

LIVING STORIES: AN INTUITIVE INQUIRY INTO STORYTELLING AS A  
COLLABORATIVE ART FORM TO EFFECT COMPASSIONATE CONNECTION

by

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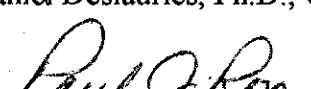
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## **Abstract**

### **Living Stories: An Intuitive Inquiry Into Storytelling As A Collaborative Art Form To Effect Compassionate Connection**

**by**

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This study explored the meaningful, autobiographic stories people share in response to a cultural call for compassionate connection through storytelling. The investigation perspective represents a shift from the constructivist, content-driven view of storytelling prevalent in story research to a relational, participatory transpersonal approach. The stance expands storytelling to encompass a dynamic process through which relationships form and transpersonal phenomena may be cocreated and experienced. The research question asked, *What makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection?* Using the qualitative research method of intuitive inquiry, 3 hermeneutic cycles of the investigation explored and clarified topic understanding. Two pilot studies engaged 1 storyteller, 1 researcher-storiographer, and 100 exhibit visitors in a collaborative, creative storytelling process developed by the researcher called Living Stories. Pilot study data informed the study design. Story materials from the pilot studies, including photography, poetry, collage, and music, were presented to 95 participants in an interactive exhibition. Data included researcher observation, and participant questionnaire responses and creative expressions. Sympathetic resonance was utilized as a validity measure. Findings indicated that creative expression of the storyteller's authentic self made storytelling elicit compassionate connection. Storytelling emerged as a collaborative art form that was inseparable from story content and was comprised of 6 components: (a) motivation, (b)

creative collaboration, (c) story, (d) story materials, (e) story presentation, and (f) storytelling experience. Six distinct features of storytelling were revealed: (a) emotional narrative, (b) interior and exterior landscape, (c) congruence, (d) authenticity, (e) love and compassion, and (f) creative collaboration. Five stages of audience storytelling engagement were identified: (a) commitment, (b) attention, (c) interaction, (d) ownership, and (e) interbeing. Compassionate connection occurred along a continuum of reported storytelling experiences, including insights and participatory transpersonal knowing. Study implications include application of findings to existing storytelling formats such as television, film, books, digital storytelling, and museum exhibitions.

*Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire.*

William Butler Yeats

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*The universe is made of stories, not of atoms. (Muriel Rukeyser, 1968, p. 111)*

“Once upon a time” is a soothing and engaging phrase to many in western culture because it means a story is to follow. Throughout my life, the most compelling books have been autobiographies and biographies, the most stirring images photographs of people revealing their inner world, and the most captivating conversations those among friends or strangers sharing meaningful truths about their lives.

I feel as though I have been led to the study of personal storytelling—the autobiographical stories we tell. Along with my endeavors in transpersonal psychology, a belief system about personal storytelling has begun to emerge and continues to take shape in response to the cultural call for personal storytelling as a means of connecting. My perspective on personal storytelling informs my approach to this inquiry and a self-styled storytelling process called Living Stories. Living Stories is a collaborative and creative way of engaging in meaningful autobiographic storytelling that expresses the teller’s story from a place of authenticity, creates connections through sharing it with others, and thereby creates an opportunity for transformation. A Glossary of Terms is provided in Appendix A for new or lesser-known terminology used throughout the dissertation. Please refer to the glossary as needed.

This chapter describes my beliefs about storytelling, a detailed description of the Living Stories process of personal storytelling utilized in the study, and the scope of inquiry and research question. My belief system and Living Stories concept are presented in this chapter to inform the reader of the starting point from which I embarked on the study. Since completing the study, my perspective has shifted to incorporate expanded

information on the topic. This chapter has been updated to reflect some of those changes, denoted by italicized phrases or portions of sentences, which are discussed in subsequent chapters.

### *Researcher's Beliefs About Storytelling*

Storytelling is an art and pastime stemming from ancient times, continuing and expanding today, in part, as a response to our thirst for connection. The modern western culture of the United States has become fast-paced and mobile, often resulting in the loss of a sense of belonging and being supported by a community. A sense of connection is missing for many people while the need for it remains intact. The current uses of storytelling in our society vary greatly. Spiritual traditions use teaching tales to inspire and guide; digital storytelling websites share personal stories using multimedia to connect and engage people. In addition to the desire to be entertained, I believe people often watch and participate in tabloid-style personal storytelling, available in mass media everywhere, in response to a hunger for connection (*in addition to a desire to be entertained*). There is a profanity to storytelling that exposes instead of honors the storyteller and seeks sensationalism rather than authenticity. People become dissatisfied consumers of profane storytelling due to a misplaced attempt to find connection. I believe there is a call in our culture for sacred storytelling as a means of connecting and transforming us.

Accordingly, I view it as no coincidence that I began developing Living Stories during recent years, nor that there are grassroots storytelling groups rapidly forming in many communities. There are many differences between sacred and profane storytelling: (a) Storytelling honors rather than exploits the teller; (b) storytelling honors rather than

sensationalizes the story; (c) the story is told with, rather than without, the teller's permission; (d) the storyteller shares the story based on heartfelt motivation rather than bragging, revenge, or other non-heart-based motivation; (e) storytelling is guided by an internal sense of truth rather than by external fact checking; (f) the storytelling environment is safe and trustworthy rather than unprotected and vulnerable; (g) the storyteller rather than other sources provides the story; and (h) audience members interact with the story and co-own the experience rather than view the story distantly as voyeurs. *I believe there is a continuum between sacred and profane storytelling; our culture seems to be moving along the continuum, as evidenced by the increasing development of creative means of storytelling that meet the need for connection.*

#### *Living Stories Description*

Traditionally, storytelling has been defined as a live act whereby a storyteller recites tales and an audience listens. As described in this section, the Living Stories concept of storytelling is expanded to encompass a larger storytelling process whereby the teller may not be present. Storytelling thus occurs between storyteller and storiographer during *storytime* and during the subsequent sharing of the story with a public audience via a mixed-media exhibition and without the physical presence of the storyteller. *Other storytelling formats, such as television and film, could utilize the Living Stories process.*

This section was written as a guideline under development for a practical application of Living Stories in the culture at large. Two pilot projects (described in chapter 3) informed the development of the guidelines. The Research Method chapter addresses the procedure proposed for the study, which is informed by these guidelines.

The following subsections explain the philosophy and purpose of Living Stories, describe the participants in Living Stories, and give a detailed description of the process.

*Philosophy and Purpose*

*We are each made of many stories.  
When we share our stories, we reveal ourselves.  
When we reveal ourselves, others see themselves in our reflection.  
This shared reflection is our connection,  
It is our compassion,  
And it can transform us.*

Living Stories is based on the belief that human beings thirst for connection—a spiritual longing at its core. Throughout time, we have exchanged stories about ourselves as a natural means of connecting with each other. We are each made of many stories—dynamic, ever changing, and growing extensions of ourselves. Some stories are ripe to be told. A ripe story is one the teller feels compelled to tell at a particular time. Through the collaborative process, space is made for the story to emerge in various forms, including black and white photography *or another photographically real visual medium such as video or film* as a primary creative mode of story expression. Both storyteller and storiographer let go of predetermining how to tell the story and allow themselves to be guided by the unfolding of the story as its own entity. The resulting story expressions may then be shared with a wider audience through an interactive, mixed-media exhibition. The audience members become participants and collaborators in the storytelling process and ongoing story evolution through their presence, feedback, and individual ways of accessing the story.

Living Stories is governed by an internal sense of truth, allowing us to access one another and feel a deep sense of connectedness, therefore engaging us in sacred storytelling. Through experiencing the unique, sacred story of the individual, we may



access feelings of interconnection on many levels, for instance on a personal, societal, and spiritual level. The intention of Living Stories is to create space for our sacred stories to emerge, to deepen our sense of connection, to create an opportunity for growth and transformation to occur, and to do so through emphasis on a storytelling process that engages the senses and is rooted in love and unconditional acceptance. Those who participate in Living Stories are affected by the experience in individual ways, just as each person's experience of a particular story, regardless of role, is unique. A wide berth is given to honoring the unique experience of the individual with nonattachment to outcome.

Sharing our stories can also transform us. In addition to having a unique personal experience, participants of Living Stories may access and create transpersonal events and phenomena. In Jorge N. Ferrer's (2002) revision of transpersonal theory, he includes a broad range of meanings of the Latin prefix *trans* for the word transpersonal. These meanings are found in the dictionary: "across, beyond, through, so as to change" (Frederick C. Mish, et al. 2000, p. 1248). Richard Tarnas (2002) explained:

Here "transpersonal" multivalently acknowledges the sacred dimension of life dynamically moving beyond as well as within, through, and by way of the human person in a manner that is mutually transformative, complexly creative, opening to a fuller participation in the divine creativity that is the human person and the ever unfolding cosmos. (p. xv)

Alfred North Whitehead (1929/1960) explains the participatory concept in a series of lectures published in the book *Process and Reality*. While neither our stories nor their impact are generalizable, our common thread is the response of our psychospiritual humanity to love and compassion as catalysts for transformation.

The Living Stories concept is aligned with a desire to (a) break down barriers of prejudice and feelings of separateness between individuals, communities, cultures, and spirit; (b) nurture the human spirit by deepening our sense of connection; and (c) reawaken us to love and create openings for transformation in ourselves and society.

### *Participants*

There are three roles in Living Stories participation: storiographer, storyteller, and audience member. These roles are described in the following subsections. Note that I filled the role of storiographer as well as researcher in the study and met the storiographer criteria listed.

*Storiographer.* Storytelling begins with the facilitator of the process, the storiographer. The storiographer engages with the storyteller for the initial telling of the teller's story and designs an exhibition of the story for a public audience. As the link between the individual and a public audience, the storiographer is an advocate for both the storyteller and the story. Ideally, the well-prepared storiographer (a) has professional knowledge and training in psychospiritual processes; (b) is actively engaged in personal psychospiritual growth work; (c) is in agreement with the Living Stories philosophy and has complete understanding of the Living Stories process (described in the next subsection); (d) has the ability to screen prospective storytellers to determine proper fit; (e) maintains a stance toward the storyteller and story of unconditional acceptance, love, and deep compassion; (f) creates a safe and inviting context for the work; (g) is skilled at facilitating an organic rather than fixed procedure; (h) is skilled at guiding one-on-one introspective processes; (i) is skilled in creative and intuitive processes; (j) is skilled at black and white photography or another photographic visual medium as a primary focus

for collaborative story expression; (k) shifts attention, at will, between witness consciousness and full absorption; (l) listens empathically; and (m) possesses exhibit design skills and ability or skills in other story presentation formats.

*Storyteller.* This person feels compelled to tell a meaningful personal story and share it with others. The storyteller who is a good fit for Living Stories

1. Has a ripe story to tell, that is, feels compelled to share a particular, meaningful story about his or her life at that time. This is markedly different from a life story, whereby the teller recalls his or her entire life.
2. Is positively motivated to tell the story, that is, as an expression of the authentic self rather than from an ulterior motive such as retribution or self-glorification.
3. Wishes to share his or her voice by sharing the story with others. The storytelling process culminates in a public exhibit or may entail different ways of being shared with others. Also, the storyteller always reserves the right not to share the story, as changes may occur after the process onset. Although revealing one's identity is implicit in sharing one's voice with an audience, the screening process makes the revelation explicit. Photographs and video would reveal the storyteller visually, for instance, in addition to the use of the storyteller's first name (and also last name, if desired by the storyteller).
4. Is not motivated to engage in the storytelling process as a means of working through deep issues. If addressing personal issues is sought, the storyteller is referred to psychotherapy, where narrative therapy or other approaches may be used in a context of confidentiality to work toward therapeutic goals.

5. Has a certain amount of psychospiritual maturity, whereby engaging in a process of tuning into one's authentic self is desired, possible, and healthy.
6. Wishes to engage in a collaborative, organic, and creative process. The process is an open-ended one in which the storyteller wishes to actively engage in opening to a certain element of mystery and unknown possibilities.
7. Is unattached to the outcome from participation in the storytelling process. Positive change may occur yet remains purposely undefined, as emphasis is placed on opening to unknown possibilities.
8. May or may not be known to the storiographer prior to the context of Living Stories. Friends and acquaintances of the storiographer may engage in the storytelling process as long as no conflict about doing so is felt by either and the criteria above are met.

*Audience.* An audience member is someone who chooses to attend a story exhibition—an interactive experience where feedback may be expressed in various ways and integrated into the exhibit. Audience members may also be inclusive of other formats, such as digital storytelling. The feedback modes made available depend on the particular story and resulting exhibit design and could include writing, drawing, and speaking into a video camera, for example. Each audience member experiences the exhibit uniquely with a potential for transformation. In Living Stories, the storytelling experience is process driven rather than content driven. Therefore, audience members need have no knowledge, experience, or previous interest in the story topic or storyteller to enhance their experiences. Many will not know the storyteller and storiographer. Others may be friends and family of the storyteller and storiographer or intimately

knowledgeable about the story topic. All audience members are collaborators in the storytelling process in several ways:

1. The story is ever changing from audience feedback, which becomes part of the story and exhibition.
2. Each audience member accesses the story in a unique way, affecting the telling of the story for that audience member.
3. Audience participation and feedback may influence additional exhibitions or story-related projects.
4. Audience members may convey the story to others and/or impact their decision to attend the exhibition.
5. *Audience members cocreate transpersonal phenomena from their storytelling participation.*

### *Process*

The Living Stories process constitutes a series of balanced cycles, like breathing, in which a full breath is composed of an in breath and an out breath. For instance, the storyteller and storiographer receive or breathe in *participatory knowing* about the story (explained below) through various sensory modalities, followed by expressing or breathing out the story in various forms such as black and white photography, collage, and sculpture. The story audience participates in the storytelling through their presence at the exhibition, creative expression feedback, and cocreation of the storytelling experience. The general components of the storytelling process are (a) intentionality and ritual, (b) story ripeness and good fit determination, (c) collaboration, (d) initial project

planning, (e) storytime, (f) story exhibition preparation, (g) story exhibition, (h) post-exhibition review and project closure, and (i) additional exhibits and other projects.

*Intentionality and ritual.* Intentionality and ritual are strong components throughout the Living Stories process. The storiographer begins not by soliciting a storyteller but by setting an intention to draw a storyteller who has a ripe story to tell. The storytelling candidate hears about Living Stories directly or indirectly and expresses interest in participating in the process. When story ripeness and good fit determination (described in the following section) have been assessed and a storyteller has agreed to project participation, the storiographer and storyteller set an intention to tune into the story and allow it to emerge. Intentionality is an integral part of the process of opening to transpersonal or participatory knowing to guide the storytelling. Intentionality is also used to sustain conscious awareness of participatory knowing.

Through more highly attuned states of conscious awareness, *one may better receive transpersonal information about the story through emodiment or participation of the whole person*, such as intellectual, somatic, emotional, aesthetic, and intuitive knowing. Somatic knowing is wisdom of the body and entails receiving information through physical responses to the world: clenching one's jaw, feeling a pit in one's stomach, or experiencing tears of joy, for instance. Aesthetic knowing is the experience of beauty and truth in response to art or artistic qualities. Although distinguished from each other for descriptive purposes, the various ways of knowing are interwoven and integrated such that they are not separate; *they are part of participatory knowing*. Refer to Incorporating the Transpersonal Perspective in chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on participatory knowing.

In their book on utilizing creativity, *Sparks of Genius*, Robert Root-Bernstein and Michèle Root-Bernstein (1999) described a concept similar to participatory knowing. They called it *synosia*, and defined it as “unified understanding linking mind and body, sense and sensibility” (p. 27). They described the synthesizing of information that comprises *synosia* as, “an integration of knowledge in which observing, imaging, empathizing, and the other tools all work together organically—not serially . . . such that everything—memory, knowledge, imagination, feeling—is understood in a holistic, somatic way” (p. 27). However, a participatory framework, that is, the link of holistic experience with participation in transpersonal phenomena, was not considered.

The use of ritual throughout the project aids in catalyzing intentionality. Ritual helps the teller and storiographer set the intention to tune into the story and allow it to emerge. It demarcates the conclusion of the storytelling meetings between storyteller and storiographer. Ritual indirectly informs the audience members who are about to enter the exhibition space that they are embarking on something sacred and wordlessly invites them to hold this intention. During the entire project, the storiographer uses intentionality in various ways, for instance, to maintain a conscious and active stance of love, compassion, and unconditional acceptance toward the teller and story. The intentionality of this stance keeps the storiographer’s heart open and judgments at bay and staves off temptation to lead rather than be guided by the process. It sets a tone that implicitly invites others involved in the project, most notably the storyteller, to do the same. Holding a loving stance also creates an emotional environment of safety and nurturing warmth that the audience feels. Intentionality and ritual lend boundaries and structure to

the organic storytelling process. They also aid in creating liminality that *engages participants in transpersonal experience and knowing*.

*Story ripeness and good fit determination.* Once a storytelling candidate has expressed interest, the storiographer screens the candidate to determine whether the story is ripe to be told and whether there is a good fit between the teller and storiographer. A ripe story is a meaningful personal story the teller feels compelled to tell at a particular time. A ripe story can be of any topic, whether about triumph, tragedy, or something in between. A good fit means that in addition to story ripeness, other prerequisites are met, which were listed in the above section describing the storyteller. The storiographer meets with the potential storyteller to discuss possible project collaboration and assess appropriateness. The overall process and its components are first described to the storyteller as a starting point to assess appropriate fit. The potential storyteller who is not a good fit for the process is referred to other professional resources, as appropriate. If the potential teller is deemed a good fit and wishes to embark upon a project, the process continues.

*Collaboration.* A storiographer is one who engages with the storyteller in the telling of the story. The storiographer creates and sustains the bond of collaborative relationship through love; constant awareness and resonant connection with the storyteller is maintained throughout the process, by holding a stance of compassion, love, and unconditional acceptance toward the teller and story. As an active participant, the storiographer facilitates a process where, alongside the storyteller, both tune into the story and make room for it to emerge, through the space created by the collaborative relationship. The trinity of storiographer, storyteller, and story cocreate and participate in



the numinous quality of transpersonal phenomena. The storiographer and storyteller open to and are guided by a sense of mystery and spirituality as the storytelling unfolds. This step is catalyzed by engaging in storytime—a time of deep indwelling in the story, which may last several months. The triune collaboration is one of constant receptivity, expressing information received, and sharing feedback for confirmation.

The collaborative process is not one in which the storiographer expects or waits for the storyteller to lead. It is rather one in which the storiographer uses intuition *and other aspects of participatory knowing* to offer suggestions to which the storyteller can give feedback, offer suggestions, and make decisions. In this way, the storiographer gently guides a process empowering the storyteller to lead. The collaboration yields storytelling elements in recorded, collected, and created form, described in the section on storytime.

As the storiographer, I utilize my creative passion for black and white photography to express the essence of the teller and the story. Through the camera lens, I capture images of the teller that reveal and combine both the teller's and my own viewpoint. Images resulting from the creative collaboration are powerful in their ability to convey the storyteller's visual identity to an audience and to create an understandable and meaningful context for the other story elements presented in an exhibition. Such photographs are paradoxically both timeless and indicative of an instant in time—they evoke the multidimensional quality of our stories. The images also evoke the beauty and truth of our stories—our sacred stories as art. In doing so, they engage the participant in aesthetic feelings that impart a type of understanding or knowledge. Another storiographer may have a different modality to offer as a collaborative creative

expression specialty. The modality chosen should evoke the same qualitative essence as that previously described about black and white photography. *It should be a creative medium that forms the visual anchor of the story expression, most likely a medium that conveys photographic reality, such as film or video.* In remaining true to the organic process of Living Stories, each storiographer must consider her or his unique talents in conjunction with maintaining integrity to the storytelling process.

Once the story has emerged in its initial telling (i.e., the storytelling feels complete to the teller), it is shared with an audience. The audience members then become collaborators in the ongoing evolution of the story by *participating in and cocreating storytelling that encompasses transpersonal phenomena.* This happens several ways. Each audience member determines how the story will be told because she or he decides how to interact with the exhibit—the pacing, order, and degree of interactivity. Audience members influence the tone of the exhibit space by the quality of their presence. They also may leave creative expression feedback at stations throughout the exhibit space, thus expanding the story exhibition for future audience members. Each audience member may also tell others about the exhibition or share the story and in doing so, further collaborate in the telling of the story. While some define the term storytelling to denote a performance or act with a storyteller and audience present, the definition is expanded in Living Stories to include the sharing of story elements over a prolonged period, without the storyteller or entire audience present.

*Initial project planning.* If the potential storyteller and storiographer agree to pursue a project together, details of the storytelling process are discussed and a fee structure is arranged (not in the case of research, of course). Initial project planning is the

first step in the collaboration between storiographer and storyteller. Each storytelling project has its own organic process within the basic structure; specific details, such as meeting logistics, vary within and between projects. Pace, length, location, activity, and duration of storytelling meetings are determined through the storiographer checking with the storyteller regularly throughout the process to determine what feels right. The storiographer may suggest a type of meeting arrangement, based on intuition or a sense of what may work best for the individual storyteller, with the understanding that the choice is the storyteller's—based on storiographer availability, of course. Often, 3-hour blocks of time, twice a week, work well. More meetings may also be preferred, depending on how intensively the storyteller wishes to engage in the storytelling. If travel is involved, the storiographer and storyteller may schedule a weeklong series of meetings with phone and e-mail contact in between the next weeklong series, for instance. A sense of completeness felt by the storyteller determines when the storytelling meetings conclude. A ritual to demarcate entry into storytime is discussed as a way to open the first storytelling meeting.

*Storytime.* After initial planning, the first storytelling meeting begins with an induction into storytime. Storytime is a period of deep indwelling in the story by both the storyteller and storiographer, lasting from several weeks to several months. During this initial storytelling time, space is allotted the story to show up in the lives of the storyteller and storiographer. The storiographer and storyteller intentionally extend their collaborative relationship to include the story as a separate entity and thus form a trinitarian relationship. The expanded relationship is envisioned to connect with

transpersonal phenomena. The act engaged in is one of opening to the transpersonal, through the trinitarian collaboration, and receiving guidance about the ongoing process.

A ritual demarcates entry into storytime. The storiographer reviews the concept of storytime with the storyteller and offers a suggestion that they each bring items they wish to include in the ritual to make a ritual altar. Items could include a candle, cloth, photo, incense, figurine, and seashell, for example. The storiographer also suggests the storyteller think about anything he or she would like to say or do as part of the ritual. It is a time of intention-setting for the ensuing process. For example, an intention is set for planned and spontaneous storytelling to occur, that is, for the story to emerge both during and between storytelling meetings. The storiographer emphasizes that final decisions about the ritual belong to the storyteller. From the point of storytime induction, one stays connected to the story 24 hours a day, whether in direct or sub consciousness. During storytime, the storiographer and storyteller remain in constant attunement with the story and aware of the various ways it emerges into their lives. While leading life normally, the story stays in peripheral awareness. Elements of the story may surface through a conversation with a stranger, a dream, an insight, intuition, or an impulse to dance or write a poem, for example.

Both the storyteller and storiographer keep a journal to record the unfolding story elements revealed during storytime. The storiographer is available between story meetings to receive communication from the storyteller via telephone or email about the story and storytelling process or to arrange additional meetings, as needed. Planned storytelling meetings may be held in any mutually agreed upon setting, such as the storiographer's home or workspace, the storyteller's home, or in nature. The activities

planned for a particular meeting, in part, determine the locale. There is something warm, inviting, and safe about the sanctuary of home that often portends it as the preferred locale. The storiographer takes great care to ensure the physical environment supports the emotional one during meetings. Intuiting, sensing, and checking with the storyteller about aspects of the environment including location and ambient features such as lighting, noise level, comfortable seating, and aesthetics aid in creating a supportive milieu. Inviting and homey elements such as lit candles, tea, and a snack are often included.

The story emerges in recorded, collected, and created form. The storyteller may voice or video record the verbalized telling of the story. The storiographer also takes notes during storytelling meetings to reflect salient or resonant aspects of the story being told. The teller may collect items relating to the story, such as photographs, memorabilia, records of dreams, or creative expressions created prior to engaging in the storytelling process. Depending on where the process leads them, the teller alone or both storiographer and teller may engage in various forms of creative expression. For instance, the teller may feel moved to sculpt clay while the storiographer watches and actively holds the space for the story to emerge through the clay, or both may sculpt clay as story expressions. Although always at the discretion of the storyteller, photography sessions are usually part of the story expression and are often held outdoors, in natural settings. Black and white photography as a collaborative creative expression extends beyond photographic sessions to include the selection of photographs most evocative of the story and the format for displaying them. If the storiographer uses a primary means of collaborative expression other than photography, that specialty is also usually part of the story expression.

When the storytelling feels complete to the teller, a closing ritual is arranged to demarcate the end of storytime, with acknowledgement that the story continues, that is, is always growing and changing. As the storytelling is nearing completion, the storiographer mentions the next step, the story exhibition, so the storyteller may begin to give input and the storiographer may begin to plan. It is also an opportunity for the storiographer to inquire as to whether the storyteller still wishes to have an exhibition. Although wishing to share one's story with a public audience is part of the selection criteria, integrity to the process requires openness to the possibility of change and demands no assumptions be made.

*Story exhibition preparation.* As storytime begins to conclude, the next project step typically comes into mental view. If the storyteller is still moved to share the story via a public exhibition, planning and preparation ensue. The storiographer asks which story elements the storyteller wishes to share and how and where the ideal exhibit is envisioned. The storiographer also offers ideas and suggestions, drawing from skills in exhibit design and information from story attunement. Preparation may involve (a) printing, matting, and framing photographs; (b) editing video and voice recordings; (c) securing display equipment and amenities; (d) working with museum exhibit designers; (e) creating signage; (f) purchasing creative expression supplies; (g) designing and creating invitations; and (h) placing event announcements in local papers and other media. If the story involves mention of anyone other than the storyteller, potential legal issues must be considered and legal advice sought by the storiographer, as appropriate.

The storyteller decides how involved to be in story exhibition preparation and whether to invite colleagues, friends, and/or family to attend. Some storytellers choose to

have little or no involvement in exhibit planning and attendance; feelings may arise in which they doubt whether their stories will be of interest and value to others and perceive planning and attending their story exhibitions as self-centered. This reaction, should it occur, is natural and an important reason why the storiographer acts as advocate for the story and teller in his/her role. At points whereupon the storyteller wishes to minimize involvement, the storiographer readily counterbalances.

Some main points addressed in exhibition preparation are (a) venue (appropriateness for Living Stories, i.e., a quiet, dedicated area without permanent artwork or other elements that might be distracting or confusing; appropriateness for the particular story and audience—for example, it would not be appropriate to use a library community room as the venue for a story involving graphic material since children are regular library users; and accessibility to the community, i.e., the site is in or near public places the community frequents, making drop-in attendance likely); (b) exhibition date(s) and duration; (c) event marketing, including public announcements and special invitations; (d) ambient and ritual elements to set a tone that reflects the story and engages the audience; (e) display and placement of story elements to best convey the story; (f) interactive elements that convey the story through many senses—for example, music the audience may choose to hear by putting on headphones and pressing a button and sculpture the audience may touch; (g) types and placement of feedback modalities; and (h) degree of identity disclosure of the storyteller and others who are mentioned in the story. Chapters 4 and 5 reveal and discuss additional concepts pertinent to exhibit preparation (such as congruence and emotional narrative).

*Story exhibition.* The exhibit may take place in a museum, library, community center, hospital, or any venue appropriate for the story, amenable to the teller, and accessible to the surrounding community. Duration may vary from 1 weekend to a month, for instance. Those who attend the exhibition or audience members are either in the vicinity and decide to attend or are invited by the storyteller or storiographer. As part of the storytelling process, the storiographer holds an intention to attract audience members who are receptive to the experience and come of their own volition, rather than from obligation, pressure, or indifferent accompaniment of another attendee. The intention is based on the view that people are more likely to receive when open to receiving, akin to the radio analogy previously mentioned in the section on intentionality. Those who are open to receiving more readily honor the storyteller and sacredness of the story. In addition, the sacred storytelling process of Living Stories, including the exhibition preparation and event, inspires a sense of reverence. Ritual elements incorporated into exhibit space entry signal the audience they are embarking upon a meaningful event filled with a sense of sacredness. For instance, a person or sign may direct attendees to take a moment in silence before entering the exhibit and remain in silence throughout their time in the space, and a curtain may need to be brushed aside to enter the space.

Once inside the exhibit area, audience members may interact with story elements at their own discretion, pace, and order. Interactive choices are built into the design of the exhibit. For example, poetry may be kept in a book to be opened and viewed, music may be accessible if one puts on headphones and presses a button, and a video may be watched by entering a separate space within the exhibit area. Types of story elements



vary between stories and respective exhibits. Other modalities could include photography, clay sculpture, collage, painting, drawing, music, audio/video recording of the storyteller, and text. Exhibition interactivity through various sensory modalities is purposeful to give ownership of the experience to the audience member as an active participant rather than a voyeur and to engage the whole person *in transpersonal knowing*. Stations for audience feedback are incorporated into the exhibit area, immediately accessible to give voice to and be viewed by the audience. As audience feedback accumulates, it becomes part of the ever-changing story. It also gives the storyteller, who may not attend the exhibit, direct access to audience response.

*Post-exhibition review and project closure.* Within a few weeks following the exhibition closing, the storiographer and storyteller schedule a time and place to meet for several hours for post-exhibition review and project closure. Whether or not the storyteller attends the exhibition, a post-exhibition review is an important step in the storytelling process. It is a time for the storyteller to review all audience feedback with the storiographer, hear from or exchange exhibit experiences with the storiographer, and process the accomplishment of sharing his or her voice with others. It is also a time for the storiographer and storyteller to celebrate their storytelling collaboration, honor the gift of the story, and mark project closure with a ritual. During the meeting and likely beforehand, the storiographer checks with the storyteller about possible additional exhibits or other projects. As in storytime, the teller and storiographer attune with the story for guidance and engage in participatory knowing, sensing if the process is complete or points toward sharing the story in additional ways. The storiographer may

also wish to utilize story elements in future professional projects; permission is discussed with and always at the discretion of the storyteller.

The story elements and audience feedback comprising the exhibition might be co-owned by the storyteller and storiographer at the project conclusion—either person able to use them as they wish. The same trust and integrity built and utilized throughout the storytelling process continues with ownership and use of story materials. The project fee structure (for projects that are not research-based), decided prior to project commencement, may be a factor in determining subsequent ownership of story elements. Photographs may be available to the storyteller in varying quantities and formats per a set price list. Although the project may be ending, the storyteller and storiographer may find they continue a relationship as friends or contact one another from time to time in accordance with whatever feels natural and appropriate to both individuals.

*Additional exhibits and other projects.* If another exhibition or project is discussed as part of the story evolution, the previously mentioned closing ritual acknowledges completion of the exhibition and project to that point. A discussion to plan the next steps follows. For instance, the exhibition could travel to different locales locally, nationally, or internationally. The storytelling could evolve into a book, documentary film, radio or television appearance, published article, speaking event, DVD (Digital Versatile Disc), or website. Smaller scale additional projects could include a series of matted and framed photographs for the storyteller's personal record, a creative grouping of several story elements into a personal keepsake for the storyteller or teller's family, or a small-scale exhibition or story event for close family and friends of the storyteller in a private home. In addition, story exhibitions and other projects could involve collaborations with other

community projects, organizations, and individuals. There is a momentum the story gathers as it unfolds; opportunities may come to the storiographer and storyteller from others who learn of the project. Some storytellers may decide from the project start not to share their stories in a public setting. An alternate goal may be sought, such as creating a book or other item incorporating story elements to share with loved ones or a particular community of people. Projects could also be designed to tell various stories of people in a particular setting, such as a police department, school, or company. The goal in such a setting could vary from a public exhibition of numerous stories to permanently incorporating story elements into the particular environment. The Living Stories philosophy can be applied in communities worldwide in a manner as potentially creative as the process itself. Furthermore, principles of Living Stories can be applied to storytelling in other formats, such as digital storytelling and documentary filmmaking.

### *Scope of Inquiry*

Personal storytelling was explored through data analysis of the Living Stories experiences of 1 storyteller, 1 researcher-storiographer, and 100 audience members. The storytelling experiences studied included those of the researcher-storiographer and the story audience, in addition those of the storyteller. By exploring the topic through human experience (within a participatory transpersonal framework) rather than story content, the scope of inquiry incorporated the storytelling *process* as a critical element of the investigation. An obvious question might have been to ask how the story itself affected the experience. However, since I believe our personal stories do not stand on their own, independent of how they are told, my questions intentionally focused on the storytelling process. The focus did not ignore story content.

The relational framework of this study considered the storytelling act as occurring within relationship and catalyzing the formation of new relationships. The concept of relationship was expanded to include the storytelling process as inclusive of transpersonal phenomena. Ferrer (2000) referred to this transpersonal view when he stated, “Transpersonal phenomena are multilocal in that they can occur not only in an individual but also in a relationship, a community, or a place” (p. 225). Encompassed in the transpersonal perspective is the view of the development of Living Stories and the investigation as the researcher’s response to the cultural call for connection through personal storytelling. Although the research question initially asked *what makes stories sacred*, the expansive style of the inquiry led to a revision of the question to *what makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection* and revealed information about the artistic components, essential qualities, and experiences of storytelling. Refer to Chapters 3 and 4 for complete articulation of the initial research question and subsequent revision.

### *Introduction to Intuitive Inquiry*

Intuitive inquiry is a recent methodologic development in the evolution of transpersonal research. Developed by Rosemarie Anderson (1998, 2000), intuitive inquiry honors human experience as both an investigation tool and focus of inquiry. In intuitive inquiry, the researcher’s experience and knowledge on the topic serve as a foundation of the investigation. Rather than bracketing the researcher’s biases as in phenomenological methods (e.g., Ron S. Valle, 1998), or attempting to set them aside completely as in traditional quantitative research methodology, intuitive inquiry is a hermeneutically-based research method.

Incorporating a hermeneutic perspective (Martin J. Packer & Richard B. Addison, 1989), intuitive inquiry requires rigorous adherence by requiring the researcher to clearly define his or her perspective on the topic, called *lenses*, at the investigation onset and refine and amplify the lenses throughout the research process in at least three successive cycles of interpretation of the experience under exploration (Anderson, 2000). This kind of research draws heavily upon the experiences of research participants and is validated by a measure called *sympathetic resonance* or understanding from within (Anderson, 1998).

Common elements of intuitive inquiry and Living Stories make the method ideal for this study. Some of these elements include (a) bringing compassion to the work, (b) utilizing intuition and creativity, (c) recognizing the value of the unique voice of the individual, (d) catalyzing social action, and (e) particularity. Refer to the Intuitive Inquiry section in chapter 3 for greater detail about the method.

Chapter 2 addresses a review of the relevant literature. Included are sections on prevailing theoretical perspectives from which this study departs, how this investigation aligns with changing trends about personal storytelling, and literature addressing storytelling from a relational, transpersonal perspective. Chapter 3 addresses the method and procedure for conducting the study.

## Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature

*Some say that community is based on blood ties, sometimes dictated by choice, sometimes by necessity. And while this is quite true, the immeasurably stronger gravitational field that holds a group together are their stories . . . the common and simple ones they share with one another.*  
(Clarissa Pinkola Estes, 1993, p. 28)

### Overview

This chapter reviews the theoretical foundation of the study and relevant empirical research. The constructivist view, found in much literature on personal narrative, posits that our narratives serve to make meaning of ourselves and our world. This inquiry focuses on expanding and enhancing the exploration of personal storytelling to include the relational, transpersonal perspective.

An overview of the history of story research is presented, as relevant to assumptions in current story research. Historically, story research has focused on interpretation of narrative text and tends to exclude exploration of storytelling process. The relational view is explained, which postulates that personal growth and development occur through the experience of healthy relationships. Personal storytelling is viewed as a natural means of relationship formation and growth. The transpersonal orientation of the study extends the relational perspective beyond interpersonal relationship to participation in transpersonal phenomena, as suggested by Whitehead (1929/1960). A participatory approach to transpersonal theory is adopted, as proposed by Ferrer (2002), which includes the concepts of participatory knowing and spiritual knowing. The concept of participatory knowing was applied in the study to both the research process and the storytelling process.

Story research with a relational perspective and story research with a transpersonal perspective are reviewed. An overview of narrative theology is presented for its relevant focus on sacred stories as a means of conveying spiritual knowing. Lastly, the cultural uses of personal storytelling are presented as providing useful data on the topic, including the researcher's observations of a collective cultural voice calling for storytelling as a means of establishing connection and as a transpersonal phenomenon in which the researcher participated through conducting the investigation.

### *Overview of Story Research*

A brief historical review of story research in modern western culture provides a context for understanding the narrow perspective considered in scholarly story literature to date and the expanded view undertaken in this study. Robert A. Georges (1969) explained that during the 19th century, ethnographic information and stories "through which men described the workings of their universe and narrated exploits of members of their species" were collected and organized by scholars and laypeople into "convenient categories" and reduced to "striking generalizations about the uniformity of cultures and the unity of man" (p. 313). Georges reported,

It was the discovery by the Grimm Brothers of the existence of such narratives among German peasants, and the hypotheses they advanced concerning the possible relationships between the stories of the non-literate and the narratives found in the written literatures of other nations and eras, that motivated scholars to turn to stories for possible insights into the history and nature of man. (p. 313)

After this turning point, scholars regarded stories as cultural artifacts and thereafter focused on attaining meaning through interpretation of narrative text. While traditional storytelling utilizes oral and written formats (Rob Baker & Ellen Dooling Draper, 1992), "the universality of storytelling was accepted a priori" (Georges, 1969, p. 313).

Philosophical debate ensued between different theoretical schools and disciplines about the interpretation of story content and derivation of similar stories among varied and remote societies. The controversy reinforced the notion of stories as surviving linguistic entities and asserted the perspective as the basis for future story research. Georges explained that the conflict also “motivated investigators to record additional story texts and to study the content of these texts [as] the primary objective of twentieth-century story research” (p. 314).

Story researchers have increasingly drawn from sociology and psychology as the conceptual framework for the analysis of story meaning and significance. The constructivist view of storytelling as a way we make sense of ourselves and the world around us persists as a central interpretive tool of story research (Jerome Bruner, 1987; Bertram J. Cohler, 1991; Theodore R. Sarbin, 1986). Georges pointed to the significant flaw in the story research confinement to narrative analysis:

The study of story texts amounts to nothing more than the study of written representations of one aspect of the messages of complex communicative events referred to . . . as “storytelling events.” If investigators expect to understand these events, they must conceive of them holistically rather than atomistically. This will only be possible when researchers recognize the fact that storytelling events are distinct events within continua of human communication and that they are unique social experiences for those individuals whose social interactions generate them. (p. 327)

In their narrative approach to the study of dreams, Daniel Deslauries and John Cordts (1995) described the inseparability of narrative from its context of lived experience and storytelling event:

It appears difficult to . . . distinguish whether meaning primarily stems from the participation within one’s own “life drama,” from engaging in communicating such [sic] event (thus narratively making sense), or from further reflection upon it. These probably all converge to form a complex gestalt of meaning. (p. 19)



Alex Nelson (1994) acknowledged the value of the storytelling process (as opposed to narrative analysis) in his research: “learning is facilitated in the process of storytelling” (p. 309). Acknowledgement of storytelling as an event whereby the audience influences the telling of the story also exists (Bruner, 1987; Sarah J. Mann, 1992).

Widespread agreement of the value of storytelling has spurred the development of interesting and creative applications. Narrative psychology capitalizes on the constructivist premise of story research. In clinical application, redefining the self through rewriting personal narrative is used as an effective treatment tool for healing pathology (Richard Simon, Mary Sykes Wylie, Laura Markowitz, & Karen Sundquist, 1994). Researchers in the field of transpersonal psychology, such as Becky Coleman (2000), Ruth M. Cox (1999), Caryl Reimer Göpfert (1999), Michael Hewitt (2002), Denise Hutter (1999), Linda Loos (1997), and Robin Seeley (2000), are turning to storytelling as an effective data collection tool in qualitative research designs.

However, what has been sidestepped is a good look at storytelling itself. More than 30 years after Georges’ (1969) admonishment of the narrow and flawed perspective undertaken in story research, the viewpoint expressed in 21st century research has largely left his prescient warning unheeded. In the field of transpersonal psychology, we have seamlessly and unquestioningly adopted the problematic story research perspective. Questions such as why we tell stories, what constitutes and comprises storytelling, what components elicit quality storytelling, and what is the impact of storytelling need to be examined.

Storytelling occurs in our modern culture in various ways and in order to meet various needs. It needs to be explored in the context of the human and cultural interaction

in which it occurs. Yet exploring storytelling as a current, cultural expression has largely been ignored—probably because we have been blinded by the historical perspective. Inherent in the act of storytelling is relationship. Yet the relational perspective has usually been overlooked in story research, that is, the perspective that we connect through storytelling. These are surprising, if not shocking questions and perspectives to have been overlooked. Because storytelling is a multidisciplinary activity, perhaps we have evaded its examination because we have not adequately claimed it (even though we utilize it) within the field of transpersonal psychology. Inadequately explored, therefore, is a transpersonal perspective on storytelling, that is, a perspective that includes storytelling within the realm of transpersonal phenomena. This study serves as a starting point for expanding the perspective on story research to include a relational, transpersonal perspective within a cultural context.

### *Growth Through Connection*

Through work at the Stone Center, colleagues Judith V. Jordan, Alexandra G. Kaplan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene P. Stiver, and Janet L. Surrey (1991) addressed women's development through theory and research. Surrey's (1991) discussion of women's growth through relational context provided a theoretical orientation that supports the concept of feeling connected with one another as a vital part of healthy development. Although work at the Stone Center specifically addressed women, the stance on growth occurring through a relational context is not believed to exclude men. Surrey pointed out that most people lead their lives in a larger relational context. Relationship in this sense is distinguished from primary or sexual relationship. Abraham

H. Maslow (1968) also included connection through love and belonging as a prerequisite for self-esteem in his model of self-actualization.

In contrast to theories of personal development, which stress individual growth and strength through independence, Surrey (1991) suggested the need for a concept that incorporates the nature of mutual power in relationship. She called this concept *mutual empowerment* and defined power as “the capacity to move or to produce change” (p. 163). This contrasts with the *power over* definition often used in our culture. Moreover, Surrey believes personal empowerment can only be viewed through the larger lens of *power through connection*. The Stone Center posited a model of human development which is a relationship-differentiation process called *relationship-authenticity* and is counter to the mainstream separation-individuation model.

The fundamental processes of mutual relationship were identified by Surrey (1991, p. 167) as mutual engagement or attention and interest, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment. Miller (1986) reported that empowered interactive processes result in increased zest, empowerment, knowledge, self-worth, desire for more connection for all involved, and trust in the relationship.

