

**LANDSCAPES OF THE UNCONSCIOUS:  
TOWARD A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF SELF  
THROUGH DREAM-WORK**

by

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**THESIS**

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### ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a narrative exploration of dream work and its value in my own experience as a developing therapist. It is my contention that dream work involves the identification and amplification of personal metaphor and symbol, and the identification of recurring themes which are reflective of one's personal life experience. I believe dream work can enable one to identify as well the personal myth or script by which one has lived one's life. In my experience, dream work has been an effective means of discerning my own intuitive inner voice over the years. It has also enabled me to be more fully aware of my emotional and psychological dynamics, and their potential impact on my therapeutic practice and therapeutic relationships. My research is autobiographical in nature and draws from journals kept over a twenty-year period. It also chronicles for the reader a gradual coming to voice, to self-realization and to a new perception of wholeness. In many ways in the writing, I have become my own therapist, and like my clients, found myself taken places I never expected to go by the process. One never knows where the road will lead when one embarks upon a journey.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day !  
Yet knowing how way turns on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence;  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

CHAPTER 1 MAPPING THE TERRAIN

## OUT AND ABOUT

A painting hangs on the wall of my office, depicting an overgrown and sun-dappled country road, winding off into the undergrowth. Like the road of which Robert Frost wrote, the image is of a road less travelled. It is an image that captures my imagination and takes me back to the days of my childhood on Prince Edward Island.

Forty years ago, my father, my sisters and I, on our way to church, sometimes found ourselves instead, going for a drive to some place that held meaning for my father. Sometimes we found ourselves at the small community graveyard, walking aimlessly among the stones and reading inscriptions, while my father told us stories of the people he had known, who now rested in this tranquil place. Sometimes we drove to the site of an old mill and a pond where my father had skated and fished as a boy. The road itself was little more than a grassy, narrow and winding pathway through the woods. All that remained of the mill and a small bridge were their stone foundations, nearly lost in the long grass. Wild overgrown gardens bore testimony to the houses which had also stood nearby. The bubbling of the brook, the song of the birds and the low voice of my father, painting pictures with words, were all that disturbed the silence.

It was on these Sunday morning drives that my father bequeathed to me two of the most abiding passions I possess today: his love for nature, and his love for stories. Given this legacy, it is fitting that my thesis should take the form of a narrative inquiry drawing on personal experience. I have always believed there was much to be learned from the sharing of our stories with one another.

#### WHERE IT ALL BEGINS

The focus of my research is a more recently acquired interest: the phenomena of dream work in self-care, or the exploration of the landscapes of the unconscious. I have chosen the subject because it is one which has long fascinated me and one to which I bring a lot of energy. As well, it is an area which has been of immense value to me, both personally and professionally in my counselling practice. I believe, as a metacognitive process of self-monitoring, dream work has the capacity to make me aware of my own dynamics and their impact on therapeutic practice and the therapeutic relationship. I contend that dream work can enable me to be a better counsellor in this way: one more fully aware of my own story and its meaning, and more fully aware of that [baggage] which I bring with me to my counselling sessions.

My personal history of dream work goes back over a period of about twenty years. Over the past five years, as I have

worked, primarily in the field of Corrections with perpetrators and survivors of sexual abuse, I have journalled especially extensively on the subject material of my own dreams and the insights gleaned from them. It is from these reflections that the bulk of my research will come.

I use the terms narrative, myth, and story interchangeably, and see their construction, to borrow Rollo May's words from his book *The Cry for Myth*, as a way of organizing our experience, born of the need which our minds seem to possess to make sense of things. Rollo May and Jerome Bruner would go so far as to suggest that our sanity and our survival as a species are dependent upon our ability to "bring some order and coherence into the stream of sensations, emotions, and ideas entering [our] consciousness" (May, 1991, p. 29), some "organization... or framing of experience" into the chaos (Bruner, 1990, p. 56). Through the process of journalling, I have recorded, storied and re-storied, the experiences, emotions and dreams of the past twenty years and attempted to make sense of them.

#### LIFE SCRIPTS

Until they find themselves in therapy, I do not believe most clients in counselling have had a place where they could safely give voice to their fears and their deepest beliefs about themselves. Therapy can provide a forum where personal



myths can be identified and explored safely: Who am I and where have I been? Why do I think and feel the way I do? How can I change direction and get on a new road? "Myths are our self-interpretation of our inner selves in relation to the outside world," Rollo May contends. "Myths are essential to the process of keeping our souls alive and bringing us new meaning in a difficult and often meaningless world" (May, 1991, p. 20). Myth, by my definition, is the script by which I have lived my life. In my experience, therapy is all about helping people make meaning and identify the myths by which they have lived: "Moving inward and outward, backward and forward, as we ponder the meaning of life events, we create a new story of self from these events, which impacts the larger life story which we may be trying to tell" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1994, p. 417). They write further, "People live stories and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them and create new ones" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1994, p. 415). This has been my own experience as I have storied and re-storied, deconstructed and reconstructed life experiences with my clients in therapy, and my own life experience and dreams through the medium of journalling.

#### SEEING IN A NEW WAY

One client in the prison with whom I worked extensively had a particularly long history of abuse with which to

contend, and a violent criminal history of his own which reflected the anger seething beneath his usually jovial manner. He was a short but powerfully built man, in his mid-30's, bearded, long-haired and tattooed when we met, and there was a lot to work on. His philosophy, "No mercy", was about to be tattooed on his fore-arm, from elbow to wrist, until I talked him out of it. "What if this is no longer your philosophy twenty years from now?" I asked. "You're stuck with it, labelled as one of those people." He decided to wait. Two years later, his lawyer phoned to ask what I had "done to him". Trim, clean-shaven, clean-cut and with plans for his life, his lawyer thought they'd brought in the wrong man for the interview. She had not recognized him. In the interim, he had come to terms with his life story, and his role in that story. Seeing himself in a new way, he became a changed man.

