part of this other set of parameters and not be a part of this set of parameters anymore. That could be like a time keyhole that could lead to a whole other realm.

Me: So when did you notice yourself coming back to this state of parameters? How long after the experience was it?

Carlos: Two or three hours went by I think. And on the mountaintop experience, I just laid on the mountain for a while just taking it all in. I don't think I moved for a couple of hours.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience and if so, how?

Carlos: I saw myself as actually having a place. It gave me more self-confidence. It put me in a deeper state of self-understanding. It also had the effect of alienation because I thought that no one will understand this or is too heavy for most people to grasp. I can see that now as a saboteur voice. There were two sides to the experience. I have this new perception, but it has this side of darkness because of the difficulty of understanding it.

Me: In the second experience, did you see yourself differently after this experience and how?

Carlos: The difference would be that I actually had more self-respect and a connection to something divine and recognizing that I am a part of that. In a really simple way, I just felt better about myself.

Me: In what way does this experience affect your inner and outer daily life?

Carlos: I started a spiritual practice of chanting a psalm every morning or a song of praise to the Divine Being. I wanted to enhance the link up that I had through that experience. That was a huge shift in feel a sense of purpose in life. I felt satisfaction with my identity. I have not been perfect with all of this since then. But coming from a place of being very rooted in Christianity and having the questions of agnosticism before these experiences. I didn't feel like I had a live handle on how to connect to God before these experiences.

Me: In what way do these experiences not affect you?

Carlos: I feel like it has a pretty comprehensive effect. I notice a difference in my sleep after that. My whole resonance was different. But I still keep my pattern of working and living from day to day. I still have the same needs of the corporeal world and life and society. It didn't affect that I still eat, drink, and sleep and self-sustenance. But then again it has because as I refine my spiritual quest and spiritual walk I can bring myself to a higher level of existence in the day to day. That is what it is all about, so I think it has touched my life in all aspects or depths of it.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Carlos: In the first one, I was playing music and spending a lot of time with this group of musicians. Some of us had been living together. The band was breaking up and the housing situation was breaking up. Everything that I had placed my hopes and dreams in for that time in my life was evaporating. So I had a feeling of loss of direction and a feeling that my dreams weren't important. What was becoming important to me was seeking unto this spirituality and carving out a space to be able to commune with the Divine. So it was a big shifting of priorities and also a time of declaring my independence in another way of stepping out of codependent relationships in the band.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you see as your next step?

Carlos: Right now, because I have specific assignments for my spiritual path, it is to complete those. The next step is to continue challenging myself to give back more from my mind, emotions, expressions, communication. I want to connect more and give back more about life, spirituality, and the magnificence of that. My pattern has been to keep it all in and not really let it out or go anywhere.

Me: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Carlos: Thanks for doing this; it is great to have the format to re-experience this. It was really powerful for me! Just the simple relaxation meditation working down the body was really good for me. It seemed pretty comprehensive. I think that's all.

### *Dixon's Interview*

When I was 5, I went to vacation Bible school where we tied two pieces of wood together in a cross and placed it in a cup of plaster-of-Paris to dry. I took it home to my mother who placed it in the kitchen window. Not long afterwards, a homeless man knocked on our back door asking for food. He said, "I knew that a good Christian woman lived here because I saw the cross in the window." I felt connected to the God of the Universe who guided this man to come past our house.

When I was 13 to 14, even though I was young, I was the organist for our Lutheran church. I had a key to the church, which was six blocks from our house. So I walked by myself to go practice. One night I remember coming home a bit later than usual after dark and feeling frightened. When I held out my hand, I could feel Jesus take it and hold my hand all the way home.

At age 19, I had a discussion with a Lutheran Minister who was also a professor at Valparaiso University. I shared a feeling about being called into ministry. At that time the Missouri-Synod Lutheran Church did not ordain women into ministry. While I felt the physical direction of my life change with a sense of a man-made barrier, I still felt profoundly connected spiritually with the unlimited God of the Universe.

About age 34, I was sitting in a Quaker Meeting with my children in silence when I felt a "knowing" from God. Afterwards I said, "I need to go see my Grandma." That was in August. In mid-October, my 8-year-old daughter and I set off from West Virginia, through Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois visiting friends along the way until we finally came to Des Moines, IA where we visited my grandma. In January, she had an unanticipated stroke, and in February, I went to her funeral.

When I was 54, I went to the West Virginia United Methodist Annual Conference where I accepted the Call to Ministry. It was a knowing again that God was calling me. However, subsequently the form and function of the call has changed from the organized church "God in a box" feeling -- about God being in the brick and the mortar which doors have closed very definitely at every juncture -- to a ministry that has yet to be revealed.

Now, at age 57, through a series of new acquaintances and their recommendations of good books and several experiences, I have come to know my version of Lynn Grabhorn's mantra that "From the God of the Universe, I AM . . ." and I slowly read the affirmations aloud and came to the most profound peace and "knowing." It seems kind of weird what I did next because I drove to the Social Security office and changed my last name to match that of my husband of 19 years.

After that time, I experienced a "convenient depression" like Norg talks about because while on Effexor, I was "free" from emotional upheaval. During this period, I read Abraham-Hicks which has brought me to a much more balanced understanding of knowing and belief in my oneness with God. This oneness for me was not an event but rather a remembrance of my existence with God that always was, is now, and always will be like Hebrews 13:8.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable to you.

Dixon: When you go to the bookstore, there is a section on religion and metaphysics. The more that I read the Bible, the more I come to see it as metaphysical, witches, casting out demons, coming back from the dead, etc. In my growing up, the things that couldn't be explained weren't talked about. Now I know God is in everything. I used to try to explain it with words but now I know it. The book *Sarah* by Esther and Jerry Hicks explains that energy will come and flow through you if your "valve" is open. Mine is open and has been most of my life. God stays there completely. When Peter was "wide open" he walked on water. When fear came and he "closed his valve" he began to sink. Now I stay in that connection.

Me: Tell me about coming back to yourself after the experience.

Dixon: Pick up the car keys, go to the Social Security Office, fill out the paper work. But even then it was like doing those things on a different plane.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after the experience? If so, how?

Dixon: Yes. I do things for different reasons. I make decisions based on this connection and in concert with the universe—continuity. I worry less about what people think. I understand more about "rejoice and be glad." The staying open and choosing to stay there is different now.

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Dixon: The difference between digital and analogue. Instead of distinct it is continuous with God. I am less ritualistic, less concerned about rules and how things "should" happen, and seeing things more as a continuous journey.



Me: In what way does it not affect you?

Dixon: I don't know that it can NOT affect me. Because I have a more balanced view of life and constancy, I don't look at problems much anymore.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Dixon: Six months before my experience, I left my teaching job that I was good at but tired of. I believe that God was looking out for my greater life. Retirement has been working at Wal-Mart, reading, reading, and thinking. I was not having to evaluate anyone anymore. I remember being mad at my husband for a series of things. I now don't make others responsible for me. Prior to this experience, I would hear "Jesus, God, and the Bible is all you need in your life." I didn't understand that like I do now. Now, I can appreciate and be grateful for the experience and it still sticks around. This is different from a mountain top experience that would leave when I came down off the mountain—it left but I didn't know why. This experience has grown through reading and understanding it more fully. "Ask and it will be given unto you." I have learned how to get from cognitive despair to joy. This way of thinking helped me get from emotional depression to greater stability. I feel like I have found the key to understanding life. I am integrated with God and God with me. I just don't see the separation anymore. I am not sad for anyone anymore. Everyone has a path and a journey.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you feel is your next step?

Dixon: For a long time, I thought I'd write a book. I just don't know what to write it on. I think I would like to "beam" more by letting the good feeling on the inside show more.

Me: Is there anything that you would like to add?

Dixon: I'm grateful for this experience.

Me: Do you have any comments about this experience today?

Dixon: I used to think that I was allergic to art and then I went to a creative expression workshop with my daughter. Today I drew snapshots of my life experiences.

### *Ellie's Interview*

Me: Would you like to tell me about your picture?

Ellie: I cannot draw what I want to. I simply saw this in my guided remembering. It is just what I experienced at that moment. I feel like this kind of image of swirling and blue was what I felt. It is not exactly what I saw. What I saw or imagined was a kind of cloud swirling white and blue that was fresh and clean.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable to you.

Ellie: I don't know how you say oneness. Well, I was very sick. I was paralyzed completely from the waist down at the age of 13. We were not Christians at that time. Somebody else told me about Jesus and God's call and the creation story and things like that. We have many prayer mountains in my native country. I was a junior high school student and somehow I gradually became paralyzed from the waist down. The doctors all gave up as to why it happened. They did not know at that time and I was discharged. Because they did not know why it happened everyone gave up. They just advised me to take vitamins and acupuncture, but nothing worked. So we all gave up. A Christian woman came and preached the gospel and asked me to go to Prayer Mountain with her. I was carried on a stretcher by people and we began to pray. There were a lot of people who came and worshiped together. I really did not know whether God is alive or God is real. I had never been to church at that point. My parents were Buddhist. But in my native country, if you don't go to church then you are Buddhist. Everyone is Buddhist. Like here Christian, it is just part of the tradition. My mother tried everything and gave up but she had never tried Christianity. The woman told her that Christianity might work--that she should appeal to God and pray. So my mom and me and this person went to the mountain together. I just wondered if God is real. I also decided that I might commit suicide because I could not imagine I would live like this. One day your legs are gone and you want to move and it doesn't work. I didn't want to live this way because it was also very painful. The doctors gave me sleeping pills but I saved them. I had enough to kill myself. So one day I decided to commit suicide, and that was my decision, secretly. But that day she preached the gospel and then I thought maybe God is real. I questioned to God. She asked me to pray. I asked if the Christian God is real then cure me. I did not know how to pray. So I just said in my mind and in my head. So then we went to a Prayer Mountain. We sang and prayed and nothing happened until Thursday. Then Thursday evening I wanted to pray honestly and I really wanted to reach God if God is real. So while everybody slept, I began to pray by myself. And before I knew it I had prayed for a couple of hours. I heard the bell ringing for the 5 o'clock morning prayer meeting. I was really surprised. What did I do? I felt caught by something. I opened my eyes and the world was colored differently and I began to see these trees and the leaves were individually bright. Things just looked different. Everything was just colored different. I was very happy. I was so happy. I felt some strength came back on my leg and I could stand up for awhile, but I could not walk. I could not stand up for long even against the wall because I would just slide down. I had no strength. It really was a miracle. Everything was different. I just felt that God was real and then I prayed to God. Oh, God, it is you and if you don't cure me from now on it is ok. It doesn't matter. If my legs are cured or not is not the matter anymore. If God is real, I don't need legs. Even though I'm paralyzed I can go on happily. I now have a really strong conviction that God is alive from that point. I decided to dedicate my life to God. I think that is the point that my life really changed.

Me: Did you have an experience of coming back to yourself? Was there a time when you felt that experience had a naturally ending to it?

Ellie: I had some weird feelings for a while. It lasted a couple of days or a week or something. Everything was totally different. It was like a different world and I was born into it. It took time but I don't know how long exactly but there was a gradual change. The color was just different. The person I became was different. I could see different ways. Everything was totally changed. People saw me as different. My mom said that my face was shining.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience and if so, how?

Ellie: Yes, Everything had been changed. Still I am self-centered but everything is just different. I became caring of others. I was also crippled. I talked to God that I have a conviction that you are alive and you are real. You don't have to cure me any more, crippled is ok. But every day my legs improved, and improved, day-by-day, bit-by-bit for several months. Then totally my legs were restored. Since then, they have never gone back up to this point. My family is very tall, but my legs are shorter. So sitting, I look very tall from the waist up, but standing I am very short because my legs are short. Because for one year of my life, my legs did not grow. This is sort of proof that I was paralyzed for 1 year and crippled. Through this period and from this moment of meeting God, I had a totally different perspective. My life went in a totally different direction.

Me: In what way did this experience affect how you now live your inner and outer daily life?

Ellie: It reminds me God is real. Because you cannot deny what happened that day. I still have a strong conviction. Everybody denies God's reality, but I cannot. God is real. You cannot deny what happened. Therefore, if God is real everything is different. All my life even right now after 44 years, from that point my life direction has been different. I dedicated my life. I went to seminary. I always know God is alive. So everyday daily life is different. My experiences have led me on my path to ITP. I was in a doctor of Theology program at Boston University, but it didn't speak to me. My husband was in a PhD program too at the time. He didn't get along with his chairperson, so he said he didn't want to finish his degree. So I said, "Oh good! I don't want to continue here." But I had a lot of scholarships, and the money helped our living expenses so I couldn't quit until he did. But I wasn't happy there until he quit. So the PhD program requires you to pour out your whole life for 5 or 6 years. But I didn't want to pour out for those things. It didn't really give me life. I started the doctoral program when I was about 45, very late. When I was in a ministry, I happened to meet Dwight Judy a faculty from ITP and a leader to our clergy at the retreat and I was fascinated with him. I asked him where he learned all of these things, and he said ITP. So he guided me to ITP. I thought if I have a chance to study more, I would really like this kind of program to make my life live not thinking, thinking. Then God gave me this opportunity and I came. Then my husband accused told me to go back to Boston University. Why are you wasting money and time? We were in Korea then. ITP was not well known in Korea at that time and it was not accredited at that time. I did not care. At my age I wanted to live and learn. It wasn't for the degree. It was also because I had this sort of mystical experiences that I wanted to

learn more about. And all the sudden I spoke tongues. These kinds of experiences and images that I shared with others and they could not understand and they laughed at me. In seminary when we studied for ordination, the teacher asked me “why do you want to be a pastor?” I said that through mystical experiences I really met God. And they just laughed at me. I decided I wanted to know more about these experiences.

I wanted to share with others who had these experiences. And ITP really guided me to a deeper level to dig into my tradition, which is Methodist. I met John Wesley through ITP. I put these things in my dissertation and things like that.

Me: In what way does this experience not affect you?

Ellie: Oh, I don’t know. It affects me all the time.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience

Ellie: Prior to this experience I was 12-years-old. I was just a simple girl. I did not know God. I was just a plain girl who lived in the countryside. I was learning about knowledge and learning to obey my parents and I did not have many dreams or anything. This experience made me want to dream and everything. Without this experience, I don’t know what my life would have been or what kind of person I’d be. I cannot imagine.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you see as your next step?

Ellie: I am very much in tune with contemplation and centering prayer. Taught by Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating. That is the direction I am in which is similar to Zen but in Christianity we have our centering prayer and contemplation. I am deeply involved in that area I translate books into Korean. I teach this prayer. I am so fascinated with this area. When I met Thomas Keating, I was really fascinated. Even though I was a Christian, I thought my prayer is not enough, but when I read him in May 1997, I thought, “This is it!” Since then, I have been practicing this. I think that these mystics really got me here and St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. They are my teachers and have guided me.

Me: Is there anything else about your experience that you would like to add?

Ellie: Reflecting on my 4 or 5 unitive experience with God, I am in him and he is in me. They seem to occur when I am having difficulties and praying. The second time about 36, I was in a place where I did not know what to do in a life situation and I was praying about what to do. The third time when I was 45, I was not in prayer. But, I had prayed about what was going on. I was really in distress and I was lying on my stomach in the living room when I heard a voice tell just very briefly and softly tell me “I love you.” I experienced enormous peace and I knew everything was ok. My energy or emotions were all of a sudden filled with peace and I understood that peace to be my own. That made a total change for me. Then I was guided at ITP and courses were changing and everything. My husband advised me even to go study further in America. I think that all these experiences were related to suffering in my life. Another time, I was praying with a group

of people and we were at the end of the group and all of a sudden I heard a voice inside of my heart say, “You are going to move to another church. You are not going to stay here.” I noticed my soul questioned to God then became where do I go? Do I have to leave? Where should I go? There were no answers. But one day I called the district superintendent of the Methodist Church. All of this process was just beautiful. He said, “I know where you should go.” I was invited to be a senior pastor at that church. I felt so abundant.

Me: Do you have any comments about this experience today?

Ellie: I haven’t been to this place of this experience for so many years. I just feel joy and gratitude. I don’t know how to express this gratitude. I am overwhelmed. Joy. Gratitude. Peace. Thanks for reminding me of this swirling. Now my daughter is very sick in the hospital, and I left a job to come help take care of her. It is so stressful now. And then you guided me into this experience again. I haven’t been there in so many years. It was so comforting and nice. I have never been to it for so many years. And then “your ok, your ok, your going to be ok” and then I just felt gratitude. I feel relaxed and peaceful.

### *Freya’s Interview*

Me: Is there anything you want to say about your creative piece?