In describing the work of colleagues Blythe Clinchy and Carol Zimmerman (1985) and Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule (1986), Surrey (1991) relayed their concept of *connected learning* as “taking the view of the other and connecting this to one’s own knowledge” (p. 171). It spoke to the collaborative format of this inquiry and supported the advantage in learning or gaining understanding through the context of relationship. However, the relational model of development and related concept of connected knowing does not move beyond

the interpersonal realm to acknowledge a transpersonal view, explained in the next section.

### *Incorporating the Transpersonal Perspective*

Transpersonal theory and the definition of the transpersonal concept vary widely within the field. Common ground is established in the belief that Spirit is the essence of human nature and also “the ground, pull, and goal of cosmic evolution” (Ferrer, 2002, p. 7). Understanding humanity in the context of and as inseparable from Spirit is central to transpersonal theory. The term transpersonal is generally used “to reflect concerns, motivations, experiences, developmental stages (cognitive, moral, emotional, interpersonal, etc.), modes of being, and other phenomena that include but transcend the sphere of the individual personality, self, or ego” (p. 5).

As the result of his extensive research into transpersonal theory, including major contributors thus far (e.g., Grof, Maslow, Sutich, Wilber, Walsh, Washburn, Vaughan, etc.), Ferrer (2002) proposed a revision of transpersonal theory to shift its perspective about transpersonal phenomena from intrasubjective experience to “participatory events which can be equally understood in both experiential and epistemic terms” (p. 12). Other transpersonal researchers, such as Christopher M. Bache (2000) and John Heron (1998), have also favored the shift to a participatory perspective. The shift corrects what is viewed as the misapplication of Cartesianism to transpersonal theory. Ferrer proposed that “transpersonal phenomena can be more adequately understood as *multilocal participatory events (i.e., emergences of transpersonal being that can occur not only in the locus of an individual, but also in a relationship, a community, a collective identity, or a place)*” (p. 116).

Whitehead (1929/1960) proposed the participatory concept in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

The actualities constituting the process of the world are conceived as exemplifying the ingression (or 'participation') of other things which constitute the potentialities of definiteness for any actual existence. The things which are temporal arise by their participation in the things which are eternal. The two sets are mediated by a thing which combines the actuality of what is temporal with the timelessness of what is potential. This final entity is the divine element in the world. (pp. 63-64)

In this study, the participatory perspective was adopted because it was viewed by the researcher as the current position to which transpersonal theory has positively evolved. The storytelling process (inclusive of the process between storiographer-researcher and process of preparing and holding the interactive exhibit with exhibit participants) was viewed as having a participatory nature, as was the intuitive inquiry research process. Future chapters address the manifestation of transpersonal phenomena.

According to Ferrer (2002), "the most important feature of transpersonal events is that they are participatory" (p. 120). Ferrer clarified the term participatory in this context to have three different meanings of equal import:

1. Transpersonal events are not objective. "*Transpersonal events engage human beings in a participatory, connected, and often passionate knowing that can involve not only the opening of the mind, but also of the body, the heart, and the soul*" (p. 121).
2. Individual consciousness plays a participatory role in transpersonal events. It is not a role of passivity "but of *communion and cocreative participation*" (p. 121).
3. By virtue of existing, humans are "always participating in the self-disclosure of Spirit" (p. 121) whether aware of it or not. "This participatory predicament is not only the ontological foundation of the other forms of participation, but also the epistemic

anchor of spiritual knowledge claims and the moral source of responsible action” (p. 121).

The notion of cocreative participation was applicable to this study in terms of both the collaborative relationship formed between the storiographer and storyteller and the experiential and community-based aspects of the exhibit. Cocreative participation in transpersonal phenomena was intentional, both in terms of the concrete, prescribed process of Living Stories (e.g., collaborative, creative activities) and aspects inherent in the overall process (e.g., a compassionate stance) as a catalyst for transpersonal experience and knowing.

As part of the transpersonal revision, it was postulated that through our participation in transpersonal events and phenomena we experience participatory knowing. Participatory knowing has been understood by Ferrer (2001) as “*a multidimensional access to reality that includes not only the intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and emphatic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings*” (p. 121). Ferrer cautioned against what he called experiential reductionism, with his reminder that experience is one aspect within the larger framework of transpersonal phenomena. Through our participation in transpersonal phenomena, “it is not so much our experience of the world that changes, but rather our experience-and-the-world that undergo a mutually codetermined transformation” (p. 118).

The term *participatory knowing* was adopted in this study. Its definition reflects my experiences and perspective as a researcher and storiographer; before finding Ferrer’s

term, I had not found another which adequately described or made sense of my experiences of knowing (I had devised a term called *integrated knowing*). In this study, closely tracking experience (while considering it within a participatory framework) served as a vital aspect of intuitive inquiry and Living Stories.

Tracking experience is not a given or necessarily simple task. I believe it requires the ability to maintain and shift attention and emphasis between a witness consciousness (or meta-awareness of one's process and experience) and deep attention to one's self or *embodiment*, a term increasing in usage (without universal or formal definition) in transpersonal psychology. Embodiment, as I understand it, is deep attunement with all aspects of one's self (cognition, emotion, intuition, body, etc.), through which one accesses or cocreates and experiences aspects of a transpersonal nature, that is, spiritual or transpersonal knowing. In a sense, embodiment describes the state of living as fully human an existence as possible, even if only temporarily. It could be said that embodiment is the experience of participatory knowing. Anderson (2001) eloquently wrote about embodiment:

*Our bodies are utterly embedded in the world.* There appears to be a miracle above flesh and bones through which we live—call it what you will, spirit or awareness or consciousness. . . . Our bodies are so magnificently organized and alert and relatively constant to our human perception that most of the time we imagine these separate bodies to be of singular significance. . . . Yet, they are more. *Our bodies are a web, a delicate filament of senses coupled to the world.* . . . Listening inwardly to the body's inner perceptual systems seems to be a fine art, requiring the skills of slowing down and listening within. . . . Intrinsic to the body is the awakened body of a vaster intelligence. . . . The mind does not wake up in enlightenment by itself. *The body wakes up in enlightenment.* (pp. 94-96)

Through participation in transpersonal phenomena, spiritual knowing may occur. Ferrer (2002) stated, "In a participatory cosmos, human intentional participation creatively

channels and modulates the self-disclosing of Spirit through the bringing forth of visionary worlds and spiritual realities” (p. 157).

Although there is, of course, no universal agreement about what constitutes Spirit, the perspective adopted in this study is one that includes spiritual knowing within the realm of possible outcomes of partaking in the storytelling process. It is the ultimate connection one may experience, among the multitude of types of connection possible. Terms such as the Divine and Spirit have been used interchangeably throughout the dissertation. The term God has been used within the context of narrative theology, in keeping with the lexicon of Christianity. In all cases, a definition was not assumed or attempted because it is considered largely ineffable and mysterious and because there is not general consensus about it. That is, different spiritual traditions have varying definitions.

### *Story Research with a Relational Perspective*

Cultural anthropologist Annette Leeland (1996) presented an ethnographic study of personal storytelling among adolescents labeled at-risk. Leeland described ethnography as “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (p. 35) and combined this methodology with elements of feminist research and narrative analysis. Her ethnographic perspective held her investigation as an exploration of meanings assigned to stories and cultural assumptions held therein. The study focus was the healing aspect of story. Healing was defined as “a transformation of meaning that changes an individual’s way of relating to the world around them in a way that is helpful to them” (p. 8).



Leeland's theoretical orientation was that personal storytelling may foster a sense of connection between tellers and listeners. Her term for this sense of connection was *deep fellowship* (Leeland, 1996) and can be likened to terms used by others to describe the same or similar phenomenon (Anderson, 1998; David Bohm, 1990; Victor Turner, 1969), such as sympathetic resonance, communion, and *communitas*. The hypothesis of her investigation was that deep fellowship or "foster[ing] a sense of connection between storyteller and listener" (p. 8) leads to transformation and healing.

During the course of 7 months of fieldwork, Leeland immersed herself in the culture of the Foundry, an alternative high school for youth not allowed to attend regular or continuation high schools, often due to habitual truancy or criminal conduct. This school aims to address students holistically, stressing spiritual, emotional, social, and physical aspects of the individual while creating a learning community encompassing school, family, and the surrounding community. Personal storytelling in a group setting is a school activity built into the program. Implicitly and explicitly throughout her writing, Leeland described the context and form in which personal stories were shared. In doing so, she acknowledged this important and often neglected element of storytelling and allowed the reader's perspective to incorporate this information. For instance, she explained that the storytelling style used at the Foundry is based on a Native American ritual called Council. Students and their instructor sit quietly in a circle and listen with full attention while the teller speaks sincerely. Listeners ask meaningful questions of the listener afterward.

Leeland spent 2 or 3 days per week at the school for two semesters to observe the culture, notice patterns over time, raise more questions, and explore these questions at

deeper levels. She initially engaged in informal conversation with students, staff, and parents and later conducted taped interviews with 14 students, 5 of the 6 staff, 4 volunteers, and 4 parents. Questions asked of students entailed how they came to the Foundry, goals in being at the school, and any alterations in their attitudes and behavior since attending. Observation and informal discussion with everyone addressed storytelling settings and effects and a critique of the Foundry in comparison with other schools.

As in the case of other qualitative research, including intuitive inquiry, trustworthiness was used as the measure of reliability and validity. Drawing from Catherine Kohler Reissman's guidelines (as cited in Leeland, 1996, p. 41), Leeland looked at persuasiveness and plausibility as criteria for establishing trustworthiness and includes cross checking assumptions and findings with those studied as another aspect of data analysis. Unfortunately, little was reported by the researcher about her data analysis procedure or process. This would have yielded helpful insights to the reader and given a better basis for evaluating findings.

Leeland's (1996) findings indicated that personal storytelling was a central component of the Foundry program and occurred in a variety of settings with often overlapping purposes. Here she made the distinction between *war stories* and *heart stories* as defined by the school. War stories are insincere bragging tales that no longer serve the individual while heart stories come from a place of authenticity and vulnerability in the teller and are healing. While referencing these story types, she observed what is often missing from content-focused story literature when noting, "It becomes the form rather than the content which creates the distinction" (p. 105). She

further advised that war stories may act as protective devices in environments perceived as unsafe, whereas heart stories require established trust and may positively touch both teller and listener.

In addition to studying personal storytelling at the Foundry, Leeland (1996) observed the story of the Foundry itself and described this as the Foundry Myth or Meta-Narrative. These terms were described as “collectively-held beliefs and moral values about the school” (p. 107). She identified seven key themes of this meta-narrative and discussed how they were shaped by and effected the culture at large. Her findings indicated that certain social forces such as racism and sexism had been covertly maintained at the Foundry as universal truths. The negative effect of this, she maintained, was *symbolic violence*, described by Pierre Bourdieu (1991) as social oppression and inequities of the larger culture that are reproduced in the smaller culture. In this analysis, Leeland used story as a tool to evaluate the Foundry rather than exploring storytelling itself, as in the other part of her study. Since most story research utilizes story as a tool to review other phenomena rather than as the subject of exploration, this dual use of story becomes salient.

Whereas much story literature has acknowledged the effects of storytelling pertaining only to the teller, Leeland included the effects on listeners, the researcher, the school, and the community. Often noted positive effects of telling heart stories at the Foundry on tellers and listeners included an increased sense of trust, respect, connection, and personal healing. Leeland believed these effects contributed to the familial atmosphere at the school and an absence of vandalism and fighting, which are prevalent at other schools.

During graduation, one staff member acknowledged the researcher's effect by expressing his appreciation of Leeland's contribution of raising consciousness and encouraging staff to address overlooked issues at the school. Leeland voiced final thoughts about her discoveries by describing stories shared from the heart as sacred and the ability to hold ambiguities, such as wisdom and ignorance, present at the Foundry as a challenging strength for individuals and communities. As a reader of Leeland's study, I sensed integrity and trustworthiness about her work alongside compassionate understanding. I felt she had truly dwelled awhile inside the stories, people, and culture she studied.

*Story Research With a Transpersonal Perspective*

Brian W. Sturm (1998) provided a different vantage point than Leeland for exploring the process of storytelling. He turned to the internal storytelling process of the individual in his exploratory investigation into the storylistening trance. Storytelling trance may occur in storylisteners and was described as a nonordinary state of consciousness similar to light trance. Sturm drew from Charles T. Tart's (1975/1983) systems approach to consciousness to decipher discrete states of consciousness associated with listening to a story. Tart's concept defined and compared a baseline state of normal, waking consciousness with other discrete or altered states of consciousness that may be induced by disrupting the baseline.

Sturm (1998) used naturalistic methodology that combined interviews and participant observation to identify characteristics of storylistening trance and positive or negative influences that affected it. He conducted interviews with 22 participants, ranging from children to the elderly. He also observed storytelling in a variety of settings,

including storytelling festivals and libraries, and formats, featuring one or more storytellers.

Findings indicated that when a good story is well told, listeners experience a storytrance state. Some of the characteristics denoting this discrete state of consciousness include (a) a sense of time distortion; (b) a lack or loss of control over the experience; (c) a placeness to the experience; and (d) active visual, auditory, emotional, and kinesthetic channels of receptivity. Factors which influence the storytrance state were identified as (a) a sense of comfort and safety; (b) rapport with the storyteller; (c) storytelling style; (d) story content; (e) activation of listener's memories; (f) the storyteller's ability and involvement; (g) the listener's expectations, preferences, and training; (h) storytelling rhythm; and (i) distractions.

Sturm (1998) qualified that his study focused solely on the storytelling event as a unit in time, which is not the total context of the experience nor inclusive of all the factors influencing storytelling experience. He stated that the larger process includes periods before and after the story is told and involves both the teller and listeners. A natural extension of his stance and findings could include a storytelling event in which the teller is not present, and yet the story is conveyed through receptive channels, such as in this investigation. Furthermore, Sturm's identified channels of receptivity could be broadened to include intuition and other forms of transpersonal knowing.

Annick Safken's (1998) qualitative study asked how students benefit from Sufi stories and how others might use these stories for self-development. Drawing from transpersonal psychology, the term *self-development* is meant to include consciousness in a broader sense than the ego. Safken included tales, parables, poems, sayings, jokes, and

anecdotes in her definition of stories pertaining to the Sufi mystical path. Sufism is a tradition described as a collection of teachings of universal truths leading to spiritual experience, with the goal of directly knowing God. While Sufi stories stem from an oral tradition, the writings of Sufi scholars such as Al Ghazzali, Attar, and Rumi were emphasized in her investigation. Unlike Leeland's (1996) view that personal stories told from the heart are sacred, Safken saw personal story primarily in the constructivist manner prevalent in psychological theory and cites literature reflecting this. She distinguished personal story from sacred story, describing the latter as teaching, healing, and transformative in reference only to spiritual stories, such as Sufi stories.

Blending feminist, organic, and connoisseurship perspectives, Safken (1998) used in-depth interviews and self-reporting from 8 middle-aged participants who previously acknowledged feeling a strong impact from the study of Sufi stories. Participant insights and the researcher evaluations were revealed through vignettes. The feminist and organic perspectives draw from subjective human experience to broaden knowledge rather than focus it, while the connoisseurship element utilizes the researcher's experiential knowledge to describe, evaluate, and interpret findings. Validity and reliability are measured by the readers' perception of credibility or trustworthiness, as described by Elliot W. Eisner (1981) and William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson (1998). Safken points to the use of intuition by both researcher and participants as an integral part of generating meaningful findings.

Elements of the study format of Sufi stories were described by Safken (1998) and serve to create a context for understanding the storytelling process. The term *study* was clarified by Safken to mean a "sense of personal experience of the story" (p. 3). Students

of Sufi stories may choose stories to which they are particularly drawn, actively engage with the story by identifying with a story character, note internal reactions to reading the story, ponder questions the story may be asking about the reader's life, look for discoveries about themselves or their lives, and determine what decisions or actions they might be encouraged to take in response. Stories are viewed as having both personal and universal meanings.

From her pilot study, Safken (1998) noted that creativity was stimulated by those who worked with Sufi stories. Effects of stories were expressed in poems, paintings, and stories. Perhaps these creative means of expression become natural elements of or reactions to sacred storytelling in particular contexts. Safken also used creativity in her treatment of data, allowing images, poems, or stories to spontaneously emerge while reading interview transcripts. In addition, she set an intention to find the main effects of the stories for each participant before reviewing the transcript and writing the vignettes. She then sent each participant his or her vignette for comment and added their remarks to the vignettes.

Three main findings were revealed: (a) although age old, Sufi stories still affect us; (b) these stories evoke core teachings of all spiritual traditions; and (c) Sufi stories are effective in opening the heart. As a result of working with Sufi stories, participants felt emotionally moved, received personal insights, were able to see their psychological blind spots, were de-stabilized intellectually, were aided in integrating new wisdom, and experienced changes in self-concept. Safken believed subtler effects felt by participants were a sense of self-acceptance, feeling empathy and compassion, a cultivation of gratitude and contentment, and gradual harmonization of inner life. She pointed to the

repetition of working with Sufi stories as an important element of their potential impact. Finally, Safken perceived the most valuable impact of the stories on her and the participants as redefining the self as a more highly developed individual.

The value Safken (1998) placed on stories to redefine the self alludes to an implicit reinforcement of her view of story through a constructivist lens. However, she also clearly stated her view of the self from a Sufi psychology reference point, which defines several levels of consciousness. Heart intelligence is considered higher than intelligence of the mind and is defined as the perception of beauty or Divine revelation. Safken described Sufi stories as speaking to the heart and as catalysts to breaking through the mind to reveal beauty. This process of creating an opening is akin to the ritual process phase of *liminality* discussed by Turner (1969) and cited in the work of Leeland (1996). The resulting Divine revelation could be viewed as part of a continuum of connection or transpersonal knowing, that between individual and spirit. If so, I believe the perception of beauty would relate to a sense of connection, described by others, that occurs between individuals, groups, and larger social structures (Anderson, 1998; Leeland, 1996; Surrey, 1991; Turner, 1969).

A remarkable insight by Safken (1998) was her reference to Sufi stories being used as prayers, in that they are devotional. She contrasted this with the personal confessional mode of storytelling in psychotherapy described by James Hillman, which remains on the personal level and disconnected from spirit. Noting the different modes of storytelling was insightful. However, I believe a clear distinction should be drawn between story content and process in comparing personal stories to Sufi stories. That is, it is through process rather than content that a sacred, universal story is delineated from one



disconnected from spirit. Leeland (1996) underscored this point in her example of the Native American tradition of personal stories shared from the heart or *heart stories* as sacred versus bragging tales or *war stories* not shared from the heart.

### *Narrative Theology*

Narrative theology stems from Christian doctrine and explores theological narrative as the expression of experiences of God. Constance A. Dorn (2001) offered a definition by stating, "If theology is the study of God and our relationship to God, then narrative theology is simply the study of the sacred stories of how people have encountered God" (p. 3). More specifically, "narrative theology examines and develops the stories of Christianity" (Dorn, 2001, p. 5). Janet Ruffing (1986) defined narrative or story as "discourse characterized by a temporal sequence of events or actions, organized in a pattern, disclosing a point of view, and connected by subject matter" (p. 108).

Narrative or story theology is a relatively new field of theology. It developed in the United States during the 1960s out of a time when the foundations of Roman Catholic and Protestant theology were shaken. Its theological home is traced to Yale University. Narrative theology derives its methodology from literary criticism and the philosophical studies of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953). Its definition and criteria are still disputed. A mounting number of studies have addressed narrative theology (Hillary Jean Barrett, 1998; Dorn, 2001; Darrell J. Fasching, 1999; Dae Sung Lee, 2001; Gregory D. Loving, 2000; & Ruffing, 1986).

Amidst the different approaches to narrative theology, Loving (2000) reported that there are six common concepts: "narrative truth, narrative consciousness, narrative authority, narrative ethics, narrative spirituality, and a stress on community" (p. 2).

Proponents of historical criticism arrive at narrative truth via historical facts that support the narrative. Neo-Orthodoxy, on the other hand, challenges historical criticism by championing the idea that “truth arrives dialectically in an entire gestalt that one can only see from the ‘inside’” (Loving, p. 3). The principles of narrative theology come from Helmut Richard Niebuhr (1941/1955), a proponent of Neo-Orthodoxy.

An ongoing debate about the definition of truth is central to narrative theology. In his important work, *The Meaning of Revelation*, Niebuhr (1941/1955) addressed truth in sacred narrative as based on experiences of revelation rather than objective history:

When Christians speak of revelation they point to history not as this can be known by external observers but as it is remembered by participating selves. Yet revelation does not simply mean inner history as a whole nor any arbitrarily chosen part of it. . . . Revelation means for us that part of our inner history which illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible. Sometimes when we read a difficult book, seeking to follow a complicated argument, we come across a luminous sentence from which we can go forward and backward and so attain some understanding of the whole. Revelation is like that. (pp. 91-93)

The work of Paul Ricoeur (1984-1988) had been studied by narrative theologians in relation to the question of narrative truth. Ricoeur’s work explored the belief that we give meaning to human experience through narrative and that the outcome of the hermeneutic procedure is an increased understanding of human experience or narrative truth. In her study of narrative truth, which included analyses of Ricoeur’s perspective, Lee (2001) concluded that theologians need to (a) consider theological truth narratively because “theological truth has to do with the holistic process of interpreting the stories,” (b) realize that “narratives are the most important building blocks of theological thinking,” and (c) “utilize the skills of a good storyteller” to achieve theological competence (pp. 167-168).

Related to the discussion of narrative truth is narrative type. Dorn (2001) explained, “Stories can be myths (which order the world), action stories (which give guidelines on how to survive in such a world), or parables (which disrupt the world and call for expanded vision)” (p. 36). While some view Bible stories as depictions of historical events, others believe the stories represent myths or metaphors of experiences with God. Myth, often misunderstood in this instance to mean a lie, is defined as a story that expresses the human experience of spiritual truth or divine knowledge. Because of the ineffable nature of spiritual experience, myth is acknowledged as a powerful conveyor of spiritual knowing and a connection point through which people may understand and develop their relationship to the divine. Myth, then, is based on the deep truths of human spiritual experience. Joseph Campbell voiced this crucial distinction throughout his lifelong study of the power of myth. Narrative theology emphasizes descriptions of God experience as narrative truth over historical accuracy as narrative truth. Historical accuracy of the Bible is the subject of ongoing debate.

Narrative theology is not confined to the study of biblical stories. Dorn (2001) offered a broader definition of sacred stories: “While scripture and other official stories could be designated Sacred Stories (with a capital [sic] ‘S’), any story that conveys a truth about God and faith can be a sacred story (lower case ‘s’)” (p. 57). The purpose of sacred stories in narrative theology is to provide a greater understanding of God. There is an assertion that through faith in the truth of the experiences described in sacred narrative, one’s understanding of and relationship to God is furthered—a tacit knowing, perhaps. The idea of noting one’s internal experience of the story text as a marker of truth, as in the case of sympathetic resonance, is not included in the definition of narrative truth.

However, narrative theology encourages members of spiritual communities to bring the teachings of sacred texts into everyday life by incorporating their own lived experiences of the texts into spiritual practice.

Christian doctrine asks its followers to believe in God, largely through a belief in the written word of God, or the Bible. Narrative theologians focus on interpretation of narrative text to ensure readers understand the intended message or experience relayed. Dorn (2001) pointed out that there are multiple ways to interpret sacred stories because there will always be the aspect of mystery that is indescribable and unexplainable. Nonetheless, the belief is held that sacred stories have transformative power, through increasing awareness of the power of the ineffable.

The concept of the sacred story has been applied and studied in terms of the life stories of congregants in Christian communities (Barrett, 1998; Ruffing, 1986). In these studies, an explicit attempt was made to bring experiences of spiritual knowing from the historical past to the present through life stories of everyday people and to acknowledge that these stories are sacred. Barrett spoke of the role of the congregational leader or minister as a steward of stories: "From the outset it has been my contention that pastors serve in particularly key and privileged positions to hear the stories of a congregation" (p. 56). This role was described with a certain relatedness to the role of the storiographer as collaborator in the storytelling process, although Barrett's primary interest was on the ability of stories to convey information from the congregation to the pastor. Ruffing spoke similarly of the role of the spiritual director in storytelling. Because the spiritual director and pastor are in positions of guidance and leadership within the spiritual communities they serve, the power of story is viewed as tool which may be utilized to

better understand and lead these communities, in addition to the view that stories create community.

By expanding the view of sacred stories from scripture to include stories of those in present day communities, Barrett (1998) and Ruffing (1986) broadened the focus on sacred stories from narrative analysis to include the act of storytelling. The relational context of storytelling was called into view and explored. Ruffing observed, “In the process of spiritual direction . . . the director is an active participant in the directee’s storytelling” (p. 256). She also concludes that spiritual communion may be experienced through the act of storytelling:

Being with directees is often a “sacramental” experience. . . . “In and through” the people the director sees for direction, the director experiences God acting and alive in his or her world. The directee’s sharing of faith experience through story can become a moment of communion in the same reality pointed to by the story. (p. 261)

Her conclusion is notable because her view of storytelling as a vehicle for creating or accessing spiritual experience expanded upon the narrative theology perspective of story as a vehicle to convey the spiritual experiences of others. Ruffing’s assertion aligns with the perspective in this study that transpersonal experiences may occur through the process of personal storytelling, although her view is confined to stories of faith experience.

Barrett (2001) discussed another aspect of spiritual or transpersonal experience through the power of story in its

remarkable ability to transport us to other realms. Stories open our minds to larger realities. Through stories we are able to empathetically experience what it is like to live in another time, another country, another culture. . . . Through stories we are drawn into the very particular world and dilemma of another . . . as well as the ageless and timeless concerns, questions, problems, sorrow, and joys of the human condition. (pp. 26-27)

She asserted these experiences are appropriate to narrative theology because “theology is the human struggle to grasp and articulate the reality of God. It is a struggle lived out in every day life and every day experience—the stuff of which is the making of story” (p. 27). Her view parallels the idea posited in this study that there is a spiritual longing present in our cultural desire to connect through sharing our sacred or meaningful personal stories.

Dorn (2001) maintained that “the call for narrative theology is being sounded in many faith groups. Roman Catholic and Protestant, Jewish and Buddhist; all have advocates for the hearing and valuing of faith stories” (p. 17). She was stating that the call emanates from a desire to balance doctrine with narrative and a realization that other types of theology have failed to significantly impact lives. It appears to me that the progression of narrative theology within and perhaps beyond the Christian community parallels my own perceptions about the call for connection from the larger culture, that is, independent of religious affiliation or specific spiritual belief. The term connection, as addressed in this study, also encompasses a broader spectrum of human experience.

### *Cultural Text*

Although a review of peer-reviewed, scholarly literature is considered the cornerstone of good research, scholarship has not yet substantially addressed personal storytelling from a relational, transpersonal perspective. Rich, cultural data are not only available, but overlooking the text of our popular western culture would obscure information vital to the topic of inquiry. The study relevance of personal storytelling as cultural text is threefold:

1. The cultural text of personal storytelling is the primary text that claimed (and continues to claim) my attention. Before I conceived of the dissertation topic of personal storytelling, I noticed a steady increase in the variety and degree of personal storytelling occurrences in society. My interest was piqued; I began to question and make connections between the ways personal storytelling was appearing and what it conveyed about the culture. A lesson cultural anthropologist Leeland (1996) once conveyed to me seemed directly applicable: *We are always, already embedded in our culture*. Although unaware at the time, I believe that through my cultural embeddedness, I was hearing and responding to a larger cultural message; I noticed not only the cultural expression of personal stories but also a cultural call for connection through sharing these stories. My initial response was to devise Living Stories. Named as the text or focal point of the study, I later came to view Living Stories within the larger context of the cultural text.
2. Cultural text is understood within a participatory framework. The cultural text or call for storytelling as a means of connection is viewed as an ongoing transpersonal event (created by the culture) in which I (as researcher and storiographer) continue to participate. My experience of accessing and understanding the cultural text (as a continual process, since it first claimed my attention) is viewed as my participation in transpersonal phenomena and transpersonal knowing. The research participants are also viewed within a participatory context; they cocreated the storytelling experiences and gave feedback that indicated transpersonal and spiritual knowing.

3. Our lived world has never before been as concretely linked; at the same time, the creative application and dissemination of personal stories seems greater than ever. The proliferation of technology has created the opportunity to interact in more varied, widespread, and impactful ways than at any other time in our human existence. In the past few years, a new generation of research has arisen, termed by sociologist Duncan J. Watts (2003) as “the science of networks” (p. 13). Watts explained, “unlike the physics of subatomic particles or the large-scale structure of the universe, the science of networks is the science of the real world—the world of people, friendships, rumors, disease, fads, firms, and financial crises” (p. 13). The popularity of personal storytelling as a means of connecting seems to reflect this opportunity or to perhaps to have arisen, in part, because of this opportunity.

Mass media, digital storytelling, and Holocaust museums represent three examples of the creative proliferation of personal storytelling in the culture. Examples are presented through my observations to illustrate the claim of the cultural text, some of which the reader (in the United States, at least) may have also observed. There are many more examples of cultural text not cited in this section; hopefully, enough are provided to convey salient concepts to the reader.

### *Television*

The increasing shift toward nonfiction television programming during the past 10 years, with an emphasis on personal storytelling, has been daunting. For example, the volume and type of television programming that features exposé-style stories about people’s lives have grown measurably to include (a) talk show programs (e.g., *Ricki*



*Lake*, *Montel Williams*, and *Jerry Springer*); (b) courtroom programs (e.g., *Judge Joe Black*, *Judge Judy*, and *Divorce Court*); (c) celebrity news magazine programs (e.g., *Access Hollywood*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and *Extra*); and (d) news magazine programs (e.g., *Dateline*, *60 Minutes*, and *20/20*).

More recently, there appears to be a new movement in talk shows that feature personal stories to benefit the personal growth of both the viewing audience and featured guests (e.g., *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Dr. Phil*). Appearing to be led by Oprah Winfrey (who gave Phil McGraw of *Dr. Phil* his television break and has creative control over her own program), it remains to be seen if a trend will develop toward utilizing the power of television media to generate positive impact through personal storytelling.

There also seems to be an increase in popularity of television programming that offers a more in-depth look at personal stories, accompanied by a tone of respect and empathy. A number of interview-style programs embody this emphasis (e.g., *Charlie Rose*, *Barbara Walters Specials*, and *Inside Actors Studio*). A documentary-style television program called *Biography* has become so popular in its 16-year existence that it has increased from one show per week to six, has a channel devoted to its programming (also called *Biography*), and has spawned a magazine of the same title. Stories told in the in-depth style feature almost exclusively those with fame, wealth, and/or power.

In addition, the rise in reality programming (which features the unscripted, real lives of its participants, in action) during the past year consumes a large portion of television air time. Although a number of these shows are activity-oriented (e.g., *Fear Factor*, *American Idol*, and *All American Girl*), many others are story-oriented, based upon revealing the intimate details of people's lives in a voyeuristic, often demeaning

manner. Some simply leave the cameras rolling, capturing the people featured in the course of their intruded-upon (by the cameras) lives, often in contrived situations (e.g., MTV's *Real World*, *The Osbournes*, and *Survivor*). The newest wave of such shows features a collaborative format in which the viewing audience decides the fate of the people featured by a call-in vote (e.g., *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here* and *Married By America*) or watches as relationships are formed by those who are featured on the program (e.g., *The Bachelor*, *Joe Millionaire*, and *Meet My Parents*).

Reporting of the news has also become increasingly collaborative. News reporters appeal to viewers to contact them with local problems so they can provide assistance and then feature the issue and resolutions in special segments. Recently, I saw a promotional television spot that featured a news reporter appealing to viewers to contact the news station to express opinions about the types of news stories desired so the station could cover them. Although sometimes criticized for making news rather than reporting it (and therefore, stepping outside the boundaries of journalism), their actions might also be viewed as the evolution of their role as one that acknowledges their human connection to the people and stories they cover.

Even fictional programming now regularly features storylines referred to as *ripped from the headlines*, that is, true stories prominently featured in news headlines (e.g., *Law & Order*). Television advertising has also turned to storytelling, with the stories of its characters clearly meant to connect with the lives of its target audience. For instance, one car commercial features a young man speeding down the highway in his new car, while his psychotherapist receives a message from him that he is discontinuing therapy, implying that his car provides a better solution to his troubles. In another

advertisement for laundry detergent, a 40-something, single mother is featured running around after her energetic little girl, with a narrator relating that the mother's tough job is made easier because the detergent is able to keep her little girl's dresses clean. The advertising strategy seems obvious: connect with the viewer on a human level and the product will sell. This strategy sharply contrasts with the mode of commercials with which we used to be bombarded, where car features and laundry detergent performances were compared to prove brand superiority.

I could continue, for the medium of television, I believe, is a large marker of popular culture and I have shared only part of my observations. Although its leaders have been charged with creating popular culture as much as reflecting it, the power this medium wields in influencing lives is strong, either way. It is the reason beloved children's television program (*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*) host and theologian Fred Rogers chose television as his profession. An obituary (The TV Icon, 2003) about him explained,

In 1951 . . . "he understood at once that television was something important, for better or worse, and he decided on the spot to be part of it." . . . He was ordained by the United Presbyterian Church in 1963, with a mandate to minister to the emotional life of children. . . . The show's 700 episodes aired nationally from 1968 to 2001, making it the longest-running children's program on public television. (p. 42)

What have these observations conveyed to me, in terms of cultural text? From my perspective, television as cultural commentary offers the following:

1. Television (and mass media, generally) is a powerful format for conveying stories. Television has far reach and mass cultural appeal (even in spite of the fact, many argue, that the quality is low or appeals to the lowest common denominator).

2. People thirst for personal stories. If the ratings did not support the shows mentioned, they would not remain on the air or multiply in such staggering numbers.
3. Personal storytelling through the medium of television is about more than entertainment (there are plenty of entertaining programs featuring paid actors): We are fascinated by each other. We want to know and be known (the television viewing audience is large and there seems to be no shortage of those who desire to participate on-air). We like to watch people in relationship (many of the shows feature dating, family interaction, or a community of people relating to each other). We want to have voice in a manner that impacts noticeable change (newer programming often features audience voting to decide the fate of those on the program). We want to participate in an activity we know others are participating in and feel a sense of community in doing so (we know many people are watching the same program at the same time, and many reality shows progress over a number of weeks or months with the progression closely monitored and discussed within the culture at large). One way of interpreting these observations is: We want connection. Television has become a vehicle for self-expression, a medium for storytelling by real people and for the general public, and a means (even if not a deep one) of establishing connection.
4. Television is being pushed creatively to become a two-way format rather than a one-way communication tool, in order to appeal to viewer desire for connection through participation. A creative, interactive environment where people can participate and influence outcomes is desired by the culture; it connects us

(compare with the rising use of mobile phones, handheld computers, and other technology devices that give the culture greater connectability).

### *Digital Storytelling*

Although lesser known than television, a recently developed (since the advent of the World Wide Web) collaborative forum for personal storytelling, called digital storytelling, is gaining prominence. The computer-based medium has been described by the newly formed Digital Storytelling Association (2002), as

the modern expression of the ancient art of storytelling. . . . Digital Storytelling uses digital media to create media-rich stories to tell, to share, and to preserve. Digital stories derive their power through weaving images, music, narrative and voice together, thereby giving deep dimension and vivid color to characters, situations, and insights. The digital environment provides a unique opportunity for stories to be manipulated, combined and connected to other stories in an interactive, and transformative process that empowers the author and invests the notion of storytelling with new meaning. Using the internet, and other emerging forms of distribution, these stories provide a catalyst for creating communities of common concern on a global scale.

*Digital storytelling* is a term not yet found in the dictionary. In his article covering the cultural phenomenon, Umberto Tosi (1999) described three distinct possibilities digital storytelling offers: (a) flexibility in the variety of ways stories can be told, (b) accessibility of the medium to millions of potential storytellers, and (c) interactivity that erases “the line between creator and audience allowing everyone, potentially, to be a participant in a process that can build on an original story” (p. 10).

Janet H. Murray (1997) explored the combination of story and computer media in her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Voicing the potential of a new tapestry of beauty, truth, narrative, and technology as an artform unto itself, Murray ponders,

In trying to imagine Hamlet on the holodeck . . . I am not asking if it is possible to translate a particular Shakespeare play into another format. I am asking if we can hope to capture in cyberdrama something as true to the human condition, and as beautifully expressed, as the life that Shakespeare captured on the Elizabethan stage. (p. 274).

More recently, Joe Lambert (2002) wrote a book called *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, as a practical guide and resource. An organization cofounded by Lambert and Nina Mullen, the Center for Digital Storytelling (based in Berkeley, California, United States), has been conducting digital storytelling workshops all over the world for the past 4 years.

Two studies on personal storytelling using digital media point to storytelling through this newer forum as a means of manifesting community, personal growth, and transpersonal experience. In Cox's (1999) study, the Internet was used as a medium for teaching a transformation learning course and establishing a virtual or online community among 12 participants:

Participants explored aspects of their psychological and spiritual development, sharing their life stories through creative writing and imagery, online and in person for one year. Personal storytelling and virtual group discourse revealed examples of transpersonal experiences, in which the participant's sense of self-identity extended beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of relatedness to others, the natural world, or the cosmos. (p. iii)

Caleb Nathaniel Paull (2002) studied digital storytelling using a qualitative interpretive approach to focus on 2 participants over the course of two digital storytelling workshops:

The findings based on the data in this study illustrate the empowerment students experience both in the process of personal reflection/expression through digital multimedia, and in the imagined social uses and influence of their creations. As they constructed representations of past experiences through the use of voice, photos, video, music and special effects, the students repositioned themselves with respect to those experiences. They formed new self-perceptions, declared social connections, and laid new

foundations for approaching the difficult issues and situations in their lives. (pp. 1-2)

Digital storytelling is conceptually similar to Living Stories, with the main difference relating to context; Living Stories takes place in a physical space while digital storytelling takes place virtually. Digital storytelling was unknown to me before I devised Living Stories. These twin concepts (in addition to other cultural text), combining art, story, media, and an interactive, collaborative format, have led me to view my call to personal storytelling within the context of participatory transpersonal phenomena.

Changes in television concepts and programming, the development of a movement to tell personal stories through creative use of digital media, and my call to research personal storytelling and develop Living Stories all seem linked. Digital storytelling is about more than making good use of new technology; the relatively low-technology forums of television and Living Stories also share personal true accounts in a collaborative manner.

### *Holocaust Museums*

Holocaust museums represent an especially poignant cultural example of the sharing of deeply moving personal stories in an interactive, mixed-media, community-based forum. The encompassing account, of course, is of one of the greatest tragedies perpetrated and endured globally in recent history. The mass, brutal genocide and horrific treatment of millions of Jews and others at the hands of Nazi Germany was termed the *Holocaust*, a biblical term for

a burnt offering or sacrifice made to God. . . . More recently the term Shoah, meaning 'desolation' or 'time of desolation,' has come to be widely accepted as more suitable. . . . Certainly, even when the word Holocaust is used, it is now to be understood, at best, as . . . a meaningless sacrifice. (Fasching, 1999, p. 22)

Holocaust museums, in remembrance of those who died and survived at the hands of the Nazis (there are also museums dedicated to other holocausts), are located throughout the United States and the world. The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California, houses an interactive exhibit depicting the stories of those who both died from and survived the Shoah. Visitors walk through rooms, some designed to resemble the gas chambers that exterminated millions. They see piles of shoes left by those killed, listen to voices relating their stories, and look at photographs.

Many Holocaust museums convey the story through interactive, multisensory experiences. The sharing of the story in a museum setting implicitly references the storytelling experience as an art form. The use of artifacts and creative media as featured materials, as opposed to fine art, implies the power these items hold to convey the story within the story context. The interactive design of these settings conveys the need to be a participant on some level in order to understand and own the experience as a shared human tragedy.

Through the need to remember and understand the Shoah so we will neither forget it nor repeat it, a format arose that shares similar goals and features of Living Stories—a connection I did not make until several years after beginning to develop the process. Holocaust museums transcend time (i.e., bring the past into the present); create physical, public venues for personal storytelling; and approach storytelling from a standpoint of sacredness and the desire to establish a sense of connection. These museums have arisen from a specific need, within a cultural context that encompasses that need. Few better examples exist in our modern lived history of the need for love and compassion, of the need to connect, than this story based upon hatred and apathy: the story of the Holocaust.



### Chapter 3: Research Method

*Your most radiant garment is of the other person's weaving;  
Your most savory meal is that which you eat at the other person's table;  
Your most comfortable bed is in the other person's house.  
Now tell me, how can you separate yourself from the other person?  
(Kahlil Gibran, 1926/1970, p. 30)*

This chapter begins with the research questions, followed by an overview description of the intuitive inquiry research method. Subsequent sections describe specific phases of intuitive inquiry and how they are applied in the study. The section on Cycle 1 describes Pilot Study 1, reflections on the pilot study, and the resulting lenses or definition of the researcher's perspective. The section on Cycle 2 describes Pilot Study 2, reflections on the pilot study, and the resulting refinement of the lenses from Cycle 1. The section on Cycle 3 describes and discusses the study design, participants, procedure, confidentiality, and data analysis and reporting.

#### *Research Questions*

Research questions were initially formulated during part of the research process called Cycle 1, in intuitive inquiry. Topic clarity increased during Cycle 2 of intuitive inquiry, resulting in the formulation of the following research question: *What makes stories sacred?* Specifically, do participants spontaneously articulate themes related to the researcher's preliminary understanding of the sacred dimensions of personal storytelling? The researcher's preliminary understanding, specified in the lenses from Cycle 2, include (a) personal storytelling as spiritual longing, (b) sacredness of the storytelling process, (c) an internal sense of truth defines story authenticity, (d) love transforms us, (e) collaborative relationship as a catalyst for love, (f) storytelling as a

transpersonal journey, (g) participatory knowing from attunement with interconnection, (h) our stories are art and art is powerful, and (i) our stories are living.

### *Intuitive Inquiry*

In this study, personal storytelling was explored using a qualitative, transpersonal research methodology called intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000). Intuitive inquiry is an approach to studying transformative human experiences developed by Anderson. Sharing the ideology of acclaimed geneticist Barbara McClintock, Anderson (2000) explained the intuitive inquiry perspective:

To know a phenomenon of experience or of nature, we must love it and become its friend. It is as though what is observed gently yields itself to our knowing. There is no object, no subject, and no intrusion. . . . Our loving approach brings the nature of the phenomenon studied alive to our senses. Searching (or re-searching) from that inside view, its essential qualities animate to the researcher's own experience in both the objective and subjective senses. (p. 31)

Intuitive inquiry incorporates intuition or inner experiences and observational data through a systematic interpretive process, based on a traditional interpretive approach called hermeneutics.

