

Coming home:
Spiritual journeyers recovering from addictions

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents three women's stories of their ongoing spiritual journeying as they recover from addictions. They have each moved past active addiction and into a rich and fulfilling spiritual life. Individual in-depth interview format gave each woman an opportunity to openly discuss her unique growth process in a story venue. Common themes which emerged from the women's verbatim transcripts comprise the core of this work.

This story of spiritual journeying out of addiction recovery presents the women's overarching themes of: struggle toward abstinence, turning to faith and mystical experiences, counselling experiences, reminders that encourage and deter spiritual journeying, and their present faith. This work was designed and facilitated to enrich participants' journeying by giving voice to their stories as they know them, and to shed light on how counselors and researchers may facilitate the same in their own work.

The participants indicate that sharing their stories in a safe and loving group format would benefit them in their ongoing spiritual growth. Along with the verbatim interview excerpts, conclusions outline how counselors may enter and participate in the stories of clients who are on similar spiritual paths out of addictions.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Coming home:
Spiritual journeyers recovering from addictions

Only through the pain can we become more of who we are
(Author Unknown).

LIFE
Life without love,
is but a pointless existence,
of happenings,
disappointments,
and meaningless moments.
When love is added,
it brings with it,
happiness,
explanation,
and above all friendship.
(Nickerson, J., 1992)

There is a difference between people who stop misusing substances or acting in a particular addictive manner and those who stop misusing and/or doing AND do the "soul work". My attention has been on those individuals who are recovering addicts on the path of soul-searching and spiritual growth.

The focus of my research is the narratives of people, who tell the stories of what they think brought them to a place of spiritual journeying, and what facilitates their continued search for a new way of being that is particularly theirs and born from knowing who they are.

Research findings in the field of recovering addicts on a spiritual quest has, for the most part been scanty. The term 'dry drunk' is familiar, but there is little in the way

of literature that allows us to step into the stories of those who have faced their hurt and pain, and moved on to a rich and fulfilling spiritual life.

As counsellors, and as people, we are introduced daily to the reality of people who are grappling to find meaning and purpose in their new found freedom from substance or addictive behaviours. How is it that we can participate in the healing for people we see as clients? Stories of their lived experience can soften our hearts and dispel our judgment of others.

Three women tell stories of their own addictive process and their struggle toward moment to moment compassion and honesty with themselves and others in their worlds. My intent was to facilitate the telling of their stories in a way that empowered them to describe the "turning points" in their lives, what, if any, were the connections between addiction and spirituality, and their ongoing process. I hoped that in the telling they more fully appreciate the meaning of their quest, and further realize the strength they possess to learn and grow in the face of adversity.

Background readings gave me a definitional understanding of addiction and spiritual growth. The three women's life stories added a depth and breadth of understanding for me because the women described the meaning

of what it is to live out their reality of addiction recovery and spiritual journeying. Their stories, bring my academic knowledge of addiction and spiritual journeying to life. Their words still resonate in my head and my heart.

Due to the sensitive nature of this inquiry, the stories of all the participants have been read and coded as to their content by them and me. They were encouraged to edit out what they did not want the world to know.

This manuscript is authored by four women: the three participants and myself. In the telling it has been a story of pain, a journey of discovery, and an ongoing process of discernment. These stories could belong to our parents, our siblings, our partners, our children, or our friends. They could be our stories. Addiction touches us all, and if we think back, we can remember moments of peace and contentment that came from being part of something bigger than ourselves.

The issues surrounding spirituality are often esoteric and difficult to put into a language that is understandable, not only to a new reader but to all four authors as well. It can be said that some things born of spirit do not have language to express the essence of what is felt or experienced. Throughout history the language of spirit has eluded many and it is said that some more profound spiritual

experiences are simply experienced, in the midst of a greater and higher power than human form. Words become elusive.

Story is one method to convey some depth and breadth of the profound and life-giving experiences of these participants. The stories can be metaphors that point to moments of grace. It is the reading of these stories that gives us the experience, so we have a small window through which to glimpse the awakenings of these people. While we read, we may experience the presence of the Divine, moving our hearts and warming our souls. No story will stir any of us in quite the same manner, and in quite the same time. We each come with our own backgrounds, carrying our own narratives with us as we read the stories of others. We sit in the midst of our own tale but we can be changed by the stories of others.

Familiar modes of consciousness tend to become comfortable and often result in stultification and stagnation of thought. One of the challenges of stories, as Gunn demonstrates, is to imagine the "other." Habitual modes of perceiving and thinking are often disturbed by encounters with stories in a manner otherwise unlikely to happen. That is my hope. Further, as Crites says, our thinking frequently becomes "unpeopled" to the point that we preclude the possibility of hearing whatever angels would say to us. Stories may reopen our ears. Our cultural history leads us to assume that we have passed beyond the need for stories - an assumption questioned in my chapter. But accepting our need for story, William Doty sees in our present predicament the presence of not only a story but a multiplicity of stories. In this situation, Doty

believes that we have little choice but to devise our own canon of authoritative stories. And Hillman circles round the soul's irrepressible storytelling activities, the demand within us for *poesis*, the imaginative making of stories, or soul making. This leads ineluctably, as he reads psychological stories, to encounters with the gods. Openings or clearings where gods come to play and where angels speak just may contribute to our collectively discovering the power of imaginative words. Such is the promise of stories. (Wiggins, 1975, pp.x-xi)..

The search for identity and purpose touches many of us at some time in our lives. It may be when we are in turmoil or when we experience great joy. We are lived by the stories we tell ourselves. Our stories escort us to who we *think* we are. Our lived experience paints our self portrait.

Our lives unfold according to the stories we tell ourselves, if we pay attention to where we have been, where we think we would like to go, and for the largest part, where we are right now. We are always in this moment. Being in the moment is a very difficult place to be. In our time we are rushing from one place to another, one idea to another, or one expectation to another. One could say that we live much of our lives in the past or in the future.

As you read, your mind may drift to other things you need to do and other places you think about being, and that is okay. Experiencing now is what the stories of these people is all about. They have struggled to be present in their lives and to simply *be*. It has been a unique

experience for me to have journeyed alongside three people who have such stillness of spirit, and joy to be awaiting the mystery of living, in this moment and this one, and this one.

Because of the esoteric nature of spirituality and my longing to honour the stories of each participant, it was imperative that I find a venue through which to gently welcome the telling. I did not want to steer conversation in any way that was not congruent with the teller's intentional direction.

Although I had a guide questionnaire in my mind, I intellectually fought against controlling our conversation with that guide. I attempted to be led by the teller by following her story and listening and responding intently with my mind, body and spirit. Bracketing my own story apart from theirs was at times very difficult. I used my own life experience as a guide to bring me back to a non-judgemental, compassionate, and a respectful stance because unconditional positive regard creates in me a trusting and a dignity that honours my story.

In using a story venue to research spirituality the researcher must have an appreciation for the twists and turns, the unpredictable, and the unexpected places the tellers may take you. The mystery of their stories and yours

unfolds in the telling. The dance between researcher and participant is open and fluid, like a waltz, with the lead shifting back and forth as the music plays on. Both individuals hear the music, know it is a waltz, but neither have heard that particular song before. The mystery of what may come next requires each to have not only a comfort with the unknown, but also a trust that the process, yet to unfold, will be steered by the participant's story.

In the next chapter, I will offer my interpretations of some background readings I have done on the topics of addiction and spirituality.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are two components of literature inquiry in the body of this thesis: addictions and spirituality. Although the two vary in content, they find themselves intimately entwined in the hearts and lives of many individuals. There is a great body of research in each category of inquiry, if one looks at them independently of each other. It is certainly not so however if you combine the terms and search the libraries.

Addiction literature

Addictions have long been the source of heartache and pain for many individuals, their families, and those around them. If a pebble is dropped into a pond, the ripples reach out and even when we cannot see them anymore, they are moving the water beneath and beyond our field of vision. For addicts, the pain runs in all directions, lapping the shores of everyone around them, in some way.

To hide the pain of hurts and fears many of us have taken up habits of usage or ways of being in the world to ease some of our personal pain. One intention for 'using' is self-medication. Alone "self-medication" seems to be in the category of care-taking of self and taking responsibility for one's own wellness. Perhaps initially the same was true.

"To come to that which you do not know,
you have to go a way you do not know;
To come to that which you do not feel,
you have to go a way you can not feel;
To come to that which you do not possess;
you have to go a way you do not possess;
To come to that which you are not,
you have to go via that which you are not."
(St. John of the Cross, Ascent, I, 1, 14.)

Framing the meaning of the aforementioned poem in substance/behaviour misuse, one could say that addicts are on a spiritual quest. The quest for peace and meaning to life is not bound to a particular path. It can be said that life-learning comes from not only the pleasurable experiences that are life-giving, but those that are painful and fraught with uncertainty and isolation as well.

It was not the beautiful or pleasant feelings that gave me new insight but the ones against which I had fought most strongly: feelings that made me experience myself as shabby, petty, mean, helpless, humiliated, demanding, resentful, or confused; and, above all, sad and lonely. It was precisely these experiences, which I had shunned for so long, that I became certain that I now understand something about my life, stemming from the core of my being, something that I could not have learned from any book (Miller, 1981).

We are all on a spiritual quest. The paths we walk to attain meaning and purpose may not always be labeled "good and righteous". It may be that souls can not know the life-giving paths if they have not trodden the soul-numbing trails as well. The experience of trying to find ones' self through substance/behaviour misuse could give a searching soul more information that could lead them out of pain.

Addicts have a wealth of information about their tried and failed attempts to feel a sense of connectedness through their use and misuse of substance/behaviour.

A soulful personality is complicated, multifaceted, and shaped by both the pain and pleasure, success and failure. Life lived soulfully is not without its moments of darkness and periods of foolishness (Moore, 1992).

Somewhere along the line some of us lose the ability to make choices for ourselves by way of the addiction cycle and the ever-increasing heartache the substance/behaviour produces. The more we hurt, the more we use. The increasing speed of the cycle of need and use, creates the shame cycle to spin ever-faster. Soon we find ourselves lost and alone without even the temporary soothing of our drug of choice or behaviour, for we have used beyond the limits of functionality.

The drivenness in any addiction is about the ruptured self, the belief that one is flawed as a person. The content of the addiction, whether it be an ingestive addiction or an activity addiction (like work, buying or gambling) is an attempt at an intimate relationship. The workaholic with his work, or the alcoholic with his booze, are having a love affair. Each one mood alters to avoid the feeling of loneliness and hurt in the underbelly of shame. ...Each addictive acting out creates life-damaging consequences which create more shame. The new shame fuels the cycle of addiction. ...Addicts call this the squirrel cage. ...Shame begets shame. ...This deep internalized shame gives rise to distorted thinking. The distorted thinking can be reduced to the belief that I'll be okay if I drink, eat, have sex, get more money, work harder, etc. The shame turns one into what Kellogg has termed a "human doing", rather than a human being (Bradshaw, 1988).

For many of us, the use of a medicating substance, in whatever form it takes, is an attempt at self-soothing. We may or may not realize the rationale for our actions at the time. Some of us take/use/act when we "Sense that we are getting dangerously close to a feeling" (Aston, 1997).

Stuffing our feelings has been one of the mainstay lessons of our world. If we find ourselves in situations that arouse intense feelings, how is it that we are to stay "composed" and present physically? We can conclude that if our day has been particularly stressful and we have managed to hide the way we are feeling from the world that when we get home we crave for something that will lessen our pain and give us some peace.

For some, the necessity of stuffing feelings and keeping them inside has been lifelong. For them it has always been perceived to be physically unsafe to do otherwise (Aston, 1997). For some who have endured emotional, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of parents, partners and/or care givers, they have never known a time of freedom from heartache and fear. How is it that such individuals cope with their everyday ways of being in the world? Does it seem unlikely that they should embrace the effects of anything that could or would give them a refuge in the storm of such internal pain?

It is often the case that use of substance/behaviour to soothe childhood trauma seems to be the only option. One survivor told us her "sense of spirituality was cut off by the abuse." It's an aspect of her life she has spent a great deal of energy recovering (Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989).

If a child is told that they must never tell of their trauma, and that there is something indelibly wrong with them in the first place, how likely is it that they would have the self-esteem to reach out and find understanding and safety in the hearts of others in their world?

Each felt "wrong" and "not good enough" to merit any caring and affirmation that came her way. Still they have all endured. ... They have had to struggle through the distortions, lies, and secrets to reframe their sense of who they are and find strengths and qualities they could value (Sleeth et al., 1989).

Unable to trust themselves, they couldn't trust others. It was a problem one woman remembered from early childhood. "I remember not feeling part of any group. For example, going to and from school with kids - I wasn't really with them. I never ever felt I was a child, I felt I had a weight on me." (Sleeth et al., 1989).

...Women who have been incestuously abused are more likely than other women to disfigure themselves, to suffer severe substance abuse; to enter into relationships in which they are repeatedly physically or sexually assaulted; to be raped; to experience suicidal tendencies; to make suicidal attempts; to commit suicide. Therapists have reported that in group sessions it is difficult if not impossible to get incest survivors to react aggressively; they "passively continued taking whatever was given" (DeSalvo, 1989).

The externally imposed silencing of abused individuals by their abusers leaves them caught in the net-of-never-tell (Laidlaw, Malmo, and Associates, 1990). It is therefore not surprising that abused individuals try to find solace in substance or activity outside the knowledge of the secrets they are implored to keep. The therapist must always keep in mind that passivity and compliance have been survival strategies for the incest survivor, no matter how high-powered a professional she is outside the therapist's office (Laidlaw, et al., 1990). When they were children, their spirits were battered, suppressed, and silenced and overpowered.

The great malady of the twentieth century, implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is "loss of soul". When soul is neglected, it doesn't just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning (Moore, 1992).

Use of substance/behaviour may be seen as an escape from the knowledge of abuse, often at the hands of someone whom the outside world would perceive as safe and trustworthy. Passivity, compliance, and addiction may have kept abused individuals alive to this point. It is easier to understand their silence when their stories come to light.

[oh], let my soul
soar above the room
let her dance on walls
to songs of violins
leap rooftops
to pages of poetry
praise
 an orange, a house
 a mountain, a breeze
let her transcend all limits
of my small life
(E. Starkman in Laidlaw et al., 1990)

Keeping in mind that we do not know the histories, the stories of those individuals who come to us for counselling, we cannot assume their addiction recovery is solely from physical or psychological dependence. The spirit of each individual has been touched by their narratives, their lives, and the lives of those around them.

We can be deprived of our identity against our will. It is our duty to understand that and how it can happen, and to rescue as many life stories- identities or, if you wish, narratives- as we can out of the ashes (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993).

Spirituality literature

Recently I found an article that describes the results of a study that originated in New York at the New York State Psychiatric Institute, in which spirituality and recovery from substance abuse was discussed. In contacting the first author, I found that indeed my search results have been similar to hers, scanty. Within the abstract of that same article the authors speak of the experience that recovering

persons in a Twelve Step program often undergo life altering transformations as a result of a power higher than themselves; a Higher Power. Within that experience there is often a subsequent spiritual journey that leads these recovering people to sustained abstinence (Green, Thompson Fullilove, & Fullilove, 1998b). Green et al. (1998b) encourage further research into the nature, implications and limitations of a spiritual approach to addictions that may offer new options for treatment.

Personal correspondence with Green has lead her to send me a copy of a life skills curriculum (Connecting and Coping) that she and her colleagues have fashioned that tries to help women do the soul work (Green, L. L., Thompson Fullilove, M., Fullilove, R. E., 1998a). Green states that the curriculum was developed after many failed attempts to teach women in recovery coping skills (Personal correspondence: Green, 1998c). The curriculum can be helpful for both men and women to start the process of evolving. Green states that she and her colleagues were amazed by the results of the "emotional sessions" and how the participants were relieved to discover or rediscover aspects of themselves that had been buried beneath the trauma and madness of their addictions (Personal correspondence: Green, 1998c).

There are many who struggle with their addictions both inside and outside helping facilities. Despite people's personal history, addiction seemingly has no bounds; and is no respecter of persons. Across Canada, around the world, the pain of old hurts birth and continue the addiction cycle.

It has been said that those individuals who develop addictions are also those who feel and sense their world more deeply and more profoundly than the rest of us (Twerski, 1998). How is it then that they survive the moment to moment exercise of hiding their feelings and pretending to the rest of the world that they are OK? It hurts so much to feel and then to be chastised for being so "out of control" that soon using something to keep from feeling seems to be the only option.

Once we stop feeling, we lose the touch stone of our soul and spirit (Altea, 1997). We loose the inner guidance signals inherent in all of us. Once we stop feeling and sensing, we can no longer get in touch with our intuition, and hence loose ourselves (Moore, 1992).

If we felt alone and afraid since childhood because of the secrets we were forced to carry, and we have grown to learn that we are to ignore our feelings and listen to our "logical brain", we get farther and farther from who we

truly are. It is my "knowing" that tells me that we are individually experts in who we are and what it is we need to be well and happy. We, each one of us, carry the inner knowledge of self fulfillment, within our souls. We are each the experts in our own lives.

To find our truth deep within us, is the journey of spirit. It is the journey toward the light of knowing self and listening to the voice of intuition (Northrup, 1998). For some of us, addiction has kept us alive to this point. The substance or action has taken on the job of distracting us from our pain, a pain too intense to bear alone. We perceive that we are alone for indeed we are.

If the sense and feeling of connectedness comes from knowing self through a journey of the spirit, and we have been in too much pain to take this journey, then indeed we are alone in ourselves, alone with just our head to keep us company. The notions of intellect are particularly solitary in nature. There is little our brain can do in the way of soul work. We can not intellectualize the feeling sense of "being". That experience is one of the spirit world. The work of getting to know self requires relinquishing "staying in your head". We must travel to our hearts for our own truth; we must find a safe place to let ourselves feel again; feel who it is we are, if in fact we ever thought we

knew in the first place.

When treatment is steeped in solely a physically (addiction) or mentally (underlying psychopathology) based explanation of alcoholism, clients may well reject and find such approaches of little use (Chapman, 1988 in Chapman, 1996).

Chapman (1998) suggests that the aforementioned model of treatment represents the logical, pragmatic, "temporal" approach that although necessary, it is not sufficient to ensure a lasting recovery.

It is by considering spiritual issues, issues related to "connectedness", a sense of purpose of being, and relationship with others, that like the third leg on a stool that provides stability, a platform is created that enables the person with alcoholism to reach recovery (Chapman, 1996).

Brown, Peterson, and Cunningham (1988 in Chapman, 1996) explained spirituality as it is used in AA to be a three-tiered concept comprised of affinity with other, self, and a higher power. Specifically, "basic to these three dimensions is a sense of connection with self and other-than-self, and behaviors that re-enforce this felt connection" (Brown et al., 1988 in Chapman, 1996).

Dyer (1995 in Chapman, 1996) describes spirituality as "an inward journey of enlightenment...expanding the godlike qualities of love, forgiveness, kindness, and bliss with ourselves." Dyer explains this journey as "free of dogma and rules" (Chapman, 1996).

It is the awareness of a higher power and the perception of spirituality as a journey intended to access or "commune" with that other-than-self that presents the traditionally trained counsellor educator or psychologist with the greatest difficulty in considering spiritual issues in counselling (Chapman, 1996).

Counsellors who accept a spiritual dimension to addiction treatment see addiction as more than a physical addiction and acknowledge its etiology as involving a three-fold process involving not only body and mind, but spirit as well (Chapman, 1996).

Spirituality, then, is an aspect of addiction recovery that involves more than a consideration of religious principles. It encompasses the belief that human beings are but a part of a much larger reality, and as so, are charged with a participatory rather than dominating role in that existence. Religion may be an important part of one's spiritual life, but it is at best one dimension of a seemingly far more complex aspect of the human condition (Chapman, 1996).

To consider the client's spiritual notions or worldview in concert with the more traditional foci of physical and mental aspects of addiction, permits the counsellor to more completely prepare the client for the difficulties of early recovery, such as coping without substance and, perhaps more importantly, reinvolvement in establishing meaningful and trusting relationships (Chapman, 1996). A resource of incalculable value is the support of understanding human companionship (Harkness, 1945).

Chapman (1996) suggests that perhaps it is not so much

our place as counsellors to identify the way to sobriety for our clients with addictions as it is to acknowledge them in their recognition of sobriety as the way and spirituality one of the important road signs.

All of us carry the baggage of broken hearts and deep-seated fears, but only some of us acknowledge that we are more alike than different (Taylor, 1998). "When you see how similar we all are, you begin to see the innocence in all of us" (Carlson, 1997, p.68). It is the acknowledgement that we are all souls and fear the journey to self. At the same time, it is the moment to moment remembering that we are similar, that keeps us "innocent" and able to see the world and others through "soft eyes". Perhaps this way of being in the world allows others to feel safe enough to be who they are, feel their feelings and make a first step toward the process of journeying into self.

I suggested earlier that spirituality is the essence of human existence. We are not material beings on a spiritual journey; we are spiritual beings who need an earthly journey to become fully spiritual (Bradshaw, 1988).

It would seem like a redundant question to ask, "Who am I?", . . . or is it? There are many reasons for avoiding the "inner" questions. Fear of many things has been the rationale for staying separate from self (Willick, 1998). Many fear that they are not ready to give up what they have

now. They fear the uncertainty of accepting the notion that they are not in control of their destiny. Societal pressures are great pushing us to achieve material goods to prove that we have led a worthwhile life.

It is sometimes difficult to find others to talk to about one's inner questions. Philosophy of life questions about one's thoughts and feelings may seem boring and unimportant to others. Conversations concerning spiritual content are often met with judgement and discomfort by others. If there is no one to talk to about meaning of life questions, without judgement, how can one release the questions of their heart?

In and through community lies the salvation of the world. Nothing is more important. Yet it is virtually impossible to describe community meaningful to someone who has never experienced it - and most of us have never had an experience of true community. The problem is analogous to an attempt to describe the taste of artichokes to someone who has never eaten one (Peck, S. M., 1987, p.17).

To be respectful of the depth and breadth of each participant's life story I had to choose a method of inquiry and way of being with the women that honoured the intensely personal and intimate nature of the work. In the next

chapter, I will describe the intentions of our conversational dance and the strength of the narrative waltz in researching these women's lived experience through story.

CHAPTER THREE
METHOD: WHY STORY?

I have chosen to study how it is that particular people with addictions choose to make a spiritual journey, from an in-depth interview format and story has been the arena. To ask a question that relates to a "way of being in the world" requires an openness of inquiry that narrative affords. To tell one's story of spiritual growth and the reasons for such a shift in perspective demands the researcher approach be nonjudgmental and supportive.

The counselor as practitioner and as inquirer holds humanistic and holistic values: that is, the client (or informant) as a whole is valued (LaCrosse, 1986; Merriam, 1988 as cited in May, 1996). Counselors in either role are interested in understanding the significance of meanings held by individuals and groups in regard to their actions (Howard, 1986 as cited in May, 1996).

I attempted to present the introduction of my thoughts on each spiritual matter in a way that did not lead the participant into some suggestion from me. That was a difficult task. I strived to bracket my own thoughts, feelings, and opinions on each matter from each discussion.

The lack of directive interference in narrative in-depth interviewing affords the teller to speak from their individual context, about their life in a way

that makes sense to them, without being steered by me.

Manicas and Secord (1983) indicated that an understanding of the informant's unique historical and biographical profile, a goal of certain types of qualitative research, is a rigorous form of knowing as well as potentially the most helpful to the practicing researcher. This is because the best vantage point for understanding another person is from that person's internal frame of reference. An understanding of the reality that exists subjectively for each client is a therapeutic necessity. Practitioners must understand their client's uniqueness if they are to design interventions that will be useful to and accepted by the clients themselves (May, 1996).

Although there needed to be clear introduction of my particular interest in asking about the topic, I attempted to not condone nor judge the narrative for its worth.

I realized that no matter how carefully I interacted with others in the context of the study, there was no way to keep who I am out of the interactions we had. I attempted to be as authentically myself as I could to encourage others to do the same. By respecting myself and Other, I encouraged self-respect in Other.

By doing multiple in-depth interviews, I hoped to develop a bond between the interviewee and myself. ... (Reinharz, 1992, p.36).

It is that bond which allowed trust to grow and the multiple meetings opened a window for original thought to be rethought and clarified after transcribing had taken place (Reinharz, 1992, p.36).

By asking someone to explain an intimate and life-changing crossroad required extreme sensitivity to personhood and respect for the courage involved in that

journey. In asking for their personal thoughts and feelings on their life, I approached them with dignity, making it clear that I believe that they are the experts in their own lives, thoughts and feelings. I believed what they told me.

There were many times when I was touched deeply by the openness and candor with which the women spoke. I bracketed my own lived experiences of addiction's pain and rejoiced in their freedom, all the time attempting to place my life story not at the forefront of my awareness. Flashes of my own life passed before my mind's eye as I stepped into their stories. At times I walked beside them, so closely that my body remembered the angst. Through the journey of their stories I was reawakened to the wonder and magic of recovery within the context of narrative and community.

There is great safety in having someone respect you for the knowledge that you possess and for many of us, this may be a very new experience; one that is empowering and nurtures the soul in and of itself.

So I took the knowledge that we all have our own answers with me when I approached the participants I interviewed for this study. For so many their world has not been one of supportive and loving respect. Within the loose guidelines of a specified interview length, I encouraged participants to tell their stories as they were comfortable

with the unfolding.

Tolerance of ambiguity is one of the characteristics needed by the counselor as a practitioner or as a naturalistic researcher. In both types of activity, there are usually no a priori procedures or protocols one can follow. This lack of structure requires the researcher and practitioner to adapt to unforeseen opportunities and events and "to change direction in pursuit of meaning" (Merriam, 1988 as cited in May, 1996). In the same vein, Corey (1991) indicated that effective counselors must be willing and able to tolerate ambiguity: "Because growth depends on leaving the familiar and entering unknown territory, people who are committed to personal development are willing to accept some degree of ambiguity in their lives" (as cited in May, 1996).

I was not looking for trends or similarities between participants' stories as they were telling them. In this way I had no preconceived notions of what it was they are *supposed* to say, for I did not know their stories and was honoured to have the privilege to be present on another leg of their journey. Without a predetermined agenda, in-depth interviews allow the teller and the listener to *be* who they are *in the moment*.

I am surely aware of the power differential between researcher and client. I related my feelings regarding this to each participant and reiterated that, indeed I may have background of an academic nature that is different to them, but that they have lived their life and know and will always know the whole story. In that way I hoped to convey to them the nature of my inquiry and that it was not merely to

complete an assignment but to grow and learn from their knowledge, and use their wisdom to render myself a better listener, a better journeyer, and to add further richness and depth to researching spiritual journeying of recovering addicts.

The processes of both counselling and qualitative research involves an engagement and conversation between two persons, the client and the practitioner or the informant and the researcher. ...Counselors and researchers alike engage in activity that delves deeply into the world as perceived and experienced by clients and informants. Moreover, the practitioner and the researcher are both willing to remain open to their own growth. Finally the success of either activity is affected by the values, skills, and characteristics of the practitioner or the researcher (May, 1996).

My method of inquiry was multiple in-depth interview style. Those individuals who participated in the journey were introspective, passionate spiritual journeyers, who clearly articulated their past and present understanding of living their own spiritual lives. Participants who were fully informed about the study parameters, who had dealt safely with their hurt and unrest from their past form the body of persons to whom I focused.

The number of participants was decided by those individuals who found me, and wanted to tell their stories. Once I decided upon my research topic and method of inquiry, I engaged myself in many conversations with friends, colleagues, professors, and interested persons in coffee

shops, libraries, and wherever my life took me. The message of my inquiry was sent out to those around me by way of others passing on my conversations with them.

Soon I was approached by passionate spiritual journeyers who were asking to be part of this project. At times I worried about whether I should have been more directive in my approach to finding the individuals who would participate. I repeatedly released my angst around trying to control the process of participants finding me. Over and over again my self-talk was "The people who are passionate and eager to tell their stories will come when they are ready. I am not in control of this process." So when they did come I sat with the quandary of my own story of anticipatory readiness as a researcher.

In the moments after our initial meetings I experienced my own fears of ambiguity and the depth and breadth of this project. I came from an academic background of quantitative inquiry methods and yet knew in my heart that the information I now sought required a different approach, one that defied a priori procedures.

Conventional, nonqualitative approaches are merely one way of knowing. Naturalistic inquiry expands the universe of knowing and enables counselors to capitalize on existing skills. Counselling and inquiry can only benefit from this endeavour (May, 1996).

Discerning my own thoughts and feelings around the ambiguity of qualitative research inquiry lead me to the conclusion that I was developing a sense of comfort within the tension. With all this in mind, I appreciated how the participants might have been feeling about their own uncertainties as they embarked on the journey of this project.

The first meeting was a time for the participants to hear first hand about the specifics of the inquiry from me, ask any questions they felt they would like to, and learn a little about me. Once the participant felt comfortable in understanding the nature of the study and had signed the informed consent form, I again reiterated that there was no expectation for her to continue with any parts of the interview if she did not wish to and there would be no hard feelings or expectations from me to do so.

Times and meeting places were organized according to the needs and conveniences of those involved. Journeymen were asked to journal their thoughts and discernments about the initial meeting within the next week, all entries relating to their reflections on personal spirituality. They were encouraged to edit their words as they saw fit, bearing in mind entries may become text within the body of the final thesis. Further journal entries by each journeyer were

requested to follow a week after each meeting with me. If journeyers wished to keep their journals after the thesis had been submitted to Graduate Studies, they were returned with Thanks.

After our initial time together, subsequent meetings encompassed the bulk of the body of the journeyer's narrative. Some areas discussed appear in the following section called 'Questionnaire guide for thesis participants'. A copy of the individual transcribed interview was hand delivered to each journeyer after each meeting, leaving ample time for her to read it and make any corrections or edits she wished to make.

Within all the conversations with participants, inquiry centered on what they have personally experienced in their spiritual journeying. That personal experience included how they came to choose the direction they did, what facilitated their voyage then and now. Inquiry sought to ascertain how the lived experience was/is for the journeyer. There was no way for me to keep myself out of the inquiry, and before interviewing anyone, I struggled with the order of the questions.

I realized that there was no 'order' and that I was not in control. "Prepare to lose your way, prepare to be unprepared, and enjoy it (Lamb in Ely, Anzul, Friedman,

Garner, & Steinmetz, 1997).

I had prepared a concrete set of inquiries. What I was not prepared for was the way in which the interviews would live themselves out. And for that I was grateful that I was comfortable with that notion; in fact the mystery was part of the journey and all I attended to at the time, was my own awareness of the possible pitfalls of any qualitative research project.

The final meeting served as a debrief session and a time for the journeyer to clarify any editing she wished to make to the transcribed version of any of the interviews.

The following introduction was read to each participant before any in-depth narrative began.

Many individuals struggle with addictions. Some people work on addiction recovery, while others also add a component of spiritual growth to that change. You are one of the people who have chosen to take on a new way of "being" in the world, while recovering from addiction. This study looks at questions such as "Who am I?" , "What is my purpose?", "Where am I going?" as people see themselves and their place in the world changing as they grow spiritually, to be more of who they really are.

Refer to APPENDIX A for QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE FOR THESIS PARTICIPANTS.

Session by Session outline

Efforts were made to schedule interview sessions with each participant 7-10 days apart, allowing time for participant reflection yet ample recall of the previous session. At the beginning of each session after the initial one, the participants were invited to revisit anything they had said from the last meeting, add to, or take back something that they had reconsidered or simply decided not to give permission to transcribe.

Session#1

Introduction (confidentiality, sensitive topic respect, expectations of participant & myself), questions from participant, informed consent, looking at YOUR process so that I might understand it from your view. Explanations to participant that sensitive and possibly unresolved issues might be unearthed for them through their work on this project. I encouraged participants to seek competent counselling if they requested it.