#### THE STORIES WE TELL

In *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, the authors write that stories "call us to consider what we know, how we know and what and whom we care about... They expand our horizons of understanding and provide rich contextual information about human actors, intentions, and experiences" (Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 13, 79). The stories shared may not always acquaint us with "the client's literal history", but true or not, they do tell us a great deal about the person doing the remembering. As Rollo May

writes, "The person re-forms the event, shapes it, adds color here and a few details there, and then we have a revelation of this person and his or her attitude to life" (May, 1991, p.66). The stories we tell and how we tell them, or choose not to tell them, can reveal to others, and to ourselves, a great deal of who we are, how we think, how we feel, and those things which are important to us. Jerome Bruner writes that a narrative can be real or imaginary without loss of power or value as a story (Bruner, 1990, p. 44). Many authors refer to the act of storying as a process of self-creation, self-invention and improvisation through which we come to learn who we are, who we have been and who we are capable of becoming (Joanne Cooper in Witherell and Noddings, 1991, p. 111, Bateson, 1989, p. 28, Bruner, 1990, p. 120).

I believe that in this way narrative research can enable the discovery of new ways of knowing and making meaning of experiences: it is a process of self-insertion. This is the power of narrative to me: it has the ability to transform and foster personal and social growth through reflection and the re-storying, re-construction and re-framing of experience (H. Rosen quoted by van Manen, 1997, p. 121, and Connelly and Clandinin, in *Narrative and Story*, 1991, p. 259 and 277).

## THE QUESTIONS WE ASK

As I have worked with the concept of narrative, I have had to ask myself a lot of deep personal questions, particularly with regard to the formation of the unconscious self, which I propose can be understood more deeply through dream-work. What are the stories that informed my concept of reality as a child? What made me feel the world was not a safe place in which to be a child at all? What made me feel powerless, or that I was living in a world out of control? What made me feel it was dangerous to ask questions or to have an opinion not held by others? What made me feel responsible for events that happened and everyone else's well-being when I was growing up? At what point did the gradual eroding of self-esteem and the silencing of my inner voice begin, and where did I get the message that I had nothing of value to contribute? Have my dreams as an adult been the most effective means I have had of hearing the voice within, which was so effectively silenced in every other way, in childhood? These are some of the questions I explore in the context of a narrative inquiry on dream-work and its value to the developing therapist.

In my experience, inner work or dream work, as I have referred to it, involves learning to decipher the language of personal metaphor and symbol (the objects and characters in our dreams) in order to develop a greater sense of who we are

as individuals and to become more complete and integrated human beings. This process of self-exploration means that there is no longer a need to exist at the mercy of, or in conflict with, the unconscious and its sometimes primitive, irrational or destructive urges; we can be more in touch with the unconscious as a potential source of renewal, growth, strength and wisdom (Johnson, 1986, p. 5, 9). I take the perspective that through the examination and amplification of symbol, our dreams begin to take on deeper meaning and begin to make sense to the conscious mind.

#### IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

The details of our dreams are often irretrievably lost if not recorded immediately upon waking. To ensure that as little as possible the messages of my dreams were not compromised by faulty memory and the passage of time, I have slept for years with a notebook or a dictaphone by my bed. The dream texts which form most of the raw data of this research were eventually transcribed in more legible form into a series of personal dream journals and the work of interpretation done there.

As I have worked with my own dreams, I have made several assumptions, which are as follows: (1) The objects and people in my dreams are all parts of myself, in symbolic form (2) I am the only one who can define these symbols (3) Only I can

decide if the dream interpretation makes sense in the context of my current life situation (4) Dreams may hold meaning on a number of different levels at the same time. The dream may involve an actual event, but may also contain some metaphorical message. Often the residue of the day is processed through dreams. (5) There are some universal symbols associated with Jungian psychology which are helpful in understanding dreams. A house usually represents the psyche or "the dreamer". Water usually represents the unconscious. Animals usually represent instinctive sides of ourselves. The "I" in a dream represents the conscious self. "Negative" or threatening figures usually represent the Shadow or unknown or less easily accepted sides of the dreamer.

When I engage in interpreting dreams, I first attempt to make all the associations I can with each of the main objects or figures in the dream (the symbols). I re-write the dream using the most powerful of these associations and try to see what parallels it may have metaphorically with my current life situation. Sometimes, I use a Gestalt technique to get at the issues: I dialogue with one of these dream symbols. In my experience, a dream will not usually tell you something you already know. I find it most helpful to keep an on-going account of my dreams so that common themes can be identified and followed over time. It is important to note that the experience of dream work is not a static and linear process

and that the associations made with the dream and its symbols may expand and change in the weeks, months and years that follow.

Sigmund Freud referred to dreams as "the royal road to the unconscious", and felt they constituted a form of wish-fulfillment, functioning to preserve sleep through the symbolic resolution of repressed or buried (usually sexual) impulses and desires. He believed that dreams held both manifest content, the obvious issue with which the dream seemed to deal, and latent content, or disguised material, which could only be retrieved through the process of "free association" around the symbols of the dream. The nightmare, however, he termed an exception: an "annomoie", or an obstacle to the development of this theory, recurring nightmares being seen, instead, as a kind of repetition compulsion or attempt to resolve anxiety, following the experience of a traumatic event.

Carl Jung, like all subsequent dream theorists, built on the groundwork laid by Freud, but differed widely in his interpretation of the function of dreaming, although both agreed that dreams were significant and worthy of exploration. Where Freud saw dreams as evidence of disturbed mental activity, Jung saw them as an attempt to restore one's psychological equilibrium, the evidence of an inner pursuit of health and wholeness, with which the conscious mind could

cooperate. Jung saw dreams as a healthy and creative expression of the actual situation of the unconscious, and as a vehicle by which one might come to greater self-awareness. He wrote (quoted by Hall and Nordby, 1973, p. 118), "Dreams are impartial, spontaneous products of the unconscious psyche... they show us the unvarnished truth." Further, in his book, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he referred to dreams as "a little hidden door to the innermost recesses of the soul" (Jung, 1961, p. 413).

Jung did not agree with Freud's use of the technique of "free association" with regard to understanding the meaning of one's dream symbols (since he felt this often leads one far from the starting-point and seems to confuse the issue), nor did he believe that most dream symbols could be reduced to set formulas. They were in fact, he felt, unique representations of various parts of the dreamer's personality, generated by that individual's imagination and having to do with that person's current situation.