Successive cycles of data interpretation shape the ongoing inquiry. Anderson (2000) defined intuition for the purpose of intuitive inquiry, with components similar to participatory knowing:

I define intuition to include the more commonplace forms of intuitive insight such as novel thoughts and ideas, together with insights derived from nonrational processes such as dream images, visions, kinesthetic impressions, a felt (or proprioceptive) sense, an inner sense or taste accompanying contemplative practices and prayer, and spontaneous creative expressions in dance, sound, improvisation, writing, and visual art. (pp. 31-32)

Hermeneutics is a philosophical tradition with the aim of gaining understanding through questioning and reflection. Interpretation of text is at the core of hermeneutic

investigation, more recently applied as a psychology research methodology (Packer & Addison, 1989). Use of the term *text* refers to any aspect of life the researcher wishes to understand more fully, such as a culture, person, or human action.

Anderson (2000) explained how intuitive inquiry utilizes the systematic approach of hermeneutic investigation to add an interpretive element to the study of transformative human experience:

At the onset of the research endeavor, the intuitive researcher initially identifies her or his values and assumptions through active and connected engagement with the experience studied and then uses these values and assumptions as hermeneutical lenses to explore and analyze similar experiences in others. This is called the hermeneutical circle. . . . Identifying and articulating those interpretive lenses is an important aspect of the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle and requires an exacting self-inquiry into the researcher's experience and an understanding of the phenomenon studied. In what is known as the return arc of the hermeneutical circle, the researcher's initial hermeneutical lenses are modified, expanded, and honed through successive comparisons with the relayed experiences of others. Specific themes and interpretations develop through modification, amplification, and discrimination. (p. 32)

The researcher's self-inquiry into his or her experience draws from heuristic research, a method utilized in the application of psychological research initially articulated by Clark Moustakas (1990). About the researcher's application of heuristics throughout the investigative process, Moustakas said, "heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration" (p. 11). Intuitive inquiry calls for at least three iterative cycles of interpretation to form the hermeneutic circle. This study utilized three cycles. Two completed pilot projects comprised Cycles 1 and 2. Data collection and analysis were the focus of Cycle 3.

Ferrer (2000) posited that studying transpersonal phenomena via human experience was problematic. He stated it was contrary to the transpersonal orientation because a subject-object model of cognition is inappropriately applied and spirituality is reduced to individual subjective experience. Ferrer alternately suggested a participatory framework whereby

transpersonal phenomena are not individual inner experiences but participatory events (i.e., emergences of transpersonal being that can occur in the locus of a person, a relationship, a community, or a place). While affirming the existence of an individual consciousness that may participate in transpersonal events, the participatory approach challenges the egocentric move of inferring from this participation that transpersonal phenomena are fundamentally human inner experiences. (p. 236)

While not explicitly stated in writings on intuitive inquiry, the methodology is implicitly intended to explore human experience within a transpersonal orientation that includes participation in transpersonal phenomena. Rather than inferring inner experience as the root of transpersonal phenomena, as Ferrer suggested one does by exploring transpersonal events via human experience, intuitive inquiry acknowledges embodiment as fundamental to our connection with spirit. As the originator of the Living Stories process, my perspective incorporates procedural elements into the research procedure to engage participatory awareness and experiences—such as a trinitarian collaboration, intentionality, and ritual. Particularity, discussed in the following section on sympathetic resonance, applies to a participatory approach in intuitive inquiry. That is, through attentiveness to our unique, subjective human experiences, our subject-object orientation may shift to one of nonduality and reveal an awareness and understanding of our participation in transpersonal events and phenomena.

Intuitive inquiry is a particularly appropriate research method for the study because of its parallel viewpoint with Living Stories and alignment with my research goals of (a) expansive rather than deductive inquiry; (b) acknowledging and appreciating the subjective experience in research; (c) emphasizing the particularistic rather than the generalizeable; (d) considering transformative effects of the researcher, storyteller, and audience on each other and on those who access the research; (e) procedural flexibility, due to close attention and commitment to the process of inquiry; (f) active involvement of the researcher as a collaborator with research participants; (g) promoting social change; and (h) accessibility of the research to a wide range of people.

### *Sympathetic Resonance*

Intuitive inquiry utilizes sympathetic resonance or understanding from within as the measure of consensus validity or trustworthiness. As Anderson (2000) explained,

The principle of sympathetic resonance in the scientific endeavor is best introduced with an analogy. If one plucks a string on a cello on one side of a room, a string of a cello on the opposite side will begin to vibrate, too. Striking a tuning fork will vibrate another tuning fork some distance away. The resonance communicates and connects directly and immediately without intermediaries. . . . The principle of sympathetic resonance introduces resonance as a validation procedure for the researcher's particular intuitive insights and syntheses. The principle suggests that research can function more like poetry in its capacity for the immediate apprehension and recognition of an experience spoken by another and yet . . . be true for oneself, as well. . . . The validity of findings is . . . formed through consensus building that notes consonance, dissonance, or neutrality by participants representing different cultures or subgroups. (p. 33)

Gibran (1923/1970) poetically described the notion behind sympathetic resonance by writing, "The strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music" (p. 15). Consensus validity, or trustworthiness, confirms that people respond similarly to the topic of inquiry. Findings reached by the researcher are considered trustworthy if they make

sense to the readers or if readers experience sympathetic resonance. As an additional measure of consensus validity in intuitive inquiry, Anderson (2000) employed the use of *resonance panels*, that is, groups other than the researcher who respond to the data.

Göpfert (1999) used the concept of sympathetic resonance in asking her participants, who experienced betrayal by a spiritual teacher, to review each other's stories about their experiences and comment on resonating aspects. Furthermore, an additional group of students and teachers who had not experienced betrayal formed an independent resonance panel, reviewed the stories, and commented on aspects resonating with them. Along with identifying her own resonance with the stories, Göpfert used the resonant features selected by the resonance panels to gain clarity about aspects of betrayal commonly understood by participants in her study. As noted by the example, resonance panel respondents need not have had similar experiences to those studied in order to experience resonance. The explanation may lie with the transpersonal concept of *particularity*, that is, accessing universality through the particular, held in both intuitive inquiry and Living Stories. Anderson (1998) explained how particularity is applied to intuitive inquiry:

For . . . the intuitive . . . researcher, expressing a comprehensive understanding of experience seeks to speak directly to the inmost self of another. It is as if speaking our personal truths—however unique and passionate that may feel—transcends our sense of separateness and brings us suddenly, even joyfully together—at least for an instant. . . . The depth of the researcher's intuitive understanding gives a universal voice and character to the research findings. (p. 75)

Sympathetic resonance was used in this study to gauge participant responses to their experiences of the story at the exhibit. Regardless of previous knowledge or experience of the story content, questionnaire data evaluated whether the exhibit participants

experienced a sense of resonance with the teller or story. Demographic information was collected to identify possible related trends in participant responses, including varying degrees of resonance.

### *Cycle 1: The Claim of the Text*

Cycle 1 of intuitive inquiry is initiated by the claim of the text and results in the emergence of a suitable topic of inquiry. The potential text is any aspect of life that repeatedly claims the attention of the researcher and corresponds with a personal interest. It need not literally be a written narrative and may draw upon the researcher's unique experience. Topics suitable for intuitive inquiry are compelling, manageable, clear, focused, concrete, researchable, and promising (Anderson, 2000). Once a suitable topic is found, the focus of the study is clarified through the process of regular contact with the text. "Researchers spend at least thirty minutes per day . . . reading, listening to, or viewing the text. Thoughts, ideas, daydreams, conversations, impressions, visions, and intuitions . . . are recorded" (Anderson, 2000, p. 36). The researcher identifies preliminary lenses to articulate his or her topic perspective through the process of engaging with the text. Lenses can be articulated by short descriptive phrases of the elements of one's perspective, accompanied by brief descriptions. Cycle 1 concludes when the research topic or question is focused.

The Living Stories Description section in chapter 1 described the storytelling process I derived from a combination of the initial concept, discussions with others, and experience from two pilot projects. Living Stories is a continually evolving storytelling process, changing as much from experiences as from discussions with others about the work, whereby new inspirations spontaneously and organically arise. Initially I viewed

Living Stories as the focal point of the study and the template for my vocation. Post data collection, my perspective has, of course, shifted. I now view Living Stories as a framework within which I have chosen to study the true focal point of personal storytelling, and my vocational wish is to share what I am learning and collaborate with others who are also responding to the cultural call for connection through story. I had to create a microcosm of the best storytelling process I could envision as a way of studying the more encompassing topic of personal storytelling.

The topic of personal storytelling claimed my attention during my first few years as a doctoral student at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. I knew I was in the right field yet did not know how I could best apply my education to personally meaningful work. Over the course of several months, memories surfaced of lifelong passionate interests. I recalled being captivated by people and their personal stories, including reading autobiographies, watching film documentaries, and, as a psychological intern, learning the life stories of new clients in the first few psychotherapy sessions. The call to creativity, particularly black and white photography, was another consistent fascination. I developed a specific interest in photographing people and capturing their essence. Sensitivity to divisiveness among people across the globe and a desire to bring people together presented another thread of lifelong continuity. These elements added to my more recent call to seek spiritual connection. What emerged was a calling to bring people together through the sharing of their stories, utilizing the whole person, including creativity with an emphasis on black and white photography, and to do this within the context of the culture at large, not through psychotherapy.



In retrospect, I believe I also was responding to a cultural call for connection through story. Through the research process, I have grown to observe my experiences within the framework of Ferrer's (2002) participatory revisioning of transpersonal psychology. In doing so, my perspective has shifted, as has my interpretation of events. My caveat to identifying Living Stories as the text is that on a deeper level, I claim the text within the context of a cultural need—a need expressed within the western, northern hemispheric, United States culture of which I am part. During the years I spent researching the topic, I discovered people using similar phraseology and ideology to my own in their work with story, new research with a similar perspective on story, and an increase in the media use of personal storytelling, although the latter often in a sensationalized and degrading manner.

Rather than a formalized process of engaging with the text for 30 minutes or more daily, I organically engaged in a process of *indwelling*, a term coined and described by Moustakas (1990) as

the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience. It involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness. . . . The indwelling process is conscious and deliberate, yet it is not lineal or logical. It follows clues wherever they appear. . . . Indwelling requires practice to enable the researcher to tap into intuitive awakenings and tacit mysteries as well as the explicit dimensions which can be observed, reported, and described.  
(p. 24)

I began to discuss my storytelling ideas with others. It often felt cumbersome to explain a still murky concept. Yet I felt myself open to mystery and to receiving clarity through ongoing, deliberate attention to the text claiming me. In these discussions, others began to share ideas that resonated with me, and I adapted them to the storytelling concept. I

brainstormed a name for my unique way of working with people and story and decided upon Living Stories. Often, I experienced insight, synchronicity, and a sense of remaining in the flow of connection with the style of personal storytelling beginning to take shape. This was the beginning of an ongoing series of collaborations and participatory transpersonal experiences discussed later. Even as I concluded my dissertation, I remained in the process of indwelling with the text.

### *Pilot Study 1*

In February 1997, I began a storytelling pilot project that concluded one year later with a public story exhibition. The experience proved a useful guide for designing the current study. The pilot description is purposefully detailed to disclose underlying processes, awarenesses, and intentions that provided otherwise hidden elements.

A woman I know was diagnosed with breast cancer. She asked everyone she knew to help her with the practical needs of getting through mastectomy surgery and chemotherapy. I volunteered to stay with her over a weekend following a chemotherapy session, as she was expected to feel quite ill. I intuitively wondered if she might feel compelled to tell her story about breast cancer, so I told her about my storytelling ideas. Before I finished, she enthusiastically proclaimed her desire to tell her story in this way.

*Storytelling process.* We began our storytelling collaboration the weekend I stayed with her. A tone of safety, sacredness, and respect was set at the beginning of our process together. We discussed and agreed how we would proceed. Using the guidelines listed in the Pilot Study Storyteller Consent Form (Appendix B), I determined her story was ripe to be told, and she had professional support to aid her with psychospiritual issues if needed. She met the specific storyteller requirements: (a) an inner calling to

share a meaningful personal story at the time of request; (b) a desire and willingness to participate in a format involving opening to various avenues of expression, such as creativity and intuition, as a means of telling that story; (c) openness to sharing the story in a collaborative format and a sense of comfort and compatibility with the storiographer; (d) the wish to share the story with others through an exhibit in a public setting; (e) a desire to make her identity known as an important aspect of the storytelling process in sharing her voice; (f) an ability and commitment to access, express, and be guided by internal processes and wisdom; (g) the experience and ability to work through psychospiritual issues through professional support or other means; (h) a lack of unresolved, deep issues concerning this story that could necessitate professional psychospiritual assistance or current, regular support from a psychotherapist or other appropriately trained professional and a commitment to maintain such support throughout the duration of study participation and as long as needed afterwards; and (i) interest in contributing to the development of the story format through her participation.

Confidentiality was also discussed in detail, and at various times thereafter, in accordance with how it is addressed in Appendix B. I emphasized she would not be asked to do or share anything she did not want to reveal, that the process upon which we were embarking together was one in which she had the final say, and that it was a true collaboration wherein we would freely exchange ideas about each step along the way. I also explained that the intention of telling her story was for her voice to be heard, her unique story was sacred, her story was not meant to be generalized to other women with breast cancer but to stand on its own as her experience, and I was there to witness the telling of her story and collaborate in its emergence but not to change it.

We agreed to open ourselves to her story, to tune into it together, and to allow it to emerge in whatever forms it wanted to take and to possibly have a public exhibit after the telling felt complete. After our initial weekend together, it felt right to both of us to meet once a week for about 2 hours with the understanding that we would continually check in with each other and the process itself to make any needed changes to our plan along the way. Our understanding also included a check-in at the beginning of each meeting to explore how to spend that particular time together, guided by how the story wished to emerge that day. We agreed to remain tuned into her story throughout the period of time it took for her to feel complete about telling it, including times in between our meetings. Anything we thought, created, dreamed, or that otherwise came into our awareness about her story was to be kept in awareness and shared, if desired, at our next meeting. I asked her to call me in between our meetings if there was anything she wanted to discuss. I set an intention for myself to tune in completely to her story; listen empathically; allow myself to be guided by the process; be completely present; and provide a nurturing, safe container for her and her story.

Knowing black and white photography was my main creative medium, she asked me to photograph her as part of the process. We agreed that although I would hold onto the resulting negatives and prints, we would co-own them and use them as we wished. There was a great trust established between us at the outset of the collaboration that has remained to this day. I have always been amazed at the continual trust she has placed in me, such as leaving decisions to me about which photographs to exhibit of those we both initially selected and how to exhibit the elements of her story, such as photographs, paintings, and poems.

She wanted to be photographed during the weekend I cared for her as she recovered from her chemotherapy session. During this time, she experienced periods of nausea, and I prepared soothing foods and teas for her. Her body was significantly thinner than before her cancer. Her long mane of dark hair had been cut short and much of the remaining hair was falling out—clumps lying about throughout her home. She kept her head covered when around other people and decided for the first time to remove this covering and reveal her head to me. I listened as she expressed the many feelings that were part of her experience in confronting breast cancer and how she wanted those expressed photographically. She wanted her mastectomy scar and nearly bald head showing in the photographs. After taking in all that she said, some ideas came to me for ways to express what she wanted in the photographs. We collaborated during our photography session, incorporating her wishes into photographs I framed and shot. Later, we independently viewed these photographs and selected those we each felt best expressed her story. Surprisingly, we had selected exactly the same photographs; this is an example of many instances where sympathetic resonance guided our collaborative storytelling process. By independently experiencing resonance or understanding from within about the same things, we were able to confirm our attunement with the story throughout the storytelling process. When our resonances were not shared, the information was equally telling. As the facilitator, my consistency in checking with the storyteller about our degree of resonance allowed us to utilize it as a tool.

Each week we decided where to meet, depending on mood and logistics. We agreed upon how our different meetings would be recorded. Sometimes I took notes and other times we turned on a tape recorder to capture our conversations. Sometimes we

walked and talked, while other times we sat and she recalled dreams that related to her story. Other meetings included photographic sessions, reviewing photographs, listening to music that was soothing to her during chemotherapy sessions, her sharing of personal poetry and paintings reflective of her story, matching poems and photographs that, when paired, uniquely expressed elements of her story, and a fashion show of favorite hats in her new collection. We met in various locales, including her house, my house, and local coffee houses. Sometimes we shared a meal or had coffee together.

After several months of spending storytelling time together, she felt her story about breast cancer was complete. Because she was still living through the experience, her story would continue, although a natural stopping place had arisen for her. We then spent time during our meetings discussing ways to exhibit her story and desired venues. She wanted people to be able to leave comments and create artwork in response to their time experiencing her story. She bought a special journal in which people could comment. She offered art supplies for people to use in creating a painting or drawing they could leave or take away as memories of their experience.

*Exhibition.* An opportunity arose a few months later for me to participate in Open Studios of South Bay Artists 1998. I turned my home into a gallery for the weekend of May 2-3, 1998, and utilized a portion of the house to exhibit the story. Two friends who are photographers displayed their work in other portions of the house. The event was publicized throughout Santa Clara County, California, United States. Maps were distributed by event organizers in many public places and private businesses, listing artist's names, mediums, and studio locations. The medium listed under my name was photography. There were also a limited number of catalogues available that included an

exhibit photograph I had submitted of the storyteller accompanied by a caption with my name and quote, “My images share the stories of those photographed. One such story is about a woman’s courageous confrontation with breast cancer.” Submission of this photograph was discussed with the storyteller in advance. I also created postcard invitations that the storyteller and I sent to people we wished to invite to the exhibit.

When the Open Studios date was near, the storyteller and I made selections of story elements to include in the exhibit. She decided she did not want to attend the exhibit and expressed apprehension about how people would react to her story and whether they would derive value from experiencing it. Still, she expressed feeling the importance of, and desire for, the public exhibit to proceed. She left final selections and arrangement of the exhibit space to my discretion. I was working within a constrained area, my dining room, and yet was mostly pleased with the final arrangement of items in the space.

An antique china cabinet and buffet along two walls in the space provided a homey and feminine backdrop for the graphic, behind-the-scenes images portraying the storyteller’s struggle with her femininity and body image. Sitting on the buffet was a casting of the storyteller’s chest, taken before mastectomy surgery while both breasts were still intact. Above the cast was a series of four black and white photographs of the storyteller, each with her mastectomy scar and balding head in stark view. An area to the left of the photographic display held a large, color collage created by the storyteller. It consisted of a juxtaposition of photographs of nature, sacred feminine images, and black and white photographic images I had taken of her.

Two other walls held the storyteller’s paintings and a photograph, each item paired with a poem the teller had written and matched with it, linking the images with

written expressions of aspects of her story. A compact disc player displayed instructions for exhibit-goers to press the play button to listen to music the storyteller found soothing during her chemotherapy sessions. A small table in one corner held a number of the storyteller's hats on shelves below a surface that included a guest book for people to sign, a written explanation of the exhibit presented, and a paragraph each about the storyteller and the storiographer.

A video camera was set up for people who wished to respond to the exhibit. A large table with two chairs, set against a window-lined wall of the dining room, offered the specially chosen blank journal; a drawing pad; various writing, drawing and painting tools; and an invitation to people to use these materials to express their reactions to the exhibit. There were also brochures and an article nearby with information about breast cancer and various organizations involved in aiding and giving voice to women with this disease. Another card on the table offered an explanation of the storyteller's condition at the time of the exhibit, namely, that she was cancer-free and still regaining her strength after chemotherapy.

During the course of the weekend in which the exhibit was open from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. both days, approximately 100 people passed through the space. Some were my friends and family. A few were friends of the storyteller. Many were members of the general public. A number of people wrote messages in the journal to the storyteller and to me; some left paintings and drawings. Several people left video messages for the storyteller. A number of people broke into tears during their time with the story and one person suggested I leave a box of tissues in the room. I was present in the space for most of the time during exhibit hours. Some people related recollections of friends or family



with cancer, and others expressed the shock and newness of a disease with its effects previously hidden from their view. One man told me he had never before seen a mastectomy scar. Another woman, moved by her experience, explained how distracting it was for her to experience the storyteller's story amidst people laughing and talking in other areas of the house. I, too, found this distracting and distasteful. Roughly 40% of the visitors came and went through the exhibit without comment.

*Post-exhibition.* I rested and following the weekend spent time with the treasured responses people left. I felt moved and in awe of their responses. I experienced an overwhelming sense of compassion and love emanating from the individual and collective expressions that were left and felt sure the storyteller would sense this, too. Some responses evoked a deeper resonance within me than others. I bundled up these materials, along with many of the exhibit pieces borrowed from the storyteller, and brought them to her house. She was not ready to review the responses with me or alone for some time.

Months passed. I checked with her periodically to see how she was doing and to find out if she wished to spend any follow-up time together. Approximately 4 months later we met to talk, review the responses from exhibit-goers, and ritualize our story time spent together and the accomplishment of the public sharing of her story. She was still reticent to take in these expressions, and I am unsure whether she ever reviewed everything. I brought the finished, matted, framed, prints that were exhibited so she could see them in this form. She had not previously known which final prints had been selected for the exhibit, having preferred it that way. Nor had she known in what order they were displayed. I layed them out before her and explained the way all the materials were

arranged in the space. She decided she wanted to live with those images for awhile. She took down the art hanging on the walls of her home and replaced them with these photographs before I left. We remained in contact, with the offer extended by me to address any pieces of her story or reactions to her storytelling experience she wished. We met or spoke on the telephone periodically.

My dissertation research was discussed with the storyteller. A mutual desire for her to participate in this study as the storyteller was expressed. Her participation in the study has allowed aspects of both the teller and audience storytelling experiences to be studied. Otherwise the research scope might have been too large. The first pilot project resulted in the gathering of valuable information, which was applied to ongoing development of Living Stories and the study design.

The next section describes my reflections upon the first pilot study experience. This experience and reflections led to the first set of lenses of the hermeneutic portion of the intuitive inquiry methodology, which follows my reflections.

*Reflections on Pilot Study 1.* During the course of time spent together in storytelling mode, I felt a special bond develop as I joined the storyteller in her private, vulnerable world. I had the sense of being submerged with her in an experience uniquely hers, yet made available to me by her. It seemed that together we met in the same place, the story place, created through our collaboration. I experienced a flow state of attunement with her and where her story was guiding us. She and I always seemed to align on what direction to go next. It was as though the flowing movement and gentle current of her story carried us forward effortlessly, and together we floated along.

It is hard for me to fully know the impact of this experience. I think some of the mysteries of femininity have been revealed to me through this storytelling experience and felt sense of connection with the storyteller. Her story is now a part of me, and I will always have it with me to look back on and remember. I also have a personal connection and experience with breast cancer that I could not otherwise have known. It had given this disease a face and emotions amidst the statistics, self-breast exams, and mammograms that only hint at what lurks beneath. In contrast, my mother went through a breast cancer diagnosis, mastectomy, and chemotherapy while I was away at college and tried to keep her experience from me so I would not worry. My brief glimpses into her pain and fear were those of an outsider. I felt largely unable to assist her because of the geographic distance and her wish to overcome the cancer quickly and independently. My mother came to the public exhibit and left comments for the storyteller and me in the journal that revealed some of her process in dealing with her breast cancer those years before.

The pilot study served to inform Living Stories and, therefore, the study exhibit design. From audience body language I observed and comments given about the annoyance of conversations and laughing going on nearby, I learned the exhibit needed to be in a dedicated space to avoid the distraction of other activities and mismatched mood. This audience response during the pilot project was consistent with audience response during the study, as discussed in chapter 4, Congruence. The use of a simple ritual to demark entry into the exhibit/story space was also informed by the pilot exhibit. A number of visitors were emotionally moved to tears and, I think, caught off guard by this reaction. Inviting participants to take a quiet moment before entering the study exhibit

served to inform and prepare them for entry into a different emotional realm as well as into the sacred space of the story. Although advertised as a photography exhibit, many pilot study visitors wanted more information about the storyteller than what I had sparsely provided, including her then-current state of health. I realized the importance of not only providing more information but also the need to place the story in the context of a timeframe—it informed my decision to create a timeline as part of the study exhibit and to provide chronological information about each story material presented. By happenstance of holding the pilot exhibit in the dining room of my home rather than a formal studio space, I realized how right it seemed to incorporate the homey and feminine furnishings of the china and antique-filled dining room into the exhibit space. It informed my vision of and subsequent choice of exhibit setting, which included homey furnishings. Also, because of the immense amount of work that went into holding the pilot exhibit for 1 weekend for the estimated 100 attendees, the study design realistically specified a 1 weekend exhibition and 100 exhibit participants.

### *Lenses: Cycle 1*

During the first pilot study, I met with one storyteller regularly over the course of several months and exhibited the resulting creative story materials in a public exhibition where attendees had the opportunity to give feedback. I spent time immersed in the story experience, story materials, and feedback of the storyteller, exhibit attendees, and myself. My intention was to allow insights to form as I maintained an open stance to receiving them. Rather than focusing on the story content, my goal was to tune into the story process.

Because the majority of my time was spent in the storytelling process with the teller rather than the exhibit that followed, my attention was drawn to the former as I formulated the lenses. I had the sense of being immersed in the text and having absorbed all the related conversations, observations, synchronicities, intuitions, and experiences associated with it from the time it first claimed my attention. They were living in me, and my task was to cognitively derive and articulate major elements that comprised my perspective to date. The question I put to myself was, *What do I know now?* I was calling upon myself to surface from my long-term indwelling or altered state of absorption in the text and shift perspective to one of locating my knowledge and extracting it. The knowledge living inside me was not all in cognitive form yet. Much of the storytelling process engaging me was creatively based, making it psychically painful to link the right brain with the left to transfer information on my perspective into cognitive form. It had to be teased out and translated into thoughts that could then be put into descriptive words.

To aid the process, I used stream of consciousness, writing down whatever phrases automatically came to mind about Living Stories without dwelling on or thinking about them. I put these in a list format and reviewed the list. I narrowed it to those views that appeared most prominent in my mind, based on items that immediately and strongly claimed my attention. I identified nine lenses. While engaged in defining each lens as a distinct viewpoint through which I viewed personal storytelling, these views continually overlapped into an interconnected set of lenses, like a kaleidoscope creating a unique tapestry of color and pattern. While each lens is qualitative in nature, some describe an encompassing look and feel of personal storytelling while others focus on specific stages of the storytelling process. The next nine sections describe the lenses.

*Lens 1: Connecting beyond self.* We fill our innate need to connect by sharing our stories. Our need for connection spans many degrees, from a sense of emotional connection with others to a spiritual connectedness with something larger than ourselves. Personal storytelling is as much about the listener as about the teller. All who experience stories may feel a sense of connection on one or multiple levels. A sense of connection occurs through understanding an experience from within and may include an understanding of the teller's story, one's own story, an aspect of humanity, or spirituality. People may feel connection with a storyteller whom they have never personally met. This may happen by hearing about the story from others, reading about it, attending a mixed-media exhibition of the story, or in a myriad of other ways. Engaging in personal storytelling also requires a unique connection to oneself, requiring tuning in at subtle and varied levels to receive the story through the many sensory channels it may travel, and experiencing an accompanying sense of personal truth.

*Lens 2: Dynamic nature of stories.* Our stories are living, breathing extensions of ourselves. They exist because we exist and are everchanging and growing because we are dynamic beings. A single story may change many times yet always remain true to the teller's experience. A story may take a new shape or twist, depending on the mood of the storyteller, the environment of the telling, or the particular audience. Our stories are multi-dimensional. They cross boundaries of time and space. An experience from long ago can be accessed by teller and listener as though in the present. A storyteller may convey his or her story with text, images, and other means without being physically present. Once the teller chooses to share the story, the story becomes its own entity and

extends beyond the teller for others to access. The dynamic nature of our stories may move, change, or transform us.

*Lens 3: Story ripeness.* Some stories about ourselves are especially meaningful to us, compelling us to share them with others. It is these stories that are ripe to be told. Ripeness indicates the teller is open and ready to engage with the story and story audience. The reason one feels compelled to share a story may not be known by the teller, nor is it necessary. Ripeness indicates the demand or desire to tell a story comes from an inner place of authenticity and marks the beginning of engagement in an intuition-driven process.

*Lens 4: Storytelling as sacred process.* Personal storytelling is a creative and spiritual process to be tuned into and followed—an unfolding and emerging that is connected to all the senses. The process of telling a story that is ripe entails attuning oneself to the story. The teller sets an intention to receive and follow the emerging story rather than attempt memory recall. The storyteller and story are honored during this process of expression. The emerging story is viewed as an authentic expression of the teller's innermost truth and, therefore, is sacred. Great care is taken to create a surrounding physical environment that exudes the same sense of sacredness. The rituals or specific practices of storytelling also convey it as a sacred experience.

*Lens 5: Dimension of storytime.* Ritual has long been an essential ingredient of storytelling, whether a bedtime story is being read to a child or an indigenous tribe gathers around the storyteller who passes on an oral storytelling tradition with inspiring tales. Rituals carve out storytime, a dimension wherein both the storyteller and the story are honored and the audience becomes engaged. Storytime is defined as a dimension

where the storyteller and collaborators meet and are guided by the story. For those ensconced in storytime, a quality exists of total engagement and immersion in an embodied experience of the story. Through the dimension of storytime, the multi-dimensionality of storytelling may be accessed; connections may be made between past, present, and future, between individuals, and between cultures. People may also experience connection with spirit and universal aspects of humanity.

In *Living Stories*, the storiographer and storyteller begin their storytelling journey with a ritual to demarcate their joint entry into storytime. At all times forward, until the storytelling cycle feels complete to the teller, the two remain in storytime. Doing so creates a space for the story to emerge any time of night or day, whether or not the storyteller and storiographer are meeting for a storytelling session. The story, for example, could come forth in the teller's or storiographer's dreams, in spontaneous creative expressions, or in coincidental happenings that seem linked to the story. During storytime, the teller and storiographer maintain a conscious awareness of the presence of the story at all times, welcoming it into their lives.

*Lens 6: Story collaboration.* Those who tell and listen to a story affect its shape and texture by their presence and style. Storytelling is an act and art form that occurs in the context of relationship. The collaboration occurs first between the teller and story, expands to include the storiographer, continues further to include the story audience, those who read or hear about the story third-hand, and so on. Each person who accesses the story in some format or another does so by filtering it through his or her unique set of interpretive lenses. The filtering is part of the collaboration, affecting the story that is



perceived. It is through the collaborative relationship that a sense of connection may be experienced on one level or on multiple levels.

*Lens 7: Power of black and white photography.* The photographic image in black and white, light and shadow, is captivating. Viewing imagery activates the right or creative side of the brain, whereas reading text activates the left or linear side of the brain. Black and white photographic images hold a certain mystery and power. They turn time upside down by capturing past instances and bringing them into the stillness of the every moving present moment. The images may stir the soul for reasons unknown and ineffable. The essence of the storyteller may be captured in the light and shadow of the photographic image, revealing the story in a unique way. The photographer thus becomes a collaborator in the telling of the story. The story is revealed through the relationship between the photographer and the photographed in a captured image others can see. My creative passion as a black and white photographer makes this tool a special offering of mine in the storytelling collaboration.

*Lens 8: Intuition as a story pathway.* As our stories change, an internal, subjective sense of truth remains constant. It is our connection to an inner sense of truth that makes our stories and the process of telling them expressions of authenticity. Tuning into one's intuition guides one to an internal sense of truth. The entire storytelling process is guided by intuition. Viewing the story and process of telling it as sacred opens the gateway to intuitive insights and personal truths therein. The term intuition encompasses the many ways a sense of personal truth or knowledge flows through a person. Dreams, insights, flashes of knowledge accompanied by visceral confirmation, psychic impressions, a sense of spiritual connectedness, and certain body sensations are among the ways intuition

might be experienced by an individual. Intuition is often accompanied by a sense of being in a flow (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) state of consciousness whereby different aspects of one's life feel aligned and connected to each other and to a deep sense of truth. This type of resonance may take place within and between people.

In the Living Stories style of personal storytelling, the storyteller and storiographer explicitly commit to engaging in the intuitive process as integral to the storytelling process. Often an intuitive alignment is felt between the storyteller and storiographer, expressed by sharing similar opinions, ideas, and feelings about the story. The commitment to follow one's intuition brings authenticity and sacredness to a flexible, organic process and implicitly invites the audience to engage in the same process. A storytelling process guided by intuition, integrity, compassion, and authenticity may lead to positive experiences in those who engage in it, from feeling deeply moved to transformed in some greater sense. It is the process, rather than the content, that is the more empowering aspect of personal storytelling.

*Lens 9: Story expression.* There are various portals or sensory channels through which our stories flow. Our stories move through us, often undetected, until we attune ourselves to them. To tune into and follow the story is to experience and savor the story in all its aliveness and through the many sensory channels it travels. Opening to the story through the senses may require turning oneself over to a lesser-known language of the self. Several articles by Anderson (2001, in press) are devoted to this theme.

David Abram (1996) poignantly expressed the vitality of connecting to story through the senses:

A story must be judged according to whether it makes sense. And “making sense” must here be understood in its most direct meaning: to make sense

is to enliven the senses. A story that makes sense is one that stirs the senses from their real surroundings, tuning the tongue to the actual tastes in the air and sending chills of recognition along the surface of the skin. To make sense is to release the body from the constraints imposed by outworn ways of speaking, and hence to renew and rejuvenate one's felt awareness of the world. It is to make the senses wake up to where they are. (p. 265)

The story travels through the gateway of the senses and, like the inhale and exhale of a breath, moves from an internal expression to an outward expression in creative form such as movement, painting, sculpture, poetry, and photography. Story movement and expression are not reserved solely for the storyteller. Everyone who accesses the story, including the storiographer and audience, may experience the inward and outward movement of the story. Those who listen to music, touch sculpture, or read text as part of experiencing the story may feel moved to express responses in creative forms such as writing or drawing.

### *Cycle 2: Developing Interpretive Lenses*

Intuitive inquiry calls for the formulation of research questions as the culmination of Cycle 1. After focusing the research topic and questions in Cycle 1, Cycle 2 asks the researcher to explore the topic through a different text to clarify the values and structure the researcher brings to the topic. A brainstorming process generates a list of interpretive lenses describing the researcher's values and structure. As the researcher moves through iterative cycles of interpretation, lenses are amplified, refined, and changed.

The text used for Cycle 2 was a second pilot study continuing the storytelling process with the storyteller from the first pilot study. Because trust and a close collaborative relationship had developed between us and she felt compelled to tell more of her evolving story, engaging in the continuation of the teller's story allowed a deeper

process of topic exploration. The initial lenses from Cycle 1 changed into more fully formed preliminary lenses to reflect my continued interpretation and understanding of the text. The next three sections describe the second pilot study and refined lenses.

### *Pilot Study 2*

After the first pilot study, spanning from winter 1997 to spring 1998, I remained in periodic contact with the storyteller. Although cancer-free, her journey through breast cancer recovery continued. We discussed my upcoming dissertation research and the possibility of her participation. I asked if she felt compelled to tell more of her story. She replied affirmatively and expressed the desire to do so as a participant in the current study, building on Pilot Study 1. The storyteller wished to culminate the continuing collaboration with a story exhibition, as occurred in the first pilot study. We re-engaged our storytelling collaboration, marking Pilot Study 2 and Cycle 2, in October 1999.

The story exhibition, based upon the collaborative storytelling process of both pilot studies, was the focus of the current study and completed the hermeneutic circle used in this intuitive inquiry. Including the pilot studies in the hermeneutic circle strengthened the research by acknowledging the storytelling process as integral to the story exhibition and audience response.

The storyteller and I agreed to track our processes more rigorously as we re-engaged in our storytelling collaboration. Three methods were agreed upon: (a) each meeting would be tape-recorded; (b) we would each track our thoughts, processes, insights, and anything relevant to the storytelling experience by writing or drawing in a journal; and (c) we would each track our specific storytelling experiences using a process grid, per guidelines by Anderson (2000).

Our first meeting of Pilot Study 2 lasted several hours. It was held in a park in wooded foothills. We sat on a blanket on an expanse of lawn with no one nearby. We each brought objects to include in a simple ritual to mark our re-engaged story collaboration. Sacred feminine images and candles were placed in the center of the blanket. I asked her what continuing story wanted to be told and compassionately listened and followed her lead as she proceeded. I sensed the same openness, trust, and connection as during the first pilot study. A tape recorder captured our conversation. I brought two journals, one for each of us to use as we wished throughout our continued storytelling collaboration. I also brought pastels and colored pens for us to use during the meeting. I took notes during our time together, writing quotes that resonated with me as well as insights and thoughts. I doodled and drew spontaneously, too. I also illustrated dreams she described. I gave her copies of the Process Grid, and we discussed using the forms to track our processes at all times, that is, during our reimmersion in storytime.

During storytime, both of us engaged in the process of indwelling. Indwelling is a component of intuitive inquiry that draws from the heuristic methodology of Moustakas (1990). Refer to the previous section on intuitive inquiry. We each intentionally held ongoing awareness of the story and storytelling process. We made connections between the storytelling process and things that may not ordinarily have seemed tied to it. For instance, dreams and conversations outside the meeting times and between different people were approached in a process of discernment to find new insights to the storytelling process or the story itself. We agreed to each make notes in the Process Grid when we had an awareness of an experience or impression related to the storytelling process. The Process Grid is comprised of six columns for recording information about

each event: (a) date and time, (b) what occurred, (c) description of the occurrence, (d) context of the event, (e) experiential details such as feelings and sensations, and (f) how the event relates to the story.

During Pilot Study 2, I lived in a different part of the state than the storyteller. We arranged to meet in person several times every few weeks. I traveled to meet with her during those times. During the weeks in between, we had story meetings by phone. Our in-person meetings usually lasted 3 hours and phone meetings 1 hour. We met at her house, natural settings, and occasionally the house where I stayed during my visits. As during the first pilot study, the nature of our meetings unfolded organically. During one meeting, we drank tea and listened to music while sculpting clay about her story. Each of us took our respective clay sculptures home to live with and reflect upon. Another time I videotaped her as she described some key elements and insights about her story. It seemed important to capture her image and voice describing her story in her words. During another meeting, I watched and listened as the storyteller created a collage while telling me about her story. She asked me to help find images, so together we cut up magazine pages. The images she chose and the juxtaposition of them on paper as they blended together often engaged her in new insights she shared with me, moment-by-moment. Some aspects of our meetings arose in the moment, while others involved checking with each other at the end of a meeting about how best to prepare for the following time spent together.

As the second story collaboration began to conclude, taking photographs to mark and express that stage of the story called out to us. At her home I took a series of black and white and color photographs. Some images were portraits in her home environment,

reflecting life changes since the last photographic session during Pilot Study 1. All her hair had grown back and was styled. Her clothing and surroundings hinted at her re-engagement with life beyond cancer. Other photographs captured artwork, sacred statues, and belongings identified as important elements of her story. These items were photographed in the context of her home and grounds in the spaces where she lived with them. Our storytime concluded at the end of February 2000 with the understanding that another story exhibition would take place as part of this research project. The first exhibition was held in Spring 1998 as part of the first pilot study. We stayed in contact. Her desire to participate in this study remained.

*Personal reflections on Pilot Study 2.* I often wrote in my journal, finding it an inviting place to keep insights, resonant quotes of the storyteller, and general keeping of the story process. While I used the Process Grid, it felt forced, cumbersome, and confusing. I was unable to determine a revised grid format with a better fit. The storyteller gave up on it from the beginning. The difficulty lay in trying to track a nonlinear, nonrational process in a linear, rational fashion. Instead, I remained in storytime and indwelling with the topic, mentally noted my intuitive process, and tracked insights as they surfaced. My experience of receiving insights was one of story elements flowing through the portals of my body and mind from beyond myself.

For example, toward the end of Pilot Study 2, some of the initial collaborative storytelling energy seemed to be fading. I noticed repetition of story elements and themes. I began to worry and feel inadequate to the task of being a storiographer and researcher. I decided to release self-judgment and allow useful information to surface. Fairly quickly, an idea flashed into my mind that perhaps the end of storytime was being

covertly signalled. During the next story meeting, I asked the storyteller if she felt the story was winding down. She said she did and shortly thereafter, we concluded our storytime.

Although the current study focused on audience response, the second pilot study (in combination with the first pilot study) served to inform the research design through its inextricable link. Because of the rich story material derived from the story meetings and deep satisfaction in the storytelling process for both the teller and myself, I believed a public story exhibition could yield a fruitful further exploration of the topic and remain true to the integrity of the story and teller. If the storytelling process had failed either of us in some major way, audience response would have been less useful because resonance would have been missing beforehand and sharing the story likely undesirable to us both. In addition, because the pilot projects went well, the research design of using a singular story by one storyteller participant dictated specifying a fairly large audience participant size to validate findings. It was realistic to specify 100 exhibit participants by calculation of a similar number who attended the pilot exhibit (with an acceptable range of 75 to 125); the actual number of exhibit participants was 95.

### *Lenses: Cycle 2*

Formulation of the lenses in Cycle 2 is a clarification of the preliminary lenses from Cycle 1. In these two cycles comprising the forward hermeneutic arc, I clarified my perspective before engaging the claim of others in the return arc. My process of lens development was one of clarifying my perspective as a whole before breaking out individual lenses. The clarification of the whole happened as a function of pausing during each cycle and extracting anew my beliefs about the topic. Doing so marked a point in time of ongoing topic immersion and indwelling. For instance, perspective changes were



informed by experiences of tacit knowing and insights from casual conversations and reading, along with pilot study data such as journal notes, audiotape recordings of story meetings, photography, and collage. Several years passed between the second pilot study and the completion of my dissertation proposal. Because I had remained immersed in the topic, my perspective evolved during that timespan.

I was unable to review each lens and clarify it individually; attempts to do so had brought the realization that I needed to refine my perspective intuitively. I had the sense that all the data and pertinent experiences were residing within me, combining to formulate my perspective, and my task was to extract it. I made a fresh list of phrases that expressed my topic view. As in Cycle 1, I narrowed the list based on which items claimed my attention most strongly and immediately. The process of listing, refining, and narrowing continued over the course of a week. I needed rest and integration between time spent with my list. Each written phrase was accompanied by a set of thoughts I held in awareness, knowing I would write them down once my list was complete.

When I finished, I listed each element and filled in my accompanying thoughts. As with the preliminary lenses, I had the experience of each lens merging into the other as part of the other, seeming more like a whole than individual elements. I experienced a breakthrough moment when my perspective clarified into an image (see Figure 1). The lenses aligned with aspects of the image. Following Figure 1 is a list and description of the lenses and how they relate to the image. I also came across a poem by Jelaluddin Rumi (1995, pp. 171-172) that expressed the whole of my perspective. It is purposely presented on the following page so it may be read and experienced on its own before the lenses are listed individually. To read each iteration of the lenses as a whole will point the reader to the relatedness of the cycles and topic evolution.