Subsequent sessions

Subsequent interview sessions included participants' definitions of addiction and spirituality, and a participant's life stories regarding their addiction history and their ongoing spiritual growth. The number of subsequent interviews varied between participants. The discernments on

how many subsequent sessions were "enough" rested with journeyer and myself. We agreed that there may always be more to talk about when it comes to spirituality because of the nature of the ongoing growth process.

Each journeyer found her own way to be comfortable with where she left her story for the purposes of the project. As in a waltz, the yearning to continue the lilt and sway of the dance can be difficult to halt. Perhaps we do not dance often enough, and when we do, we are reluctant to stop.

Discussion around continued spiritual conversations were instigated by all three women. They all expressed an interest in finding a forum in which to speak as candidly about their own ongoing journey and exchange thoughts and feelings with others on similar paths. They spoke about wanting to be part of a community of passionate spiritual journeyers, who would unconditionally accept them for who they really are, and not who they are *supposed* to be.

As the constant journeyer in each session, I was torn by the womens' unanimous request to be part of a group of like interests and paths. I was the one who had heard all the stories and was ever aware that confidentiality was essential, but confidentiality to what? In discussions with my supervisor about the struggle I encountered, it was discerned that, for the depth and breadth of the thesis

project, I might forgo bringing the three women together within the present work, even if I had broached the subject directly with each journeyer.

The initial intention of the thesis was not to research spiritual journeying of a group of recovering addicts. It was out of the process that each participant's desires were born. I still sit with the question of how the spiritual journey of each participant may have been different had we come together as a group, not to mention how the body of this work may have been changed by the group process.

Did I honour the participants' stories by deciding not to act on their yearnings? Is there a *right way* to honour such a request? Is it the researcher's prerogative to unilaterally decide or should the researcher involve each participant in the discernment process? Each researcher, was she or he to duplicate this project, may be faced with such questions.

Through the subsequent sessions we talked about what hindered them from beginning their spiritual journey? Request was made for examples of turning points/ significant events and/or people, who/what allowed them to begin their spiritual journey? I asked if they recalled people, places, books, and/or events that stood out in their mind as important to their becoming more of who they are, letting

them know that it was OK to be who they are. In looking at the story of their ongoing journey, we talked about what/who hinders them now, and what/who encourages their spiritual growth now.

Discussion of transcribed interviews with all suggestions of change from participant were gratefully accepted. Participants were requested to code their own transcripts according to what they perceived as themes discussed, and return them for thesis writing purposes. A copy of the final revised transcription was offered to participant, for their last revision opportunity. Once the transcriptions were set into the body of the manuscript, the participants were offered a copy. Thanks were extended to the three journeyers for their openness, their honesty and their courage. Their stories are powerful and meeting each of them has been a gift to research and to me.

Participant selection criteria

1) Participants understood that sensitive and possibly unresolved issues might be unearthed for them through their work on this project. I encouraged access to competent counselling but no participant requested it.

2) Participants had documented addiction history with subsequent recovery in process.

3) Participants had ongoing and well-founded spirituality, which they acknowledged was matured well past "initial epiphany".

4) Participants were introspective and articulate.

5) Participants' age, gender, and sexual orientation non-specific.

I left the decision of appropriate participants to the universe, knowing that in time, they would find their way to me, and to the journey of the thesis. I trusted in the process of my own spirituality and my own belief system that whatever happened would be as it should be. There is a trust in the process that is difficult to describe because I simply let it be. There is nothing more I can say to describe it.

It is time to get to the narratives which are the core of the thesis. Before you read the stories of these people, it is important to contextually define key terms, about

which we will speak: addiction, spiritual journeying and how the two may be combined.

CHAPTER FOUR
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Addiction

Individuals who have problems with excessive behaviours such as eating, drinking, drug use, gambling, smoking, and sexuality present similar descriptions of the phenomenology of their disorders (Cummings, Gordon, Marlatt, 1980; Orford, 1985; Stall & Biernacki, 1986; Wallace, 1977; in Donovan & Marlatt, 1988).

Within the aforementioned framework, an addiction is seen as a complex, progressive behaviour pattern having biological, psychological, sociological, and behavioral components. What sets this behaviour pattern apart from others is the individual's overwhelmingly pathological involvement in or attachment to it, subjective compulsion to continue it, and reduced ability to exert personal control over it (Donovan & Marlatt, 1988).

I would like to add that there is a significant spiritual component to addiction, which is markedly absent from the previously cited definitions.

Spiritual journeying

"... those people who long for a transformative or complete understanding of themselves and of their place in the world must somehow find a teacher or set of teachings to help them along. That guide may be a person, an idea, or a set of values; whatever it is, it establishes the orientation and outlines the procedures the seekers should follow in order to make real the transformation for which they hope. The perfection such a person seeks may take a number of forms, each reflecting the fundamental world view presented by a pertinent religious system. It may be the fulfillment of being or the return to nonbeing; it may be the personal or impersonal; it may be the enjoyment of the good life or the release of the good death. Whatever the goal, spiritual disciplines claim to offer their adherents the means by which the religious ideal may be reached..." (Eliade, 1987; p.19).

Having said all that, it is also relevant to note that to

many the word 'religion' does not mean that these individuals belong to any particular sect or theological group structure.

Harris (1990) defines spiritual questions as those dealing with who we are, why we are here, and what is required of us. Pate and Bondi (1992) conceived of spirituality as having to do with issues defining our place in the universe. Chandler, Miner-Holden, and Kolander (1992) viewed spirituality as having to do that which we hold sacred, that which constitutes our ultimate context in understanding things (as cited in Parker, Horton, & Watson, 1997). If the *why* question is to be answered, the discovery of spiritual meaning, or metameaning, is the foundational psychospiritual task on which the therapeutic work of assimilation must be grounded (Parker, Horton, & Watson, 1997).

Combining definitions

Since many recovering addicts have had first-hand experience with recovery work through Twelve Step programs, it is appropriate to define some language of spiritual recovery from that context. In Twelve Step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, steps two and three speak of a 'Higher Power' and 'God as we understand Him'. Step two:

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity". Step three: "Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him."
(Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1975).

Within the framework of 'God as we understand him' and 'Higher Power'/'The Divine' lies a great deal of definitional diversity. Concrete examples of Higher Power for a recovering addict may be anything from the Alcoholic Anonymous group to which she or he belongs, to the car in which they had their last drive. The notion of Higher Power/The Divine may initially be something of concrete and material nature. The idea grasped is that they are not in control, and that there are many forces outside themselves, whatever they may be, that are stronger and more powerful than they are. For an addict to gain insight into the possibility that they are not in control, is a hurdle not easily accomplished.

Spiritual journeying can take many forms but paramount to most of them is the notion that it is a personal internal search for meaning of existence, that requires one to experience feelings and issues that relate to "matters of the heart".

The search for knowledge of truth has been a human quest since the beginning of time. We want to know how the earth began, what the meaning of life involves, and if there is a purpose to this existence (Prentice, 1997).

For many, intellectual understanding of Higher Power comes first, before a deeper "knowing" takes place. Thomas Kuhn suggests that psychology makes intellectual sense of life while spirituality lifts a person above it (Robinson, 1986). Notions around levels of awareness could render some clarification as to how it is that some acknowledge the presence of a higher Power, while others are at the stage of having a 'feeling sense' of a "Presence of an Absence".

Presence of an Absence can be described as an internal emptiness, a longing to find meaning and purpose in life, and having no means by which to access either for any sustained length of time. Could it be that prior to an experience of spiritual awakening or epiphany of any magnitude, some souls have nothing by which to compare other people's experience. Perhaps it is because they do not have a personal memory of a 'feeling sense' of the presence of a Higher Power/The Divine in their midst. Epiphanies rising out of the felt sense of a Higher Power can allow us to feel we are part of a much larger picture, which some call the Collective. The felt sense of the Presence of an Absence may be the result of one's lack of experience with epiphany, the

Collective, God, the Divine, or any manner of terms one might put to the experience.

The Presence of an Absence can be likened to an intense internal yearning for something, creating what many call a "Black hole". The yearning creates feelings of emptiness and aloneness that are different than sad feelings or those of loneliness. The yearning I speak of is one that cries out for something to fill a deep pit within, that is present, even in the company of others.

Addiction may be seen as the end-stage of reaching outside ones self to grasp comfort from the pain within. As obscure as it sounds, the image and description of "Black hole" seems to be easily understood by many who have experienced ontological insecurity, a sense that life has no definite meaning or purpose and that the person does not feel they fit into any particular slot in 'the big scheme of things.'

It was Tillich, quoting Kierkegaard, who wrote of the confusion humanity has with the notion of 'God'. The meaning of 'God' lies not in the idea that 'God' is some supreme being 'out there in the heavens', that we can turn toward and therefore away from the world, to find purpose and meaning to our existence. 'God' is a depth of reality reached by a "... deeper immersion in existence...."

(Kierkegaard in Robinson, 1963, p. 47).

For the word 'God' denotes the ultimate depth of our being, the creative ground and meaning of all existence (Robinson, 1963, p.47). 'God' is within each of us; 'God' is quite literally, love.

Love for self and world, allows a knowing that one is not alone. An empathy and 'soft-eyed' view of the world and self, emerges when one renews the acceptance of love being the source of one's being. 'I am loved' because 'I am.' The non-judgement of such a notion frees one to 'be' and 'allows others to be'.

Perhaps the struggle to change self and others, creates the pull away from 'being', hence leading one back to a place of 'I'm not OK, and you're not OK'. Lack of self-acceptance and self-love may be overarching the addictive process.

The question of ontological insecurity (I'm not OK because I do not know who I am, therefore you must be 'not OK too'), may be at the root of humanity's external verification for being. Swimming in a sea of uncertainty, struggling for something outside ourselves to save us from our pain of 'aloneness', invites more internal struggle.

Keeping in mind that many who yearn for a sense of purpose and fulfillment in life, feel the need to somehow

soothe the pain of their "non-knowing self". The hope is find some transient solace in a substance or activity that takes them out of their misery if only for a short time.

Use of substance and/or behaviour which distracts them from their pain is only a temporary fix for the pain from within. Soon addiction to substance and/or behaviour leads them to yet again be in a position of needing "self-soothing" when the drug/behaviour of choice no longer works for them.

For some an initial epiphany; feeling the presence of a 'Higher Power'/'The Divine', leads them to search for more of the same. The epiphany serves as an "enlightenment moment" when they feel they are not alone and that hope is sensed perhaps for the first time. Spiritual journeying can be seen as the learning process to extending/replicating the feeling of connectedness that came with the initial epiphany.

CHAPTER FIVE
PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Three women told their spiritual journey stories out of ongoing struggles with addictions. Initially the verbatim text was presented in script style which was awkward and tedious to read. Introducing each speaker in turn did not present the stories with a flow that allowed the reader to be in the room with us readily. Identifying each speaker over and over created a distraction.

To ease the reader's eye, and encourage identification of the speaker, I differentiated the women's words from mine by using a font change. Their words are seen in Times New Roman script and mine in italics of the same font. The other sections of the thesis are printed in Courier New. The font chosen for the women's words is crisp and clear reflecting their articulate diction.

Through hearing the life narratives of three women with addictions who are on their own spiritual journey, I have gained a sense of what conditions propelled them to do the work. Through understanding what they perceived to be the facilitating factors to their spiritual journeying process, some themes emerged for them and for me.

The personal narrative chapter reflects the common themes that emerged across their three life stories. As in any story, there is a beginning, a middle, and an ending.

After transcribing all the interviews, I went back and line-by-line coded each woman's words according to specifically what they were talking about. Grouping common codes within each woman's story, shed light on the overarching themes they shared.

It was then up to me to decide whether to combine the three women's accounts into one story according to the themes that emerged or tell each woman's story separately. Would I be honouring each story by combining them? Many long walks searching for an answer, brought me to a decision. My discernment was that it was not how I aesthetically placed their words on the pages of this document, but the grace with which I did that.

I decided to go with the process and allow the themes to speak for themselves, because, after all, they are not my words but theirs. The common themes are broad and reflect the important features each woman chose to share with me. The aforementioned themes are reflected in the titles of the six sections of the personal narrative chapter.

In the beginning of each spiritual life story, the women spoke of their struggle towards abstinence, and their uniquely-defined subsequent turning to faith. One woman chose to share examples of her mystical experiences. Their personal experiences of being in therapy dot their growth

story, and are embedded within the middle of their spiritual growth stories. As their stories moved past initial epiphanies, they discussed hindrances and encouragements along the path of spiritual growth. Each woman described the lilt and sway of her present life dance as she gave us a picture of her present faith. .

In an effort to protect identities, the three women were asked to chose alternate names for themselves. They are known to us now as Marie, S., and Jane Doe. They each grapple with life questions like: who am I, what is my purpose, how do I fit into the world, and where do I belong? Marie, S., and Jane Doe escort us along paths on their journey that they trust will "lead them home".

STRUGGLE TOWARD ABSTINENCE**Marie's struggle toward abstinence**

...I ah.. well, If I start from the beginning, I was sort-of, well , you know, I was in a fairly bad place, I was in high school, just drinking a lot, and ah... had no control over the drinking, and it led to a lot of shame and a lot of guilt, and...I quit drinking first and then I was still acting in ways I felt ashamed of, and I couldn't stand the shame and I discovered, ...ah Christians who...talked a lot about their faith and it was, just really appealing to me, it was , ah... it was a way out, it was hope that I could change.

a way out of...

a way out of .. the shame, a way out of ah... the behaviours that I was ah... ashamed of, which were all related to my sexuality, and I ah... so I ... it's like I wanted to, ah...so I, ... which was all related to my Mum's sexuality...

OK, so we're going back a ways here?

Yeah, it's like, like I don't know where to start, ah...laughing

Well, start from the beginning

Yeah...ah...

Can you describe shame to me from your personal perspective? the feelings?

just the feeling of, I hate myself, like I hate myself...

Would that mean that you know who you are?

No, at that point, I didn't know who I was, No, No, I ah... I just knew I wanted to be a good person. The concern wasn't who am I. It was how can I be good. How can I live a good life? How can I be someone people love and they praise? I wanted praise. I wanted love, and I wanted ah... recognition. ah...I wanted to go places, be somebody...

and that all hinged on doing the right thing?

Yeah, ah... ...

acting in the right way to gain those external , I'm seeing you doing things to ...

That's all true, that's all true, but ah... .. I mean I always had an inner voice too, I mean I always had a seeking, wanting , wanting, I wanted at the time, perfection to me at that time meant being good at everything, like not being the best at anything, but being what I thought , at that time was balance. I thought that was what balance was, being good at everything, ah.. then you can get approval and praise from all sectors of the world.(laughing)

and that was your main aim, to find a balance where the world considered you good enough?

I think so, ah... it's hard to go back, and say what was, I really, I think that something that happens when we're on our journey, (laughing), is I tend to look back at myself then and I tend to be quite judgmental as to who I was at that time? But, ah... I think I was hurting and I think I was lonely, and I wanted love and I wanted approval and I wanted recognition. And the way to get that I understood was being a good person, and being a good person meant being a bit of a chameleon. Being good at different things with different people...

very adaptable

Very adaptable. I had 5 parents because I was adopted when I was 5, and knew my natural parents. My natural Dad was wealthy and distant. My natural Mum was extraordinarily poor and ah.. many addictions . And my parents that raised me were middle class, working, so I had, and they all had very different personalities. ...

So I had my natural Dad's wife as well, I wouldn't really consider her a parent but she still an instrumental role.... So I grew up with basically 5 parental figures ah.. and wanting and feeling the need to be a good daughter to all of them. So I learned how to become, ah...I could adapt. I was very a very different little girl with my wealthy parents than I was with my natural Mum... ..

You were talking about your 5 parents and how you were very different with each one as a little girl?

Yeah. So I learned adaptability and I mean I also learned that ah... there's a lot of variety out there in people. And in a sense, there's some negatives to that but there's some positives to that too, you know. I'm comfortable with a lot of different people, and I like a lot of different people. ...

So, yeah at that point that's what I was looking for. I ah... drank a lot because, because it was the only way I could, basically, ah... I could be with people, and (laugh) and ... it ah... ..it helped fill the loneliness, and ah... .. It was temporary and I hated myself for it, ah... .. but I didn't know what else to do...you know, ...

There was an urgency to be with people, you didn't want to be alone, is that what you're saying?

Yeah, ah...Yeah...I mean I'm being evasive, because basically I don't want to say it, but basically sexually. So, (laugh) so ...as we just move quickly over and beyond that (laughing), ah..

So when I quit drinking, I thought that would end but, of course I was still lonely and it didn't end. I just didn't like that and I hated that because I was demeaning myself.... And so I ah... there was nothing healthy about it. There was no... and I wanted love and I wasn't getting love and it hurt, so .. I ... When I discovered this group of Christian people who... talked so much about love, and...I had gone to church too always, and I had never listened to anything the ministers had to say.

I would just go to sit in the church because I would feel something, and so I always had that in my life, there was something there, and when I , ... met these people I started going to their churches and I would cry every time I went, I would just cry and cry and cry...

Have you figured out where the tears are coming from?

Well, it's interesting because I just experienced another service recently which I started to cry at? and ah.. it was a terrifying feeling, I don't know if that was a terrifying...it was a very conservative service and I don't know if it was terrifying because it brought me back to this place , but I think I was crying because I knew something was going to change and I knew something was gonna change, and I was afraid of the change.

I knew, Yeah, I knew that if I kept going to these churches I was going to have to change and on the one hand I was very afraid of it, cause I was afraid of being swallowed up in it and I knew it was fairly extreme but I was also aware that it would be a great relief. You know I felt that there would be a lot of relief, ah... so... I was torn 'cause... .. I wanted the relief bit I... I... .. I didn't want to lose myself...you know...I was also afraid, aware that, ...ah... to follow this...faith that ah... I wouldn't... .. I was afraid that I would lose my sexuality...my ... even all the things I hated about myself I also loved about myself.. you know... in that bizarre paradox way (laughing)... you know?...

To come to a point to be able to look at yourself in that way and go OK, that's me?...

Yeah, that comes later in the journey, I was one or the other at that point...

...you were either ...

In that first stage for me, that first stage of turning to faith, turning to faith was

not about learning who I was. Turning to faith was about letting go of who I was, and...and...putting Jesus as my mentor...who was going to teach me who to become. and that person was going to be a better person than who I was.

OK, was He replacing a previous mentor for you?

I didn't have a mentor before...

So what lead you through your life to that point? what made you do the things you did? Sounds like you're telling me...

I think it was just the compulsions, the need for love drove me, from place to place: wherever I could get love, ah.. or wherever I could fill that hole. Sometimes it was sitting in a church, sometimes it was dancing, sometimes it was drink, sometimes it was a temporary night with somebody, ah... friendship always played a very strong and valuable role in my life, you know that was always a good and positive thing in my life.

Could you bring your heart into a conversation with a friend more easily than bringing your heart into the bedroom with a one-night-stand for sex?

Oh, yeah

I wondered if you would come from the same place as me? I can remember consciously and sometimes leaving my heart outside the bedroom, needing so desperately...

Well , you know I always hoped that they would love me. No but the next day, I would ...

What about directly after the act?

Well, that! Forget the next day...(laughing) ...(clapping her hands)

Oh, I'm feeling really empty now ... that's not good. I really should bring myself in, when I come in...

(still laughing)but it was always also about receiving love, it was never about giving it...

... so was it an intimacy thing?

Oh, I mean I didn't, ... I didn't ... get it... I mean I just wanted ...

You mean you didn't get it intellectually or you didn't actually get what you -

I mean I didn't get the idea of intimacy, I didn't get the idea of mutuality, the idea of give and take ...

S's struggle toward abstinence

Ok, ah... I understand that you are looking at ah... an individual's personal story around recovery from addictions, my situation would be my recovery from having experienced the addictions of another. Although I understand addictions in a broader sense now, and I'm sure that I've got, ah...

I've come to understand ways in which my own behaviour could be classified as addictions. Ah... that I will be sharing with you my story of how, a journey out of that, ... way of viewing the world and ah... how spirituality might or might not have tied into that? I guess I understand...

... Ah ... well, for my own benefit, I think I would just like to say that... I ah...lived in a chaotic, rageful situation with a Father who drank... .. ah...he ... really never chose to do anything about it... ah... so it was the typical situation of a fairly well ah... positioned family in society... keeping up the illusion of functioning and ah...

Everything was normal and right and nobody talked about anything. And ah... he went to, he sort-of stopped drinking in his later years, but mostly because he was so sick he couldn't drink. He was diabetic and he became very... ah... .. ill...physically, with a couple of amputations and he... ah...lost his kidney function, and he...ended up dying of cardiac arrest at he age of 57.

Ah... but, of course, witnessing all of that, ... I can look back now and I can see times when I saw things and thought, well, it's going to be different or whatever, ... but I, it wasn't really,... I didn't do anything about it, and I just went on to become an adult and ah... married and ah... at some level was very unhappy with my behaviour?

At some level I would identify behaving in a way that I didn't feel very good about? But then, I guess I didn't feel very good about myself in any respect because I believe that shame is a very huge component of addictions and ah... I guess one of the things that I want to say too, is that I've really come to realize that ah... ah... my journey from the very beginnings of looking at the whole concept of addictions as a family illness, children of alcoholics, and all that kind of stuff, as one constructed version of the way we can look at things?

So I guess, I'm kind of, what I might call myself, a constructivist, in that way, and I start to see, well, OK, somebody has constructed a story or a way of looking at these dynamics and so on, there might be other people who might construct a different way of looking at it? Ah... so I'm very conscious of that. I'm in a bit of a confused state, because I believe there are many ways of looking at things.

So some of the things that I will say, will end up being, ah... because I've been emersed in that philosophy for a while? Because my own trying to learn and understand? Then I can look at, and there's lots of information out there about children of alcoholics, and there's lots of constructed ways of looking at it.

There's lots of theories?

Lots of theories. And so now, I'm in a bit of a, because I've been exposed to a lot

of other stuff, you know, I'm really, I don't know what I think now. And you know, it's probably that whole thing about not being comfortable with the confusion, as opposed to, well, there has to be only one right way, and it's searching for that one right way, so...you know...

Were you brought up thinking that there's one right way, and it's just a matter of finding it?

Oh, absolutely. I'm, and again, I'll give you this paper to read. I mean, I was the product of the sixties, ... the fifties and sixties. I was born in 1949 and I grew up in the 50's and 60's, very highly, a time when positivism was, I mean that was it! You know, and scientific research and so on, and I graduated from the University of Guelph in 1971, and in a science degree, and you know, that was it. And that was my thinking, and that was the way, although I don't think it really, it caused a lot of conflict for me because I was just seeing hypocrisy.

I would just keep saying, well, this is crazy, there is no such thing...there's other ways of looking at stuff, you know? And that's always been a thing for me, all my life. Just observing so much hypocrisy, but anyway, Yes, I very much grew up to think there was only one way and then of course, the other way of looking at that is you live in a family where ah... someone is very dominant and powerful, there is only one way and you toe the line or else.

And the whole Father side of my family, or my paternal family, that ah... very much high achievers, dominant thinking, males were very important in the family, blah, blah, blah...So, ah.....being aware of what I'm saying is, maybe just repeating how I've come to make meaning of looking back and trying to understand ah... what the hell was going on, and why... I know some people think that you can just do something differently, but, for me, sometimes understanding it helps me change.

Sometimes I think I can't change what I don't understand? And sometimes I can just try to do something different, anyway. So, I became an adult and was living in this fast-paced world of ... get it all, do it all, be it all, ...ah, trying to operate in that world with some pretty strong feelings of shame, a lot of comparative thinking, and of course, you grow up in a school system that that's all you learn.

You compare yourself to outside variables and you're compared to each other through marks, and everything is a competition. It's all, and it kind-of went against my internal stuff, because I grew up in a really small town, where community was really important. And ah... ... so I think that I... was surrounded with a lot of stuff that just didn't sit right with what my personal beliefs were for some reason?

Anyway, ah... ... I became an adult and had a child, and ah... did a lot of questioning at some level and just kept on truckin' (laughing), just kept on goin', never really paid too much attention. But , I think because all that was going on in my life, I was becoming more and more unhappy. More and more depressed. ... ah... just, I just felt... terrible! Just constantly feeling worse and worse and worse. ah...

What were the things that were going on, in your life? You mentioned that your Father was an alcoholic, and died in his late 50's, so you would have been through university...

I was married and my daughter was probably, ... well, he died in 1980, and she was born in '75, so she was 5 years old.

So, are you talking about the fact that your Dad was so sick, was he close in distance, to you? Was that the chaos that you refer to?

No, ah... Ok, I'm kind-of wandering. I guess I'm trying to lay some background around me as a child, and being in that process of that family, that was non-feeling. I wasn't,... I had no, I realize now that nobody talked about they felt about anything. I mean, you weren't allowed.

You just kept your mouth shut and tried to keep the peace. And I became very much a person that was rewarded for being responsible. I was first-born. I was the responsible person, ah... of 14 years of age I looked after ah... an uncle's kids. His wife had, was eight months pregnant, and she had some kind of hemorrhaging and had to go in the hospital. He had ... four other kids, and I was elected to look after them, as a housekeeper, at 14. And just totally take over the, his wife's job, and to me now, I mean I think , now that's amazing!

You know, buy the groceries, cook the meals, take the kids to wherever they had to go, some of them had to go downtown with me to get allergy shots, ah... one was 3, one was 5, I mean it was a big job. So, but then I think that was a result of my role as a care-taker in that family, I was, must have somehow been rewarded for that. Ah...

A caretaker in your own family?

A caretaker in my own family, when I was young. 'Cause my Dad was a Doctor and he was off doing his thing, and my Mum was running around doing her thing and probably there was... .. I don't have a lot of memories about that, but probably, I mean, for some reason, I was ...must have got some kind of praise for probably doing part of her job.

Taking care of your brothers and sisters?

I have one brother. And just taking care of household responsibilities. I guess.

So is that who you were then?

As a child?

Yeah, if you described yourself as who you were as a person?

Very isolated, ... when I look at my own daughter and how important her friends

are in her life... I don't recall... I made a few friends...but very isolated, very... and I think a lot of that had to do with shame of what was going on in the family.

I don't recall bringing any friends home. I remember spending a lot of time in the woods, I guess. We used to live in an area where we could go out in nature and build forts

and do all kinds of stuff like that. So, Yeah, that gave me a lot of freedom or something , or being away from the house.

I didn't get along with my brother well. I think I had a lot of issues around...ah... feminist-type things, you know, boys are more valued, boys get to do this, get to do that, and I was trying to be put into this mold of being feminine and all that stuff (laughing) and it was bullshit to me, I guess. And I was pretty rebellious, but I was very... well behaved. I didn't get into any kind of trouble. I mean, I was just trying to be perfect, I guess. Ah... so does that explain who I was then?

Yes it does. ... You've mentioned shame many times. How did that fit into who you thought you were then? It seems to be important...

Well, I'm thinking about ...feeling that way, I guess... ... because of the stuff, it's ... there's a stigma around addictions... and ah... you're supposed to... ah...(sigh)... it's such a paradox or... whatever, because your Father's a Doctor, and you're living in a society where that's really valued. But yet he's behaving, in a manner that's very stigmatized (laughing), you know?

So, your community knew that he was drinking? Or...

Ah, we lived in a big city, ah... I'm assuming that they did. Like I said, I don't have a lot of memories of those days, I have very few memories between the age of 6 and 16.

It's very, I find that...I have a lot of memories of the little town we lived in, before we moved to the big city... ah... I think that was really traumatic for me, leaving that because I was ah... it was a very small town and ah...

I think I had a sense of safety in that town or something, because it was so small, and everybody knew everybody, and it was like... you know how they say, it takes a community to raise a child? And that's how I felt.

I felt a lot of, I felt very valued and my Mum's sister lived there and it was just great and all of a sudden my whole world was up-rooted and I moved to a city where you were anonymous, and I think that had quite an effect on me, moving. Ah...

I get the sense that what you're telling me is the shame was there ...part of your identity, even though you have a big hole where you can't remember between 6 and 16, when you look back...

There's a lot of things that I can't visualize in my mind? Ah... I feel like those years, have been, in some ways, blocked out or, at least they weren't happy years. ...

Ah... I remember when I was probably in grade 3, I guess, would be when I really first started having a real sense of that? That there was something different or there was something maybe having a real awareness of that? And I don't know what that would be around? Like I don't know if that was around... around things that my Dad did, or what. I really, I don't remember.

I remember very few incidents ... I remember one time a policeman came to our door, but I don't remember what that was about, if it was anything to do with something he had done? I don't recall a whole lot of my parents fighting, but you know, sometimes you hear about a lot of arguing and fighting.

He was never physically abusive. He was certainly very rageful. He could just tear you apart with his tongue, 'cause I certainly took on those behaviours too. Ah... ... but I really don't recall what kinds of things... I just know that for some reason, I felt 'less than', ah... 'not as good as', ah... and again, what I would put the label on now, is shame, I was ashamed of myself, but ah... and then I had a lot of issues too with my Mum around, because I was being rebellious and felt that I didn't have...

This is how I've come to make meaning of it: that I didn't have control of my life. I mean, I was living in a way, that I was very controlled. I was very controlled. I was supposed to do this, do that, whatever. There were a lot of expectations on how you were to behave. So, I ...

And S., how did you know you were doing the right thing? Did you get feedback that, you kind-of knew the rules, and how did you know when you were following the rules? Was there some indication from somebody that "Yeah, you're being a good girl now, because..."?

Well, I guess ah... maybe it would lessen the flack. I don't know?

It would be less uncomfortable in the house, or...

Yeah... I was quite good at conforming, I guess. Although I would find ways to rebel. And I believe one of the ways that I found to have some control in my life was around ah... eating. And so, my ... way of rebelling was... I had some control over that.

They couldn't control over what I put in my mouth. I could sneak. I could ... you know, I could... And I was a big person, you know, I mean my Dad was a football player. He weighed, I mean he was a huge man, I mean he was a big muscular man. And my Mum is a very tiny petit little thing, and I inherited more of his genes than hers, I guess.

And ah... also the image of family, of the perfect family didn't include a kid that was larger than what, it was the whole body-image thing. So, a lot of stuff that I played out in that way, in control, trying to control and get my feeling or sense of control, I guess. ...

Did that start early?

Oh, Yeah. I would say, ah... we had a lot of fights about that. In fact, ah... my Mum was very clothes-conscious, and my Dad too, but I think it mostly came from her, and she was always has had a reputation as part of her persona, as being a fancy dresser. Of being this beautiful person, and my experience of going shopping was just feeling so horrible, because nothing fit me. And I don't know if I was imposing that on myself, or her frustration, because I was this large or misshapen kid, or whatever I was. Ah... .. that ah... I couldn't make the mold. So, ah... there were some really bad experiences between...

That was when you were a little girl, going with your Mother shopping for clothes? Are we talking pre-teen?...

Yeah, well I can't ...
So you were eating ...

And Yeah, so I had some terrible experiences with her. In fact, now when I look back, the first time I ever went shopping, for myself...I never went into stores, when I became an adult, I learned to sew. ...And I wouldn't have to go into a store and put something on, and feel that humiliation and terrible feeling. So I learned to sew and I'll make my clothes. I made, in fact I made, ah...

I'm a pretty creative person too, and I love to create, and that was kind-of a expression of creativity for me, but when my daughter came on the scene, I made everything for her, until she became a teenager and then it was important to... well, you wouldn't believe the stuff I made...I made everything, there isn't anything I haven't made: bathing suits, men's top coats, snowsuits, ah... raincoats, I mean, just anything. I made it all for her.

Ah.. but you know, you could say, that was a way to avoid going into stores and repeating that same thing. And ah... it took me a long time to even be able to go shopping with my daughter. It was just very, it was just all flashbacks, I guess to that experience with my Mum.

So then I ah... when I was probably in 1993, I would say, was probably the first time that I ever went and spent a whole day shopping, by myself, and actually bought some clothes and had just the tinniest little bit of acceptance around me and clothing? And to be able to go in and try things on, and actually buy stuff that actually fit me, and I felt Ok about wearing. That I couldn't believe that. That was just a major (laughing) I thought "Jesus, I spent a whole day in a store and I've actually bought clothes, and I've tried things on, and I've made a choice and, you know, that's amazing!