Freya: There was a color when I went into my experience. It was the softest yellow. I went into the light, and it was the only thing you could see. I was like a light shining on me. I was not merging with God. I didn’t have a relationship with God. I was God. So this isn’t God and the other me, it’s neither. It was not a merging of two. I was God. Myself and the Divine is one. I realized that I had had it wrong all along. This book in the corner represents knowledge. It was flying out at me rapidly. There wasn’t anything I didn’t know. I understood everything. There wasn’t anything that I didn’t understand. There was no mystery. There was no doubt. When I was in it, all that I was thinking is “Oh, my God! There is only love.” Then, I could feel a little bit of the absence of it. That is all that we are experiencing on this planet, just a little bit of the absence of it. And without the absence of ANY of it, that is what you can experience and that is what you can experience and that is what you can know. And my body, and my soul, and my everything was brilliant.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable to you.

Freya: It is an interesting thing to have the mind that keeps it from me. I will try to explain this to you. It feels like it is not of my mind. I will try though . . . That feeling of oneness . . . It is total immersion in the most extensive, ecstatic love. It is far greater and more complete than anything that I had experienced on this material, earthly plane. It resembles it only in that earthly love is that limited aspect of it, but this Love is almost overwhelming. It filled up my body. Actually, I wasn’t in my body. I wasn’t a body. My body didn’t come with me. It was beyond my body. But that feeling of God was finally

real. It went beyond a mental concept and a touching of it here and there, to a total blending. I wish I could go back to the total experience, and speak from there. I am glad I had words that day. I remember saying, "All there is, is Love." Any sorrow or sadness is just that we can't feel that, and separateness is just that we can't feel that intense love. I remember when the tears were coming down my eyes, I didn't realize it 'till later, but it was so intense my body couldn't really hold it. The main thing that I realized was that I wasn't visiting God, or having a relationship with God, or blending with God, but I was God. That is the most beautiful . . . That the separateness is alive . . . There is a metaphor of a white light shining through a prism through the human body, and as it comes into the human body, the light refracts many different ways, and many different angles. Humanity is just that white light being turned into many different colors. I've seen that the Holy Spirit is really just the same. I realized that day that the only reason that we feel the Holy Spirit is different is because we think that it is outside of us and that it comes into us. What I realized that is different from any of the teaching that I had in church, that when we can quiet the mind, we can feel that we are it. When the mind is quiet and we can feel that we are this, we are brilliant? I had been meditating before my experience happened, and maybe I was meditating that day. It was a time in my life where I was starting to open up, but I don't think it was a cause and effect. I think we do these things and then the spirit just moves. I just popped into the experience. It was like walking through a cat door. There was nothing really that led up to it. I think it is just the way the Spirit works. I don't know how it works.

Me: So tell me about coming back to yourself after the experience.

Freya: I wasn't afraid. I didn't even go "Oh my God, look what I just experienced." I came back in an amazing calm. I told no one. I didn't share it for years. I walked around. I don't know if I had the time or just didn't do what I was supposed to be doing. It was many hours. I left the house. The fragrances were intense. I didn't know things could smell so strong. My senses were acute. My mind felt very quiet. My sensory perception was at its height. The birds, I could hear them as if they were sitting on my shoulder. I was like I was having this unitive experience with the birds, the plants, and the songs of the birds were as if I'd never heard them before. The one bird was singing to me as if he were following me around. The colors almost remind me of twilight, as the sun was setting. They were intense as if someone took the crayons and put this lavender color over my geraniums. The colors were Spectacular. I was like a little kid in the candy store, but I didn't have the awareness of what I was experiencing. I didn't know that until I came out of it. I didn't know "Did you hear that bird? Did you see those colors?" When I was in the experience, I was just in it. I remember sitting and just looking at my birch tree in the back yard. There wasn't the need to do anything. Just sitting was all I needed to do. The love that I felt lingered. It wasn't as strong, but it lingered. The knowledge went away. I don't remember what I knew. But I knew that I knew everything. That was the first thing to fade--that feeling of knowing everything. I remember when I started coming out of it in a few hours, was "What do I know?" That was the first thing to go. I couldn't remember what I knew. But the colors, the sound, the feeling of love that never totally faded. I think that that feeling of opening and love and feeling in my heart--the connection of all things, stayed. I noticed that there wasn't fear. That took a long time to

come back. There wasn't any insecurity or doubt or fear. Mostly I just wanted to sit and to have a mind that was quiet and observe.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience? And if so, how?

Freya: There's a part of me that I rejoined was a part of me that said, "Oh, I remember." I remember at 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. There was a part of me that has always been there. It is not like I've changed. It is that I've reremembered a part of me that has always been a part of me as a backdrop. There is more my personality, and then there is that which does not seem to change since when I was 4. I could feel her. And that is the part that I have reunited with. So I didn't change necessarily, I just brought an aspect of me out into the light a little bit again. Maybe my personality part didn't have the power and the control that it used to. Though over the years, those parts still struggle. Well, the personality still struggles. It always has the tendency to come back. It wants to be more present. I remembered all that I forgot, that I am all things are not separate, that God and Freya are not separate. I just remembered that again. I didn't necessarily have that experience when I was little, I WAS that. I WAS the God part. There was a bigger piece of this God part in me. It is the one that talks and it is the one that moves through the world. I realized that the personality piece was not a very big part of me. I realized that I was more that God part is a lot bigger. I realized that I was a lot more like that when I was a child. This personality piece started to take over more as I got older, but if I could reduce it back; there was that God part in me all along. It is child-like, not child-ish, but child-like. I could see a bird and not put that label on it as what kind it is, and just let it be without the labels. I didn't have "that is lavender. That is geranium." I just saw things as they were. I didn't have to label it. Now, I can quiet my mind, and just go into it. It seems like the labels that were between me and the flower or geranium have disappeared. All that I needed to do was to quiet my mind. I have been able to understand it a little bit more over the years. I had the experience, but it took me a long time to be able to put it in words. I just knew that "All there is, is Love. And there is the possibility to know all things." Over the years, I have started to be able to put words to it.

Me: In what way does this effect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Freya: I'll start with my inner life. I can inter into my daily life and be silent and have the connection of the unitive experience just by releasing or letting go or surrendering. It is a shift that is really subtle. I can just "let go." It is almost how one relaxes to fall asleep. I can be very awake and just let go. It may be walking around, talking, moving around. I don't need to be meditating to do that. I can do it while riding a bicycle. It is a shift in consciousness. It is not very difficult for me to do. Now, I know that it is a unitive experience that I can drop into. There are different degrees. I can drop into the sound of the clock where my senses are broadened. I can see you without as much personality. Your eyes look different. I can reach a more connected place. I go in and out of that all day long. There are times that I feel like I need to stay more in my head, like when I am listening in class. But I am the most happy when I stay in this connected place. I speak the best, and I listen the best. I walk into a grocery store and attract the most incredible sales people, the butcher, the one behind the counter, the bagger. I rendezvous with the

most incredible experiences that almost put me to tears. I can go into Macy's to buy a shower gift and chat with a young man until we are both crying. Then I forget. I then live more in my personality and my head. When I quiet my personality, ego, mind, head whatever we want to call it, the shift is so dramatic for me. The vibration changes so much. The shift is huge is for me know. I know exactly where I am and I will die this way. So my inner world I have been able to manifest from there. As I am in alignment with this state of consciousness, the connectedness, this unity during the day, things are different for me. Traffic does move for me. If I lose something, I can find it easily. It seems like I not only affect my inner state, but I also affect my outer state. Myself and the traffic, the sales clerk, other student, my children it is not really any different. It is the material and the unmanifest. It is like a dance, a ballet that is choreographed by God. It is a dance between myself and god, the spirit of everyone and the material. It is not a hierarchy, not a difference, not *a* and *b*. It is just a play between the two that are so intertwined that you cannot tease them apart. When I live in my outer world, and I'm more in my mind as I call it, it is not easy in the world. I feel very different. If I'm in my mind and I try to speak about my spirit and my inner life from my mind, it is met with criticism. If the folks that I'm around are in their mind, in their outer world, they can't access what I talk about. So, there are few places that I can speak about it. I can live it, but I can't speak about it. It used to be lonelier. That is just when I am living in my outer world and my ego and I try to speak about it. But when I am in a truly connected space it doesn't matter what anyone else says or thinks, I am not lonely at all. But when I'm a little more disconnected from it, it's difficult. Like with my family, my kids, they can see me, but my siblings and nieces and nephews, I think that it is really too bad that they don't know who I am. It is really too bad that I can't speak about this. It would give me great joy. Then over the years, I've just learned to bring my love to the family and they accept me a lot more than if I am trying to talk about it. But that took years to learn. Talk about dark night of the soul! When I was trying to talk about being connected to God, it is just not something that is a mental construct. It just has to be felt. Over the years, I stopped talking about it even with my family. Maybe someday, I will help them go there. That is the biggest blend that has happened over the years. I have a niece that is not really doing well. Her twin sister died. She is staying in an apartment and doing some drugs. When I saw her the other day, she gave me a pretend hug at the family get together. As I chatted with her a little bit, I said, "Is it tough getting off of drugs?" I spoke from that connected inner wisdom. She said, "Yea." I said, "I have been working with someone who has an eating disorder and who can't tell what she wants so she overeats." So I told my niece to pick a rose. There was a big bush nearby where we were sitting. I said just pick something of beauty for yourself. So just breathe and look at the color of it. Notice how the sun hits it and how the wind moves it. Just be there with that rose there for a minute. I could tell that she just dropped right down and was with the rose and quieted her mind for just a minute, she was with the rose. I said, "The lady that I was working with found out that this is what she wanted every time she ate. She lost a hundred and fifty pounds." I asked my niece if she could feel that sense of connection. She said she could. I said, "When you do drugs, maybe it is this sense of connection that you really want." She said, "I love you, Auntie." And she gave me a hug and put her head on my shoulder and kind of held me for awhile. It was very different from the first hug. When my mind tries to limit things, my heart seems more the master of all things are possible. I



am learning over the years to let that heart inner space just be. It took me years to learn, and still I sometimes struggle with it, especially in classes. But what I want to end with here is that the shift is not that big of a deal and it can be taught. We are looking for this big pointy finger of God, and it is not . . . it is this sweet little movement of the rose in the wind. It is not a big thing; it is a little thing that is close to Him.

Me: In what way does this experience not affect you?

Freya: I would say that the only time that it doesn't affect me would be when I'm really in the grips of my mind and the inner life is not open to it, when I am really in the grips of my ego and personality. At times, I can just get angry before I notice that it is really there. But this is the only time that I can think of that it does not affect me.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Freya: I had just gotten a divorce. One of my children had moved out. I was starting to come into my own. I lived in my house by myself. I was growing up. At that same time, I was giving myself permission to read spiritual things. I was reading my first books like *Celestine Prophecy*, *Conversations with God*, and that started to get everything churning. I was reading, meditating, and living on my own which was very blissful. I don't think it was cause and effect, but I think it just holds the space for an awakening to happen. My kundalini had started rising just before this experience. I think it was probably within the same month. I have no clue what made it happen. I think I was ready and asking for spiritual energy and having the body be open to the experience. It is like turning on the hose and having your foot on it a bit and the hose jerks. I think that is what the kundalini was like. My body wasn't quite able to be open to all of it. That is the only thing that I don't know if it had any correlation between the two experiences. It is like when this gal channels Abraham Hicks. You can feel it. It is way greater than anything that I have ever met. I stood up one day in her seminar. She said are you running a lot of energy? She said, "We can feel it, please sit down and I will answer your three questions. The first thing that you want to know is what happened to you. You had an opening and you've been asking. You just popped into the other side where there is not a lot of matter. The second thing you want to know is why you can't get back there to this huge merging where it is really different. Once you are open, you are open. You are asking for other things now. Your third thing is you want to know what you do with your life now. Just go have a good life."

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you see as your next step?

Freya: I only have one step and that is to return during the day to that inner life and bring it out, to return to that unitive place, to return to my relationship with God, to return to my true self. And whatever happens, I'll be guided from that place. What I want some day is to be sitting in a group, not standing in a seminar using my mind, but sitting in a circle on the floor and dropping into this space and speaking. I see myself doing this. The sitting on the floor represents that it will not be my mind doing this. I am letting Spirit come through me. There is no stress doing this and life is sweet. I do not want to be

standing up and having my ego do this. I would be so limiting. It is about just Returning to this place. If I make a lot of money or not, it doesn't matter. If I get old, it doesn't matter because nothing can be greater than living in this connected place. It is all that there is.

Me: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience?

Freya: All is well. I am complete.

Me: Is there anything you would like to say about this experience today?

Freya: You got me there! The experience brought me into my connection. I can feel it. I had a feeling that it would. It takes a little time for the mind to settle down. It has no power that we don't give it. It is not separate; I don't mean to say that it is separate. But as the mind stops speaking, the heart says, "as you wish." It is the essential power; it is who we are. It took a little time to speak from that connected place. That is how we help each other; we will give each other time to do this. As we walk around the schools and life like this from these connected places, we will serve. If we brought a third person into the room, with you and me in this connected place, it would not take them long to get to this connected place. This was the perfect experience. You sat in a connected place that I could feel and see and it helped me get to a connected place. I appreciate that.

#### *Gina's Interview*

Me: Would you like to tell me about your creative expression?

Gina: That is the image that came to me from the meditation. It is about the birth canal, and it's about birthing. The image and the word that has always been associated with this experience for me is "midwife." It felt very orange. That was the first color I put down because there is something very warm, divine yet earthly about the experience. The black is the unknown—the transition between worlds, of not knowing yet what the birth is going to bring, coming from a dark place, going through a passageway that is dark, and yet a glimpse of the yellow and knowing that there is light. The pink is the holding, a profound experience of love and peace. The star emanating from the center and bluish is the mark of Spirit, the birth of Spirit. So it is a tremendous transition in a process of great holding and love and kind of a paradox, and going through a birth process that is not comfortable that can be painful and fearful because of the unknown aspects of it. The red is the energizing experience that I walked away with when this experience was done for me literally felt like that if I flicked my fingertips then lightning bolts would come out, if I wanted to. It was so electrical, so tangible, that I would be like Zeus just throwing lightning bolts if I wanted to. Then the other quality of coming out of the experience was almost a shimmering kind of quality. Everything that I looked at had a new clarity, a visual clarity—almost shimmering. That is what those little stars are just a sparkling kind of visual effect that happened when the experience was over. In the last 18 years, this has not diminished. I had difficulty remembering a lot of the details that led up to the

experience, but the experience itself and the body experience was very profound and has always stayed with me and the aftereffects.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable to you.