In some dreams, Jung recognized universal themes, which he believed provided evidence of a layer of consciousness common to all mankind, something he called "the collective unconscious". This he saw as the source of "primordial images" or archetypes, figures found universally in the ancient religions, myths and legends of all cultures, which evoke similar feelings and issues for all, and occasionally appear



in our dreams: the wise old man, the virtuous maiden, the warrior, and innumerable others, people who seem to speak to us with authority or to exude nobility, unlike the usual characters in our dreams.

Jung's teachings on personality and dreams have come to form the foundation of much that encompasses dream-work today, and I will explore the terms he coined in the larger context of this thesis, since these are the terms which are an integral part of my own method of interpreting dreams: the psyche, the shadow, the persona, the ego, the animus/anima, and the self.

I have chosen to be the only participant in this study on dreaming and I make no claim to recommending the practice of dream work be adopted by all others in the counselling profession. It is a practice which holds meaning and value for me, and it is to this value and meaning, only, which I can attest. The contribution which I believe my research makes to the field is that, generally speaking, dream work is not storied as a personal experience of the writer's coming to voice. Secondly, I believe that the power of narrative is its ability to evoke connections for the reader with their own experience. It is my hope that my work will challenge other developing counsellors to do their own inner work and through this reflective process come to a deeper understanding of the demands which therapy makes upon their clients.

CHAPTER 2 EXPLORING THE PSYCHE

## THE LONG ROAD HOME

I have gone home to Prince Edward Island many times in the twenty-odd years since I moved away, but I have rarely taken time on these return visits to reflect or to re-visit places that have had significance. One morning in July, however, I was travelling alone, and I found myself once again turning off the highway and making my way to the farm where I grew up, the farm my family left over thirty years ago. The house and the towering oak trees that once shaded its lawn have been gone for a long time, as well as the barn, the out-buildings and the woods where I played as a child. Even the brook exists now only as a damp depression hidden in long grass. The dirt road narrowed as I drove, until it was barely negotiable by car, and finally it ended in a farmer's field.

Sitting there in my car that morning, I recalled the many times I had walked this road as a child, nearly 40 years ago, going to and from school, kicking at the fine dust and pebbles with my little brown oxford shoes. I recalled picking berries in season, along its ditches, with my friends, and following lumbering loads of baled hay, as my father drove them slowly to the barn. It was on this road that I took my share of spills and scraped knees as I rode my first bicycle, and along this road, on warm summer mornings, that my mother drove my

younger sisters and me to the beach, to wade in the warm pools of salt water left by the outgoing tide. It was this road which occasionally filled in, in winter, so that even the plow got stuck, forcing us to travel over the fields, by horse and sleigh, to the community's one-room school.

I have revisited this place many times in my dreams over the years, but there was little left that bore any resemblance to my memory of it, when I returned. On that morning in July, roads chosen and not chosen were figuring prominently in my thinking. I had come to the Island to get some time alone to write, and had been asking myself, "What have been the significant roads in my life?" Certainly, the long dusty road to my childhood home has been one, in the literal sense. My chosen path of study has been another, and my having chosen to write a thesis in the narrative form is what I am coming to think of as a third, "a road less travelled" by those generally doing research.

#### OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Initially, I struggled with whether to write a thesis or not. Certainly the writing is not a problem, but "Can I defend it," I've asked myself, "and what purpose does its writing serve?" Carl Sandburg wrote of the wagon trains that headed west: "The cowards never started and the weak died on the way." There are days like that in this journey for me as well:

days when I feel I have nothing to say, that there is nothing within me burning to be written and no reason to start out on this journey at all... But then as Robert Frost wrote in the poem which prefaced this work, sometimes "way turns onto way", and one comes upon a road less travelled that begs to be explored. Narrative research is such a road for me.

As my vision of the form my thesis might take begins to take shape, the way before me becomes a little clearer. A thesis might leave options open for the future. It could be a therapeutic process, a journey of personal growth, an expression of the deepest parts of the emerging self, and a channel for the inner voice which I have come to realize has been often silenced except in my dreams. It can also be a place where I explore personal myth and life stories which have held meaning for me, some of which form the basis of a self-concept developed a long time ago.

The picture painted in memory on that morning in July was of an idyllic life in the country in kinder and gentler times, but I came to realize that morning that there are other stories there too, and some of them more painful and less easy to share than others.

## A HOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION

In the process of the exploration of these childhood stories I have found myself in numerous dreams in recent months, living in houses that are either new constructions or under renovation. In Jungian psychology, the house is frequently recognized as the universal symbol for the psyche of the dreamer: my Self in the broadest sense of the term, conscious and unconscious, part of and yet separate from the world in which I live. As I have recorded these dreams in my journal, it would seem I have been very much a Self in process in recent months.

In one dream, I am telling the builders of a new house that I want the steps they have built of stone to be part of the foundation of this new construction, as opposed to something separate or tacked on. Metaphorically, I believe the dream connects my need to "build" on "the steps" of personal growth and development I am currently taking in my life with my need to integrate what I am learning into the very foundation of the person I am becoming.

In another dream, I find myself in the home where I grew up, renovating an area on the main level. Behind a wall I've taken down, I find a dimension to this house, which I have never seen before, although I seem to have assumed its existence from exterior windows that did not belong to rooms

I knew or occupied. Now that its presence is undisputed, I see there is a chasm between the two sides of the house. An old woman who occupies these other rooms tells me I cannot get to her part of the house from where I am, but if I go to "another level" there is a passage-way. I find my way upstairs and make my way through a closet to her side of the house. The closet is a place where things are stored, metaphorically, the passage perhaps made in the processing of past memories I've locked away. The old woman is an archetype in Jungian terminology: a benevolent being who speaks with authority. A warm motherly figure, it is conceivable she might represent a part of me that knows what is best for me.

I am intrigued by the way in which symbols sometimes seem to evolve over time. A year ago, I dreamed of living in two separate older houses that stood side by side, one of them without a door. Now it would seem these two separate houses exist under one roof as a single unit, and that both are accessible to me.