So, those kinds of things really played out in my life. Ah... .. I'm getting a little wandery here, so, I guess who I was as a kid, I can see that ... you know, into an adult, until I was you know, well into my 30's. All of this stuff was, that's how I see it anyway. There's so much stuff! Ah... .. of who I was, as a young adult, either playing out. I don't know if I was trying to resolve those things, or avoiding them, or ah... .. whatever.

You talked earlier about ah... finding eating as being a place where you could have control. Did that have anything to do with who you were as a person? Did you continue to use that control for awhile? Was that helpful for you, to get through difficult times?

Yeah, I'm sure it must have been. It gave me a sense of having some sense of control in my life and I think people need that. Ah... ... it's probably tied up with rebellion, is, you know, I guess I needed that. I needed some kind of control.

And the other side of that too, is that ah... when your... ... again, all throughout my life, and even now, I want people to see me, who I am inside the package. Okay? And that's a very difficult thing for me to accept, all my life and I find that really difficult to accept in society too, because we live very much in a world that ah... your worth and your value is ah... got nothing to do with your soul or your spirit, or whatever. It's basically the package.

And I'm sure that I still have some issues around that. It makes me mad (laughing). Ah... it's always made me angry, and ah... one of the things when I think about this issue of eating and having control...

... Yeah, ... yeah, and my thing when you talk about addictions, I would say that my situation, alcohol and sugar, they say are very closely related? You know, so I have a real sweet-tooth and a fondness for sugar and you know, and maybe if you want to look at some genetic explanation, you know, I can do all kinds of things around sneaking, maybe if I was a boy and 12 years old, I might have been sneaking booze? I don't know. You know, there's all kinds of ways of looking at it.

So you remember having to sneak food, S?

Oh, yeah.

You had to do that?

Oh, I don't know if I had to, but I did it. You know, and I don't know if it was around "Oh, I'll get you, you know, you tell me, I can't do this and I'll do it, I'll show you!"

So, was there a rule in your house, that you could only eat so much?

Well, there was an understanding that my weight was an issue. 'Cause it was...

So they were open about that, were they? They just came out and said...

Well, actually, Yeah, because ah... I was ... diets were always an issue in our house, but then I mean, we're talking about the 50's and my Mum was you know, if you think about the historical and cultural time, ah... you know, the suburban housewife was expected to be running around vacuuming with her pretty little suit and dress, and pill-box hat, I suppose.

...and the high heels...

Oh, yes . My Mum, you wouldn't believe the state of her feet today as a 75 year old. Her feet are in terrible shape because of her ah... and her toes are all turned in because of those pointed shoes, and those spike-heeled shoes to wear. Jesus Murphy!

And when I think about it now, all of those things, maybe because of the way I see things, it just made me so angry. Like, maybe I was, I don't know, If I was ahead of my times, but maybe I saw the foolishness of all that... you know, and I saw the way all of those, like conforming to social norms, or something, and especially as women, and what women were expected to do, and and, ...

Of course, we used to go to my Grandfather's farm, and I loved my Grandfather, because I was the oldest grandchild, and I was female, but that didn't make any difference with him. I could shovel shit as best as the next of them, you know? And I could be out, I can remember standing on a big milkcan, with a big mallet, pounding in a fence-post, and we were fixin' fences, you know, but he allowed me to do that.

He didn't care if I was male or female. He didn't tell me to go to the house because I was a female. And I think that's why I...I had more freedom just to be who I was or something?

...And besides, again, I don't react well to guilt-trips. (laughing). So, anyway, I feel like I'm way off topic here, but I'm trying to explain, as a child, either how I brought that into my adulthood, or but... it's the craziness of it, you know,... how I either reacted to those things or how I ... was rebellious against them and tried to be different as an adult or... just that I'm not going there or... something but, I don't have a sense of really doing a good job of it?

I mean, well, I was talking about my Dad, in his rages... See, I went that road too. I repeated a lot of that stuff. I came to learn to behave like him. I came to learn to intimidate people, people were afraid of me. Because I could be, whatever too. So, I learned all that. And then I carried that into my adult stuff too, and took that into my life as an adult.

So, you were like that as late teen, early 20's?

Oh, well into my 30's. I did that for a lot of years. "Don't step out of line, or you'll...." (laughing) Ah... so anyway, I don't know, I'm trying to think of if there's any, you know, if I'm setting the stage for OK, how am I going to change here? But that's

what I saw.

I saw myself as a person who left that situation with very low self-esteem. And part of that too, was not a lot of social support, if I, I can put words on things now, that I couldn't then?

Ah, when my daughter left for university, ah... I was, she went to university in 1993, so I would have been 44 years old. And I had probably been about 7 years, into ... 6 or 7 years, into what I call, the start of my own personal recovery... and the night before she went to university, you know, it's a scary time, you know, she was in her bed, and crying and really scared about what it was all going to be about, ... leaving home and all like that... and ah...

When she got up there, she went to university one weekend, and the next weekend I asked my husband to leave. And that's another whole story about our separation, but, ...ah... I very consciously said, "Now, if I want to maintain a relationship with this child, we can either drift apart, 'cause she's left home, or I can, what can I do to foster, and to nurture an to continue to have a relationship with her?" And one of the things that I realized was that, you know, I need to be supportive of her.: phone her on a regular basis, send her little care packages from home, go and visit her, cause I mean, it's only 60 miles into Halifax from where we were. You know, make an effort here. Ah.... participate! I wanted to make a concerted effort to have a relationship with her... ah... unlike my relationship with my Mum.

Because, my Mum and I don't,...didn't, but I'll talk about that later....and ... I started to think, "Well, when I went away to university, where the hell was my Mother? I don't remember sitting down having all kinds of warm, nurturing support the night before I left. I don't remember getting phone calls or ... you know... stuff... I don't remember any of that. I don't remember having a sense of feeling really supported ... whatever... And ah... and then I started to realize that when I went away to university, my Mum was at home, on a farm, having been moved by her husband ...

...And so we were living on this farm, and when I went to university, my Dad was , what I'll say, was a full-blown alcoholic... I mean he was drinking big-time...ah...he was a Doctor and there was and being an alcoholic and living on this farm....and I was thinking "Where the hell was my Mum?"...

And so anyway, and so living on this farm, and of course, farms need hired men. And one of the guys that he had had as a patient, had had a bleeding ulcer and he had done surgery and fixed his bleeding ulcer and then he was supposed to be discharged from the hospital but he didn't have anywhere to go.... and ah... my Dad, I think he had lost his family or something, this hired man, or this guy. ...

So my Dad offered him a job. And he suggested to him that, and my Dad, like me too, was kind-hearted, and so on. And so he thought he'd take care of him, and so he brought him home to the farm, and he became the hired man. But, he was a drunk too (laughing). So, there's my Mum, and this is all part of my own recovery, as I see it, in, you know, probably, at the time, I could have been, or might have been really pissed off about....

I probably couldn't have verbalized it but, where the hell is everybody... just this

scared, lost, little kid... at university, and you know, where the hell is every body, and ah... I suppose, by that time you don't have any expectations that they'll be there , because they've never been there anyway...

Jane Doe's struggle toward abstinence

Like it's not really stressful... but I'm thinking ... well, once we start talking ... then I'll understand.

OK, well then we can move right into that. After me reading a few things to you and explaining to you what it is I'm looking for, in my perspective, what it is I'm looking for in this research, what did you understand me to be asking you? Like what shakes down as being the essence of what I'm asking of you?

The connection between... the connection of spirituality to recovery. In that , ... I'm looking for a word... how , not how you get from recovery to spirituality, but what the connection is between the two.

Do you see a connection?

Yes.

What is that connection? Or do you want to talk about what your definition of addiction is and then what your definition of spirituality is? Do you have sort-of concrete notions of what those are for you, in your own words?

I see them as being very close. ...

So how is that?

... .. If I just deal with addiction, I only go so far, and then I level off. ... Then I have to make a conscious decision of whether I'm going to pursue spirituality, or I'm going to stay where I am. And for me, where I was, was not where I wanted to be. And after looking around, ... I could see that or I felt that I needed to be grounded in spirituality in order to maintain my rate of growth. I wasn't satisfied with just dealing with addiction, and... still having, what felt like an empty life.

So, am I hearing you say that where you're starting out in this conversation, is a place where you stopped using substance, where you cut the action of addictive behaviour?

Uh-Huh.

And felt there was still an emptiness there? So, you wanted to move from , just not taking to something else? Something more?

Yes. When I took the addiction away, it was like a gaping hole.... And for some

people I see, in recovery, that's OK. They want to eliminate the addiction because they want to stay out of jail, or they want to keep their wife, or they... whatever. But for me, when I ... when I practiced abstinence, there was that gaping hole, and it just wasn't good enough for me. I wanted more. When I saw the gaping hole, I lived with that for a time, and I thought... I don't like this...

Did you have the gaping hole when you were using?

Yes, but I was covering it with the substance. I was trying to fill the hole with the substance.

And did that work for you?

And the substance I used more and more and more, and ... the hole just wouldn't fill.

Did it work for you at first?

Ahhhh... at first I thought it worked... .. that was a long time ago, I don't know.

OK.

I think I thought it worked. I think I was using substance to make myself feel OK, but then there came a point where I was using more and more and it just wasn't filling the hole anymore. And then I continued to use more and more and more, and then I couldn't hide from the hole anymore. And then I felt like I was being swallowed by this emptiness... and that's initially when I looked for help and got into program, and did some recovery and then, a couple years later I realized that I was , felt like I had this big gaping hole, the only thing that had changed was that there was no substance to put in there.

And if anything, it felt worse. And I spent a time thinking, I might as well be using because I felt better using. I felt much better using. And then I made that conscious decision. "Am I going to use again to make myself feel better, or am I going to find something constructive, something that's good for me to fill the hole.

Can you describe that hole? I'm thinking it's an emotional or ...

It's part of Self. It's like you it's like existing,... just existing, with no sense of Self. Ah...

Did you have a purpose for your being around at that time? Did that have anything to do with the hole?...

I didn't have a purpose. It just was. But not in a healthy sense. It was like being...

I was shut down emotionally, ah... anything but whole. Ah... .. I didn't like who I was.

Who were you?

Yuck! (laughing). Who was I? Ohhhhh, boys! I was the person who was the total idiot. Absolutely! I was the person you didn't want coming to your parties. I was the person that you didn't even want to talk to on the phone. I was so... .. ah... .. engrossed in self-pity and self-loathing...

Is that where the hole was? Is that part of the hole? Or did the hole create the self-loathing? Or is it a chicken/egg thing?

I think it was a chicken/egg thing. Ah... .. I always... I never felt whole, anywhere previous to that, that I recall. ... And because I didn't feel whole, I believed that there was something drastically wrong with me. And that's where the self-loathing started... Because I wanted ... I could see whole people, but I didn't know how to be one.

...
And it's that kind of situation where... .. it's like wanting a chocolate bar and you can't have one. You feel like everyone's standing around eating chocolate bars, and Wow! You really want a chocolate bar, and you can't have one, and you can't have one, and you can't have one...and you get more upset about it, and you get more obsessed about it and you get more upset and more obsessed... until it's driving you crazy. And that's what I felt like.

I could see all these whole people and I knew what they looked like, but I didn't know who they were, in the sense of their Self. I didn't know how to become that. I didn't know ... how to be that. ...

So, are you describing how you felt about yourself after you stopped taking?

It's interesting. I remember going to A.A. meetings and people talking about self-loathing. And when I first went to A.A. meetings, I didn't know what they were talking about. And the longer I was sober, the worse I got. The more I hated myself.... And I remember one of my turning points was going to one of those meetings and having that topic come up, and people were talking about it, and all of a sudden I realized I knew what they were talking about. And I knew I had become that....

Do you think that you realized that because of your length of time of abstinence ... that you were perceiving that you believed you always were, or

I think I got more extreme as I got more sobriety. I think I had that before and didn't recognize it. But I also think that through that first year of sobriety that my ...attitude toward myself ... got worse and worse and worse. I was beginning to see ... the

reality of me not being whole.

And after that year, I went out and used again. ... and then I woke up again, and then I woke up again and thought" No, this is not where I want to go, there has got to be some other way to feel the way I want to feel without using and killing myself in that manner . So then I did a turn around there and went back to program, and got more serious about it. ...And it happened again. But I took it further, I let it play through further...

Which happened again?

I continued my attitude and my self-hate grew initially and then because I was more conscious of it perhaps or because I had a better idea of what it was, I started looking for ways ... instead of looking for ways of escape, I started looking for ways to become whole.

Escape in the self-loathing?

Yes. It's the whole motivating factor for me.

You wanted to stop hating who you were?

For a long time, I thought I wanted to stop being who I was. But then after a time, I realized that I just wanted to stop feeling that way about myself. I wanted to be one of those whole people I saw standing on the fringe. I wanted to go over there. But when I went over there, I was so broken, and so dysfunctional, those people didn't want me over there.

They didn't want you?

So, I had to come back and say OK, what do I need to do to get over there?

What did those people have that you wanted?

They liked themselves. ... They had good attitudes. They seemed to like their lives. They seemed to like themselves. They enjoyed things on a level that I had lost long ago. ... And those were the things that I wanted.

You wanted to be like them, or you wanted to be part of their community?

What I saw was... I wanted to have that sense of Self that I saw that they had, being comfortable with yourself... not always looking over your shoulder... ah... all that...

So there was a component of fear in your life? Because when you say, looking over your

shoulder, I think "Somebody's going to get me".

Oh, Yeah big time! Yeah, it was like a free-floating anxiety, a free-floating fear. I could never figure out what I was afraid of, but I was just always afraid. ... And I think, when I look back, I think it had to do with how I was feeling about myself.... ... I was feeling so insecure about myself. If I walked down the street and I saw people, I would be afraid that they would say something rude to me or that they would in some way hurt me. And now I think that that is ridiculous.

Do you think spirituality led you away from fear, anxiety and the 'hole'?

Yup. It's the only thing that has worked. And it's interesting too, because I see it as really as black and white. I see if I have that hole, there's only two things I can fill it with: a journey of addiction or a journey of spirituality or higher awareness. I only see two choices. It always strikes me as so interesting, because I keep searching thinking: there must be other people who feel the way I do, who put other things in there. They still either wind up to be either addiction or spirituality.

It's interesting isn't it?

Yeah!

Addictions come in all forms, don't they?

Yeah, they do.

Do you think it's a common human experience: that hole?

... Ah.... common, yes....

Let me re-phrase that a little bit. Do you think you are unusual to experience that hole?

No. Absolutely not.

Did you used to think you were unusual?

Yes. I used to think there was something wrong with me. I didn't think anybody else had that hole! I didn't even think I could talk about that hole, because nobody would know what I was talking about. I was so isolated that I really believed that. And that 's so far off the wall, ... but that's where you go! When I'm pursuing spirituality, I see all kinds of people with those holes. Doing all kinds of different things, trying to make themselves whole. ...

TURNING TO FAITH**Marie's turning to faith**

... and I ... I... I just wanted , and ah... ... and had a desperate kind of persona in it, Yeah,... very needy. Ah... so that the faith part was having a completely different focus, you know...becoming somebody, not finding out who I was.

So was that an intentional shift?

...very intentional and I mean it happened over a period of a year. The first part was always crying. The second part was always, OK, if I'm going to make this shift, I have to intellectually believe it, as well, like there's gotta be some scrutiny intellectually. So I mean I played mental gymnastics over the Bible to make it work ah... truth ah... legalistically, I mean I wouldn't use that word, cause I realize that that is not a nice word to use to talk about your faith, but that's what I was doing...

That's not the usual word?

Yeah, (laughing) but

Can you go back to your first step and describe it a little bit more fully for me? You said the first would be a lot of crying ?...

Just recognizing that there would be a lot of change. These people seemed to really care about me, they wanted me to change, they wanted me to come to know Jesus, and ah... in that was a sense that there would be... I felt pulled by their love, by their interest, their the ... the ever-presence of emotion, the things that seemed important ... they cared about things that seemed important, they cared about the poor, they cared about people on the streets, they cared about things bigger than just everyday things...

And those were important things to you as well?

Yeah, always had been important to me, meaning of life questions, always had been important to me... ah... Drove my friends nuts...(laughing)...and these people were interested in those questions, so there was commonality in that sense. But I didn't, prior to that point, had been much more open. I had been spiritual, or at least been attracted to spiritual things, but in a much more diverse way... .. but I think I needed emotionally something much more concrete.

I needed a way out of my past, and they were drawing me into it, and I was eager and afraid to go: don't wanna lose myself, wanna loose myself. Want to get rid of that baggage, that shame, that was the biggest motivating factor.

If I become a Christian, if I do this sort-of choice where I'm going to choose to

live for Jesus, then I'm not going to feel shame anymore, because I'm gonna live with higher purpose and that's going to be... I knew that would change things for me. I just knew it would.

So, it was a yearlong process, because first the crying and then I had to ... have all my intellectual questions answered, so it was a matter of running into the right minister, who was ...ah... very, very intellectual and yet, a very big heart. So, the heart was taken care of, but, but in order to make the switch I had to go through all my intellectual questions ah... which, he did. ...

Now there were some mental gymnastics that had to go on there, and ... ah... but I was also willing to take those mental gymnastics, to make it right. I wanted it to work for me, so I was willing to help him along? You know,

As you asked the questions you needed to probe a little further to make sure that you understood?

Yes, Yes, I needed to know that it was OK, that I could defend my belief. So that if other people were asking me what I believe or why this drastic change or ... I needed to know, I needed to articulate why I believed what I did. So, it's like I went through that whole process.

So you went from an emotional place where you cried, and I'm still really curious as to where you think the tears came from. I've been there myself and I have trouble articulating why the pouring of tears in churches too. Not all churches, but especially at benediction time.

Yeah, like I would leave the church crying... ... I really think those were tears of... ... fear, and the emotions behind it were... fear and ... hope ... at the same time. There was so much confusion around it. I couldn't articulate it either. It was like I wanted this change so bad, and yet on the other hand, I was so afraid of what that would mean...and that mixture, I think, is what caused the tears... ...

The ambiguity, don't know what I'm afraid of, but I'm definitely afraid. I'm trying to be hopeful, and I know it's there, but I don't know what I'm hopeful for....or did you know what the hope was about?

It was about , well if I do this then I'm not going to feel shame anymore... ...

That's the hope ?

Ah-ha, Yeah,...Yeah...generally I could be a good person...

Oh, you had found the possibility..

To me these were good people, they didn't do what I did... .. and it's because they had faith and they had Jesus, and they followed Jesus, yeah,...that's what.... So once I had intellectualized it, then it was a mere, it was just... ..

I went to a service and it was... about this man and he was horrible, he was talking about Satan, and he had been a High Priest for Satan, and somewhere in there he said that "if you are not for the Lord, then you're against the Lord".

I don't know why that in particular stuck with me, ... but ah... .. it was like... .. OK, I'm gonna do it, and that night they played a song, the last song was "I have decided to follow Jesus" and that night I sang that song, and I meant it... and... it was a real relief... .. and I made drastic.. you know.. I went all into it... because, you know, now I had new focus and a new way to be perfect.

Like before, being perfect was being good at everything, and you know, wanting approval blah, blah, blah, and now I was focused on Jesus, so I did Bible studies, I read every day, you know, I really focused. Ah... new friends, drove my old friends absolutely bonkers, (laughing), some of them are still around to see a more real person.

Was there something evangelical about you in those times?

Oh, yeah!

So you were really excited about this new-found...

Yeah, I was excited and also, I mean afraid because what it teaches is heaven and hell, and those who believe go to heaven and those that don't, go to Hell and I took all the good stuff and I took all the bad stuff too...I took it all. And struggled with it because I hated that, but there just didn't seem to be any other way.

It was either this way or it's that way. And now I'm goin' that way, so I gotta take it all, and I did, and ah... at great cost to me as a person. But, I think, when I reflect on it, I'm glad that it happened because it lead to where I am now, I mean , I think I needed that extreme to bump me off of this this place where I was always feeling shame. ah... mind you, there was shame in this as well, because everything, because if you're not Mother Teresa, then I was feeling shame.

It's a pretty hard calling when you think you have to be and do, and, ...personify Jesus. ... and your vision of Jesus is ... purity, and something, I think, my vision of Jesus, I don't think I even envisioned Jesus in the flesh, I think I ... I don't think I had a concept of Jesus, I think I just had a concept of God. And, ah... Jesus was good... you know, but I don't think that it got more real than that?

And good has a list of rules too? So, in order, to be Godly, to be more like Jesus, I follow all these rules, but I could never follow all the rules because I keep screwing up, so that would be where the shame came from? That far side of your other self, still external to who you really are? So, would you say that you perceived God as outside yourself at that time? as opposed to, goodness because that is something that you didn't feel you were?

Well, here's an interesting thing about Marie. And that is, that I , which I learned about later, which is a brilliant thing to know about yourself. (laughing)...that is, some people feel shame because they feel that they're never,...that they're less than everybody else.

And then, there's people like me who feel shame because they think they're better than everybody else and never measure up. Which means , like...pride and ah... self-deprecation are the same thing. Arrogance and self-deprecation are the exact same thing because they're based on a belief that people aren't equal and I ... I always, and will continue to struggle because this is a childhood thing. ah... that I always struggled with this weird thing of, I can do more than anybody else. I am better than everybody else, but then , I'm not, and then I realize I'm not, or I fall or whatever, or it's such a high standard to live up to, that it's shameful.

So, my approach to that shame is coming from a place of extreme, ah... pride and arrogance...ah...and that stems to, as a child, having parents that couldn't take care of me, and saying "Adults are idiots, I'm the one that's got it together."

That was your thinking as a child?

As a child, and so,...when you grow up thinking that, it stays with you a long time. You know, (laughing), so, ... it's embarrassing, it's embarrassing to discover how arrogant you are. (laughing)... but it's true, and I don't know how I leapt on to that discussion?

You were talking about shame and you moved right into comparing dissolution of personality itself and arrogance as sort of the same thing?

Yeah, but how did I get into that? I don't know?... Where was I with the journey... ... I guess, I was talking about the new shame. Yeah, so it was still about shame, now I was a Christian, and...now I have all these things to do to be like Jesus, and ... there was a lot of righteousness in that, but I was a lot more settled,

So are you saying that is another word for arrogance?...but now you've got the rules...

Yeah, self-righteousness. But the mind-games are really brilliant, because they are so subtle, because I know better than to be self-righteous in an obvious way, you know, I know better than to say, I know it and you don't. It's much more subtle than that. I know better than to wear my "way I serve" on my shoulders. You know, I do it much more privately and subtly.

I know in a conversation, you don't say, "Do you want to come to know the Lord?" You know, I know how to do these things much more subtly. And you know, it's not just a total manipulation, I want for people to have faith. I want for people to look at the bigger questions of life, meaning of life.

I want for people to be able to grow, you know, I want good things for people but I'm carrying around this whole agenda as well. And ah... think that I have answers for people as well. So, it's kind-of this mish-mash of ah... arrogance but hope for people, I mean...it's sad.

Sad for whom?

It's sad for both. It's sad that I think I have to change people, and it's sad that I was so lonely because I ah... because I couldn't just be myself... you know, I thought I had to do all this , and sad because I had a heart-full of motivations. I wanted good for people and I wanted good for myself, but I was trying so bloody hard.

You were trying so hard to be perfect? Are you still trying really hard?

No, No, I don't think so, sometimes I do, and then I realize that... I don't have to...
(laughing)... ..

S's turning to faith

And I started to look at alcoholism, you know. How did this play a part in who I am today, and what the hell's going on in my life? And why I'm so depressed. Feeling so crappy, and all this... So, he suggested that ah... .. I should get myself to an Al. Anon. meeting. That would be the answer for me! (laughing). So, being the dutiful person that did everything everybody said I should do, I did that. I went down and I went to this group in B. and ... I ... experienced, for the first time, ever, I think, in my life, a place where... well, I shouldn't say for the first time ever, because I've reflected on that a bit, but... I experienced people who heard me. They listened! ...

Nobody ever listened to me before. I was crazy, well, you don't think that way, or you not feel that, or, through my family, ah... .. I mean there was a lot of game-playing going on between my husband and I...and I was dismissed or (laughing) you know, ah... certainly there was no ability in either of us, to affirm or accept, you know, all of those things now that I understand are so important? Or to give some kind of unconditional regard to a person? It wasn't there! But, those women, because they were all women, there was the odd man, but basically they were all women, they just ah... took me under their wing, I guess. They didn't dismiss what I was thinking or feeling. They really allowed me to come there and, it took me a long time, I was very ah... skeptical, ah...

I thought they were some kind of a cult, (laughing)... I was trashed by this guy who had originally told me to go there, because I was starting to discover things, and I was talking about stuff. I was, it was like a whole new world of understanding open to me, it was very painful because, of course I was still in my mode of beating up on myself, and you know, that there was something wrong with me, and of course, you go to a place where they start telling you what you're doing that's not effective, well then you beat up on yourself even more. Even though they tell you not to do that. But you know, it's one thing, you know, it's a long process to get through that! ...

But I really believe, just now when I reflect on that, is that there were people there who actually didn't dismiss me! And even the relationship, the little dynamic that was going on, within my own immediate family, between my husband and my daughter and I, you know, she was 13 at the time.

From the time when she was 6 years old, when I started asking those questions, till then, it took me that long, until I found a place where I found an answer. I started to go to, and like I said, I started opening up to some kind of understanding of ... "Hey, there's a whole bunch of stuff that I don't understand here." And , where the hell have I been, why don't I know this? And that was the big statement for me! What the hell, 'cause I didn't consider myself that, I mean, I thought I was this intelligent, functioning person! How come I don't know this stuff? How come I have to come to a crisis in my life to start learning some of this?

It was just ... then I started to ah... I thought well, OK, I'm going to go to, I started going to open A.A. meetings so I could start to listening to actual alcoholics talk about their life, and listen to all the war stories, or whatever they call those... Ah... but below it all, I guess I'm a person that's pretty good at reading between the lines because, what I

could see was ... a whole pile of people, who, nobody wanted anybody to know you were coming there, it was all like, there's still all that shame and stigma around alcoholism, and you go in there and there's all these people who have turned their lives around, and I'm thinking... this is a reason to celebrate! What the hell is everybody hiding out here for? This is amazing, it's absolutely amazing what these people have done with their lives, and if anybody had ever said that you had anything to do with A.A., well, Jesus, you know, it would be awful!

So, I would go there and I would listen to this and then I started to realize that I was feeling better. I would start to feel better after I had gone. I think that it was that whole thing, Hey there is something better! 'Cause I had already asked myself "Is this all there is?" So, I think that was starting to rub off on me, that feeling of, there's something else to life? There is, you know.... and I,... so through that process of going and trying.... I had some compassion for my Dad, I didn't ... ah... I don't really recall having any feelings for him... most of my feelings were around my anger with my Mother... which I guess is quite common...

But, I don't really remember any kind of feelings towards him. I ... have some fond memories of his love of the outdoors, and I think he took us camping and that kind of stuff... and I have a real love for that, so there's some stuff around that, but mostly my memories of him are fear, and my humiliation, in terms of some of the things that were witnessed by friends or people in the community... ah... and again, the relative anonymity of the big city... and you go to a small town of 6 or 7 thousand people, and you're the Doctor and you're a drunk... you know, you can play all the games you want, but people know! It's not spoken, but it's felt. ...

You know, and again, we're back to the shame. So... those points in my ... whatever, combination, I mean, now I can look and say, you know, OK, it's a will to live, it's a spirit, it's that human desire to, you can only go down so far and then you have a choice, you're either going to kill yourself, or you're going to do something. You're just sick and tired of feeling sick and tired. I didn't want to feel crappy anymore. Especially when I could see, Well, hey, there is something else. Maybe that's what.... I don't have to feel like this anymore!

Because I realized later, I see that book, *Feeling Good* with David Burns, one of the classes that I took the prof. suggested that we read.... and ah... I remember ...

You were sick and tired of feeling rotten?

Well, and feeling that there was ah... anyway... I guess realizing that I could , somehow I was getting the message that I could do something different... Oh, I know, it was when I was reading that book, there's a little part in there, about the Beck Depression Inventory. And I thought I should try to answer this the way I think I would have answered when I was so depressed, before I got some bit of change in my life... and ah... I was this close to being suicidal, according to their scale...and I didn't know that at the time. I mean, I just knew I felt really crappy, and anyway, so I really think that, when I was that low, I mean, I just have to try to make up something, well I could, well, I didn't

want to die....

...and I got to a point where I had to wake up, I couldn't deny it anymore, I couldn't say, well, this isn't really happening, or maybe I could say that it was some spiritual thing, that someone was looking after me, and this person came into my life and these people were here when I needed them? I don't know. I just know that it was a major turning point for me.

Cause I guess what I'm thinking about here, is this, when you wanted to know what happened, or what was the turning point, or whatever? Ah... you know, I've talked about my own examination of things, and then I guess getting into that spot, where you found people who actually listened to me, and things I could actually relate to.

But this thing with the... is this coincidence or... and I was looking back when I was moving some of my stuff... I have some stuff stored and before Christmas, I went to look at some of the stuff, they're in the storage places, I'm trying to get rid of it. And I was looking at all of these things that were reminders to me, of this year, and it was 1989. And I was thinking, why, the hell did so many of these things happen to me in 1989? And then I realized that, shit, that was my 40th birthday! That was the year I turned 40! So, I don't know...

So I started the job, and this woman that I met, ah... she is a very extremely positive woman! And now here's this negative person whose struggling to figure out who she is, and I come and I get a job at this school. And it's a school with handicapped young adults, and she's so positive and so up-beat, and vibrant, and whatever...

And she also, I mean, I'm a person that's got the antenna out and I know, now OK, "You gotta pick up the cues, about how you're supposed to be, right?" There wasn't any room for negativity in that program. There wasn't any room for criticism, and there wasn't any room for any game-playing, you know? And you wouldn't believe what I learned in that! It was like me going back to school! It was like me re-parenting, well I don't know if re-parenting is the right word, but...

I was learning a whole lot of stuff, a whole lot of skills. I was becoming aware of... well, where the hell, where was I? How come I don't know this stuff? How come I don't know about feelings and about talking to people and stuff? And here I am in a place where I'm starting to learn that. And I watched her, she'd screw things up...she'd miss appointments or she'd screw things up, and I'd look at her and she'd never beat up on herself about it. She'd just ... and I thought that was so foreign to me, because if I made a mistake, well, I was an idiot, or I was and I just went on and on, and beat myself up about it. And I was watching her ...

...So, what I was saying is that I have a problem with defining what spirituality is. I don't know if that's a problem, maybe the problem is that people do try to define it, you know, be definitive about what something is. Ah... I just see it as, something that is believing in some other force or power beyond myself. And I can't define that. And then I also think about the spirit of people, when you talk of people's spirits. So, for me the kinds of things that I see in terms of the beauty of the human spirit, and the

will to live, and the will to grow, and ... I guess I see that as part of my definition of what spirituality might be.

But also when I got to a space, or when I'm in a space where I'm open, what I say by open, I mean when I can trust enough to put my fear aside, and just watch how things are provided for me, I mean , that's incredible. And I can look back and see lots of times when in my past life when lots of things were provided for me but I was too fuddled up or muddled around to, or afraid or caught up in what other people might think, and you know...

I think that's why I'm in such a conflict right now, because if I really sat down and wrote down and listened to what it is that I want to do, the only things that are stopping me are still more of that horse-shit.

Was there a turning point in your life where you remember a situation that ...

...Made me realize that? Well, I would say, the awareness came through being involved in that group. I was at such a low point in my life that I just felt so bad about myself when I got to that group of women, that support group. And of course, the focus in that group is very much, get the focus on you, look at what you're doing, stop complaining about what other people are doing.