*A story is like water  
that you heat for your bath.*

*It takes messages between the fire  
and your skin. It lets them meet,  
and it cleans you!*

*Very few can sit down  
in the middle of the fire itself  
like a salamander or Abraham.  
We need intermediaries.*

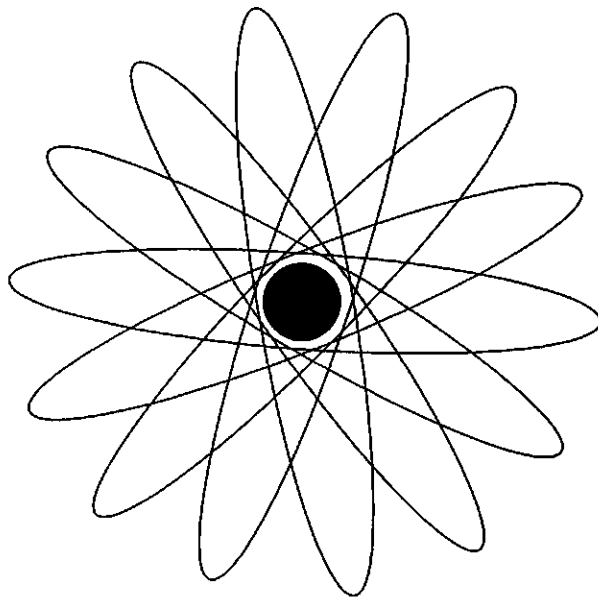
*A feeling of fullness comes,  
but usually it takes some bread  
to bring it.*

*Beauty surrounds us,  
but usually we need to be walking  
in a garden to know it.*

*The body itself is a screen  
to shield and partially reveal  
the light that's blazing  
inside your presence.*

*Water, stories, the body,  
all the things we do, are mediums  
that hide and show what's hidden.*

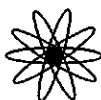
*Study them,  
and enjoy this being washed  
with a secret we sometimes know,  
and then not.*



*Figure 1.* Cycle 2 whole perspective depicted as an image. The entire image represents Lens 2: Sacredness of the Storytelling Process. The core of the perspective is Lens 4: Love as the Core, depicted by the circle or cylindrical rod in the center of the image. The remaining lenses are depicted as the interwoven rings that surround the rod.



*Lens 1: Personal storytelling as spiritual longing.* We naturally thirst for connection and share our stories in order to feel connected. The basic human thirst for connection is a spiritual longing to know our interconnection or nondual nature. We are interconnected yet often fail to realize it, instead feeling separate or disconnected from one another and from spirit. Rumi (1995) alluded to this in the last lines of his poem, quoted on the previous page, “enjoy this being washed with a secret we sometimes know, and then not” (p. 172). Sharing our voices through sacred personal storytelling opens and ultimately awakens us to our interconnectedness. Our culture often engages in profane storytelling in a misplaced attempt to find connection. There is a call in our culture for more sacred storytelling as a means of connecting and transforming us.



*Lens 2: Sacredness of the storytelling process.* Sacredness permeates, encompasses, and creates the tone of the overall perspective. Represented pictorially as rings surrounding a solid core or rod, it is reminiscent of an atom or lotus flower in full bloom. Sacredness is the spiritual, mysterious nature of sharing our meaningful personal stories. Sacredness encompasses the organic process of opening to mystery and being led by it. Intention and ritual invoke the sacred, spiritual, and mysterious into the storytelling process. Sacredness beckons forth the story that is ripe to be told. The storiographer who sets a sacred tone attracts storytellers with ripe stories or meaningful personal stories they are compelled to tell at a particular time. The teller and story are honored and viewed as sacred. Sacred storytelling leads to a felt sense of interconnection in various ways, for instance, with others, community, and spirit.





*Lens 3: An internal sense of truth defines story authenticity.* Part of the sacred storytelling process is for one’s true or authentic self to be expressed through sharing a

meaningful story. An internal sense of truth guides the storyteller to express his or her story from a place of authenticity, as opposed to fact-checking for external accuracy. For authenticity to be fully embraced in the storytelling, the teller must feel compelled to tell the story and make decisions about how to tell the story throughout the process. In other words, the authentic story engages the teller in a series of actions guided by an internal sense of truth. In speaking one's truth, the storyteller is sharing his or her authentic voice and, in doing so, is aligned with spirit. When an authentic story comes forth, truth and beauty are communicated in the creative expressions. These expressions of the true self and authentic story are art. They convey the sacredness of the story and of the teller's voice.

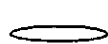
- *Lens 4: Love transforms us.* The core of the perspective is love. Depicted as a darkened circle in the middle of ovals, it is most clearly viewed as a glowing cylindrical rod of light extending through a group of intertwined rings. Through love, we open to a spiritual journey. Love is the source of divine spirit, the guide to truth and transformation, and the center of the sacred process of storytelling. The storiographer maintains a stance of love and unconditional acceptance toward the teller and story, embracing both with an open heart. The story is accessed by the storiographer and teller through opening to, acting out of, and creating a container of love and compassion; the story emerges from the encompassing container of love. The story exhibition is designed to set a tone of compassion that brings the audience into the story and creates an experience or understanding of the teller and story from within. Love and compassion are awakened in those who connect with the teller and story. Our attitudes, intentions, and behaviors are

influenced by love. Love is the pure energy we tap into and through which we feel our interconnection. Love transforms us.

 *Lens 5: Collaborative relationship as a catalyst for love.* Through relationship we feel love. Through love we know our interconnectedness and tend to our spiritual longing. In the sacred storytelling process, the storiographer and storyteller form a relationship stemming from compassion and trust for each other and the story. The relationship forms a container of love through which the story is invited to emerge. Thus, a trinitarian, collaborative relationship is formed between storyteller, storiographer, and story. The storiographer and storyteller tune into the story and are guided by it as a living extension of the teller. When the story is shared with others, the collaborative relationship expands to include the audience. Each audience member collaborates in the telling of the story; the way each person chooses to access the story and the creative expressions they may leave for others to see affect the telling of the story. The relationship continues to expand as more people access the story by direct experience or hearing about it from others. Love expands as the relationship between the story and others expands. As love expands, transformation becomes more widespread.

 *Lens 6: Storytelling as a transpersonal journey.* We are transpersonal beings, interconnected with all, with spirit as our true essence, intertwined with the psychology of our unique personalities. Engaging in sacred storytelling attunes us to our spiritual essence and realization of our transpersonal nature. Growth and transformation occur as we align ourselves with and stay true to our transpersonal journeys. Opening to mystery is a gateway to the sacred dimensions of our stories and our participation in transpersonal phenomena and events. Through compassionate and loving relationship, intentionality,

and ritual, we open to and are guided by the mystery of our sacred stories. Storytelling crosses the seeming concrete boundaries of place and time guiding our daily perceptions of life to alternate realities or realms of consciousness. Sturm (1998) referred to the experience as a storylistening trance. Through opening to love and interconnection during the storytelling process, we cross a paradoxical threshold into multidimensionality. The paradox lies in the importance of acknowledging and including the context of our stories in a particular time, place, and person, yet experiencing a boundary crossing through time, space, and our sense of self when we do so. In accordance with Ferrer's (2002) perspective that people participate in transpersonal events, we may participate in transpersonal phenomena not in our usual awareness. A storytelling phase of tuning into the story called storytime evokes our awareness as transpersonal beings and attunes us to transpersonal experiences; as the storyteller, storiographer, and audience attune with the story, there is movement into deeper spiritual connection, and dualistic perception diminishes. There is an awakening to interconnectedness.

 *Lens 7: Participatory knowing occurs from attunement with interconnection.*

Through attunement with the story, we attune to our interconnectedness or awareness of ourselves as transpersonal beings. Whereas attunement with the story leads to connected knowing, it is through attunement to our interconnection that participatory knowing occurs. Participatory knowing may be experienced as information or phenomena flowing through one from sources beyond and interconnected with oneself. One's consciousness and the body housing one's consciousness are portals of interconnection with transpersonal phenomena and events. By setting an intention, one may more readily attune oneself to participating in the formation and receipt of information through these

portals or ways of knowing. This is similar to turning up the volume on the radio and tuning into a station to receive the strongest signal; the information is broadcast whether or not one listens and is received more loudly and clearly by making the indicated adjustments. By tuning in, we become aware of our participation in the receipt and creation of information and phenomena. Rumi (1995) referred to the role our physical form plays in relation to our spiritual connection or interconnectedness when he said, “The body itself is a screen to shield and partially reveal the light that’s blazing inside your presence” (p. 172). Rather than relying on memory to access our stories, integrated knowledge comes from the whole person. Such knowledge travels through various channels such as thoughts, intuition, emotions, and touch and appears to us in many forms such as insight, discernment, and resonance. Elements of the story may appear through dreams, spontaneous creative expression, movement, synchronistic conversation, aesthetic response to artwork, and music, for instance. The various ways of knowing are interwoven and integrated so that they are not separate. They are experienced by those attuned to or with integrated awareness of the participatory nature of transpersonal phenomena—hence, the term integrated knowing. Integrated knowledge of the story may be experienced by those in relationship with the story, including the storyteller, storiographer, and audience. Integrated knowing lets us cross boundaries of time, space, and self to access other people, realms, and phenomena.




*Lens 8: Our stories are art, and art is powerful. Art conveys beauty and truth.*

Through sacred storytelling one’s ripe, authentic story is expressed. The expression of this truth and the beauty of one’s true self or spiritual essence revealed, is art. Hence, our stories are art. Art is the yang or outer expression of the yin or internal sense of truth of



our stories. Art is powerful in its ability to communicate. Art evokes in us a direct response or engagement with our aesthetic feelings or knowledge. Hearing the truth spoken, viewing a photographic portrait capturing the essence of a person, or gliding one's hands along the contours of a sculpture may instantaneously and spontaneously move one to tears, a sense of awe, visceral resonance, vibration felt in the heart chakra, or a direct experience of interconnectedness. Creative expression of the story by the teller, storiographer, or audience (through story feedback) may be considered spiritual expression, that is, attunement with the transpersonal or participatory knowing expressed in external form.

 *Lens 9: Our stories are living.* Our stories embody movement. They are like water, moving in elegant, fluid motion through, between, in, and around us. Our stories are extensions of ourselves, as dynamic and evolving as we are. Rather than fixed fact, our sacred stories reflect an internal sense of truth. Different tellings at various times may elicit different renderings of the same story. All are true because they come from a place of authenticity. Our stories flow through us as cycles of breath, carried from internal awareness to outward expression. The dynamic nature of our stories is part of our interconnectedness; the story extends beyond the teller, immediate audience, place, and time to connect with other people, places, and times. Through our interaction with the story as active participants rather than voyeurs or observers outside the experience, we affect and are affected by the story. For instance, audience members who attend a story exhibition access mixed-media story elements in the space at unique paces and ways and express reactions to the story in different creative ways that become part of the exhibit, each affecting the telling of the story. Storytellers, storiographers, and audience members

are impacted in different ways by their unique storytelling experiences. As we connect with the sacred story of the unique individual, we may awaken to our interconnection, experience love and compassion, and be changed or transformed as a result. Thus, the ever-evolving story reflects and affects the ever-changing person and interconnected universe and vice versa.

### *Cycle 3: Engaging the Claim of Others*

The third cycle of intuitive inquiry calls for the researcher to collect original data on the topic (Anderson, 2000). The purpose is to gain topic input from perspectives other than the researcher's, usually empirical data in the form of interview data or behavioral observations. The researcher determines the target population and selection criteria of those to be interviewed. Post-interview, the researcher uses the lenses developed in Cycle 2 to analyze interview data, adjusting the lenses according to an expanded circle of understanding about the topic.

Since the text under investigation was *Living Stories*, receiving input from participants in *Living Stories* seemed the most natural way to engage the claim of others. Rather than interviews, data collection focused on responses of audience members who attended a story exhibit, via creative expression and a questionnaire. The following subsections describe the research design, participants, procedure, confidentiality, data analysis and reporting, as well as limitations and delimitations.

#### *Research Design*

Mixed-media story elements arising from the storytelling collaboration between the storyteller and researcher-storiographer during the two pilot studies were presented to 95 research participants in an interactive story exhibition designed by the researcher-

storiographer, with the storyteller's approval. Participants spent time in the exhibit at their own pace. Data collection consisted of completion of an open-ended questionnaire following exhibit attendance and a participant option to leave creative expression responses at stations throughout the exhibit space in the forms of drawing, writing, and videotaped message. Data analysis included thematic content analysis of questionnaire data as it related to the researcher's lens formulation in Cycle 2 and aesthetic response of the researcher to creative expressions analyzed as individual and collective audience feedback. Lens clarification, presented in chapter 4, concludes Cycle 3.

### *Participants*

*Number.* The research design specified 1 storyteller, 1 storiographer, and 100 audience members (with an acceptable range between 75 and 125), the latter based on a similar number who attended a public story exhibit during the first pilot project. The audience goal was met with 95 participants during the course of the single weekend the exhibition was held, September 20-22, 2002. To enrich and deepen exploration of the storytelling process within an appropriate research scope, one storyteller was designated and utilized, rather than a larger number. One storiographer was designated and utilized, in keeping with the Living Stories format. The relatively large number of targeted exhibit participants was intended to increase the likelihood of attracting a diverse group, such as those known and unknown to the teller, those familiar and unfamiliar with the story topic of breast cancer, and those with some variance in demographic background, thus providing substantial data to meet the research goal of engaging the claim of others. The goal of attracting a diverse group was met, as reported in the Demographics section.

*Criteria.* The storyteller who participated in the pilot studies participated in the current study. Refer to chapter 1 and Appendix B for storyteller participant criteria. The researcher served as the storiographer, as in the pilot projects. Refer to chapter 1 for a description of storiographer criteria. Combining the roles of storiographer and researcher was of benefit to the researcher in providing greater immersion in the story process than would otherwise have occurred.

The same selection criteria applied to all exhibit participants and were as follows: (a) desire to experience a story through an interactive story exhibition in a public setting and not for another reason, such as fulfilling an assignment or because someone else placed pressure to participate; and (b) at least 18 years of age, due to the graphic nature of some exhibit materials. Refer to Appendix C, Audience Informed Consent Form. No other restrictions were placed on audience participation. Members of the general public, known to the storyteller, known to the researcher-storiographer, and familiar or unfamiliar with the story subject matter, were welcome to participate if they met the selection criteria. The storyteller's review and approval of those invited by the researcher-storiographer was a criterion. She approved everyone who was proposed. Those known to the teller and researcher attended the exhibit and enriched the investigation by providing data that was compared to that of the general public. Also, those familiar and unfamiliar with the experience of breast cancer attended, providing rich data. Refer to chapter 4.

Initially, to safeguard against positively biased responses, selection criteria disallowed participation of anyone who knew the researcher-storiographer as more than an acquaintance. Upon reflection, this restriction seemed unnecessary and was removed after refining the research questions and questionnaire to focus on specific aspects of

what make stories sacred rather than on more general questions about the storytelling experience. Nine of the 11 questions posed in the questionnaire directly related to the nine lenses. Refer to Appendix D, Audience Questionnaire. Based on the questionnaire responses, coded with the consent forms so the participant identity could be known, I believe audience bias was avoided.

*Recruitment.* The storyteller signed the participant consent form prior to Pilot Study 2 and participated in the current study as a continuation of her pilot study participation. Her participation in the second pilot study included an intention to become a research participant and have her story shared with an audience of research participants in a mixed-media exhibition similar to the first pilot project. Refer to Appendix E for the Storyteller Informed Consent Form for this study. At no time prior to or during exhibition preparation did the storyteller express reservations about her initial plan to have her story shared in a public exhibit, nor did she express regret after the exhibition.

One of my greatest concerns and most time-consuming efforts in preparing the exhibition was participant recruitment. In keeping with the Living Stories goal to make stories accessible to the public, the exhibition was designed and advertised to make it available to a wide range of participants. The venue was selected in San Francisco, a city known for diversity and interest in the arts. The site, located in a neighborhood called South Park, was easily accessible by public or private transportation and prone to foot traffic. The exhibition weekend was specifically chosen not to coincide with events at a nearby baseball stadium, which competes for parking space in the area. Posters were placed in the surrounding area and in the front window of the venue. A number of passersby became research participants.

I designed a postcard invitation, which was printed and used for participant recruitment. Refer to Appendix F, Audience Recruiting Postcard. From this template, I designed the poster—which I had printed—and an electronic invitation for email distribution. I considered inclusion of a black and white photograph, particularly one of the storyteller, to be an important aspect of engaging the public with the story and a desire to attend the exhibit. Although the postcard was initially designed with the teller's picture, because of ethical considerations it was later replaced with an image of me holding a photograph of the teller.

Invitations were distributed by the storyteller and myself and were available to the public at the exhibit venue during the weeks prior to the event. With the teller's approval, I distributed invitations targeting those in the transpersonal community, friends (who were encouraged to invite others), the arts community, the digital storytelling community, and the breast cancer community. For instance, invitations were sent to people affiliated with the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, California Institute of Integral Studies, Institute of Noetic Sciences, Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley, San Jose Museum of Art, Center for Digital Storytelling, Community Breast Health Project, and Northern California Cancer Center. Although several breast cancer organizations were contacted about the exhibit, told about the story topic, and encouraged to invite their members, no action appeared to be taken by these groups. In the general invitation, the breast cancer topic of the story was purposely not revealed to prevent the audience from having preconceived ideas about the story and/or choosing not to attend due to such preconceptions.

With the assistance of a public relations expert, I drafted a press release and distributed it to local news media. Refer to Appendix G, Media Exhibition Announcement. The purpose was to have the event listed in calendar sections and possibly have an article written to provide public awareness and increase participant recruitment. Local newspaper listings included the San Francisco Chronicle, Palo Alto Weekly, and Mountain View Voice. Notices included the exhibition title, time, date, and place, with an explanation of the study and an invitation for interested individuals to contact the researcher with questions and/or attend the exhibition as research participants. Although one reporter expressed interest in writing an article, my notification reached her too late to meet her deadline. In retrospect, I realized event promotion and participant recruitment would have been far easier and yielded a greater number had the exhibit been part of a larger event, such as Open Studios or National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (October of each year).

*Screening.* I was stationed at the venue entrance throughout the hours of the 1 weekend exhibit to greet and screen potential participants, give them the consent form to read/sign, and answer questions. Refer to Appendix C, Audience Informed Consent Form. The following were required of participants: (a) attend an interactive, mixed-media exhibition at one's own pace; (b) consider an option to express one's reactions to the exhibit through written, drawn, and/or videotaped response at stations in the exhibition space; and (c) complete a questionnaire immediately following time spent in the exhibition. Several passersby opted not to participate due to the 1 hour estimated time of participation listed in the consent form. A few other passersby were unable to participate because they had children with them, who were ineligible to participate. Refer to the

previous Criteria section. None of those who came to the event due to receiving an invitation (Appendix F) were deemed ineligible to participate.

### *Procedure*

*Exhibition planning.* Initially, the storyteller was asked if she wanted to be involved in exhibit planning. As with the exhibit in the first pilot study, the storyteller wished to have little involvement. However, she was asked for some input in the beginning and reminded she would have final approval on aspects ranging from the invitation design to exhibit materials displayed. First, emphasis was placed on venue selection and exhibit design that were complementary, appropriate to the story and materials to be displayed, and easily accessible to the public. Refer to the section in chapter 1 on exhibition planning. The storyteller and I discussed ideal venue features. They included a local site, windows and natural light, nature visible, an artistic yet homey feel, and a public setting. I created a picture in my mind, setting an intention to find such a place. As I drove around town doing everyday tasks, I scouted possible sites with peripheral awareness, noted possible venues, and followed up with telephone inquiries. Not long after, the space I envisioned was offered to me sight unseen. I was struck by the synchronicity of it as soon as I went to see it and readily accepted the offer. Refer to chapter 4, Flow Experience, for greater detail.

The exhibition dates of September 20-22, 2002 were chosen, taking many factors into account, including (a) venue availability, (b) time needed for event promotion and exhibit preparation, (c) holiday weekends (these were avoided to lessen nonattendance due to local residents going out of town), (d) dissertation schedule, and (e) storyteller availability. Although the storyteller had a conflicting engagement throughout most of the



selected weekend, she was unsure about whether or not she wanted to attend the exhibit and knew her schedule allowed her to attend either at the beginning or end of the weekend if she so chose. We discussed her reticence to attend and agreed to remain open to whatever she decided, which ultimately was to attend.

The times of the exhibit were determined based on hours most likely to draw participants. At the suggestion of the exhibit space host, an opening reception to mark the beginning of the event was planned for Friday from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Although I liked the idea of an inspired beginning to the weekend, I was also concerned about the juxtaposition of a party with the serious nature of the exhibit. I later addressed the concern by having all food and drink located in a room other than the exhibit space. I also closed off one reception room door located near the building entrance and sat stationed there to direct people down the hall to the exhibit as they arrived, judging it would be less emotionally difficult to go from a somber exhibit to a gregarious party atmosphere than the other way around. Refer to chapter 4, Congruence. The remaining hours of the exhibit were set at Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 5:00 p.m. Choosing the venue, dates, and times as quickly as possible was necessary in order to begin event advertising. The event was publicized through publication announcements and invitations from the storyteller and researcher-storiographer. See the Recruitment section, above.

*Exhibition preparation.* I prepared the exhibit design and layout concurrently with exhibit planning, using my background skills in the design of human environments. I made a special trip to the exhibit space to study it carefully, measuring the room, noting the placement of features such as electrical outlets and doors, checking lighting, and

perusing the existing furnishings. At home, I unwrapped all the story elements, previously stored in my closets and cabinets, and placed them around my home in plain view, satiating my craving to be surrounded and informed by them about how to present the story. I needed to see everything at once and absorb the visual stimuli as my aesthetic and creative guide. Photographs, poetry, paintings, collages, a breast casting, and hats filled my living room. My home was turning into an altar dedicated to the story and exhibit. A momentum had been building over the preceding weeks, as I became more engaged in the exhibit plans. My life focus gradually shifted entirely to this task. I reviewed my journal notes from meetings with the storyteller over the past few years and personal reflections about the process. I made final photograph selections, based on previous input by the storyteller. I asked the teller if she would mind the hats being available for the audience to try on; she readily consented. I took out a large drawing pad and sketched a layout of the story elements in the exhibit space—this drawing became a template I kept in my mind as I continued exhibit preparation.

Throughout the 2-month period of exhibit planning and preparation, I was in regular contact with others, relying on the support of friends and colleagues and the materials and services provided by small businesses in my local community. I initiated many phone calls and e-mail messages and visited numerous businesses such as framing shops, photographic suppliers, and art supply stores. I was pleasantly surprised by the sense of connectedness to my surrounding community and support I felt during this time.

I designed the exhibit to evoke the sacredness of the teller's story and maximize the likelihood of sympathetic resonance in participants. Anderson (1998) stated,

Intuitive inquiry is completed in a creative expression of the findings. . . .  
The researcher's task is to so richly portray the essence of the findings that

a significant portion of the audience immediately apprehends and recognizes the experience as familiar. . . . It is the researcher's responsibility to present the findings in as many forms or genres as necessary to maximize opportunities for sympathetic resonance to occur.  
(p. 93)

Expanding upon Anderson's instruction to the researcher in reporting findings, I believe an appropriate goal of the exhibit design was to convey pilot project data (story materials) to the exhibition audience in the same way. In this sense, the opportunity for sympathetic resonance was maximized and subsequent interpretation of audience data became another layer of potential resonance. Some of the design elements employed to evoke resonance were (a) the choice of an aesthetically pleasing space, (b) a spacious layout of materials within the space, (c) creative expression stations integrated into the space allowing for a sense of privacy yet inclusion, (d) near museum-quality presentation of materials, and (e) opportunities to physically interact with the story materials. For instance, music and audio recordings were available to participants via headphones so they could listen at their discretion and without impacting others in the space. Signs invited participants to try on the hats and leave responses at the creative expression areas. Story materials included written narrative, paintings, a breast casting, poetry, photographs, music the storyteller listened to during chemotherapy, hats the teller wore after chemotherapy, a collage, and an audio recording of the storyteller. Creative expression areas in the exhibit space included a table with supplies for drawing or writing, a chair and tripod-mounted video camera for videotaping responses (accompanied by instruction that an exhibit assistant would film the message in a private area, if preferred), and a lounge chair with music listening station and a sign inviting participants to also write or draw.

With the assistance of several friends, I installed the exhibit in the space a few days before the opening. We moved some existing furnishings out of the space and left others to support the exhibit, as planned. A large table in the center of the room was reduced in size by removing leaves and set up as a creative expression area. A heavy dresser was left in place to add a homey feeling and to hold a mirror for trying on hats. The antlers of a large wooden deer were used as a hat rack. A club chair and ottoman with nearby sidetable and lamp, used as an area for music listening and creative feedback, added a sense of home. The reason for intentionally creating a homey setting was twofold: (a) to implicitly invite audience members to interact with story elements by creating a sense of comfort found at home as opposed to the sterile, “do not touch” environments of museum culture; and (b) to subtly underscore the context of the story in our own lives, that is, no household is immune from the possibility of encountering breast cancer or a life and death struggle.

Once all the exhibit materials were unwrapped in the space, I laid them out according to my template drawing by lining photographs, text, paintings, and collages along the bottom of walls. Sensing some changes were needed, I began trying some variations. A friend who stayed late helping (who also was an exhibit assistant during the exhibition) began offering input. We started discussing possible layout changes and the reasons for them. I noticed a sense of collaborative spirit during this time that was extremely helpful; I made better decisions by receiving her input than I would have made alone. Refer to chapter 5 for a discussion on collaboration.

Two changes that resulted from the discussion and subsequent experimental rearrangements of story materials were the layout of materials in chronological order and

the exclusion of one collage. The story materials in the physical exhibition space dictated a layout of consistent chronology, whereas I opted for a more lenient chronology in my sketch. I had questioned inclusion of the omitted collage all along; when my friend suggested excluding it, unsolicited, our ensuing discussion validated my instinct that the piece did not hold the same charge or aesthetic communication of the story as the other story elements. When we completed exhibit installation, the room and layout of the story within felt and looked right to both of us.

I experienced another impromptu and fruitful collaboration with the exhibit space host during the installation. She and I had previously discussed having lit candles in the building spaces where the opening reception would be held and where participants would fill out questionnaires. As an afterthought, we discussed having candles in the exhibit space to enhance the mood of the space during the opening reception on Friday night. She provided the candles and on her own, placing them in areas throughout the exhibit. I did not rearrange them and throughout the weekend chose to keep them lit in the exhibit, even though the room had sufficient natural light on Saturday and Sunday. In their questionnaire responses, a number of participants remarked upon the effect of the candles in creating a sense of sacredness. During installation, the exhibit space host also asked if I wanted flowers in the exhibit area and suggested it might be nice to use the storyteller's favorite flowers. I called the storyteller to ask her about the idea and she was touched and in favor of it. The exhibit space host graciously said she wished to purchase the flowers, purple and pink dahlias named by the teller. She arranged and placed them in the exhibit area and in the room where the reception was held, in an aesthetically pleasing way.

*Exhibition.* The venue entrance was located at street level in a small, sidewalk-lined neighborhood on a circular street with a park in the center and cafes, stores, galleries, and residences around the rim. In the foyer, I greeted, screened (as described in the prior Screening section), and gave consent forms to potential participants as they entered. Refer to Appendix C, Audience Informed Consent Form. All aspects of participation were explained and questions answered. Because I was present in this role throughout the exhibit weekend, I gathered much observational data. For instance, several times, participation was withdrawn after exhibit entrance; most of the time, participants explained their reasons for withdrawal, and I observed their accompanying emotional states and body language. I was also aware of the number of people in the exhibit at any given time, length of time spent completing questionnaires, and participant age range. Refer to chapter 4, Observational Data.

I directed participants to take signed consent forms down the hallway to an exhibit assistant posted at the exhibit doorway entrance. Consent forms were collected and participants were told they would receive a questionnaire after concluding the exhibit, coded with a number to match their consent form but without their name, in order to protect their privacy. Two exhibit assistants staffed the exhibit entrance and space. During the weekend, this duty rotated among three volunteers. All were close friends with Ph.D.s and well-qualified to assist. Two of them had graduated from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and had used intuitive inquiry or a related qualitative methodology in conducting doctoral research. The third person works in arts education and conducted doctoral research on creativity; she also acted as a consultant on museum design standards for the exhibit.

Exhibit assistants instructed participants to access the exhibit however they wished and informed them that the exhibit was in chronological order from the right side of the room to the left. They were also invited to take a quiet moment before entering the exhibit space; a sign at the room entrance also offered these instructions. This simple ritual was intended to introduce participants to the exhibit space and set the tone for entering into storytime, a sacred realm where they were free to become immersed in the offerings. Initially, the door to the room was kept open, in keeping with the tradition of gallery spaces and public places. However, from the beginning of the exhibit Friday evening until the end of the exhibit Sunday evening, the exhibit participants consistently chose to keep the door closed. If the door was left open for any length of time, a participant from inside the exhibit would close it. After awhile, the exhibit assistants kept the door shut and no participant inside the exhibit ever opened it, except to enter or exit. Refer to chapter 5 for an interpretive discussion of this behavior.

Once inside, participants were be able to wander freely, much as in a museum. Signs throughout invited participants to interact with the story elements and creative expression options. A goal of the exhibit design and procedure was to provide an experience as unrestricted as possible in order to value the uniqueness of each person entering the space and the way in which their inner guide directed them. The room housing the exhibit, previously dubbed *Cloud Nine* by its owner, was rectangular-shaped with a high, cloud-painted ceiling, white walls, and deep blue carpet. A window-lined wall at one end revealed an outdoor garden area with ivy-covered walls, seating areas, potted plants, and decorative objects. A glass door along this wall accessed the adjoining porch and private outdoor area. As participants entered the exhibition, they faced a long

wall, lined with stark, nude, and semi-nude black and white photographs I had taken of the storyteller in nature during the time she was in chemotherapy treatment in 1997. To the right of this wall the story chronology began. A wall plaque explained the purpose of the exhibit within the context of dissertation research on the connecting power of story and the 5-year timeframe during which the storyteller and I collaborated on the telling of the story. Three oil paintings and accompanying narrative, both by the storyteller, expressed aspects of the beginning stages of her breast cancer experience. Underneath, a table held a grouping of lighted candles and a breast casting of the storyteller before mastectomy surgery.

To the left was the wall facing participants as they entered the room. It continued the story with a timeline of some key events of the story and storytelling process, followed by a poem by the storyteller and paired photographic portrait of her. After a brief pause, participants reached a grouping of four photographs, bracketed on each end by two poems. Arriving at the corner, an area with plump lounge chair, side table and lamp, compact disc player, headphones, and compact discs of music the storyteller listened to during chemotherapy greeted participants with a sign inviting them to sit, listen, and draw or write. Along the next wall to the left, a videotaping area was set up in front of the window with instructions and an invitation to videotape a message, followed by the wooden deer and antlers capped with five of the storyteller's hats in the opposite corner. Nearby, the final wall supported a heavy dresser of dark wood and glass cabinetry. On the dressertop, a mirror rested, surrounded by vases of flowers in purple hues and lighted, cream-colored candles. A sign invited participants to try on the teller's hats and tuck in their hair to envision a bald head from chemotherapy. To the left of the



dresser hung a framed collage by the storyteller, followed by a plaque with the teller's narrative about her experience 1 year following mastectomy surgery. A final grouping of three photographs I had taken reflected the teller's current, healthy status. Underneath the photographs hung a wall-mounted audiocassette player and headphones. A sign invited participants to listen to the storyteller's voice. The tape of several minutes, edited by me from a meeting with the storyteller, shared aspects of the teller's story related to the final images. The middle of the room was lit by a chandelier at night and housed a large, round, cream-colored table brimming with art supplies and a sign inviting participants to leave written or drawn responses to the exhibit.

Upon exiting the exhibition space, an exhibit assistant distributed coded questionnaires to participants. Refer to Appendix D, Audience Questionnaire; the font size used in the questionnaire given to participants was larger than appears in the appendix, for reading ease. Participants were informed they could return to the exhibit space for questionnaire completion or go to one of the neighboring areas, a comfortable room with couch, chairs, tables, and refreshments or the private, outdoor space in the back of the building. A restroom for participants to use was located along the hallway. Participants handed completed questionnaires to an exhibit assistant or me before leaving. Prior to the exhibit opening, the storyteller expressed the wish to provide feedback about her exhibit experience as part of her participation. Closer to the exhibit weekend, she expressed reticence about attending the exhibit. She ultimately came late Sunday afternoon, preferring to go through the exhibit by herself and not give feedback. The teller's visit marked the end of the exhibit.

Just after, an exhibit assistant and I entered the exhibit space alone so she could videotape the exhibit with my help. In silence, she moved around the room, camera in hand, and I moved the camera cord behind her. I realized I had not taken any time to absorb the exhibit and felt like doing so. I left my friend to her task and slowly circled the room, welling up with emotion as I felt the emotion of the teller's story. I felt surprise by my reaction; I had not expected to feel moved because the story was so familiar and I had lived with it and the creative elements expressing it for so long. Being quiet in a room dedicated to her story, isolated from the rest of the world for only a few moments, delivered me anew into her story, and I felt grateful. There was a lighthearted and happy feeling expressed among those remaining in the exhibit building—the storyteller and her partner, two exhibit assistants, the woman who hosted the exhibit, and me—by smiles, laughter, and animated conversation. Most of the group went to dinner afterward to celebrate the completion of the exhibition.

### *Confidentiality*

Ethical considerations pertaining to confidentiality were carefully weighed. While a departure from some traditional standards occurred, it was done within the context of a transpersonal, qualitative research design suited to and calling for such changes. The issue of confidentiality arose in a specific way in this study. It was counter to the selection criteria and storytelling purpose for the storyteller to remain completely anonymous or use a pseudonym because the goal of Living Stories is for one's voice to be shared with others.

The exhibition was held in the same general geographic area where the storyteller works and lives, and event announcements utilized the storyteller's first name. However,

the storyteller's identity was kept confidential prior to the exhibition and event announcement. Also, her first and last name and identifying photographs were excluded from the dissertation. Materials utilizing the storyteller's name were approved by her prior to use.

Access to exhibition materials was granted exclusively to research participants; exhibition assistants and the exhibit space host were participants in the study. Exhibit participants included those known to the teller, again breaching traditional participant anonymity. The change was deliberate in order to include individuals with whom the storyteller specifically wished to share her story, a natural desire for one engaged in a deeply personal storytelling process (which includes, as an element, the wish to share the story with others). The teller decided to invite some people she knew to participate. Ultimately, 14 of the participants knew the teller. Allowing as participants those known to the teller, added a richness to the data by including story responses from those both known and unknown to the teller. Leaving the decision to the storyteller empowered her to continue organically leading her storytelling process while it was combined with a research project. The exhibition held during the first pilot study was open to the public and utilized the first name and photographic images of the storyteller; she expressed no doubts or regrets about having permitting her identity to be revealed.

The storyteller was informed of all considerations pertaining to confidentiality prior to the onset of research and consistently during the course of the study so that her wishes could be followed. There was no implicit or explicit pressure placed upon the storyteller to encourage a particular degree of identity disclosure. The storyteller never wavered on the decision to use her first name in the exhibit and related event

announcement materials. However, the storyteller voiced reticence about the use of her photograph on the audience recruiting postcard after initially agreeing and, independently, the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology's Ethics Committee suggested considering an alternative. It was clear another design was needed. Alternately, a picture of the researcher-storiographer holding an exhibit photograph of the storyteller was used, with her approval. Refer to Appendix F, Audience Recruiting Postcard.

Audience participant identity was kept confidential throughout the study and in the dissertation. Visual identity disclosure occurred among fellow participants who concurrently attended the exhibit, however. Also, some chose to sign their creative expression responses, even though they were instructed it was unnecessary. Since creative expressions became part of the exhibit, identities were revealed to subsequent participants who chose to view them. Audience members who left creative feedback chose to share their voices in response to the story and therefore were purposely not restricted from identity self-disclosure. The sacred storytelling context intentionally provided an environment to safeguard the described level of potential identity disclosure between research participants. Following the exhibit, participant data was kept confidential and stored in a secured location at the researcher's residence.

### *Demographics*

There were 95 exhibit participants, thus meeting the target goal of 75 to 125. Approximately 2/3 were female and 1/3 was male. Most participants were not acquainted with the storyteller. Refer to Table 1. Approximately half the participants (49) attended the exhibit on Friday evening, when the atmosphere in the building was crowded and

Table 1

*Audience Demographics: Gender, Exhibit Atmosphere, and Relationship to Storyteller*

Audience Demographics	Participants ( <i>n</i> =95)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	63 (66%)
Male	28 (30%)
Not indicated	4 (4%)
<b>Atmosphere</b>	
Crowded	49 (52%)
Uncrowded	46 (48%)
<b>Storyteller acquaintance</b>	
No	81 (85%)
Yes	14 (15%)

noisy due to the opening reception. During the remainder of the weekend, the environment was uncrowded and quiet.

Seventy-nine participants filled out questionnaires; the remaining participants withdrew participation after attending the exhibit. Participants who withdrew participation after attending the exhibition were considered participants because their presence affected the quality of the environment and they may have left creative expression responses. There were 44 creative expression responses left in written and/or drawn form. Refer to Table 2. Because participants were instructed that signing creative expressions was unnecessary, the ratio of responses to participants is unknown. However, 15 creative expressions were voluntarily signed or initialed by 15 participants. The remainder of expressions mostly appeared distinctive, as observed by varying handwriting and drawing styles. Table 2 reflects a 1:1 ratio in reporting of creative expression feedback, for purposes of reflecting a general trend from known and observed information. No participants opted to leave videotaped responses. This could have been from lack of audience awareness that the opportunity existed, due to the unobtrusive display of the video camera.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis phase of the research process lasted approximately 5 months. While writing the results, clarity about the findings continued to evolve. As specified by intuitive inquiry, the procedure included holding the data up to my perspective or lenses and inviting new insights and clarification to emerge. Methodological steps are undefined, however, to allow the intuitive inquiry researcher to respond in a way most appropriate to his or her research process. Intuition and sympathetic resonance were

Table 2

*Level of Audience Participation*

Participation	Participants ( <i>n</i> = 95)
Questionnaire	
Yes	79 (83%)
No	16 (17%)
Creative expression	
Yes	44 (46%)
No	51 (54%)

important tools used to guide the data analysis. As I began to review the data, I intuitively found the need to be absorbed in it and keep the lenses I previously named and described in the background. My lenses or perspective were arguably always present and data I reviewed filtered through them. During data analysis, I purposely aimed to see with fresh eyes, or a beginner's mind, the information revealed by participants. Keeping my perspective in subtle and peripheral awareness, rather than in the foreground, served the research process by avoiding circularity and not overshadowing the data.

In addition, *trickstering*, or using confusion and paradox as gateways to deeper understanding, and *varying magnification*, or viewing different levels of detail from small to big picture, are intuitive inquiry techniques (Anderson 2000) I utilized to guide my analysis. Periods of incubation, or empty space and rest, were utilized throughout data analysis to allow data to shift and integrate further into my awareness in a new and expanded way. Themes, questions, ideas, and interpretations were noted as they appeared and then organized and reported.

Upon completion of the exhibition weekend and data collection, I remained fully engaged with my topic, acutely aware of receiving inner guidance on how to proceed with the research process and trusting in the organic nature of the process and my ability to be guided by it. I gave myself several days of rest at home and then took a trip to visit friends out of state to allow for rest and integration of my exhibit experience. The flow feeling experienced during the exhibition continued while I was away. Refer to the section in chapter 4, The Flow Experience. The trip was restful, enjoyable, and aided my transition into data analysis. I brought my research journal with me and began to jot down reflections during my time away. Once home, I reviewed the 79 questionnaires and 44 creative expressions.

*Questionnaire.* The first questionnaire question purposely did not relate to the lenses, in order to elicit responses outside the researcher's perspective and prevent circularity. Questions 2 through 10 related respectively to each of the nine lenses. Refer to Appendix D, Audience Questionnaire. To analyze questionnaire data as related to the researcher's preliminary perspective or lenses, thematic content analysis, as described by Kimberly A. Neuendorf (2001) and Robert Philip Weber (1990), was initially included in the research design. As part of the organic nature of intuitive inquiry, the plan shifted partway through review of the data to more appropriately accommodate the research process—as described in the remainder of this section. Additionally, observable demographic information was notated and compiled, as planned.

Embarking upon my first review of the data, I was able to read about 25 questionnaires in one sitting before I felt satiated. It took four different sittings on different days throughout the course of a week before I read all the questionnaires. I



purposely read them in the order in which participants attended the exhibit (questionnaires were consecutively numbered and handed out in order) so I could note possible chronology-related trends. For instance, I wondered if there might be a field effect over time or other differences based on those who attended the opening reception, which was crowded and had a party-like atmosphere, compared to the relative quiet of the rest of the weekend.

Also, since I had been at the exhibit venue during all the hours it was open, I relived the event and recalled my observations by reading the questionnaires chronologically. I had collected observational data in my mind that would supplement the questionnaire data. Questionnaires were paired with matching consent forms, making participant identification evident. Having such knowledge was helpful in supplementing what I observed with participant responses and in collecting demographic information. Unfortunately, I did not require a printed name under the signature unless the participant requested to be contacted with research findings. This resulted in several unrecognizable signatures—an oversight I would correct in future research. I began adding to my research journal, jotting down thoughts, observations, recollections, and demographic information. I purposely did not try to synthesize information, form conclusions about the data, or even hold onto the information I read in the questionnaires. I viewed my first readthrough of the questionnaires as a first pass at getting acquainted with the material—a way of letting myself begin to absorb it slowly without the added burden of trying to make sense of it.

Next, I reviewed the creative expression data. Refer to the following section, Creative Expression. I did not try to draw conclusions or look for themes during my

initial review. Afterwards, I purposely released focus on the materials for the next several weeks to commence an incubation period. During incubation, three ideas emerged:

1. Each questionnaire would best be analyzed as a whole response from the participant, rather than as a series of responses to the lens-related questions, as initially planned. In many questionnaires, responses to one question were better or additionally answered by responses to other questions, making analyses of individual questions (as related to corresponding lenses) inaccurate.
2. Traditional content analysis would be less appropriate than initially thought because of the above idea and also because observational data I recalled during questionnaire review supplemented participant responses, sometimes resulting in different findings than the responses alone revealed. For instance, a few questionnaires from Friday evening were only half-completed, with no written explanation; however, I observed the crowded areas where people were filling them out and heard some comments by people who stopped short of finishing because of the environment. Also, some participants with whom I was acquainted did not know the storyteller yet answered that they did, leading me to the realization that question 11 had been misunderstood by some and was therefore poorly constructed. I was able to correct for the error.
3. In addition to its use throughout the storytelling process, collaborative relationship would further serve data analysis. Being interviewed by my friend/exhibit assistant, someone I know well and who knows my topic, would provide a natural and useful way of extracting information from me.

I met with the Chairperson of my dissertation committee to confer about the first two ideas. She agreed the newly proposed method of questionnaire analysis would be acceptable and congruent with intuitive inquiry. I repeated the questionnaire review, journal in hand.