The concept of the expanding self is not a new one in my dreams, but has occurred in varying forms over many years. When I resigned from my position as a bank teller a number of years ago to return to school, I found myself in a dream that night taking possession of an older house with moveable walls. When I demonstrated this capability to someone in the dream and removed the exterior walls, we found ourselves in a garden

in full bloom. I had protested initially that it was too early in the season to remove the walls so this development of being in the garden, and especially one in "full bloom", came as a complete surprise. Metaphorically, I had not felt ready, but the dream seemed to say, "It's not too early at all." It was time to take down the walls that had to this point defined me: to expand my concept of myself and my "limits". Now I feel I am doing it again: taking down other walls, moving into other new psychological spaces.

#### THE UNRAVELLING OF SELF

I know that the silencing of my inner voice did not occur overnight. Rather, a gradual eroding of my sense of having value as a person and having a right to my thoughts and views of the world happened slowly over time. As a child, I know that I lived with people whose own sense of self was fragile and damaged, and their capacity to entertain diversity or dissent in the family circle was extremely limited. It is obvious as I recall situations from early childhood that I had already developed an unhealthy fear of the disapproval of my elders, well before I went to school, and that the silencing of my inner voice was well underway even then. As I reflect on this, I recall one incident in particular which clearly illustrates for me the degree to which I had, by the age of four or five, already internalized the external voices which

said in response to experiences of pain, "You must have done something to deserve this."

While playing in the backyard, near the wild rose bushes which grew around my grandmother's back step, one sunny summer morning, a wasp or a bee exploded out of nowhere and stung me on the heel. The jolt to what had otherwise been a carefree morning of play would not be as memorable, however, if it were not for the clear memory I also have of the way in which I processed the experience. "I can't tell anyone what really happened," I said to myself. I knew the attack had been unprovoked, but it would surely be construed somehow, that it was my fault that the bee had attacked me. Better to say nothing at all. I wiped away the tears that welled up in my eyes, and swallowed the lump in my throat. "I will tell them I stepped on a thistle, if anyone asks," I remember deciding.

I feel this memory, which is my earliest recollection of not feeling I can "tell it like it is", probably constitutes a milestone of sorts, because at that point the denial of my right to feel what I felt and my choice to come up with a more plausible "story" was still a conscious and deliberate act. "Numbing out" eventually became second nature.

That children were to be seen and not heard, I understood from the outset, I think, but the point was driven home with a vengeance in the early weeks of the first grade. I was six,



when I started school, and I was asking a class-mate in the next seat about her trip to the mainland ("What's it like?") when a blow to one ear and then the other, delivered without warning by the stout middle-aged woman who was my teacher, consigned me to stunned silence. My head rang as it slowly dawned on me that this was not a place where one could safely ask questions. I became a quiet, compliant and obedient student, but the houses in my dreams in those years were blazing infernos, symbols of the self under siege. At least once, in those dreams, I remember my parents insisting I eat my dinner, while I tried to draw their attention to the fact that the place was burning down around me. I could not make myself heard.

Ann Oakley writes, "Re-vision --- the art of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction --- is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Oakley, 1984, p. 2). Beyond that, I contend it is also the means by which I am able to put things in perspective and move to the next level, where a passage to whole other dimensions and possibilities exists according to my dream of the renovated house. The purpose in storying and re-storying is not about placing blame, but about healing and moving on. It is about "re-visioning" myself as the capable and intelligent human being I always was but did not know and so did not own.

As a child, story-telling played a significant role in my development as a person and in the construction of my psyche. As it is for most children, it was a way in which the inexpressible could find expression. Eventually what could not be spoken aloud as a child came to find expression in the written word, and I filled scribblers with stories of wild stallions that could not be tamed, and abandoned houses whose empty rooms still echoed with the laughter of children when no one was listening. I made up bed-time stories for my younger sisters about resilient and creative little girls who could overcome any adversity, and my teachers called me "Emily Dickinson" and "the next Lucy Maud Montgomery". They nurtured my pursuit of this means of expression, through short stories and poetry, and as I have only recently come to realize helped form the basis of my identity, which was that of a writer, especially in my adolescent years. I took solace in my writing despite reprimands that scribbling would not pay the rent and despite frequent reminders that there were more important things to do.

At one point, in my teens, I also wrote a convincing story about a girl my age who could not take any more and decided to end her life. It was years later that I eventually connected the story with the high school guidance counsellor's sudden interest in me at that time. Oddly enough, when she asked, "Isn't there something you want to tell me?", I couldn't imagine what that something might be. The separation

of my conscious from my unconscious was complete and I had lost touch with what was going on beneath the surface.

I had many recurring dreams during this period of my life, but one in particular stands out which had to do with the experience of being silenced, and with my need to convey a vitally important written message. Each time the dream took the same form, but at the crucial moment, the pencil I'd just been using vanished. Over and over again, I would wake from this dream, frantically searching the foot of my bed saying, "Where did it go?" I find it interesting that in recent months as I've pondered the meaning of some of these old dreams and childhood stories that I have found myself dreaming some of these dreams again, with a new twist. This dream was one of three which I have re-experienced in recent months.

In the present, I am looking for my cellular phone. The image insinuates I've found "my voice" again and am no longer using the written word as my primary means of communication so have made some progress. The question around the loss of the instrument of communication has changed too, from "Where did it go?" to "Where did I leave it?" and I retrace my steps, looking everywhere I can imagine. The search eventually, perhaps not surprisingly, takes me back to Prince Edward Island, where the phone finally surfaces in an office building in Charlottetown.

The significance of this development in the events of the dream is not lost on me. I lived in Charlottetown for four years while attending university, and it was there that I lost whatever last vestiges of self-esteem remained. I had a mental block when it came to the subject of Research Design in Sociology, which was my major. I could not complete the last half-credit of my B.A., and for the fifteen years following, resigned myself to being as stupid and incapable as everyone said I was. I told myself the degree was not important. It was not until a cancer scare at the age of 39 and the subsequent awareness of my mortality that I was jarred into seeing that this and other failures still haunted me. I decided there were things from the past to face, and Research Design was one of them. In the end, the course was not the monster I had made it out to be at all. I completed my B.A. in 1993, and dreamed about the house in the garden with the moveable walls. It was time to expand my world.

#### LIVING WITH REALITY

I pursued an interest in abuse issues, following the completion of my undergraduate degree, initially because I saw a growing need for which most of the professionals I knew had not been trained. It was a need I wanted to help meet. A few graduate level courses eventually led to a supervised position as a therapist in the prison system, working with perpetrators and survivors of sexual assault. Initially I worked as part of

a team, but later made the weekly journey to the federal prisons and provincial jails alone.