Gina: I was attending a Christian conference in Texas. It was called Fullness in Christ Conference. It was put on by Bras and Beverly Robinson. They are very lovely, loving people. Their ministry was to bring the power of the Holy Spirit back to individual believers and back into the church as a lived experience so that the presence of the Spirit would manifest freely within the church. This conference was generally attended by pastors and their wives. I wasn't a pastor, but I was doing pastoral work as the director of women's care. So I figured I qualified even though I didn't have the title of pastor or the ordained authority. So I went and I went without my husband who wasn't interested in going. So I went myself. It was a very loving experience at the conference of meeting absolutely wonderful people. It was long hours, lots of singing, and praise and worship, lots of music. We would go from 8:30 or 9:00 in the morning to 11:00 at night. I wasn't getting a lot of sleep. I was at a kind of podunk hotel so I was a little afraid to sleep at night so I wasn't getting a lot of sleep, but they had food there so I was getting plenty to eat. I was so wrapped up in the praise and in the worship and the teachings. There was a lot of stimulation. The worship was wonderful and so uplifting, it took me out of myself in a transcending kind of way. Occasionally people would come up to you and say, "Would you like for me to pray for you to receive the fullness of the Spirit?" It didn't happen a lot, but occasionally you would see people going off. They didn't make a big spectacle of it. Then one day I was having lunch with some people I had met at the conference, pastors. There was a woman sitting next to me and two men sitting across from me. When we finished having lunch, one of the male pastors asked me that question, "Would you like me to pray for you to receive the fullness of the Spirit?" I said "sure, absolutely." So we went off to one of the conference rooms that weren't being used. So there were two men and a woman there. I was standing and they started to pray. One man was praying out loud and the other two were whispering softly. No one was touching me. No one was physically touching me they were just kind of surrounding me. I had my eyes closed and I felt myself starting to spin. I noticed my body swaying and sensed heaviness and very gently it kind of came down on top of me and surrounded me. I knew at that point that I had a choice to either push back and resist it and shake it off or that I could choose to surrender to it and just go with whatever was happening and I chose to go with it in that moment and surrendered. The next thing that I knew I was on the ground. Someone had caught me. I had fallen back like a dead weight. I was lying on the floor. I felt like my body was part of the floor. I was so heavy and so relaxed and so melted. It was like my body was melted into the floor. I was consciously thinking. My mind is a little bit chattering saying, "This is interesting." I could still hear everything going on outside of me. I could still feel a profound sense of peace. But I had this consciousness still. And I always knew I had free will. I knew that even at this point I could get up and shake this off if I wanted to. There was no imposition on me. It was a dance. It was "here I am, Are you willing?" And if your not, that is ok, we can end this now. But if you are, then let's dance. I was like a witness observing all these different

things. The man was praying and saying a lot of prophecy type things over me. I have a lot written down here if you want the details, but the two that stay in my memory are these. My hands were flat out on the floor. And he touched my palms and said that you are anointed for healing. You are going to be a healer. And the second thing that he talked about was about being released by the status quo of the hurts and pains of being a woman and said that I would take a role that would almost challenge the traditional roles of women. He went on to talk about how all that is good and fine, but that I would still need to submit to my husband. I thought that was really curious that in one sense, I was being freed, but then in another sense, I was having a cap put on me about my needing to submit to my husband. At the time, I was accepting and open to what was being said because I was in the element of the church, so I was accepting of that. But now when I look back on it, it seems to me to be a little dissonant. So, I was still in this profound peace and hearing these words when I start feeling in my solar plexus, spontaneous muscle twitters and flutters. It was not like I was sick or anything. I remember thinking that this is weird. Where is this coming from? As soon as it starting the man said to the woman, put your hand on her abdomen. And I'm thinking, "Oh, wow, this is cool. I wonder how he knew?" So she puts her hand on my abdomen and he began to pray and I think that is where he began to talk about being released from past hurts and gender roles and things. And then they stopped. I remember hearing a profound sense of peace and energy. I remember coming out. The verbal prayer kind of stopped. It went from a voice of authority and saying some things that were pretty spot on for me to a diminishing. When it got quiet, I felt like it was passing and then I just lay there in silence for a couple of minutes. They just watched over me, and then I gently opened my eyes. I felt an internal freedom that it is ok to get up now. I felt like the dance was over. Ok, now I can get up. And when I did, after not having slept for several days, I was so energized. It wasn't in a caffeine kind of way, but it was a very peaceful, calm and centered energy with clarity of thought and clarity of vision. I looked around and the colors were very vibrant and shimmering like almost sparkling. Like I said before, I felt like I had all this electricity going through my body and that if I flicked my fingers little stars or lightning bolts would come flying off. We ended and we hugged each other and said thank you and went on. That was it.

Me: Did you have an experience about coming back to yourself after the experience was over?

Gina: Yes and No. My consciousness was always there. It never left. The level of the mundane or earthly realms was there. I could still hear and process and knew I could break this spell any time I wanted. So in that sense it wasn't like I checked out of space and time. But in another way, if you asked me how long it took, I couldn't tell you. It seemed like it lasted for an hour, but I'm sure it just lasted for a few minutes. So I couldn't tell time. I also had an experience of kind of melting in my body. So the leaving was an experience was a sense of not having a really strong body boundary. But I never lost that awareness of what was going on around me but I did lose a sense of my body boundaries, so I had a sense of coming back into my body and my will. I think that it was more of a will surrender where I handed over my will in that moment. And I came back

to my own personal will, an expression of that will. So in that sense, I did come back, but not in the sense of my awareness of my surroundings.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience, and if so, how?

Gina: Yes. Right after the experience, I ran into another man in a hallway and I hadn't really talked to him at the conference yet. We sat down and were chit chatting and it turns out that he was diagnosed with AIDS. I thought, ok, I'm being tested here. I've just had this experience where I'm told that I'm a healer, what am I going to do with this? So I had this internal argument going on. One part of me thought "You need to ask if you can lay hands on this man and pray for healing." Another part was saying, "I can't do that. He is going to think that I'm full of it. He's going to think that I'm stupid." But the first part won out. I didn't tell him about my experience, I just asked him if I could lay hands on him and pray for him. He was very willing, and I did. I have no idea what happened or if anything changed for him. But I think that it is more important that I chose to act on something, because I then chose to see myself differently at that moment as a healer.

Me: In what way does this experience affect how you live your inner and outer daily life now?

Gina: It is a little harder because it happened 18 years ago. It is hard to parse out or tease out exactly because I've had so many of these experiences since then. One thing that happened that same evening though was something that I still carry with me. This is where the midwife comes in. I was back at my hotel that night. I had time to be alone with the experience and question what does all this mean? I was just sitting in silence, a prayerful and open silence. I heard a very distinct internal voice say to me, "You are a midwife." That's it. "You are a midwife." I didn't have a clue what that means, and I still don't. But I hold that with me all the time, all the time. Two years later, as I was still working on staff at that church and was working with a woman in a spiritual guidance session. She happened to be . . . I did not put this together at the time. She happened to be a professional midwife. At the time, many of the women could not afford to give me monetary donation for my time, so they would give me little gifts that they would hand make. Kind of like the country doctor model form of payment for energy exchange. So she cross-stitched for me, without knowing the story, the Webster's dictionary's definition of midwife. It said, "Women helping Women." She gave it to me. On the back she wrote, "Thank you for the wonderful labor support." That piece I carry. I carry both the healer and the midwife identity shift with me. I think that out of the experience 18 years ago, this is what I still carry forward into my life. Both of those have an implication on my identity as the healer. I am at ITP preparing to be a healer. I am drawn to that, and I have taken energy medicine classes. I am working on a dissertation with breast cancer patients. And as a midwife, I am drawn to working with women. I have worked with men, but I am more drawn to feminine spirituality. So those are all carryovers from that experience.

Me: In what way does this experience not affect you?

Gina: It didn't through me into a huge spiritual bypass kind of a thing. I didn't go "Wow! This big thing happened to me so now I need to through my life up into the air and do work as a healer." I didn't feel like it was necessary or the wise thing to do. I didn't try to make the prophecy happen. If it is a prophetic word then it will come manifest through my life without me trying to birth it. I would be midwifed. That is how it didn't affect me. It was beautiful and lovely. It was an oasis of refreshment and a mystery to ponder that I still ponder to this day. But, it didn't necessarily turn my life upside down.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Gina: That is a tough one only because my memory isn't going to be really precise on this one. Let's see, it was 1990. I was doing ministry work as a leader for a very large church in San Jose ministering to women. Because in that fundamental evangelical faith tradition women are not allowed to teach men. Women can teach children or other women, but not men. They also do not ordain women. That was one reason that I was not ordained although I was already on staff as a director of women's care for 3 years. I believe that was around this time 1990-1993 so I had just gotten into this position. I chose this position. I saw the need of this position because in a church of 2000 people where at least half if not over were women, there was not much pastoral care for women. I asked why there was not more pastoral care of women, and the answer that I got was astounding. The answer was that men should not sit with women alone, especially with women who were in a vulnerable place because they might be sexually attracted to them so we don't do that. We might see them once or twice, but then they just need to deal with their issues with their husbands not with us. So, I heard that and I said, "Well, I'm trained for this, so how would you feel about me stepping into that role and doing that because I think that there is a desperate need here?" The answer was "Ok, you can do that but we won't give you the title of pastor." I said, "I don't care." Even though, I knew that I would be doing the work of a pastor. And they said, "We are not going to pay you because your husband makes enough money." And I said, "Ok, would you be willing to process any free will offerings that I get from the women that come to me so that I have something to report on my taxes and cut a check for me each month?" So, I had just started that work. It was fabulous. It was sort of a don't ask, don't tell situation. The male pastors would say are you doing ok? And I would say, I'm doing fine. And then I would take the women by the hand and we would go behind closed door and do inner healing work. It was fabulous. So that is what was happening at the time. And as far as my marriage goes, I was having some dissatisfaction with both my marriage and my husband. I had wanted a more emotionally and spiritually intimate relationship that was not in his capacity to offer. So I felt ignored as a wife and had made the decision that I can't change him and I can't get it from him so that I'm just going to offer that to the Lord and ask that I be filled in that way from my ministry work with women. That is one reason that I went to the conference by myself. He was just like yea, have a good time, see you later. So that is what was going on in my life at the time.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you see as your next step?

Gina: It really synchronistic that you asked that question. Right before I walked into the door here today, I am pursuing ordination with the Gnostic order here in Mt. View. There is a sanctuary of The Holy Order of Mary Magdalene. They specifically emphasize the ordination of women as priests. So I was just told today by the bishop that I would be accepted in the training for ordination. So, it feels very . . . there's completeness about it. There's a validation. There's a longing that is being answered and a fulfillment. There's an honoring. It's funny because many years ago I had given up and put to rest and was totally ok with not being ordained and prepared to do my work as a psychologist or however I could in the world. Because I realized deep, deep down that I didn't need to have external validation to do the work of service or to do the work of God. I could do pastoral work without the ordination and the title. But, when I realized that my clinical work in psychology, a huge revelation, that this is not really my heart's desire, I switched emphasis in January. I had a huge openness and to my utmost surprise, what popped in was this desire for ordination which I thought had been released and put to rest, has been resurrected. So I went to talk to the bishop in this sanctuary in Mt. View. I've been doing spiritual guidance with her for about 4 months now. And today, of all days, she just told me "welcome and yes, I will pursue ordination with you."

Me: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Gina: Thank you for your emotional resonance and response to my news of acceptance to the ordination process. You are the first person that I've told. I don't want to talk about it and for other people to know about it. It is that I don't want to talk about certain things to the public. I want to keep it to myself. It is still very, very precious. I'm not ready to talk about it.

Me: Do you have any comments about this experience today?

Gina: It was actually a very beautiful experience. I really am surprised about the intensity of the recollection. Coming in, I thought this is going to be really tough to recall because it was 18 years ago. Yet, I think it has something to do with what happened before I came in here with my spiritual guide. I think all of it kind of constellated. And I think those things are connected, very deeply connected. So I'm going to take it into my private meditations. So it has been a very wonderful experience.

### *Holly's Interview*

Me: Would you like to share about your picture?

Holly: I was really surprised about the visualization exercise and about how much the emotion was still available to me. It was really great. The word that comes to mind when I think about the experience is Gratitude. It represents a really big change for me to have a feeling of handing off a lot of really big things to God. It was just one of those experiences of I'm not doing this by myself anymore. It was interesting because it was at night in kind of a dimly lit sanctuary so some things were very traditional. But since this time, I have had other experiences . . . one in an evening meditation with the same cross

but in different colors. It changes color and form slightly to be this more Celtic looking cross that doesn't show so much here in this picture, but it has swirls and filigree that is really beautiful. It is more a universal cross for me anyway, and it showed up inside of a mandala. Then another time last year, I was intrigued by how some of the spiritual dreams that I was having were starting to show up for me and what symbols were coming forward. That's this purple and this beautiful light, some of these things forward from this experience. This might have been when that started to show up. When this experience was happening, it was in a time when I was in a lot of personal despair. A lot was happening in my family. The purple was kind of an edge of darkness. The color was sort of a sense of light in the middle of a dark time. It is something holy and the glimpse of something between me and this darkness. And the center is this very amazing, warm light that held this particular to hold this particular crisis and sadness for me. There is stained glass in my church. It was dark but the windows were backlit. It was just so lovely. Actually, it inspired me to put stained glass in my house. It just came up for me in this meditation.

Me: So tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable.

Holly: Well, in this instance the experience of oneness was this sense that the people and problem that I was turning over was that it was not gone but shared. And that being in this holy light that it was not any longer just me with it. Since this first experience, because I've certainly had others, through accessing this experience I have been reminded that this particular set of burdens was shared. It was a sense of relief. The word that I took away from this remembering experience was Gratitude.

Me: Did you have an experience of coming back to yourself after the experience?

Holly: Well, yes. But I'm pretty centered. There was a physical leaving of the church, which was very helpful. It wasn't so much that I left myself but the edges were blurred. It's really interesting that I use that word because I recently had another experience on Saturday. The word that I used for it was seamless, which describes the dissolving of the dualism in a different way. But that word . . . I like that word. On Saturday, it was all color merging to create white light. It was three-dimensional because it was all around me and in my head, there were not walls or seams, it was everywhere. It was much more of a Samadhi experience. In the first experience these colors were all separate, and in this last experience there was not color or they were all one. So coming back to myself on Saturday my first words were, "How fun was that?" But in this first experience that is not the way I would have described it. It was excruciating but wonderful. That just has to do with the events that precipitated the experience, and it was all so new. And now, 4 years later, I am more likely to play with the experience of it. I am much more joyful and I'm not so afraid. In the first one, my suffering was so great. That is where the Gratitude comes from. It was a Lenten experience. It has been interesting. I've started journaling, and during the Lenten season each year, I have experienced some sort of loss. I'm not sure that that is just awareness on my part of if it is synchronistic. But this could be another aspect of unitive experiences. But it has certainly given me pause that during



this time each year, I experience loss. There is a sense of two thousand year's worth of timing that I am connected to this suffering, but also the hope of it in Easter. This year I have lost another very important teacher, but a lot has come out of that. It has opened a lot of doors for me. It had to happen. So in my Protestant tradition, history, and teaching, that suffering of Jesus was necessary and just part of the plan, so in a sense, I feel very much connected to that.

Me: So do you see yourself differently after this experience? And if so, how?

Holly: Definitely. Yes. I would have to describe the last 4 years as a series of awakenings and awareness. And I have set an intention to stay aware and to pay much more attention.

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Holly: I breathe more. It is sort of funny to say that the first time is the hardest. But now, I can more quickly access this feeling of not being alone. It's not that I mind being solitary, but I feel very connected to this loving Spirit of the universe. When I'm in despair or in crisis, my family situation is particularly crisis filled, it is just so much easier to access this connection. I actually made a decision right after this happened to be of service in some small way every single day.

Me: In what way does this experience not affect you?

Holly: Well, like I said, I'm pretty rooted to the earth. So I am very practical. I don't talk about it much. I've found that I can share my spiritual self just by being. And I can't talk to people about it. But, I didn't feel inclined to become a contemplative and live on a mountain somewhere. That's just not me. So in that sense I haven't changed. I'm just a little more informed, I guess.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Holly: Both of my daughters . . . one of my daughters is a recovering meth addict and my other daughter had a suicide attempt somewhat related to her sister's drug addiction. I decided at that same time to leave my career and stop working completely. Kind of everything at one time to deal with this crisis. So I was pretty ripe for an experience.

Me: So if you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you feel is your next step?

Holly: To have more fun! I'm serious! That is one thing. I could sense then that I had to stop in order to know the next thing that I had to do. I mean there were obviously a lot of mechanics and things that just had to be done. So, this crisis was front and center. But at the same time I just hated this bent that I had been on of work, work, work for money and things and a technical focus. I mean, I'm sorry but this software is just not saving the world. I don't know exactly the answer to your question, but my path is to stay open to it and to open more. I see it as multifaceted. That makes my body tingle when I say that.

I've had some really neat and different kinds of healing touch experiences. Being able to sit with someone else and breathe with them to calm them down. I don't know exactly how all of this works together yet. So I'm trying to take my past experience and my grounded Protestant experience and bring it all forward or the part that is useful going forward. I don't know what that looks like yet, but it will be more integrated and it will have more facets to it.

Me: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Holly: Actually, this was very helpful. When I saw your advertising flier, I just laughed. I had never used this word "unitive" and I like it. So, I am really interested in seeing your research because I had not thought about it in this way. So the journey continues.

Me: Do you have any comments about this experience today?

Holly: I continue to be amazed about how experiences live inside of myself. I can recreate this sort of physical experience or emotional experience. It is so lovely even though in this particular experience, I had a real access to how painful it was. That makes me feel grateful too because I remember that this is where the gratitude came from. I thank you for helping me connect to this experience again.

### *Iris's Interview*

Me: Is there anything that you would you like to share about your drawing?