I read the questionnaires in reverse order during the second review, hoping to notice trends by taking in the data from a perspective varying from my first reading. Again I wondered if field effects could play a part in chronology-related trends. I set an intention to let the data flow through me and to remain open to any findings and data synthesis that formed and to let the process be effortless not forced, akin to casting a wide net and noticing what is caught rather than capturing small things that catch my eye. My intention was to access information from beyond myself rather than solely using my personal filter to reveal findings and interpret data. Findings and interpretation of findings became an intertwined process. I took notes in my journal about each questionnaire, copying sentences resonating with me and noting similar responses that eventually (as the number of reviewed questionnaires mounted) revealed themes. I also energetically breathed in and out the responses of each successive questionnaire, taking in yet not holding onto the data with the intent that the information I needed would remain within me and percolate to eventually reveal meaning.

As pages in my journal filled, I experienced periodic spurts of insight about the topic, akin to Anderson's (2000) "intuitive breakthroughs, those illuminating moments when the data begin to reveal and shape themselves before you" (p. 37). A word or short phrase would materialize in my mind to reflect the coming together or receipt of new information. It seemed as though the audience was speaking to me in unison, softly

shouting in my ear, “We have this to tell you: . . .” It also seemed as if the entities of text and topic—Living Stories and personal storytelling—were informing me directly. Brand new thoughts and ideas came into consciousness in what seemed like a creative and synthesizing process. I believe I was engaged in participatory knowing.

About halfway through the second questionnaire review, my friend and colleague (a transpersonal researcher and study participant who was well-versed on my research) and I arranged to meet so she could interview me about emerging findings. We concurred that having our meeting in nature would match and enhance the process. I brought a tape recorder so I could capture our conversation without taking notes. During dusk we sat at a table on a lake surrounded by grass, trees, and birds. I purposely left the interview duration and questions unspecified, instructing my interviewer to ask whatever questions came to her mind as a starting point from which to organically proceed. She asked me to describe special points, such as the most surprising finding and the finding that jumped out at me most. Her questions had the right blend of breadth and depth to coax the information from within. Many details I heard myself stating were already noted in my journal, but other aspects extended beyond my initial impressions, adding new information or greater depth of understanding. The interviewer’s deep listening furthered the extraction process, as did her clarifying or follow-up questions and observations. Occasionally, I asked her if she had any response to my comments, related to her own experience at the exhibition and surrounding events. Our time together concluded 1½ hours later, when I felt thoroughly emptied of available information. We agreed to hold another interview session after my second review of the data was complete.

I reviewed the remaining questionnaires, continuing to take notes in my journal and experiencing breakthrough moments of insight and clarity. I also reviewed the creative expressions, as described in the following section. I then called my friend, and we had a second interview by telephone—since she was no longer in town—with the same open-ended approach as in the first. I tape recorded the second interview, which lasted approximately 45 minutes and again yielded insights about the data.

I rested from active engagement with the data during the following week, letting information integrate. I then replayed the tapes, receiving more insights. During incubation periods, I remained engaged with the topic in peripheral awareness, making connections between the research and parts of daily life, such as films, books, and conversations. I began to outline data findings by theme and to write, often quoting from participants. Rather than asking myself, “What do I know now?” as I had in successive cycles of lens development, I asked myself, “What are the data saying?” This process exuded a sense of expansiveness; rather than focusing on specific phrases or responses, I felt immersed in the whole of the data as a collective resource.

As I registered insights from the exhibit participant data, I found that specific findings often melded into each another, somehow intertwined. This experience became progressively more confusing as I attempted to organize the findings during the latter stage of data analysis. I noticed a constant shift back and forth between my focus on the detailed components of storytelling that appeared in the data and how they fit into the larger structure of the storytelling process. I was engaged in the research process of varying magnification, a concept Anderson (1998, 2000) has discussed in its application in intuitive inquiry. By varying the magnification, the same object looks entirely different

when viewed under a microscope at 3x and 2000x magnification, for instance, thereby providing more information about the object under investigation through the change in perspective. The fact that I felt confused began to make sense.

Through engaging in the confusion or trickstering as a gateway to deeper understanding, clarity finally emerged. In order to catalyze this process, I intuitively decided to take daily walks in nature. New insights regularly surfaced during the walks and began to build toward major breakthroughs over the course of a week. Toward the end of the week, I began carrying a mini tape recorder on the walks to record new thoughts, insights, and clarity. The process of reaching deeper understanding continued outside of the walks in nature but they effected a breaking loose of consciousness that spurred the process.

*Creative Expression.* Creative expression data were treated both individually and as a collective audience expression. Aesthetic response of the researcher was used to access resonance and other aspects of participatory knowing. According to art-based researcher Shaun McNiff (1998), “The basic test of aesthetic significance is whether or not the expression of another appeals to the person perceiving it. This is a completely different measure of efficacy than the conventional scientific criterion” (p. 172). Braud (1998) said, “*Aesthetic feelings* may serve as useful indicators of the validity of methods, findings, and conclusions, as well as any conceptual models or theories developed from the work” (p. 220). Aesthetic response was gauged in relationship to the story; when viewing creative expressions, resonance with the story created aesthetic appeal rather than a personal aesthetic response. In this way, aesthetic response was tied to participatory knowing.

After the initial questionnaire review, I reviewed the creative expressions comprised of 44 written and/or drawn entries in 4 tablets. Since creative expressions were spontaneously created as participants moved through the exhibition space, they were not coded for identification. Although participants had the option of leaving videotaped messages, no one opted to do so. I noticed that a light, uplifting feeling in my psyche accompanied my perusal of the creative expressions, as opposed to the heaviness felt when absorbing the questionnaire responses. My brain did not have to filter or translate the creative expressions. They were immediately accessible and understandable in contrast to questionnaire review, which required me to decipher handwriting and meanings of a large volume of responses.

Following the second questionnaire review, described in the preceding section, I reviewed the creative expressions again, noting individual responses that resonated within and seeking the larger message of the creative expression data as a collective audience response. As in the first review, I experienced a simplicity and clarity in the creative expression data in comparison to the complexity and variation of the questionnaire responses. I had the sense that the creative expression data defined a particular aspect of the storytelling experience, compared to the wider variety of information appearing in the questionnaire data. The particular aspect was elusive. The qualitative experience of the creative expression data remained with me as I continued questionnaire data analysis.

Then, I experienced a breakthrough in the questionnaire data that led to the finding of *emotional narrative* as an essential feature of storytelling. Following the breakthrough came the realization that the collective creative expression response was

directly linked to the emotional narrative. Refer to chapter 4, Emotional Narrative. The link lent clarity to the collective response of the creative expression data and also explained the lack of prominence of creative expression in the overall data analysis; although the emotional narrative was one of the strongest findings, it was only one of many findings. Creative expression data, therefore, played a surprisingly understated role (albeit useful and important) in data analysis and resultant findings.



## Chapter 4: Research Findings

### *Overview*

My goal in this chapter is to convey the story experiences of the exhibit participants rather than provide the reader with a direct story experience. I purposely did not attempt to share the teller's story in the dissertation. None of the story materials used in the exhibit, such as photographs or poems, have been included in the dissertation. The teller's first name, which was used in the exhibit, was also omitted. It seemed vital to the storytelling process to present the story materials in an interactive, physical space. I could not re-enact the interactive exhibit in this dissertation, nor did I wish to attempt it. I also came to realize that the story would be out of context if shared in the dissertation and, therefore, would compromise the stance of honoring the teller and remaining true to the storytelling process.

Because the focus of this study was the storytelling process, and not storytelling as utilized for exploring another topic, the focus on exhibit participant responses utilized the intuitive inquiry concept of sympathetic resonance as a means of exploring the storytelling process, which culminated in the exhibition. In addition, the exhibit event was also considered part of the storytelling process. Exhibit participant responses, therefore, addressed the initial storytelling process between the storyteller and storiographer-researcher as well as the storytelling experience of the exhibition.

The findings presented in this chapter reflect information revealed by the data. A combination of questionnaire and creative expression responses by exhibit participants and my observations as the researcher comprised the data that were analyzed. Please note that findings from observational data stemmed from my internal as well as external

observations. While chapter 5 is reserved for in-depth interpretation and implications of the data, this chapter contains a fair amount of interpretation, necessary in order for me to reach many of the findings listed. The highly intuitive process of making connections in order to see the findings in the data is a hallmark of intuitive inquiry and one of the aspects of the research process that I believe best serves this study. Through the reader's own response to the findings presented, it is my hope that this aspect of data analysis will be understood and appreciated as an asset rather than a liability.

Findings presented in this chapter were the result of dwelling upon the data, letting it integrate within me, and noticing insights as they emerged. In-depth interpretation and implications of findings, in the next chapter, were the product of even deeper reflection intertwined with knowledge of the topic. While intuitive processes were still at work in the latter discussion stage, connections and insights were less the product of an instantaneous and direct jumping forth from the data as they were in this chapter. Further discussion about intuitive inquiry as a research method and the role of the intuitive inquiry researcher have been presented in chapter 5.

To illustrate findings, exhibit participant quotes have been included. Selected quotes are often representative of a larger number of similar participant responses or those with which I resonated as reflecting a collective participant response. A few exhibit participants were particularly articulate in their questionnaire responses and were, therefore, often quoted. To distinguish how strongly each finding appeared in the data, I used quantitatively descriptive language, such as stating that a few or many participants responded similarly.

Participant consent forms and corresponding questionnaires were numerically coded in chronological order of exhibit attendance. To cite participants, the consent form number preceded by P (for participant) was used, for example, P93. A few numbered consent forms and questionnaires were accidentally distributed out of chronological order. These were later renumbered to reflect proper chronology for the reader; for instance, P139 was renumbered P74b. Creative expression responses were uncoded and could not be cited by participant number unless the participant signed his or her name. Participant quotes referencing the storyteller by name have been altered by inserting *the storyteller* in place of the name, to protect storyteller confidentiality.

#### *Summary and Revision of Research Question*

In keeping with the research goal of expansive inquiry, the findings address a broader spectrum of questions than the initial research question. A meta-perspective of the storytelling investigation or set of meta-lenses emerged during the latter stages of data analysis, bringing the organization for the findings into view. The findings were organized by the meta-lenses in three main categories: art, essence, and experience. The meta-lenses and findings within the meta-lenses constitute the researcher's final understanding of the topic or final set of lenses from Cycle 3. Refer to Table 3 for the summary of study findings.

Through the research process it became apparent that the research question—*What makes stories sacred?*— was better addressed through revision of the question to, *What makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection?* In addition to the research question, other questions arose and were addressed by the data. For instance, it became clear that stories could not be separated from the context of storytelling; the elements

Table 3

*Major Findings Organized as the Art, Essence, and Experience of Storytelling*

Meta-Lens 1:	Meta-Lens 2:	Meta-Lens 3:
Art form components	Essence	Experience
A. Motivation and stance of love and compassion	A. Emotional narrative	A. Audience engagement
B. Creative collaboration	B. Interior and exterior landscape	B. Participant insights and change
C. Story	C. Congruence	C. Participatory transpersonal experience/knowing
D. Story Materials	D. Authenticity	
E. Presentation of story	E. Love and compassion	
F. Experience of storytelling	F. Creative collaboration	

comprising storytelling as a collaborative art form began to appear, thereby addressing the more encompassing question, *What comprises the art of storytelling?*

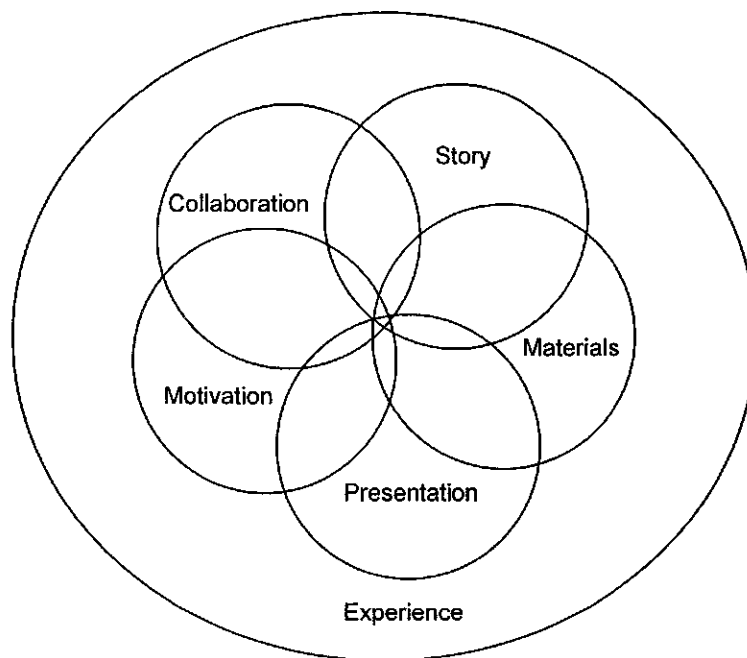
Findings also indicated essential qualitative features of storytelling, thereby addressing the question, *What is the essence of storytelling?* The experience of storytelling is the third main category of findings, addressing the questions, *What encompasses storytelling experience?* and *What engages audiences in the storytelling experience?* Storytelling experience has been addressed as a participatory transpersonal phenomenon and in terms of participant experience. Although the study scope and design did not include a measure of impact, findings about the storytelling experience addressed participant insights, resonance, connectedness, and other experiences related to immediate impact. The section on storytelling experience also addresses what engages or immerses audiences in the storytelling experience; included is the movement of the study participant from observer (of the story) to participant (in the storytelling experience/transpersonal phenomena). The stages of audience engagement in storytelling were (a) commitment, (b) attention, (c) interaction, and (d) ownership. Storytelling experiences indicated compassionate connection occurred on a continuum (including personal insights, sympathetic resonance, participatory knowing, and spiritual knowing).

The three categories of findings are not completely distinct and separate. They are largely interwoven. For instance, *storytelling experience* is both a category of the meta-perspective and a component of the storytelling art form. Love and compassion are included in the *motivation* component of the art form and are also essential qualities, to cite another example. Many of the participant quotes used to illustrate one finding applied to numerous findings; however, quotes were repeated only rarely.

Finally, the general use of the term storytelling throughout the chapter is intended to mean storytelling as a means of eliciting deep connection. Although the nature of intuitive inquiry does not lead to generalizeable findings in the positivistic sense, I believe the findings reveal a degree of particularity; that is, concepts presented may be applicable to storytelling in a broader sense. Refer to chapter 5 for a discussion of this idea.

### *Meta-Lens 1: Storytelling as an Art Form*

One of the most significant findings was information about what comprises storytelling. Through data analysis and a larger view of the entire storytelling process, beginning with the pilot projects, it became clear that exhibit participants participated in a storytelling process, not merely an exhibit. Responses indicated the story was conveyed through the exhibit setting, story materials, and collaboration between storyteller and storiographer, for instance, as presented by findings in the remainder of the chapter. The story was not separate from the storytelling process; the storytelling process appeared in the findings as a collaborative art form. The *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* definition of art that applies to the art form of storytelling is "a skillful plan . . . the conscious use of skill and creative imagination" (Mish, et al. 2000, p. 64). The process of storytelling in the study was comprised of a series of components that denoted how the art form was actively carried out. Although the storytelling process is a progression of activities, the components are not completely linear; there is interaction between all the components at various times. Figure 2 depicts the relationship between components.



*Figure 2.* Elements comprising the art of storytelling. The six elements represent stages of the storytelling process and are also intertwined as nonlinear elements with permeable boundaries. Experience of storytelling is an element that encompasses the entire process and is considered within a participatory transpersonal framework.

The description of components or elements is as follows:

1. *Motivation* and stance of love and compassion. Storytelling was driven and sustained by love and compassion. Intentionality (by the storiographer) to draw a teller who was positively motivated to share a meaningful story marked the beginning of the storytelling process. Love and compassion were the motivating forces for engaging in the storytelling process by both the storyteller and storiographer. The intentionality and act of maintaining this stance throughout the storytelling process were also part of this component. Exhibit participants overwhelmingly reported the presence of love and compassion in the story and exhibition. Exhibit participants also commented on the exhibit as inclusive of a loving collaboration between storyteller and storiographer; even though they had not been directly involved in that aspect of the process, they participated in it through the exhibition storytelling experience. Love and compassion appeared in the data as essential to storytelling, that is, essential to the art form in its entirety (refer to Love and Compassion section).
2. *Creative collaboration*. Storytelling included participation in an expanding collaboration or series of collaborations in creative process. The collaboration was first created between the story, storyteller, and storiographer (but is considered within a participatory framework that includes storytelling as a cultural response/collaboration). The collaboration centered around a creative process of storytelling that resulted in the story materials presented in the exhibit. As mentioned above, exhibit participants responded to the



collaboration as part of their storytelling experiences; they also became collaborators through their participation in the exhibit (including interactivity with materials, creative expression feedback, and presence in the exhibit space/participatory field). The collaborative and creative process yielded authentic expression by the storyteller and was perceived as such by the exhibit participants.

3. *Story*. Storytelling was the expression and experience of the story. The story was more comprehensive than a series of events. It entailed a factual narrative, breast cancer theme, and hero's journey theme—and it also included the qualitative essential features, such as an emotional narrative, authenticity, and love. The story was authored by the storyteller but became co-owned by exhibit participants who embraced it as part of their shared humanity and/or spirituality.
4. *Materials* that convey the story. Through creative collaboration in the storytelling process, the storyteller and storiographer expressed the story through various materials, many of which were used in the story presentation/exhibition. The creative expression of the story through these materials created and allowed exhibit participants multisensory access to the story. The storyteller's artifacts elicited strong resonance from exhibit participants (hats, music, breast casting, and audiotape of the teller's voice). Photographs created a powerful visual anchor; exhibit participants reported that essential features of the story, most notably the emotional narrative, were strongly conveyed through images of the teller.

5. *Presentation* of the story. Exhibit participants experienced the storytelling through the presentation of story materials in an exhibit design and setting. That is, the physical context and mode of story presentation were intertwined with the story and storytelling experience. The ambient environment, physical aspects of the space, and interactive exhibit design contributed to the story expression. Exhibit participants noticed and expressed the importance of congruence between the story, story materials, and story presentation as a function of their storytelling experiences. Love, compassion, respect, and integrity were underlying features of congruence that participants experienced in the story presentation and that added to their sense of reverence and respect for the teller and story. Exhibit participants were influenced by the presence or absence of other participants in the space and the general energy and mood of the participants. In addition, participants reported regulating their experiences based on how they interacted with the story environment (e.g., pace, interaction with story materials, and modifying the environment by closing the door, for instance).
6. *Experience* of storytelling. In addition to the story presentation at the exhibition, the storytelling experience encompasses the entire storytelling art form. That is, storytelling experience is ongoing throughout the entire storytelling process, as described by the components of the art form. Storytelling experience is viewed as inclusive of transpersonal phenomena, which are cocreated by the exhibit participants, the storyteller, and the storiographer. Exhibit participants reported experiences of connection on a

continuum of a personal, transpersonal, and spiritual nature. By participating in the storytelling through the interactive, multisensory presentation of the exhibit, rather than taking an observer role, some exhibit participants experienced participatory or spiritual knowing. Experiences reported included a sense of time, place, and/or self alteration, sympathetic resonance, and a state of flow. Data also revealed aspects of storytelling that engaged or immersed exhibit participants in the experience: commitment, attention, interaction, and ownership.

Several of the storytelling components have been addressed in findings under other meta-lens sections. Findings related to motivation, the first art form component, have been addressed in the subsection Love and Compassion of the Meta-Lens 2 section because Love and Compassion is an essential feature. Findings about creative collaboration, both an art form component and an essential feature, have been presented in the Meta-Lens 2 section. Experience, the sixth component of the art form, is also the third meta-lens. Findings pertaining to storytelling experience have been included in the Meta-Lens 3 section.

### *Story*

*Like night dreams, stories often use symbolic language, therefore bypassing the ego and persona, and traveling straight to the spirit and soul who listen for the ancient and universal instructions imbedded there. Because of this process, stories can teach, correct errors, lighten the heart and the darkness, provide psychic shelter, assist transformation and heal wounds. (Pinkola Estes, 1993, p. 28)*

The term *story* is defined in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as “an account of incidents or events . . . the intrigue or plot of a narrative or dramatic work” (Mish, et al. 2000, p. 1156). The finding of a factual narrative, described in the next

subsection, pertains directly to the account of story events. This finding became clear as the emotional narrative finding emerged (explained under Meta-Lens 2). The emotional narrative was intertwined throughout the storytelling process, whereas the story emerged as a component of the storytelling process. Exhibit participants perceived two layers of story in the exhibition: a woman's journey through breast cancer and a shared human life and death struggle.

*Factual narrative.* Wall plaques with dates, titles, a timeline of story events, and other information about the story delivered the factual narrative, that is, the account of the story aside from the emotional narrative. Some factual narrative came in the form of written accounts by the teller. An audiotape of the teller featured her talking about various elements of the story otherwise unknown to the exhibit participants. Several exhibit participants voiced the desire for much more factual information about the teller and story. They essentially noted the imbalance between the emotional and factual narratives. Weeks after the exhibit, one exhibit participant (P66) verbally expressed to me, "There was not enough texture to the exhibit to fill out the emotional space that was created." Another participant (P79) commented, "After concluding my tour of the exhibit—I still felt somewhat disconnected. I wanted to know more personal info about [the storyteller] and hear more about how the experience w/cancer affects her life."

As I planned and designed the exhibit, I knew I was falling short in factual narrative but did not know how the exhibit participants would be impacted. It was important for exhibit participants to know the storyteller in the context of her life and her battle. For instance, some wanted more information about the teller's friends and family and their involvement in her story, voiced by 1 participant (P84) who wondered, "Where

were her friends and family.[sic]" Most participants did not comment about the lesser amount of factual material or express the desire for more (although it is difficult to interpret the lack of communication). Some expressed a satiation from the exhibit as presented, content with the emphasis on emotional narrative. As 1 participant (P70) stated, "I don't know much at all about the specifics—I have depth, but not breadth—it's the former that really matters."

*Breast cancer.* The story theme presented in the exhibit could be summarized as one woman's journey through her experience of breast cancer. Many exhibit participants resonated with the story through their own experiences with breast cancer or close relationship with someone who experienced breast cancer. Men and women alike had been touched in their lives by this disease. Many revealed personal information of their experiences in the questionnaires and creative expressions:

I came in with the memories of my mother's own fight with breast cancer. She is a formidable survivor and an extremely wonderful woman—and a great story as well. I also arrived with news that I have a condition which might evolve into a more "internal" cancer, so my own future is very uncertain. (P40)

I have had a lot of experience with breast cancer. My sister had both breasts removed. I have friends who have survived treatment. I have a friend who is just completing treatment. I have had more than one scare myself. (P38)

The story hits home as my mother is a breast cancer survivor. The story makes me think about what my mother was going through—yet I still don't know for sure because we never talk about the breast cancer. (P79)

My mother had a radical masectomy [sic] (double) when I was 12. I never quite realized what she went thru until taking the time to explore the exhibit. (P80)

I myself had 2 cancers, both of which were "incurable" but both of which have been cured! (P68)

*Shared life and death struggle.* Most exhibit participants resonated with and expressed understanding of a deeper layer of meaning and story theme as the shared human experience of life and death struggle. For some, this was their connection point to the story, not the breast cancer theme. One exhibit participant (P44) explained, “I could not connect through her cancer, rather I could connect through her choice to live, not because I’ve had to sit and consciously choose life, but because I admire her choice.”

Some voiced their resonance with a shared human struggle through a personal connection. For instance, 1 participant (P77) said, “I have gone through a very challenging time when I also had to choose life and take the steps of healing and thriving. (still ongoing).” Others identified an aspect of the teller’s story they most resonated with as a larger human experience:

When she told of being not wanted and separated and not loved—those feelings seem to me to be universal. (P74b)

Her spoken words are most with me, the not feeling she had a right to want to live. That’s almost more tragic than managing to/having to live through what she did. (P37)

Many specifically mentioned the emotional narrative of the teller’s struggle as evocative of shared humanity:

[The storyteller’s] pain, fear and anguish are universal. (P57)

I think suffering evokes shared humanity. (P39)

We all have our points of tragedy and grief and periods where we make a choice to live. (P61)

Facing one’s own mortality with a resolve to live life more fully was a personal insight expressed by several exhibit participants. For instance, one exhibit participant (P60) stated, “This exhibit underlined everyone’s ultimate frailty and the importance of

maximizing your life.” Some exhibit participants responded to the story as a whole as evoking universal truth or shared human truths:

This story is about our shared humanity. (P77)

I resonated, felt, invited, knew I heard/saw a universal truth communicated through [the teller’s] story. (P53)

Internally, at some level at least, we know death is inevitable—that’s a truth that this exhibit evokes. (P39)

Revealing an archetypal relationship w/death & journey of the soul. Specifically told by [the storyteller]. The journey—challenges, victories, humbling, etc—feels universal. (P92)

Refer to chapter 5 for a discussion of how this finding pertains to the myth of the hero’s journey.

### *Story Materials*

The story materials were the expressions of the creative collaboration between the storyteller and storiographer and the direct representation of the story in the exhibit (as opposed to less direct aspects of the storytelling such as the exhibit ambiance and setting). They comprised a component of the storytelling art form, as expressed in the earlier described finding/section, *Storytelling as an Art Form*. Story materials consisted of (a) black and white photography, (b) poetry, (c) hats, (d) a collage, (e) music, (f) a voice recording of the teller, (g) a breast casting, and (h) paintings. Exhibit participants experienced different degrees of resonance with the various types of story materials. Each type of story material has been presented in an individual subsection to emphasize the variety and strength of exhibit participant response. The finding that appeared most strongly in the data was the power of photography as a visual anchor for the storytelling.

In addition, the combination of story materials was perceived by exhibit participants as important in providing a multisensory experience and an array of ways to receive story information (further discussed in the Presentation of the Story section). For example,

The inclusion of music, the hats, her poetry and artwork enabled me to feel a holistic compassion, as opposed to perhaps a more “clinical” sense of sympathy (P43).

So many ways to access her story and feelings, through [the storyteller’s] poetry and art and Sharon’s photos. Her art helped me connect to the story, but her face throughout helped connect it to a person, a living woman. The elements complemented each other. (P37)

An aspect of the combined story materials that emerged as a finding was that concrete elements or artifacts of the teller’s provided exhibit participants with a connection to the story as real. The next subsection presents this finding.

The Story Materials section includes creative expression responses by exhibit participants because they were included in the exhibit. Exhibit participants were invited to view the creative expressions of fellow participants as well as leave their own; the growing body of creative expressions by participants became part of the storytelling. By extension, exhibit participant creative expressions became story materials with an added layer of resonance, that is, response to the original story materials.

*Storyteller artifacts made the story real.* Concrete elements or artifacts of the teller’s were important to most exhibit participants. Most mentioned the impact of hearing the teller’s voice and trying on her hats.

Listening to the music, hearing [the storyteller’s] voice, trying on her hats. These things scared me at first, making them that much more real. (P73)

The hats, tape etc presented the story in a real concrete way. (P3)



Definitely hearing [the storyteller's] voice made the story more than just a pictorial representation—the audio made it real. (P79)

It was . . . very real and touching to hear her voice. (P86)

Some of the physical artefacts [sic] like the hats certainly resonated as a consequence. (P84)

The reality of [the storyteller's] physical appearance, the hat rack—some hats she probably wore when she wanted to look her best, others she wore when she just wanted to get through the day. (P86)

A few also mentioned the breast casting; 1 participant (P40) explained, “It is the most exacting item of the past or what could have been.” These concrete elements seemed to serve to bring participants closer to the teller herself, given that she was not physically present. A few expressed the importance of these artifacts in breaking the barrier of acceptability of experiencing the intimate nature of the storytelling. One participant (P26) recalled, “Until hearing her voice, I did not feel like I had any right to enter into such an intimate experience.”

*Photography as visual anchor.* The story materials that garnered the strongest response from exhibit participants (i.e., largest number and level of impact reported) were the black and white photographs of the teller. A series of five nude photographs of the teller taken during the timeframe of her cancer treatment were visible to participants as soon as they entered the exhibit space. A series of three photographs graced a different wall and depicted the teller clothed, several years after recovering from cancer surgery and chemotherapy. The photographs were continually referred to as powerful and associated with conveying the emotional narrative, particularly the vulnerability and anguish of experiencing and exposing a body ravaged by cancer and chemotherapy. One participant (P90) reflected, “The photos—all of them—were incredibly moving.

Powerful, forceful, clear. . . . Only after I saw the nude photos of the mastectomy did I remember that my mother had breast cancer and a mastectomy (30 years ago).”

(References to the photographs have been included throughout the chapter findings, e.g., Sacredness, Love and Compassion.)

Seeing the storyteller’s image was also an important means by which exhibit participants established a sense of connection with her. As noted above, 1 exhibit participant (P37) commented, “Her art helped me connect to the story, but her face throughout helped connect it to a person, a living woman.” Another exhibit participant (P36) stated, “The photos made it so real because you could put a face with the name and the story. And to see the before and after is powerful.” The photography seemed to act as a powerful and vital visual anchor of connection with the storyteller and emotional narrative. The latter exhibit participant comment also reflected the photographic depiction of the teller as external landscape through which factual narrative was revealed (i.e., through a photographic comparison of physical changes in the teller, exhibit participants gained the context of change over time or story progression).

Some expressed a sense of ownership in the story through connection with the photographic depictions of the teller (Refer to Ownership section for more information):

I think that Truth and authenticity revealed themselves in [the storyteller’s] nudes. It was her fighting her body. It was her fighting her fears. It was her choosing to live, having only her skin and her hopes. This is powerful. The image is powerful because the gaze backward begs me, “Will you choose the same?” (P44)

The photos of [the storyteller] had a great impact for me, for I saw myself in her position. (P68)

A number of exhibit participants responded that the photographs reminded them of war or the Holocaust. One such response was, “My spontaneous reaction is a mixed one.

Mostly, it made me think of the holocaust [sic]. The photos were moving and powerful. They made me a bit uncomfortable” (P38). The nude photographs of the storyteller were presented on a dedicated wall, with the teller’s poetry on either end. A number of exhibit participants commented on the powerful combination. For instance, “The initial shocking photos of an attacked body and written statements were very powerful” (P42).

Exhibit participant responses overall indicated that a powerful visual anchor (i.e., a visual depiction of the teller and story in an aesthetically strong manner) was vital to the storytelling. That is, exhibit participant connection to the teller and story would likely not have been effectively (or nearly as effectively) established without it. As 1 participant (P7) expressed, “The photography high-lighted and amplified the story.”

*Poetry as authentic expression of internal landscape.* Exhibit participants expressed strong aesthetic response to the teller’s poetry, as did the attendees of the pilot study exhibit (the same poems were included in both exhibits). Exhibit participants commented regularly about the potency of the teller’s poetry in conveying her inner processes about cancer, death, and the emotions of her experience. One participant (P34) shared, “I went back to one of the poems repeatedly [sic]—the one with the line, ‘a river with schools of emotion making their way to the sea.’” Another explained receiving an insight from the teller’s perspective of cancer as a counselor, as expressed in one of the poems. The strength of the poetry, particularly in combination with other story materials, was commented on regularly, such as previously mentioned: “The inclusion of music, the hats, her poetry and artwork enabled me to feel a holistic compassion” (P34).

*Trying on teller’s hats as catalyst for deeper experience.* A portion of the exhibit featured a mirror next to hats the storyteller had worn during chemotherapy. A nearby

sign invited participants to try on the hats and tuck in their hair to imagine themselves bald to emulate the effects of chemotherapy. Exhibit participants commonly reported moving deeper into the story experience through trying on the teller's hats:

When I got to the hat exhibit, I finally saw [the storyteller]. At that point, she became real. She wore these hats, and I was hesitant at first to touch and try them on because I felt intrusive. As I tucked my hair under the hat, I realized how close cancer could be, both in presence (these are hats I could buy) and in absence (someone wore these hats, but where are the stray hairs?). (P44)

The hats. . . . It really brings you into her world. I could really see her trying on different ones . . . sometimes frantically [sic]. (P89)

Trying on the hats & imagining myself bald helped me step into [the storyteller's] shoes. (P90)

In planning the exhibit, I intuitively thought the act of trying on the teller's hats would initiate exhibit participant embodiment of the teller's experience. The hats had been included in the pilot study exhibit without a mirror or an invitation to try them on. While attendees were touched by the presence of them, they did not seem to connect with the teller through looking at them; I sensed it would make a difference if they wore them. The teller responded affirmatively when I asked her if I could include the hats in the study exhibit and allow participants to try them on; participant response indicated the accuracy of this intuition or participatory knowing.

*Collage as sacred.* When asked if the story or exhibit evoked a sense of sacredness or spirituality, the most common reply was to mention the collage created by the storyteller:

[The storyteller's] collage. It seemed to embody the whole of worldly struggle, and peace. (P4)

My favorite part is the collage, with the elements acnologing [sic] the influence of nature over our lives and with Death always at our sides. (P34)

The collage—combining death, the elements & primitive symbols elevated the pain & suffering from something to be escaped/avoided into something which is inextricably a part of this divine/sacred experience of life on earth. (P53)

The collage, especially the inclusion of spirituality, reminded me of connectedness to one another and our human experience. (P69)

I felt very drawn into the mystery revealed by the collage. I felt there was something in that for me to learn more about. Something ancient and powerful. (P92)

The collage featured a combination of black and white photographs of the teller (taken during the same photography session that yielded the larger, framed nude photographs of the teller), images of nature, and sacred feminine images (such as statues of feminine dieties). The teller and I had experienced strong resonance with the piece. By contrast, another collage created by the teller did not elicit strong resonance in either of us, yet we had decided to include it in the exhibit. I listened to my intuition (i.e., lack of aesthetic response) and removed it at the last moment. The upcoming subsection on the paintings also speaks to the lack of aesthetic response or resonance.

*Music as powerful conveyer of emotion.* Music the storyteller had listened to during chemotherapy treatment was available for participants to listen to by putting on headphones and selecting one of several CDs by musician Leonard Cohen. Many exhibit participants responded strongly to the music as an expression of the teller's emotional state and internal landscape (e.g., her thoughts, internal struggles, strategy):

There is truth and authenticity found in Leonard Cohen's music as it relates to [the storyteller's] state of emotions. It is at once reflective and filled with anger. (P26)

Her choice in music was also very powerful and disturbing. The one song I listened to (#1 on The Future) spoke of being torn apart by drugs and anal sex. Does cancer (read, intrusion) feel so negating? (P44)

I put on the CD headphones and was very surprised by what was playing. I imagined (after reading the sign) that one listened to Mozart or Enya when looking for inspiration—perhaps chants, etc. What I heard was—instead—very evocative of death—I think the words were “this waltz (laced?) with brandy and death.” (it was also in a minor key, very dark) I then thought that maybe part of getting through the experience was really to embrace it head on, as opposed to denying, running, covering or diminishing it; to steal its power. (P43)

Some exhibit participant responses acknowledged the tug of the music on their emotions.

One participant (P79) conveyed, “The power of music also helped to evoke a more emotional response.”

*Voice recording of teller as connecting.* Underneath the set of photographs depicting the storyteller in her current state of good health and happiness was a recording of the teller’s voice, accessible by putting on headphones and pressing the *play* button on the recorder. Many exhibit participants responded very strongly to hearing the teller’s voice as a point of resonance and connection:

It touched me to my core. (P88)

Hearing her voice on the tape really connected me the most—especially because it was her own words, her own story. (P90)

Hearing [the storyteller’s] voice connected me to her more. (P86)

The portion of the exhibit that showed internal truth was the tape of [the storyteller’s] voice and story, because words read on plaques sound differently than words said aloud. (P40)

The voice recording was the strongest direct link to the teller, given she was not present during the exhibit. My perception of exhibit participant comments about the voice recording (presented throughout the chapter) was that in addition to the teller’s heartfelt

sharing of particular story content, the recording provided evidence that the teller wanted to share her story—a reassurance to the exhibit participants, given the intimate nature of the story. Exhibit participants responded to the content of the recording with deep empathy and compassion (for instance, the story she shared about her cat, referred to in the Love and Compassion section).

This finding, like others, confirmed my intuition during the storytelling process with the teller. I knew it was important to include audio and video of the teller because of their direct representation and expression of the teller. I had intended to include more voice recording segments and some video segments but only had time to prepare one voice recording. Had I included these additional recordings, I believe they would have strengthened the overall storytelling experience.

*Breast casting as artifact.* On a stand atop a table was a plaster casting of the teller's chest prior to her mastectomy surgery—the only representation in the exhibit of the teller's breast before it was removed. Although not mentioned by many, those who responded to the breast casting were appreciative of its significance. One participant (P40) expressed, “The only thing that evoked a sense of respect was the plaster casting of the breast because it is the most exacting item of the past or what could have been.” Another participant (P92) stated that along with the other story elements, “I loved seeing the body cast.”

*Paintings lacking in aesthetic response.* Three paintings by the storyteller, accompanied by explanatory text captions, were included in the exhibit. None of the paintings were representations of the teller but rather symbolic images of her experience. Most exhibit participants did not mention the paintings. Only a couple of participants

expressed resonance with one or more of the paintings. The lack of response to the paintings possibly indicated that they did not convey the story to exhibit participants or carry enough emotional or factual narrative to be engaging. A few exhibit participants mentioned a lack of connection with the paintings:

The first three paintings did not convey a sense of a person, or another individual that I could know and have a conversation with. (P44)

I don't paint and have a hard time identifying with or even understanding [the storyteller's] art. (P37)

They paintings were included in the exhibit because they were the teller's creative expressions about her early process of dealing with breast cancer, before she and I began our storytelling meetings; they lent context to the timeline of her story and also were important to the teller's process of dealing with her illness. She wished to include them, and I thought they helped to fill out the story and types of expression representing it, although I did not experience strong resonance or aesthetic response to them. I recall that during the pilot study exhibition, attendees also did not comment on the paintings but consistently were drawn to the photography and teller's poetry, in concert with exhibit participant response in this study.

This finding (lack of participant aesthetic response to the paintings) appeared to validate aesthetic response as an element of the storytelling process. That is, resonance through aesthetic response (or lack thereof) to story materials during the initial storytelling process (between storyteller and storiographer) was a good indicator of exhibit participant aesthetic response. During the storytelling process, the teller was far more drawn to her story expressions through her poetry than her paintings (i.e., even though both means of expressing her story were powerful for her, her aesthetic response



to the completed expressions varied), for example, and this response was matched by the exhibit participant responses. It should be noted, however, that creative expression is intended to be purely expressive rather than to garner aesthetic response.

*Creative expression data as collective emotional response.* The center of the exhibit room housed a large round table covered with art supplies and creative expression feedback by exhibit participants. Chairs surrounding the table were often filled by participants. Several exhibit participants commented positively about being able to respond creatively and view other participant creative feedback:

Being able to write my reactions and read those of others made it more powerful. . . . [The storyteller's] artwork and the artwork of other exhibit visitors gave me a feeling of reverence. (P86)

Thank you especially for the spaces to create art & response. That is very good for connectedness. (P85)

I really liked the idea of giving the opportunity of giving back by writing a message, making a drawing or recording a video. (P83)

The creative expression data seemed to evoke a collective interior and emotional response from the exhibit participants. Unlike the questionnaire data, which offered opinions, perceptions, and a wide array of information, the creative expression focused more specifically on the emotional and interior landscape of the exhibit participants' responses. Deep gratitude for the storyteller and storytelling experience that the storiographer provided (through the exhibit) were repeatedly expressed in words, often accompanied by drawings. The inspirational effect of the storytelling was also voiced, often in concert with introspective comments and poetry. One participant drew a butterfly in blue pastel and above it wrote,

The inner battle rages within  
 When will I find peace  
 When will I realize that my inner demons are my teachers?

Do I need illness and the close reality of death to fully embrace myself?

I am dying—we all are dying, each and every  
 moment of the day  
 Yet I take life for granite  
 I do not fully embrace myself and others

[Storyteller], thank you for sharing your story  
 I so admire your strength and courage  
 You are a teacher and inspiration.

Soft blue butterfly  
 Singing gentle in my ear  
 Awake alas & listen  
 For I am always here

Another exhibit participant drew an image in yellow and light brown pastels that looked like the sun radiating heat and on top of it wrote:

Asleep—pain—Asleep  
 Asleep—PAIN—waking  
 PAIN—Waking—Awake  
 Awake—PAIN—Reflecting—  
 Awake—PAIN—Questioning—Understanding  
 Awake—PAIN—Gratitude—LIFE  
 AWAKE

Thank you [Storyteller] & Sharon.

A number of drawings depicted brightly colored circular shapes; one included the caption “*Ode to the dead and gone Breast.*” This expression of compassionate tribute to the teller was echoed by many of the exhibit participants through their creative feedback. Many offered messages directly to the storyteller (beginning, *Dear [Storyteller]*), responding to

her in the most direct way possible after experiencing her intimate, revealing, personal story. Love and compassion seemed to be at the core of the collective response; as the storiographer-researcher, my heart vibrated in resonance. There were no critical comments or sentiments lacking emotional context.

My aesthetic response to the drawings (those without accompanying writing) was congruent with my inner response to the written creative expressions. I experienced a light, open-hearted, deeply compassionate energy when absorbing the creative expression data. The exhibit participant process of engaging in creative expression yielded an interior and emotional response, echoing the emanation of an emotional narrative from the creative process engaged in by the storyteller and storiographer. Creative expression seems to have acted as spiritual expression—an expression of the essence or authentic core of the human spirit. Chapter 5 explores this idea further.

### *Presentation of the Story*

Data revealed the story presentation as a component of the storytelling art form. Exhibit participants responded to numerous elements of the storytelling process converging in the exhibition: the display of the story materials in an interactive exhibit design within an ambient environment (homey furnishings, natural light, candles) in a particular setting (artistic, intimate building space with comfortable outdoor area surrounded by a small neighborhood community). Many described the setting and ambience as beautiful and sacred. Several exhibit participants commented positively about the combination of storytelling and artistic expression in an exhibit setting:

The art makes it more intense and real. (P50)

The art of storytelling and the idea of making it a gallery show seems like a positive evolution. (P85)

One exhibit participant (P26), who identified himself as a writer, voiced concern: “[The storyteller’s] struggle is sacred and yet it is laid out before us as art. I don’t know how I feel about this.”

Three aspects of story presentation emerged from the data: (a) The warmth of the exhibit setting was perceived as contributing to the storytelling experience, (b) participants used environmental control to regulate emotional intensity, and (c) perceived influence over the storytelling was related to the exhibit atmosphere. These findings have been presented in the following subsections.