My clients, in the latter case especially, were deeply wounded men who raged against the injustices they had suffered as children. I was aware of the way in which transferences could be triggered in therapy, but despite this, chose to work in wings of the prisons and in an office in Halifax where I felt we would not be disturbed by guards or anyone else, as I worked to bring healing and a measure of relief to their lives.

If thoughts of the danger I placed myself in arose, I brushed them aside. I realize that now. I chose to ignore my inner voice, because I feared someone would say, "If you can't take it, honey, you shouldn't be here.", and I wanted to appear the strong and capable professional.

There's no doubt at all that I was stressed during this period of my life. The house I grew up in appeared in my dreams as a house that was literally coming apart in a gale: boards creaking and groaning with the strain, and nails popping while I just as quickly drove them back in and tried to keep it together. There were other dream images of planes flying through funnel clouds that threatened to take them down, and of freighters nearly swamped in heavy seas. The house where I lived was snowed under, but the neighbour's cat

was managing to stay on top of the drifts. I think of this metaphorically as a side of me managing to stay on top of it all. In another dream, there was also a waitress waiting on too many tables, who was ready to quit.

The most graphic of all of these images was the one that really got my attention, however, following an incident in which my personal safety was seriously threatened by a client with a history of violence. Overnight I became aware of the mine-field in which I was working, and could no longer leave my work behind at the end of the day and go home. Something had changed.

In this dream, I was walking the streets of a place like Chernobyl in the Soviet Union, after the explosion of its nuclear reactor: metaphorically, living in a poisoned and uninhabitable psychological space. I met no one as I walked up one street and down another. Everything seemed permanently frozen and suspended in time, just as it had been at the moment of impact. There were mannequins and other displays of merchandise in store windows, houses with little picket fences and tidy gardens, pies cooling on a window-sill, all the signs of what had been a normal life, now poisoned. When I eventually encountered a photo-journalist as I walked the deserted streets, I was surprised. I questioned his presence in this place, and he confessed he was being fined ten thousand dollars for "trespassing" but said he considered it

"worth it to tell the story". I've felt that the part of me which he represented, was paying a heavy toll for being involved in the work I was doing, but I still considered it "worth the cost".

At the same time, it was not an image to be ignored. As a result of the dream, I made some drastic changes to my practice, which would insure my security and safety. I never worked in isolation again.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACES

Not all of the dreams I have had over the years have been about houses, obviously, but are still about the self: about me and about the psychological space I occupy. Sometimes the building is a school or a place of learning in which I find myself in life, a hospital or a place of healing, a church or a sacred place where I come face to face with things set apart and previously untouchable. Sometimes I find myself in prison, in a stuck place where I see no way out. Sometimes I find myself in little shops and restaurants which are sources of nurturing and creativity, places where my needs can be made known and met.

Sometimes dreams take place in a vehicle. As a child, I frequently found myself a passenger in a car that had no driver: clearly an image of the powerlessness I experienced

around the direction my life seemed to be taking then. As an adult, I have found myself in the driver's seat and in control, to varying degrees, most of the time. In periods of stress, I am perhaps negotiating slippery roads with poor visibility, trying to keep up or wondering if I can, trying to decide on a direction to take, or trying to avoid things that are coming at me. Sometimes others are driving, and my associations with these people are the issue to be explored. Who is metaphorically "driving my bus" today? Is the road a dead-end? Is it under construction? Where am I going?

When I was experiencing a period of great loss, with the anniversary of three deaths in the family and the end of the most meaningful work I had ever done, with the completion of my contract with the prison, I dreamed my house had been broken into and robbed of everything of value. In a second dream, flood waters threatened my garden and everything I had planted. A third dream buoyed my hope that this too would pass and that there would be life again once the flood waters of this current crisis receded. In this third dream, a dove bearing an olive branch, as in the Biblical story of Noah and the ark, landed on the window-sill of my office. I was working on the third floor of one of two ancient stone houses outside the wall at Dorchester, and as it turned out, the hope the dream foretold was not ill-founded. Within a month of the expiry of my contract with the prison, I was back again, in a new role with a new contract from another source.



Earlier I referred to the recent re-experiencing of three recurring dreams from years past and I shared the dream of the missing instrument of communication (first a pencil, then a phone). In the second of these dreams, my entire yard is a potential sink-hole, bordering on collapse with scant inches of earth covering a huge abyss. The image disturbs me. "Am I really so shallow? so fragile?" I ask myself upon waking. "We have to do something before someone gets hurt," I say in the dream. Where previously I have only observed the phenomena in my dream, this time I decide to do something about the situation. I call in others to help, which I see as symbolic of "calling on all my resources". We jump up and down and "shake things up". There is a huge dust cloud and when it settles, only a little depression in the ground as evidence of the situation's ever having existed.

"Many voices, both inner and outer, are only too eager to tell us what we ought to be and do and feel," Marlene Schiwy writes in *A Voice of Her Own*. "Engulfed by what others need and want from us, we are often unfamiliar with the landscape of our own desires" (Schiwy, 1996, p. 91). In my experience, exploring this landscape of our desires and potential poses a threat to those closest to us who are not willing to have things change or to have us contemplate life in new, healthy and positive ways. In the hours preceding the dream of the sink-hole, I was feeling undermined by a phone call, in my efforts to move on with my life. I was being asked by a member

of my family to reconsider the pursuit of further education at the post-graduate level, and my capability was being called into question by this individual. It may be significant that in the dream, a small depression remains following the resolution of the situation with the sink-hole. As in many of my dreams, this may amount to a play on words. I am left with a little sadness, a little depression, that those closest to me cannot celebrate and encourage my pursuit of recovery and new goals.

In the third recurring dream, I have a post-office box in Wolfville, like the one I had over twenty years ago. I dream that I still have the box but haven't picked up the mail in a long while. I've never actually seen the contents of the box in previous dreams, but this time I do, and there is nothing in it but garbage: torn envelopes, chocolate bar wrappers, and scraps of paper. I tell the elderly gentleman at the counter, "I don't need these anymore." and turn in the keys. Metaphorically, I say to myself through the symbols of the dream, "I don't need to keep poking in the garbage of the past, and collecting the old messages." It's time to move on.