So, they call it a spiritual program... .. but I think it is very much a philosophy of ... looking at how you're behaving and what you're doing with your energy and time, in life, and how you treat people...that was part of it. Plus working for that woman in the school and working with people with special needs.

Ah... it's a ...Yeah, when you can really connect with your own pain, and you can really get in touch with your own feelings, you can really understand what it feels like. 'Cause lots of times, you stuff it down, and you don't really feel it, but then when you go through a process of the pain around feeling it, and ah...

I can remember writing a paper, I took it somewhere outside my class. I can remember the professor suggesting that I read this book for this paper, and it was called "No Fat Chicks", and I thought, "Ach, I've read so much, my head was so full, I can't read this but I thought "Well, she said that maybe I should read it, so 25 after 5, I go to the bookstore, get the book, and start reading this book. Well, all the pain around my parents.

...

I heard this really neat program the other night on 'Ideas', about... myths around weight-loss, I guess through all of that, because within my family because there was such an emphasis on my weight, because I wasn't accepted as a person, as who I was, my body wasn't OK, I had to through messages from my parents, and messages from society, and whatever I was doing myself, you know, and so when I read that book, "No fat chicks", and this women put words on those feeling that I had and all those experiences, I called my friend who was one of the members of this group and I was so blown away by that, I was, I think I cried on the phone for 2 hours to her about that. You know, just feeling all that pain.

Now is that coming back as you talk about it now?

A little bit. And it was very, very painful. But, I didn't have the words to put on it, or I just stuffed it down or whatever, but when you get to a point where you can connect with that, or at least for me, when I could connect with that, it's cathartic...But it really makes you understand what it means to be hurt. You really understand the impact of others on you, and you really understand that you don't want to have that impact on other people.

And a guy in this group that I'm in, he's black and there's four of them in there and they're all talking about all the pain that they've suffered with racism and whatever. And of course, one day in the class, he made some remark to another women and myself, somebody brought some chips, or some junk food and we were ...indulging...and he made the remark, "A minute on the lips, a lifetime on the hips". So the 2 of us said to him, well, you know you probably wouldn't say that at home, (laughing), to your wife, but like, why do you feel it's Ok to say it to us? And so we got into this discussion about it , and I said, "Well, you know, I got a book maybe you could read, so we changed books because he had read "Germaine Greer on Menopause". So I said, well, you read this book and I'll read yours. Because I said, you know, you explained to me your pain around racism and your hurt around you not being who you are, and being criticized for your skin colour, and your package. And I'm expressing to you there's "This is my package", so when you make remarks around that, you know, it's the same stuff. To me, it's the same stuff.

The same hurt and pain?

So, I guess in terms of turning points, a lot of it was being in two different places at the same time, and ... I guess, with people with special needs, to really have your eyes opened to their world and how marginalized they are, and what an impact that has on, and so on... and being in this other philosophical, so called, spiritual program, that you try to follow a ... ah, I guess a prescribed way of using your attitude, looking at your attitude and trying to be the best person you can be, sort-of-thing.

The group that you're in, with the women, how long ago was that?

Ten years ago. I started ten years ago, probably this month.

And it was a group of women only, or were there men too?

Oh, there the odd men, and it's a group that is nationally, international, so...

An open group, or closed group? So, the members went every week, or ...

It's open, in that it's open to anyone who would come, but you need to become a member in a sense. I mean, people drop in and drop out, but it's anonymous, so it's not

open in that way. If you do participate, you're expected to follow the prescribed game-plan, which in some ways, there's some things that I take issue about that. That's another story. So, what were you asking me about the group?

I was asking that it started ten years ago, that it's an anonymous group, and do you still attend from time to time?

From time to time. I have a very close connection with, I guess in coming back to school and studying all the kinds of stuff around some psychology, I guess, when you start learning about people's behaviour, and people's development, and you realize that emotional support or social support or whatever label you want to put on it, but that you have some forum to express yourself?

I didn't have that in my family because my husband didn't, I was dismissed. I didn't have it with, I still don't have it basically with my Mum, she can't handle any emotional discussion with me, because it's either, if it's something around a problem I'm having, or I'm not doing that well, well then, it's her fault because she wasn't a good-enough Mother.

And if it's something I'm really excited about, I don't know if that's a threat to her because she's lived her life differently that I have, so she isn't in a space where she's able to be there for me. So, I didn't really have it anywhere, and I had a lot of friends that we engaged in a lot of talk about people, but it wasn't, I didn't know how to open for that kind of support, you know? I didn't know how to express my feelings because I learned not to.

So, Yeah that group for me, as I look at it now, ...it was a life-saver. It really was, it was the thing that changed, going there was a life-saver for me.

Now, how did you decide to go there? What instigated...

The issue, I think that I talked about that on the last tape, about being so low, and being this child, having to find myself as a child of an alcoholic and starting to be aware, and of course, somebody telling me, well, you're a child of an alcoholic, and you should go there.

Jane's turning to faith

To define spirituality... I would define spirituality very simply as ... I think that we all have spirituality, I think that we all are spiritual people. When I look at my spiritual journey the consistent thing I see is striving for higher awareness ... of myself, of God, of others, of religion... just higher awareness. And I try to keep it that simple, because that works for me. In doing that, I go many different places, striving for that higher awareness.

So, how do you work with that in your life?

Faith. That's what faith is. ...

Faith to do what with?

If I can't comprehend God, why would I believe in something I can't comprehend. It doesn't make any sense! That's up here in the head again. In the heart I have the acceptance that says "Don't even go there". Why would I spend my life trying to figure out something I can't comprehend? That's a waste of time, it's a ridiculous action and it's going to slow down my spiritual growth. So that's right off-limits for me. What I do see, is that God is all encompassing. What I do see is that there's a part of each of us that is connected to God, and in some way connected to each other.

There's a universal something?

But beyond that... again, that is something that I can't comprehend. So, that's as far as I can go with that. And I'm not really interested in exploring that because I don't see it going where I want to go. I want to learn how to live here on this earth, in this year, on this day, in a way that is going to be conducive to other people's growth, to be conducive to my growth, and hopefully will be a little environmentally friendly, in there. (laughing) Do you know what I mean?

Yeah. It's big. Don't you think?

...(sigh). No. Actually, I think that is very small. Very minute, but very important.

The impact of those words spoken by you, on me, is huge. There's somebody else in this world...

What do you mean? Somebody else, yeah, there's other people in this world, Rhonda. I'm just one of them.

...who thinks in that way, that they're interested in being a particular way. I just find

that so touching that you are concerned not only for your own spiritual growth, but for everyone that you come in contact with. That there's a piece of God in every one, or that's what I'm understanding you to say?

Yeah. And there's a piece of me in every one. ... that means I have a great responsibility to that person, if I want to be whole. ... (laughing). And that why I hear a lot of people saying, ... they are talking about responsibility, they're talking about accountability to God. Well, if we can't even be accountable and responsible to each other, how are we ever going to do that with God? I see people and ... we're here personally, ourselves, and then they put above us, God, and then the people that surround us, are above God. They want to be accountable to God before they are accountable to the people we live with. How does that make any sense? That doesn't make any sense to me.
...

It sounds like things have changed for you. What has changed?

...(laughing) What's changed? Well, Oh, my sense of Self has definitely changed. The level of fear that I live with has definitely changed. The way I perceive myself, the way I feel about myself, the way I feel about other people, the way I perceive other people. The world, God, addiction... all that has changed.

And that change started on that second round of abstinence. You went back to program of having this extreme hole, fear again. What were the things you got in program that lead to a spiritual place of finding yourself? Was there something in program that did that for you?

...Ah... perhaps not in the way it does for other people. I don't talk to very many other people who relate to my story in program. What I got out of program ... was that 12 step programs are all focused around God. There are millions of people around the world who have recovered from addictions in programs that are focused around God, ... so there must be something to that. So what it did was open my eyes, and get me to a point where I could be open, about spiritual concepts.... ... 'cause before that I wasn't. I wanted to be whole.

What is whole?

... .. I think being whole has to do with balance, and living in harmony. I think it has to do with living with higher awareness, striving for that. That it's not about achieving the higher awareness, it's about wanting it. And it's about working to get it. ...

...So we were going to pick up at the end of where we were last time. And that was talking about responsibility for others, in that you've decided that letting go of your own control,

may have other people react to that? You were talking about how other people were really upset that you were laying in the bottom of the canoe. They were fearful for you, but you weren't afraid, because you had given up your control. You were quite happy about that. And I said, they're a limit to how much responsibility you take for other people's actions?

I think rather than a limit to how much responsibility I take, I take a different responsibility now.

How is that different?

...(sigh) I see people going around taking responsibility for things that they're not responsible for, and not being responsible for things they are. An example of that is... ahhh... ... if I say something that offends another person, if I didn't mean it maliciously and if I didn't do it to cause that person harm in any way... if they ask my opinion about something and I give it in a caring manner, I have done that in a responsible way. If they become offended by what I've said, I don't see myself as having a whole lot of responsibility in that. ...

Whereas before, I would have taken a whole lot of responsibility for how anyone ever reacted to anything I ever said, or did, or was or became, or might become. Like there was all this responsibility. Now, ... I perceive that we need to be more responsible on a different level and less responsible in those ways.

I need to be more responsible about what I put into the world and what I take out. I need to be more responsible for my thoughts. Ahhh.... I need to be more responsible to God. I need to understand how my life and the way that I live it, impacts other people, that perhaps I don't even know. And less responsible for everyone's reaction to everything. It's their reaction, not mine.

If I have done something, without care that has hurt another person, then Yes, I have that responsibility. And just as responsible for throwing a piece of garbage on the ground, as I am for slapping someone in the face. I don't see, as a society, that we do that. ... It's not... .. I don't know why. I can't comprehend how we can all live together on this earth, and not feel responsibility to each other, to live in a meaningful way, physically, spiritually and emotionally. I see that as my responsibility to the other people on the earth now.

What was it that switched that attitude about how you feel responsible from what used to be to what is now?

That's something that has been developing over a long period of time. When in January, I had my month of silence, the solitude that was one of the things that came together for me. ... was the ... for years that's been nagging at me, but I couldn't put it together...I couldn't see what it was... I was able to explore that a little more when I got the time to be quiet and be by myself and not be influenced by society and family and all

that negativity that's out there. And that was enough time that I could put together for myself, without being influenced by anyone but myself and God. How I felt about that, what I wanted to do, and how I should go about doing it.

So how did you go about getting to that realization? Were there particular things that set the stage for you? You were all alone...

The silence. I was in solitude. ... And I think the months previous to that, where I would have a couple of days of solitude, or a day here or a day there, or sometimes 3 or 4 days ...ah...it all came together gradually, but it was ... I would get glimpses of it, and glimpses of it, and then through the longer period of time of solitude it really came together.

It was something that I have been concerned about and something I have known for a very long time that I have a responsibility to every person, but I didn't know how. I didn't know how to be responsible. I didn't know what my responsibility to all those people were. I didn't know on what level it was. I didn't know ... how it would manifest itself. It was like just a gradual awareness that came over time, which really emphasizes, for me, the importance of silence and solitude. Major growth tool... ... if you can do it....(laughing)

What kinds of surroundings did you have that made that possible? I take it that you weren't in ... if you had silence, you weren't in a town, where there would be a lot of traffic noise or...

I was back in the woods... way back in the woods... (laughing) no distractions, so far back in the woods that in January it was rare to have a person drive by, let alone come on the property.

So, what's it like to be ...

No phone. That was important. No phone, no TV, CBC was on strike (laughing) there was no distraction. It was hours of sitting in the chapel, just sitting in the chapel.

Did you have any notion in mind, that you were set and determined to figure this out?

No. I just knew there were all kinds of pieces of the puzzle coming together ... and sometimes you could see them coming but until they land, you don't know what they are. It was just enough time, it gave the opportunity for those things to land, for me to examine them. To figure out what I was going to do with them. Whether I was going to accept them, or reject them, and then how I was going to deal with it.

So, you sat in silence in the chapel... not thinking about anything in particular?

Well, sometimes I would. It was very free-flowing. Ah... but most of the time, No, I was just being. ... Just being, in the moment. I think there's a lot to be said for that.

Right there, right then?

Yeah, And there's so much more clarity, when you are there.

Is there something about being in the chapel that you found conducive to just being?

I find that chapel a powerful place anyway.

...So what we have talked about before the tape started was, where are we going with this? Not necessarily to wrap it up, but to get back to some of the fundamental questions we started with? Not that you've strayed, but that we can put flesh on the bones?

I know what you're saying.

But, so, I've tried to come up with this question. What is that you use as a guide to live out your spirituality? What are the guiding principles that you live by to be a spiritual being in this world?

I think what you're asking me is ... (sigh) ... what my principles for living are, how do I make the distinction, how do I make the distinction between whether I'm going in the right direction, whether I'm doing the right thing in a situation, and ... ah... how do I take something from my mind, something that's in my head, and apply it in real life situations with real people.

Yeah. So, what I heard you say was "What are my principles for living?" And how I paraphrased it was " How do I make the distinction between whether I'm living out those principles or not." Is that what you meant?

Uh-huh.

*And then how do I take something from my head, which is a principle I live by...
...a thought...*

...A thought, OK, ...

...and make it an action...

In everyday living, in interaction with ordinary circumstances with ordinary people...

...every day... OK, now, you know how I am and how I wander. Don't be afraid to bring me back.

Actually, I don't find you wander. You elaborate, but you don't wander. But I will if I see you doing that.

OK. ... Where should I start? Do you have a suggestion?

You said, when I initially asked you the question, that you have to break it down into 2 parts: what my principles are, and how I live them out.

OK, so I'm trying to put that into one tangible guideline. ... OK, so... ... my guidelines for living... are simply trying to live in the life or in the positive or doing God's will or whatever label you want to put on it, as opposed to ... living a life of selfishness and self-pity. It's going out instead of going in, in one sense. ...

Can you explain that to me? Going out instead of going in?

It's like....in my life if I try to learn to give... with my life previous to recovery, all I could do was take. I would take, take, take, and never feel fulfilled. Now I can give and feel fulfilled. I still have to go inward to search but not in that selfish taking way, in a much more healthy way

Now I have 2 questions around that. One is around going in to search, ... just bear with me for a minute...

Yup.

And what that is, what you're searching for , how you get that answer, when you know you need to go in for those things, and before that you said 'giving'. Now, I'm assuming you're not meaning that in a literal sense of giving things away, necessarily? What kind of giving, like in a every day way...

Any way I can see to give...

In a kind of martyr way, though?

No. ... when a martyr gives, there's always strings attached.

OK. So, your giving attempts to have no strings attached?

I want to be giving, in what I think is a clean way. ...

OK, now can you describe what 'clean' is?

In a way that gives the other person freedom, in a way that empowers the other person ... in a way that's providing the other person with something they need, be it ...ah... something ah... tangible...ah... if I give a gift, I try to give something that will empower that person or... .. do something positive for their emotional well being, or their spiritual well being, or their physical well being.

And how do you know what that might be? Where do you get that knowledge?

... If I get someone a bottle of Chippy's Golden Glow (laughing), I'm probably not too concerned about their well being. If I spend some money and buy someone a nice bottle of wine, that's a show of appreciation for who that person is in my life. That's the difference. Not that gifts have to be expensive, but they have to be from the heart, and they have to show something to the person that I'm giving them to. It doesn't always work that way, but it's always my intent.

To show them what in particular that you're giving?

It depends on the circumstance. If I see someone who is low in self-esteem, for instance, I might give them something that they would really treasure, that they would be honoured to have. If I see someone who ah... is frightened, then maybe a book would be appropriate, about fear, or something connected to fear that they would be interested in..

It sounds like a very personal thing.

I think that that is how it needs to be. I can't do that with everyone, because not everyone recognizes the value of that. ... I try to do it with everyone, but some people are harder than others. (smiling)

And why do you smile about that?

(laughing) I'm thinking about my family and how hard it is to buy a gift for anyone in my family, because... .. they don't appreciate that I don't have money... they don't understand that I don't have money. When they think of gifts, they think of big, expensive, gaudy things... (laughing)

Pricey things?

With no personal attachment.

So their definition of 'gift' is different than yours?

Yup. ... I see trying to apply the same principles, but often the message gets lost.

...

So, what do you do with that? When you give from your heart, but it's not accepted that way?

Then I've done my part. ...

Which is reaching out?

Yeah, I'm reaching out, or trying to put something back into the global consciousness. I've made an effort with that person to help them in some way. Not that it's up to me to judge what kind of help people need, ... but I think when I'm listening to people, it becomes very clear what they're asking for. ... if I'm listening... and it's hard sometimes to listen... but that's back to the family (laughing)... very hard to listen...

So if listening is a big part of knowing what to give, how do you know? Are you a better listener now than you used to be?

Oh, yeah (quietly)... yes...

What has brought you to that? Because that's a spiritual thing, isn't it?

... ah... the perception of listening is... (sigh) goes in many different directions. If I'm listening to someone and I'm nodding my head and I'm saying "Uh-huh, Uh-huh", but I'm not really listening, ...but if I'm really listening to that person I can really hear a lot. ...And I find ... it's been my experience that people tell a lot about themselves, if I just listen...

So you are listening with more than your ears?

Yes, when I'm listening to someone talk ... if it's someone that I know well, or someone that I grew up with, then I know their history and I know and I try to put that in, so my perception is coming from their point of view... so that I can see the meaning of what they're saying... .. 2 people can say the same sentence and have it mean things at opposite of the English language. Talking is a lot more than taking things literally. Communicating... I think is much more spiritual...

So which one of your principles lead into the way you listen now, than the way it used to be? 'Cause I think I'm understanding you to say that your principles have shifted and changed over time, so that what they are now is not what they were 5 or 10 years ago?

If I'm having a conversation with someone who's come from a dysfunctional family, they haven't been heard very much. Just the listening is often a gift for that person. ... I lost the question...

The principles you carry now, how do they affect your listening?

...Before ... I started my journey of recovery, the only listening I did, was to get pertinent information, because it was directly relevant for me or to collect information. Now, for me, listening is a much more communication. It was cold before. ... I still don't see myself as a great listener, because I'm too busy talking (laughing). But when I can be mindful about listening, I listen with my ears and my eyes and my intuition, and I mean every part of me is listening. Before, everything was literal. You know. That's a bizarre place to be. And some people I talk to now, are where I was. ...

Do you know what that reminds me of? It's when you talked about, a couple of sessions ago when you talked about growing up in dysfunctional families, what you see common with yourself and others that you know, is this hyper-vigilance, this super-awareness, this radar. So have you transposed that fearful radar, into some other kind of radar that you use in your communication?

That's interesting.

'Cause not everybody uses intuition and looking and ... there's different kinds of listening...so I wondered if that has ...

That is interesting... I've never thought about that, but now that you've said that, I would think that to be accurate, ...

You've got a lifetime of skills of being mindful, ever...

Yeah, I can spot danger from 500 paces... you know?

So, with that experience, what can you spot now, that allows you to be a spiritual being in your every day life?

I can spot sometimes danger to other people. I can still spot danger to myself. But that's not the focus of that radar anymore.

Oh, so what is the focus of your radar now, if that's changed? The radar reason has changed?"

If I'm listening to someone talk and the radar is engaged, it's like I'm going there

with them. I try to go there with them...

How do you do that?

By being present. By being mindful. By validating. ... being supportive in whatever way I can. I don't know if that happens...but I ... when people are talking about things that are painful for them, it's been my experience that I always felt alone on my pain, even though I was talking to someone about it. ...

It was rare that I didn't feel alone in my pain. ... and we're not alone in our pain, but everyone is so afraid of our pain, they put up that wall and they just sit there and nod their head without being involved...and that only builds that sense of aloneness. And where I've come from, I just felt so much aloneness, ... that to me that's a pretty big gift.

I don't know if anyone else would perceive it that way, but that's part of me doing what I can. I don't have the power to change anyone's life or change any one person or any of those things, but if I can walk beside a person for a short time, instead of observing them from a distance or like they're in an hour glass, and I'm looking in from the outside, that's got to be helpful, ... it's got to be supportive.

How does it feel to you be a listener who is engaged, mindful, present? Do you get a body sense, or get some indication within yourself that ...

It's in my heart.

So what happens, so that you know? Because it's not happening all the time?

... How do I know? I guess I can feel, in part what that person feels. I don't think I have any ability to feel someone else's feelings, in their entirety. I would not even dream of putting that perception across, but, ... when I'm doing that, all I'm doing is trying to make them feel that they are not alone, because they're not.

Millions of people grew up in dysfunctional families. If you grew up in a dysfunctional family, you're the norm, you know. But we treat it as though it's foreign. But the more we get out and talk about it, and the more we do about it, the more likelihood that we'll break the cycle here.

So the ramifications of doing that go far beyond, or I see them going far beyond the person that I'm listening to, because that stops the cycle. ...That's a lot of people who don't have to go through it. ... And being validated, I mean, when I was a negative person, I was a person who was not validated. I couldn't get validation. It's a strange world. If someone does something wrong to you or me, they've done something wrong. Not, Oh, I took that the wrong way, or you took that the wrong way, or either one of us deserved it, or invited it, or too sensitive, No, No, No. ... (laughing)

It's a hard thing to put into words? There is definitely something that happens within us that ...

Well, I think that when you look at self-help groups and people who are,... I hear a lot of counsellors saying, "Embrace your pain." Well, Ok, I did that and it was very lonely in there. I wouldn't wish that on anyone. If someone is talking about their pain, if I can embrace even a little bit of it, maybe that will give them just a little bit of extra strength. ... or maybe it will give them something I don't see. As long as it's positive, I don't care what it is.

So is part of it, helping humanity go the distance?

...I've gotten a lot of help in my journey, and I take it as my personal responsibility to put some of that back. ... And it seems like a small thing to do, but it's still putting something back. ... and if I continue to put things back where I see the chance to do it, then I've honoured my responsibility to do that.

Can you articulate what the purpose of all this is?

Of all this life? Of all this thesis? Of all this taping? ...it's a big world out there...

That was a bit obscure... the words in my head are not coming out very clearly. I'm trying to be as close to the words that you used to, that as you live day to day, you try to be present and mindful of where you are and listen when people need to speak, and so, the purpose for being that way, or living out that principle, is giving back to others...

Well, I think pity is such a waste of time. The only thing it ever got me was suicidal tendencies. That's really where I want to be. If I'd wanted to be dead, I wouldn't have chosen to come here, would I? It doesn't make any sense to me. And yet why I chose this doesn't make any sense to me, but (laughing) I'm here. There must be a reason!

You chose? You mean to be on this earth?

In this life, in that dysfunctional family. (laughing)

Oh, your belief is that you personally choose to.. that you pick your family?

Oh, yes, I think so.

Before you were born?

Oh, yes, I think so.

For what purpose? To learn lessons in this lifetime?

... Quite possibly. I'm not sure what the reason is. I don't get to know that until I die again.

So you are a believer in reincarnation of spirit?

Yeah, not in the typically understood sense, No, but yes. How's that for confusion? I do believe in reincarnation. I do not believe in reincarnation within the confines of any set list of rules or regulations that I have ever read or heard of. ... The body dies, the spirit does not. ...

Would you say we are predominantly spirit? The body just happens to be there? Or do you think that the body is predominant and the spirit resides within?

It's just this case that weighs.. it feels like it weighs 500 pounds and we have to drag it around wherever we go...

The body?

Yes. I had a healing experience where I left my body. And ever since then my body feels like a piano. (laughing)

That's big.

You know, like it's clumsy, it's awkward, it's hard to move. It takes a lot of energy to move this body, compared to what I experienced before. It was like you just thought about something and you were there, BOOM! Ahhhhh.....That's wasn't any work. Then I come back to this body and it's like, this body weighs a ton! It's awkward, it's clumsy! It's encasing me. It felt like how you might feel if you were laying in a coffin? an enclosed space and... it was bizarre... I guess it was bizarre, but maybe not. But that's another story. ... Another story...

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES**Jane's mystical experiences**

... .. I remember crying one night...Oh, what a bizarre night. I forget what month it was, but it was the first moon of the month that had 2 moons, no, it was the full moon after the Blue Moon. That's what it was. And it was so still out there... and I couldn't stay inside ... I was compelled to go outside.

And it wasn't exactly a warm night. I'd be saying to myself "Now wait, you've got to go inside, it's too cold, you've been out here too long." And I would go in, throw some wood on the wood stove, stand by it, get all warmed up, put some extra layers of warm clothes on , and go back out.

I couldn't stand to stay inside because it was so beautiful outside! And it was a full moon, and it was so still. There was not a breath of air, and I walked around and around, around the monastery and I got tired of going in circles. Up the hill, down the hill, back by my place, back up the hill, down by my place... and after a while, I thought "What am I doing, eh?"

What were you doing?

I just didn't want to go inside. It was too cold to sit.

So you were walking to keep warm?

I was walking to keep warm and I must have walked around that little road 50 or 60 times. And every time I did, it was like the first time. It was like I was seeing it for the first time.

It was so light. You could see the detail of the grain in the logs of the cabins. It was so light. And after a while I realized that "Hey, it's so light out here I can go anywhere I want. So I went out and I went for about an hour I walked through the woods on those back trails, ... and like it was so light that the trees were leaving shadows , you know?

And I came back ... and I said "OK, this time I'm going in and I'm staying in, and by now it's 10 o'clock at night or something... and I come across the front of my cabin, and the moon is so bright, ... and in the garden I can see the sprigs of things sticking up from last year, and I can see the shed, and I can see the poles for the climbing peas, you know. I could see everything. And the snow was shining, and it was beautiful.

By my cabin is a bunch of really tall trees, and I walked over towards the garden, and as I stepped out from under the trees, it was like stepping into daylight, and it was so beautiful. I went to the garden and went over... there's the lamp post with a kerosene lamp in it, and I went over there and I was just standing there, turning in circles, just looking and looking and looking,... it was so beautiful! ...

And I just couldn't move. I just couldn't get myself to go inside and I was so

struck by the beauty...and I'm just standing there looking around, looking at the snow and looking at the trees, and you know...looking at what used to be flowers last summer ...everything... and it was so overwhelming ...

The next thing I know...I'm on my knees ...and I'm crying and I'm crying and I'm crying and I can't stop and it's so cold the tears are freezing to my face... but you know something? It was so beautiful that the tears were tears of joy simply at what was coming in through my eyes and the peace and the quiet... it was absolute silence. You couldn't hear a squirrel in a tree. Nothing was moving...and the light ... it was awesome! I must have looked like an idiot. I must have been out there on my knees for at least 10 minutes, crying like a baby. And I literally had to force myself ... I was so amazed by what I was seeing that I didn't even know my feet were cold. My feet were like ice-cubes. My hands were like ice-cubes. I didn't even know the tears were freezing on my face. ... I felt safe. I felt free. I felt like I was surrounded by more beauty than I had ever seen in my entire life, all put together. ... And I felt like I was surrounded by joy. And it was amazing!

And you were all alone?

Uh-huh. I was very glad I didn't have to stop and answer the phone in the middle of all of that. ...That made me realize how distracted we all are. How distracted I am. ... How distracted our life-style is. ... and how important it is to take the time for solitude and silence. ... and see what God really is offering us. ...

... I could tell that a hundred times and you still wouldn't understand what I saw, ...how I felt. It was so big. ... And tears of joy that wouldn't stop flowing ... I cried for days. I just think about it and I'd start crying again. ... I forget why I was telling that story but... ..

I think I probably asked you what solitude meant. ... How have you taken that experience and made it meaningful to you now in your spirituality? It sounds like a profound...

Now I know I can get there. ... Now I know I'm capable of feeling that. Now I want to feel it again. And I can't feel it in a bottle and I can't feel it in a pill. ... I have to be living in harmony to feel that... .. I can't live in harmony ... with distractions.

I have to live in harmony with God. I have to take my responsibility as a human being. I have to take my responsibility to other human beings, my responsibility to God, my responsibility to myself, and not allow myself to get saddled to the baggage of other people's responsibility. ... I have to be clear in order to experience that. It really made me stop and evaluate what my distractions are.

... .. Another story...

Is that another story that would add to your spiritual journey?

Oh, yes, big time! ...

How old were you when this happened?

Oh, that happened 5 or 6 years ago. ... Are you interested in hearing that one?

I think so.

(laughing) Ok, I'll tell you. On my spiritual journey I've had, what I call very powerful spiritual experiences. Now the Baptist may not define them that way, and actually probably any organized religion, under the heading of Christianity would not think that what I had was a spiritual experience but there's no doubt in my mind, and I believe that to be true because I happened to be the one that was there. Anyway,....

As you point to your heart "In my mind", as I point to my heart...So you said the Baptist church would not classify it as a spiritual experience?

Well, I don't know...but No, they would not think it was, No, No. I can't see it anyway. That has not been my experience.....

Does this story have anything to do with going in to search?

No.

Does it have anything to do with giving?

Well, it sort-of has something to do with searching. ... And it's about, I would say, receiving instead of giving. But it's doing an inner search. ...

...Ah, I was sick ... and I did quite a bit of meditation about being sick. I was really frustrated, and I was really angry about being sick. My body was letting me down, the usual rejection of illness that I think people go through. ...

...I went to bed one night and I went to sleep, and I woke up, and I felt like I was reaching up, physically, weightless, reaching up. ... And there was like... beings... reaching down ... like the visualization would be like an aura. Although they did have a body form, but what was so striking was the light. I was so struck by the light that I couldn't see the faces. I could see... the basic features, but no detail.

Anyway, it was like looking at an outline, a hazy outline, with an aura around it. Anyway, there was 4 or 5 of them . And it was like I was snapped out of sleep and I felt like I had been snapped out of sleep and snapped into some reality other than here...anyway, it was ... very peaceful and I felt very safe. And they were saying, not verbally, but saying Come, Come, so I went.

And I got a tour ofnot the world, but more like society. It was more like a tour of the Collective. And I had experienced the Collective before, and that's how I recognized it as that.

What do you mean by the Collective?

..The place where everybody comes together, the part of everyone that is a part of everyone else. The part where we all connect.

That universal something?

That universal whatever... you ... there's certainly no words for that...

You call it the Collective?

I call it the Collective, for lack of a better explanation or a better word....

Is that an accurate term for you?

Well, it is for me because everything was there. Everyone was there. Every emotion was there. Every fleeting moment for every soul that ever was, was there. ... It was really ... well, I'm glad that I didn't go there in human form because I would have passed out and I would have missed the rest of it.

Anyway, ah... it was like floating with these beings and having an tour and having all these things explained to me. ... "This over here is this, and this over here is that. OK, now we're going to go over here and look at this. And now we're going to go over here and look at that. This is what that means over there, it's connected to this." And all this stuff. ...

...And I remember my response was ... nothing but joy and excitement, but not excitement like we get physically excited. Excitement right at the root, at the very base of my soul , joy and excitement, something I had never experienced before...and I was awestruck by all that I was seeing. I couldn't take it all in! ... I knew what it meant but I couldn't comprehend it. ...

...And then we went back to this place, and all of a sudden that was gone and we were back in this place, and we were in a room but I couldn't see any walls, but there was some sort of enclosure or energy or something. But there were no walls. I looked around and I couldn't see anything. ... and the light just kind-of faded off, very gradually, like in a fog, but not as defined...

Anyway, ... I was going to say that we sat and talked but we didn't sit. We were just there, kind-of hanging. And I was told that I could ask any questions I wanted to. So, I started asking questions, in my inquisitive way, you know? ... And the beings that I was there with, ... I'm going to do my best to describe this, and I'm not very good at describing this... I would ask a question, ... and they would laugh... .. and it was a laugh that I have

never heard before. ...

...It was a laugh with such joy... and I'd be sitting there innocently thinking "I don't know what they're laughing about, but I love it... you know, because I was all serious about my questions. ... And then I realized ... it's like when a child comes and asked you something and it's so absurd and you just do the belly-laugh? You know what I mean? It's like when a child asks you a question that is so obvious, in a very serious way, and you can't keep a straight face? It was like that, only it was like a thousand times more joyous and

Is it like the innocence of children just touches you?