*Warm embrace of space.* The exhibit space was purposely chosen and designed to be congruent with the story. It was a fairly intimate size (large enough to comfortably house the story materials but not too spacious), featured natural light and a view overlooking a garden, was filled with homey furnishings, and included burning candles and fresh flowers. Most exhibit participants commented on the contribution the inviting setting made to the storytelling:

The warm embrace of the space. (P69)

Style and intimacy of photography, set up of exhibit was like a sanctuary rather than a gallery. (P66)

The mix of materials is very effective—I felt like I was occupying someone’s house rather than simply hearing a story. (P84)

Beautiful—the setting—simplicity, space, images, furniture, flowers, candles, privacy, windows feels enlivening, nurturing and inviting as though the story is held in beauty. (P92)

The overwhelming response that the story was “held in beauty” seemed to indicate a strong resonance of exhibit participants with my intention in choosing and designing the space. It also indicated the contribution of the setting and ambiance in portraying the

story and the presence of love and compassion as the stance maintained throughout the storytelling process (refer to Love and Compassion section for more information).

*Exerting environmental control to regulate emotional intensity.* Exhibit participants remarked positively about the interactive nature of the exhibit—essentially, an environmental control feature built into the exhibit design. One study participant (P89) remarked on his appreciation for the interactive format because it allowed him to make choices and create his story experience and compared it to noninteractive formats where the story was “force fed.” Besides utilizing the interactive design of the exhibit to decide how, when, and whether to access various story materials, exhibit participants purposefully made environmental choices that regulated the emotional intensity of their experiences.

For instance, several participants (approximately 5) chose to leave the exhibit and withdraw from study participation because they were overcome by emotion and the discomfort was too great for them. Being overwhelmed seemed evident in those who withdrew participation after entering the exhibit; most of the time, participants explained their reasons for withdrawal, and I observed their accompanying emotional states and body language. One woman approached me, crying. She respectfully and emphatically said I was “onto something big” but she was emotionally unable to go through the exhibit at that time. If one member of a couple withdrew due to emotional discomfort, the other subsequently withdrew in an act I perceived as solidarity and support for the companion. In such cases, it was consistently the woman companion who withdrew for emotional reasons and her male companion who followed and remained by her side.

Others regulated the degree of emotional penetration by choosing not to interact with specific story elements they knew would deepen their emotional response. Several participants expressed their decisions not to try on the hats or listen to the audiotape of the teller's voice specifically to avoid a deeper emotional story experience:

I didn't go near the hats, or even glance in the mirror. That opens the potential for more impact than I want. (P37)

I chose not to listen to the audio portions of the exhibit to maintain distance from the character ([the storyteller]). (P11)

Some reported purposely utilizing control of the environment to submerge themselves in the story to have as deep an experience as possible. A method to deepen story immersion that was reported by a number of participants was to allow as much time as was needed in the exhibit and to move at a slow pace. Their descriptions sounded like a willful letting go into full absorption of the storytelling experience, a savoring of the depth of emotional experience the storyteller, story, and exhibit offered. One participant (P53) described, "I took it slow . . . and loved doing that. . . . My heart opened. I felt a tenderness in me, a sense of becoming more alive in response to the reality of [the storyteller's] shared experience." Refer to the Interaction section for more exhibit participant responses.

Others regulated the same elements of time and pace to prevent full immersion in the storytelling experience. These participants expressed an inner knowing that moving through the exhibit at a somewhat quick pace would lessen their emotional experience and therefore decrease their discomfort. One participant (P34) explained, "I needed to hurry through in order not to be overcome by emotion." Refer to the Attention section for more information.

By making choices about how to interact with the story environment, participants intuitively understood their ability to regulate the quality of their experiences. In essence, participants were able to tailor the storytelling experience to fit their individual needs. The ability exercised by participants to exert control over their environment to regulate their emotional experiences came as a surprise. It seemed that exhibit participants brought a high level of awareness and sophistication to their participation by making choices they expressed as deepening or lessening emotional intensity of the storytelling.

However, an understanding of the principle of environmental control was purposely built into the exhibit design. Based on my training in human environments design, I know that people are more content in environments they have some control over (Alan Hedge, 1982). Not only are the controls they exert helpful in meeting their individual needs, but also the knowledge that control is available puts people at ease. Even when control is not actually available but is perceived to be available, people respond much more positively than when they perceive control is unavailable. (For example, in office environments, workers will often complain they are too hot or too cold if a maneuverable thermostat is unavailable. As soon as a dummy thermostat is placed in that environment—i.e., a thermostat that appears to be adjustable but in fact does not work—complaints dramatically decrease, even though the temperature remains unchanged.) Applying this principle to the storytelling environment yielded new information about regulating emotions, something not considered in office design. Moreover, exhibit participants used pace to regulate the emotional intensity, not an interactive design feature but an aspect of themselves they could utilize to affect environmental impact.

*Perceived environmental influence and atmosphere.* Exhibit participants expressed vastly different opinions on whether they influenced their exhibit experiences depending on when they attended the exhibit. Almost every exhibit participant who attended during Saturday and Sunday expressed the perception of having personal influence over their exhibit experience, upon being pointedly asked in the questionnaire. A number of these exhibit participants commented that they enjoyed the quiet and sparse population of the space. During these days, there were never more than 2 or 3 people in the exhibit room at a time. The atmosphere on those days lent itself to a slow pace and solitude or personal space in which to experience the exhibit. Participants seemed to want this type of atmosphere because it was congruent with the story and exhibit. Responding that she did influence her story experience and explaining how, 1 participant (P78) remarked, “SLOWER & QUIETER—pace for me was *just* right—I would rather have this as a response to an exhibit than so many other things of a much more shallow nature.” It seemed as though the story required the audience to experience a quiet reverence to match the sacred space and exhibit mood (refer to Congruence section for more information).

Those who attended the exhibit on Friday evening, when the exhibit was crowded and the reception space next door was noisy, were far less likely to perceive they had influence over their exhibit experience. This was evidenced by the large number of *no* responses to the questionnaire query about whether they believed they influenced their experience of the story or exhibit. There were often many people in the exhibit room at a time. Participants stood in line to listen to the voice recording at several points during the evening. Some opted not to listen to the tape due to the line (as reported by a few



participants). Chairs in the space were also filled, offering less choice about where or if to sit (at the creative expression station and music listening station).

### *Meta-Lens 2: Essential Qualitative Features of Storytelling*

These findings were confusing at first because they appeared intertwined with all or most of the storytelling elements—until clarity came with the realization that the characteristic of intertwinement distinguished them as essential aspects of storytelling. The *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* definition of essence that applies to the essence of storytelling is “real or ultimate nature of a thing (esp. as opposed to its existence)” (Mish, et al. 2000, p. 396). Through the art or act (i.e., the existence) of storytelling that occurred in the study, certain features or essential qualities existed throughout. That is, each essential qualitative feature was important to all the stages or components of the art form. The essential features were as follows: (a) emotional narrative, (b) interior and exterior landscape, (c) congruence, (d) authenticity, (e) love and compassion, and (f) creative collaboration.

#### *Emotional Narrative*

*In a portrait, authenticity is not achieved by names and dates, but needs something further. (Catherine Drinker Bowen, 1944, p. 433)*

Perhaps the strongest finding was the discovery of an emotional narrative, as opposed to a factual narrative. The emotional narrative delivered the emotional tone and depth of the story and storyteller to the exhibit participants. As 1 participant (P63) remarked, “It was a deeply personal telling.” The factual narrative delivered dates, times, and other details about the events of the story (refer to Factual Narrative, listed in the Story section because it focuses on story content). The exhibit included a lot of emotional narrative and comparatively little factual narrative. Although a number of participants

expressed the desire for more factual information, the emotional depth conveyed through the storytelling was considered vital by many participants. As 1 participant (P70) explained, “Now I feel that I know deeply her emotional and somewhat physical struggle, which is interesting because I don’t know much at all about the specifics—I have depth, but not breadth—it’s the former that really matters.”

Describing her resonance with the story and exhibit, 1 participant (P57) said, “I felt its emotions, truly.” Many participants listed their own emotional states in response to the exhibit, a sort of sympathetic resonance with the emotional narrative. For instance, 1 participant (P36) reflected, “The inner response I felt was first sadness for [the storyteller] to have to endure this and next joy for her to have dealt with it so admirably and to have survived.” Words commonly used were compassion, sadness, hopefulness, and gratitude. Emotional responses of exhibit participants unfold throughout the chapter.

The emotional narrative emerged as an important essential feature of storytelling. The finding of an emotional narrative arose from the numerous, consistent emotional references by exhibit participants to similarly describe various aspects of the storytelling experience. Emotional content about various aspects of the storytelling process was pervasive throughout questionnaire and creative expression responses. Therefore, responses evocative of the emotional narrative appear throughout the findings presented in this chapter.

Exhibit participants reported the emotional tone of the storytelling experience as related to the mood of the story and storyteller, qualities of the collaborative relationship between storyteller and storiographer, compassionate stance created and maintained toward the teller and story, and features of the exhibit environment. Exhibit participants

responded consistently with the same terms to describe the emotional narrative conveyed by the story exhibit. Exhibit participants conveyed qualities evoked by the teller and story as sadness, fear, hope, anger, courage, vulnerability, authenticity, and spirituality.

Vulnerability and courage were emotional qualities most often perceived about the teller and viewed by many exhibit participants as authentic and meaningful:

A courageous woman's journey . . . and her willingness to share her vulnerability and feelings so openly. . . . I appreciate this kind of work.  
(P77)

Internal sense of truth/authenticity . . . each of us are vulnerable as [the storyteller] was – Real life Truth. (P54)

The emotional tone of collaborative relationship between storyteller and storiographer was perceived by the exhibit participants as compassionate, loving, honoring, safe, authentic, and respectful (refer to Collaboration section and Love and Compassion section for more information).

Exhibit participants experienced the emotional narrative through the story materials and presentation of the story. One participant (P78) reported about the overall emotional tone of the exhibit: "It is an intense exhibit But [sic] the gentleness and intent to honor the human condition in tact [sic] and handled with integrity." The emotional tone exuded by the exhibit space and surrounding rooms, attached outdoor space, and neighborhood was described as beautiful, homey, warm, sacred, light, airy, intimate, and artistic. One participant (P34) commented, "I loved that this place feels like someone's home and that I am sharing an evening with her family." Several participants commented that the exhibit space felt sacred, like a sanctuary. A number of participants commented on the candles in the exhibit space as exuding a quality of sacredness or ambiance that matched the exhibit tone.

Responses to the story materials often spoke to the emotional narrative that was conveyed through the story materials and presentation. For instance, exhibit participants remarked,

The photographs. She looks so vulnerable. Her story about her childhood on the cassette. Explains more about her vulnerability. (P83)

I found the photos to be particularly powerful in articulating the narrative of [the storyteller's] journey. (P26)

Exhibit participant responses indicated that music conveyed somberness, photographs revealed the teller's vulnerability, and poetry by the teller relayed the emotional and spiritual depths of her experience. None of these items provided much factual information about the events of the teller's breast cancer experience. Yet, participants often referred to the depth of emotion conveyed as powerful. Refer to the Story Materials section for more commentary.

Exhibit participants expressed appreciation for the congruence between the emotional narrative elements of the storytelling, including the storyteller's vulnerability in living and sharing her story, the story materials, the ambience of the exhibit space, and the collaborative relationship between storyteller and storiographer. Keeping the exhibit room door closed, an act consistently carried out by exhibit participants throughout the weekend (whether the surrounding area was noisy or quiet), seemed to emanate from a desire to contain the space and protect the vulnerable, intimate story elicited by the emotional narrative. Refer to the Congruence section for more information.

*The pull of story.* The initial connecting point or engagement of the exhibit participants with the story and teller seemed to have happened through the emotional narrative. Exhibit participants experienced a beckoning, almost hypnotic pull from the

emotional narrative as soon as they entered the exhibit space. There was a dropping into the experience that occurred:

I felt drawn in from the beginning . . . showing [the storyteller] from the inside. (P46)

The material immediately grabbed me and I didn't want to be distracted—the images, straight ahead as I entered the room, were compelling and vulnerable. So was the breast casting. (P92)

When I stepped into the door I was pulled into a merging with the art and writing by the door—my attention emotionally went to them. (P93)

As the researcher-storiographer, I was surprised by the palpable emotion the story conveyed to me as I spent time in the exhibit briefly after it closed Sunday evening. I made a notation of the experience in my research journal soon after (before reviewing exhibit participant data):

I noticed the emotion that came up for me as I went through the chronology of [the storyteller's] story—especially the poetry with photos. I was surprised because it's so familiar to me—the space . . . and context of dedicated, homey room, and the pieces all by themselves in the space evoked the emotion of sad, raw, hopeful/hopelessness, anger, making peace, spiritual connectedness—it oozed out of the pieces and into the air I breathed and into me. Can a mood hang in the air? It seemed to . . .

Many subsequently described nonordinary states of consciousness or other transpersonal phenomena during their time in the exhibit, such as time slowing and a felt presence in the room of loved ones who had died from cancer. The element that seemed to catalyze story immersion, in combination with attentiveness, was the emotional narrative. Refer to the Audience Engagement section for more information.

*Emotional intimacy as connecting versus invasive.* A number of exhibit participants remarked on the emotional intensity of the exhibit. For many, the emotional narrative was connecting (on various levels), and for a few it was overwhelming or off-

putting. Numerous exhibit participant quotes throughout the chapter reflect sympathetic resonance—for instance, in the sections Authenticity, Love and Compassion, Hero's Journey and Particularity, Ownership, and Transpersonal Insights. In a creative expression response, 1 participant wrote,

[Storyteller]—Thanks you for all you have shared. You have beautifully expressed some things I would not have seen without your generosity. . . . I lost my best friend to breast cancer. Choosing to live and giving yourself the right to live get down to the bedrock of being.

Another participant (P34) remarked, “I must respect someone who examines her own story so carefully and wishes to tell it. This is a story of a very personal time and personal struggle—that she ([the storyteller]) has let us into her life evokes a sense of respect.”

A few who felt emotionally overwhelmed to the point of leaving the exhibit space tended to be women. In those instances, they (or someone accompanying them) usually explained that uncomfortable memories of their own experiences or those of loved ones surfaced and were too painful to confront at the time. The few negative responses to the exhibit or story came from men:

This was too self involved and narcissistic—the realm of the private is violated in an embarrassing way. (P75)

[The storyteller] was brave to be so public. . . . she also was focused too much on something that was only a body part—only a physical part of living and not living. (P74b)

Also, a few men expressed initial feelings of invasiveness that later shifted:

I felt a very strong bodily—physical—presence—a violation of mind & spirit—only at the end was there a sense of peace and acceptance. (P31)

I am glad to have had a chance to hear her story in her own voice. Until hearing her voice, I did not feel like I had any right to enter into such an intimate experience. (P26)

It is not surprising that some participants had a negative or less than enthusiastic response to the storytelling, given individual preference and the fact that the story format is in development. It is notable these participants were all men. Women routinely share intimate personal details of their emotional lives with one another as an accepted social practice of being in relationship whereas men are often socialized not to disclose their emotional lives. Yet, 1 male participant (P49) responded, “Despite the very private and personal trauma she suffered, I do not think I infringed on her privacy—I think she allowed others to have access to her feelings and emotions.”

It was only women who commented about the cultural inclination to keep emotional narrative private and inferred the value of making it known:

I was most awakened by the images and words of vulnerability, naked honesty, despair, confusion. These are the gifts so often buried in our Western culture. (P53)

It showed the side of life that most people/society hide—yet it is happening everyday/every moment. (P12)

Many exhibit participants, while not offended by the story or experience, found the emotional experience difficult yet worthwhile:

It’s depressing and I don’t want to think about it too much. . . . I like the way the story was told in the subject’s words and from her perspective. It felt more intimate. (P39)

This story was difficult to be with, but in the end gave me so much hope and peace and inspiration. (P70)

I felt uncomfortable and repulsed at the early pictures . . . relieved by the end. . . . I respect/appreciate [the storyteller’s] grit. (P69)

It is a sobering experience for me to confront the fear and pain of what she experienced, but it is very positive and hopeful to see that it is possible to make it through, that one can get beyond it to the other side, and that things of great value can be had out of it. (P71)

The section Exerting Environmental Control to Regulate Emotional Intensity offers additional information about how exhibit participants interacted with the environment in response to the emotional narrative and personal preference/need.

### *Interior and Exterior Landscape*

Subsequent to the findings of an emotional and factual narrative came the more subtle finding of an interior and exterior landscape. As the finding of an emotional narrative surfaced from comments by participants that described emotional qualities of the story and teller, I detected another layer of distinction. Some participants described the story experience as engaging or informative due to revealing the teller from the inside:

I felt drawn in from the beginning . . . showing [the storyteller] from the inside. (P46)

Educative because of seeing the process of dealing with breast cancer from a complete different angle from the inside. (P47)

It gradually became clear that the interior landscape conveyed by the exhibit offered more than the teller's emotional states and was therefore different from the emotional narrative. The interior landscape revealed her inner psychospiritual struggle and decision to choose to live. It was the description of the internal life of the storyteller, including emotions, thoughts, and attitudes, whereas the exterior landscape was the detail of the teller's outer life, such as physical appearance and surroundings (which also conveyed emotional narrative). Rich descriptive detail of each type of landscape was important to exhibit participants.

For instance, a series of black and white photographs of the teller during the timeframe of her chemotherapy treatment revealed her nude form with balding head and



mastectomy scar. Exhibit participants responded to her body poses and facial expressions in the photographs as expressions of various emotions she experienced then, such as anger, sadness, and joy (which revealed her inner landscape and emotional narrative). The photographs also elicited an essence or a tone of intimate self-disclosure tacitly understood by exhibit participants, as reflected by numerous comments that the act of revealing herself was both vulnerable and courageous (another layer of inner landscape and emotional narrative, with the added nuance of encompassing the storytelling process).

Exhibit participants also responded to the exterior landscape conveyed by the same photographs. They compared her withered form to that of a concentration camp victim, for instance, and also expressed the positive effects of seeing her progression from someone struggling with cancer to a survivor (as referenced by comparison to other photographs of her with regrown hair and added weight). One participant (P80) stated, “The eyes tell the story!” Photographs that depicted the smiling teller after surviving cancer included her cats and her partner, creating context through conveying information about her life (both exterior landscape and emotional narrative). Exhibit participants responded positively about having additional context and knowing the story had a happy ending; they viewed the teller overcoming her struggle as hopeful.

### *Congruence*

Exhibit participants showed a strong sensitivity to congruence between elements of the storytelling experience, including the exhibit environment and story materials. The finding of congruence appeared as an essential feature of storytelling, due to its pervasiveness throughout the storytelling. For instance, exhibit participants commented

that the environment provided a nurturing holding ground for the story. One participant (P69) stated, “What a beautiful space in which to ‘enjoy’ this exhibit – the perfect frame.” The atmosphere of the physical environment exuded warmth with its homey furnishings, light-filled space, and beautiful décor. Several exhibit participants commented that it felt like church and positively noted the lighted candles and general feeling of the room as sacred. Refer to the Warm Embrace of the Space section for more information.

When aspects of the physical environment did not match the emotionally vulnerable tone of the story exhibited, exhibit participants acted to correct the incongruence. One notable example that occurred continuously during the exhibit opening night was that participants closed the door to the exhibit space to block out the noise from the exhibit reception in the neighboring room. This act seemed intended, in part, to rectify the incongruence between the deeply personal exhibit story and the laughter and party chatter of the opening reception. An exhibit assistant, who was present the entire weekend and also went through the exhibit as an exhibit participant, interpreted the act of door closing in the same way.

Exhibit participants further created congruence by consistently remaining silent while in the exhibit space throughout the weekend (without a request to do so). Those who struck up conversations were quickly shushed or ushered out by other participants. The exhibit environment exuded an air of reverence toward the teller and story that exhibit participants seemed to instinctively maintain. One participant (P89) expressed, “I never saw anyone talk to anyone else in the exhibit, same kinda [sic] response you give

when a funeral precession [sic] goes by or the same feel when we give a moment of silence in remembrance [sic].”

The finding of congruence is consistent with audience response to the pilot study exhibit. During the pilot study exhibit, the story exhibit space was not separated from other exhibit areas or the reception area, except to be set apart in an alcove of the larger room. At various time attendees, visibly shaken and weeping from the story exhibit, expressed dissatisfaction at others laughing and talking nearby. They seemed to be experiencing a visceral sense of disrespect being meted out to the teller and story due to the juxtaposed mood and actions of others. The demand for congruence appeared linked to a demand for respect and quiet reverence for the storyteller and her story due to her vulnerable emotional and graphic self-disclosure.

During the exhibit planning and design phase, I was aware of making choices that were attentive and sensitive to the story and teller. However, I was not consciously aware of the common theme of choices related to ensuring congruence. I could not have voiced at the time of making the exhibit audiotape the sense I had that a decision was being made to sacrifice congruence in order to include an audiotape of the teller's voice. From the experience of the pilot study exhibit, I knew I needed to have a reception in a separate room from the exhibit. With the design change in place, I sensed that there was still not enough separation because the reception noise could be heard in the exhibit space. My intuition was confirmed when participants opted to close the door to the exhibit space.

Congruence among story materials was also important to exhibit participants. Several noted the casual tone of voice in the audiotape of the teller as disagreeable compared to the serious tone elsewhere, even though there was consensus that hearing the

teller's voice was an important aspect of the exhibit (refer to Story Materials section).

The audience comment on the discordance between casual and serious tone seemed confirming of the storytelling process; the audience did not know that the audiotape was made outside storytime, the usual context of the storytelling meetings between storyteller and me. At the time we made the recording, it felt forced and uncomfortable to both of us, being completed solely for the exhibition when time and circumstances prevented other options.

### *Authenticity*

The exhibit participants overwhelmingly viewed the story and storyteller as authentic, as well as feeling that larger truths about humanity or spirituality were revealed to them through the storytelling. Responses often included expressions of respect for the teller, sympathetic resonance, and deep empathy—a sense of connectedness. The finding of authentic expression or authenticity as an essential storytelling feature appears to directly address the initial research question *what makes stories sacred*, or as revised, *what makes stories elicit compassionate connection*, and is presented in this section and the following subsection, Sacredness.

The finding of authenticity appeared strongly in the data; no exhibit participants challenged the truth of the teller's story or her authenticity in sharing her story. As 1 participant (P84) expressed, "There is nothing that rings false—everything seems authentic." Another (P87) commented, "It is a story of truth fully exposed. By not hiding any of it, it makes it very real." They believed the teller disclosed deep personal truths about herself and her circumstance. One participant (P7) stated, "[The storyteller] is frank and honest in describing her feelings."

Women who identified themselves as breast cancer survivors said the story accurately conveyed their experiences:

I lived the same story. (P10)

The story told exactly how I felt about overcoming this obstacle. (P68)

I felt sadness, empathy and a connectedness to [the storyteller] because I had a similar experience. . . . All of the emotions were certainly authentic. (P2)

It was the emotional narrative of their experiences that the storyteller accurately conveyed. Others who were not survivors but knew those with cancer expressed the realism the story conveyed to them:

I work in a hospital. I see images every day (in real life) that rival these images. . . . You never get used to it. (P38)

I experienced this exhibit on a very personal level. It evoked strong feelings of fear and sadness; a real downer. I thought of my mother and how she must have [felt] when this happened to her 42 yrs ago. (P60)

Many exhibit participants voiced resonance with story authenticity in terms of communicating a larger truth:

I resonated, felt, invited, knew I heard/saw a universal truth communicated through [the storyteller's] story. (P53)

I am reminded by [the storyteller] that mortality is a balance of vulnerability and invincibility. (P43)

Though it is a single journey it represents the truth of a fully-present/alive human journey. (P77)

There was a poem where she says we are nothing—to me that is the ultimate truth. (P89)

*Sacredness.* Most responded with a sense of reverence or respect for the emotional depth the teller revealed to an audience whose makeup she did not know. The audience expressed the belief that the storyteller's authenticity commanded respect and

made the story and story experience sacred. When asked in the questionnaire if anything about the story or exhibit evoked a sense of sacredness, many participants expressed the storytelling as inclusive of sacred or spiritual elements:

[The storyteller's] whole outlook and attitude, her acceptance and her joy, her ability to look deeply, her willingness to share are sacred acts that evoke in me a sense of awe, reverence and respect. (P45)

Definite sacred feeling. Awesome feeling of acceptance. (P62)

A removed breast is sacred. (P73)

All life is sacred. (P75)

Each life is sacred and this exhibit conveys this with the setting of the exhibit, (candles, fresh flowers, etc), as well as the pictures, etc, telling story. (P77)

The setting—privacy, cleanliness, candles & flowers, the photos themselves. Theirs [sic] a respect modeled by the photos themselves. Somehow holding the beauty & pain, honoring it w/awareness, presence—Holding [the storyteller's] body & experience as sacred that fills the space. (P92)

Using a photographic medium with voice, style, creative processing, this is like creating a soul. Seems sacred to me— (P85)

After I put on the hat, I could look at the photographs of [the storyteller], especially the nude photograph of [the storyteller] seated on the grass, and begin to understand/sense the immensity of choosing life. I believe that the sacred nature of the exhibit came upon me almost insidiously. Once I saw her humanity, I could see her divinity. (P44)

A few exhibit participants found the word sacred off-putting, perceiving it as a religious term not in their belief system. However, these participants tended to express related terms to describe what the story evoked. For instance, one exhibit participant (P39) responded, “reverence and respect for the body, soul, spirit, not sacred.”

The use of the term *sacred* by exhibit participants communicated various meanings. The dictionary definition of the term is wide ranging, including, “dedicated or

set apart for the service or worship of a deity . . . worthy of religious veneration . . . entitled to reverence and respect” (Mish, et al. 2000, p. 1026). The latter definition was most applicable to exhibit participant comments. The use of the term, in the context of the various responses, seemed to encompass a sense of spirituality. The storyteller’s authentic expression of herself and her story—from the heart, open, revealing, vulnerable—was met by exhibit participants with resonance or a sense of connection, an affirmation of the human spirit.

One participant (P85) reflected, “I believe to be that truthful about oneself And [sic] to share the story is Authentic Self at best. Authentic self is connectedness.” Perhaps the exhibit participants collectively voiced the notion that when we are our most authentically human, we are most connected to our spirituality. In response to the research questions, *What makes stories sacred?* or *What makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection?*, the answer appears to be the creative expression of our authentic selves.

#### *Love and Compassion*

*It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye. (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 1943/1971, p. 87)*

Most exhibit participants experienced the presence of love and compassion during time spent in the exhibit. Some expressed exhibit and storytelling experience in its entirety as exuding love and compassion:

The entire exhibit is loving and compassionate. (P38)

Lovingly and compassionately portrayed. (P61)

The very existence of the exhibit, which gives special illumination, shared illumination to [the storyteller’s] story strikes me as loving. [The storyteller’s] willingness to share her story seems to come from a space of

LOVING. [The storyteller's] embracement of the experience also seems to come from a space of LOVE. (P88)

A number acknowledged the expression of love and compassion as depicted in the story content, most notably the teller's special bond with her cat, described on a portion of the audiotape and conveyed in several photographs:

My tears flowed when listening to [the storyteller] speak about her maternal connection to Yoda. I was surprised that my feelings toward my cat are so strong. (P73)

The spoken word on tape about the cat and the picture of the cat. The way two living species touch each other or interact can say a lot with their poses, etc. (P40)

Others mentioned the relationship between storyteller and storiographer-researcher:

The artist's relationship w/the subject comes through as loving and compassionate. (P39)

The sensitivity of Sharon's depiction of [the storyteller's] story. (P84)

To take such honest pictures must have been heartwrenching to both subject and photographer. I think love and compassion would have been the only tools one could use to make it through those. (P89)

Many commented on their inner responses to the exhibit as compassionate or empathetic:

My reaction is one of compassion. (P3)

Deep empathy. (P57)

The way the lens of the camera invites you in . . . in such a way it touches you heart & soul. (P80)

The pervasiveness of exhibit participant responses about the presence of love and compassion throughout the storytelling process identified this finding as an essential storytelling feature. The finding is called Love and Compassion to reflect the feeling of love accompanied by the human response of compassion. Responses by exhibit participants reflected an understanding and experience of the love and compassion that



was maintained throughout the storytelling process (by the storyteller and storiographer-researcher) and was the motivation for the storytelling process (i.e., the first component of the storytelling art form, *motivation and stance of love and compassion*, described in the Storytelling as an Art Form section).

### *Creative Collaboration*

Data revealed creative collaboration as a component of the storytelling art form and as a continual thread that appeared throughout the storytelling process (i.e., an essential feature). The creative collaboration between storiographer and storyteller was evident to exhibit participants, who often commented on what the collaboration conveyed to them and how it impacted their experience (refer to Story Materials section for more exhibit participant responses):

The juxtaposition of what came from [the storyteller] (her words, both written and spoken) and what came from Sharon but was of [the storyteller] served to evoke a powerful presence of [the storyteller]. (P33)

The manner and style of the photography showed respect for the teller and the story. (P66)

The pictures were realistic yet respectful and I felt the photographer clearly cared for the subject. (P77)

Individual perceptions, moods, preferences, and life circumstances are some of what exhibit participants brought to their collaboration in the storytelling. For instance, 1 participant (P43) reported, “I identified with the vulnerability in some of the portraits, as I arrived in a very vulnerable state. I think I drew upon and recognized [the storyteller’s] strength as I moved through the space.” Some were overcome by emotion due to their personal experiences with cancer (presented in other sections). Exhibit participants also noted their own impact on the storytelling from interactions with story materials,

participation in giving creative feedback that became part of the exhibit, and individual pace used to access the exhibit. Refer to the Audience Engagement section for more information about exhibit participant collaboration in storytelling process.

A few exhibit participants also commented on the collaborative process of sharing the storytelling experience with other participants. For instance, 1 participant (P40) reported, “Being at a table with strangers, sharing an emotional journey is rather altering—especially when everyone is trying to be so quiet!” A related occurrence revealed by the data seems mysterious. Although I have not made sense of it, it holds some sort of resonance that compels me to report it.

On repeated occasions (at least five), the chronologically ordered questionnaires revealed two extremely similar participant responses in a row to a particular question. The 2 participants had been in the exhibit at the same time; in some instances the identical responses came from people who had come together, and in other cases they did not know each other. In all instances, no talking had taken place; participants maintained silence while in the space and afterward while completing questionnaires. The following two responses, for example, report participant answers to a question about whether they experienced self, place, or time alteration while in the exhibit:

What can happen in the years, is so different from person to person. Sometimes you forget that other people are going through the same years as you but are going through the world in such a vastly different way.  
(P36)

Five years is not a lot of time but it seems things I did 5 years ago happened forever ago, and do not always have a great impact on my life now. For [the storyteller], what happened five years ago will impact her at all times. (P37)

Both participants express a relational awareness of the same span of time lived differently by the storyteller than by themselves and/or others. Their comments are notable because these participants did not know each other and there were no other reports of similar responses. It is not possible to know if repeated similar responses reflect a creative collaboration in the storytelling process by way of transpersonally cocreating it (in the immediate vicinity, perhaps). However, it is intriguing to consider.

### *Meta-Lens 3: Storytelling Experience*

Storytelling experience encompasses exhibit participant experiences of the exhibition (inclusive of transpersonal phenomena) as well as the flow state experienced by the storiographer-researcher and others in connection with the larger storytelling process. Exhibit participant reports of their exhibit experiences indicated the storytelling created a wide array of connections. Data revealed exhibit participants engaged in or connected with the storytelling through a series of stages, presented in the following subsection. Through storytelling engagement or immersion, exhibit participants experienced personal insights and change and participatory and spiritual knowing.

### *Audience Engagement*

The finding of audience engagement gradually emerged over the course of data analysis, through a combination of observational data and exhibit participant data. This finding addressed the issue of *what engaged or immersed the audience in the storytelling experience*. This finding emerged as a series of stages affecting the collective audience, rather than individual exhibit participants, although individual experiences varied (and are included in the presentation of this finding). Exhibit participants appeared to become immersed in the story through a series of increasing stages of connection: (a)

commitment, (b) attention, (c) participation, and (d) ownership. The following subsections explain the stages and how they appeared in the data.

In summary, the finding indicated that when exhibit participants committed to attending the exhibit, they focused their attention on the exhibition. When they were attentive, they experienced the pull of the emotional narrative. The emotional narrative and movement through the exhibit at a slow and relaxed pace increased story immersion. Interacting with story elements and the exhibit environment transitioned the audience from observers to participants in the storytelling process. Those who became participants in the storytelling felt a sense of story ownership and deep immersion.

*Commitment.* People who chose not to participate in the exhibit/study were those who spontaneously stopped by, having noticed the exhibit event while walking through the neighborhood. They did not want to make the time commitment, estimated at 1 hour. Obviously, those who came to the exhibit for the express purpose of attending had made a previous commitment to the event, which they carried out.

Participants who entered the exhibit space made a level of commitment to be present to the story experience through their participation. Commitment was explicitly made by signing the participant consent form and implicitly made by walking down the hall to the exhibit entrance, taking a quiet moment alone before entering (as instructed outside the entrance), and walking through the doorway to enter the exhibit space.

*Attention.* Prepared for participation (i.e., having committed to it), participants gave their attention to the story once they entered the exhibit. Through attentiveness, the emotional narrative took hold as though pulling one into the story; a number of participants reported this experience. One participant (P92) relayed, “The privacy of the

space, the fullness of the images and arrangement created a mood that drew me in.” As reported in the section on emotional narrative, some were engrossed in the connecting aspects of emotional intimacy while others were overwhelmed and chose to withdraw their participation—and effectively, their attention.

As the storiographer-researcher, I was surprised by the forceful pull of the emotional narrative I experienced as soon as I went into the space as a participant (after having been in the space many other times without this reaction). It claimed my full attention. Everything else fell away, and I was absorbed and entranced by the story, most notably, the mood exuding from the story. It seemed palpable. In my research journal, I reflected upon this experience (which occurred immediately after the exhibit closed on Sunday of the exhibit weekend):

Can a mood hang in the air? It seemed to—but only through my attentiveness—it’s as though my presence drew it out for me. By contrast, [the exhibit assistant] was stoically filming the room simultaneously. With full attention, the story elements came to life and communicated. Without that attention, they didn’t.

My attention had connected with the potency of the emotional narrative, and my immersion in the story was immediate. My observation that the exhibit assistant was unmoved by the exhibit while filming it was later confirmed by her. She also expressed having felt engaged and emotionally moved when she went through the exhibit space previously, as a participant. Her exhibit experiences mirrored my own, in that we had been in the exhibit space many times to install the exhibit, check on participants during the exhibition, and take down the exhibit and were not emotionally moved by or connected to the story or story materials until we gave it our undivided attention as participants.

Pace appeared to influence attention. Pace was perceived by many exhibit participants as an important factor in their absorption in the storytelling experience. It seemed as though a self-selected, relaxed pace generated greater attentiveness and engagement in the experience, and vice versa:

Allowing myself not to be rushed increased the impact and seriousness of the story. (P79)

I have lots of things on my mind. I'm tired and hungry from a long bike ride earlier today. But I'm not pressed for time, and that's made all the difference for my experience today. (P73)

I did not have time to digest all the material. We were on vacation and I did not want to be there for any greater time. (P63)

I needed to hurry through in order not to be overcome by emotion. (P34)

I was in a hurry and couldn't take much time. I couldn't really take the needed time to let the poetry in. I couldn't let it all go in deep. (P90)

*Interaction.* Interaction with multisensory story elements was expressed by many participants as making the storytelling experience more powerful—of moving them deeper into the experience. Many expressed the transition from observer to participant that occurred in the process. The exhibit design invited audience participation in the story experience through trying on the teller's hats, selecting and listening to the teller's music, playing an audiotape of the teller's voice, and expressing feedback in creative forms. Exhibit participants responded positively to the interactive nature of the exhibit design:

When I was allowed to wander, then I allowed myself to drop my "observer only" role. I could experience her story for myself, rather than being told what it was. . . . The story only became powerful to me when I was asked to participate in it (ie put on a hat), because, in doing so I understood her humanity. (P44)

Powerful and absorbing—I felt a participant in the experience. (P56)

Participating took me from observer → participant much more deeply. . . . When I drew and wrote at the round table I accessed my experience of the story and my connection to it. . . . The interactive quality brought it home, allowed me to more profoundly experience the story: it was quieting and provocative—so much more meaningful than just a stroll thru a gallery. I was 100% more present than at other (non-interactive) exhibits. (P69)

I think that the involvement of tactile and auditory stimuli as well as the opportunity to express increased the story's impact on me. (P88)

I loved seeing the body cast and images—photo, collage, creative expression—and hearing the audio tape of [the storyteller]. I find this to be a very, very powerful way of witnessing/experiencing a story—much more than reading or even an interview. The poetry also—it all went so much deeper—combination. (P92)

Becoming a participant through interaction, rather than remaining an observer, appeared to pave the way for a sense of story ownership. One man (P89) stated, “The interactiveness is great, not only does it let you get in touch with her feelings it makes you get in touch with your own.”

*Ownership.* Insightful comments by a number of exhibit participants revealed the change in story experience from observer of another's story to ownership of the story for oneself through exhibit participation. Several men remarked,

Powerful authenticity. This could be me. (P60)

Seeing [the storyteller's] story is more like listening to one of my own. (P74b)

Other exhibit participant responses included:

The hats and mirror were a good addition into feeling a shared humanity, because its so infrequent that we hear or share peoples' story and think “oh—that could be me.” The mirror helps us look at ourselves in that aspect. (P40)

Immediate response: wanted to leave—Don't deal well with illness and death. Reflective response: It could be my story. (P57)

Facing one's own mortality—to know/realize that, I, too can become a cancer patient at anytime and that I may feel the very same emotions of [the storyteller]. (P79)

Ownership by exhibit participants, in some cases, included transpersonal dimensions.

Refer to the section Participatory Transpersonal Experiences/Knowing.

Establishing ownership was also an implicit part of the storytelling collaboration between the teller and the storiographer-researcher; as the storiographer, I purposely did not interview the storyteller because I did not want to take away any of her ownership in the initial telling. Instead, at the beginning of each storytelling meeting I asked her what she wanted to share about her story and how the story wanted to come out creatively. I only asked questions to clarify meaning, if uncertain. So, she maintained leadership in the telling of her story. The finding of audience ownership indicates a parallel process of ownership; through the stages of audience engagement, exhibit participants were leaders in the creation of their individual storytelling experiences, which led some to claim story ownership.

### *Participant Insights and Change*

Most participants reported personal insights from their storytelling experiences. Often, the insights revealed a changed perspective, a stepping back and viewing oneself from within a larger context than in normal, everyday life:

Seeing the timeline, what can happen in the years, is so different from person to person. Sometimes you forget that other people are going through the same years as you but are going through the world in such a vastly different way. (P36)

I was constantly aware of the inner question How would I respond/react? How many of the largest of life questions might I be answering in truth and is the truth mine or someone else's? (P78)



The story brought me back to an awareness of how and who I want to be in the world and what really matters. (P70)

This made me focus on what's really important in life, i.e. loving someone and feeling the same from the other and not waiting for tomorrow to [sic] things that are important. (P60)

Reconfirmation [sic] that we should be glad to be alive and what we are given. (P47)

It made me reflect upon the fragility of life. (P3)

A revalation [sic] that's rather obvious, but I don't think of: Cancer is something. (P37)

Hoping for more openness in my life. . . . To be more understanding. (P62)

A number of male participants expressed not feeling a sense of connection with the story but gaining "the insight of what women have to go thru [sic]" (P67). The following comment reflects what a number of men conveyed: "I could truly empathize with [the storyteller's] pain. But to be honest it was hard for me to feel a connectedness with her" (P89).

Some exhibit participants commented on being changed in some way by their storytelling experiences:

I feel like I can relate differently now to friends who have had surgery—it was easy to be somewhat dismissive of the intensity prior to seeing a scar and mutilation face to face. (P69)

I have always believed and said "I have no creativity," but seeing and experiencing with many senses the dozens of kinds of creativity helped me find my own—I hope I keep looking. (P70)

The sense of an altered tolerance. (P74b)

*Participatory Transpersonal Experience/Knowing*

Reflections by a number of exhibit participants revealed experiences, insights, or knowing of a participatory or spiritual nature (also refer to comments in Ownership section):

Those hats transported me into humanity vs. detached observer. . . . I felt connected to [the storyteller], the physical [storyteller], but only briefly. She became real, but then she became an icon for cosmic/divine injustice. In other words, she lost her individual identity and became an image through which I received other revelations. (P44)

We all seem to be connected to the same source. (P42)

We all may live in different bodys [sic] but in the end we are all the same – I am the same as [the storyteller]. (P52)

I was hit hard by the idea . . . that the body and mind and all things are connected. (P74b)

Intuitively I needed to be here today to remind me that we are all on a journey—a journey of rediscovering our sacred beings. (P51)

I need many reminders that life is to be lived to the fullest and one should pursue one's dreams though it's quite difficult. I feel this exhibit is yet another message to me. . . . There is a spiritual called [sic] "God is trying to tell you something." (P86)

Reverence and respect for the individual spirit—and awareness it lives in each of us. (P54)

While creating the drawing, listening to COHEN's music: I had image of ankh on upper right side of vision and image of the trauma on upper left side. I see that [the storyteller's] collage (which I had not yet viewed while creating drawing) has same upper right and upper left themes. Idea that "the game is channeled" strikes something within me. (P88)

Some exhibit participants expressed intuition or possible participatory knowing about the future:

I find myself not wanting to write this but I had the feeling that my partner would get breast cancer. (P72)

I hope NOT to have to wear [the storyteller's] hats. I feel that I will. . . . I feel that I am ultimately waiting to be faced with breast cancer again on a personal level. (P38)

I felt it put me into the future, knowing that everything is going to be o.k. (P68)

Had an intuitive feel that my spirit could handle a similar challenge. (P69)

*Crossing time, space, and self boundaries.* Exhibit participants experienced a sense of alteration in time, place, and/or self boundaries during the exhibit. Many exhibit participants reported time alteration:

Time slowed—I think to be in this room and set up for a period of time to spend with slowed my day. (P72)

Time had strangely stopped. (P55)

Kyros [sic]—spiritual time. (P85)

I felt very engrossed in the exhibit while viewing/listening. Had no awareness of time. (P60)

Several expressed experiences with loved ones who had died of cancer. Some of the language exhibit participants used to describe such occurrences was remarkable in its concreteness:

My friend Karen, who died from breast cancer, was there in the room too. (P8)

My mother died in my living room of brain cancer after 2 yrs of struggle. . . . It transports me to my mother's side. (P34)

I felt I was reliving a bit of a conversation with my mother who died and had breast cancer, my step father who died of cancer and my favorite cousin who just died of cancer. (P78)

I had an immediate connection to my mother's battle with ovarian cancer. . . . The CDs, selecting them reminded me of—and took me there again—being in the doctor's office as my mom took chemotherapy. (P86)

Some expressed transportation to another place or time and place not necessarily associated with a lost loved one:

I was back in childhood, searching for my safe place – a happy life. (P27)

I found myself back in 1983 with diagnosis, mastectomy and chemo. I remembered more details about that time than I had in years. (P2)

Altered time/place → Nazi Germany. (P38)

Several commented on being more fully present:

Fully present in here and now. (P54)

It helped me to ground and become more present and so more authentic. (P91)

I felt called to BE in the moment! (P53)

Some relayed experiences of/with the storyteller:

When I tried on [the storyteller's] hats I had a sense that I had visited her experience for the briefest second. Tears filled my eyes. (P5)

For me, [the storyteller's] story became more ingrained once I listened to the Cohen track. . . . I was part of her world when listening: for the moment. . . . I felt it was her singing. (P80)

When I was in exhibit room, I “felt” in somehow [sic]—the story inside—including the joy. (P77)

A few expressed a sense of being alone or exclusively engaged with the teller and story:

Suddenly I felt in a different world with the music, candles. As if you/I was turning inward and listening to her story. I also felt that it was good to see the exhibit by yourself. Didn't feel the need to talk to somebody else. It was her and me. (P83)

Time slowed, my mind slowed, there was nothing in the world but [the storyteller] and her story—being with her and her process. (P92)

*The flow experience.* As the researcher-storiographer, I experienced being in flow throughout preparation and execution of the exhibition. Flow was the experience of

everything associated with the exhibit flowing smoothly, effortlessly, and with ease.