In one final dream, I find myself at dusk on the shores of a new and unexplored territory, where three rivers converge and flow into the sea. I am waiting for a light on the distant shore and there is a feeling of expectancy and excitement as I contemplate the journey ahead. I am not in total darkness,

as I stand in this place. As I reflect on the image, perhaps it is not dusk at all but the approach of dawn: the dawning of a new day.

CHAPTER 3 EMBRACING THE SHADOW

## CHILDHOOD DEMONS AND SACRED STORIES

The house I lived in, as a child, which belonged to my paternal grandparents and which my family shared with them for eight years, was not a house in which I ever felt safe. The long upstairs hallway with its numerous unused upstairs bedrooms fuelled my imagination as a child. I was convinced things lurked in the shadows of those empty rooms, and my dreams were full of the monsters that inhabited these spaces. I remember the feeling of anxiety I experienced as a child, standing at the foot of the stairs, the feeling of not being alone, of being watched, of being reluctant to move beyond the point where I stood, despite my grandmother's exhortation that I "visit Mrs. Jones" before heading for bed: her polite way of suggesting I go and use the bathroom. My bedroom was downstairs in the rooms which my family occupied. The bathroom was at the far end of the upstairs hallway, past endless open doorways, and involved a trip never made at anything less than breakneck speed, and never negotiated alone. My sisters and I went in pairs. I think I really believed a Mrs. Jones existed somewhere in the upper regions of the house, although I never saw her. Certainly my grandmother believed in her, it seemed. My sisters and I were not sure who else lived up there besides Mrs. Jones and were not willing to find out. The feeling of anxiety as I think of exploring these upper regions of the

house is the same feeling I experienced again a week ago in a dream.

At first I am in the parking lot of a church at night. My husband has gone into the building without me, and I am afraid to leave the safety of the car, because there is a figure waiting in the shadows. A man I don't know approaches and asks for directions to a service station, which I give him, but although he seems to be walking away, I do not trust him. I decide eventually to go into the church too, but in the foyer, I experience the fear I felt as a child. There is a stairway here which leads to unexplored and seemingly uninhabited other levels of the building. I cannot go there. Instead I follow the sound of voices and eventually find a group of people whom I join. The man from the parking lot comes in behind me, and at some later point, strangely, I find myself sitting with him, showing him black and white snap-shots of myself as a child. I still do not feel safe with him, but I reluctantly engage him in conversation and share with him something of who I am and where I have been. This dialogue with a side of myself with which I am apparently still somewhat uncomfortable signals an acceptance of that side's presence, grudging though it may be. It is for me, as it would be for my clients, a sign of healing and growth.

The man's initial request for directions to a service station offers a clue to his identity or character, but

nothing is clear. Is he looking for fuel or a source of power? Is he looking for a mechanic, or someone to fix something that is not functioning properly? He may represent a part of me which has difficulty asking for what it needs and which struggles to be (and fears not being) in control. He may represent a part of me that is beginning to recognize more fully the dysfunction of past and current relationships. He may represent something from the domain of the unconscious which I am not yet able to even recognize or acknowledge: an unknown entity.

Whatever the case, in the broader scheme of things, he is a threatening figure and what Jung would have referred to as the Shadow, an unintegrated part of myself which the people around me probably found unacceptable and which I probably learned to repress very early in my life.

It is confusing for me at first that this figure is a member of the opposite sex. Jungian textbooks say the Shadow is usually a member of the same sex as the dreamer, and I struggle with this concept as I try to sort out the dream's meaning. A figure of the opposite sex would be, typically, the Animus or Anima (the Soul) in its masculine or feminine form, and the dreamer's gender opposite.

In this case it may be that the untenable qualities I possess have been unconsciously projected on my polar

opposite, as a way of distancing myself still further from them. They are the qualities and behaviours which were shamed and punished and which still threaten me with rejection and abandonment if they are embraced and therefore cannot be allowed to overtake me. The Shadow appears in my dreams in the form of threatening figures, of wild animals and intruders, of people who embody all that I am not, or whose characteristics both good and bad, I am reluctant to see in myself.

I think about the dream again and wonder about the significance of encountering such a figure in a church, and what this has to do with where I currently find myself. I am reminded of a second recent dream involving a church, but a church that I have partially dismantled and am attempting to rebuild. I cannot get the parts of it to fit back together in the dream and conclude some of the more damaged pieces will have to be replaced.

As I contemplate both of these dreams, I realize that probably, in the process of writing, I am moving into "sacred" spaces, and beginning to look at the stories there. Stephen Crites writes that sacred stories "seem to be allusive expressions of stories that cannot be fully and directly told, because they live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies of the celebrants. These stories lie too deep in the consciousness... to be directly told; they form consciousness rather than being among the objects of which it is directly

aware" (Crites, 1971, p. 295).

When I think of sacred stories, I think of the untold stories in my family and of the way in which it has always been understood that these areas were off-limits. The unspoken message given has been: "We can't go there. If we open up the box and examine its contents, we may not be able to get the lid back on it again" (Journal entry, Dec. 1998). I ask myself as I look at the dreams involving sacred spaces, "What have I not allowed myself to sit with till now? What have I not previously entertained or faced? Once I have deconstructed the stories of my life can I ever make them fit back together again? What am I afraid of finding if I negotiate the stairways into unexplored regions of the psyche? Having found myself initially abandoned in the parking lot, am I feeling alone in the process at some level?"

At the same time, I am aware that this is a journey which I fully expect my clients to be able to make in therapy. I expect them to share secrets far more painful than mine, to speak of things they have been forbidden to share, to disclose behaviours and thinking patterns of which they are deeply ashamed. I expect them to face their demons, when I have run from mine until now. I have a new respect for the people who sit in my office and for the courage that has carried them to my door.



I am coming to know first-hand, as I write, the power of storying to create healing and wholeness, and the capacity of sharing to "restore those parts... that have been scattered, hidden, suppressed, denied, distorted, forbidden" (Deena Metzger quoted by Maguire, 1998, p.41). Salman Rushdie would add, "Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts" (Maguire, 1998, p.22).