Yeah, yeah! Yes, that's exactly it! And it was also, ... they weren't laughing at me, it was joy, such joy! That I knew, there was no level on which I had any hesitation that they were laughing at me. I had no hesitation about it. ... We were all laughing. I was laughing with them.

So I asked all my questions, any, and all, I asked them... every single question I had, ... (sigh) ... and they smiled in their very joyous way, and said that I wouldn't remember any of the answers. ... But it was important that I had the knowledge so that I would know that I had it. ... that when the time was appropriate, it would be used... plain and simple... but I'm not going to remember the questions, and I thought, "This is so clear to me, that it would be impossible for me to forget this." "This is so clear to me." and I could ask a complex question and in one sentence, what they would tell me would be so clear to me, the reality of the answer was so crystal clear. ...

...I thought, you're crazy, because I thought that there was no way that I could possibly forget this. There's no way. But I don't remember a question today, and I don't remember an answer. ...

What do you remember?

I remember that I was getting a lot of knowledge. ... I was shown a lot of things, then, ... came the singing ... ah... the singing was phenomenal! If I was standing or sitting in an auditorium and I heard that singing, I would pass out! It was so beautiful! And in the singing ... by now we are standing at the edge of a tunnel... and I've heard people with near-death experiences talk about tunnels and passing over, and that's the only thing that can relate it to, although I have no idea what it was. At the end of the tunnel was a light, pure white light... and they're singin' and singin' and I'm just bather in this music and it was absolutely awesome and the light inn the tunnel was getting closer and closer, and I don't think that it was actually a tunnel, it was probably like that fog thing again,... I don't know what it was... anyway, because there was no perception of a straight line anywhere, and nothing solid or tangible, so there the light comes.

The next thing I know, I'm on my back like I'm laying down, suspended in mid air. I'm just laying there. and I have a split second of hesitation, and I thought "What's happening?" and one of them says, "You're going to be healed." And I didn't

have any more hesitation... Everything was so safe.

And they're singing, I mean, ... I can't describe it, it was so (laughing) ...I mean my heart feels light just remembering it...just talking about it... so the light comes and this is something I'd never heard before , but since this has happened to me, I've heard of one account of this... ... and it was when I saw the white light was getting closer and then it was next to me, I thought "Oh, I'm looking at Christ." and then it was something like some other awareness in , what should have been my head, just put me in a place where I could embrace the peace and the love and the serenity and the freedom and all those things.

The light stood next to me, by my side and it was like a wand, I swear to God, the only thing tangible was this , like stick, like a wand, and the Light had the wand, and it moved it from my toes to my head and back, and again... all the time the other beings were singing, ... and then there was no comprehension of words. I felt like I had been blessed, and then we were going out through the tunnel. ...

And at that point, I'm feeling so great, I'm saying " I'm coming too." And they're going "No", not the white light, but the other beings are saying "No.... It's not your time. You have to go back." And I'm saying "No, I don't want to go back. I want to be here. This is where I want to be." And they're saying "No, you must go back." And they knew... there was no sense in arguing, because I don't even know where I am, you know? ... So then they bring me back, and it's a sense, literally of coming down, ... and I remember ...my body coming awake and I wasn't in it yet, and I remember coming back into my body, laying in the bed...

It's just like putting on a pair of coveralls, you know? Like the legs and then body and the arms. And I put my feet in first, and when I put my feet in, my body woke up. It was just like ... ah... putting on a shirt... you put your arms in ,... and you just lay down and you're back in your body. ... And when my body woke up, I thought "Oh,... this is a weird dream!"

And then I realized that I wasn't even in my body yet, I only had my feet in. And that's when I realized that it wasn't a dream, like consciously, I realized that it wasn't a dream... and I laid there in bed and I ran the whole thing over in my head... ... The first thing I thought of was those questions and answers. And do you think that I could remember any one of them? One little tiny titbit of it? No. ... Not a speck and it was so fresh and it was so new. And I thought "There is no way that I could forget that." It was so clear! It was so re-al-i-ty !

So, that was that experience. It was probably, well, I don't know if that was the most major one. It's hard to measure them. ... Yeah, that was the most major. ... When they were taking me from place to place, it wasn't like flying over the earth and saying "Oh, yeah, there's Europe, and there's Halifax." It wasn't like that at all. It was like flying over a mass of entities. I was really disappointed when I woke up the next day and my body still hurt. ... I thought "What's been healed?" I don't get it, I don't get it, I don't get it.

Did you get it yet?

Yeah. (laughing) I get it now.

Tell me. What got healed, Jane?

... .. I think my inner child got healed. I think the damage that was done, being raised in an abusive family for the most part was healed. The only thing that's left is what I choose. ...

It was all taken away, and I have chosen to take certain things back because I'm a perfectionist and I think that I can achieve a higher level with those things. I know I can turn them back any time and they will just fly. They'll just be gone. ... and that's the same kind of choice I made, in this body, in this dysfunctional family, in the little town of W., ... that's the same kind of choice I made. ... Can you see the parallel? I can just Phisst and it's gone! It's strange.

I did not want to come back. I'll tell you that! I did not want to come back! It was so peaceful. ... There was so much joy! It was the joy that struck me, the sound of those voices... even though I have no visual...I wasn't looking ... at the beings the voices were coming from, but I could hear from the voices, they were singing with their heads lifted up. I have this perception that the up-lifted heart and an up-lifted head, these entities were singing. so sweet... .. I could never, ever describe that sound. But if I ever hear it again, I'll know immediately what it is. (laughing) The acceptance, Oh Rhonda, the acceptance was ... like it's all part of the plan. ... All the horrible things I did, were all part of the plan! ... Not a plan as we express a plan, or how we think of a plan, but there is a plan! ... All those horrible things I did were part of it. And it enabled me to forgive myself. ...

When I talk to people about drinking and driving, they say "Well, weren't scared you'd kill someone?" And I'd say " I don't know that I haven't." And I really don't know that. I did so much impaired driving when I drank, that it wouldn't surprise me at all, if I had killed someone or injured someone. ...And that's something that's haunted me for years. But it doesn't haunt me anymore.

For years and years and years, I lived with terrible guilt, thinking I might have hurt someone and not even know it. And how do you get forgiven, and how do you forgive yourself, and how do you do all that stuff if you've got nothing to work with? It's almost impossible. ... But that experience enabled me to forgive myself, not just because it's part of the plan, but because I've changed my ways, because I'm earnestly seeking God's will for me. 'Cause I'm not driving impaired anymore. ... and that was part of my process.

Amazing! Big! And after I had that experience, I felt like I was stoned for 6 months...straight! just whacked right out of it! I was so damned happy, it was pathetic! (laughing) Ahhhhhhhh! Nuts! Nuts! ... There's no way, in the English language, I could describe what happened to me. It was absolutely amazing!...

Have you read about anything that is similar?

I've got one instance of someone having a similar experience with the wand.

Do you remember where that was?

No. It was ... about 3 years ago. It might have been "Embraced by the Light", that book. I don't know. I think it was. ... The way I felt with that experience, was the cornerstone of my making my decisions as to whether I was going in the right direction or the wrong direction, whether I'm treating someone in the appropriate manner or not. If I don't feel like I'm on the way back to those feelings, I know I'm going in the wrong direction.

Part of the gift?

Yeah. ... How's that for guidance? I mean, really... I don't always abide by it. I can use a conscious decision to use it destructively too.

But you now have that body memory, a feeling sense as a cornerstone to compare how you are with other people. ...

And I only get a sense, when I'm with another human being, I don't feel the same way I did when I was having that experience, but I know if I'm getting warmer or colder. Do you know what I mean? ... And it's that simple, cuts right to the chase!...

Is it like... would you compare it to describing one pain as different from another?

Yes.

So, it is a body feeling sense, it's something within you ...

It's more like a pain in my heart though.

Do you have different pains in the heart?

Yeah.

Sometimes I think there aren't words for my experience of what you are telling me? And other times I think, like you said, I think I have not come to a point where I can articulate it. I'm so overwhelmed by the body-sense of it, because it is so new?

That's not what I'm saying. I'm not talking about whether or not you can articulate it. I'm saying, that what I'm saying, is touching you on a much deeper level. It's like you already know what I'm talking about, but up here (pointing to her head) you don't realize that. You are reacting... do you know what I'm saying?

It's like 'coming home' ... that is so rare for me. And even putting that into words, ... like as you took me through your story, and tried to put it into words in as vivid a way as you could, to bring me anywhere near where you can't even describe yourself? Like it sounds like it's in your body, it's in your mind, it's in your memory...

But I know that you've been there, so you know.

That's true. And that you know that I know that you know... it's like it's outside my awareness ...

I know that you have had those feelings. I know that you have been in that place, 'cause you can't have those feelings unless you've been there. ...and for you, they're close, or closer perhaps to the surface than they would be for someone else. ... I can tell someone else that story and they go " Oh, Wow!", but I don't, I never feel like it connects. But with you, it connects!

You are describing 'coming home' to me.

I am describing 'coming home' to me!

Are you?

Yes!

Oh, can I give you a hug? (laughing tearfully)

(tearfully joyous) Yes. ... (laughing, hugging, crying)... ... Oh, my God, what next? ... That's what I'm describing.

And you know I think we are! ...

Yes. ...

A home we've rarely been to?

And we've both experienced it. And somewhere in our consciousness we are aware of it, even though you may not be able to articulate yours, or to think about it in concrete terms or remember being there, I know you were there.

And there's a yearning to go back?

Always! Always! And that's what keeps me driven.

COUNSELLING EXPERIENCES**Marie's counselling experiences**

So, Ok, the next phase in all of this, if it's broken up, is I meet a woman named J., and she is a very pivotal person, in the next phase. And J., ... I meet her at choir, and her partner, and at the time, I didn't know they were lesbians and her partner S., is there. S. invites me to take voice lessons with her. I start going to their home, and I start to get to know them. They're really great people and J. starts, J's a counsellor, and J. starts asking me questions.

J. gives me a book to read, called the "Wounded Heart", about sexual abuse, ah... ... I recognize that some of the things that happened in my childhood were sexual abuse that I never would have saw as such? ah, more things that I saw. ... I was never physically or sexually abused, but I discovered there were other ways.

She ah... gave me another book called "The Road less Travelled " and asked that if I wanted, when I was done that, to, she asked me to ask myself if I needed/wanted counselling? I read the book and decided "Yes, I need and want counselling." J. is and was very spiritual, and we would start our counselling sessions with prayer, and so I felt safe. She is just a very loving woman, and her...

... I went from one extreme of being an alcoholic and being very bodily, and in a sense, to being very spiritual and in the head, and then, the place where we ended is where I start to discover balance. I can be, just all of me and that's good and that's safe.

Was there something, do you know yet, whether there was something in particular that you realized or that happened to you that allowed that transformation?

Oh, absolutely. One of the things that J. gave me when I went to counselling with her is, ah, ... well she let me give it myself, whatever, but the thing that I discovered is that God loves me as I am. As I am. That was, that was, that was it. I mean it took, I mean that's huge, and it took so much ... ah..but that's really what it was. That I could make mistakes, that I could even try, you know, in that process of figuring out who I was because I had, I suppose in my extremes, in my earlier years, in those extremes, I was following after, reacting a lot, to my childhood and to my parents , so that process, although it was very experiential and experimental, it wasn't about finding out who I was.

It was about reacting against who everybody thought I should be, or what I had experienced, and then when I became a Christian, I wanted to be the perfect Christian. And so I cut off all kinds of parts of myself. So then to get to this place of understanding that God loves as I am, I had to, you know, experiment a little bit with who I was, how I felt in different circumstances.

I had to feel myself out, but in order to do that I had to know it was OK to make mistakes, that God would still love me. So, that was it, that was the clincher: that process.

And it was around J. telling you that God loves you no matter what, just as you are right now, or always was?

Yeah, Yeah. ...

It was that statement that did it for you?

I don't think it was that statement, it was a process which came to head in an experience,... it's hard for me to go back and think of exactly how things transpired, but I know that, I know that, sort-of the experience that I hang that hat on, that I say, "that's when I really knew", was a very bizarre experience...I don't know if I,... at a winter carnival...?

S's counselling experiences

Ah... I never considered going to any kind of counselling because I didn't understand that things were bad enough that I needed to. Ah... but I also had a very, my Father was ah... constantly enraged about psychiatry and he thought it was a pile of shit! Ah... that pretty well instilled (laughing) some pretty bad attitudes about it. Ah... and of course, there's a stigma around that, and I so anyway,... ..

Jane's counselling experiences

You had told me that you haven't talked to a lot of people in program who got what you did out of program. That you got the notion that millions of people had been helped in program, and the core element that you saw was that it was God-centred.

Yup.

So, you figured, well there must be something to that. And pursued that. You had mentioned counselling before we started taping?

Yup, counselling. (laughing)

Is that funny?

Yeah, that's hilarious! Now don't get me wrong, counselling did help. It just took me a lot of time before I found one who would help, or could help.

What were the qualities of the counsellors or some of the counsellors that did make a difference to you?

Ah, in order to explain that, I have to go back and do some history. I went to my first therapist or counsellor in grade 4. It was not a positive experience.

What was the purpose of the therapy? How did you end up there?

Ah, I'm not exactly sure, because my memory is bad there. But it was after my oldest sister had died, and I guess my behaviour, at that time, in stead of all focused inward, turned outward. Instead of lashing inward at my self, (this is just what I can remember, so it might not be very accurate) instead of lashing inward at my self, I started lashing outward at other people. And the family I was in, it's OK to lash inward, but it's not OK to lash outward.

So I wound up, they took me to the Doctor and they went and talked to the Doctor, and all this lashing out and this anger and stuff. And the Doctor recommended that I go see someone at Mental Health and so my parents sent me over there, where they put me on Phenobarbital and ... made me feel like an idiot, quite frankly. It was so, ... it did so much damage, what they did over there to me, that when I look back, to me it's just scandalous.

It's bad enough that a parent can abuse a child, but then to send a child to someone else to abuse, it just boggles my mind. I can't even comprehend it. And I know that my parents thought they were doing the right thing.

But the whole time I was over there, I knew I wasn't the problem. And that's

where I became the problem. ... That's where the focus got put on me. That's where I became the scapegoat. That's where I became the focus of the family anger. I was over there for a year, and not one person asked me about my family or how I was being treated there. ... Or what was happening in our family unit.

And to me, that's bizarre, that's absolutely bizarre. I know things have come a long way, and I know people were doing what they thought was best, but that's so inadequate.

...

You thought they were blaming you for your actions?

That was 30 years ago. But even for 30 years ago, that's inadequate. In my mind. But I don't know, because I was only a child 30 years ago. But... that's my take on it. I was so insulted by the things they requested of me there, by the way they talked to me there, by the way they treated me there, that I wound up going there once a week, I would go in the Doctor's office and I would not say a word to the man.

I'd sit there for an hour. I'd walk in and he'd say Hello, and I'd just sit there and cross my arms and look out the window. I wouldn't say a word because he had insulted me. I had more intelligence than that, at that age. I knew I shouldn't be treated that way. I knew I shouldn't be treated that way at home. I knew I shouldn't be treated that way at Mental Health.

And what it did is, it painted a picture for me of a totally abusive world. There was no help and there was no hope. Up until that point, I had hope. ... And if that's all I knew, and if that's all that's available for me, it's not going to get any better. ...

So, I went back to a therapist when I was, just let me point this out too, they put me on 75 milligrams of Phenobarbital a day, and left me there. I went off that Phenobarbital on my own in junior high school, it was grade 9 or grade 10, I don't know...and then as an adult, society kicks me because I am addicted to drugs. ...

Like how.... we have to be responsible for our actions. We can't pin things on kids and we can't poke them in holes and expect them to turn out OK. And it's that whole view that kids don't know what's going on and kids are intelligent, and kids ... like that's so far off the mark. ...

I knew that when they were asking me to put round pegs in square holes, that there was something wrong. I didn't know what it was, but I knew there was something desperately wrong. I knew when they put me on the Phenobarbital, , at that age, I knew that that drug was going to hurt me,... in a big way.

And you know, it's that whole degrading experience, really threw me, ... plus because my family was dysfunctional, it put me in a position in my family where I became the problem. I became the focus of the negativity in the family. ...

When it started out you were reacting to the bad things that were going on in your family?

Yeah. ... and what that did, was take me from a position in the family, where ah...some of my siblings were seeing me as a victim and it switched that whole balance to

me being a victim in their eyes to me being the problem. So what that did in practical terms, that took any sympathy away that I had or any compassion from anyone in my family.

Most people went from being compassionate and a little sympathetic to hitting me every chance they got. ... And that's what I think people... who are therapists don't see, that's what they can't know, when they're dealing with something like that. They can't know the depth and the impact of what they're doing, because they're working with a dysfunctional family unit, it's never going to come back to them. It would be very, I think it would be very rare.

And I think that that's a big gap, even today. When I hear, 'cause I still talk to kids and have contact with kids and some of them are in therapy and I still see the same things happening to kids in therapy, 30 years later, and that disturbs me so much! ... It disturbs me because I still have a very personal connection with it. And it disturbs me because I still see them going where I was. And no one deserves to go there. ...

How would you change that, if you could change that now? How would those counsellors been with you as a child that would have made all the difference?

It would have made a difference if I had had someone who cared. Not cared about what they were doing, but cared about me. That would have made all the difference in the world. ...

And what would that have looked like?

That would have been someone listening to me. If I'm in therapy, why are they listening to my parents?

So, you've got ...

And why are they judging me on anything other than me? Why are they you know, like, it just doesn't make sense.... But because they wanted more information, more information, more information... it wasn't a safe environment for me, I didn't feel safe, I didn't feel like those people cared about me a bit, at all....

And they were getting the information about my behaviour from my parents instead of observing it themselves.It would have been easy, and I realize in that situation you can't always observe behaviour, if you only see someone for an hour a week, but the summer, when school was out, I was over there every day, for 5 hours.

They had lots of time to observe my behaviour. So either they didn't understand what it meant or they didn't care. ... If you have a degree, I expect you understand what that means. Not always, ... but I think that a lot of my experience even as an adult with therapists, is that people listen to what you say, and that's good, but there's more factors to be considered. ...

What am I doing? ... You know, if I'm a dysfunctional person, are you just going

to look at what I'm saying and make a judgement off that? When I have no sense of reality? If I'm a dysfunctional person, I don't have a sense of reality. ... Do you see what I'm saying? It just doesn't make any sense, it's an observation. It's a gut feeling.

If I'm a child and I'm in your office, and you're worried about the next client that's coming in or you're worried about the report that you're going to send home to my parents, or you're worried about whether you're going to get your PhD,... do you think that I'm sitting there feeling that you care about me? Not likely!

You knew all that at the time?

Yeah. Kids in dysfunctional families are hyper-sensitive. They've got radar like insane! And I've been like that as far back as I can remember. People telling me what a sweet kid I was, and I knew they were shaking their head and saying "Oh, it's such a shame."

You know, it's like an alcoholic can't kid an alcoholic. (laughing) It's the same deal. It's a different structure. Kids run more in instinct. It's all done from the perspective of an adult. ... Well an adult sees things this way, a child does not. ... A child does not feel the same way as an adult, a child does not see the same way as an adult.

A child does not have the same skills as an adult. So how does that balance. So that's a real struggle. I don't say that condemning the whole profession. I'm just saying I see this huge gap here, that was there 30 years ago when it was me, and 30 years later when it's my nephew. The same thing is happening to him.

He's being told to conform. He's being taught how to live in the family unit, how to live in the dysfunctional family unit. That's what they're teaching that kid, today. And he's going for therapy. The worst thing he'll ever learn is how to live in this dysfunctional family unit. Isn't that a set-up? There's so many different...fields of thought on how to deal with kids... .. and I've yet to see one that works.

You know, if you're dealing with a kid, you don't put a man in thousand dollar suit behind a desk and the kid on the other side. How does a kid from a poor family talk to a man sitting behind a mahogany desk wearing a thousand dollar suit? ... How can you relate to that man?

OK, put on some shorts and some Birks and don't sit behind the desk. Let's not even go in the office. You know? You know what I'm saying.

I don't think I know nearly as much as you do, Jane.

That was so damaging to me, and those drugs...Oh, my God. I was a zombie... for years... and everybody thought that was great, because I wasn't lashing out. ... You know, being a zombie is a wonderful experience, ... yes... I really enjoyed the zombie stage...(laughing... ..

Did that get you ready for other numbing agents?

Absolutely. ... When you think about how fast someone that young gets addicted...

...

Did you get addicted to the feeling of being ...

Numb. ...

So you could no longer react to the bad stuff happening around you?

What it really did Rhonda was it numbed me but I still knew I was in great pain. All it did was cut out the reaction... ... It was like sitting in the midst of all this confusion where nothing makes any sense and everything hurts, and being powerless, more powerless. ...

It wasn't a very good solution. ... and then coming out of that 5 years later with a full-blown addiction, and then your family and society in your face because you're an addict? That doesn't make any sense. ...

So, did you go from being numb on the drug that was prescribed for your behaviour, to stopping that yourself? To finding that you were in such pain that you needed something?... and then there was that absence of numbness... So you looked for other ways to get that numb feeling? So you went to drinking or...

... First alcohol, and then street drugs... ... insanity... absolute insanity...

... but you were medicating the pain?

Yeah... yeah...(quietly) Not in a way that I see more or less lethal, ... just effective... to curb the behaviour.... and then I got to the point with the drugs and alcohol that I was starting to lash out again. And that's when I started to realize that something was very wrong. ... Not everybody is lashing out. There's something different about me.

I've got to do something about that. I'm going to kill someone else or I'm going to kill myself. ... and I went back to therapy again, I think I was 20 or 21. And that was very bizarre. I went to some guy... I can't remember his name, I don't know what his qualifications were, I don't know... he did everything short of shock treatment... ...

What was his agenda? Did he care about you?

No. He cared about his theory. And that was...he sent me for a test where they put electrodes, on your leg and your arm and they push a button and your arm jumps. ... and it was something about testing whether the cells were talking to each other ... or something, I don't know what he was looking for ..but anyway, this is a man who couldn't talk to me, couldn't look me in the eye.

When I look back it's obvious to me now that he didn't have his work done. Maybe he was abusing his kids, and he couldn't look me in the eye,... I don't know, he

couldn't look me in the eye.... he was doing all scientific theory with me. Well I had already scientific theoried into a full-blown addiction, that's what I'm doing there. So, it's not working.

So I made a conscious decision after the testing was finished and he still didn't know what was going on, that I was not getting anything out of my time with him and that I would not go back to him.

The next counsellor I had was a woman who wanted to put all my family in a session together. When she came in the room, she said Oh, this is very interesting. you're all over on one side of the room and Jane is over on the other side all by herself. ...That tells me something, she said, and then she introduced herself, but she acknowledged that. She wasn't rude about it, but she acknowledged that and validated that for everyone in the room, not just for me.

So I went to see her for maybe 6 months and then catastrophe struck. She had a death in her family and she was having a hard time. She wound up leaving my town and I had no therapist...again... and even before her I had gone to other therapists and I would go once and I would know... I just wouldn't go back...

What would you know?

That they weren't hearing me, or that they were thinking about how they were going to pay for the Porche out in the parking lot, or they were distracted or it was just a living. ... There was no heart in it. They weren't passionate about what they were doing...and I just didn't go back. ...

So after all that, when that woman left town, I just went FUUMP, right back to the bottom... After all this searching, I found a good therapist. What are the odds that I'd find another one? Not very good.

And I know by this time that I can't do this by myself. I know that. At that point I knew that. So that's when I seriously got into A.A. 12 step programs and I got another therapist.

She still laughs about my first year in her office. I couldn't do an hour appointment. I couldn't sit down for more than 5 minutes. I was bouncing off the walls. I was such a mess. That was 16 years ago. ... and we still laugh about that. Every once in a while she reminds of that, and how I looked to her on those first few visits..... and I literally couldn't, Rhonda sit in the chair for 5 minutes. I physically could not sit. ... I couldn't sit at home and watch a movie, and I couldn't sit in that office. ... I use that as a marker point for progress. ... (laughing)

This was after you were in the other woman counsellor's office?

A couple of years after her.

Could you sit in the first woman's office?

... Ah... it was hard... it was very hard... she was very patient... she didn't get upset if I got up and walked around the room or whatever. I wasn't as bad then. I had gotten worse, much worse... in that 2 years. I was always pacing, always pacing... .. I was like a caged animal.

I can't even stand today to go to the zoo, because I see those caged animals and it really upsets me because it's like a trigger that takes me back to that point in my life where I just paced and paced and paced... ..

So when I went to the first woman, she could sort-of listen to me, and ... I thought that was the best I could get. ... I was pleased that I had found that, after my previous experience. So what I did with her was I covered issues that were not uncomfortable

Not uncomfortable?

Not uncomfortable for her. ... because there would be places that I would go when, all of a sudden she wasn't looking at me anymore. ... or she'd be sitting there in tears and not telling me why and I would be having the sense that I was triggering something in her. ... That was not compassion for me, but pain for her...

So I quickly, having the radar, figured out where those spots were, so I stayed away from those, because I knew she couldn't go there with me, and she couldn't help me with those. So I worked with the help that I could get from her. ...

How could she have done that differently? If she had described her tears, would that have helped you?

No. That wouldn't have done it. She just didn't have her work done there. She wasn't past it herself. ... And that's ... to me that's the main underlying factor, is having that work done. It's the difference in talking to someone about alcoholism, who'd read it in a book, and someone who's alcoholic. ... and I wouldn't classify her as a great therapist. And I wouldn't classify her as ... certainly better than many of the previous ones, but still inadequate in many, many ways.

But because I felt that that was all I had to work with, and I just utilized all I could in that situation, and tolerated what I didn't like so I could get going. ... and as the years went by, I think I just out-grew her.

And every once in a while, every couple of years I would call and make an appointment and go back and feeling like I needed help and see her sitting in the same place in her life and in her profession, and I really realized that she can't help me, but that's OK because I've got some skills now. ...

Then I would go some place else and search out some support and then the other therapist I've been to is someone who pretty well goes by the book, you know? I like her and enjoy talking to her but she doesn't hear me very well. ... (laughing). She hears the problems, fine,... but she doesn't hear where I am.

So I say I was an abused child. I'm a survivor of alcoholism and incest, and physical abuse and vast quantities of emotional abuse from many different angles. And I

could see her brain, and I could see the cogs turning and she would be thinking, "OK, that gives me this personality profile". ... And she would spit back "OK, Jane. You are this." And I would say, "No, that's not where I am." "Yes, you are this." And I would say, "Back up the boat now. " I was there 6 or 8 years ago, but I am not that now. And she would say, "You are this."

So, OK, so I gave up on that, and I'm back thinking I'm on my own again. But it's more OK this time, than it's ever been, because I have more skills. I have a better idea of myself and a better sense of where I want to go. ... It would be , I feel it would be a real rare circumstance that I could get a therapist now, who would be really helpful to me.

And I'm sitting there saying to her, I don't know how to deal with this. And she's saying, "Well, you seem to be coping rather well, see ya later, and you don't need me." I'm saying , This is not where I want to stop in this process. And she'd say, "Yeah, but you're doing all right. You don't need to come back." No, I want to go further, I wanna go further." "Well, it's not really impacting your life, you're not drinking and you're not smoking dope, and you're not shooting up, and so you're OK, so see ya later." "No, No, No, you don't understand!"

That was kind-of our last appointment. "I do not want to stop here. I want to be weller than I am today!" And she said "Well, I don't see anything wrong with where you are today, Jane." Well , I do. Hello? Hello? Hello? So I guess I won't be going back there now. (laughing). 'Cause I've gone as far with her

Is she saying the same thing as the other guy said, only in a more compassionate way, like I can't help you?

Yeah. "You're OK, W., go home" is what she's saying. And I'm saying No. I'm not done yet. This may be an acceptable plateau or a level to coast at, for her, or maybe that's what's in the textbook. But if I stop here, it's not where I want to be yet. ... I still wounded child issues. I still have abuse issues. I don't expect they'll ever be gone. But they can be less of an issue. ... And she's saying that they're not impacting my life. Well, they are! They're always going to impact my life. It's the degree. It should be my choice, not hers.

I agree. It is your choice.

Not in her office. ... And I have to respect her choice. And I mean, I don't come out of that with bitterness and anger and resentment. I come out of that with respect for her. She's honest and up-front, tells me what she thinks. ...It's not often accurate. But it's honest, and that's good enough. It doesn't always have to be accurate, because I don't have to believe it anymore. I'm not a chair anymore. ... not a chair anymore. ... I was a chair for a long time. ...If that had happened to me 15 years ago, that would have had a great impact on me, a big impact again.

What are the helpful things that counselling did for you over your spiritual journeying

course?

.... over my spiritual journey? Counselling? Helpful?Oh, I'd have to think about that. (laughing)

In respect to figuring out who you are and what your purpose is, and what you're supposed to be doing with your life.

I've never had a counsellor who had a direct spiritual connection in their counselling. ...

Did the first woman have a spirituality about her that allowed you to be ...

Ah... I don't know. I was pretty sick when I was seeing her... I wasn't really looking at her too closely. I was really looking at my selfish old self. ... Ah... I expect that that was one of the reasons that what she did worked... and now that I think about it, she did talk some about spirituality. ...

I was just wondering if any of your sessions or things that you took form those sessions was the way the counsellor was with you were any pivotal points in there where you noticed where you figured out your direction, in who you are, or gave you some safety in knowing that you were believed or ... because back in your transcripts you mentioned about safety and people in your life...

Yeah... what counselling did for me was give me validation: Yes, what these people had done to me when I was a child was wrong, and NO, I'm not who they say I am, or who they perceive me to be.

It set up, for me, a place where I could get myself to a point where I could look at spirituality. It wasn't a direct connection to my spirituality in that sense. And I wish that was there.... I wish that was possible.

But there seems to be this gap, where counsellors and therapists don't talk about spirituality, or they didn't. Maybe they do now... I don't know, but they didn't with me. But that's where I wanted to go. ... nobody would talk about it.

So I took what I could get,... to use to my advantage in my growth, so I could get to spirituality. ... Does that make sense. It's not that counselling didn't help with my spirituality. It helped with doing the background work. But when it came to the big issue of spirituality, ... it wasn't that supportive.

How would that look in session? If you went in and said "These are some of my issues and I want to work on that."

I've done that. I've said "Ok, I want to work on spirituality." And everybody says "Hurrah. Let's get at it! That's exciting!" But when you start talking about spiritual

concepts, all of a sudden I felt like there was this... .. it was like, it wasn't a 2-way conversation anymore. It was like I was being observed. Instead of... .. there was no participant on the other side of the desk. ...

And what would the participant respond with? How would you know they were a participant instead of an observer? What would make it feel like a collaborative , is that what you mean?

Yeah. Yeah. ...

So it needs to be ...

Well, because spirituality is such a sensitive and big issue, it seems to be, but... I could be wrong about this too, ... but there seems to be this Christian attitude and the Christian churches... like they know and you don't. ...

It was like I would say, OK, this is what I think about God. And I was getting back "OK, but where you really need to go, is over here, Jane., because this is where God is. Well, I was raised in the church and I never saw God in there. ... But because there feels like there's some kind of differential there, ... and it feels like being judged, but I'm not sure that it is. I haven't figured that out. It's never been that important to me to figure that out. ...

Because I've just gone on and done my own thing anyhow. I can't adopt some else's spiritual principles. I have to go out and find my own. ... But that's like... in that structure of organized religion...when you join the Baptist church, you adopt the principles and the beliefs of the Baptist church. And when you join the Catholic church, you adopt the principles and beliefs of the Catholic church.

I don't want to adopt anyone's beliefs. I want to find my own. But because I'm sitting across the desk from a Christian therapist, it seems to me that it's consistent that they are wanting me to adopt... .. 'cause they say "Oh, well, what you're saying is similar to this. Maybe you would fit into to this church." And I say , No. I've had some extremely negative experiences in the church. Church is not where I want to go, ... right now."