Upon first examination, I thought the experience occurred only in my life but came to realize others associated with the exhibit also experienced it. As the following description illustrates, it seems those of us working on the exhibition tapped into a similar flow experience, which could be understood as participation in and cocreation of a transpersonal phenomenon. The remainder of the section describes the flow experience and associated events.

As soon as I was ready to look for a venue, I was offered exhibit space, free of charge, by a woman I had just met. The space and locale fit exactly what I had envisioned—a San Francisco gallery space with a homey, artistic feel, natural light with nature surrounding, and several rooms available for the exhibit and questionnaire completion. Furthermore, the space was home to a nonprofit organization called Healing Environments, with a mission that included using beauty and art to create healing spaces for those with serious illnesses. The woman and her business partner had never offered the space to anyone for an exhibit before, after having considered doing so for a long time, and both agreed this seemed like the right opportunity.

Throughout the exhibit weekend, the exhibit space hostess remarked how she felt part of a positive flow, that her space was filled with people with good energy, and the event progressed smoothly from start to finish. She repeatedly remarked upon the amazing friends I had who helped run the event and whom she enjoyed meeting and discussing intersecting interests with. She also expressed being pleasantly surprised by her experience, because she lived and worked in the space and had never before allowed public access. What could have felt invasive did not.

A close friend also expressed the experience of being in a flow state. She flew in from out of state because she did not want to miss the exhibit and wanted to help. We worked many long hours together and did not eat regular meals or stop to do much aside from tending to the exhibit. Yet, she remarked throughout her visit that she felt immersed in and held by positive energy surrounding the exhibit, which resulted in her feeling fed by the experience. When she returned home, she was surprised to find that she did not need recovery time or feel out of sorts from her irregular diet, work, and sleep schedule during the trip.

Throughout the exhibit preparation phase, I felt in constant flow. Even though I had had a project management background and experience in the vital rigors of planning, I did not schedule project tasks or organize and track on paper the exhibition plan. Instead, I experienced an effortless, internal holding of the project plan, complete with details and deadlines. I experienced a calm knowing that I could easily track everything internally and did not experience concern about my deviation from my usual planning route. I felt relaxed and happy.

The internal sense of flow I experienced was mirrored externally. A framing store agreed to give me a 30% discount on exhibit-related framing, and a clerk there spent several hours helping me with framing ideas and options to fit my exhibit needs, going far out of her way in doing so. A cashier at another store where I purchased exhibit supplies asked if I was a student so he could give me an extra discount, which he did. At a photography business where I had an exhibit photograph retouched, the retoucher did so while I waited (after I was initially told by telephone that I would have to leave the print for several days) and then charged me nothing, stating how quick and easy the task was

for him to accomplish. A close friend who lives in Seattle mentioned my exhibit to a friend of hers whose career is in public relations. Her friend offered to help write and distribute information to the media, sight unseen. I still have not met this generous woman, who gave much of her time over the phone and via email, writing and editing copy, obtaining contact information for various publications, and coaching me on how to properly contact the media to publicize the event.

Also during this time, a friend and dissertation study companion offered to help with the exhibit preparation. She became instrumental in helping me complete the many tasks required, working countless hours in the weeks leading up to the event, including exhibit installation. She relayed her experience of being in flow whenever she ran exhibit-related errands and its absence at all other times.

In addition, I should have asked for help with the exhibit weekend because I knew I would need it—yet I inexplicably did not. Instead, friends appeared and offered to help, several at the last minute. They helped throughout the weekend, assisting participants during the exhibit and with exhibit installation, teardown, and clean-up. With the exception of additional audio and some video I wanted to include in the exhibit and did not have time to prepare, everything unfolded in a timely and successful manner.

During the exhibition weekend, the flow experience continued. A family friend who generously donated food and wine from his restaurant for the reception unexpectedly brought a waitress to pour drinks and freshen the food throughout the evening. The entire weekend happened as I had envisioned. The opening reception on Friday night was packed and I had close to half of my needed participants by the end of the evening. Throughout the rest of the weekend, there was a steady flow of people who participated.

It seems remarkable to me that there were never any lulls without anyone in the exhibit space or rushes with many people in the space at the same time. Even exhibition teardown and clean-up was pleasant—several friends offered to help and made it go smoothly. It went much faster than I expected, and as I relaxed at a neighborhood café afterward, someone who lived in the neighborhood recognized me from the exhibit and gave me lots of positive feedback about his experience as a participant. The latter is notable because he had not filled out a questionnaire, due to feeling ill, so I was synchronistically able to receive his feedback.



## Chapter 5: Discussion

*Telling or hearing stories draws its power from a towering column of humanity joined one to the other across time and space, elaborately dressed in the rags and robes or nakedness of their time, and filled to the bursting with life still being lived.*  
(Pinkola Estes, 1992, p. 19)

This study investigated the question, *What makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection?* Using the qualitative research method of intuitive inquiry, three hermeneutic cycles of the investigation explored and clarified topic understanding. Data analysis revealed three meta-lenses or main categories of findings: (a) storytelling as an art form, (b) essential qualitative features of storytelling, and (c) storytelling experience. Additional findings were organized within the meta-lenses, as presented in chapter 4. Major findings discussed in this chapter have been organized by meta-lens. The chapter concludes with a discussion of story research implications, study limitations and delimitations, intuitive inquiry, and the practical application of study findings.

### *Meta-Lens 1*

This section explores findings within the meta-lens of storytelling as an art form. Storytelling is discussed as inseparable from story and as inclusive of transpersonal phenomena. The story theme of life and death struggle is explored as it relates to Joseph Campbell's description of the hero's journey. A broader discussion of the relationship between story content and process follows. The section concludes with implications of the visual anchor finding.

### *Redefining Storytelling*

Study findings reveal storytelling as a dynamic art form. The storytelling process is complex and multifaceted and is inseparable from the story itself, as Georges (1969) suggested; storytelling includes essential qualities that narrative alone, as a simple

depiction of events, does not. Story or narrative must therefore be expanded from its definition as a description of events to inclusion within the context of the act of storytelling. This view is far more encompassing than suggested by the story research tendency to focus myopically on story text and narrative analysis alone.

In this study, the definition of storytelling was extended beyond the traditional definition of the oral tradition. Study data revealed the nature of storytelling as an art form comprised of key components and essential qualitative features, largely through exhibit participant response to storytelling in an exhibition format without the presence of the teller. Sturm (1998), Jessica Joy Senehi (2000), and other modern story researchers have persisted in recognizing storytelling only as oral narration. The nature of storytelling in this investigation included of a broad range of mediums and a process over time that were communicated to exhibit participants, nonetheless, who understood and resonated with the compassion-based collaboration between the storyteller and storiographer. Storytelling was therefore considered within a larger framework of creative formats, such as digital storytelling, documentary film, performance art, interactive mixed-media exhibitions, television programming, and radio, whereby the storyteller is not necessarily present and the audience is not necessarily congregated in one place. The exploration of storytelling in this study pointed to the application of the storytelling process to many artistic formats, such as those already mentioned.

Study findings also indicated that storytelling is not an event with a fixed place and time but has a transpersonal nature. For instance, findings indicated the storytelling process between storiographer and teller was transmitted to exhibit participants, some exhibit participants experienced the presence of a departed loved one, and many

experienced time alteration. Storytelling was a multidimensional experience for many exhibit participants. Experiences reported often indicated a discrete or nonordinary state of consciousness, as defined by Tart (1975/1983). Time distortion and a placeness to the experience are two elements of the storytrance discrete state of consciousness identified by Sturm (1998) that exhibit participants reported. The emotional narrative seemed to elicit the entry of participants into nonordinary states of consciousness through its seemingly hypnotic pull into full storytelling absorption.

The storytelling process used in the investigation seemed to promote cocreation and participation in transpersonal phenomena. For instance, some exhibit participants reported co-ownership of the story along with the storyteller, participatory knowing such as the receipt of information about future events, and spiritual knowing or divine communion. In addition, the report of flow possibly indicated the cocreation of a storytelling-based transpersonal phenomenon. Research findings fit within the participatory transpersonal framework described by Ferrer (2002), who posited that:

Human participation in transpersonal and spiritual phenomena is a creative, multidimensional event that can involve every aspect of human nature, from somatic transfiguration to the awakening of the heart, from erotic communion to visionary cocreation, and from contemplative knowing to moral insight. (p. 12)

Given the increasing use of storytelling in qualitative transpersonal research methods such as organic inquiry and intuitive inquiry, the application of study findings could serve to strengthen storytelling as an investigative tool. For instance, storytelling could be effectively utilized to spur sympathetic resonance and participatory knowing.

*Hero's Journey*

As the finding emerged of exhibit participant resonance with the story as an expression of shared life and death struggle (refer to chapter 4, Shared Life and Death Struggle), I felt called to review Joseph Campbell's thoughts about the hero's journey, a theme repeatedly expressed in mythology. In a videotaped interview of Joseph Campbell (Joan Konner & Alvin H. Perlmutter, 1988), Bill Moyers introduced his interviewee by remarking, "Mythology to him was the song of the universe, music so deeply imbedded in our collective unconscious that we dance to it, even when we can't name the tune." During the interview, Campbell described the hero's journey as "leaving one condition, finding the source of life to bring you forth in a richer or more mature or other condition." He further described the process as one of undergoing a figurative death and resurrection—a transformation of consciousness by trials and revelations.

Campbell's description of the hero's journey bears a strong resemblance to the teller's story of confronting a potentially life-threatening illness; gaining physical, mental, and spiritual strength to overcome this obstacle; and returning to her life transformed and healthier than before she became ill. Part of the teller's story was that she had never in her life chosen to live, let alone to thrive. Facing her own mortality gave her pause to embrace life, decide to live, and learn how to thrive. Not only did she overcome cancer, she embarked on a new career, began a healthy and loving relationship, and decided to share her story with others. Campbell (1988) reflected that by embarking on the journey to save oneself, the hero ends up saving the world because "the influence of a vital person vitalizes." His sentiments related to the teller's learning to thrive and inspiring others through sharing her story. The exhibit participants' resonance with the

teller's story as a hero's journey pointed to particularity. That is, through sharing her unique experience, others resonated with the qualities of the teller's story as expressing shared aspects of humanity.

### *Relationship Between Story Content and Storytelling Process*

Several questions may arise for the reader about how story content may have impacted the study findings. For instance, *does story content matter, would the findings have been different if the story content had been different, and how do story content and storytelling process interact?*

Through data analysis, an answer that arises is that the story content is important and that a good storytelling process yields good content, no matter what that content might be. I would clarify good content to mean a story that is deeply meaningful to teller and audience, rather than a particular story or story theme. If the story I presented had been an entirely different one, yet completed with the same attention to process and presentation, I would expect a similar level of audience engagement, connection, and insight, but different emotions and types of insights would arise in participants due to the different nature of the story and story theme.

The universal theme (life and death struggle) in the story was important to the audience—in their ability to connect with the story and apply insights to their own lives. I believe the interactive, creative format of the story presentation, alone, would not have yielded deep resonance if the story had not accessed something deep and meaningful in our human consciousness.

However, story content and storytelling process (i.e., story and storytelling) cannot be separated. John Dewey (1916) explained this concept:

There is no distinction of subject matter and method. There is simply an activity which includes both what an individual does and what the environment does. A piano player who had perfect mastery of his instrument would have no occasion to distinguish between his contribution and that of the piano. In well-formed, smooth-running functions of any sort, -- skating, conversing, hearing music, enjoying a landscape, -- there is no consciousness of separation of the method of the person and of the subject matter. In whole-hearted play and work there is the same phenomenon.

When we reflect upon an experience instead of just having it, we inevitably distinguish between our own attitude and the objects toward which we sustain the attitude. When a man is eating, he is eating food. He does not divide his act into eating and food.

The storytelling experiences of exhibit participants were created through a mixture of story content and the other components of the storytelling art form (i.e., motivation, creative collaboration, story materials, and story presentation). The storytelling art form was inseparable from the story content in conveying the story, that is, creating the storytelling experience. Exhibit participant response overwhelmingly conveyed this finding. Furthermore, the storytelling process yielded essential features that offered far more depth in conveying the story than content or factual narrative alone. Emotional narrative was one of the key essential features of the storytelling, for instance.

If the teller had focused on recalling the events of her breast cancer experience (i.e., story content) rather than engaging in creative collaboration and the overall Living Stories process, I believe exhibit participants would have experienced vastly less sympathetic resonance and compassionate connection. I believe male study participants would not have said the story could have been about them (as did several) had they not related to the deeper life and death struggle—largely conveyed by the emotional narrative and interior landscape of the storytelling. I believe a focus on event recall would have

been less impactful on the audience due to the emphasis on story content rather than on the authentic expression of meaningful experience.

The starting point of the storytelling process, motivation to tell the story, was critical in relation to story content. If the story had not been meaningful to the teller or the motivation in telling it had not been heart based (i.e., had been motivated by retribution or any negative intention), engaging in Living Stories would have been pointless and impossible. One cannot go deeply into a heart-based process of authentic expression without the motivation and intention to do so.

### *The Visual Anchor*

The finding of photography as the visual anchor of the storytelling presented interesting implications. While engaged in the storytelling process, I felt the palpable power of the black and white imagery of the teller but did not have an understanding of why I felt it. The data indicated that having a visual depiction that conveyed the interior and exterior landscape of the teller and story was important. Seeing the teller's face was often remarked upon, in addition to the starkness of her nude form, body postures, facial expressions, and mastectomy scar. These aspects of the images gave participants visual and emotional markers of the teller's experience. Leonard Shlain (1998) pointed out that the invention of photography in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a major force in elevating "the importance of images" and restoring some balance "to the left brain-leaning European-language-speaking peoples" (p. 381).

The emotional narrative conveyed through the photography was strong, as many participants remarked upon the emotional state of the teller and their own emotions upon viewing the images. I do not believe the depth of experience the photographs conveyed to

participants would have been present if the photography had not been aesthetically strong. In other words, it was not only the visual aspect that was important but the quality of the visual images that communicated deeply. I believe the aesthetic strength of the photographs was aided by the immersion in storytime and creative collaboration engaged in by the storyteller and me during the photography sessions. We were deeply engaged in the story and storytelling process, and it was the depth of our collaborative process, in part, that was captured by the photographs. Certainly, this could not have taken place without the teller's openness; she brought an open, honest willingness with her to the storytelling process (her heart-based motivation was acknowledged as story ripeness and the first component of the storytelling art form). Also, the collaborative relationship created a safety and trust that allowed for the authentic expression captured in the photographs.

I believe a visual anchor was vital to the storytelling because the teller was not physically present. Many types of storytelling feature mixed-media formats where the teller is not present (e.g., television, film, and digital storytelling). I believe other visual media, such as video, could be effectively used as the visual anchor. In fact, video or film are the primary media of documentary filmmaking, often a powerful storytelling vehicle. Had I included video of the teller in the exhibit, I believe it would have added to the visual dimension participants required. However, I also believe the storytelling process encompassing the use of visual media is equally critical. Several research findings revealed that the compassion-based collaboration between the teller and storiographer-researcher was communicated to participants through the story materials (e.g., Love and Compassion, Sacredness).



*Meta-Lens 2*

This section explores findings within the meta-lens of storytelling essence. The finding of emotional narrative is defined and discussed. The relationship between emotional narrative and authenticity, creative collaboration, and other art forms is also presented. Creative collaboration is also discussed in a separate subsection addressing this finding as both an art form component (Meta-Lens 1) and essential feature of storytelling.

*The Power of Emotional Narrative*

The emotional narrative is the emotional tone, essence, and feeling of the story and storyteller, as conveyed through all aspects of the storytelling art form. Through the varied ways emotional narrative intertwined with other findings, and the strength of the finding on its own, the power of emotional narrative became clearer. The emotional narrative of our culture is often hidden and undervalued, with its focus on facts over emotion. The imbalance reflects a missing piece rather than healthy focus. Our culture, especially male culture, often does not regard public displays of emotion as appropriate. Many also meet private displays of emotion with discomfort. Storytelling that reveals emotional narrative uncovers what is often hidden in our culture (as expressed by several exhibit participants) and in great need of being expressed.

The emotional narrative carried the story authenticity, as well. The teller's truth of emotional expression about her story and aspects of shared humanity were clearly conveyed to the audience and perceived; not 1 participant reported an experience of the story as inauthentic. Many were moved by the depth of authenticity. The emotional narrative acted as the connection point for exhibit participants. Through the emotion, they

connected to the teller and story and moved deeper into the experience. The powerful pull of the emotional narrative was experienced by a number of exhibit participants.

The concept of emotional narrative is congruent with the concept of landscape of consciousness proposed by Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtes (1976). Greimas and Courtes suggested that a dual landscape is essential to storytelling; the landscape of action depicts the unfolding of events while the landscape of consciousness depicts the inner lives of the story characters. Their concept of dual landscape is also similar to the finding of interior and exterior landscape.

*Relationship with creative collaboration.* The large amount of emotional narrative in the exhibit was a direct reflection of the storytelling process. Engaging in an intuitive and creative process rather than one based on recall drew out the depths of the teller's experience. For example, when we first began our storytelling meetings, the teller wanted me to take photographs of her baring her newly acquired mastectomy scar. The day of the photo shoot, we discussed the range of emotions that accompanied her confrontation with breast cancer and decided to capture them on film. She bared her nearly bald head to me for the first time and decided to leave her head uncovered in the photographs. Baring her chest scar, her uncovered head, and her emotions during our photography session took her to a place of raw vulnerability and intimately revealed authenticity. The photographs were vehicles that carried the teller's powerful emotional narrative to exhibit participants.

The creative expression data, viewed as a collective audience response, revealed sympathetic resonance of the audience with the story and storyteller. The creative expressions embodied an emotional narrative that added to the teller's evolving story. The creative process, whether utilized by the teller or the audience, accessed exhibit

participants' emotions and evoked responses rooted in compassion. The questionnaire, by contrast, which required rational rather than creative thought, encompassed a greater range of commentary.

*In the context of other art forms.* As the finding of emotional narrative began to emerge, I was intrigued by the strength of the finding. It was intertwined in most of the findings and was completely new. That is, it was not in any of my lenses prior to Cycle 3. Intuitively, I tried on the finding with other storytelling formats to see if it applied. Books and films came to mind as fitting applications of emotional and factual narrative. This further exploration led, in part, to the later-emerging and more subtle finding of interior and exterior landscape. From the side exploration of emotional narrative, I became confident in the finding implication that stories are most compelling when emotional narrative is included—and in fact, that emotional narrative must be present for stories to be engaging.

Classic novels, such as Gustave Flaubert's (1857/1928) *Madame Bovary*, Guy de Maupassant's (1888/2001) *Pierre et Jean*, and Kate Chopin's (1899/1964) *The Awakening*, came to mind as vivid examples of particularly rich emotional narratives balanced by equally detailed factual narrative. In addition, interior landscapes of the characters are as richly drawn as the exterior landscapes of the stories. These classics stand out from much contemporary literature because the latter often features far less depth in the descriptive detail of these storytelling qualities.

I realized that recent popular films, such as Steven Spielberg's (2001) *Minority Report* and Chris Columbus's (2001) *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, which had failed to fully engage me as a viewer, had explanations based upon narrative and

landscape—based on my interpretation, at least. These films featured great attention to factual narrative and exterior landscape via state-of-the-art special effects, costumes, story premise and content, and set design, for instance. Yet they lacked emotional narrative and interior landscape, that is, depth of emotional life, expression, and personality of the main characters. By comparison, Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) included the same high level of special effects, cinematography, and rich exterior landscape as in the Spielberg and Columbus films yet included engaging interior landscape and emotional narrative, as well.

Other movie viewers and book readers undoubtedly have differing opinions from my own due to individual preference. Exhibit participants also differed in the degree of desired narrative and landscape. A resolution to disparate audience tastes and common cultural and human needs lies in acknowledging the importance of both types of narrative and landscape and maintaining somewhat of a balance in the inclusion of each type.

### *Creative Collaboration*

The creative collaboration aspect of storytelling had a large influence on the study findings. The forming of creative collaborations was multilayered throughout the storytelling process, including between the researcher-storiographer, storyteller, and story; between the researcher-storiographer and those who supported the story presentation (e.g., assistants, store owners); and between audience and exhibition. I believe it was the creative collaboration aspect of the storytelling process that particularly drew out the teller's authentic self and authentic expression of her story. Ken Wilber (as cited in Andrew Cohen & Ken Wilber, 2002) referred to accessing one's authentic self as "opening to authentic being beyond conventional and egoic modes" (p. 47). Michael

Chekhov (1953/2001), widely known as a great acting teacher-theoretician and actor, referred to the creative state that may be achieved in acting as beyond the ego, encompassing truth, and distinguishable from one's ordinary state of consciousness:

The usual, everyday feelings are adulterated, permeated with egotism, narrowed to personal needs, inhibited, insignificant and often even unaesthetic and spoiled by untruths. They should not be used in art. Creative individuality rejects them. It has at its disposal another kind of feelings—those completely impersonal, purified, freed from egotism and therefore aesthetic, significant and artistically true. (pp. 88-89)

It is this creative state that the storyteller and I engaged in during storytime; we gave ourselves over to the creative process of storytelling. Our photography sessions together exemplified this process. Findings indicated the photographs and other creative media stemming from our creative collaboration conveyed a strong aesthetic sense and artistic truth to exhibit participants. Dewey (1934) said, “In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience” (p. 105).

Creative collaboration is heart based and opens different channels than intellectual process. Chekhov (1953/2001) spoke of the relationship between creativity and compassion in the craft of acting:

Creative feelings . . . are compassionate. Your higher self endows the character with creative feelings; and because it is able at the same time to observe its creation, it has compassion for its characters and their destinies. . . . Compassion may be called the fundamental of all good art because it alone can tell you what other beings feel and experience. Only compassion severs the bonds of your personal limitations. (p. 90)

Checkov was describing compassionate connection as part of creative collaboration. As the storiographer, I experienced compassionate connection with the storyteller through the shared creative process. Findings indicated exhibit participants experienced

compassionate connection through their creative collaboration in the exhibit storytelling. Many participants reported feeling empathetic toward the teller and sensing the compassion-based relationship between storyteller and researcher-storiographer.

Legendary blues rock guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan (1989/1999)—considered by many to have been a musical genius—verbally described the heart based aspect of his creative process (recorded on one of his music albums):

Since I can't read music . . . I find out that I do the best when I just listen to where I'm trying to go with it and where it can go and not try to rush it, not to try to make up things as I'm going, necessarily, just let them come out. Then I'm a lot better off. If I start trying to pay attention to where I am on the neck and "this is the proper way to do this or that" then I end up thinking that thing through and instead of playing from my heart I play from my mind and that's where I find that I get in trouble. If I just go with what's in my heart and let it come out, then I'm ok.

Vaughan's description was one of authentic expression through creative process. Love and compassion appear to be inherent in the creative process, in addition or perhaps related to being essential qualities of the storytelling process. Exhibit participants reported the teller's story expression as authentic and commented on the congruent compassionate nature of various aspects of the storytelling process, for instance.

The interaction and influence of creative collaboration was expressed by actor Kevin Spacey (as cited in Meg Grant, 2003): "When you watch a movie, you don't participate in the actor's performance, you respond to it. In the theater, there's a breath between audience and the performer, moments that are sometimes overwhelming. It's alive" (p. 144). His comment speaks to one of the earlier interpretive lenses of stories as living. In retrospect, I would say that *storytelling* is the dynamic process and that multilayered creative collaboration is a large part of what creates the dynamism. Checkhov (1953) spoke of the actor's creative collaboration with the character one is

playing while Spacey spoke of the added layer of creative collaboration with the audience. In this study, creative collaboration in the art form of storytelling similarly occurred in a multilayered fashion. The audience collaborated in the storytelling by engaging with story materials, creatively expressing feedback, being present in the exhibit space, and cocreating transpersonal phenomena.

Layers of creative collaboration may be increasing in museum environments. In response to current global dialogue and war-related events, curator Susan Landauer (as cited in Mark de la Viña, 2003) realized many pieces in the permanent collection of the San Jose Museum of Art in California, United States, addressed themes of war and aggression. She curated an exhibit of the art work called *Disarming Parables* in the museum's new Conversation Piece Gallery, a space designed to invite visitor response and spark community dialogue. Visitors may leave written responses in the exhibit space for other visitors to read. The curator's response to cultural events through a relevant exhibit and the museum's new policy to invite community dialogue and written visitor response represent creative collaboration far beyond artist expression. Perhaps art museums, in addition to Holocaust museums, are beginning to address the cultural call to share meaningful stories through creative expression and collaboration.

### *Meta-Lens 3*

This section explores findings within the meta-lens of storytelling experience. An expanded understanding of the role of storytelling is discussed. Findings indicating storytelling experience as a continuum of connection are also discussed in subsections: Participation as Connection, Empathy as Connection, Particularity as Connection, and Compassionate Connection. The subsection on empathy includes a discussion of

sympathetic resonance and validity. The subsection on particularity adds to the finding of four stages of audience storytelling engagement by suggesting a fifth stage called interbeing or oneness. The section concludes with a discussion of the finding of flow.

### *Redefining the Role of Storytelling*

At the onset of the investigation, my view of the roles of storytelling was polarized, in that I considered them to be either sacred or profane—with the former as the focus of study. Study data revealed connection through storytelling as a continuum of participant experience ranging from personal insights to spiritual knowing. Sacredness is at the far end of the continuum of connection. In addition, I came to question other forms of storytelling—such as those that do not necessarily elicit connection—as possibly serving useful roles, rather than dismissing them as profane. For instance, much of the storytelling on television could be termed profane because it exploits the tellers, is lacking in compassion, and does not tell stories meaningful to the tellers. However, this type of storytelling may function as entertainment.

In his look at storytelling among the Western Apache, Keith H. Basso (1996) cited four major categories of storytelling in that culture that are based on time (when the events took place) and purpose (objectives in recounting): (a) myths, (b) historical accounts, (c) sagas, and (d) gossip. Sagas, for instance, are told for relaxation and entertainment while myths are told for enlightenment and instruction. In the modern, North American western culture upon which this investigation is focused and embedded, there are likely various types of storytelling that fill various roles and cultural needs. For instance, there are stories that are told to inspire, such as those in the many popular variations of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books (e.g., Jack Canfield & Mark Victor



Hansen, 1993). I have come to view personal storytelling that elicits compassionate connection as filling a specific cultural need and role, among other categories perhaps yet to be fully investigated and identified.

### *Continuum of Connection*

The study initially set out to investigate what makes stories sacred, stemming from the perspective that sacred stories connect us. Within story research, there is a range of views about what constitutes sacred story, including personal stories shared from the heart (e.g., Leeland, 1996), stories about spiritual communion (e.g., Barrett, 1998), and stories emanating from sacred texts or teachings (e.g., Safken, 1998). Exhibit participants reported a range of responses about sacred aspects of the story exhibition, including considering the term sacred as off-putting in a religious sense, perceiving the storyteller's authenticity as sacred, viewing deep respect and empathy for the teller and story as sacred, and experiencing divine communion during the exhibition as sacred.

During data analysis, my focus began to shift from sacred aspects of the story or storytelling to gauging types of connection that occurred, as reported by exhibit participants and researcher observation. Trying to pinpoint sacredness was too confining and unclear, given the range of experiences reported. Findings showed that connections were happening in a multitude of ways or on a continuum. The notion of a continuum of connection is meant to conote an unfolding in motion rather than a linear structure. While a variety of connection-type experiences were reported by exhibit participants, varieties of individual experience and interpretations of experience made it impossible to order connections or necessarily identify them as concrete events. Cohen and Wilber (2002) pointed out that individual interpretations of experience vary based on level of

psychospiritual development. This section is intended as an exploration of the theme of connection that appeared throughout the findings.

*Participation as connection.* The act of choosing to participate in the story, to interact with exhibit materials and immerse oneself in a lived experience of the story, was an act of connecting with the story. Through each choice—whether to enter the exhibit, how to move around the room, which elements to interact with, or what feedback to leave—exhibit participants assisted in the creation of their storytelling experiences. Choices resulted in a commitment to a certain degree of being present to the story, letting it into one's life, and even allowing it to consume and carry one through the experience of it. The storyteller and storiographer-researcher also created connection through actively tuning into the story and creatively expressing the emerging story. Through embodiment, the storyteller, researcher-storiographer, and exhibit participants participated in the storytelling.

A poem by Rumi (1995) describes embodiment as a portal through which participatory knowing occurs:

On Resurrection Day

On Resurrection Day your body testifies against you.  
Your hand says, "I stole money."  
Your lips, "I said meanness."  
Your feet, "I went where I shouldn't."  
Your genitals, "Me too."

They will make your praying sound hypocritical.  
Let the body's doings speak openly now,  
without your saying a word,  
as a student's walking behind a teacher  
says, "This one knows more clearly  
than I the way." (p. 111)

This is akin to Anderson's (2001) observation of "the awakened body of a vaster intelligence" (p. 96). Through participation in storytelling, embodiment created connection points and compasses of knowing. Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (1999) spoke about the importance of synthetic understanding "in which sensory impressions, feelings, knowledge, and memories come together in a multimodal, unified way" (p. 296). The interactive design and multisensory aspect of the exhibit offered exhibit participants many modes of embodied story connection.

In order to gain insight and meaning from a story, one first experiences connection or resonance with it; one participates in storytelling at some level. Because we live an embodied existence, we are forever in relationship, including all aspects of the art form of storytelling. Dewey (1934) explained,

In art, as in nature and life, relations are modes of interaction. They are pushes and pulls; they are contractions and expansions; they determine lightness and weight, rising and falling, harmony and discord. The relations of friendship, of husband and wife, of parent and child, of citizen and nation, like those of body to body in gravitation and chemical action, may be symbolized by terms or conceptions and then be stated in propositions. But they exist as actions and reactions in which things are modified. Art expresses, it does not state; it is concerned with existences in their perceived qualities, not with conceptions symbolized in terms. A social relation is an affair of affections and obligations, of intercourse, or generalization, influence and mutual modification. It is in this sense that "relation" is to be understood when used to define form in art. (p. 134)

While constructivists acknowledge that it is important to "concentrate not only on the *content* but on the *form* of the narrative" (Bruner, 1990, p. 113), a participatory perspective is absent. Findings from this study allow for a shift in the constructivist paradigm to what could be called *participatory constructivism*. That is, we are not merely making sense of our own lives through narrative interpretation but are also accessing and

cocreating transpersonal phenomena and achieving transpersonal understanding or participatory knowing.

Constructivism tends toward cognition as the primary mode of knowing or interpretation. Along the continuum of connection discussed in the following subsections, heart-based response is the basis for receptivity and knowing. Empathy and compassion were strong components of exhibit participant responses. Emotional narrative, discussed earlier, was the catalyst for audience storytelling engagement; it was the feature that drew them into the storytelling and provided a sense of connection with the storyteller.

Findings indicated love and compassion are primary to storytelling and, I believe, may lead to positive impact and transformation. Constructivism might expand its view of the action or telling of stories “as the object to be described” (Bruner, 1990, p. 113) to encompass the psychospiritual dimensions of heart-based experience.

*Empathy as connection.* Empathic connection and sympathetic resonance with the storyteller and story were reported overwhelmingly by exhibit participants. Daniel Goleman (1995) described empathy, the capacity and ability to know how another feels, as rooted in emotional intelligence. He said, “the key to intuiting another’s feelings is in the ability to read nonverbal channels: tone of voice, gesture, facial expression, and the like. . . . 90 percent or more of an emotional message is nonverbal” (pp. 96-97). The emotional narrative of the story was largely delivered through nonverbal communication. Exhibit participants commented about the teller’s facial expressions and body postures as evoking emotional narrative, for instance. Perhaps the lack of verbal story communication and the the quiet pull of the exhibit space reduced distraction and created

a greater awareness and receptivity to nonverbal communication—thereby enhancing the opportunity for empathy and sympathetic resonance to occur.

The unifying sense of connection described by Anderson (1998) as sympathetic resonance was the intuitive inquiry measure of trustworthiness used in the study. Similar concepts of connection were referred to as *communitas* by Turner (1969, p. 131), *communion* by Bohm (1990, p. 7), and *deep fellowship* by Leeland (1996, p. 8). Leeland spoke of interpersonal connection and personal transformation (which could be considered from a transpersonal perspective) that may occur through storytelling in reference to her research on storytelling in an alternative high school:

Learning the stories of students can foster a sense of connection between storyteller and listener. I have experienced this as a deep sense of fellowship. I hypothesize that this . . . “deep fellowship” then leads to a transformation in identity as healing occurs of the wounds that contributed to feelings of separation and alienation. (p. 8)

In this study, sympathetic resonance expressed by exhibit participants addressed the earlier storytelling collaboration between the storyteller and researcher-storiographer. That is, their resonance expressed the trustworthiness of the Living Stories process. The essential qualitative features of storytelling that emerged as findings seem linked to the storytelling process that was used (Living Stories) and as possible catalysts of audience resonance. Braud (as cited in Braud & Anderson, 1998) stated, “Resonance is an indicator of fullness and fidelity and is, therefore, an indicator of validity” (p. 224).

Audience sympathetic resonance also reflected participation in cocreated phenomena. In other words, the exhibit was created for the purpose of creating an opportunity for sympathetic resonance; it was part of the storytelling. Most exhibit participants reported direct experiences of empathic connection to the teller or of the

storytelling as loving and compassionate—rather than solely perceiving the relationship between the teller and researcher-storiographer as compassionate. The Hindu spiritual leader Paramahansa Yogananda (1956) has taught, “The heart purified by friendship provides an open door to unity” (p. 2). His teaching could be interpreted as applicable to the bond of empathic connection and spiritual knowing reported by exhibit participants. Safken (1998) described sacred stories as speaking to the heart and Leeland (1996) said speaking from the heart during storytelling may lead to deep fellowship.

Research from the Stone Center (e.g., Surrey, 1991), which posits that connection through mutual relationship is critical to psychological growth, could be expanded to include a transpersonal perspective. While this research shows that mutual empathy and mutual engagement are important elements of mutual relationship, this study found that exhibit participants experienced a high degree of empathy and engagement with the story and teller—even though not through mutual relationship/presence. Some reported participation in transpersonal phenomena and participatory or spiritual knowing related to Barrett’s (1998) assertion that sacred stories have the “ability to transport us to other realms” (p. 26). In addition to person-to-person interaction, perhaps storytelling that elicits connection (in various ways) also fosters growth, both psychologically and spiritually. Future research could address this question.

*Particularity as connection.* Through story engagement rather than uncommitted viewership, a number of exhibit participants claimed story ownership. That is, they reported experiencing the story as their own. Through the teller’s unique story expression or particularity, a sense of shared humanity took hold. After one takes story ownership, one may move beyond it to experience unity on some level. That is, the distinction of

duality begins to disappear as one sees himself or herself in the other. One may experience a merging of energies, of souls, or of emotion or an embodied sense of interconnected being. Spiritual leader Sri Aurobindo promoted the idea of knowledge through identity, as reported by Satprem (1970/1993):

The authenticity of the experience and its practical relevance can be immediately verified by a very simple test, which reveals a new mode of knowledge through identity: we know a thing because we are that thing. Consciousness can move to any point of its universal reality, focus on any being, any event, and know it immediately and intimately, as one know the beating of one's own heart, because everything now takes place within; nothing is outside or separate anymore. (p. 147)

Several participants reported being one with the story, being alone with the storyteller (even though she was not physically present), or experiencing divine unification. It is possible that more participants had unitive experiences but did not interpret them as such or articulate them in questionnaire responses. Because only a few participants reported unitive experiences, a finding did not emerge.

Through the conduit of particularity, perhaps some audience members moved to a level of storytelling engagement beyond the four stages identified in the findings (commitment, attention, interaction, and ownership) to a fifth stage of interbeing or oneness. Interbeing is a term introduced by Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) to mean awareness of being interconnected with a larger reality. He stated, "Too many people distinguish between the inner world of the mind and the world outside, but these worlds are not separate. They belong to the same reality" (p. 4). This fifth stage is in keeping with the transpersonal concept of particularity or accessing the universal (i.e., unity) through the unique.

The notion of particularity is also at the foundation of intuitive inquiry:

The intuitive researcher rallies a vantage point uniquely her or his own. Like a specially design telescope, the lenses of the researcher's experiences, motivations, and inspirations permit the intuitive researcher to see more subtly into the phenomenon being studied and to related [sic] to it in a deeply connected way. At least some particulars address universal phenomena. (Anderson, 2000, p. 34)

Particularity was the most enriching and complex aspect of this research process. The parallel epistemologies of particularity in the research method, Living Stories, and exhibit participant experience are intriguing. Through my deep connection to the topic, I experienced a merging with something larger than myself or the topic. I experienced my participation in transpersonal phenomena, accompanied by participatory knowing about the topic. My experience of this was strong during data analysis, when insights emerged from the data. I also experienced the cultural call to connect through storytelling as participatory knowing through deep attunement with the topic.

*Compassionate connection.* Due to the continuum of connection interwoven among study findings, naming or describing the encompassing qualities of this transpersonal continuum seems important. Although the types of connections and impact are not known precisely, the phrase that describes my general response to them collectively is compassionate connection. Arriving at the phrase *compassionate connection* has allowed for a revision of the research question that feels more appropriate to what was addressed by study findings: *What makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection?*

Whether exhibit participants voiced experiences of connection on personal, interpersonal, or transpersonal levels, their responses seemed to exude a sense of compassion alive from within and reflective of what exuded from the storytelling. Findings did not indicate the absence of love or compassion anywhere in the art form,



essence, or experience; there was a permeable quality to the presence of love and compassion throughout the investigation. Many participants seemed to experience deep connection, whether through claiming story ownership, gaining new insight, or experiencing the presence of a lost loved one. It is difficult to know which experiences reported could be considered aspects of spiritual knowing or connection. Other participants surely experienced less deep connections. The limitation of open-ended self report questionnaire data and varying individual capability for self-awareness and communication of experience make it difficult to tell.

### *Flow*

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) coined the term *flow* to mean optimal experience. He described flow as the product of merged action and awareness:

When all of a person's relevant skills are needed to cope with the challenges of a situation, that person's attention is completely absorbed by the activity. There is no excess psychic energy left over to process any information but what the activity offers. All the attention is concentrated on the relevant stimuli.

As a result, one of the most universal and distinctive features of optimal experience takes place: people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing. . . . It is for this reason that we called the optimal experience "flow." (pp. 53-54)

The finding of flow during the storytelling process, experienced by the researcher and others who assisted with the exhibition, indicated participation and cocreation of a transpersonal phenomenon associated with the storytelling. The storytelling process was perhaps part of a larger field created by the culture or created a field of multidimensional, transpersonal phenomena; this idea meshes with transpersonal theory suggested by Ferrer (2002), Rupert Sheldrake (1995), and others. Individual experiences of flow were not

merely subjective observations but were connected to the coparticipation in and experience of flow in a larger sense.

My experience of flow during the exhibition was appropo to often-quoted words, usually misattributed to Goethe, by W. H. Murray (1951):

The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.  
(p. 7)

Murray's description of commitment as a precursor to flow fits my experience. As soon as my proposal was approved (after a long process), I experienced an internal excitement and commitment to planning and holding the exhibition. I embraced this next aspect of the research process as a fun and creative activity, in stark contrast to the difficult process of writing I had previously experienced. My experience of flow began immediately thereafter and continued through exhibit completion, a period of approximately 4 months. My immersion in and focus on the activities of exhibit preparation and execution fits with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) description of flow as arising from merged action and awareness.

It was during this same period that a number of people who became involved in the project expressed to me their experiences of flow. It seemed like they got involved with the exhibit out of the magnetism of flow and then experienced there own flow state out of having joined the flow. For instance, the fact that the woman who donated her space for the exhibit had been asked numerous times but never offered her space for exhibit use before was interesting—especially since she offered it to me shortly after we first met, without knowing me well and without my asking to use it. As her space became

filled with story material, exhibit assistants, and finally exhibit participants, she repeatedly remarked to me how surprisingly smoothly everything was going and how much she resonated with the people and energy in the space.

*Expanding the Approach to Story Research and Theory*

This study seemed to investigate storytelling from the inside out, which served the research well. Through deep immersion in a creative storytelling process as the focal point, interior qualities of storytelling emerged from the data (the findings of the essential qualities of storytelling). These qualities were not tangible and obvious but came out of the complexity of the data and intuitive inquiry research method. As the researcher, I sensed the interior quality of the investigative approach, although not cognitively until much later. I had the sense of being inside storytelling, as if all the molecules inside a box comprised storytelling, and I crawled inside the box—and communed with and was immersed in the molecules. Anderson (2000) described the inside view achieved through intuitive inquiry:

To know a phenomenon of experience or of nature, we must love it and become its friend. . . . Searching (or re-searching) from that inside view, its essential qualities animate to the researcher's own experience in both the objective and subjective senses. (p. 31)

Some exhibit participants also described being inside the story or storytelling as part of their exhibit experience, such as 1 participant (P80) who remarked (referring to the storyteller), “I was part of her world” and another (P5) who commented, “I had visited her experience for the briefest second.” In a sense, the study explored the interior and exterior landscape of storytelling—parallel to the essential quality of storytelling revealed by the data. By using intuitive inquiry to befriend and get inside storytelling, I was able to access essential qualities of storytelling that otherwise may have remained hidden. Most

story research takes an exterior perspective by focusing on story content (and participant response to content), which makes getting inside the experience of storytelling less probable.