Iris: Well, this is me. I'm walking through this grass. It was this most beautiful grass that I had ever seen. It was very thick and there were ferns on both sides. My toes in the grass . . . it felt like silk going in between my toes. I heard this music far away and I was walking through this grass. The music sounded really good. I was 17 and you can imagine what the music was but it sounded like they were having a part and I just wanted to go. It was taking forever, forever to walk through this grass. The stuff on the sides was big thick ferns that were beautiful and thick. The stuff in the middle was mostly grass. When I was just about there, I heard my mother's voice calling me. And we had this sound, I was raised out in the country, my mother would call me by making this sound kind of like a yodel at lunchtime. In fact that is how I met my husband. I made that sound to my brother and my husband overheard it. He couldn't believe that my brother turned around in this big huge crowd and knew it was me. So, I heard my mother make this sound, I knew it was her calling me. At first, I kept going, but she kept calling. So I was afraid somebody was hurt, somebody was really hurt. So, I knew I had to go back to help her because I didn't know what it was. What had happened to me was that I was in the hospital. I had been hit by a drunk driver. I was out of it for 5 days. On the fifth day, my boyfriend told me this later; they came and told my parents and him that I wouldn't make it through the night. I had a 6-inch hole in my diaphragm and my stomach had slipped up next to my heart and pushed it over to the other side. That night that I had the dream, my mom was outside my room praying, "Lord, I don't care what she has done. Let her live. Let her live. Let her live!" She was uncontrollably crying. The next day, I woke up. My

father had come in to see me and then my mom and then my boyfriend to say hello to me. About 6 months later, he told me about that night and what had happened the night I had the dream.

Later, I was a flight attendant for 14 years. I went all over the world looking for this place that I had seen in my dream. It was my quest. There had to be a place like this, but I never did find it. That is what I saw. That is what this picture is about. And that is my feet. And those are the people who were singing and calling to me. It wasn't people that I knew or anything, but it was just a party. There were dark ferns on the side and this is tall, fragrant, spring, meadow grass. Up there was those people who were a couple of blocks away. And then as I wanted to go hear the music and see who was there. But then I was getting closer, I heard my mom calling. And it was with an urgency that I had to come back. And, whenever I have these experiences of knowing or instructions, like if I see someone before they die or maybe something that I have to tell someone, it is with that same urgency. I have got to do what I know I need to do. It is very strong and I recognize that voice. I know it is different from any other voice.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable.

Iris: Oh, gosh! I didn't want to leave. Even if I think about it, it is like, "Let me stay here a little longer." I don't know how to describe it. It is this sense of peacefulness but it is more than that. It's not the word. I'm not very good with words. It's . . . I guess when an infant cries and someone picks them up and they know it is going to be ok. Or when a kid is hurt and the parent comes and picks them up and they know it is going to be taken care of. In that place I didn't have to DO anything, everything was taken care of. I was just totally content. Totally, totally content. Like, "Ok, you have done a good job. You've done everything you are supposed to do and here's your reward. Here's your reward." But, I didn't get to go all the way there. But this is the feeling that I was getting about this place. But I didn't know I was dying when I was having this dream. I found that out later. I was very content and I wanted to stay there. I did not want to leave. But it was a feeling of you have got to leave right now because someone is bleeding to death and it is going to be your fault if you don't come put pressure on the wound. That is an example of the pull that took me out of the experience. I wanted to go here so bad. I wanted to see what this beautiful, ultimate thing was. It was just perfection and how do I describe perfection? If I were going to be death right now, I don't know if a party would be the same place that would lure me away from life right now. It would probably be something different, but the feeling, the desire, the drive, the determination to just stay there would be the same. I just wanted to stay there. When things happen in life or I get information and start feeling like wait a minute, why did I live from this? When I was recuperating and reading the newspaper about a mother of five who died in a car accident, I would question why I had lived. This isn't right. I wasn't married or didn't have children. I shouldn't have lived and she should have. Why was I chosen? I was perplexed by that. I couldn't tell anyone about what I saw for about 10 years. And then I started talking about it a little bit. I told my boyfriend but no one else for 10 years. Then I talked to some ministers. It confirmed my determination that I am here for a specific purpose or purposes. There are certain reasons as to why I'm here even if I don't know what those are. So this was an awakening that

changed my whole life. I didn't get to go to college or take my classes. My friends and even my boyfriend changed. My boyfriend asked me to marry him in the hospital. I said no come back when I'm not drugged up. I look at my life and that town and I think how things might have been different if I had not been in that car accident. I think people look for God too hard. He comes when you need him but not always in the same way. He comes in all different kinds of ways. But people put different experiences off when they don't fit saying, "oh, you just imagined that." But when you go through something like this, you just know. You just know. It is clear.

Me: Tell me about the experience of coming back to yourself from this experience of oneness?

Iris: I was in intensive care. Like I said, I didn't talk about it for 10 years. My mother doesn't even know that this happened. She would just start bawling and crying. It is just too much for some people. I am very careful as to who I talk to about this because there are a lot of people who . . . I think that because there have been a lot of books written about near death experiences . . . You know it is like bypass surgery. Twenty years ago that was not even talked about. It was a big thing, like pick out your coffin before you go in. But now everyone is having it. So there is not the seriousness of it. The outcome of it is looked at differently. I went to a near death experience group and I saw that. I had heard about how some people are, but I had never been around so many people at one time who were like that. I didn't go back. I didn't want to go back. I think that if people are sharing authentic near-death experiences, it is difficult to talk about them. If people just want to have any experience of near-death, those people just love to talk about it. When you live through this experience, you don't have any fear of dying. I don't have any fear of dying. Not in a suicidal way, but sometimes I look forward to dying because there are a lot of cruel selfish people here on earth and I think that maybe I was kept here just to show some of God's mercy to people.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience? If so, how?

Iris: I paid more attention to the little things. Like when people said, "you are so lucky." or "how did you come up with that idea," or "imagine that." I didn't feel like I was better than anyone else, but it was like there was a radio station that other people were trying to tune into, and I could tune into the station very clearly. I feel like before, I went to church and did everything that I should do there. I had always gone to church since I was an infant. My whole family, aunts, uncles, cousins, we went every Sunday. I believed in those things and I did those things, but when this happened, it became really real to me. This is really true. Somebody didn't make all of this up. I don't know how else to describe it. I don't want to say Proven. Because I had not ever doubted that there was a God or heaven. Later, I thought what if this was really a trick of the devil to make me think these things are true and they are really not. But no. I just momentarily thought that. But no. no. no. I think that I am the same as everyone else, but I think that is why I work so hard. I don't want to be a waste. I was spared and that was a Great gift and that put a burden on my soul that I have been saved for a reason so I must live for a purpose. It is

not sit and watch TV and eat Bonbons all day. I feel like this is why I do a lot of the things I do. I want to do good for other people.

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Iris: I feel a responsibility and accountability. I don't want to waste any of my life. I don't have to be a CEO of a company but I would never want to be cruel to someone or hurt someone intentionally. There is so much of that in the world. I have so much of a difficulty understanding people who are selfish and cruel. I don't think it bothered me before, but now it really, really bothers me when I see that. I ask for help a lot more when I need that strength of God right with me. I pray a lot more. Maybe before, I would have prayed three times a week or something like that. I pray all the time now and I also give thanks all the time now. Even for little things, everywhere. People just don't . . . I think that they think things need to be like Michelangelo's painting for it to be God. Others want God proven to them. God doesn't need to do that.

Me: Is there any way that this experience does not affect you?

Iris: No. I don't think so. I can't think of anything right now.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Iris: I was working in the lab all summer long preparing for college. I had just graduated from high school. I was ready to begin my adult life. But there was nothing catastrophic or sad. I was just normal.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you feel is your next step?

Iris: I don't know. There are several steps. I am learning what they are each day. I am learning more and more and more each day. I think that I have to be open to things. One thing that I am really learning is that I just don't need to pay attention to what others think. This happens when you get older as well. Everyone has an opinion of my experience, but they weren't there. I was the only one in this place. So that is different than where they have been. This experience is different for others. When I went to that group, I heard other's stories of going through a tunnel or things like that. At break time people talked to each other. People who had a near-death experience had one color of nametag and others had a different color of nametag. When I heard people talk there, some people seemed like that had had a near death-experience and some others there just seemed like they were in it for the money or attention. But I feel like my perception of danger is much more intense, much more sensitive to good than others. My sensitivities are much more clear and heightened. At the break of that conference, someone came up and wanted to know about my near death experience and I just wanted to push away from them. It was so overwhelming. It was like they wanted to suck me up. I just said, "I can't really talk about it. It is too fresh in my mind. I can't talk about it." There are people out there like that. People that will make things so shinny. I am not more special than anyone else. I think that everyone has these abilities. It was just my situation that happened made

it more clear cut and definite for me. So people think that there is a place like this or another dimension, but until they have experienced something, they don't really know.

Me: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Iris: When things happen to me, I am not a psychic or anything. This is totally different from that, what I experience. I can never Make it happen. In other words, if you asked me to tell you when you are going to die. No. I can't tell you. I can't do that. I don't make things happen, but maybe 6 months from now, I'll see somebody's whole funeral. I'll see the whole thing happening. It is always somebody that is near death or very very sick. I will see this set of instructions that comes to me. I don't know. I didn't have any of this before this experience. It doesn't happen very often. Maybe five times in 10 years and it is always right. It is always right. It is really important for people to know where their information is coming from and read the Bible and challenge these things. There are a lot of people going around pretending to be who they are not. They give information that is not even accurate. The way that the world is right now is, it is so scattered. A lot of people are just looking and searching for the answer so bad that they will by almost anything from a salesperson. The thing is they can have the answer for themselves. I'm not special. I'm not special, but I do know if God needs my hands, or my heart, to reach someone unreachable on this earth. My heart and hands are His to use because they really belong to Him.

Me: Do you have any comments about this experience today?

Iris: I am still thinking about this place that I went to in the meditation. I don't get to go there very often, and I just want to stay there.

### *Julian's Interview*

Me: Would you like to share about your picture?

Julian: This is me on the mountaintop having the experience that I had regarding the Mother and Christ. They are sort of coming to me and I am calling to them. This is like living water that is coming down. Here are the crosses of Jesus but with a circle. Then part of what happened for me out of that was my creativity and my connection to the gospel. And this represents that my abundance came out of this experience, my life's work. This is not me but a visual of the Mother.

Me: Tell me about the experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable.

Julian: So I was a Christian and about 21 or 22 and going to a progressive church in San Francisco. I was feeling a lack of presence of the feminine. So I asked Jesus Christ and Father God if there is a mother. One of my friends who had been abused asked me why would I want to go to heaven with a dad and a son with not mother. That seems like a terrible thing with no Mother. Even when I was a little girl, I remember asking my mother if this was like a broken family where there is no mom. So the thought arose,

“Where is the Mother?” So I had the courage to ask the question, which felt scary enough as it is. I knew about the goddess but there was absolutely no connection at time. And even in popular culture the connection of the Mother or Mary with the Goddess wasn’t made. The Goddess having anything to do with anything Christian was not in popular culture and was underground at best. So the thought arose, which I am grateful for the thought, and in a very short period of time, my entire life was turned upside down, which I didn’t connect at the time. Within 2 weeks of the question, I had moved out of San Francisco, left my job, and moved to a mountain in the middle of nowhere. And I didn’t connect it. Then as I got to the mountain and started working with a woman named Sellers, who is definitely a part of it and devoted to the Mother and the Goddess. I just started being in inquiry personally about “Where is the Mother?” and it was kind of coming but not really. Then my experience was that I finally decided I needed to figure out what this is. So basically, I went outside and prayed to Creator. And I said that basically I need to let go of everything every single thing that is going on so that it can occur. And I said that it is feeling uncomfortable for me not having a Mother in the picture. And again, being Protestant, there was no Mary for me whatsoever. I mean, she’s a nice girl who died and was buried in England. So, I told Creator, and it was scary, I am giving up everything I know except for the name of Jesus that I won’t release. But nothing else around it. Like Jesus is my Savior. But not how you get it or what is required once you get it or anything else. But every other belief, I give up. And I give up the word God because there is no way for me to think of it except as male. I gave up the word God for 3 years. But I felt like I was praying to Father God because I no other possibility for that. I definitely have never worshipped or considered other gods. I felt like I could die or cease to exist from asking the question, not from punishment or fear, but that if I go into that place that I would just disappear. So that was the catalytic moment of going into that place and asking for what is the truth from the universe and myself to reemerge as was appropriate to me. That was the question and I definitely felt the earth shake kind of and the heavens kind of open. So within a couple of days of that I did a drawing of a mother and a child. I recognized it as the Virgin Mary and a very modern, alternative way. I had the feeling like it was going to go away. That the drawing itself was kind of a singular point that was going to go away. I thought I would never be able to do it again. Although I went to art school and I was raised by artists and everyone in my family is an artist and a poet, I did not have my personal unique expression that I would identify as my own. Others would say good job. But in terms of having a message in my work or an intention in my work, it didn’t exist before that moment. So the question “Who is the Mother?” It was like the voice said, “It is Mary” or “It is Me.” So since I had given up all my beliefs, I said, “OK, I’ll go with that.” And I went out to the goat barn and showed my teacher what I had drawn. Like “Look what I did” It is called we are within the wings of truth. It shows a mother and a child and wings and a bunch of eggs. Then I sat back down and drew another one that was like a mother and a child within another bigger mother. So that was like an egg too. So that was it. In terms of living into my greater authentic purpose, that was the huge start of it occurring. I began to study and found that other people had very little connection between Mary and the goddess I noticed. Sometimes I would find one sentence in the entire women’s anthology. They don’t want to talk about it. The Goddess people don’t want to talk about the Christian stuff. And the Christians don’t want to talk about the Goddess. Basically, I was like in a new territory. I feel like I still

am. Not unhappily so, but like, my gosh! So then I started working on the whole family of God. There is a Father, there is a baby, and there is a Mother. We are the rest of creation. I started making up a new cosmology, but I still didn't use the terms God in fact I took a whole vacation from it. I still am recovering from the Father image. For 3 or 4 years, I worked with the image of Christ as Mother. Because in order to get clear on how I understood it, I just had to take a break from it. There is so much belief around the Father. I personally felt like in relationship to God the maleness just takes over. It is so shrouded with the masculine that has negative attention to it. You have to be very disciplined to extract the feminine from the scriptures. So that was the experience that was followed up with painting and drawing and my breakthrough with my picture of the mother and the child. I almost stopped painting that day. She said why don't you just try this one last thing. My husband actually did the wash background and gave it to me and said since you are not going to paint anymore, here why don't you just try this. I still have the painting that was the same as the drawing. Then I say my way of doing art. Since then it has been different. That was a string of pearls that was connected.

There was another experience. I was meditating. Then I looked at new age stuff and saw that it was all patriarchal. Then I got on the patriarchal thing that this is not acceptable. This is what is wrong with the world. Oh, and this is another piece. I felt that between the mountain top experience and the drawing and this other experience of feeling like there was a downloading of these files of what I call the collective women's soul. This is who I actually work for. I work for her. Some unnamed unnumbered, check out girl in the middle of nowhere. That is basically who I work for. There is a whole way of how they inform me of what I do and why I do what I do and why I'm inspired and able to do what I do based on the circumstances of life. So I feel like I work for her, whoever her is. This is the really big part. I definitely became a feminist at that time because I became aware of the suffering of women in the world. In my vision, that part didn't present itself. But this part where I felt all or most of the suffering in the world is another experience where I felt like I was going to die. It was crushing me. It felt like it was going to kill me. I don't know where all that kill stuff comes in but I felt like how could anyone live with this knowledge. How could anyone bear this in their body? How could anyone possibly go on with this knowledge or be normal be nice when people were so horrible to one another? I saw a movie by Alice Walker at this time called "Warrior Marks" about female genital mutilation. I started getting statistics on rape, abuse, and battering and my mind was blown.

I grew up with feminism, but this experience had me become myself at the level of unreasonable compassion, the bodhisattva, the awakened heart. I could feel the pain of others and I said to Mary, "How will I do this? How will I live knowing this? How does anyone live knowing this?" No wonder people are oblivious watching TV, because you can't live and know unless you do something about it. You can be political or you can create or you can become a healer. There are not 10 million choices on how to manage suffering once you know about it. So she gave to me to do the art. That is how I manage it and not to take it into my body and become sick from it. Very, very clearly within a few years of that, I was to offer the teachings that she gave to me. Which this was a whole other way of doing the drawing and painting than how they do in school. That was



a huge part. I was also really mad for a long time too. So in the middle of all this sweetness of the Divine Mother coming to me, I was also totally pissed about what was going on in the world and patriarchy and suffering. I was just really angry. I think it was healthy at the time. A couple of months later, I asked, "What is wrong, what is missing?" A voice again, said, "The mother is missing. The Mother is missing." I remember running to my husband and telling him. "I've figured it out! Nothing will work because the Mother is missing." As long as She is missing, not anything will work--not Christianity, not Buddhism, not romance, not politics, not anything. Nothing will work without her. It is the missing thing about how we are operating on planet earth. I was effulgent about it and energized.