And the response is " Well, how are you going to grow spiritually, if you're not in some religious structure or Christian structure or support group?" Well, I don't have to do that to grow spiritually. God does not segregate himself so that He is only in the church. I don't think that makes a lot of sense.

But it's that Christian focus, in that they say, "OK, what your telling me is similar to these Christian principles, and these Christian principle represent this church. So it's only logical that if this is the direction you are moving in, why don't you just jump into this church, grab an oar, and paddle along with them ,and you'll just excel and you'll get all the things you want.

I don't want to adopt those principles. There are some things that I don't like about those oars. That boat's got a few holes in it. It's a lot easier to paddle a boat that doesn't have holes! Do you know what I'm saying? ...

Yes.

And then that gets perceived that Oh, that's not good enough for me. That's not it. That's not it at all. I do not want to be in a position where I feel obligated or pressured to take on principles that I do not believe in, to fit into a place where there are principles that I do believe in. I'm not going to cut off my nose to spite my face. I've done that too many times. I'm not interested. I've tried it in organized religion and the results were disastrous. But it's like this one track mind, this tunnel vision. If you call yourself a Christian, then you must go here or there. I decide whether or not I'm a Christian, not someone else. and until that changes, I'll be a Christian outside of the church. ...

So a counsellor that directs or advises...

Because they feel that's their expertise. Because that's the way they are taught to behave, because that's what the church demands. ...

Is that helpful to you?

No. That's not helpful to me. That's damage! That W doing damage control. Oh, God, the dikes are springing leaks! ...Go get a load of gravel... so you're up on top of the dike and you're putting the gravel down and you're spreading it all out, and there goes the boat full of holes and the Christians are just-a rowing...(laughing) and they're all smiling... their feet are wet but they're smilin'. ...

And that's been your experience in counselling? When you start talking, you're directed and ...told what you should do...

Well, there are strong suggestions. And then because of the nature of spirituality, if you don't do it, then maybe there's some evil in there or maybe this or maybe that, and it gets into a whole other thing. life is not as black and white as the Baptist church... mostly grey... and that's fine. I don't have any doubt that the church helped me. It's the people that are in it. The people who are attracted by the church are most likely helped by the church. But I find it hard to go to a place where I feel judged. And I feel judged in the church. When the church looks at me and says "Well, that's your own personal issue of insecurity. I don't see them taking responsibility. And that's a big factor for me. They're not being accountable and that's my perception.

So, you think the counsellor has the position of being a guide, or the client is the guide? If you were going to pick the qualities of a counsellor, as a hurt and damaged child, or as an angry adult or as a person trying to live in harmony now, are there some qualities that would be helpful to any or those people in you? Do you think that all those people are still in you, in all of us?

Yeah! That's the core! The core of our being, isn't it?

Is that what it takes? Is that one of the things that a counsellor must believe?

I think it's bigger than that, Rhonda. 'Cause I think a counsellor sitting in an office and one person comes in with Multiple Personality, and then, you get an alcoholic, and then you get somebody's kid that's all messed up, and then you know.... there's so much...but, ... it's been my experience, but then maybe I don't know how to shop for a good counsellor... that's crossed my mind too... when I started this I didn't know how to shop for anything else and get a good deal, right? ... but what I hear consistently, when I was in program... what people in program are saying ... I don't want to hurt anymore... I don't want to suffer the pain of hurting other people anymore... I want to stop this merry-go-round of pain. That's what I hear them saying consistently.

Is that what you're saying?

And that's what I've been saying all along. I don't like where I am. I don't want to be where I am. I don't know how to go anywhere's else. And in my experience, if I ask a therapist what do you think of this, they say: ... either that's not important or I've got the therapist who's always telling me what they think of things.

I think people generally make their own decisions, but they don't know what the options are. They don't know what tools are available, I mean, if some one told you you had to dig up your sewer tank, you're standing out in your backyard in front of this totally wonderful green grass, while the rest of the lawn is dying, you know that's where the septic tank is, and you're scratching your head, and saying "How do I dig up a septic tank?" And what do you do?

You call some one who knows. ... And you say "How do I dig up this septic tank?" And they say " Get a shovel ... start in the centre of the tank, should be about 4 feet down, and they give you that concrete instruction. They tell you, "Watch out for big rocks. They can be hard to get out. And if you want it pumped out, you have to book the truck a week ahead of time."

But that doesn't seem to be the way it works in therapy. Nobody wants to tell you ... what direction to go in.

Did you ever get the sense the counsellor you sat with, thought that you had the answers?

That's rare...in my opinion, that's very rare. ...

Would that be helpful?

... The one person I found who thought I had the answers, was not good at helping

me find the direction on how to achieve those answers, ... they couldn't help me find the shovel first. ... So that's ... with the exception of that one woman...she would do that for me... she would say, these are the skills that you can learn in this office. Which ones do you think you need to do this job? And those are the ones we'll focus on.

So she left it up to you to choose ...

She made me aware of which tools were available. ... If you called Buddy and he said "No, I don't know what you need to dig that.: Is that helpful? Or he says OK, I'll be up in half an hour, and he's got a shovel, a pick, a backhough, a ghetto-blaster, and a mixmaster. Which tools do you think you're going to need to do this job, Rhonda?

Would I know that?

Well, you'd probably know you need a shovel. You might ask him about the pick. you know you don't need a blender, right? Like... people are not where they are through stupidity. They're where they are because they can't find the tools, they don't know what the tools are. Same as me, ...ah I had this ... rotten, insane Toyota van that you had to take the seat out to change the spark plugs, and then when you get in there, there's this little tiny hole, and you've got to access all 4 sparkplugs from this little tiny hole that's like 4 inches high and 8 inches long. So, you've got ratchet, the socket that's say 4 inches, ... the handle on the ratchet is probably a foot. And I'm standing there thinking " I know people do this. There must be a way." So I put the seat back in and I drive out to the Toyota dealer and he sells me the right tool for \$18.00. I didn't know that tool existed, but I knew where to go to ask about it. I never would have gotten the spark plugs changed in that van, if I didn't have the right tool. It was impossible. I would have had to take the bloody motor out. But with the right tool it took about 15 minutes!

What tools have you found for your spiritual journey now?

... What tools have I found? Intuition, ... is probably foremost, learning to listen to my intuition, learning how to use my intuition, allowing myself to be guided by dreams and my meditations and my prayers. ... Ah, tools like ... learning that I am worthy, I'm worthy of God's love. So, being able to accept that, really excels me, propels me into this whole spiritual world. ... Tools like that.

I didn't know that I was allowed to accept God's love. I was brought up, in a world where I was only hated. How could I know that God could actually love someone as horrible as me? I didn't have that tool. It took me a long time to find that tool. If I had been able to go to someone who knew about spirituality and said, "This is the dilemma, I don't know, I don't know what I need to fix it." I think they could have said "Well, here are some tools. Let's look at them. Which ones do you think you need?" ... Do you see what I'm saying?

Yeah. So, do you think if someone had said, ... Some people talk about a still small voice inside them. It tells them this and that, it's a gentle voice...

Uh-huh.

Would you have understood?

People did tell me that. And No, I didn't understand. Once I got to a certain level of understanding then I understood, but people were telling me things "up here" and I was down "here". They were telling me things 2 levels above where I was. They were not accurately perceiving where I was. ... And I'd say "OK."

Some people would say that I need awareness. And I would say, OK, I need awareness. I understand that. Well, you need awareness. Ok, well I understand that. Well, Jane, what you really need is awareness. OK, I understand that, how do I get it? Well, Jane, I don't think you understand. You don't have any awareness yet. Are you working on awareness yet Jane. I understand that I need awareness. Where do I find it? Where do I get it? What is it?

So, how do you answer that question for yourself now? If you had been the person sitting in the other chair, ...

I would say, ... well it depends on where the person is. But my take on awareness, is that you start where you are and you do one thing. ... do one thing that will bring you to more awareness. One thing, not do all this. Just one thing. Just get started.

Can you give me an example of what one thing would be?

OK, if you told me that ... that you weren't getting along with one of your sisters. There was clash, clash, clash. All negativity from both of you, just hacking right at it. And you said, I can't see where she's coming from. So, you need awareness, but you already know that. How do I become compassionate and see where she's coming from. And I say, do one thing. And what's the first thing you think you've got to do? Do you have to stop hacking, take a break and have a good look? ...

You have to do something compassionate for her, you have to take responsibility, you have to make yourself accountable to her. You have to give something to get something back. These are your options. You don't have to do it that way.

You can continue to hack, or you might find another way. But I might present those options as a starting base. Something for you to think about... If you've already taken a break and looked at it, then you don't need to do that. You've done that part. OK, you're not there. Have you been accountable to her? No, I can't do that, because she'll hurt me. She'll walk all over me. OK, so you're not there. ...

What can you offer, you've got to be able to offer something. Can you say, "I'm sorry things are so stressed between us. I really don't like this. I'd like to work it out."

And offer her a little help, a little hope? Let her make up her own mind? ... So, instead of going right to, Well, you've got to look at it from her point of view... that's a long way from where you are now.

And you have to go through all those process to get there, but no one is talking about that. Just do one thing. Don't do something you've already done. Don't do something you're not ready to do. But do something, one thing, no matter how big or how small, just one thing.Do you see what I'm saying? ...That might not work for everybody. If I were schizophrenic or multiple personality, that might not work for me. I don't know, 'cause I'm not those things. I can see how that's really hard to add up when you're sitting on the other side of the desk. Who is this person? What do I need to provide for this person? I wonder if I'm going to get that raise? Oh, this appointment is over in 5 minutes anyway... (laughing) You know?

And as a client, you knew that?

Oh, yeah, people aren't stupid. They pick up on that stuff. They don't always know what it is, but they know if it's positive or negative. ... Pretty simple...Motivation, there's a lot of accountability in motivation. If you want to help me so you can get paid for that hour, that's got nothing to do with me. I'm coming because I want help, not because I want to boost your pay cheque.

If you want to help me, ... so you can hide from your own dysfunction, I'm not interested in that either. ... I want no part of making you sicker. I'll pack my little bags and get right on out of there.

But people like me and where I started from, don't know those are options. They think if they go in and they see a therapist, they think that that's the only one on the face of the earth that's going to help them. And that's where the responsibility that I see for me and the accountability of the therapist comes into play. If it's not someone you can deal with, then refer them to someone else. Don't just throw them out of the office, saying there you go, I can't help you. ...

Options, offer them options. Let hem make up their own mind. Options, options, options. I've spent most of my recovery creating options for myself. 'Cause for years and years, and years, I felt like I didn't have one, not even one! And I had all kinds of options, but I couldn't see even one. And in recovery, it's options, it's the pride in making my own decision, be it the right one or the wrong one...

REMINDERS THAT ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYING**Reminders that encourage S's spiritual journeying**

Is that how you try not to judge people in the world as well?

Oh, Yeah. I guess... all of what I've been through to come to the realization of how being judged by someone, you've always had a lot of pain over, being criticized, ... and that kind of stuff. And I was always very judgmental of myself and lots of times I still am. I'm trying to not do that to myself. Trying to be more encouraging of myself and try not to be critical of myself, but Yeah, when you finally take ownership of this, the way you've treated others, and the way you've treated yourself, you don't want to do it anymore, at least, I don't.

And also, the issue, I think I talked about before, about being so low, and being this child of an alcoholic and starting to be aware, and of course, somebody telling me, well, you're a child of an alcoholic, and you should go there. ... ,and of course being a person that does everything you're told, I did that. But, it was a good thing. But now, my connection with those, I have 2 or 3, of the people in the group... and I think that's ...I became, it was a small group, maybe 10, 10 basically, or even less than that. But I maintained a connection with about 3 or maybe 4, out of the group.

From 10 years ago?

Yeah, oh yeah. I was with that group for probably... .. oh, I mean up until I moved....

Now, how often would you go?

In the beginning?

Say, in the last, you haven't been in that community for what, 3 years, how often would you have gone 3 years ago, how often would you have gone, in the run of a year?

Ah... .. well, ... maybe 2 or 3 times a month. Towards the end, it was getting less and less.

It was getting less and less because you wanted it to be that way?

No, it was mostly other things that were going on in my life, but I had established supports without actually physically going to the ...

So you got what you needed from the people that you'd met, without actually going to the meetings?

But I was also changing in my mind-set. There were things that I wasn't

comfortable with, in terms of certain parts of their philosophy. So, I was seeing a beginning of a change. Now when I moved over here, I realized how important that connection is, and I don't have those connections so much. Although, when you're in a school with a bunch of counsellors, you've got all kinds of people you can talk to.

Is that how you found your program? That you had all kinds of people who were supportive?

Oh, absolutely. A whole different ballpark than the real world. (laughing). Exactly.

Reminders that encourage Jane's spiritual journeying

I want knowledge for my heart. I want to nurture my heart. I have all kinds of knowledge in my head, and I hardly use it. But what's in my heart, I use... constantly. And it's what's in my heart that determines my direction. ...

The wisdom in your heart then goes to your head to tell you what to do?

In a sense, yes. ... It's more like going on intuition, than it is thinking about it. Not that I don't think about things. I don't ... you know, like if I'm going to open a bank account, I have to figure out which bank I'm going to go do that at. You know, that's what I need head knowledge for. But where I'm going spiritually, if I use my head, I just go in circles. I have to use my heart.

And how do you access the knowledge of your heart? What kind of conditions encourage you using the wisdom in your heart?

... It's the tool of silence and solitude, if I can get it. (laughing) Being still, passionately present

Do you practice that in a solitary place?

... That seems to be where I get my answers....

Do you know where your answers are coming from?

... I would think that my answers come from God....If I can get my mind quieted and all that knowledge in my mind to just, shut-up...I can hear God. When my mind is full of ... you know, when you come to the hurdle and you say "OK, am I going to go around it to left, am I going to go around it to the right, am I going to go under it, or am I going to go over it? ... OK, if I go around it to the left, I'm going to knock the person to my left over, OK I shouldn't do that. If I go around it to my right, I knock the person on the right over. I shouldn't do that. Am I going to go under it? I could, if there's room. Am I going to go over it? Well, I could if it's not too high. ..

Can you go straight through it?

No, I fall down and break my neck! So, there's all that to consider. ... If I just use my intuition, I run up to the hurdle and I just jump it! I don't have to do all that work. Do you see what I'm saying?

I see what you're saying. So, you get the direction to jump the hurdle, and the hurdle is the question, a decision in your life?

Yeah!

So you link up somehow in a solitary place, ...with your God? ... and get the direction to... or is it the strength to jump?

Or sometimes you can just jump!

'Cause you've practiced long enough?

'Cause you're already moving. But if you're not already moving, sometimes you have to just sit there. Sometimes God comes and knocks it over, and you just get up and step over the hurdle and you're on your way...

What is or who is God? Is God 'out there' for you Jane? Is God in another person? Is God in you...

Are we not all God?

I don't know. What do you think?

I think God is all encompassing. God is everything. That's what I think.... I think it would be ridiculous for me to think that I can comprehend or put a label on God, or just to even comprehend God. ... If our universe is expanding at 42million miles a minute, I can't even comprehend that. How am I going to comprehend God? I can't. I need to accept that and let it be. ...

So, how do you go about doing this? Do you have sort-of a guide? Something you read? Something you... ...

I've taken on the practice of prayer twice a day, prayer and meditation combined.

You're praying to...

To God. Through Christ. I use that prayer book.

What prayer book?

Christian Prayer. And if nothing else, on a bad day, when I can't even get into it, it reminds me... what I'm supposed to be doing here. ...

And what is that, Jane? What are you supposed to be doing here?

Being mindfully present. Responsible to others, myself and God. Being

accountable to others, myself and God. And just trying to go through life, not kicking the people in the knees. People don't need any more aggravation in this society. You know?

If you can get someone out from behind the TV and talk to them for half an hour, talk to them, not about yourself, but talk to them... that's quite a gift, in this world that we live in. That's what I try to do.

I've realized when I had the big gaping hole, I didn't think I had anything to give. Now I realize that I have all kinds of stuff to give. You know, I feel I could go to a yard sale and give all day, and still have lots left.

Where are you getting it all?

... .. I believe that I get it all from the energy that I call God. That simple reminder, twice a day, will fill my cup.

What do those reminders look like?

Sometimes I open that prayer book...I opened it this morning , I was distracted, there's like 7 pages you read for morning prayer. I think I read one. That's unusual for me. I almost always... I don't think I've ever done that. I just opened it and read one page. But I was so distracted and I was reading the words and realizing that when I was reading the next sentence, I had no idea what the sentence before had said.

So what I did was, I looked at the page, and all I could see was the word, God, God, God, God, polka-dotted all over the page, this word God jumps out at me. And that's all I got for today, was a reminder that this is about God.

This is not about me. This is not about you. This is not about Wolfville. Or anybody in it. This is about God. ...Maybe that's all I needed today. I certainly wasn't getting anything else out of it this morning. Oh, Man!

...I find that chapel I talked about earlier, a powerful place to be.

How is that?

Oh, that's hard to describe. Ah... that chapel has been there 20... 22 or 24 years. It has not had a high volume of people from the outside. It has had predominantly monks praying in it. Ah... it feels really ah... good, the chapel does. It feels very strong and it feels healing in many senses, ...and it's quiet.

And you can sit in there at night and the candles are going and you're just in there with the candles going and ... it's very peaceful, and it ... feels safe. Ah... and it's OK to just sit in there and do nothing. It's a place designed to do that. It's the purpose of it.

So when I go there,... it's, it's like permission to let go of all that's buzzing around my head, and just be still.

Is there an atmosphere in the building itself?

Most definitely. There's an atmosphere on the property itself, but then the building itself, to me, is amazing. And even though the library, and there are other rooms in the same building, they don't have the same feeling as the chapel.

Is there another presence in the chapel?

I would say that God is very present in the chapel. Ah... it's very interesting when Sister S's sister, M was there, this one Saturday night, she did a vigil for an hour in the chapel. It's an hour in the chapel, uninterrupted, no one is permitted to go in there when you're in there.

And you can go in there and you can do anything you want. There's nothing that is... you just go in, and you pray, if you want to pray, or you can purge, if you want to purge, if you want to cry, you cry, if you want to sing, you sing, if you want to dance, you dance. You do whatever you want.

If you want to turn on all the lights, you do that, or you can turn them all off. It doesn't matter. But, it's very safe, because it's an hour. You sign up for your hour, and everyone knows that they can't go in the chapel for that hour, and that they should even restrict how often they walk by the building. Like it's that private.

The cabin I was in was close to the chapel. It was the closest one. And I didn't know that it was M's hour for vigil, although I knew there was a vigil for that evening, so, I was giving a wide berth and I didn't go in there. ... But I could sense, I could feel, I thought, I was thinking, "Who is in there?"

Like there was such joy... and I was sitting and I was looking out the window and I was looking at the chapel and all the lights were out, and I was thinking, "I wonder if there is anybody in there?" ... But it was on my mind, and normally if someone is doing a vigil, I just wouldn't think about it. It wouldn't be an issue. But, it was on my mind, on my mind, on my mind.

And a couple of days later M told me that that was the same time that she had been doing her vigil. And I said "Well, that's really weird". And I told her how I felt and she laughed and I said "Why are you laughing?" And she said "Well I was in there singing and dancing, dancing all over the place." And that's the kind of power that's in there. There's so much joy.

There's also the seriousness of prayer.... And it's like, when you go in there, if prayer is what you want to do, ...it seems easier in there. But I think it's because it has the prayer already existing. If you want to go in and praise God, and do something joyful, it seems like it's easier because that presence is already there and it's like you're being welcomed. It's like you're being called. If you want to go in there and meditate, it's an awesome place to meditate. Awesome place to meditate....

What makes it good for meditation?

The atmosphere is so clear and so unpolluted ... and so peaceful. ...

Is there another place that you can do the same thing?

I've never been in a place like that before and I doubt if I'll ever be in one again. I hope I would be in another one, but I can't imagine that I ever will. ...

That was the first time you found a place like that?

Not the first time I found a place like that, but the first time I felt a place or was in a place that felt ... so clean, so spiritually clean.... ... I just can't imagine that I'll find another. ... I haven't, my last week there, I didn't even go in, because ... they were taking out the stain-glassed windows and taking down the crucifix ... and I just couldn't do it... ... I knew it would be devastating... so I didn't go...

I feel like I've really lost a treasure when I think about not being able to go and sit in that chapel. And even though his presence will remain... the crucifix was really the focus of the whole thing... ...

What is the story of the crucifix in that chapel for you? How does that hook in to how you could meditate and pray, and just be in that room?

It's as if that's where the energy in there has been focused or is focused ... and so it was really easy to get focused ...

What was the crucifix for you? What did it say to you? Because it's a visual image, right?

To me, it said "I am Christ and I am here." ... That's what it said to me(quietly). ... I think about sitting in those chairs. They're not there now. And even though they look like hard, uncomfortable chairs ... the simple design of the chair was conducive to a solitary meditation. ...

Can you describe sitting in the chair?

When I sit in the chair... ... my chair is in the second row by the aisle. ... When I sit in that chair, and I like going there at night, 'cause when I sit in the chair and you light the candles, and you see the crucifix in this warm glow of light, ... and underneath is the Holy Sacrament, and on the altar are 2 sets of 6 candles. ... And by the pulpit are 2 candles. And it's all very soft glow.

And when you go in there at night it's so still in there... ... it just felt so safe... ... it always puzzled me, usually in a building like that, you know, with big timber and rock foundation, there's usually creaking noises and ...not in there... three sky lights... and not a light or a shadow would catch your eye and distract you. Surrounded by windows...

There was nothing there that would catch your eye and distract you. Sometimes I would sit on the stairs at the back and I could see the whole chapel, and I would just sit there

I don't know if you're familiar with purging? When you purge you turn over your sins, you turn over you will and your life and you lay face-down on the floor... you lay face down on the floor because that is the most vulnerable position you can put your body in. ... And I could go in there in that big space, ... and lay face down on the floor and do my purging and feel safe about it. ... And it always struck me strange. I never feel safe when I'm face-down on the floor. You can't look behind you.

Usually all my senses just go on high-alert if I'm face-down on the floor...but not then... just there... .. so there are safe places in the world. Sometimes they're hard to find, but they're there. (laughing)

And I don't know if I'll ever find another. Which is interesting because I don't normally feel un-safe in the world. But it was just SO safe there. Way off the scale on Safe. That's how I felt. Someone else might go in there and not feel that way. It felt like Love in there, and joy... .. peace... ..

Are they things you need now to continue on your spiritual journey?

I don't know, I can't see them yet. No, they're not things I need. I wouldn't have to give them up, if I needed them.

What do you need to be who you are?

Freedom. Safety. Freedom and safety. Who can give me freedom? I can. Who can give me safety? I can. It's risky business though. I make a mistake, I get hurt.

Is there someone watching over you?

I feel like there's many people watching over me. There must be. Look at where I came from and look at where I am. Divine providence.

I'm thinking it's quite a switch from where you are as a person now to where you were.

It's quite a switch, Yeah. It feels a lot better where I am, but I don't want to stop here. I want to keep going. I wouldn't mind stopping and having a little snooze and maybe something to eat, and then moving on, but I don't want to plateau here. And not go any further.

You spoke last time about the big hole inside you. Is that still there?

No. I get fleeting moments where ... I detect part of it is there, or ... for the most part, No.

Is there something that triggers that knowledge of the 'big hole', that...

If someone calls me stupid, I feel the hole. ... When someone takes my personal power from me, when I let someone do that to me... I feel the hole. ... When someone tries to make me responsible for something that isn't my responsibility, I feel the hole. So abuse has taken on a whole new definition for me now. ... I now define that as abuse, anything that takes my power, or anyone who tries, in any way, is abusing me.

So I assume you're really careful to not do that to anybody else?

It's on my inventory list. I haven't had time to look at it. But it's something that I will look at, and re-evaluate

You have an inventory list?

Uh-huh.

Is it something like actually concretely written down?... It's in your head or...

It's a combination of Head and written down, things I want to check on, with me, about me. I know that I take other people's power. I know I do that. When I need to look at it and find out how I do that, and stop doing that.

It's not something you want to do?

No. (shaking her head). ... If I'm doing that, I'm interfering with their spiritual growth. I have a big responsibility there. ... I'm standing squarely between them and God when I do that. ... That's one I'm sure I'll never perfect, but I'm sure I can get better at it. ...

... I have had some healing spiritual experiences and in those encounters I realized that I was 'home'. Those experiences were so real, so powerful and so life-giving, that they opened up a whole new awareness to me. Now I yearn to be 'home' here on this plane. The power I was given... and the joy

There's a yearning to go back?

Always! Always! And that's what keeps me driven.

That's what keeps you driven?

...(nodding) That's the life force.

The life force. Ahhhh, the force to go back home where the reality of what life is meant to be, is? What is this life force?

It is the spiritual basis that we are. It's the root of our very being. ... The life force, not as in the physical, but as in the power of the spirit, ... the all-encompassing, ...

.... Now, could you do me the favour of explaining to me, as well as you can, what life force is to you? In order to write this up, I can write what I think it is, but to articulate it in written form as to what you think it is, I need you to put more words to it.

OK, when we look at each other, we see a physical body. OK? My physical body is 5'6" and weighs, I don't know, 155-160 lbs. My life force is Much larger than 5'6" and how ever how big around I am and how ever wide I am.

My life force is the part of me that's connected to you and every other human being in the spiritual world and Christ himself, and Buddha, and everyone else. ... It is the part... that connects us all in that Collective, and at the base of that, is like this enormous power base, ... which we carry in our souls... and that's love... agapé. ... That's it! ...

What I do influences every other person on this earth, ... every other soul on this earth, every other soul that's ever existed, anywhere, is influenced by anything that I say, or do, any decisions I make, ...

We have such power?

We do! ... And when I connect with your life force on this plane, in these bodies, it's a powerful dynamic. It's a powerful dynamic on the other plane, ...

WHAT DETERS SPIRITUAL JOURNEYING**What deters S's spiritual journeying**

When I was living on my own after I separated, ah... my 11 year old niece came to visit me. I have a brother, who's 4 years younger than I am, ah... he's had his times with drinking, and I think he's pretty well, he doesn't drink, but Oh, he's so... negative and he's got this big macho bravado front on him, and he's probably, ah... suffered as much or more from my Dad's drinking than even myself. ah...

Anyway, he had 3 children and the oldest daughter, she was the middle child, ah... came to visit me one summer. She was down in P.E.I. visiting some other cousins, and my Mother, who's always the orchestrator of trying to, again, get the family to be the way it's supposed to be. She thought it would be really nice if L. came and visited with me. And I said, "Well, you now, that's OK".

I was working the school system, and I had the summer off. We organized a time when my cousin would bring her over, and she could spend a couple of weeks with me, and that way, you know, she would get to know her aunt, and all that. Because I don't really have any, ever since I was young, I left at 17, and really didn't spend any time with the family except if I absolutely had to, and I don't really have a relationship with my brother.

And ah... anyway, she came down to visit, and I was really looking forward to this, and I had spent a week at a Girl Guide camp in P., being the camp nurse and dealing with all these little 9 to 12 year olds who had homesick problems and, you know, the odd sunburn, whatever, but most of their issues when they came to see me, were 'cause they were homesick. And I really felt good about the rapport that I had with them and nobody and died, or (laughing) whatever... And ah... they would come to see me and I felt pretty good about patching them up or making them feel OK and you know, encouraging them that they were doing OK, and so on and so forth.

So I went home after this week thinking, "Well, you know, I'm going to spend time with this little 11 year old, and get to know her, and we're going to have a good time." I was feeling pretty good about that, and anyway, she came into my house, into my life, for this 2 weeks and it was an unbelievable experience for me. ...I just got so angry.

I couldn't understand where this anger was coming from. And my whole attitude about having her just changed, just overnight. She talked about nothing but her father. She never mentioned anything about her Mum, or her sisters or her brothers, always Dad this, Dad that. Ah... she had a t-shirt that he had given her, that she wore, called "The Road Kill cafe" and it had recipes on it from road-kill. And the reason that he had given her that was because she ah... she was, she had declared herself a vegetarian and she wouldn't eat anything with a face on it. ...

And, all of a sudden this whole issue of control, and eating was in my face again. It was like, Oh, here we go. And he, like my Dad was a very rageful, ah... controlling ... person with these kids... he would scare the shit out of everybody. He was intimidating and ah... and he and his wife have separated, and , which is the best thing, because until

he gets some clue as to how to have better relationships with people, and raising kids, I mean, it was awful. But here she was having this whole issue with him, and she was ...

And here we are. I was witnessing, the whole cycle's repeating itself. He's acting just the way my Dad did and here's this little girl and I guess I was seeing just, it was me all over again. I didn't understand what the hell was going on, why this had happened but, like why this had happened, but through some friends and talking about it, and I figured, well, here we go again.

She's got no control in her life 'cause she's got this rageful Father, and she's you know, in those families you're not allowed to make choices, you know, you are just told what to do and you're expected how to be. And now she's playing it out through, her control over eating is that she'll control, she'll be able to do, have some control, in terms of being a vegetarian. Although it turns out that actually she had some, an eating disorder, and they had to deal with that at a later time, but you know...

So she chose not to eat, where you chose to ...eat as much as you wanted....it's sort of the same thing?

...Yeah, Yeah, I think so. ...

... I think that's why I'm in such a conflict right now, because if I really sat down and wrote down and listened to what it is that I want to do, the only things that are stopping me are still more of that horse-shit.

Now, what is that left-over shit?

Oh, what people think, and fears, afraid to make a mistake, you know, being criticized or all of the stuff that I lived with, all those messages, you know, "You're not good enough, who do you think you are, ah... what do you want to do that for? " (laughing). You know?

So, I realized on the weekend , I was thinking about that, the limitations, and trying to free myself of limitations. Because we were talking about strategic planning and we talking about people brain-storming, and just that free-flow of ideas, and not to put any judgements on them, and so on, and so on. And of course being in a space where I'm not totally familiar with that stuff, 'cause I've never done it before, and so people tend to try to make me think things by what their own experience is, right?

So, how does that apply to me, or what does this all mean. And so I was thinking about limitations and how, trying to throw off the limitations and trying to live , and that's really important to me because the next 10 years of my life that I see down the road is really clear and open. And I do want to throw those limitations off. And, I guess I see that as part of this process, I think I'm too impatient, I want it to happen right now.

That the limitations be gone now, you mean?

Get rid of them. I don't want to do those anymore.

So would you say the limitations, you perceive have always held you back? Is that what you're saying?

Oh, absolutely. Well, I don't know if they've held me back. I've believed in them, or I allowed them to. I have a hard time with that, because I don't like the, I need to let go of the blame around that. But it's not a blaming thing. It's kind of...

It's kind-of how it has been for you? Whether you want to judge it, or whatever?

Yeah, because there's too much cost, and there is a cost. There's a big cost. And even now when I know... like there was a big cost as a child because if you don't conform the family will get-ya. You know, or they'll make it really uncomfortable for you.

And what did that look like then, when you tried to be who you were?

Oh, criticism and innuendo, and of course there are some family demands, the way you're accepted, the way to be, cause we lived in a professional family and you had to put on the front, and all that kind of stuff...

You had an image to live up to? So, you do you remember trying to be something other than who you were then?

Oh, I've always had to. I've struggled with that all my life, because I've been living sort-of 2 lives. ... I've been, and then it would. ... It all comes out in other ways, in not very nice and constructive ways, you know?

So, what places in this world right now are you free enough to be as much who you are as you can be? Like when you get up in the morning now, do you have a list maybe people you'd be with or places that you'd be, where you'd feel more free...

OK, I'm starting to be more pro-active in choosing who I will be around.

So, people have an affect on you, you mean?

I don't know if they have an affect on me, I don't want to deal with people who are gossiping or negative or "poor me", or... and that , I find that , within work situations. I will make an active choice not to participate in a conversation that's destructive or when

they start talking about people....

Why, is that, S?

It's because it is demeaning and it's unhealthy.

What does it do to you? As far as talking about your spiritual path?