I dream that a new house is being built next door. It is a huge construction which uses every inch of available space and blocks the windows of the house in which I am living. Metaphorically, it changes how I see things, just as this whole experience is changing my perspective of the world around me. I can see nothing as I did prior to this point in my life. In a second dream I explore the rooms of the house in which I grew up. I am with an aunt who has always been very critical and who likely embodies a self-critical aspect of my Shadow. One of the rooms of this house seems always to have been without light, and to have been kept in the dark. In the dream I am forced to bring in a lamp so we can see what is there. In my life I have reached a point where I am ready to confront the past and the personal myths that have defined me, to bring what has dwelled in darkness into the light.

A threatening male figure, dressed this time in surgical greens, corners me in a washroom in a third dream and I make feeble efforts to defend myself. I question whether he is the figure of healing he would have me believe he is, and write of the dream later in my journal that it seems to beg the question: "Will this process [of exploring childhood stories] do more harm than good?" (Dream Journal entry, July 25, 1998). I am sure all of my clients have wondered that at times. Once again, in this dream, I have been left alone to face my fears and feel abandoned. The journey of introspection is a lonely one, and one most easily shared in retrospect, I am discovering.

The initial journey into silencing in childhood was also made alone, with love withdrawn and withheld, and voiced as such: "No, I don't love you", while I pleaded for acceptance. The words were meant to bring me into line and achieved their desired goal. It was perhaps fear of precisely such an experience of rejection and abandonment that fuelled my panic as a child of four or five in Sunday School when I accidentally wet my pants. I don't remember a lot about that particular Sunday morning, except that my teacher cleaned me up and pinned her own dry underwear on me before church, in an effort to calm me down, and that this is a story still told with some amusement by my parents. I mentally bless the woman whoever she was for the gift of compassion she exercised on my behalf. That she would go to such lengths, in sacrificing her

own dignity for mine, tells me that I must have been more than a little upset by the situation, but that I was also heard for once.

#### IN THE LION'S DEN

As a child, the Shadow figures in my dreams were mostly animals: bears and lions and tigers at the windows, threatening to leap in and destroy me. Thinking about this now, it is conceivable that animals represented an instinctive, even primitive level of power or voice which I, as a child, could not exercise.

I have not had a lot of dreams about wild animals as an adult but I do recall several of these dreams around the point in my life when I was beginning to experience health problems again and had also been notified that my work with the prison would end with the expiry of my contract with Correctional Services. In the first dream, I am in Africa, staying in a compound with a family. In my journal, I write that part of the wall of this compound is down in the dream, and that a lion has been seen lurking about: "a mangy hungry-looking animal" (Dream Journal entry, Nov. 1, 1995). When my husband opens a window to look out, in the dream, the animal leaps at him, but he is not hurt. I am concerned about children going out to play, who may be carried off or injured. In retrospect, I interpret the dream's symbols as saying my defenses are down

and I am feeling vulnerable and powerless. The lion, by my description of it, is needy and not well cared for (hungry, neglected, unhealthy). As the capable professional in prison, working at that time with perpetrators of sexual assault, certainly neediness and vulnerability are not qualities I would embrace in myself or consciously acknowledge as part of my identity. These characteristics would conceivably be repressed and find expression in the figure of the Shadow and its most notable characteristics.

In the second dream, a month later, there is a second wild cat but this time it is in my house. This one is a cougar or some kind of bob-tailed cat. I am afraid it will be spooked by the confined space. I manage to catch it, and maneuver my way to the door with it in my arms, where it turns into a domestic cat when released. The Shadow in this dream would seem to be no threat at all, when it is embraced, but the cat loses its tail as I let it go and becomes bob-tailed like the wild-cat. I think of a cat's tail as an expressive means of communicating its feelings, and in the same journal entry, I am lamenting my lack of a safe place where I can vent my own feelings without someone trying to "fix" it. In effect, I feel cut off at this point: overwhelmed by work and the weight of the issues with which I am dealing. Like my clients, I need someone who will simply listen without feeling the need to "make it better".

## NINE LIVES

Although the dreams outlined to this point might seem to indicate otherwise, the Shadow is not always a dark primitive force to be avoided at all costs. At the point when I first began working in prison, I became aware that as I gradually grew into and became comfortable with myself in the role of counsellor, my life was symbolically unfolding in a series of cat dreams at the same time, representing the qualities I was gradually integrating into my life. This sequence of dreams illustrates again how a symbol can develop over time. As I began life in my new role, I dreamed about a new-born kitten struggling to get on its feet. Some months later, the same dream-kitten had developed into a gutsy, spunky, half-grown cat that I decided I liked. I had gained confidence and was able in my prison therapy sessions to appropriately confront the impaired thinking and behaviours of my clients. I was able to deflect the jokes of the guards and others who knew my position as Sexual Addiction therapist and to appropriately put them in their place when necessary. The dream-kitten which had been napping in a small burrow at the root of a tree surfaced and put the run to a guard dog that had invaded its space in one of my dreams.

A year or two into the program, as I began to feel overwhelmed by the weight of the issues of my clients, the cat was managing to stay on top of the drifts when the rest of the

world seemed snowed under, in my dreams, and finally I was searching the cupboards for food with which to nourish it as its hunger and neediness became obvious to me, and as the work began to take a toll on me emotionally.

Most recently, the cats in my dreams have taken on the face of the newest member of my feline family, Willow, whose spunk and courage are enviable. I smile as I watch her take on three crows, who outnumber and outweigh her, in the garden beyond my window as I sit journalling. In the last of the cat dreams, I embrace her and say, "I could not bear to lose you." She embodies all that I like and respect in myself and struggle to integrate: tenacity, courage and a spirit that rushes in where angels fear to tread when the need arises.

#### THE RESCUERS

There have been a number of significant dreams in my life when the Shadow, far from being my potential undoing, has been much more my salvation, and salvation from an unexpected source. The first such dream occurred nearly 25 years ago.