Shortly after that I also got a message from Jesus. My husband was really new age at the time. I was not. I was a feminist and Christian. I was meditating and I felt like Jesus said. It was a voice but not a voice. I was a thought that occurs powerfully. He said, "Ask him if he will consider looking at me the way you do." He believed in Jesus Christ, just not as his savior. And He said, "If he does not say YES you may not marry him." It was that extreme. Nothing like that has happened since then. It was so specific. I was really terrified. First, I talked to my Mom. She said that he is a seeker after the truth first and foremost. He is also a scientist. If he studies the word, he will arrive at Jesus, because there is no other truth. I love my Mom's conviction. So I believed her and believed the moment and in 15 minutes I went to talk to him. We were engaged to be married in a month or so. I said, "Are you willing to consider Jesus Christ as your Savior the way that I do?" And he said, "Yes." And then he did not convert for the next 3 years and we fought the whole time about this. And then he did convert. We still fight about religion all the time. He is at least with me now on the Jesus point. This was over the course of 5 or 6 months with the mountain as the peak experience with the other experiences around it.

Me: Can you tell me a couple of sentences about the experience of becoming one with God?

Julian: I became more connected with people and the universal suffering of others, which in a way, all people are children of God. So the connection of oneness was with God through the creation as God's creation.

Me: Was there an experience of coming back to yourself after the experience?

Julian: I would say that it has been ongoing since that time. My life is sort of a continuous mystical experience since that time. It continues since that time. How I came back in terms of living my life, it began to shift my path. I pretty much stayed merged. But it comes and goes because I can't carry the suffering that comes along with the loving on a continual moment-to-moment basis. When I am painting and working with the students, I sort of live there more. I sort of know all the files are there and that I can access them. There are definitely major shifts in consciousness because I'm connected to the entire world in a way. I am able to live out Jesus's command to love one another. Not live out fully but able to consider loving my neighbor as myself and loving my enemy and loving one another. I can't do that in the abstract, or with the person next to you only.

To get those messages, you have to be able to do it with people you don't know--that unreasonable compassion. I think that is one key element in my own path of transformation. With people who aren't having breakthrough that is the piece that is missing--the ability to go from loving those you know and care about to everybody else.

Me: Where do you know? in your head? in your heart? Where are those files living that you download? Are they in you?

Julian: No. I think that some people could carry them, but I don't think that it is healthy for me. I don't think it is healthy for most people who live between worlds. I can pull a file that I need to pull in order to look or see or feel, but it is more like an energy field, a stream in the cosmos, it is an energy field where the records are about it, where you can kind of poke your head up into and then get a glimpse and come back when you get what you need.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience? If so, how?

Julian: I think that would have come later. I didn't see myself differently at the time. I saw myself as a feminist, as a thinker, as an artist. Those were shifts. My purpose began unfolding and I had my first art show a year later. I gave my first speech on the lack of the feminine and was a fireball about it. In terms of much later, I saw that having that experience and that trip has put me in the realm of the mystical and how I operate between the worlds and the sacramental worlds I was trained in and the church that I was trained in. In the church it is a sacramental tradition; everything is real. It is in the metaphysical but in the extreme. If you say this is the body and blood of Jesus Christ and you follow the right way to do it, it becomes for you the molecules for you so that you can be healed. It was not just an empty concept. I saw myself as a priestess eventually who was a sacramental being and a teacher.

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Julian: My entire life is in the extreme. So I live it as a minister. Everything I do is an offering for others. Ultimately, everything I do for myself I do for others. But everything I do is an offering. In terms of my inner practice, most of the time I practice through my painting and my teaching. I don't have a super active prayer and meditation life although I fancy myself that I would like to do that more. But I am having so much spiritual experience all the time that I probably have more than others on a calm day anyway. It permeates everything. There is nothing that is not included. The fact that I am here to fulfill work that Jesus and Mary has given to me and everything that I do has to be in alignment with that or I have to say No to it. It affects all of my inner and outer daily life all my money, my body, my relationships. Everything. In a way it is classically Christian in term of a calling, but the subject matter of the Madonna or that I don't teach Christianity but painting and visionary business to people from all traditions. When I am teaching, I am the witness to Jesus and Mary but I don't talk about them, but I am a witness to them. So I can be a good witness that not all Christians are all whacked out, but the work that I do with them is the expression of Jesus and Mary through me to them.

And I always pray that the will of the Creator be manifest enough that my own will be aligned with that prayer through totally surrendering. So it is a three step process of surrendering my will to the Creator's will so that it becomes one with the Creator's will. I don't know how to say anything for sure. But I have just chosen this as my story, and I'm sticking to it.

Me: In what way does this experience not affect you?

Julian: No way I don't think.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Julian: I was working in a corporate job in San Francisco and going to art school. Partying. Living the high life.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you see as your next step?

Julian: This might sound sort of strange, but success. When I am successful to the degree that my work is really out there to the degree that it is going to be out there . . . Not only will I have time to practice and paint instead of just paint, answer the phone and email, paint, answer the phone and email, like that way that I have to be in business. I hope to be painting and overseeing business and teaching and really be a full-time minister. So my next step is to become successful so that I can really become a full-time minister to my community. Success will enable that both financially and being known enough. I feel like I am not someone who is the converter through the traditional sense of the gospel. I am not evangelistic in that sense. There are certain stones on the path to Christ and different people stand on different ones. I feel like the way that I share it and the stone that I stand on, people can hear it from me that could not hear it from anyone else. I feel like my representing Him and being who I am and painting the feminine and teaching visionary business to women who are not Christian is ultimately going to have people consider him. I have friends who are totally away from Him and Mary and the church who don't know because they are with me because I am a witness of love and nonjudgment. I want people to know Jesus and Mary because I think that it is the way so I want people to know that this is the way, but I don't look at them and think "Wow you really need to convert." Because I think that they will arrive at the truth when the truth can be revealed to them in the context that the truth can be revealed to them. But I do think that Christ is the most direct path and that Jesus is the way. So that is what I'm holding to.

Me: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Julian: I wish that more space could be created for people to have profound mystical experiences. That is something that we do here when we create events. For example, people can actually have increased self-esteem after a day of being here. But I am amazed at the lack of environment of sacred space where people can get away from all the chatter enough to have an experience. So in the context of what you are doing, I think that it is really important. It is important for others to know we are out here having these

experiences, I just wish more could happen. And that is why I love gospel and that's why I love black churches in particular because the chance of it happening for me personally, because they get the movement and the environment that gets the Holy Spirit moving in a way that doesn't happen in other conservative churches. In other churches I feel like I'm going to fall asleep to the point where I feel drugged. Where I can hardly breathe and I hate the carpet and it is not the Jesus I know. I know they love God, but I just have to get out of there. But when I go to other gospel churches, mostly Black or Latin churches don't have as much of a cap on the Spirit. So I have more of an experience there.

*Katarina's Interview*

Me: Is there anything you would you like to share about your picture?

Katarina: I was just realizing I always do this self-critical thing in expressive arts. I even took a course with working with expressive arts therapy and I'm still critical. I realized during the meditation and that process how important words are to me. And that I was reflecting on the word. So as I did this I realized that words are important to me and the meaning that I touch. The most significant experiences that I have had, have been through poetry and through words. So it shows in my picture. Longing. I think that I am a fan of Rumi and Rocca. They write beautifully about the value of longing and where it takes us. That has certainly been my experience in my spiritual life. I am also an enneagram type four. So I am appreciative of slight melancholy and how deeply longing can take me and other areas that I wouldn't experience if I didn't follow my longing. And the longing feels like Pain. But longing has also led me into the experience on Oneness. Then I was playing with One. Longing is also a kind of Love. It lets you know what you really love and long for. Atonement. I'm definitely a Jungian and I've had 8 years of classical Jungian analysis with a Franciscan friar of which my religion has been a part of my own process in doing that. Jungian is about the staying with the meaning of the tension of the opposites. That is what the crucifixion is for me. That is why I feel like I live the Christ experience when I stay in the tension between conflict or between what is and what can be or between the past and the future. I relate very much to the crucifixion and resurrection in that way. So I feel like life on the cross is the right way for me to live my life. As if I am continually being crucified with the continual hope of rising and resurrection. The redemptive love of sacrifice. The crucifixion has meaning for me more than being a dogmatic belief. I don't need to . . . it use to be for me . . . and I think that I had to go through that phase of believing in it in that way. But the cross and atonement are very real for me by staying in that tension and conflict between two goods or two evils and not feeling like there is a way out but to just hang there. But there is atonement. AT-ONE-MENT. I think that is the unitive experience. There are regrets or mistakes or errors or sin, missing the mark, and recognizing that in myself and staying with the fact that I regret what I have done and I resolve to do better, and staying with that. There is no kind of release in the staying with the reality of my mistakes. I have what I now feel is a more child like trust and that God is a mighty being. In my childhood it was a man with a long gray beard that was going to help me. But now it is about going within and the inner process. I don't claim to be God, but I do feel that God is in me. Atonement is coming back to that oneness and whatever has separated me from God. I can be lack of attention

or a forgetting of who I am and what I'm about. Coming back to that is a feeling of atonement for me. I didn't portray it very well but I see the continuum of longing leading me into oneness. Longing and the Pain of Longing will take me there if I stay with it. I know it will because I've experienced it. I can treasure the longing in my daily life. It both leads me forward and helps me remember the past. I really have a deep appreciation for longing. This is Jungian and portraying my sense of SELF because I think that is what this is all about--the archetype of God and the Self. They are not one in the same, but they are linked. When I studied at CIIS, I read about a concept called the psychic being. It is that spark within oneself that resonates with the Divine Being and so that is the linkage--the spark of the divine in each person.

Me: Tell me about your experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable to you.

Katarina: What came to mind was that when I listened to Beethoven's string quartets as a child, I would cry. Something about the harmony between the four instruments and I would have a profound experience. And I would think of it in relationship however I conceived of God. There have been other things that have happened through the years too. But what I really fastened on was an experience that I had with a small group of people that met on every Saturday morning. There was a little room in the Episcopal Church where three or four of us met with the priest. He had a Tibetan bell and a candle. He would have visuals so that you could fasten your eyes on something if you wanted to. This was actually my idea, but each of us would bring a piece of scripture or a poem or a page or two from some book that we were reading. It wouldn't have to be Christian spirituality but it often was. Rumi, poetry, and Thomas Merton were often read. We would share that and then we would meditate silently with each other for 45 minutes. With great regularity I would enter into a deep sense of oneness. I think what was read kind of created a atmosphere. Certainly it was beautiful and we would kind of breathe together. And you could hear the creek outside and there were no other human sounds. But I think especially the words would often help me as I concentrated on them and closed my eyes to go into a deep meditation for 45 minutes and have a profound sense of oneness with God within, with God without, with the small group of people that were there--without being aware of their own individuality but being aware of the US. It was a time of profound change in my life. What had happened just before was that my daughter was about 11 or 12. I was starting to get a sense of her moving on with her life and I was questioning how I would move on with my life. There was a sense of un-lived potential building up in me, spiritually, academically especially. I didn't know what was going to unfold in that regard at all. Within my marriage, I was comfortable but there was something big that was lacking in it. But the big thing that had happened before that was that my mother had had a psychotic break. I as the eldest of four children was responsible or took the initiative to facilitate her being committed. That really called for a strength that I didn't know I had. It also connected me with a deep sense of intuitive ability but also intellectual and psychological understanding that I had. I knew that I had a calling in that area that had been unfulfilled. That was right before this. So my mom was in and out and fought the system for awhile. She ended up being hospitalized for some time and ordered the personnel to not allow us to have any information about where she was or

what she was doing. So in another words she emancipated us. I had just turned 40 at the time. Another thing that happened was that I had a miscarriage. This was my second child that I had wanted desperately and I had waited 10 years to finally get pregnant. We had had all this fertility testing and it didn't look like it was going to happen and then all of a sudden I got pregnant. Then a couple of months into the pregnancy, just when I thought I was safe, I had a miscarriage. There was an event that happened that precipitated or coincided with the death of the fetus that involved my husband and some domestic violence. All of this came up which was completely out of the realm of what was normally happening in my life. This caused me to pray a prayer that I had never prayed before with such determination. I prayed that I can't have a child with this man. Here I am pregnant and I thought it was going to be a fulfillment. I desperately wanted this child. I thought it would make up for all the other things that were unfulfilled in my life. I went in for a check up and the doctor did an ultrasound and the fetus had died. They can date the death through the ultrasound. It had died that day when I had prayed that prayer. It connected me in a deeper way with the power of prayer. I don't have an evangelical sense of what prayer is. My husband, my second husband, was just diagnosed with cancer. And I don't pray that he will be healed. I pray that we will have the strength to deal with what is happening. So that is what was happening prior to this 6 months of this phase of me doing this every Saturday morning. I was involved in other things in the church. That 6 months ended in the summer, it would be this week, actually. I ended that 6 months with a week at a Benedictine retreat. I spent that week all in silence. Most of all you are with yourself a lot in these beautiful surroundings. Without premeditation, I got back home and my husband and I walked to the store to get something for something he made for dinner and as we walked back to the house I said, "This marriage is over." And I meant it. And it was not premeditated. It was just something that was stirring up inside of me in a very deep way. So that ended that phase of the Saturday morning, because it meant that I needed to give him custody of my own church, so to speak. So it set me off on my own journey. I have continued to have those kinds of experiences, and I think something almost alchemical happens during those experiences. During that Benedictine retreat, I am going again this next week, so this was 9 years ago. All of these events were part of the phase of profound change in my life. Within a couple of days of my husband leaving, I enrolled at CIIS to finish my bachelor's degree and went on for my Master's degree. So it was really a metamorphosis, but I feel like that series of experiences that I had on those Saturday mornings were crucial or essential in all of this.

I would lose a sense of physical separation in the experience. I didn't rise up out of my body and look down on it or anything although I can understand that experience. Most of all I would lose a sense of boundary and separateness. I also had a feeling of oneness with that small community. It was a sense of Us, a subjective sense of merging. Something that I would normally feel cut off from in myself and outside of myself, beyond myself, but also with this small group of people with them being separate from me and separate from each other. Longing is the number one emotion and sadness and pain attached to that. I felt it throughout most of it. If there is a point where the longing vanished, it was in that oneness if I can make it that discreet. It is more a sense of something drawing me toward the experience of oneness. Also something in me doesn't really want to let go of that. Even experiencing oneness, there is a knowledge that this is something that I can't

really claim. I can't really hold it. It is not mine. It is something that I can move into, be surrounded by, and paradoxically be contained by. It is within me and outside of me. There is a sense of movement, of being pulled into it, moving through it, and a knowing that it will be behind me and something I can recall. So there is a circular movement of coming back to it again and again. I talked to my priest consistently throughout this time about these experiences. I've also talked to my analyst about the experiences because he is someone who understands these mystical experiences.

Me: Did you have an experience of coming back to yourself after these experiences of oneness?

Katarina: Yeah, but bringing something with me. I don't know what to say about it. If there was one discreet experience, I might have a different reaction to coming back, but because I have experienced these kinds of things more than several times throughout my life, it is not with a great deal of shock certainly or loss that I come back. I do feel gratitude and a sense of calm. I also have a sense of being capable or grounded. That groundedness makes me feel ready to move on and accomplish what I need to do.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after these experiences and if so, how?

Katarina: I felt like that I had gone to places within myself and traveled to places external to me that gave me a wider range of potential. Certainly it led me to do things that I never would have done or make choices that I would never have conceived of much less acted on. It enlarged me. Rumi talks about, "We've expanded you." I felt an expansiveness after coming back and I felt equipped to take on things that surprised me both in terms of relating to other people, an interpersonal capacity that I did not have before for whatever reason before, but also as far as exploring and acting on potential that I had always feared that I had. But through this I discovered that I did have and owned up to the responsibility of doing something with that.

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Katarina: It has shaped my choices and who I am and mostly what I value. That is really what it comes down to--value. What I desire, what I value, choices I make. The choice I made to go into this work as a psychotherapist with a strong commitment to integrating religion into therapy. The choice that I made with my husband beyond all rational sense. I married a man 20 years older than me and who for 42 years was a Benedictine monk and abbot of his community in England near Oxford. We were married 2 ½ years ago. He lived all of his life in a monastery. We jumped off a cliff when we married and fell in love. We are very, very compatible and very happy. And I never would have chosen to do that without these experiences. Lots of choices based on values from these experiences.

Me: In what way do these experiences not affect you in your daily life?

Katarina: I can only think of the way in which I kind of fall short of living up to things. I am human and I'm superficial. I spend too much on clothes. I don't know, all the ways in which I'm just . . . I don't regret being human and complex and being drawn to different things . . . I don't think that I can answer this question. I sometimes make choices that don't go towards these values of mine. But I really think that it affects everything. Everything. Even if I don't live up to certain ideals that I have.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience? You may feel like you have already answered this question.