Reader-response theory, postulated by Stanley Fish (1980), maintains that narrative derives its meaning solely from reader interpretation. Text is viewed as a blank canvas upon which the reader projects understanding and cultural assumptions. Chris Lang (2003) reported that Fish

considers the attempt to access the author's intention as naïve; for how would one ever access an intention as it does not exist in any objective or uninterpreted realm that can be mediated to our consciousness without itself being interpreted? (p. 3)

Fish's view reflects a seemingly solipsistic stance. While I believe it is accurate to say that, by nature, individual interpretation is part of human experience, findings from this study indicated that participation in transpersonal phenomena are also ongoing during storytelling. By not objectifying text or intention, Fish opened the door to an expansion of his approach that could be termed *transpersonal reader-response theory*. In this expanded view, the community, author or storyteller, and readers or audience, cocreate and participate in storytelling not as a fixed or objective event but as ongoing transpersonal phenomena.

Furthermore, study findings, such as the finding of flow, indicated that interpretation is not confined to projections of subjective experience emanating from within, as Fish (1980) presumed, but is inclusive of participatory knowing. That is, through embodiment, we become aware of the multifaceted dimensions of knowing including intuition and aesthetic response, for instance. It is through participatory knowing that we may interpret and understand our experiences as a tapping into and

cocreating of transpersonal phenomena. When participatory knowing occurs, one's usual subject-object orientation may shift to a merging or unitive experience of knowing through interbeing.

Reader-response theory and constructivism, for that matter, would do well to depart from Cartesianism, as Ferrer (2002) proposed for transpersonal theory, and adopt the participatory view of Whitehead (1929/1960). Although we dwell largely in subject-object awareness in our daily lives and only fleetingly (if ever) in interbeing, knowledge of a larger expanse of human consciousness and realm of existence invites story researchers to adopt the participatory transpersonal view. Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) explained, "The ideas of inside and outside are helpful in everyday life, but they can become an obstacle that prevents us from experiencing ultimate reality. . . . The nature of enlightenment . . . is innate to every being and not just a transcendental identity" (p. 4).

### *Limitations*

Research limitations, that is, unavoidable restrictions in the research design, were as follows:

1. Having to read and sign a consent form and agree to be a study participant prior to entering the exhibit was necessary and yet off-putting to some, resulting in several people choosing not to participate.
2. Each participant had a dual role as study participant and exhibit-goer, thus likely affecting exhibit experiences and responses to it. Knowing questionnaire completion was imminent may have reduced the number and type of optional creative expressions left by participants.

3. Reliance on the audience to identify and articulate their internal experiences of the exhibit was a limitation. Due to the nature of the topic studied, information was received by tacit knowing and other forms of knowing that engage the right brain, taxing participants to describe such information and processes in words. The task of doing so has been continually difficult for the researcher and is acknowledged as inherently difficult for anyone. Responses were only as accurate as each participant's ability for self-expression. There is no other way to determine one's internal experience. Having several forms of creative expression available to participants, in addition to the questionnaire, was designed to offset the limitation by broadening the number of channels for expression.

#### *Delimitations*

Research delimitations, that is, chosen restrictions in the research design, were as follows:

1. Studying personal storytelling through facilitating a storytelling process with a single storyteller and one story, rather than multiple storytellers and their individual stories, or interviewing other facilitators of personal storytelling, was a delimitation. The trade-off was an opportunity to explore, in greater depth, the life cycle of the story and storytelling process. Also, I had the opportunity to study storytelling through Living Stories, the text that claimed my attention. Interviewing others working with story would have eliminated the possibility of studying all of the elements of Living Stories. Being in the dual role of researcher and storiographer allowed for greater immersion in the topic and a better vantage point from which to draw insights.

2. For appropriateness of scope, the study focus was on immediate audience response to a story experience, preceded by (and, therefore, linked to) a specific storytelling process. Future research might address a fuller scope of both process and response, for instance, long-term effects of the story experience. Assessment of participant transformation would contribute to the field of transpersonal psychology and add utility to the practical application of personal storytelling.
3. Revealing the identity of the storyteller through photographs and use of her first name throughout the exhibit was a delimitation. Should she have future misgivings about having revealed her identity, there will be no recourse. Fortunately, the storyteller has not wavered in her decision during the past 5 years of contact and story collaboration with the researcher-storiographer—including two public exhibitions of her story.
4. Prior to the exhibit weekend, the number of exhibit participants was unknown, in order to realistically follow Living Stories by drawing from a self-selected public audience. The result could have been a lesser number of participants than specified in the design. It was important to draw a spontaneous public crowd from passersby in addition to those who received invitations or saw an announcement and planned to attend. In either instance, during the exhibit weekend, people made the decision to attend. If participants signed up beforehand, they might have attended out of obligation rather than desire when the actual event took place. The event was publicized with the delimitation in mind, thereby meeting the target participation goal.

5. The demographic make-up of the audience was also unknown until the exhibition.

Although a particular demographic make-up was not specified, a research goal was to avail the story to a wide range of people. The delimitation was countered with extensive event advertisements and a venue locale frequented by, and accessible to, a wide range of people. Those who participated were largely from white, upper middle class culture, although there was a range of diversity within that group. Whether the result means the research goal was only partially realized or something else, such as the exhibit having attracted those for whom the cultural call was most relevant, is unknown.

6. The questionnaire design focused on the researcher's lenses. The choice to do so could have limited the participant responses. However, an attempt to reduce the delimitation was designed by the first question (a request for participants to spontaneously reflect upon their experiences) and by the creative expression options. The questionnaire focus also placed a high level of demand upon the participants. Whereas the researcher had studied the storytelling text intensely for several years to arrive at the lenses, participants were asked to respond to them through one experience—a difficult task. Yet, for this very reason, without directing participants to comment on aspects of the researcher's perspective through specific questions, it would have been unlikely participants would have mentioned them.

### *On Intuitive Inquiry*

Using intuitive inquiry as the research method proved to be both a challenging and deeply rewarding experience. The method required analytical reflection of my



intuitive processes, often inchoate and amorphous by nature. The complexity of this process was something I grasped only gradually, as a matter of carrying out the investigation. I found data analysis and the emergence of findings to be fun and surprising experiences. As the researcher, intuitive inquiry invited and offered me freedom to live in the mystery of intuitive processes and watch for, rather than deduce, meaning—within the rigorous framework of this research process. I had been previously skeptical about how much new information could come through my personal filter or interpretive lenses and worried about how to avoid circularity. Many concepts and phrases completely new to my topic understanding emerged from the data, however. Emotional narrative, congruence, and interior and exterior landscape, for instance, were unknown to my thought process about storytelling before engaging the claim (per intuitive inquiry) of the exhibit participants and analyzing the resulting data. By capitalizing on the researcher's intuitive processes and ability to track them, I believe the research method catalyzed a level of understanding that might otherwise not have been accessed from the data.

In this investigation, the hermeneutical circle was expanded. In addition to engaging my own claim (forward arc) and the claim of others (return arc), my circle of understanding included participation in transpersonal phenomena. An illustrative image that comes to mind is a permeable circle, representative of the initial hermeneutic circle, radiating an infinite number of circles beyond and connected to it. The expanded perspective of the hermeneutical circle is referred to throughout this section and is an element of my increased understanding or interpretation of intuitive inquiry.

### *Lens Development*

One of the most difficult aspects of intuitive inquiry I encountered was lens development. Throughout the research process, I struggled to understand what lenses were and how to access, organize, and present them. Although I intellectually understood that lenses were simply a description of my topic perspective at various points throughout the hermeneutic cycles, putting this idea into practice proved extraordinarily difficult for me. As a new intuitive inquiry researcher, my understanding of lens development improved with the realization that my perspective, not the lenses, was developed and clarified through the research process. I did not look at the lenses (in comparison to the data) to clarify them at successive cycles; I looked at my perspective anew—a sort of gauge of participatory knowing. I found it helpful to identify my evolving perspective by asking myself (at the end of each cycle) with a beginner's mind, "What do I know now?" Knowing that I could not divorce myself from my perspective (because it was inherent), I asked myself, "What are the data telling me?" during Cycle 3 (analysis of exhibit participant data). Asking this question helped me to integrate the exhibit participant data within the context of my participatory transpersonal immersion. The answers to the question were the study findings and my final set of lenses.

As would be expected, breakthroughs and shifts in perspective (lens development) came at random times, not necessarily connected to my previous lenses but fresh and anew out of transpersonal participation—that is, out of a more encompassing engagement in the intuitive inquiry research process. I came to understand that lenses identified at the end of each cycle were markers in time of a continual, ever-expanding process of topic

understanding, not the product of a specific set of procedures followed during the particular cycle.

While lens development was extremely informative to the research process and an inherent aspect of intuitive inquiry, I experienced an ongoing and unresolved difficulty in calling out individual lenses. I experienced my perspective as an intertwined and indivisible whole. Various aspects of my perspective blended into each other as I tried to separate them; this occurred throughout each cycle of the research process. Aspects I tried to describe were not parallel to one another. Often, the way I could best express my perspective was through an image or poem—evoking of an essence inclusive of more than a sum of parts. I still do not know how to bridge this collision of intellectual and creative worlds. Shlain (1998) warned that while every individual is endowed with feminine and masculine features, “writing subliminally fosters a patriarchal outlook” (p. 1) by its requirement for linear, sequential thinking (masculine or left-brained) as opposed to the holistic, synthetic approach of feminine, or right-brained, activities.

Inherent in any research endeavor is the limitation of communication through written text. Not all meaning lends itself to text. In intuitive inquiry, the limitation is amplified due to the primary focus on intuitive and creative processes. Moustakas (1990) accounted for text limitation by devising creative synthesis as the last phase of heuristic research:

The creative synthesis can only be achieved through tacit and intuitive powers. Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the questions, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis. This usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing material and examples, but it may be expressed as a poem, story, drawing, painting, or by some other creative form. (pp. 31-32)

Intuitive inquiry also lends itself to creative synthesis. Throughout the hermeutic cycles, I utilized poetry and figures to express themes, in addition to written descriptions and quotes from the data. It has not been enough to assuage the difference between internal process and external communication, however. Perhaps future intuitive inquiry research and method development will better address the limitation than have I. New modes of research process require new modes of formal expression, which could be addressed through the use of technology if the research and publishing communities will embrace such an expansion. The use of sound, digital video, and user interface through computer technology, for instance, would allow research to be disseminated in nonlinear, creative forms in addition to text format.

### *Participatory Nature*

Understanding my role as a participant in transpersonal phenomena, rather than as a subject analyzing subjective and objective data, assisted me in deeper engagement in the intuitive inquiry research process. I came to realize that I was engaged with the topic and participation in transpersonal phenomena continuously throughout the research process. That is, I was immersed in long-term indwelling as part of my research participation. Collecting and analyzing participant data was one aspect of topic engagement. Another aspect entailed participation in the cultural text, that is, a tapping into the cultural call for storytelling. In this expanded hermeneutic circle, my perspective did not seem like merely my own but rather the product of accessing something happening in our human soup—within the context of the western, North American culture to which I am inextricably linked. Concurrently, I saw for the first time many of the same ideas or participatory knowing that I experienced expressed by others in the

popular media, popular culture, and scholarly research. This seemed like a confirmation of my perception that I was tapping into the cultural text, or engaging the claim of the culture, and cocreating the evolution of the topic. Study data, in other words, were not confined to exhibit participant responses but included a range of transpersonal phenomena experienced by the researcher. Without a perspective of the participatory nature of intuitive inquiry, I might not have observed and interpreted the flow experience as a finding, for instance.

### *Intentionality*

Intentionality was the tool I found most helpful for tracking my intuitive process for notation in this study. I set an intention to maintain an awareness of my intuitive processes or participatory knowing throughout the study in order to later record them, after unsuccessful attempts to track my specific intuitive processes as they occurred using Anderson's (2002) concept of a process grid. This simple addition to my research procedure added a layer of awareness often referred to in transpersonal psychology as witness consciousness. Intentionality resulted in my mental notation and later written documentation of my intuitive processes. Intentionality was also a useful tool in promoting the use of participatory experience/knowing throughout the storytelling and research process. I often experienced myself tapping into the transpersonal realm by setting the intention to engage fully with the story and teller and receive information transpersonally. I would recommend the addition of intentionality as a specific skill for the intuitive inquiry researcher, per Anderson's (2002) article on the method.

### *Trusting and Using Intuition*

Trusting and utilizing my intuition, sympathetic resonance, or participatory knowing was an important element of my role as storiographer throughout the storytelling process and intuitive inquiry researcher throughout the investigative process. After setting an intention to receive information transpersonally, I listened with full attention or engagement (embodiment) to what flowed through me instantaneously. My intuition usually came in the form of suddenly appearing thoughts, neither deduced nor pondered beforehand. These thoughts carried with them a degree of certainty, a knowing that I could not prove except to act based on them and see what unfolded. It was in the unfolding that confirmation occurred; a larger insight followed or other events led to the same new information in a mysterious series of coincidences. Often, the intuitive sense of knowing was not first available to me in cognitive form; there was a blurry, internal precognition on the edge of consciousness that eventually shaped into awareness and thought.

Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (1999) defined the process described above as creative thinking and said that “gut feelings and intuitions, an ‘essential feature in productive thought,’ as Einstein put it, occur well before their meaning can be expressed in words or numbers” (p. 5). They also pointed to creative thinking as an essential aspect of many great achievers:

This feeling of knowing without being able to say how one knows is common. The French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal is famous for his aphorism “The heart has its reasons that reason cannot know.” The great nineteenth-century mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss admitted that intuition often led him to ideas he could not immediately prove. “I have had my results for a long time; but I do not yet know how I am to arrive at them.” Claude Bernard, the founder of modern physiology, wrote that everything purposeful in scientific thinking began with feeling.

“Feeling alone,” he wrote, “guides the mind.” . . . The reports of eminent thinkers, creators, and inventors . . . tell us that conventional notions of thinking are at best incomplete, for they leave out nonlogical forms of thinking that can’t be verbalized. (p. 2-3)

In developing the intuitive inquiry research method, Anderson (2000) acknowledged and capitalized upon this process to enrich the investigative process. I experienced participatory knowing throughout the storytelling process and learned the importance of trusting it.

For example, I had internal reservations about using one of the story materials in the exhibition and even sensed the storyteller did not feel strongly about including it. During installation, a friend who collaborated in the installation layout suggested not including the same piece (subtly suggesting her lack of resonance with it). The piece also did not fit well anywhere in the room, which seemed further confirmation. Although I will never know whether my lack of resonance with the piece would have been echoed by exhibit participants because the exhibit only happened without the piece in it, I had other experiences of intuition that were confirmed by exhibit participants. The exhibit paintings were such an example; I was not drawn to them, and in fact only 1 of the 95 participants mentioned resonating with the paintings (and several expressed a lack of resonance with them).

Intuition also aided me in my role as researcher by guiding data analysis. For instance, I was stunned by the high degree of emotional response by participants in both the pilot study and current study exhibitions. I had followed my intuition in the storytelling process and design of both exhibits, which led to a focus on the emotional narrative. Yet, I was cognitively unaware of the notion of an emotional versus factual narrative. I pointedly added more factual information to the design of the current study

exhibit than was in the pilot study exhibit in response to visitor questions and confusion about the storyteller and story during the pilot study exhibit. I knew it was an important addition, yet at the same time I instinctively knew the emotional aspect was the more critical component. It was only after reviewing the data several times that the thought formed about emotional versus factual narrative. The idea first appeared as a flash of insight. Then, information I previously received from the data fit together and made sense in relation to the new idea. Afterward, I was able to look back on my intuitive storytelling and exhibit design process and identify the seeds of the knowing before they were fully available to me.

### *Internal Process of Data Analysis*

As I began data analysis, my understanding of intuitive inquiry increased through an insight about the research process. I realized that rather than reviewing my lenses, studying the data, and comparing the two as external tasks leading to internal understanding, my data analysis would be largely internal and inchoate. As the researcher, long immersed in the topic, I was the receiver of insights. That is, my consciousness was a place where expanded understanding about the topic converged and coalesced. By paying attention to my intuitive process and participatory knowing, I would gain expanded understanding from the data. Through active participation in this process, I learned to utilize my own creative artistry within the framework of scientific rigor. In describing his practice of the craft of acting from the same perspective, Yul Brynner (1953/2001) described utilizing oneself as the instrument of creativity by contrasting it with external artistry:

When you are a pianist you have an outside instrument that you learn to master through finger work and arduous exercises and with it, you as a



creative artist have to perform and express your art. As an actor, you the artist have to perform on the most difficult instrument to master, that is, your own self. (p. xlx)

I came to understand that the intuitive inquiry researcher capitalizes on the blending of a unique, in-depth immersion in and understanding of the topic, in a manner similar to heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), with the ability to see the data with a beginner's mind. An expanded understanding of the topic emerges from an integration of the two.

For instance, I observed the continual exhibit participant practice of closing the exhibit room door and was later able to understand it as related to the new concepts or findings of congruence and emotional narrative. By contrast, the data analysis technique of content analysis—used in some qualitative research methods other than intuitive inquiry—relies on themes revealed by word clusters, a tool not requiring the researcher's intuitive process. Had I relied on content analysis, I believe many of the key study findings would not have emerged.

The internal processes of intuitive research that I utilized per Anderson (2002) and found particularly helpful during data analysis were varying magnification, incubation, and trickstering. Through employing trickstering, for example, I retained patience in allowing clarity of some findings to emerge; I initially experienced some confusion about emotional narrative, but the additional finding of internal and external landscape finally emerged—as distinguishable yet related to emotional narrative.

#### *Impact of Study Participation on Researcher-Storiographer*

Intuitive inquiry (from its roots in feminist research) and Living Stories share the perspective that deeply involving oneself in connection with the story, storyteller, and/or topic of inquiry may catalyze positive change or transformation. In my roles as the

researcher and storiographer, I experienced personal insight and growth as a result of my participation. By voicing one example, I hope to make explicit the link between goal and outcome, although my growth from this process has been more far reaching.

I recall a particular personal insight that began to take shape during my review of exhibit participant data. I was surprised by exhibit participant resonance with the teller's life and death struggle accompanied by their personal directives to embrace life more fully. I sensed the insights voiced by the exhibit participants applied to my life. It was when exhibit participants slowed down and fully immersed themselves in the story exhibit that messages of valuing life seemed to emerge.

I had concurrently been interpreting my own messages about slowing down from the large number of speeding tickets and other traffic violations I received during the last couple of years of the research process. Ironically, I received two of the three speeding tickets while rushing to yoga class in order to have a meditative workout. The life lesson for me stemmed from the fact that although I intellectually embraced the concept of being fully present in each moment as a spiritual practice, I was also exceedingly impatient.

I never saw a link between being present and being impatient until a flash of insight came during a break from my analysis of the data. I realized that my lesson from the story and exhibit participant response to the story was that each time I felt impatient, I was willing the present moment to pass and specifically not wanting to be present during it. To practice being present in each moment was to accept each moment, whether it involved traveling to yoga class or being in yoga class. Although this insight is not novel, it had never before sunk in as an integrated understanding of the spirituality-based concept. Since the insight and deeper understanding occurred, I have been able to slow

down with less impatience and greater acceptance and feel more present in many moments. This subtle change in my understanding and experience feels significant in my personal growth and directly related to my participation in the study.

### *Practical Application of Findings*

When I began research on the topic, refining the Living Stories style of personal storytelling was my motivation. I believed it was a particular format necessary to connect people through storytelling. My focus has shifted substantially throughout the research process. As findings emerged from the data, I began to see key principles and concepts (such as congruence and emotional narrative) as applicable to storytelling in a broader context.

Applying study findings to storytelling in media formats such as television and film could be particularly useful. Not only do these mediums utilize a similar mixed-media format (e.g., visual, voice, music) but they are influential and far reaching in terms of cultural impact. Television, in particular, is going through a large transition to include personal storytelling through reality programming (and other types of programming reviewed in chapter 2). If indeed the shift in television programming has been prompted by the cultural desire for personal storytelling (at least, in part, to re-establish a lost sense of connectedness and community, as suggested in chapter 2), applying the research findings to engage audiences and elicit compassionate connection could positively impact both viewers and the media industry. The television program *Biography*, for instance, could increase the depth and impact of its stories by engaging in compassion-based, creative collaboration with those whose stories are featured (in essence, moving from biographic storytelling to collaborative autobiography).

Study findings could also be effectively applied to the storytelling mediums of film and books. As reviewed in the section Balancing Emotional and Factual Narrative, it is my perception that some films and books are engaging, largely due to plentiful emotional narrative, while others lack an engrossing quality because they lack emotional narrative. Both mediums are text driven, that is, they rely on a written narrative (film script or book text). Therefore, story construction is rooted in literary criticism (i.e., based on plot, theme, and character development, etc.). As noted in the Overview of Story Research in chapter 2, which is also text driven, there is a primary focus on story content that may impede the development of a more encompassing, process-driven approach to storytelling. The process-driven approach of this investigation revealed essential features and components of storytelling that could possibly be applied to film and book development (resulting in a strong emotional narrative, etc.).

The expanded view of storytelling offered by this investigation is applicable to the many increasing uses of story in response to the cultural call for connection. Some people are writing books on how to share stories (Howard Thorsheim & Bruce Roberts, 2002; Richard Stone, 1996) and leading workshops on personal storytelling (e.g., Community Building Storytelling Project; Center for Digital Storytelling), for instance. Those who work with story to build community or for other positive impact have had little or no benefit of research to aid their perspective and methods because little research has been conducted on the process of storytelling (and most research that does exist promotes a constructivist approach and narrative analysis). As a result, current community applications of storytelling are often recall based (such as the books mentioned above) rather than rooted in creative collaboration and emphasize story construction over

storytelling process. In addition, the growing trend of museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the San Jose Museum of Art in California, United States to engage in interactive exhibit design that shares stories or responds to culturally relevant themes could be met with the application of study findings.

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## Appendix A

## Glossary of Terms

*Aesthetic knowing*

The experience of beauty and truth in response to art or artistic qualities

*Audience*

Those who experience the story, once the storyteller and researcher-storiographer have undergone the initial storytelling phase, and may include those who attend a public exhibition of the story, read about the story or related research, or learn about the story from some other source—everyone who accesses the story is perceived to affect its telling, hence becoming a collaborator

*Collaborative storytelling*

The art or act of telling stories about oneself in collaboration with one or more persons, for the purpose of creating a relational context that affects and enhances the storytelling process and impact; the type of storytelling engaged in through Living Stories

*Consensus validity or trustworthiness*

Confirms that people respond similarly to the topic of inquiry (rather than confirming something concrete); intuitive inquiry uses sympathetic resonance to measure consensus validity

*Connected knowing*

The concept of acquiring understanding by establishing a relationship with the object of inquiry

*Embodiment*

*Deep attunement with all aspects of one's self, through which one experiences and/or cocreates aspects of a participatory transpersonal nature, that is, spiritual or transpersonal knowing; a term growing in use within transpersonal psychology and intuitive inquiry*

*Flow*

*The experience of life flowing smoothly, effortlessly, and with ease—the subject of a book by the same name by Csikszentmihalyi (1990)*

*Incubation*

*Purposeful periods of empty space and rest, a retreat from research focus, to allow the topic to shift and integrate into the researcher's awareness in a new and expanded way; utilized in intuitive inquiry and borrowed from heuristic research*

*Indwelling*

“The heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of a quality or theme of human experience,” coined by Moustakas (1990, p. 24)

*Interconnection*

A felt sense of being part of or connected to a larger whole, including other people, communities, and spirit

*Intuition*

“include[s] the more commonplace forms of intuitive insight such as novel thoughts and ideas, together with insights derived from nonrational processes such as dream images, visions, kinesthetic impressions, a felt (or proprioceptive) sense, an inner sense or taste accompanying contemplative practices and prayer, and spontaneous creative expressions in dance, sound, improvisation, writing, and visual art” (Anderson, 2000, pp. 31-32)

*Lenses*

One's perspective on the topic of inquiry, manifested as a short descriptive phrase (accompanied by a brief description) of each element

*Living Stories*

A collaborative and creative way of engaging in meaningful autobiographic storytelling that expresses the teller's story from a place of authenticity, sharing it with others as a means of engaging the human need for connection and thereby creating an opportunity for transformation

*Participatory knowing*

"a multidimensional access to reality that includes not only the intellectual knowing of the mind, but also the emotional and emphatic knowing of the heart, the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings" (Ferrer, 2002, p. 121).

*Particularity*

The transpersonal concept of accessing universality or interbeing through the particular/unique, held in both intuitive inquiry and Living Stories

*Personal storytelling*

The art or act of telling autobiographical stories about oneself

*Resonance panels*

Groups who respond to the data generated by initial research participants; part of intuitive inquiry method, employed as a use of sympathetic resonance to measure consensus validity or trustworthiness



*Ripeness*

A person's calling to share a meaningful personal story at a particular time

*Somatic knowing*

Wisdom of the body, which entails receiving information through physical responses to the world, such as clenching one's jaw, feeling a pit in one's stomach, or experiencing tears of joy

*Storiographer*

The person who initially meets with the storyteller to engage in the storytelling process and later creates the storytelling exhibition or other format for a public audience—the function of the storiographer is an integral part of Living Stories and, in the case of this investigation, is fulfilled by the researcher (referred to as the researcher-storiographer)

*Storytelling Process*

The internal movement of, response to, and cocreation of the storytelling

*Storytime*

(a) A collective field created by the story, storyteller, and storiographer(s)/audience and resulting in an experience of being immersed in and guided by the story, and (b) an open-ended period of time during the storytelling process initiated by ritual and intention-setting and concluded with a ritual when the storytelling feels complete to the teller

*Sympathetic resonance*

Feeling a sense of connectedness through understanding an experience from within

*Text*

*In hermeneutics and intuitive inquiry, an aspect of life that repeatedly claims the attention of the researcher and corresponds with a personal interest*

*Trickstering*

An intuitive inquiry technique of using confusion and paradox as gateways to deeper understanding of the data

*Trustworthiness or consensus validity*

Confirms that people respond similarly to the topic of inquiry (rather than confirming something concrete); intuitive inquiry uses sympathetic resonance to measure trustworthiness

*Varying magnification*

Viewing different levels of detail from small to big picture; an intuitive inquiry technique of data analysis

## Appendix B

## Pilot Study Storyteller Consent Form

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to join me in an exploration of the process and the effects of personal storytelling. As part of my requirement in the Ph.D. program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, I am designing and conducting original research currently entitled, *Living Stories: An Intuitive Inquiry into Form, Process, and Effects of Personal Storytelling*.

You are invited to participate in this study as a storyteller due to your

- ~ inner calling to share a particular story about yourself at this time,
- ~ desire and willingness to participate in a format involving opening your sensory channels as a means of telling that story,
- ~ openness to share your story in a collaborative format and felt sense of comfort and compatibility with me as the storiographer,
- ~ wish to share your story with those who are drawn to experience your story through an interactive public exhibit,
- ~ stance of the importance of making your identity known as an aspect of the storytelling process and purpose,
- ~ ability and commitment to access, express, and be guided by your internal processes and wisdom,
- ~ experience and ability of working through psychospiritual issues that arise in your life through professional support or other means,

~ lack of unresolved, deep issues concerning this story that could necessitate professional psychospiritual assistance or current, regular support from a psychotherapist or other appropriately trained professional (and commitment to maintaining professional support throughout the duration of your participation in this study and as long as needed afterward),

~ interest in this research project and in contributing to the development of this story format as a means of fostering human connection, through your participation.

#### Your Participation in the Research Process

Together, we will tune in and follow the process of your unfolding story.

Therefore, much of what happens will be determined by an in-the-moment awareness and collaboration between us of what feels right for you and is true to your process of sharing your story. We will meet at regularly scheduled times and dates, as we determine. This may take several weeks or longer. This format is subject to change, based on what we sense is needed along the way, and we will determine meeting locations accordingly. Following the story through the senses is an important aspect of this storytelling process. Your story may come through writing, drawing, movement, dreams, or any conceivable channel of expression.

Our first meeting will involve a ritual to mark the beginning of our journey together of following your emerging story. We will discuss how to tune in and follow your story. The storytelling will begin at this time. Photography, video, audio equipment, and/or other means may be used both to track and express your story, at your discretion. In between meeting times will also be storytelling time, an immersion in your story for both of us. This may involve creative expressions such as dancing or sculpting clay or it

could entail noticing dreams, intuitions, emotions, or synchronicities. We will each have a journal and specially designed process grid for tracking our processes daily. This process will continue as we lead our otherwise usual lives. We may share the process that happens between meeting times during subsequent meetings. You are free to call me any time throughout the study whether it is to ask a question or share an insight.

We will discuss how to introduce your story to the public (that is, 100 self-selected people who are drawn to experiencing your story and agree to be research participants), either during the storytelling time, as it arises, or upon completion. Venue and format will be determined in a collaborative manner. Once again, nothing will proceed that feels uncomfortable or undesirable to you. I will secure the site, engage the marketing effort to invite the public, and work on design of the storytelling space, including display of expressions you have agreed to share and areas where the public may respond with their own expressions. You may be as involved in this next phase of sharing your story as you wish. You are free to invite anyone you wish to the public storytelling and may also decide whether to attend any part of the event, which will take place both days of a single weekend. Each person who enters the exhibit will sign a consent form, agreeing to become a research participant. The data collected from these participants will be threefold: 1) expressions they may have created in the areas set aside in the storytelling space, 2) a questionnaire answered upon completion of the exhibit, and 3) an observational video of the story exhibit during the time research participants are in the space.

The week following the public storytelling, we will meet to immerse ourselves in the collected data. This will be a time for us to absorb the materials before us and note

our reactions, as they arise. Processing time may be needed afterward to sit with the materials and the entire experience for it to integrate within each of us and for each of us to achieve greater awareness of how we have been affected. We will continue to track our reactions through daily expressions in our journals and process grids. One last meeting will take place a week later to share effects of the storytelling process, dreams, insights, or any other material that comes forth. There will be a ritual to demarcate the closing of our storytelling time together.

#### Results of Research and Participation

I will review the active audience member data by myself, in addition to our collaborative immersion of the data, to synthesize this information in a meaningful way. I will also reflect on my own process, creative expressions, and process grid, as well as what you have shared about your process as storyteller and will review materials you have collected and/or created. My reflections about the experiences of all participants and myself, and transformation that may have resulted, will be available to you in manuscript form, should you want a copy. Alternately, you may wish to receive a copy of the entire dissertation, which will be made available to you upon completion. During our final meeting, I will check with you to determine your wishes about obtaining a record or the results of this study.

By participating in this study through telling one of your stories and sharing it with others, you open to the possibility of changes this may bring in your life. You may feel liberated, empowered, or deeply satisfied in having your story fully and completely heard by others. There may be a resulting sense of integration of this story as an

acknowledged part of who you are. There is a certain mystery of the unknown to be embarked upon by following the call to tell your story. The rewards may be plentiful. It is also possible that through the process of personal storytelling set forth, you may experience the surfacing of issues related to your story. Some reactions, emotions, or memories that you experience could seem overwhelming. Should this happen, you may require greater support than what is created through our collaboration and scheduled meetings. If that is the case, I will have several referrals available to you for professionals I recommend as particularly suited for you and your needs. We will discuss current support systems you have in place in your life before beginning the storytelling process and how you may make use of them in times of need.

#### What to Expect

Your participation in this study is held with the utmost respect; is entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn from at any time during its conduct, without any repercussions or ill will. From start to finish, the time of your involvement in this project may be approximately two to four months. At no time will you be asked to do or disclose anything you do not wish. All materials associated with the telling of your story, as well as the content of our discussions, will be held in strict confidence during the initial storytelling collaboration, to protect and respect your privacy. Items will be stored in a manner befitting their unique and special purpose, in drawers, closets, and lockers accessed only by me. In following the story process together, any situations arising that could compromise your privacy, such as having a meeting in a public place or having photographs developed at a lab where others would see them, will be held in continual awareness by me and brought to your attention for discussion. Such situations will only

proceed if you are comfortable with the level of privacy possible. I will use discretion at all times to safeguard your privacy and the sacredness of your story.

Only with your permission, materials created or gathered as a means of telling your story may be used in the public storytelling portion of this study and in published materials. Some of these materials may make your identity known. Such materials could include photographs, video, audio, paintings, poetry, and sculpture. Again, discretion will be utilized at all times to protect the sacredness of your story and storytelling process. Upon completion of reflecting upon your story and any associated materials at the conclusion of this study, I will return to you all items you created or provided. In the case of expressions that we may cocreate, such as photographs or video I may shoot of you, we will be co-owners of them. I will not use any such materials outside of the study without your consent, if at all, and you are free to use these materials as/if you wish.

#### Points of Contact

If at any time you have questions or concerns please feel free to call me collect at (858) 483-5201. Also available to contact are my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Rosemarie Anderson, at (650) 493-4430, ext. 18 and the Academic Dean and Chair of the Ethics Committee for Research of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Dr. Robert Schmitt, at (650) 493-4403, ext. 38. Please know that the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology assumes no responsibility for psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

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I have read and understand this consent form. To my satisfaction, I have had all questions about this research and my participation answered. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary. My signature indicates my willingness to participate in this study, as described above, and to have the research results published.

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

---

Sharon Hoffman, Researcher

---

Date

[address]

[address]

[phone number]

sharon@livingstories.com

## Appendix C

## Audience Informed Consent Form

Dear Exhibition Visitor,

Consent Form #:

You are invited to participate in a study exploring personal storytelling.

Your participation will involve:

1. attending an interactive, mixed-media story exhibition at your own pace
2. an option (not required) to express your reactions to the exhibit through one or more of the means available in the exhibit space (drawing, writing, and videotaping a message)
3. completing a questionnaire immediately following time spent in the exhibit space

Your total participation time is approximately 1 hour and will vary, depending on your individual pace. For the protection of your privacy, confidentiality will be assured in the following ways:

- Optional reactions you express/create in the exhibition space do need not to include your name. During the exhibition, reactions will purposely remain in the exhibit space, where they may be seen by other participants to enrich the exhibit experience.
- A code number will be used to identify your questionnaire, and it will be placed in a secure location upon completion. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire.
- In the reporting of information in the dissertation or published material, any information that might identify you will be altered or not included to ensure your anonymity.

As a research participant, you will have the opportunity to experience the story of another person through interactive mixed media. Information revealed in the exhibit is deeply personal about the storyteller. This may be a moving and life-enriching experience.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. Some of the material in the exhibit is graphic in nature, including photographs with partial nudity. You may experience strong emotional reactions as a result. Should uncomfortable emotional issues arise, I will be available to answer questions and discuss resources for resolving your concerns.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me collect at (650) 625-0400 or contact my Dissertation Chairperson/Chairperson of the Ethics Committee for Research of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D., at (650) 493-4430. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology assumes no responsibility for psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

You may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the conduct of the study and for any reason, without penalty or prejudice.

You have the opportunity to receive information from me in the future through mail or e-mail about the findings in this study and/or the continuing progress of the personal storytelling format being researched by checking below:

\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of research findings.

\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to know of continuing progress of the personal storytelling format.

I attest that I am at least 18 years of age, have read and understood this form, and had any questions about the study and my participation answered by the researcher to my satisfaction. My participation is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage participation. My signature indicates my willingness to be a participant in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
signature – participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sharon Hoffman, Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

[phone number]

[address]

[address]

sharon@livingstories.com

Please print your name, address, and email address below (optional), if you indicated that you want to receive research findings or further information about personal storytelling.

This information will not be shared with anyone.

name \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for the valuable contribution you are making by participating in this research project.

## Appendix D

## Audience Questionnaire

Questionnaire #:

Dear Exhibition Visitor,

There are no desired or undesired responses to these questions. Please simply do your best to reflect your exhibit experience in this questionnaire. If you are unsure about the meaning of a question, please answer based on your interpretation of what is being asked. If you need more room to respond, extra paper is available. Note: Questions are on both sides of paper.

1. What is your spontaneous reaction to the story told in the exhibit? Please be specific.

2. Is there anything about the story or exhibit that you identify as evoking a sense of shared humanity or spiritual connectedness? Please explain.
3. Is there anything about the story or exhibit that you identify as sacred or evoking a sense of reverence and respect? Please explain.
4. Is there anything about the story or exhibit that you identify as connecting to an internal sense of truth or authenticity? Please explain.
5. Is there anything about the story or exhibit that you identify as loving or compassionate? Please explain.

6. Did you resonate with or experience a sense of connection with the story or [the storyteller]? Please explain.
7. Is there anything about the story or exhibit that you experienced as altering your sense of self, place, or time? Please explain.
8. During your experience of the story/exhibit, did you perceive anything that felt like an insight, intuition, or similar type of inner response? Please explain.

9. Is there anything about the story format (i.e., an artistic, interactive exhibition) that influenced the impact or power of the story for you? Please explain.

10. Do you think you influenced your experience of the story by your individual pace and way of accessing the exhibit? Please explain.

11. To what extent are you acquainted with [the storyteller] or her story?

Please place this in the box marked *Completed Questionnaires* or hand it to an Exhibit Assistant. Thank you very much for your participation! --Sharon



## Appendix E

## Storyteller Informed Consent Form

Dear Storyteller,

Following your valued participation in two pilot projects, you are invited to participate in a study exploring personal storytelling. Your participation will involve:

1. selecting and/or approving materials from the pilot projects or otherwise to be included in an interactive, mixed-media exhibition of your story to approximately 100 research participants
2. an option (not required) to participate in exhibition planning (including venue and layout) and to attend the event
3. an option (not required) to invite those you wish to participate in the study
4. an option (not required) to express your reactions to the exhibit to the researcher in written and/or verbal form prior to the exhibition opening and to have verbal comments audio recorded

Your total participation time is approximately 5 hours and will vary, depending on the options you exercise. The exhibition will be held during one weekend, September 20-22, 2002, at 150 South Park Street, San Francisco. For the protection of your privacy, confidentiality will be assured in the following ways:

- Storytelling materials related to this study (including those from the pilot projects) that you have created, collected, and recorded have been and will continue to be kept in closed, secure cabinets and closets inaccessible to others.
- Your first name only will be used in the exhibition and related event materials, such as event announcements.

- Photographs of you as the storyteller will only be used in the exhibition and related event materials, such as event announcements, with your prior approval.
- In the reporting of information in the dissertation or published material, any information that might identify you will be altered or not included to ensure your anonymity. Neither your first nor last name nor photographs of you will be included in such materials.

As a research participant, you will have the opportunity to share your story with other research participants through an interactive mixed-media exhibition. This may be life-enhancing. Should you opt to attend the exhibit, you will have the opportunity to view creatively expressed responses to your story by other participants. This may be a moving and rewarding experience.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. Information you reveal through the exhibit is deeply personal, as may be responses you may review (if you opt to) through creative feedback from other participants. You may experience feelings of vulnerability or other emotional responses, as a result. Should uncomfortable emotional issues arise, I will be available to answer questions and discuss resources for resolving your concerns.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me collect at [phone number] or contact my Dissertation Chairperson and Chairperson of the Ethics Committee for Research of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D., at (650) 493-4430. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology assumes no responsibility for psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

You may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the conduct of the study and for any reason, without penalty or prejudice. You may withdraw consent of the use of your first name in the exhibition and related materials at any time prior to its use during the conduct of the study and for any reason, without penalty or prejudice.

You have the opportunity to receive information from me in the future through mail or email about the findings in this study and/or the continuing progress of the personal storytelling format being researched by checking below:

\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of research findings.

\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to know of continuing progress of the personal storytelling format.

I attest that I have read and understood this form and had any questions about the study and my participation answered by the researcher to my satisfaction. My participation is entirely voluntary and no pressure has been applied to encourage participation. My signature indicates my willingness to be a participant in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
signature – participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sharon Hoffman, Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

[phone number]

[address]

[address]

sharon@livingstories.com

Please print your name, address, and email address below (optional), if you indicated above that you want to receive research findings or further information about personal storytelling. This information will not be shared with anyone.

name \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for the valuable contribution you are making by participating in this research project.

## Appendix F

## Audience Recruiting Postcard



Sharon Hoffman

Photography and mixed media

JUST ONE LIFE

An interactive exhibition of [Storyteller's] true story

One Weekend Only: September 20-22, 2002

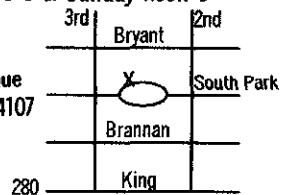
Opening reception Friday Sept 20, 7-9:30pm

Saturday 10-5 & Sunday noon-5

Poetica

150 South Park Avenue

San Francisco, CA 94107



Admission is free and the public is invited. This exhibit is part of a doctoral study on the connecting power of story. Visitors must be 18+ yrs and will be asked to complete a brief survey.

for more info: [phone number] sharon@livingstories.com

## Appendix G

## Media Exhibition Announcement

CONTACT INFORMATION: SHARON HOFFMAN, [phone number]

## MEDIA ALERT

SAN FRANCISCO -- Issue date, 2002 --

Sharon Hoffman, Ph.D. candidate, will hold an interactive exhibition of a woman named [Storyteller's] true story entitled, "Just One Life" on September 21 & 22 in San Francisco, Calif. Featuring black & white photography and mixed media, the show runs Saturday 10am-5pm and Sunday noon-5pm at Poetica, 150 South Park Street. Admission is free and the public is invited. This exhibit is part of a doctoral study on the connecting power of storytelling. Exhibit visitors are encouraged to touch, look, listen, and access the story in their own way -- and to leave feedback in the form of writing, drawing, and video taped messages that are then incorporated directly into the exhibit to become a permanent part of the story. Visitors must be at least 18 years old and will be asked to complete a brief survey. For more info: 650.625.0400 sharon@livingstories.com.

## ABOUT SHARON HOFFMAN:

Sharon Hoffman is a Ph.D. candidate who has undertaken research on personal storytelling, in process with the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto. Her research asks the question, "What makes stories sacred?" In Hoffman's opinion, some stories are profane -- that is, they expose and sensationalize the teller and story -- while other stories are sacred. Sacred stories express the teller's truth about something meaningful. Hoffman's goal in holding the exhibit is to provide a community-enriching

experience and to increase our understanding of the value of personal storytelling through her research on the topic. She developed her interest in the connecting power of story from a lifelong fascination with autobiography, photography, and psychology, combined with her awareness of and sensitivity to divisiveness between people locally and globally. She currently resides in Mountain View, CA.

The space for her current exhibit was generously donated by Poetica, a division of Healing Environments, a Palo Alto-based nonprofit organization with the mission to aid the current movement toward holistic medicine and encourage hospitals, hospices, and individuals to nourish patients, families, and caregivers with healing environments.

#### ABOUT LIVING STORIES:

Sharing real stories has made a comeback in popular culture, from reality television to digital storytelling. Hoffman has embraced this ancient pastime, which she believes has gained renewed interest due to a cultural desire to reconnect in an often-disconnected world, and has shaped it into a storytelling process she calls Living Stories. By sharing meaningful, personal stories in public forums, her storytelling process aims to reconnect us. She believes that when we understand each other, barriers of prejudice and separateness fade...and in the end, we become transformed.