OK, it puts me back in a space where I don't honour and respect people. You know, nobody knows what people are going through, nobody knows, everybody is on their own space in this process of growth. And I've had times when my behaviour I didn't understand it, or it was such that, and I had been severely criticized for. Maybe there was a legitimate reason, or maybe the experiences that I had gone through, whatever.

I don't want to go there. I just don't want to engage in that. I don't want to participate in things that I think are destructive to the human spirit. My boss one day, I walked out of the room on him. And to do that, I'm in a pretty tenuous position right now, but he and the other person that was in there, they started talking about this girl and what she looked like and they wanted to know what she looked like and they wanted to know if she was good-looking.

And I said " Well, I'm not sure I understand what this has to do with whatever it was we were talking about. You know, her package, or whatever, you know, I said, and we were at the end, and I said, "well, I don't want to go there". And then he started a lot of defensive stuff, and scrambling. "Well, how will I know what she looks like...". And I just walked out of the room, and I can see the, and sometimes I'm not too politically smart (laughing), and I could see the implications of that a couple of days after.

And is that what's important to you?

To what? To make a political point? No, it's not. And I'm not going to participate in that kind of stuff. If you want to, go ahead, but I'm not going to. I've made choices in my workplace...where every body is in and around the secretary's office and they're all wrangling on about the clients and I just go to my office. I'm not going to spend my energy, I realize I only have so much energy, and I'm not going to get myself all wound up in all of that.

I want to be a force of some kind of positive energy in the world. I don't want to do that, and sometimes I get hooked into it and sometimes I'm not very clear about it.

What happens when you stay in the midst of that kind of conversation as far as your energy?

I don't like it. Sometimes, I feel like I want to say something, but I know it's pointless and people don't understand it, and that's where they are at. And sometimes I

will say something, or I might add some different perspective, depending on what kind of mood I'm in. Usually I just keep my mouth shut, ... well, I shouldn't say *usually* because I haven't really thought about it that much, but ...

What deters Jane's spiritual journeying

What I have received. ... It's deceiving though, when you say, listen to people who want to speak. ... I think that's a little deceiving because I don't listen to people who want to speak. ...

OK, how would you put that differently?

There's a lot of angry people out there who want to speak, as a means of hurting other people or kicking other people or lashing out, or whatever, and I'm not interested in listening to those people. I'm interested in listening to people who are searching in earnest for a better way. I want to support the people who are making the effort. I do not want to support the people who are not, because that's codependency, that's enabling. That's me putting energy that is making things worse. I want to put my energy that's making things better. So, it's not just anyone that I want to sit down with and be ever so present with. ...

Are you working toward being gentle with everyone? Does that include the people who are not safe for you now? Are you doing that now?

Actually, I was doing that, but I don't do that anymore. I just, I don't know, in the last year, I just got to this turning point where I just ... don't really acknowledge those people. That's the wrong way to say that. I do acknowledge them. I just am not interested in being around those people. I'm not interested in putting any energy into them. I'm not interested in listening to their sob stories. And that sounds cold and harsh, I'm sure, but ... that's how I feel.

I was spending a lot of energy, putting energy into the wrong people. ... and it's not a matter of direction. There are some people who are spiralling down and they want some help, and those people I help. ... Some people are spiralling down and they're angry and they're going to take everyone down with them, and that's where I don't go, or try not to go. ...

Are they dangerous people?

For me they are. I need to preserve myself first. If I'm preserving myself first, then I'm doing what is the common good. That's part of me being, or trying to be responsible.

Is that hard to weigh out? 'Cause sometimes that sounds like judgement of others?

Yeah, it does. ... but I'm finding out that making a judgement of others is not the bad thing. It's making a harsh judgement of others that does the damage. Or I should say, it's the invalid judgement of others that does the damage. ... It's not for me to decide the direction that a person needs to go in or what kind of work they need to do. Those decisions are not mine to make. ... But I think that judgement is a part of life.

If I make a judgement against someone ah... I think in our language, making a judgement and making decisions for other people becomes the same thing. And I have just learning the difference between making a judgement and making a decision for some other person.

If I am a judge, sitting in a court of law and I judge someone guilty, I have made a decision, because I've decided to put that person in jail for amount of time. ... If I'm sitting watching court proceedings and I'm looking at that person who is being tried and I think that this person is guilty, that's a judgement. That's sort of the way I have to cut it. And I don't know really what those terms mean. Because I'm so confused at the difference between making a judgement and making a decision for other people, that it's really hard.

It is hard, isn't it?

It is hard. And there's no words really again, that describe accurately

Does it have to do with what's in your heart, to make the distinction?

Yes, it does. If I'm judging maliciously, you know, ... if some one steals my car, and I go to court, and I'm angry, and I'm thinking "Oh, they're guilty, they're guilty!" That's not the same thing as me walking into the same court and seeing the same person on trial and saying to myself "I think they're guilty". "I think they're the ones who stole my car." It's totally different. And the output is totally different. How I feel inside is totally different. How they perceive me is totally different. How everyone in the room sees me is totally different. Like there's a fine line. Everything meets somewhere, it sure does....

So principles like compassion and love and forgiveness and those ... are those some of the qualities or principles you are talking about?

Forgiveness and acceptance...

So that cuts out all the malice and anger and judgement and hatred when you drop the job of judging someone...

Uh-huh. ... Forgiveness is important to me because if someone else has done something to offend me or hurt me in some way and I'm not forgiving to that person then I am the one who is paying the price. They don't know whether or not I have forgiven them. (laughing) It may not make one iota of difference to them. I am the one who is carrying the anger and resentment and ulcers and migraines and all those good things. ... And for me that's the difference between positive and negative... for me I relate it to a way of feeling ...about myself and others, ... perception. I think many things return to that.

So the negative side would be the anger and resentment?

And the pity, the pity party (laughing) ... pity, pity, pity, "It's such a pity!" Now isn't that ironic? That that phrase would be so predominant in my Mother's generation, and "Oh, that's such a pity!" (Laughing) ...

... So if you're in a space where you're not very patience or you've been struck by something I've said or somebody else in your community of people, ...

Every person serves a purpose, directly and personally for me. And I serve a purpose directly and personally for all of those people. I mean it's all part of growth. If you want to live in harmony, you need to learn how to accept. ...I couldn't accept anything when I started this....

Did you start by accepting other people's impatience, or your own?

Other people's. That's how I learned to accept my own. I didn't know I was going to get that....

It was a side-effect?

It's called living in the mystery. You never know what you're going to get or where you're going to wind up. But you always do. (laughing)

What is that mystery for you? That's a big part of your spiritual journey for you, isn't it?

Yeah, it's like if you throw something in my path, and it really sucks,

Give me an example. What would throw you off your spiritual journey right now? What kind of places, people...

Well, if I was suddenly... lost all my support system, and didn't have healthy people around me, and was suddenly surrounded by very unhealthy people, I would probably gradually go to where they are. So, I want to surround myself with healthy people or people who are going in the same general direction that I am.

What does that look like? Who do you choose to have in your company now? What community have you built?

I choose only people that I respect, or that I feel that respect me, because I don't want to be abused anymore. I done that, been there, got the postcard. I've got that. I feel

like that part of my journey ... I'm going on.... So I don't want to do that, so I try to axe those people off. I find that I have to be.... I can't axe them off with hate and resentment, or impatience or intolerance, I have to just not accept that part of them.

PRESENT FAITH

Marie's present faith

(Singing)

I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back
No turning back

(Narrating)

I decided to cut corners.
Cross over.
Tired of being a suckling to guilt
I thought ,
Jesus
might perfect me.
Coax me,
like a snake charmer
with a sensual woman
dancing to the rhythm
of Satan's pulse...
pulse.

Kneeling,
I slipped into a
crevasse,
rested.

It had been startling when the invited speaker said " If you're not for the Lord, you're against the Lord." He had been, we were told, a High Priest for Satan, thin, with pocked face and flamed, frightening stories, and I was tired of resistance, trying to re-create myself, make myself presentable to God. A concise decision.

(Singing)

The world behind me
The cross before me
The world behind me
The cross before me ...

(Narrating)

Behind me, a legacy, a mountain of sin, to memorialize all that had passed,
 replaced by the living word of a dead man, who exhaled inside me. And others too,
 chosen, and choosing, and I had better help them choose, by living a Holy life.... Lots of
 holes.... Like, no more friends with whom to be equally yoked. Like no more poems
 demanding , like no more music pulsing, like no more sex, drumming it's own intimacy.
 Hallelujah binging. I have a joy, a peace in knowing. I am a sinner seeking glory.... ...
 Alone.

(Singing)

The world behind me
 The cross before me
 The world behind me
 The cross before me

(Narrating)

Trapped in contractual faith
 And so much to loose
 Groggy with counterfeit peace.
 Banging into this ascetic Jesus
 Who gazes Holy eyes
 Spaced gently
 Iced blue and slanted up
 Staining glass with indifference.

But what of my Jesus?...
 Would He snort laughter?
 Would He caress a woman
 Lying limp
 Curled over herself?
 He would stroke her body smooth.
 Coax her from stone.
 Tell her that her faith
 has healed her of denials.

(Singing)

Though none go with me
 still I will follow.
 Though none go with me
 still I will follow.
 Though none go with me
 still I will follow. ...
 No turning back, no turning back

... .. *When did you write that?*

I wrote that this summer. and I... I ... I wrote it because...I wanted to write something that still showed that even though I've gone through this major kind of transition of faith where I'm OK and I don't talk about my faith a lot, and I don't have to bring Jesus into every conversation, and I ahhhh... I still wanted to speak it,... I still wanted to say, ...but I still believe, I still , I'm still on a journey, it's still important to me, ah...it's just different, I still needed to articulate it,...you know? It was for me, ah.....

Did it give you a sense of where you were, once you put it into words?...is that what you mean?

Yeah, Yeah, but you know I still, I was still ...ah... in writing it, there was a tension, a ... there's a fear almost of ah... it's almost like there's a fear around using the name of Jesus because, because of what it meant to me at one time, ... it's hard, really, it's really hard for me to get to a place where it means something different and not be ashamed of it, because everywhere I go, ah... it seems to be tainted with all this negative stuff; the name of Jesus, it's , you know, ah...this rigid stuff, this stuff that oppressed people, you know it's so wrong, it's so wrong, so it was hard, it is hard for me to write it, to let myself even say.. the name of Jesus.. in my own positive way.

So you've redefined the word?

Well, it's about, it's like,... it's about Jesus being a man, it's about me seeing Jesus as a man.

As opposed to...

As opposed to, an icon of purity.

Epiphanies

Epiphanies now come in hieroglyphics
streaked across a mango sky
single syllables of awe proclaiming home

In the daily routine of walking from work
stopping at the post office to pick up mail
general delivery, compartment 67

I am a six foot tidal wave lapping at the moon
no witness present and only silence
to wrap this gift with scraps of velvet cloth

Nothing like the epiphanies of my twenties
moments like high beams coming at you
or the terrifying beauty of Soprano joy

no more leaps of faith
only human steps on the road home

S's present faith

To get some kind of approval. Because I think that there wasn't unconditional approval? What I see now, is I really worked with my daughter, ah... in fact, she wrote me an e-mail the other day, she's struggling around whether to do Honour's or not, in her program. And she saw the struggle her boyfriend went through, because his parents were on his case, you know, to do it, and they were really trying to influence. And I was trying to say to her, You know, that I have come to learn that we don't do anything well, or with any sense of joy, if it doesn't have meaning to us. And I said, if that has no meaning to you, then you need to make the decision based on what has meaning to you, what turns your crank? What energizes you, whatever.

And allow her to have the freedom to do that. And she will write me back an e-mail saying how thankful that she is that she knows she has a parent who will support her whatever decision she makes. ...

... So, that's part of your spirituality, is it?

Being able to be connected with people, and being open... ...

What do you mean by 'open', S?

I feel, I'm not as afraid of life anymore. Sometimes, I get hooked, and so, when I first graduated and I didn't have a job and I got really caught up, but a job appeared and I took the job and I always start seeing, I guess I see that I'm in the place that I need to be and I'm becoming more trusting of that? Becoming more and more trusting that you know, things unfold as they should and what I need will be there.

Is there something bigger thing or power that is directing this? You mentioned that...

Yeah, I don't know if I would say necessarily that it's not, for me it's not a vision that there's somebody up there pulling the strings. I think that's a religious construct, that's very dogmatic? I don't see that.

What's your picture?

In fact, I turned away from that, when I was in the church. I was like, we, I have my Sunday school bars, 8 years perfect attendance, all the little things from the Anglican church, you know. But when I got to university, well actually when we moved to Ontario, anyway, I left that all behind.

I became a bit of, going through a science program, I think I became a bit of an atheist. I didn't believe in anything. I thought that was a bunch of bullshit. I became, sort-

of emersed in the religion of science for a time. But none of that fit, you know? Fit for me, either. Ah... but for me now, and I've done some reading, some of Scott Peck's work....

Which ones have you read?

Ah, I've read one or two of the road books...
"The Road less travelled"?

Yeah, I read that one, and there was another one that one of my friends gave me... but he talks about different development of different stages of faith... and how we are given something as a child and then we start to question or we get, I don't know, I could look it up, but... it really made sense to me because I could see myself coming back to a different faith at a different level.

And it wasn't that stick-in-the-dogma, you know what the church tells you and they don't let you question. And, in fact, he advocates that if people are allowed to question, they will come to a different understanding on a different level. Ah... and they will actually come back to the church.

Now, I don't see, at this point in time in my life, I certainly don't see myself going back to a church, as such, because I can't relate to that. But, I certainly, my concept, of, and I hate the word God, and I have terrible times with that word. Someone told me one time, to use the letters as 'Good Orderly Direction'. And I could handle that.

Within my group, and of course, this group was based supposedly on a spiritual practice, it's a 12 step group and you were supposed to turn your life and your will over to the God of your understanding. Well, that just about makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck. It makes me want to barf! (laughing)

It doesn't work for you?

No!

It makes you a little angry?

(laughing) However, the power of the people in that room, which was outside of me...you know, it wasn't anything to do with me... there was some force or some power, I don't know if you want to call it love, ... compassion, ... whatever you want to call it that ... there was a power in that room for healing... I don't know what name to put on it, but I just know that... ..

Is it what some people might call synergy? If you made a picture of it, would it be, if whatever comes from me is like a ribbon and whatever comes from you is like a ribbon, and if there are 7 people in the room then there's these 7 ribbons that comes up, and it's what's happening with those ribbons, and that tie that ...

For me, I kind-of see it as ah... is that each of those people because they, the ones who were there, because the other people were there for a long time, and I was a new-comer, they knew where I was. They radiated some feeling, it's like a radiance of compassion or understanding or acceptance.

It's like I think, what Carl Rogers calls unconditional positive regard. I was Ok, it didn't matter what package I was in, it didn't matter what religion I was, it didn't matter what colour I was, they saw me as a human being. It had nothing to do with any of the, and to me, that's the beauty of anonymity, like I was just my name, that's it.

But, of course, they did know, because it was a small town. But the thing is, I come in there, and this is me, this is my name, and this is me. And it doesn't matter what kind of clothes I wear, what financial status, what marital status, whatever. I am just a human being on the same level as anybody else.

And I remember something one of the metaphors, somewhere in some reading somewhere., instead of being on a ladder, we are all on the same level in a circle. And that's where I have so much trouble. I feel it now, and I see it. And then I get into situations where people are being in hierarchies and playing games, and all that stuff, and it just "Get a life, you're just fighting and struggling, you're wasting your time". You know, I... ..

Where else in your life do you have that same feeling that there's love and compassion and understanding for you as a person, in the world.

With my daughter, ah... with a couple of my friends, I have a, well, you asked me about the people and keeping connections with them. Two of them came over to my graduation, and they both have blonde hair, and they were standing on the step where I got the picture taken with me.

And when I looked at this picture, it was like these 2 angels. You know, their blonde hair, and they're just like my Guardian Angels. So, I did go back at Christmas time and I went to, they have an annual supper, a Christmas dinner, and they go out for dinner and Chinese food at a Chinese restaurant. So, I thought, well, I'm going to go over there, and I'm going to go out for dinner. They made the effort to come to my graduation, and I thought, "That would be really nice".

Well, we went and we had dinner, and of course, everybody, just when I walked in the room, it was like, they were so happy to see me, and they were just so warm and welcoming, and so we talked and chatted at dinner, but then we went back and had this candlelight meeting, like there was, in the room, multi-candles in the room and they had the lights turned down, we had our meeting.

And... ah... I forget what the topic was but... you know, it just made me realize that I felt at home, you know, I felt safe, ah... accepted... and it was just beautiful... just... and I don't have that here anymore, like I ah... and I'm not so sure that I want that, in terms of, it's hard to make those same connections? ...So, I try to maintain those individual contacts? Another thing that happened too, is when I, did I tell this about

coming up here for my interview?

I don't think so. Are we moving away from going home?

No, ah, I remember..., I don't know, I guess part of it is that appreciation and gratitude when you start to really be grateful for some of the things that have happened in your life? And I remember it was a storm day, when I had made up my mind, that I had to do something differently with my life, and I was separated from my husband, and he wasn't prepared to face his shit, so that he could come to some kind of acceptance, so we could accept each other, instead of all this other stuff.

So, I was coming over here for my interview, on Wednesday, and it was a storm day, and ah... I think I had to be here at 2 o'clock or something, and it was really important to me.

I was very hopeful about getting into this program because it was something that I needed to do, to get going down the road and creating a new life for myself? And, ah, anyway, it was a storm day, and I thought well, I'm going to go to the meeting before I go over here, ... I don't know what drew me there, but I thought, well, I'll go 'cause I didn't get to go on Wednesday, 'cause Wednesday morning was the most intimate group because... ah, Wednesday mornings were, a lot of people who don't work go there then, of course, when I started work, I couldn't go on Wednesday because I was in school. So, storm day, I get to go.

And, ah... I remember saying and thanking everybody in the room that I was coming over here, and how much they had meant to me (crying). Sorry, Rhonda (crying). Ah, how much ... they had meant to me, it meant so much to me, because I never would have been coming over here,.... I don't know what the process was that I found, ah... somebody or some people who were able to believe in me, so that I could learn to believe in myself.

That's what I see and it was... I'll never forget it, I mean... sometimes I ... I mean, I'm only human and I, but I never will forget that. And it was so important to me, and I, you see those kinds of things... why was that day a storm day, and why did I get to go there? 'Cause I was really nervous about coming over here, 'a course.

I didn't know how much rode on the interview, and I mean, and I didn't know how many people I was competing with, and I wanted it really badly, and all that stuff, you know, so, ah... just to be able to do that, and those people, and I know I'm really all over the map. But being open is to start to be open to those experiences in that whole, I don't know what you call it, whether it's new-age philosophy or what it is, just to be gentle enough with myself that when something happens, to be able to learn a lesson from it? ...

And not beat myself up, that I screwed up or that I was wrong, but to learn and to grow from it. And to me, that, it's just so much simpler, 'cause what's going down in this job and to be able to say to myself, 2 things, to be able to say "Ok, I'm in this situation right now, what it is that I'm supposed to learn here, or what it is that I am learning here?"

And the second thing is to ah... to be able to start looking at, instead of, you know,

it's been a difficult job, ah...there's a lot of stuff about it that I don't like, and I'm with some very difficult people, and to be able to say, instead of focusing on all of the things that might be doing wrong, or whatever, but to say, Ok, what is it that you've done right here?

What is it that you've brought to this situation and that's been, and even in individual situations or in my job at school, when I was with the special needs children.... What is it that brought me to that period of time that I was there, and then you said something about, and that was a struggle that I, if I don't really know how much time I spend thinking about why am I here, what's my purpose? ah... a lot of it is, is around finding a job, what it is that I'm supposed to be doing?

As a job, you mean, that's part of the question?

But, I understand by coming back to school, that a lot of that stuff is a construction. I don't need to define myself, just by a job. You know, we, it's so hard to separate yourself from this cultural shit that's going on around you all the time... you know?

You find a job, with people in it, that have a different philosophy really affect how you can be in the world? Like a job doesn't define us, but the wrong job holds us back?

Well, you're emersed in it all the time. I mean, I go down there every day, and I'm emersed in whining , negative, complaining, immature people.

So what do you do with that? When you want to be non-judgmental, and you want to be open, what do you actually do with that?

I try to present a different perspective.

So you stay in it as long as you can...

Oh, well I don't have a choice.

I wondered if you left those situations, and went back to your office or segregated yourself?

On no. I can't do that. I try to confront it. I try to model something different. I try to tune it out sometimes. ... ah. .. it's hard because I've been trained as a counsellor, I'm not under contract with these people to counsel these people and get their life together.

These are co-workers are they?

Well, they're participants in a program that I'm facilitating (laughing) and you

know, I'm wise enough, I don't know if wise is the right word, but I'm aware enough to know that some of this stuff you don't... you know, you've got to start being a little introspective and start making some connections to, making a connection between your behaviour and the consequences of that or the

Are you talking about yourself, or are you talking about the people you're working with?

No, I'm talking about those guys. I'm not going to take on the role of trying to I forget what I was supposed to be talking about...

I was asking you about, ... trying to ask you about the place you find you can live out your spirituality and where you find it difficult to do that. What you find holds you back? What encourages you to be who you find yourself to be right now, who you want to be?

OK, a lot of what holds me back, is still working on the limitations, you know, my own I say, I find it a really difficult balance, and maybe I'm making more out of it than it is but... there had to be a balance between accepting yourself as you are, but trying to be something like, I've been a very serious, responsible person all my life. Well, I want to have fun now, I don't want to be like that anymore. I want to enjoy life, I don't want to be, so... is it a case of just trashing that part of you, or I mean I know it's not, but how do I become more fun-loving and more enjoying and more jestful, you know all that kind of stuff.

I guess I have to learn to do it. Or if I, I think maybe part of my spirituality is ... Ok, if I want something, the universe will provide it for me, but I have to take the opportunity to do it.

Do you believe that? That if you want something, that the universe will provide it?

Oh, absolutely. Oh, I've seen that too many times, Rhonda. Absolutely. And when I...

So, is self-judgement and judgement from others, holding you back from... like is that what your fear is? Because you've mentioned fear a few times, but you haven't defined it?

It's a patterned, ... you have to play with your thoughts too... Ok, last night when I got back from Truro, I was tired. However, I've known about this thing at Fundy Folk for a while, and I've wanted to go, and it just seems, for whatever reason, whatever, and I thought OK, I like music, I like, I love songs that speak to, he was singing a song last night that ah... about relationships, and he was talking about some girl who said she couldn't live without him, and he didn't understand why she wasn't dead.

Well, like it, he was so... so many, I watched in the hotel, I was flipping through the channels and there was this girl and she was dancing around in fields, and it was a country and western channel, and she was singing about how she needed this guy in her

life because she needed a reason to live.

So, here's these diametrically opposed ideas, there's this whole myth shit that I grew up with, and here's this guy who's a young man and he's singing about "Don't give me this bullshit, this is not what love is", and he's talking about love being a behaviour and not a feeling.

Oh, it's what we do and not what we feel?

Yeah! It's how we behave towards people and it's not about a feeling. You know, that's hormones. But, and that's what I like about folk singing, because to me, it speaks more, it's not the mythology around stuff, it's the, it speaks to the issues, sort -of-thing, you know?

Is there a feeling of home when you go there? Is that one of the reasons...

I like folk music, I guess, because, yeah. I love politically or socially, songs that sing about social issues or they speak to stuff like that. But I had to force myself, because I was tired. I could have easily said " Ok, if you're going to go, you're going to end up going all by yourself. What do people think about that? You driving down there, and going all by yourself?

What do you think about that, S?

I had a good time. I'm going to go back the next time. I think that I have to do it. If I don't do it, I'll sit home and just do nothing. And I don't need somebody, I can still enjoy the experience. It would be very nice if I had someone who would... and had I come back early enough, I could have called around and found somebody maybe that wanted to go.

Jane's present faith

... .. I think being whole has to do with balance, and living in harmony. I think it has to do with living with higher awareness, striving for that. That's it's not about achieving the higher awareness, it's about wanting it. And it's about working to get it. ...

Can you do it by yourself?

Absolutely not! I couldn't even comprehend trying to do it by myself... (laughing) I'd be sitting in the tavern this afternoon, if I tried to do it by myself. I wouldn't be sitting here! (laughing) Yeah, I tried that!

That was part of the addiction story?

That was way back! (laughing) When I was so afraid to ask anybody for help or would even recognize that... it seemed to me that if I couldn't do it by myself, then I was weak, and I wanted to be anything but weak! So, I went for quite a while trying to do it by myself, and that doesn't work very well.

Did you perceive that as strong, if you could do it on your own?

Yup!

So that lead you through all kinds of rocky water?

All kinds of interesting things.

So you've realized... you've come to a point where doing it yourself...

Doesn't work... at all...

Do you think any of us can do it alone?

Nope!

So what is it that you've figured out? If you can't do it by yourself, is it other people, is it a place, is it ... what do you combine with W, the person, to create a spiritual journey where you would be striving to become whole?

It takes all kinds of things. It takes, number one: it takes people.

That's the first thing, is it?

That's the first thing for me. And I'll tell you why. People, because people say

things to me that I don't want to hear, people say things to me that I don't like. But what that does is, it makes me really stretch... and every time I stretch... it's like an inch worm going up a wall, every time I stretch, it's my feet that come back up, not my head that goes back down. ... Do you know what I mean?

You'll have to explain that to me.

Every time I stretch, when I come back to my normal position, I've gained that much in where I'm going. I never knew that before. ... When I stretch... when you say something to me that I can't get my head around, I say Rhonda, say that again, I don't get it. Then we talk about it, I'm probably not getting it because I don't want to hear it.

Or 'cause I don't want to look at it. But if you're patient enough, and I can become receptive enough, and I can get that, I don't have to believe what you're saying, I don't have to take it on as one of my values... but if I've stretched to understand that concept, whatever you're saying.

When it's all said and done and I'm looking back on it: (a) I'm more open, and (b) I've learned something, and (c) it's helped me on my journey. 'Cause I'm not in the same place I was before we had that conversation, nor am I the same person. And it's all relevant.

So one of the components of that other person is that they have patience with you?

It's that they make me stretch! If they don't have patience, I have to stretch to have the acceptance of their lack of patience. Do you see what I'm saying?

Uh-huh.

So, I've connected! ...

... I think I probably asked you what solitude meant. ... How have you taken that experience and made it meaningful to you now in your spirituality? It sounds like a profound...

Now I know I can get there. ... Now I know I'm capable of feeling that. Now I want to feel it again. And I can't feel it in a bottle and I can't feel it in a pill. ... I have to be living in harmony to feel that... .. I can't live in harmony ... with distractions. I have to live in harmony with God. I have to take my responsibility as a human being. I have to take my responsibility to other human beings, my responsibility to God, my responsibility to myself, and not allow myself to get saddled to the baggage of other people's responsibility. ... I have to be clear in order to experience that. It really made me stop and evaluate what my distractions are.

What are your distractions from your spiritual path?

Almost everything I've ever done in my life (laughing) ... if I'm focused on money, I'm not focused on God. If I'm feeling apprehensive about someone else's responsibility or their perception of my responsibility to them, I can't have that. ... I get really off the wall and distract myself with drugs or alcohol, I'm a long way from that. ... Mindfully present in the silence. That's how I can have that.

So the mindful presence in the silence is the ultimate? Is there a way, that you have figured out that you can take that mindful presence to community with other people?

I believe you can take mindful presence into community with other people, Yes. But I don't believe I'm going to feel like that when I do.

Because there's other distractions? What are the things that you do to be mindfully present when you are in the company of others?

It used to be, when I was sitting here talking to you, I'd be planning what I was going to do tomorrow. I'm not doing that now.

What are you doing now?

I'm here. I'm not thinking about what's going to happen in an hour or what happened an hour before this conversation. I'm thinking about what's happening now.

And how has that changed your perception of your now's now?

I have a lot less thoughts in my head. It's a lot easier to listen to my intuition. It's a lot easier to go with my heart. I can feel secure 'cause I still feel connected to God. 'Cause I don't have all that distraction.

Of other thoughts in your head?

Yeah. Yeah.

What is your intuition?

I'm not sitting here thinking "Should I say this or should I say that?" I'm saying whatever comes.

And where do you get that direction, when you say "What ever comes" you're pointing to your chest?

Uh-huh. From the heart. If I knew where to point at my soul, I'd point at that too. I don't know where to point at that. (laughing)

So do you think your heart and your soul are sort-of close or?

Yeah. I think that... when I was a child I thought my soul was some second part of my Self, that I was mysteriously connected to. Now I feel my soul is my Self, as much as my physical being. There's no disassociation between me and my soul anymore.

You try to speak from your soul? Your soul speaks to you?

Through me.

Does your soul give you information in words or in feelings or, like your soul is you?

Rhonda, I'm not thinking about what I am saying. So, it's not coming in words. *Is it too esoteric to describe?*

I think so. ...I know it's a combination. Obviously I'm thinking about it on some level or my mouth wouldn't be moving. But I can feel, when I'm sitting here talking to you, I can feel it in my heart. And I can feel it out here. It's coming from everywhere.

So as you speak to me about your spirituality, which is linked into almost everything I think you've said tonight, ... is it something you just intuitively know and words just come to that experience?

Yes. That's a good way to put it. Yes.

I would think that would take a lot of trust to go with, not your head, which most of us do. ... That's a big statement, how would I know. But thinking that there isn't angst or clutter as you heard your words come out your mouth, that there must be some safety before you speak...

Uh-huh.

I'm really being awkward, because I don't know how to describe what I see? You just seem to have the ability to just speak it.

When you ask me a question and I pause, it's not because I'm thinking about it. It's because I'm waiting for it.

You're waiting for your answer?

Yeah.

And it comes to you?

Yeah. Sometimes I don't know how to describe it. Sometimes I have to search for a word. ...

Do you believe you're given direction from somewhere outside your soul?

Absolutely. The difference is in the choice.

On how to react to the direction you're given?

How to react and whether or not to accept it. If I'm second-guessing that direction, I'm second-guessing God.

Jane, how do you know the direction you are given is from God? Can you differentiate between an old thought that you've had or been taught orhow do you know the difference? Cause I understand you to say that you're mostly certain of Godly direction, how did you learn to know the difference? Was it a learning?

That's a new knowledge for me.

How did you get to that?

I don't know. Everything seems to manifest itself over time, and come in bits and pieces. But I'm thinking that ... when it's from God, it feels much different than it does if it's from Jane. ...

And I'm taking that sometimes when it's from God and you have this intuitive knowing that it's from God, that it may not always be what W's head wants to hear?

Right! Always feels safe if it's from God.

Not necessarily what your brain wants to hear but you somehow know that it's ...

It feels safe, not particularly attractive sometimes, but it feels safe. If my heart is pounding, that's me. If it's coming gently and safely, with peace and with joy, ... then I take that as coming from God. ...

I think I asked you before to describe God, but now that you're in context of telling me how you get direction, in different ways, that all your direction doesn't come from God. otherwise there would be now figuring out whether it's from God or not?

No, I still have my dysfunctional over-reaction to things, and I have to watch for that. That's the main thing I have to weed out, to figure out whether one of my buttons is being pushed. ... What I've found, or what I'm finding now is that... God doesn't push my buttons. I do or someone else does. God does not push my buttons. ... Coming to God for me has been a journey of stopping doing things. Everybody says "What do I have to do to attain closeness with God?" To me, you don't do anything. You stop doing. You get rid of that clutter. Do you know what I mean?

Do you turn off your head?

No. It's not disassociation. ... It's getting rid of the clutter. It's being mindfully present in a place where you can be receptive to God. ...

Have you learned a way to be receptive to God while in the presence of other people?

I feel like I'm doing it now. But I couldn't do it at the grocery store. I couldn't do it in a movie theatre. Maybe someday I will learn. I don't know. But today I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it in the middle of a busy street. Not ... to feel the way that I do now.