Katarina: These events called me to a deeper questioning about the way I was living my life even though I was going to church every Sunday and I was active in my parish etc. etc. These events called me to ask me questions about my marriage and about why I was set on having a child, and about my calling, and about committing my mom and needing to rise to that occasion and realizing this deep strength that was there and that I needed to account for. These experiences connected me to that deep core.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you feel is your next step?

Katarina: Bringing greater discipline and spiritual practice to my life. My husband is not a monk anymore now of course. He is an Episcopal priest, so on weekends I'm a rector's wife. This is a whole new experience for me. It has called for strength. I also need to not conform to whatever I think that a rector's wife needs to say and do in that role but to be me. Also, I think, I really appreciate this experience today, but it reminds me of my . . . Back to that class in East/West psychology, one piece that I really appreciated was that it talked about people's different paths. That professor told me, "You know, you are a *bakti* person. Your path to God is very passionate and very romantic." And that is true. So I guess reminding me in a real tangible way that this is who I am, and I also want to bring more discipline to that passion that kind of draws me in and connects me to my relationship with God. That is my task, I think.

Me: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Katarina: I guess I would just express my appreciation for what you are doing. I think you are on to something good, and for the timing in my own life. I thank you for inviting me with your flyer. Because I had a conversation recently with a clinical supervisor around this whole notion around belief verses deep knowing. I've come down hard on the side of knowing. I understand why belief happens, but also I realize for me that it is not about believing in Jesus as my personal savior at all. It is about living the Christ experience. Not that I am Christ, but that he said you can do what I am doing. That is important to me.

### *Liam's Interview*

Liam: I couldn't get into any of the feelings or the senses of it. I can't pull it up. I can remember aspects of it. But I can't feel it. The only visual picture that I have is that I was



alternately laughing and crying. I felt bathed in this experience. I call it liquid love. I knew intuitively that I had experienced God because I felt this sense of love. The fact is that I new intuitively it was Jesus. He was saying to me "You are loved and you are accepted in me." The love was so strong that it was literally sweeping over me. I felt a sense of being intoxicated. Because in college I had done cocaine and peyote and hallucinogens. While this experience of God's presence in no way was to be compared with a drug, I only use the drug issue to make the point that I was under the influence totally of something...this presence of God was pure, clean, not like a drug . . . so there are similarities yet differences.

I'll be glad to write this out but I'm not very good at all at drawing.

Me: I get a sense of being in liquid love when you describe this. The drawing is just trying to capture the experience before words. That is just the purpose of it. You don't have to do it. It is just to get to the meaning of the experience before words.

Ok, when I abused drugs in college, I was into experiences, and experience that took over me. This experience was clearly not connected to any expectation that I had. IT clearly was not rooted in an emotional atmosphere. IT was something that happened to me that I feel gave me a revelation. The 3 unitive experiences that have happened to me were clearly interactions with God. I knew he was specifically connecting with me on a level that he bypassed my intellect . . . it was instantly that I felt intoxicated. I felt laughter. I felt a sense of acceptance. I was always a person who had a horrible self-image. Because I don't believe that you program your brain overnight, I don't think. I had a lot of old tapes, and I still do for that matter. That night I realized that God was not who I had perceived HIM to be, a rule keeping God, but rather someone who loved me, accepted me, and was a real being that was a personality, not a moral principle that was impersonal. That HE was a person and that his love for me was great. I didn't have to try to get him to love me. He did love me. Interacting with him was more than my humanness could almost handle. I asked the minister what we were experiencing, and he was over there weeping with his hands up and he said, "This is the Holy Spirit simply worship Him." Of course, I didn't know what he meant. To a Baptist, the idea of worship is a sense of how one works for God not to simply adore Him. I didn't know what he meant.

I didn't think I could drive. I was that intoxicated. I had this overwhelming urge to go to my father, whom I had hated/loved and be reconciled to him. I wanted to ask his forgiveness for our years of problems. I was living with my parents when this happened. I had walked into the house (after the experience of God's presence) and it was as if I was not myself. I felt this need to ask my father to forgive me and told him that I wanted he and I to be straight. He thought I was drunk or something. He said, "What is wrong with you?" I said, "I don't know. But God has touched me. And I want you to forgive me. And I want you and I to love each other." For 6 months after that, I had this incredibly strong desire to read scripture. And when I would read it, it would begin to make sense to me, to come alive in me. It made sense to me as it described the battle between the human desires and the Holy Spirit's work. Where as before when I would read scripture, it just

didn't make a good deal of sense to me . . . It began to come alive for me. I'm not trying to push my views. I've learned to be very careful with that. I am just trying to be honest with you. Another area where I experienced change after being filled or touched by the Holy Spirit was in the area of sexuality. I had always had a high view of females because I was very close to my mother and my sister. In college, I was frequently sexually active although I felt I was immoral. But sometimes I didn't feel good about sexual experiences because I felt like sex was something we were all too casual about . . . I saw particularly females used sexually. After that experience with the Holy Spirit, not only did I have the desire to be reconciled with my father, but also I had a desire to be clean in other areas including sexuality. Going back to the experience, I felt that God had touched me. I had the immediate desire to be clean. It was purity. The room illuminated, I'm not making this up, and it is like the room brightened. There are mentions in scripture about the Shekinah glory of the Lord, where God's presence appears. I didn't even know that at the time. I had never even heard that term. I had a desire to be morally clean and not use sex for my own needs to be met but rather in marriage as God had intended where a couple truly enters into becoming one as God intended.

That lasted for about 6 months. Then it is just sort of comical. I moved into an apartment complex. There was a couple living above me and every time they made love, I could hear them. Then I started coming down off my mountain and I started struggling sexually. I called it that touch of God, which lined up as I started getting into scripture. I began to see in scripture that God is, for the Christian and the orthodox understanding, pure. He is holy. Sexuality is for a true love, committed relationship. It was like all of these things just came into me and I could sense them intuitively and then I found them in scripture. There is a scripture that I had heard all my life and it meant nothing to me that says, "Behold, if a person is in Christ, they are a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new." I was experiencing this...my desires were changing. My past experience at church had been "don't do the things that you really desire to do...don't do things that are fun, like go get drunk, although I knew that even though there was fun in these behaviors there was also fallout or downsides to these behaviors. But now I saw myself as in the battle that Paul talks about in Romans where he talks about, "That which I would not do, I do." Romans 7. I saw that. I can remember that I had gotten so sick of our drug use and our sexuality . . . people getting pregnant . . . abortions . . . hurt . . . pain. I saw what happened to a lot of us. I saw girls with shattered self-images as so many of them felt used and empty. They were a sexual object to most of the guys. I began to see that the things scripture calls "sinful" despite having a thrill side, did in fact lead to bad consequences. I had two more very dramatic answers to prayer where I prayed something trying to understand God's leading. God did speak to me but only with enough to show me He was in fact the author of my desires toward ministry yet not showing me exactly where my path would take me specifically as in Chaplaincy. It was like God said, "OK. I'm going to let you see that it is Me who has authored your desires for ministry and let you know that it is I who is leading you." In my growth as a Christian and subsequent dealings with God, I feel like on occasion God will give dramatic leadings or experiences but that is not the norm. Usually, we have to simply read His Word, pray, and walk by faith. Another experience however where God gave me a dramatic sign was this: Remember, I had said to God over 20 years ago, "God, I have

this strong overwhelming need to be with hurting people. I don't know if this is a calling." None of the preachers I had spoken to could help me sort out what to do after I had received Christ, and had the filling experience previously described and then had a strong need to be with hurting people to help them. . . . "God, I don't know how to hear you. Is this me just wanting to be a do-gooder or to be needed or is this you giving me this urge to be vocationally working in ministry." Because when I would get around people who were hurting, I would have these overwhelming feelings of pain for people and a desire to spend my time helping people. I wasn't sure how to know if this meant God was calling me to vocational ministry or not. I asked God, "If you have called me as in the Biblical sense, either send a stranger to me or have one of my senior pastors come up to me and say, 'God has a call on you.'" (I've prayed for dramatic answers like that before and never got any kind of an answer.) But 2 days after I prayed that prayer, a lady comes up to me in after a church service and says, "Mister, I feel like I have to tell you something." I said, "What?" She says, "Mister. I'm an Episcopalian. I go to St. Phillips Cathedral. I'm visiting here because your church has groups for alcoholics. I don't even believe in all the stuff that goes on here--speaking in tongues and interpretation and all that stuff. But, during the service, I saw the back of your head, and a message came into my head. It is the oddest thing. I started to leave the service after the benediction a few moments ago, but I could not leave. I felt compelled to tell you something."

I thought who is this nutcase? Because if you are in charismatic circles, I believe that there are those who are real and then there are those psychologically unbalanced or mystical people seeking experiences for experience sake, just to be honest with you. I know people who don't test anything. If they feel something, then it's the Lord. You know. Now back to the story.

I said, "Lady, I don't know what you are talking about. Tell me what you mean." She says, "I saw you and a message came into my mind. I don't know what to do with this." I said, "What?" She said, "The Lord wants you to know that he has a ministry for you but you are not ready. And it is him who has placed these desires in your heart to be in ministry. It is not you. Don't be afraid of it. He has a ministry for you. But your job now is to be patient and wait." That was June of 1986. I had it all written down. At first when she said that I thought "What?" Then I remembered that I had asked God to help me know if the calling was from him 2 days earlier!!! I was blown away by such a clear answer but nothing opened up for me in terms of ministry full-time. I was expecting something to simply come across my path. I continued as a very busy Christian layman but no vocational ministry presented itself as I thought it might. You're probably thinking, "Well, why didn't you just go to seminary and get trained?" Because I was scared. I still never saw myself as a professional, vocational, minister. I don't like King James Version of the Bible talk. I didn't even care for a lot of ministers as I thought some were insincere. But God had touched my life. He had helped me and I had experienced him. And I knew that when I went to the jails to visit prisoners, that God would give me a sense of compassion. God would give me a sense to tell somebody something. "God loves you." "You are important." "You are this, that, or other." I would get feedback from people who said "Wow! Thank you! You are neat." And I would say, "No, no, no, no . . . You don't get this. I'm not neat. You don't get this. There is a God, and he knows

you and he knows me. And I don't understand a lot about God but He is real and cares for you. I don't want your money. I'm not trying to get you join a church per se, but God loves you. Jesus Christ loves you." I would have this strong compulsion. And I was scared of it. That is why I wouldn't just go get into ministry. I would talk to pastors and they would say "just go get trained. I would ask, "How do you know it is God?" I thought it was a dramatic thing to say that God of the Universe has told you to be his ambassador! Now, in a sense, I've come to believe that we are all ambassadors of Christ. But that experience that night made the God of the Bible come alive. . . I have also had words of knowledge twice ( where God reveals something to you that you could not have known for the specific purpose of ministry . . . not fortune telling)

I visited with a man in the hospital once who was critically ill. I knew his wife as she had been a customer of mine. She liked me because I didn't judge her and I didn't condemn her. She knew I was religious. She didn't have a clue about what my faith was really about but she asked me to go visit her sick husband. I ask her what she wants me to do and suggested that she send a minister. She said, "No, he hates ministers." However, we have lived a very rough life morally and I'm afraid he might go to hell. I said, "Well, what do you think I can do?" She said, "Well you're religious, just go see him." So I go visit this man. I said, "Buddy, if you die today, do you have peace. Are you comfortable with dying?" He said, "No, I'd go to hell if I die." I said, "Why do you think you would go to hell?" He said, "I was raised in a church, I understand that there is a hereafter and I am sure I'd go to hell. You don't know how bad I am." And I said, "Well, you don't know how bad I am." He said, "Well, are you a preacher or something?" I said, "No, I am simply a Christian and your wife asked me to visit you because I am a Christian." I said, "God loves you Buddy." He just stared at me. I visited him three times. And each time I shared with him the gospel, tried to get to know him and hopefully support him. He was very clear that his relationship with God wasn't in order. So the last time I went to visit him, I asked him if he sensed he was getting ready to die. He said, "Yeah, I probably will die." I said, "What if you die and there is the God of the Bible awaiting you? What if there is a God going to hold you accountable for your life? What if he says, 'I reached out to you. I took your sins, and you rejected me.' What if that's true?" I said, "Buddy, will you just talk to God when I leave the room? Just pray a prayer from your heart and tell Jesus that if he is real . . ." He interrupted me and said "No. You don't know how bad I am. God can't love me." I then prepare to leave and all of a sudden I had a strong impression to tell him, "I am God but I am also a Father, and I love him. But he will not come to me. I want to gather him up in my arms and hold him, but he does not understand My heart." I thought, "Am I imagining this impression because I want something to happen so bad?" So I said, "Buddy, I'm going to leave today and you probably won't ever want to see me again, but I think God just told me to tell you something." He said, "What?" You have to understand, this guy was rough. He was uneducated. He had been an auto mechanic all his life. Now he's going to think I'm weird. I'd told him about the love of God, but he didn't get it because he didn't think he was worthy, but I said no one's worthy. I said, "God loves you and me. The fact we are sinners is true but he has paid for it through Christ's substitutionary death. I can't get it through to you. But I think God just told me to tell you something. If this offends you, forgive me, I am out the door." I told him. He started crying. This man is 60 something

years old. He said, "I want you to leave." I left, and I thought, "Dear Lord," I thought, "That was probably just a charismatic spasm." A week later, I got a call from his wife and she said he was actively dying, now. She said, "Can you come by and see him." I thought, "Oh, I'm sure he really wants the Pat Robinson guy to come in the room . . . I wondered if my word of knowledge had made him afraid of me. So I go over there. And I say, "Buddy, I'm going to say something to you. Did you call on the name of Jesus?" And he nods like this. That was it. Buddy dies shortly thereafter. His wife and I were then talking in the waiting room. I told her what I had told him . . . that I felt God told me to tell him. She looked like somebody had hit her in the face. She said, "Dear God! When Buddy was a child, his daddy would beat him. He would get limbs off of trees and beat him unmercifully. We had sex, but he never told me he loved me. He couldn't receive love." She said, "We want you to do the funeral because he has always resented preachers and authority figures. He had never kept a job. His children hate him. He beat the hell out of them." Then it hit me; Buddy could not connect with the concept of a father because of his earthly father. God was using a monkey like me who was in that room to say to him, "I love you but you don't understand me. I want to hold you, but you won't come to me." Well, talk about unitive experiences affecting you, that was a revelation to me that God desperately tries to get our attention and he uses fools, human beings, that don't even know they are being used. The unitive experiences, those are the gifts of the Spirit. These things have opened up for me the things that I have found in scripture. Many Baptists say that these gifts of the Spirit ceased with the first century that to me, is not true. But I don't control when He works or what he does. He is above my understanding. I know people who tell me that they have had experiences with God that are experiences that are totally contrary to His revealed WORD and CHARACTER revealed in the Scripture. So, although I tell you of these experiences, I am quick to add that experiences MUST be tested against the revealed Word of God and if they are in conflict with scripture or principles of scripture I do not put any stock in them. I was in wild charismatic circles for years and I saw people come forth with prophecies that were contradictory to Scripture. I have also had friends who were not Christians in the clear scriptural sense of the word, and yet they claim to experience God/ Jesus. Upon listening to their descriptions etc it is clear that they have a "different Jesus" which is no Jesus at all because their Jesus doesn't line up with the clear Jesus of the Bible. Paul discussed such false things in scripture. Paul tells us to test everything. So I test things. I add this disclaimer as I believe one must be careful with esoteric, emotional, unitive experiences, and test them in light of scripture.

Me: I'm going to ask my questions anyway, but you may have answered most of them already. So you can just say that if you feel like it is something you've already talked about.

Me: Can you describe that experience of oneness that you described in your experience as "liquid love"?

Liam: A sense of euphoria. I had found what I was looking for. I had found reality. The drugs that I had experienced in college were counterfeit for this peace. My sexual escapades were wonderfully fun for a time . . . but consequences always followed . . . but

they were all counterfeit compared to the this presence of God. They were imitations. This is reality. I was in euphoria. I literally thought, “I can’t drive my car home.” I felt drunk. There were waves of peace and joy. I was literally intoxicated. And these other two guys in the room experienced the same thing. One was a Baptist minister who didn’t feel like he wanted to leave Baptist circles, but he had experienced the filling of the Spirit accompanied by the gift of speaking in tongues. The other guy was less knowledgeable about Christ than I was. But that night, before this filling happened, the three of us had been to a men’s prayer service, then the pastor, me, and this other guy had moved to the pastors’ study for conversation and prayer. For weeks, I had been asking God to cleanse me of my past because I had been having this sense of my sinfulness, not in a condemning way but an awareness. This is probably a huge part of it and I forgot to tell you. I was beginning to have a consciousness of my sinfulness. I had begun to pray, “God please clean me up. Make me authentic. Make me real. Because if this thing is as real as all these Pentecostal and Pat Robinson say it is on TV, I want to know you. I’ve lived the other side and it is a dead end.”

But I will say that this, I don’t know about being slain in Spirit and all that because I also believe in the power of suggestion. But that night the presence of God was so overwhelming. I sometime think that maybe people can fall out under the presence of God. Because when a little bitty human being comes into the presence of God, it’s not that odd to me to think that you could have a physical manifestation and fall out. Euphoria. Drunkenness. Peace. Symmetry. Wholeness. All my life, I’ve been wanting to be loved. My daddy didn’t express love me. I had to please my mother, and to please my Sunday school teachers I had to memorize Bible verses. To get my friends to like me, I would smoke pot. I’d trip and I’d get into sexual behaviors with girls even though I didn’t feel good about some of them because of peer pressure, peer pressure, peer pressure, and then Whoom! God really does love me! Even me! And it is not about me. It is about him. And then I got this compulsion to tell it. It isn’t about us; it’s about how good He is. Agape means a love based on the lover not the lovee (I made that word up. But you get what I’m saying.) It’s not the recipient. God loves us, because God is love. It’s not whether we are worthy. It’s got nothing to do with us. And that’s grace. When grace gets a hold of our hearts, it starts transforming us.

Me: Tell me about coming back to yourself after the experience.

Liam: Got home. Pulled my father out of the bed. Told him I was sorry for the way that I had hated him. And after I had assured him that I was not under the influence of anything but that God had touched me. He said, “Ok, that’s good.” Then I got into bed, and I just lay there in the bed feeling very goofy but good. I knew it was Jesus. So I said, “Jesus, I love you.” I felt his presence and his peace. The feeling of being intoxicated and in the presence of God that had dissipated by the next morning. But I know I couldn’t sleep much through that night. It was a feeling of “God, thank you that you exist. Thank you that you love me. Thank you that you are real.”

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience? If so, how?

Liam: I saw myself as accepted by God because of Christ as opposed to striving to get God to like me. So, yes, for 6 months to a year I felt myself accepted and as a child of God. But there's more to this story because I fell away from that.

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life now?

Liam: I go through ups and downs, but I stay connected to the Lord. And I try to keep sinful things out of my life because I saw from scripture and over living the last 30 years that to the degree that I try to walk with the Lord and to turn away from things that would grieve his spirit, His presence is able to be more real. I can't be effective if I'm not connected with the Lord. Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me then I will remain in you and you will bear much fruit." If I don't I can't bear fruit. I've learned that we walk by faith and I've stopped asking for dramatic experiences to confirm what the Scripture tells us clearly. If I get them, praise God, but they are not necessary.

Me: In what way does it not affect you?

Liam: I don't think there's not a way. When I go through times when I get really down, I do what I learned to do from the Psalms; I recount what the Lord has done for me. When I go through times where I don't see prayers answered for a long time. Like, it was 20 years from the time that God called me to ministry where I was stuck in the business world and I would always go back to that unitive experience and other things. But that unitive experience, made an impression on me that was indelible. Another reason that it helped me, is I saw that the same God who came by His Spirit on the day of Pentecost to empower His church had also filled me and empowered me!!! It turned Peter from someone who denied Christ to someone who was fearless. And I know it is not because Peter was something special. He was just a coarse-talking fisherman.

It affects me. I go back to it. But, I don't require feelings like I used to. I feel like God wants us to walk by faith. If I need a manifestation of his Spirit by a feeling or a unitive experience, I now know don't have to have it. If I get it, Praise God, because I love feelings. I'm an emotional person, but I don't have to have it. I get aggravated if someone tried to whip me into an emotional experience. To me, a lot of charismatics and Pentecostals, although I am part of them in one way, they try to whip up emotion and I don't care for doing that.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Liam: Great conviction of sin. Great conviction of wanting God to make me authentic.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you feel is your next step?

Liam: To start walking in obedience in certain areas. Like I want to start doing some things for my daughter and my wife that don't come natural for me that I've got to start acting on. Relational things that if I love them, I need to start doing some things.

Me: Is there anything that you would like to add?

Liam: I just think that God has been incredibly, incredibly merciful to me. The longer I live, I see the reality of Christianity including the human/ sinful nature. I've also seen the need we humans have for love, significance, belonging . . . all of the things God has given us in His Son. I've never known anyone yet that if I know them long do not disappoint me in some way. I disappoint myself. I'm amazed at myself and how selfish and childish I can be. The longer I live, the more that I'm aware that there is this great and mighty God, and we are indeed made in His image and therefore, we are special. We are special! God loves us. We are created in his image! But I also see the evidence of the fall . . . the struggle between our new heart given when we are born again and yet our human nature's desires (see Romans chapters 7 & 8) a real distinction between God and man. I also see evil in the world so much evidence that the Christian explanation of reality fits!!!!

Me: Would you like to share anything about this experience today?

Liam: No. I've told you so much. I've never even told my daughter about some of my weird experiences because I don't want her to think that if she doesn't experience something like that, that it means anything. Because I don't believe it does.

### *Mei's Interview*

Me: Would you like to share anything about your picture?

Mei: It is interesting that this experience came to mind in the meditation. It is not the one I thought would. This is a medicine wheel and this is the ground. It is huge area of ground. This was a treed area of a park. This was a grassed field with trees all around us. This is me, and I was coming into the wheel. When the wheel was planned, they asked me who my animal spirit was. My animal spirit is the lion or one of them. This is the actual skin of the cougar. When I put it on, I was standing outside the wheel. When I stepped into the wheel my job was to bring the cougar energy to the wheel. When I came into the wheel and followed its path around the wheel. I became the cougar and everything changed and all of a sudden I realized that I was seeing things through the eyes of the cougar. It was an incredible moment of being one with everything there. The way the trees moved, the way I could see the wind . . . It was just an incredible experience. The word that keeps coming up is one, one, one and Leone. le one. It was all about being in the one. As this happened, there were a lot of people out there. Afterwards, people keep coming up to me saying, "Boy, you really brought the cougar energy." But I was aware of was that I didn't bring the cougar energy. The cougar energy filled me. I channeled it somehow. I'm not a big user of the word channeled. But as soon as I put that skin on, I was one with the cougar spirit. It was an incredible moment. It didn't last for long. It was almost like having two minds. One part of me was the observer saying "Wow, don't lose this." But knowing that as soon as I became completely aware of it, I would lose it. And another part of me in the oneness experience. The lion is still very



important to me. It is the Christ energy that I connect with. Yes, this was transformation, because by having an experience like this, what it does for me is that it strengthens in me the theories that I had about these things. Because it is not the kind of knowing that you can have by the stuff you can gather about these things, it is the kind of knowing that comes from having the experience. Which is very different from learning in a book or taking notes. Nobody can take this away from me now because it is part of my experience. And this type of learning is very different from learning some church principle or some dogma. That is outside of me and this is my own inner knowing. That cannot be taken away from me. You can't make me deny what I know that I know that I know. So when I have these experiences, it helps me connect with that inner source of who I am and that inner resource and the vastness of my inner world. It is about how I connect to the great cosmos inside of myself. In a sense, I am this tiny spec in the cosmos and I am the whole cosmos in those moments. It is a moment when I am everything. So yes, it changes my life. I may only be a spec of dust here for a short period of time, but without the dust, there is no cosmos. That is the power of that kind of experience.

I was asked to be a blessing at a church this night by one of my friends after I had already agreed to be a part of the wheel. What I realized when I was out there dancing was that while I was out here doing this and they were doing the anointings, that we were really all doing the same thing. It was all part of the same thing. It was another one of those oneness moments. As I was smudging to bless, they were doing anointings with oil. It was just incredible to feel the expansion of that. All the same action at the same time by different people in different places with all different baggage, but all the same thing. That has been my biggest growth in purpose.

I started out as a Roman Catholic. I was a nun. I don't know why this is my life journey. I just know somehow that my whole journey has been opening to possibility. I never say now, "No, that just can't be." Because I know that is no longer true because of these kinds of experiences.

Me: Tell me about the experience of oneness in whatever way feels most comfortable.

Mei: In this particular instance, the oneness came visually. Somehow through my eyes, looking through the cougar mask, I knew that I was no longer Mei. So there was the experience of oneness coming through the eyes. But also the ears. Because it didn't sound like people standing around a circle anymore. All my senses were changed. Somehow when that happened there was suddenly a feeling of being incorporated into something much bigger than myself but I didn't feel diminished. I felt magnified. But it separated me from my present surroundings, that total oneness. It was like I knew things were there around me but they weren't important because there was something, much bigger that was there. It was almost like being in two universes at the same time. One was so much more inclusive that it just enveloped the other. Because all the senses were involved. Even the way that I could feel the wind on my face. Everything was different. Everything. Universal energy is what I have come to. I used to hate that. I would think, "Why would you want to call the God that I love Universal Energy. NO. I hate that." Now, I have come to this love relationship with this universal energy because it so much

bigger than my word God. God was so in a box. Now, this universal energy is way more. It is like that quote, “God said that we were made in God’s image and likeness, and we’ve returned the favor.” We create God according to who we think that He should be, and that is the God that I don’t want to be a part of. So when I get hooked into this universal energy, those words are way bigger than I could ever figure out. I try very hard, even though it is human to try to categorize, I try very hard not to do that. That is the ability to open to the truth. My experience is only one piece and everybody else’s is another. And the more that I can bring that into my experience of what life is, the more complete it is. This life is just one part of this journey. An Ojibwa teacher said to me, “You westerners think that you are humans having a spiritual journey. You’re not. You are spirits having a human journey. And you will just keep on after this.” And for me that is really true.

Me: Tell me about coming back to yourself after the experience.

Mei: At this event I didn’t know anybody. So it is not like I had close friends to share this with. People who came up to me I made small talk with. But to be honest the experience was so big at the moment, I really couldn’t talk about it yet. I just took things in because I was part of the event. It was what people had seen that I didn’t know they saw. I just thought that this event was happening to me. I wasn’t aware that other people were in tune and aware that something was happening. For every one of these stones represented around this circle, we had someone come into the circle and do something. I don’t know what their experience was. I do know that a lot of people came to me about my experience. So, I’m sure that I didn’t understand all of this while I was there. In fact, I sort of needed to get away from there so that I could be alone with the experience. At the same time, I didn’t want to leave the community because they were part of the experience. So it was a really difficult time. I tend to isolate when I’m doing the integration process. I was willing to hear what people said because it helped feed the integration, but a lot of the integration happened after I left there. Later, I began to share with people I trust enough. But it is hard to even talk about this. But this really changed my life because I see things so differently now after this experience.

Me: Did you see yourself differently after this experience? If so, how?

Mei: I saw myself differently because I realized that these things can happen to me. I also realized that I didn’t make it happen. That was important, because it is also possible to imagine things. But, I didn’t go in there looking for anything to imagine. This just began happening and I became aware of it. When something like this happens and you feel so magnified, you feel so much smaller and humble because this amazing thing is happening. And somehow you are everything and nothing all at the same time. That is part of that paradox. For me, you have to get the picture; I’m part of a very organized church. And this stuff isn’t understood or recognized. I used to say to God, “Will you cut it out. I don’t need anymore of these experiences. I have had way too many of these. Will you just cut it out?” He never listened. But this also keeps me on the walk. Even though I am very cautious about who I tell, people go, “You’re a pastor? How do you do that?” I say I don’t know. It is hard to be me and to be a pastor of a Christian church. I am

learning to speak the language that the people need to hear and to fill the words with different intentions so that eventually it will open up their ability to embrace more than they knew in the words so they begin to hear the intentions of the words. Like the word Salvation although I have a very hard time with that word, I put new intention behind the word so that it is filled with new meaning. So eventually it doesn't mean *salvation*, Jesus died on the cross and his blood saved me. I have a hard time with that. Every time I stand at the communion table and serve communion this kind of experience happens to me. IT always did. I'm putting some of that together right now as we speak. Remember, I was raised Roman Catholic. Women can't be priests or consecrate. I will never forget the first time I was standing at the communion table and one of these experiences happened. I'm standing at the communion table holding bread and all of a sudden, way more than bread. So I go from feeling like "Oh, my God, what am I doing here. I'm not sure I'm supposed to be here" to "of course, I belong here." So there has been a lot of this in my life. Thousands of times! Every time I meditate, I go into one of the places. You can't count that. It is a knowing that you're a just this moment in time and you are everything all at the same time. That is incredible. If I tried to explain that to my church people, they wouldn't understand. I have to find a way to explain this in words that they will understand. They will come up to me and say things like, "You are so special, we don't deserve to have you." I get that all the time. They are starting to understand that there is something different about me. I'm not like their other pastors. I was supposed to be finished at the church 9 months ago, and I'm still there. I don't have a contract, but I'm still there. It's because they keep going, "we can't let you go yet." I'm so blessed because of these experiences that I know I bring some energy to them. I know it is healing and it makes them feel that they are bigger than they thought they were. That is important because without that, they begin to go into these downward spirals because it is a persecution kind of faith. So when someone shows up like me whose energy is bigger than that. They feel that. They don't understand that is what is happening, but that is what is happening. When they get caught up in, "Oh my gosh, I'm really bigger than that." That is so exciting. Who would ever want to go back to "Jesus died for my sins. I am wicked, and I need to beat myself every day." Oh gosh. I love Jesus. But let's not get hung up on the church's Jesus. Ok?

Me: In what way does this affect how you live your inner and outer daily life?

Mei: It is everything. It is my life. When I ask myself, and I do this often, what's my purpose? I'm always reevaluating that. I'm doing that again now. I think all of us have a purpose. What am I supposed to be doing? How am I supposed to be investing this divine energy? Sometimes I say to myself, "Why don't I just go get a job at the Post Office. I would love to be a mail carrier and not have to worry about all this stuff." Then I laugh. Do you know what would happen? Everybody on your route would be saying things. Because this kind of energy doesn't go away. It's there and I see that. When I show up somewhere, people will feel it. I've had people say, "I just want to be near you." Ok. This stuff I understand. I've learned it over many years of doing this work. The secret, I've learned, is to be open to anyone, anything, anywhere. And when you're open, the divine universal energy can use you. I'm a person who never worries about money. I'm always finding jobs and losing jobs and I never look for jobs because the universe takes care of

me. Because when I say to the universe, “Ok, what do you need from me?” The universe isn’t going to say to me, “Well, you are going to have to make a living so that you can do this work for me.” No. The universe says, “Ok, I’ll provide. This is what I need done.” I never worry about anything. Everyplace we have always lived has been a gift. When we first moved here, we lived in a mansion with 13 bathrooms down by this river. Could I afford to live there? No way. So I said, “Ok, now what horrible thing do you have for me to do.” Because it usually goes that way, you know. And it was a very rough go here, but I was given this paradise to live in so that every night when I came home, I could be renewed and refreshed. This was the universe’s way of saying to me, “If you keep doing this work for me, I’ll take care of you.”

Then I moved to Texas, because I was called down there. Oh, God. I didn’t want to go. At the interview, I said everything that I could think of to make these people say, “Oh my God, get her away from us.” Every time I would say one of those things that I would think would separate us, they would go, “Oh, yes!” and I would go, “Oh, No!” So I ended up in hellhole of El Paso, Texas on the Mexican border. Hell hole because it is so HOT there. I don’t like hot. And I mean it was HOT!!! We were in the Chihuahuan desert and it’s hot there. I didn’t want to be there. So when these people called and they wanted me to come, I was living in Michigan at the time. They said, “Do you want to come look for a house?” I said, “No.” They said, “No?” I said, “No. Just go pick one out for me. If God wants me there, God will provide. Just go find me a house and tell me when you get one.” They said, “What do you mean, go find you a house?” They thought I was totally crazy. They said tell us what it absolutely has to have and then give us your wish list. The house came with the entire list. I knew that. I even got a prayer garden outside my bedroom window. I asked for a prayer garden, and I got a prayer garden. I never saw this house ‘till I got there. We got off the plane and went and signed the papers. We were going to dinner, and the realtor said, “Would you like to see the house you just bought?” So we went to see the house. But I had actually done all this work with Spirit beforehand. I had journeyed with Spirit and taken care of all this stuff so that it was ready and waiting by the time I got there. So everything I do, I don’t do by myself. There is no way for me to operate without Spirit. They are not separate.

Me: In what way does it not affect you?

Mei: I can’t think of anything. I really can’t.

Me: What was happening in your life just prior to this experience?