It's not that I think God isn't there. It's like there's different levels of awareness and closeness to God. ... And I can't get, what for me are the higher levels, if I'm surrounded by distraction. The less distraction: the higher the level that I go to, which doesn't mean that I think I should go out and live in the woods the rest of my life, all by myself with no phone and no TV, and no running water and no electricity.

I'd love to but that's not practical. And I think that I need to search that out. I think I need the process of searching that out, in order to reach that level when I am there.

Just to clarify: search out, you need to maybe be in a solitary place, or you need to be with distraction...

I need to search out a solitary place, a place of silence, in order to attain that level with God. But the process I go through in searching that out and making that happen is what I perceive to be my responsibility to God, meeting God part way. I have to do my part of the work.

To be in a place that allows you to be...

Receptive. Have I got you totally confused?

No, I think I'm understanding what you're saying. So is there a ... is that the purpose of your spirituality?

Nope.

What is the purpose?

That's the part I like the best.(laughing)

That's the part you like the best?

That's the part that feels the best. Although I shouldn't say that because there's always some element of joy and some element of peace and you know, all those things are in there some where, but what did you ask me?

You said No. My question was "Is that the purpose of your spirituality?" To find solitude, to gain a closeness with God? And you said No. So then I wondered if you have sort-of a divine purpose for your spirituality, if there is a reason ...

I think it's as simple as the word love or maybe agapé.

What is agapé to you?

It's a very potent form of unconditional love. I think that the purpose for me in all of this is to learn love, in the true sense of the word. ... Because if I learn love, and I can give another person a taste of love, maybe they'll come closer to God. And I think that's what it's all about. I think that's my responsibility. ...

So would you say that even though it's really feels good to be in solitary, in communion with God, when you're alone in those moments, that they might be, they're certainly perks along your spiritual journey, are they kind-of practice sessions? Like that's a crude way to put it, but if your purpose is to really learn the definition of love/agapé...

I have to learn for myself first...

...In order to ...

If that was my purpose, I should be a monk. I am not a monk. Nor will I be a monk.

You don't believe that's your purpose?

I don't believe that's my purpose.

So your purpose has something to do with learning love and agapé for yourself first, to ...

Put some out in the world. If I'm a monk, I can attain that. But it stays with me. It gets given away on a very limited basis. I see a higher objective than that.

A different one for you?

Yeah.

And that involves other people.

Yeah. Definitely. Not crowds of other people, I'm sure. But other people. I could not really seriously take a guess at what God's mission for me is, 'cause I don't know that. But that's where I see myself going at this stage of the journey.

Today, that's where you see yourself?

Yeah, when I was out there in the garden on my knees crying, with joy in my heart, I had some sense that I was somehow, supposed to take that spirit away from that place. Not take it away, so there was a void there, but take it away and share it with other people. I don't know how that will manifest itself, but I knew it wasn't just for me.

Did it seem like a gift at the time?

Oh, it was absolutely a gift. Absolutely. There was times, one morning I got up and went down by the lake, and there was a layer of ice on the lake, bit of snow, very still, and I was sitting down by the beach. ... Just sitting.

When I got back to my house, it was like 3 hours had gone by. It only takes 30 seconds to walk from my house to the beach. And 30 seconds to walk back. I was shocked! I spent 3 hours looking at the sky, and the ice, and the snow, and the trees... the lake...being rather amazed by the whole thing, awestruck at the beauty, and ... that's a real battery-charger! ...

I could live out here for 10 or 20 years and not have that experience once!

So what is the difference, Jane ?

Silence, solitude, mindfully present.

So are you working toward figuring out how to be mindfully present...

Outside of the silence and the solitude, Yes.

How do you do that?

(laughing) I don't know yet. Got any books I could read about that? It's going to be hard. But it's not unattainable. I just have to give up a few more things.

CHAPTER SIX
MY REFLECTIONS/ PERSONAL STATEMENT

When you need to make a decision and there is no one around to judge or direct you, you will need to listen to the still small voice inside you. That voice is the voice that will guide you. It may not always be a voice that suggests the easiest journey. But it is the voice that is your truth. Practice listening to that voice because although it does come naturally to you, it takes work to listen and more work to heed. Such is the stuff of real importance in this life. Take care, take heed, you are not alone (Sisson, L., 1961).

I spent a number of months looking for more and more material to say "Yes, this is a good idea you have for a thesis topic, it is worthy of further development, you have my permission to start this project." It was the realization that I was again waiting for external validation of my existence. I was again not listening to the still small voice inside me that was saying, THIS IS THE QUESTION, not AN IMPORTANT QUESTION, but THE QUESTION paramount to living, instead of existing.

That question took form as I sat and listened to that voice from within. I intuited that there was so much to say and I sensed that there was also little time in which to say it. What this meant to me was that there was still an unresolved neglect of my inner feelings and thoughts around soul. I felt that I had been born into a world that on outer appearances, was telling me that "soul work" was not

important and that there was so much more to do than think and feel the feelings. I sensed the urgency was what I had always lived with in an attempt to satisfy my inner needs, but not at the expense of relating to the world outside my heart.

I feared alienation from most of the rest of the world who seemingly did not agree with my inner journey. I thought that I needed to, at times, be only in the company of others of like mind and heart, who were also on the journey to soul. It was scary for me to be thinking and working on this and be seeing outside myself *rolling eyes* and comments of invalidation, "What are the touchy-feely things you are talking about now?"

Only through the pain can we become more of who we are. How bad did it have to get before I surrendered to the questions I needed to answer for my very survival? Was I afraid, and if so, what was I fearing? When did I not feel afraid? Where was I? Who was with me? What was I doing? What happened to make me fearful? How did I feel about myself being scared? What did I do to soothe myself?

In researching some of Dr. Charles Taylor's work, I came across the following excerpt, another small piece to the universal puzzle of 'being'. It is my experience to have

met someone who appears to be living out what Dostoevsky would called 'humble love'.

At some ideas you stand perplexed, especially at the sight of some men's sins, uncertain whether to combat it by force or by humble love. Always decide, 'I will combat it with humble love.' If you make up your mind that once and for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humbly is a terrible force: it is the strongest of all things and there is nothing like it.
(The Brothers Karamazov: Dostoevsky in Taylor, 1988, p.1)

IV

O world, thou chooseth not the better part!
It is not the wisdom to be only wise
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.
Columbus found a world, and has no chart,
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies:
To trust the soul's invincible surmise
Was all his science and his only art.
Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but a step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine,
By which alone the human heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.
1884
(Santayana in Holzberger, 1979 p.86)

Safety issues circle around fears of fears of fears. In the telling of one's tale, sometimes tears are shed to mourn the death of silence. Through the pain we can grow and become more of who we are, gaining new-found hope for all our tomorrows, in the here and now of this earth plane and later in a new reality. Some searching is born out of fear

and a sense of aloneness, pulling us to many places for a sense of connectedness. At times 'inner 'homesickness' can disable us from being in the 'here and now'.

When I speak of 'homesickness' I mean an intense yearning for completion, belonging and acceptance. A completion of self can be sought in the acknowledgement of one's worth in the eyes of others. Passions held dear to one's heart have been bargained away for the potential of a soul connection with someone. The hope for a soul connection with a partner can be a distraction to take away the pain and feelings of "wanting to go home". If one intuits that they probably would not find 'home' in a particular relationship, they resign themselves to 'joining the crowd' and letting the soul journey go again. Keats (1818) wrote:

There's a sigh for yes, and a sigh for no,
 And a sigh for I can't bear it!
 O what can be done, shall we stay or run?
 O cut the sweet apple and share it!

And so it goes, when one's partner is not on the same spiritual journey, there is an urge to ignore one's inner voice and director, and share the sweet apple of the romantic love ideal. The addiction to intimate relationships to fulfil the longings and emptiness within has been my story. The deep homesickness within me sought solace in someone outside my body. I gave up much to grasp fleeting moments of connectedness that in the end were only dreams

unfulfilled. I gambled outside myself so many times that I could no longer hear my inner voice. My inner voice was so remote; just a whisper. I no longer knew who I was.

If we do not know who we are and cannot listen to the still small voice within there is a great deal of uncertainty and fear. Childhood can be recalled as just a handful of flashbulb memories. It is very hard work to go back and try to salvage a memory. It feels like a place that is not safe to go, and perhaps that is why one cannot remember.

If we are fortunate, we have someone who was there with us, when we could not be present to our own experience. They can serve as touchstones to our past. I had a loving family, but there was always something missing in me. I felt the Presence of an Absence. My little sister was always there and remains a steadfast touchstone for me, no matter what. She remembers what I do not. She is my memory. She was there beside me, when I could not be there myself.

Some of us have people who remain rocks who serve as anchors in the storm. They were in our world when we could not be there for ourselves. We can borrow their stories of us and slip them on like old coats. They never really fit, but they keep us warmer than we would be otherwise. They are not ours because we do not remember "being there". We

remember only their undaunting love, in the purest sense we have ever known.

My spiritual development had been arrested and in need of attention. It was my sister who was one of the ones who facilitated my spiritual development. She provided what counsellors are asked to give: a safe, trustworthy, and compassionate forum in which to anchor life experience and manage feelings of shame, guilt, isolation, and helplessness. Childhood experiences of uncertainty and distress call for hope, reassurance, and a sense of purpose that a solid faith or spirituality can provide (Reinert & Smith, 1997).

We, as counselors, can model safe community, which for some clients is a new experience. Counselling without judgement, can birth a new-found trust in humanity and as Reinert et al. (1997) suggest, one's relationship with God or Higher Power is something that cannot be taken away; it is a relationship marked by safety and security.

Reliving our lives through our stories can be very painful. Some of the old feelings come back. To get to a place of spiritual peace, often there is a struggle.

Perhaps the most difficult task that victims have in answering the *why* questions is to become free from the deep-seated shame by forgiving themselves. This task is complicated by the profound interconnection that exists between the willingness and ability of suffering individuals to forgive themselves and their willingness and ability to "forgive God" (Casarjian, 1992 as cited in Parker et al. 1997).

The symbols that emerge from the mythic imagination and become active in ritual have the power to constellate meaning, thus aligning the life of the individual with the depth and power of the sacred (Marie-Louis von Fral as cited in Doty, 1986, as cited in Parker et al. 1997).

Recounting the path of pain and discernment out of that pain through story and symbolism into the story of spiritual experience, allows the wounded person to draw healing power into his or her life situation and be restored by connecting with Herman's (1992 as cited in Parker et al., 1997) "indestructible inner life". If we think of therapy as alchemy, then ritual may be regarded as the crucible in which the symbols of the sacred are placed, and through which their power is refined, distilled, and communicated to the wounded psyche...(Parker et al., 1997).

What I want to do tonight is tell my story, like I did when I was a child. But unlike when I was a child, today I want to be heard. This time I want to be believed. I want to let go of the pain that I have held inside me for so many years. I need you to be brave enough to be a witness to my pain. And I want you to act. I need you to comfort me (Parker et al., 1997).

Counselling recovering addicts who are on a spiritual journey requires that we hear their stories with more than our physicality, more than our intellect, more than our drawing from our own lived experience. We are required to hear with non-judgemental compassion and love for their courage and their wisdom. It is a tall order because we must have our own work done. We must be comfortable with the tension.

We are more alike than different (Taylor, 1998). It is through the telling that we are freed, knowing that we are more than our childhoods lost, more than our pain. We are all people becoming human, people on our way to self.

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Before I had completed interviews with the participants, I thought that there were turning points that could serve to facilitate a choice to start and continue soul-work for recovering addicts. I expected to hear concise stories of flashbulb memories reflecting specific turning points of discovery for them, so that I could write about concrete isolated instances.

I did not hear that. In fact, the women all expressed their angst in trying to remember such times. Instead, I am left with the notion that in fact, the question itself may have been ill-conceived. I had made an assumption that the choice towards spiritual growth is a linear process. Perhaps it is not, and that is why the question posed was not answered.

I now perceive spiritual journeying as a life-long process. The journey to spirit does not always look the same. When I started this research I thought that one's spiritual journey began after a definite and intentional decision had been made to set off on a different path with spirituality being the end-point of that destination. I no longer think the process is that "black and white".

I had labelled spiritual journeying as one particular way of being in the world, that of striving for one's

meaning and purpose through regimented and dogmatic paradigms. Although I had rejected studying and living out theological doctrine as being the only way toward knowing self and purpose for being, I had however unintentionally substituted my own definition of spirituality. My original definition had excluded any life experience prior to "epiphany".

It would seem that, as Moore (1992) suggested a soulful life has many components, like a multifaceted crystal which throws the full colour spectrum to the world around it. I originally assumed that addicts prior to "epiphany" were not on a spiritual journey because they did not "appear" to be living a "spiritual" existence.

Looking back now, I more fully appreciate the periods of darkness in their lives, that as Saint John of the Cross may have described as "the dark night of the soul": a sense that their Higher Power had deserted them. Children see the optimism in life, the possibility, the imagination and the mystery. Perhaps it is when their innate sense of connectedness is shattered by abuse and isolation that they search outside themselves for purpose and meaning because the family they were born into did not fulfill their need for belonging and safety.

It would seem that all three women in this study

experienced isolation and shame at a very early age. They all sought to be loved and nurtured, to fit in and be accepted. S., Marie, and Jane were spiritual journeyers since they were little girls. Their spirits had been compressed, suppressed, stifled, and muffled, and yet they travelled on, hoping to find peace and belonging, meaning and purpose. The paths they took are a reflection of their courage and earnest searching, from their childhood trauma through their active addiction years, to their present understanding.

Certainly it can be said that the S., Marie, and Jane gave us eloquent, clear pictures of their lives and how their journey unfolded as it did. They gave us the knowledge of what, for them, were the precipitating factors that allowed them to begin the trek to inner self, to be with their feelings. They each showed us how they decided to *go there?*

Marie, S., and Jane Doe struggled to *be good* by doing what they had been taught is the *right thing*. Trying to live and act according to someone else's rules for *good behaviour* is difficult. Sometimes those who taught them how to be in the world did and do not practice the same lessons. I understood that the women decided to take responsibility for their own decisions, own them as theirs, and learn from

their own experiences. The voice of their intuition was helpful in guiding them to do their own *right thing*.

I understood that at the base of their own knowing was love and compassion, not only for others, but for themselves as well. Listening to their intuition was not arduous work. In order to hear their inner voice, they had to be silent and still. That was where the strenuous work came in, in the non-doing. Few of us can take the time to stop, be still and await for our inner guidance.

In conversation we meet ourselves (MacKinnon, 1998). We bring ourselves to social inquiry. It is through the mirror of social interaction that we can speak the 'truths' of our inner selves, to be courageous enough to say what it is our hearts are yearning for.

The voice of lived experience births a new lived experience, for in moment to moment poetizing, in communion with others, our memories of thoughts and thoughts of feelings appear.
(van Manen, 1997, p.13).

We are changed by discovering in conversation with others, what it is to be human. For me, entering the life stories of the woman in this study has been a journey of spirit.

The act of telling one's spiritual growth story, within the context of respect, non-judgement, and gentleness may create a cocoon of acceptance and presence of Higher Power. It has been my experience throughout the women's

stories, that often where there is honesty and love, the presence of Spirit abounds.

Spiritual journeying is not a solitary trek. It is through discourse with another person, that words are put to the music of the soul. Recollecting our lived experience with another human, brings each thesis, antithesis, and synthesis out of our own minds and into yet another lived experience.

How can I describe the process that led to the final copy of this manuscript, in the context of the counselling process? How can I describe the way in which our interview conversations led to an understanding of how these woman wanted to be heard? I set out to gain an understanding of how these three women moved from a state of active addiction, through abstinence struggle, and on to their on-going process towards spiritual wholeness. I wanted to do more than that.

I wanted to hear them and not label them. I wanted to be intellectually and spiritually open to any topic they introduced, with a passion to accept what they had to say without judgement. I knew that listening was not enough, empathy was not enough. Beyond empathy is grace and love, coupled with respect and compassion and skill within discourse. I would say I tried to love within the tension,

to go where they went in their stories, always bracketing my story from theirs.

There are many approaches to counselling and researching lived experience. Taking an expert stance as a clinician or as a researcher separates me from clients and research participants. I sought to find a balance between us that allowed for safe and open dialogue, while stream-lining our conversations to spiritual journeying. I see that balance as the waltz, with each dancer focused on the common tune. The approach I used gave each woman the expert stance in her own story.

A clinician is supposed to note the way stories are told. ... A diagnosis is partly made on the basis of a person's style with his tale. A psychological diagnosis too is a "telling about the patient". It is a caricature, an abbreviated character sketch - Szasz and Goffman might say "character assignation" - in the language of a clinical specialist to be read by other clinical specialists. (It's definitely not for the patient.) A psychological diagnosis does not say what a person has, or what a person is. It describes his *Zustandsbild*, his clinical picture. It tells about the presentation of self to the clinical writer. (Hillman in Wiggins, 1975, pp.136-137).

She had taken her story literally in the clinical language in which it had been told to her, a tale of sickness, abuse, wastage of the best years. ...She knew her psyche because she had been emerged in its depths. Hospital had been her finishing school, her initiation rites, her religious confirmation, her rape, and her apprenticeship with psychological realities. Her pedigree to survival and diploma was her soul's endurance through, and masochistic enjoyment of, these psychological horrors. She was indeed a victim, not of her history but of her story in which she had put her history.

(Hillman in Wiggins, 1975, p. 139).

...This is partly why therapy pretends to being creative, and I use that word advisedly to mean originating of significative imaginative patterns, poesis. Successful therapy is thus a collaboration between fictions, a revisioning of the story into a more intelligent, more imaginative plot, which also means the sense of mythos in all the parts of the story.

(Hillman in Wiggins, 1975, pp. 139-140).

Counselling recovering addicts who have issues relating to spirituality is surrounded by underlying notions of powerlessness. Because each woman has her own perception of spirituality, one can speak of multicultural dynamics here. Even with the myriad of definitions of spirituality, there seems to be a core underpinning of keen awareness that is a necessity for minority cultures who have been deprived of power or status (Miller, 1986 in Hanna, Bemak, & Chi-Ying Chung, 1999).

Keen awareness in this context refers to each woman's understanding that each is "less than", "not good enough", and they have the uncanny ability to know when others are

judging them or when they are not in a safe environment.

Hanna et al. (1999) call this ability, wisdom.

The women in this study have lived through addictions and are now on a different spiritual path. They have a lifetime of experiences and knowledge through discernments they have made. They have struggled through self-loathing and self-hate and are on the path to spiritual awakening; a huge body of wisdom in itself. Hanna et al. (1999) suggest that the counsellor is required to be wise in the aforementioned sense as well. Intelligence is another matter, although pre-requisite to effective counselling.

Hanna et al. (1999) suggest that intelligence can be differentiated from wisdom in specific ways. Wisdom is concerned with depth of understanding, whereas intelligence is concerned with extent and breadth of understanding. Wisdom is comfortable with ambiguity. In contrast, intelligence has little patience with ambiguity and sees ambiguity as something to be resolved, preferably sooner than later (Sternberg, 1990 in Hanna et al. 1999). Tolerance of ambiguity is a mark of higher stages of development. Wisdom is also concerned with resolution of ambiguity but by allowing clarity to emerge from ambiguity without reduction or oversimplification (Hanna, Giordano, & Bemak, 1996 in Hanna et al. 1999). The women who participated in this study

are what Hanna et al. (1999) describe as wise.

There are hundreds of theories of counselling, yet research has not found that any one of them is clearly superior. The field is currently allowing clarity to emerge by recognizing the importance of the recognition of common factors, or the integration of theories (Hanna, 1994; Norcross & Goldfried, 1992 in Hanna et al. 1999). The emerging clarity also dictates that attention be placed on the perspective and needs - including culture and developmental stages - of the client, rather than molding the client to fit the needs and assumptions of the theory itself (Hanna et al., 1999).

In the field of counselling one could harness his or her practise to any paradigm of thought that fits with their worldview or that they have become familiar with. Hanna et al. (1999) discuss wisdom and intelligence within the counselling practice. Sternberg (1990) observed that the *"wise person resists automatization of thought but seeks to understand it in others,"* whereas *"the intelligent person welcomes automatization"* (Hanna et al., 1999).

The wise multicultural counselor is highly empathic and compassionate, does not automatize skills and approaches, is deeply insightful, is not easily fooled or deceived, has extensive self-knowledge and awareness, learns from mistakes, can readily reframe cultural contexts, knows a wide range of coping strategies, can cut to the essence of situations and conditions, properly frames problems, sees the interdependence and connections among people and things, is extremely tolerant and accepting, and is adept at self-transcendence. This same list of qualities can also be seen as desirable outcomes for clients to achieve as well (Hanna & Ottens, 1995 in Hanna et al. 1999).

Hegel offers a theory of the process of "mind becoming conscious of itself" (Dockwrey, 1998). Hegel says that the process of discerning what we think has three parts: the original notion being labelled as 'thesis', the opposite view as 'antithesis', and the discernment of the two as 'synthesis'. He argues that the trilogy of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis allows recollection of thoughts and thoughts about feelings, as one way of coming to some understanding of who one is in the world (Dockwrey, 1998).

In the process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis there is no ending, no conclusion, only the ever-present linking of experiences of being human. Hence within each moment Marie, S., and Jane Doe are somewhere in the process of becoming more of who they are. They are either thinking about thesis, thinking about antithesis, or recollecting each of these and coming to synthesis. The experiential

parts become the whole in synthesis, and yet the experience of synthesis is momentary because a new consideration is at hand; a new thesis. And so it goes. The spiral of thoughts continue within each moment, as part of the whole experience of being human.

Retrospectively considering their life-events can provide them with, otherwise unseen clues, into who they are, what makes their life meaningful, and what their life purpose may be. When they attempt to solitarily intellectualize the trilogy of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, they become bogged down in confusion. They remain isolated.

Story gives wings to one's inner thoughts and feelings. Marie, S., and Jane Doe could discern confusion by communing with others, as they listen and ask questions for clarification. Story-telling encourages clarity because the speaker seeks to be understood. In the telling, they found zones of their own bewilderment. They searched for words to express their thoughts and feelings. When the words come for the first time and 'feel like they fit' they may label them as synthesis. In the moment of synthesis, a new awareness is illuminated to them and to me. We can call this awareness 'Ah-ha'.

'Ah-ha's' can serve to help us recognize the lessons

in the pain of previous spiritual journeying experiences. The 'Ah-ha's' are the insights of new conscious awareness which have only come by way of connecting the bits and pieces of encounters along the way. One could say that only after the painful experience can one reflect back and find a new awareness because of the experience.

If the mind can think only one thought at one time; awareness cannot be *in* the experience and reflecting *back* on it at the same time.

A person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience. It is only, after the fact, one can make sense of experiences.... Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through (van Manen, 1997, p.10).

Reflection, consciousness and awareness are critical to spiritual journeying. If I say that consciousness of past events can be the touch-stone to understanding self, then retrospection is the manner in which that must come to be. Recalling is not enough. For the women in this study, awareness of their intentionality, both past and present, became a vital link to understanding the patterns of their personal ways of being with others in the world.

We may discern who we are, what we think and feel, and what our purpose is, through story. At times, words are not necessary. Silence is part of the story. In the presence of

a kindred spirit, universal energy in the moment is a communing phenomenon. Let me drink in my connection to the whole, for in that moment, I am experiencing the Oneness of being human, sharing the pain, the joy, and the upcoming discernments yet to unfold from the mystery of now.

Addictions are the end-point of where external searching for validation of self can lead us. (Laing, 1960, p.25).

Story-telling may be our internal searching for meaning and purpose made public. Story sometimes allows our unconscious thoughts and feelings to be born into our consciousness. At that moment we know what we know, perhaps for the first time. Consciousness itself cannot be described directly (van Manen, 1997, p.9).

Consciousness is the only access human beings have to the world. Thus, all we can ever know must present itself to consciousness. Whatever falls outside of consciousness therefore falls outside the bounds of our possible lived experience. To be conscious is to be aware, in some sense, of some aspect of the world. In open conversation with each woman, we become aware of what it was we think and feel, are and long for. We spoke from our hearts and not our heads, for we were free just to be who we were.

What we must do is discover what lies at the ontological core of our being (van Manen, 1997, p.13).

The individual in the ordinary circumstances, of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. He may lack the experience of his own temporal continuity. He may not possess an over-riding sense of personal consistency or cohesiveness. He may feel more insubstantial than substantial, and unable to assume that the stuff he is made of is genuine, good, or valuable. And he may feel his self as partially divorced from his body (Laing, 1960, p.42).

Dilthey suggested that lived experience is to the soul what breath is to the body:

Just as our body needs to breathe, our souls need the fulfilment and expansion of its existence in the reverberations of emotional life (Dilthey, 1985, p.59, in van Manen, 1997, p.36).

Through each woman's description of their lived experience of spiritual journeying, the reader can grasp the nature and significance of what their journey has been for them. The fundamental questions of 'Who am I?', "What is my purpose?", resonate in the reader's own mind, taking the experience to a personal level - a shared experience with the text. Not only may the reader consider the text, but the questions may be internalized and owned as their own fundamental human inquiry.

Not only has there been experiencing on a personal level for the reader now that the thesis has been completed, but all the way along the road to its completion there has been opportunity for discovery of personal truth, both for

the women and for me. I brought myself to this inquiry, with all my theses, antitheses and syntheses. I came to this inquiry with an open heart, as a spiritual journeyer, ready for rich communion with the people I journeyed beside on this project.

As in any story, when we come to the end of the reading, we ask ourselves how the reading has impacted us. Have we been changed by the text, have we learned something about ourselves, or can we set ourselves into any of the story lines? Do we recognize ourselves or others we know and love between the pages of what we have read? Has the text moved our understanding beyond where we were before we read it?

Research into spiritual journeying of recovering addicts dives deeply into emotional territory. What can we gain from hearing the stories of these three women that could increase our knowledge and wisdom in counselling an ever-growing population of suffering and searching peoples? We are more alike than different. Compassion and love without judgement seems to be the overarching request of each participant in this thesis of counselors. We are beseeched to do our own work and live within the tension of their pain, with grace and respect for the work they are doing.

Finally, a person who has consciously worked through the whole tragedy of his own fate will recognize another's suffering more clearly and quickly, though the other may still have to try to hide it. He will not be scornful of others' feelings, whatever their nature, because he can take his own feelings seriously. He surely will not help to keep the vicious circle of contempt turning (Miller, 1981).

We are asked not simply to sit silently with them in their pain, but to enter their story and take an active role in their narrative. How we do that is an individual process for each of us, one that is deeply personal to each of us.

I came into this work attempting to avoid pre-conceived notions and outcomes. In the presence of Higher Power, in whatever form or name is comfortable for the participant, coming *Home* became not only possible but, at times, inevitable. To be *Home* is to be aware of the presence of something larger than self, and that "knowing" is one of the hallmarks of spiritual journeying. Many of us who have chosen to soothe our deep feelings of hurt and fear with substance and/or behaviour, realize we must come back to the "feeling place" to "know who we are".

Belief in God is the trust, the well-nigh incredible trust, that to give ourselves to the utmost in love is not to be confounded but to be 'accepted', that Love is the ground of our being, to which ultimately we 'come home' (Robinson, 1963, p.49).

Throughout the interviews I glimpsed each woman's pain and their story of abuse and abandonment when they were

little. Addiction brought them some peace in their struggle to survive the pain and confusion they lived. The path out of addiction toward spiritual growth required a great deal of courage and faith, something that required trust of extreme proportions.

There is no way around the pain but through it, and it is my earnest contention that addicts are the most spiritually courageous of us all (Northrup, 1998; Aston, 1997). It has done something to my spirit to see women starting over and to see how grateful they are for the small things of life (Green, 1998c). Talk is the concrete stuff of human discourse (van Manen, 1997, p.23). Any talk is not what I speak of here, within the context of this thesis. Talk about spiritual journeying is a description of the meanings of lived experience, in an intensely personal manner.

Questions like: What is it that constitutes me being me? What constitutes the nature of the lived experience of ontological security/insecurity? What is it that creates meaning in my life, purpose, and direction? These questions are deeply personal.

A man's concern, even his despair, over the worthwhileness of life is an *existential distress* but by no means a *mental disease*. It may well be that interpreting the first in terms of the latter motivates a doctor to bury his patient's existential despair under a heap of tranquilizing drugs. It is his task, rather, to pilot the patient through his existential crisis of growth and development (Frankl, 1959).

And so we are back at the beginning. True community where unconditional acceptance is paramount, can be modelled in research and in counselling if we as counselors have the courage to "be home". The women in this study have discovered love and an understanding of something larger than themselves that has "brought them home".

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE FOR THESIS PARTICIPANTS

Some queries:

Spiritual journeying will frame our discussions together. I am interested in how spiritual journeying has and still is helping you answer the questions:

Who am I, and what is my purpose in this world?

I understand that you are on a personal journey of spirituality. Can you summarize what spirituality is for you personally?

How would you describe your moment-to-moment spiritual life?

Was there something or someone who initially brought you to a place of seeking meaning and purpose in your life?

What are your thoughts on the quest for meaning and purpose in life, in relation to that being a fundamental human condition? Do you think your personal quest is unusual or unique?

Did your quest have a beginning, or have you always sought meaning and purpose?

Is Higher Power acknowledgement fundamental to your spiritual journeying?

Were or are there, predisposing internal human conditions that lead to spiritual journeying for you? If so, what were/are those conditions?

Are/were there external conditions to you that are/have encouraging your journey? If so, what are/were those externals?

Are there people in your life who serve as spiritual advisers to you? How is their presence in your life helpful, in relation to your ongoing spiritual journeying?

What might your experience of 'initial epiphany' look like to you?

If life is not meant to be the quest for happiness, does

that mean that anything else is void of meaning and purpose? Can you comment on this statement in relation to your own search for meaning and purpose?

Do you live your life for others' benefit, and if so, to what end? Is altruism the goal? Is there a goal at all? Are you headed toward somewhere, and if so, does that mean that everything you do before you get there, is for that purpose? Where are you going?

For you, Is God, 'out there', in your heart, both, or neither?

In your experience, if God is only 'love', is God absent when you do not experience a loving presence within you?

In the evening, when you reflect on the day you have just lived, how do you discern whether you have lived your purpose or not? What do you do with feelings of guilt and shame when you realize that you have not been true to your purpose?

Are there times, or have there been time when you did not feel or think that your Higher Power was with you, that your God had deserted you? If so, can you describe that experience.

What does it look like to be spiritually journeying?

Define addiction from your own experience.

Describe your thoughts/feelings about who you perceived yourself to be before you began addiction recovery and spiritual journeying.

What were the critical events in your life that you feel led you to set out on a path of addiction recovery? on a spiritual journey? Which came first, or did they happen at the same time?

Can you describe your first "awakening"?

What conditions allowed you to begin your journey?

What conditions encourage you to continue your journey?

What conditions hinder (slow down or sidetrack) your journey?

Appendix B

Consent Form

Name: _____

I understand that Rhonda Nickerson-Smith is conducting research for her Master's of Education degree at Acadia University within the School of Education. In her thesis research she is exploring the personal stories of people recovering from addiction/s who have chosen to make a spiritual journey. I understand that the findings from this research may be published in academic journals, distributed to therapists and counselors working with recovering addicts, and presented at workshops and/or discussions in the community.

I agree to participate in interviews between myself and Rhonda Nickerson-Smith during the course of this research project.

I understand that the interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. Everything I say will remain confidential and at any time I may ask for the taping to stop and my words not be transcribed. Confidentiality will be assured by no mention of my name in any records of this research.

I understand that I will be asked to journal my thoughts and feelings after each meeting, and that after I have edited them, they may appear in the body of the completed thesis. I realize that I will be given opportunity to read and edit what has been written about me and/or my journal entries, before the final version goes to Graduate Studies at Acadia University to be read by people outside the thesis committee.

I understand that at any time during this research project that I may withdraw my consent and participate no further.

I understand that I may read the transcribed version of my interview and change, delete or clarify anything I have said.

Signature of Research Participant Date

Signature of Researcher Date