Mei: Oh gosh. It was a long time ago. I don’t have a direct answer. But I know at this time, as it is always, that deep struggle between how do live in the fullness and oneness of this and have to live within the confines of organized religion? How do I do that? At that time the confines of organized religion was the Christian church. But now I’m not as afraid of it because I’m not as invested in outcome anymore. Here is my metaphor for life. My job is to hold on to the tail of the kite. If the kite soars, I soar. If the kite crashes, I crash. It doesn’t matter. Just hold on to the tail of the kite, that’s my job. So that is why I have no investment in the outcome. So that is why I can be at this church where I am. If

they don't like me and they fire me, that's fine. That means that God has somewhere else for me to be. There is no investment. That is how you put your ego away. It's not about me. It's about where Spirit calls me. The older I get, the more wisdom that comes with that, I realize that it has nothing to do with me at all. My job is to show up and hold on to the tail of that kite. That's my job. And there is no ego in that. I'm not saying that I don't have any ego issues, but I do trust in God to provide.

Me: If you see yourself on a path of spiritual growth, what do you see as your next step?

Mei: I know Spirit is calling me to do something really important for Spirit. I see it beginning to materialize now. I don't usually move or go somewhere because I just choose to, even vacations, but because Spirit calls me to. Vacations, I don't take vacations. Even if I think it is, it is always a spirit quest. I go to learn something. When we left to move back to Ohio, a year and a half ago, the impetus was my husband's illness. I couldn't take care of him alone. So I said Ok. Awesome things happened to let me know that I was supposed to be back in Ohio. I went all the way to Ireland to meet this little old crone who told me without knowing anything about me to move back home now, to be near my mother because I was in trouble and to get home because the spirits were telling her to tell me to get home, now. So, when I got back in the States, I moved. That didn't happen just because my husband was sick. That happened because in the spirit world I wasn't paying close enough attention, so they throw me an intervention in the most unlikely place. Little Ol' Mary in Ireland who says, "Get home. You need to be near your mother, now." I said, "How do you know that?" Well, it's a long story but my grandmother had shown up in Mary's room and let her know that I was in big trouble and that she needed to get me home. The way that I understand this now is that the Universe was worried that I was going to get sick trying to do everything and take care of my husband at the same time. The universe doesn't want me sick; the Universe needs me. So, it got me home. I said I'm here, what do you want me to do? All the sudden it started to open up. My husband is getting the care he needs. I see him several times a week. But I don't have the burden of his care. I'm serving in this little church. People are asking me to do things. I have this medicine wheel in my back yard, and people are starting to come once a month and they are building this wheel and they have asked me to start teaching them about that. I do believe the Spirit is asking me to be the hub of the wheel to sort of draw this community together. Not necessarily a Christian community but a spiritual community. I believe Spirit had me buy a house that was way too big for me. Everybody thought I was crazy, but that's Ok. I'm going to do what Spirit says. I think it is going to be some sort of spiritual community. There's enough room there for three or four people to live together in a spiritual community. It could be something very important and very powerful. One of my Ojibwa teachers said, "It is your job to anchor the light. Wherever you go, you need to anchor the light." And I think these are some of the ways that I can do that. I first I didn't know what she was talking about it. She said you know what I'm talking about. She said that I'm not going to live anywhere too long because you need to keep moving and anchoring the light. Move and anchor the light. Move and anchor the light. I see what is happening. I go and start these little communities. The same thing is happening now. The religion editor asked to come and write this up. I didn't ask. When you allow yourself to become one with this greater energy, it draws others toward you.

You don't have to go and put a shingle out. My biggest lesson right now is to learn how to let go of money issues. Like I said, I don't really worry about money. But I have this hang up. Somewhere, I bought into this notion that "I deserve to get paid what I'm worth." Well, that is not true. I am learning. So it is like the first gathering I did in my home. I just opened it up to anyone in the community. I think that the love offering was 22 dollars and there were like 15 people there. So that is not very much money for all the work I did. So finally I came to the notion that I need to let go of this. It is not about money, I just need to do what I'm supposed to do. Out of that, someone introduced me to her pastor at her church. That church has now hired me to be the consultant for their worship program and the pastor has asked me to be her mentor. Well, that is incredible. I need to free myself from that old message because it doesn't work that way. Let go of that money thing. I don't know what is going to happen. I've had that one meeting. Next month, they are going to come and build the medicine wheel in my yard. The following month, they are going to have a ritual there. The following month, I'm going to teach them how to build their own personal ones that they can carry around with them in their pocket and for travel or whatever. So it is all about teaching prayer and communication and teaching how to be one with the universe. These were mostly Christian people walking around my back yard contacting the spirit of the place. They did it and sensed where the earth was calling for the wheel to manifest. They were right on, because it was exactly where I thought it would be. I always check it out with the community. It has just been incredible. So I think what is next although I'm not sure what this is growing into. I can really believe that the house will hold a spiritual community that three or four people will live there too. I think I won't live there all the time. I think that will be my spiritual hub and then that I will go out from there and do this other work. I'm not sure what it is going to be but this is what I'm beginning to see.

Me: Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience?

Mei: I just feel so privileged I cry. I think everybody has these experiences. But I don't know why some are just so much aware of them than others. When I was in Peru, Matthew Fox and I took a group to Peru long before I started working for him, this was when I was still living in Texas. We were down in Machu Picchu. He stayed for 1 week and the whole group stayed for 2. This was after he left and I had the whole group that last week. This is another experience that I almost told you about.

On Machu Picchu, it is an archeological dig site. There are no paths or roads or anything. There's stone. So at night they lock it, because there are no lights or electricity and people can get hurt. The people we had with us wanted to go for a nighttime meditation. So we arranged with the guards, since we had been up there 2 or 3 days ahead of time and we knew the terrain, if we brought flashlights and all, could we come up and have an evening prayer vigil. So they allowed us to go. That night we were arranging to get ourselves out of the hotel and to Machu Picchu and I got a phone call while I was organizing everybody to go up. It was from home, and I found out that they had been trying to get a hold of me for several days. They were worried that my mother was going to die. She had fallen and crushed her arm and a whole bunch of blood clots were going towards her heart and they couldn't set the arm because of the blood clot in the heart. So I

learn all of this in the moment before I'm going up on this trip. I chose not to tell anybody. I talked to the guide that was with us. He said, "I don't know how I would get you out of here." First of all, what are you going to do with this group? I was alone with 30-40 people. He said that I would have to get you on a bus, then on a train, then on a plane. I don't know how to get you out of here. So I said, "Ok. Let's just do what we are doing now. Don't tell anyone. I don't want to spoil anybody's time." So we took the bus to the top of the mountain. They let us in the gate and locked it behind us.

My roommate didn't have a flashlight. So, I said, "Come with me." We met in a circle first, all of us. We prayed and everybody went to wherever they wanted to go. They had already preselected their meditation site. There was a tiny sliver of the new moon. A lot of wind. My roommate wanted to go to a certain place so I started walking her over there. I asked her, "Do you hear anything?" She said, "No." I said, "Don't you hear drumming and singing and chanting?" And she said, "No. I don't hear drumming and singing and chanting." Of course, what I know is that I'm the only person there with a drum. And I'm not playing it. And I'm hearing drumming and singing and chanting. So we are walking along and there is a lot of wind. You can really hear the grass moving. I'm hearing this chanting that is very distinct. And I said to my roommate, "Do you hear that?" She said, "No. Would you cut it out? You are starting to spook me. I don't know what you are talking about." I said, "Well, I thought I heard something." So I hear it very clearly. I make her stop and I say, "Now, just listen." She was really mad at me. She said, "Will you stop it? You are scaring me." I said, "Ok, ok." So I took her where she wanted to go and I left her there. And the agreement was that in an hour and a half we were going to regroup. So the place that I had chosen to go, I decided not to go, because that is where I heard all of the drumming and singing and chanting. And I got scared, because I thought that if she can't hear it, I'm not going over there! So I got scared. And I got this thing about my mom on my mind. And all I want to do is work with my inner healer. I've got this inner healer that I often work with and I wanted to talk to that angelic presence and ask what to do. So, instead of going where I wanted to go, I went out into this, like, plaza area. I set my blanket and the stuff that I had brought with me. And I faced the Temple of the Sun, but you could see the little tiny sliver of the moon up there. There wasn't much light. Behind me there were leveled areas where the high grasses were waving. And I was sitting there and my intention was to pray and ask my inner healer what to do about my mom. All of a sudden, I see this long tube of light coming at me from where I had just left my roommate. And I thought, she doesn't have a flashlight, and nobody else is over there. What is this? It is so black out there that I thought maybe I'd better flip on my flashlight so whoever is coming towards me doesn't trip on me. They wouldn't see me sitting on the ground. So I flipped my flashlight on, and the other light went out. It is so strange, that through this whole experience, I never felt afraid. I'm sitting there trying to pray, wondering what just happened, worried about my mom, knowing that I had just heard drums and singing and chanting. All I want to do is pray for my mom. I'm just starting to get into it again and all of the sudden there are these three shadows, these three figures around me. I can't see them; I just know there are three figures. One of them kneels down on one leg in front of me, takes his hands and puts them gently on my face, and says in broken English, "I have been looking for you for a very long time." There

were three men surrounding me, I should have been terrified. And I wasn't. I wasn't afraid at all.

And he says to me, "We're going to pray." Ok. So far I have no connection. I am soooo dense. I have made no connection. He is doing something over here on the ground. Here I am sitting cross-legged. One man sitting here. Another man sitting there. And this one that talked to me is over here. And he said, "We're going to pray." And I thought ok and I closed my eyes, I was so confused by everything that was going on. I had kind of lost my focus here. So he starts with this one sound. The only way I know how to explain it is . . . It felt like a column, like a big marble column. It felt like a column of sound that was coming from the center of the earth and shooting out into the universe. It was like this huge light. I don't know how else to explain it. It was just this huge sound. I had no idea what it was. I just kept my eyes closed. I was just in bewilderment. I mean here I am with the men around me and here I am on the top of this mountain. I was like OK? What's going on? So, all of this is happening. And he is just singing and chanting. I think, "Now I know where all of the singing and chanting was coming from." This guy, he's singing Pachu Mama, he's on all fours. I could just see shadows; it's all I could see. So he's finally finished. And I said, does anybody here speak English. And this man who speaks really good English said, "Oh, Yeah." I said, "Who are you guys?" And this is how Spirit works. Remember I'm not in California at this time. He says, "Well, I'm from California. This man is my healer. And when I come to town, we come up here and we do healing work together. And this man is his assistant." I said, "Oh, ok, fine." And then I hear the man and his assistant arguing in Spanish. I am able to pick up just enough to know, with the help of the man from California, that the boss is telling his assistant to tell me to come see him at 10:00 in the morning. The assistant is telling him that he has appointments all day. The boss says, "I am the one who decides who I see." The California guy tears off the little piece of paper and writes 10:00 on it and says "here" and gives it to me. I take the little piece of paper and tuck it away. And as quick as they were there, they were gone. I mean, they were just gone, all of a sudden. So, now I am looking at my watch to see how much time I have to pray for my mom and 2 hours had gone by. I was so mad now because I thought, "Those guys took up all my time. Now I can't pray for my mom." It hasn't hit me, yet. It is just amazing how dense one can be. It has not hit me yet. So, I was so mad. I thought I better go get my friend and I figured the rest of the group would be waiting for us. I said to her immediately, "Did you see someone with a flashlight, a long skinny flashlight?" She said, "NO. Now, don't start that again with me! I didn't see anyone." I said, "Ok, ok. You didn't see anybody. Come on let's go meet the others." As soon as we walked into the circle, one man, only one man, said, "Did you guys hear that awesome sound?" I said, "Yes. I heard it." He said, "Wasn't it awesome?" I said, "Yes. it was very awesome!" And I thought "Wow! There is one man open enough to hear that sound." I was sure it was the powerful sound that he heard. So we did our closing prayer and we got on the bus and went down. I grabbed my roommate and said, "You come to meet with me right now." She said, "Ok." So we went to the room and I said, "Sit down. Just listen and hear me out. And I don't want anyone else to know about this." So, that little piece of paper was my lifeline. She would never have believed me. I would have never believed me. I said, "We are going there tomorrow morning. I want you to go with



me, but I don't want anyone else to know about this because we don't want a parade. We want to figure out what this is all about."

So the next morning, the two of us walked in to the village. In this village, there's no streets like we know of, there's like these steps that go up the side of the mountain and they are huge. And we were at the bottom of these steps, and I could feel him. We were trying to figure out the address. We really weren't sure. There's like all these huts that are stuck together all along the side. I said, "That's him standing up there at the top." Remember, I hadn't seen his face the night before. She said, "How do you know that him?" I said, "I just know." And he came walking straight towards me. It was amazing. He said, "Come." I said, "My friend?" He said, "It's ok, come." He showed me into his hut and closed the door. I thought, "I'm so glad I brought my friend." There was another woman there. I didn't know who she was and still don't. He sat us in the four directions and he said, "Just close your eyes. We're going to pray." He started again! He warned us about a couple of things. He told us that we would feel the Spirit water, that we would hear the Condor's wings. So, I had to peak a couple of times because I couldn't believe this was happening. He was nowhere near me, and I could feel the wings brushing my face. And the Spirit water was amazing. Again, an hour and a half just went by just like that. It's like there's no time and it's just gone. After we finished praying, I said, "Ok. Will you answer a couple of questions for me?" Communication was really hard. I said, "I don't care. We'll figure it out. What did you mean when you said that you'd been looking for me for a very long time?" He said, "You don't understand. You don't know my mother." Well, evidently, in a past life, he had been my older brother. He said, "I wish you had known my mother. You look like my mother." She had just died. He said, "You were a powerful healer, and you were my sister, and I've been looking for you for a very long time." It was incredible. Because I didn't even get into past lives and all that kind of stuff. Now, I go, ok, why not? Let's look at that. Why not? So all this expansion. It is not about one lifetime; it's about a spirit's journey. So this has been incredible. And here's the best part.

I came home. I called my sister and I said, "How's mom?" She said, "You are not going to believe it." This is when it dawned on me. It took me all this time. This is when it dawned on me. I am soooo dense. She said, "You're not going to believe this." I say, "What?"

"I just took Mom to the doctor's this morning and the doctors apologized for scaring her."

I said, "You'd better tell me the whole story. What happened?" She said, "Well, we went to the doctor's they were checking the X-rays. They were checking her heart, and they tell me now that there never was a blood clot." And I'm going, "Oh my God! That is what this was about!"

So one Sunday morning I preached. I told the truth. I told them the story that I just told you. I told them to draw their own conclusions. But I told the truth and that was hard for me to do. I told what really happened. Because this is not part of their "Jesus"

experience. I tape recorded it, and I sent it to my mother. And I said, “Here’s the rest of the story.” But she has never talked to me about it, to this day. But she’s still with me. She is now 85 years old, and she had never talked to me about it. She thinks I’m crazy, but that’s ok. But that helps me understand the body just being a part of the spirit’s journey. I’ve had other manifestations that others of us have had. I don’t understand but I have my own theories about that. I don’t adhere to any one because I just go with what I’ve come up with. I just can’t believe that I would meet this guy in Machu Picchu, Peru who I know nothing about, who treats me like a long lost relative, who gifted me unbelievably. He didn’t do that to anyone else in our group. It had to be something. He gave me this beautiful Celtic circle with a cross that he carved out of the serpentine stone of the mountain. That would have taken years . . . And I wear that and I remember. And the Alpaca cape that he gave me, I wear that and I remember. He made me a medicine bag. When I went into his hut, he had pictures of all of these spiritual leaders posted all around his hut. So those kinds of things and something about the universal energy and the openness of the heart where these things are drawn to you. Can you imagine me preaching on a Sunday morning? I can’t say these things. So I try to take the scriptures and put new life into them.

Me: So do you have any comments about this experience here today?

Mei: Well, I am grateful. Because whenever I have an experience like the one I’ve had today, it does the same thing for me as this experience that I told you about does for me. It reminds me that I am called to tell these stories. Some medicine people would tell you, “Don’t tell the stories because that gives your power away.” But that is not what Spirit is teaching me. Spirit is teaching me that it is my job to tell the stories. Because when people begin to see the power in you then they have hope that they can be a part of that power also. That is very powerful. So every time I am invited to tell these stories, I know that that vibration goes out again. That is why I have to write it down or put them on a CD or do something with them. I have to keep telling the stories because it gives other people hope, and people are moved by them. I just know I have to keep telling the stories. It helps me to remember them. And the word Re-member is really important. We take the pieces and re-member or re order them in different ways. We are supposed to re-member all the time. Every time we take the pieces of who we are and put them together, we begin to see and in that expansion is how we connect with each other. So we remember. So I applaud you and wish you well in what you are doing.