As a university student, I had moved away from home for the first time at the age of 18. Exercising my first taste of independence and freedom, I rebelled against all the values my parents and grandparents had instilled in me. By the time I reached my third year away from home, the glow of this newly

found freedom was beginning to wear off, and I did not like the person I had become. With the end of one of my first serious relationships, I was also in the worst depression I had ever experienced in my life: suicidal, drinking far too heavily and too often, not sleeping or eating properly, and wondering where to turn. Life had become an intolerable rut from which there seemed no escape.

In a dream, I found myself on the edge of a high cliff looking out to sea, as though I had come to the end of myself. The wind was high, a terrific gale whipping up the waves, and battleships were passing close to shore as they headed into battle, all hands on deck, facing into the wind, focussed. As I stood there, however, suddenly the ground beneath my feet began to crumble. The ships were gone and I looked about desperately for someone to call who would save me. There was no one. A distant figure that would be no help at all stood farther along the shore: a frail wisp of a woman dressed in clothing from another era. There seemed no point in calling her attention to my plight. I felt myself falling into space and knew my life was over. But suddenly she was there, with a hand on my arm and a grip like steel, halting my descent into the abyss as I looked up into her face.

I had not previously thought of this woman as a Shadow figure, but realize now that she represents everything I was no longer willing to see in myself in that period of my life.

Representing everything I professed to despise, she fit the description of the Shadow archetype at that time. The picture of old-fashioned virtuosity, she possessed a strength that surprised me, however, and was not as far from me and from what I had become as I believed. A short time after the experience of this dream, I abandoned my rebellious lifestyle, reconciled with my parents and made a commitment to Christ that changed my life and my life's direction for years to come.

#### LETTING GO

Just over a year ago, still travelling alone weekly to work in the prisons, I decided I could not face another winter on the road. The stress of the travel and the work were beginning to wear on me, although I still did not want to leave. "They need me. Who will pick up my case load?" I argued with myself.

In a dream I find myself at night in a prison cell of my own. In the dream, I am awakened by a man who calls himself Prince Charming. "That's quite a name. What's that supposed to mean?" I inquire sarcastically. Without replying, he opens my cell door, and leads me through a labyrinth of hallways to an outside door of the prison. He points to a parked four-wheel drive vehicle in the lot, which he says is mine and has been there all along. A means of escape from the situation has been



right in front of me but I have not seen it. The ability to trust others to do what I might just as easily do myself has not come easily to me over the years. It is hard to let others take the controls. Will they do the job the way I would have done it? Will they care about my clients as much as I have?

Prince Charming was telling me, "It's time to let go." I took the door he opened and the vehicle he offered. There were other counsellors with whom I could comfortably entrust my clients. I went back to school to complete my degree, and took a small office close to home where I could see a reduced case load of new clients.

#### FACING FACTS

During the period, over fifteen years ago, when I lived and worked in Halifax before I was married, there were other dreams in which rescue figured prominently. In one, again, a storm was brewing, the sky was dark and foreboding, and there was talk of a potential flood coming. On every corner of Quinpool Road, very serious, tall, burly men dressed in sou'westers were selling foot-long rubber dinghies and admonishing passersby to save themselves. The seriousness with which they took themselves, and the inadequacy of the devices they touted, dissolved me in laughter that literally woke me. Dreams draw our attention to situations that need it, in my experience, and no doubt, I was taking myself far too

seriously at some level. I still sometimes do, but the dream was telling me I needed to lighten up.

A second dream repeated the message. A horse was blocking the sidewalk and the passage of a man in formal evening dress (top hat and tails). The man smartly rapped the paving stones with his silver-topped walking-stick and roared, "I am the Archbishop of Canterbury." The horse shook one raised hoof in a disdainful gesture which said, "I should be impressed?" The sound of my own laughter over the picture this presented again woke me, but again I was able to glimpse the somewhat self-righteous creature I had become. I was confronted with the need for a new way of being, and forced to laugh at my pretentiousness.

I inherited my sense of humour and fun from my mother, but over the years that which was once so much a part of her has all but disappeared. She is no longer the woman who sat down to tea with my dolls and me to play "pretend", but, ruled by her fears, has withdrawn more and more from life. In essence, if I am honest, more than anyone else, she has become the personification of my Shadow and the embodiment of all I have refused to embrace in myself. I have forced myself, not always consciously, over the years to face my worst fears, rather than let myself be controlled by them as she has been by hers. I have done things she would never dream of doing, pushed myself beyond the realm of the comfortable many times

without knowing why. I think now that perhaps I wanted to prove I was different.

It is interesting therefore that in a dream, at this stage of my life, I find myself calling on her to help me extricate people who have been trapped by a landslide in the basement of my house. These people are faceless, nameless, unknown and probably symbolically repressed dimensions of Self that have been trapped by some profound shifting of the depths. My mother in the dream is much younger and healthier, the mother I remember from the early years of my childhood, a woman I have not seen for over forty years. In the dream, there is an effort made by the Ego (myself in the dream) and the Shadow (symbolized by my mother) to work together to free something that has been trapped in the unconscious. In our working together, I begin to see her in a new way, begin to entertain the thought that I might even someday be willing to embrace this side of myself which she represents.

## CHAPTER 4 UNMASKING THE PERSONA

### MOUNTING A DISGUISE

The Shadow is not the whole of the unconscious personality, and as we begin to explore our dreams we encounter a myriad of other archetypal figures and images, among them the Animus (or Anima, if the dreamer is male) and the Persona. The masks we wear, the faces we present to the world, and the roles we play function to create a specific impression on others and also as a disguise for the inner self (Jung, 1964, p. 350). These are the realm of the Persona. It appears most often in dreams in which articles of clothing figure prominently, metaphorically representing ways in which we have cloaked ourselves.

One warm summer evening, when I was perhaps three or four, my mother put me to bed as usual in the bedroom off the kitchen. It was not yet dark outside and I was not ready for sleep. A second door on the far side of the room led to my grandmother's front hall, and for a time, I lay there in my bed, studying the situation, staring at the ceiling and restlessly toying with a plan of escape. I decided I would play a joke on my mother. I would impersonate the man who sometimes came to the door selling fish. Escaping through Grandma's front hall, I made my way around the house to the back porch, in search of a disguise, and moments later,

dressed in my pajamas, and wearing my father's cap and boots, I knocked at the kitchen door. "Would you like to buy some fish?" I asked. My mother was not amused. I was escorted back to bed, wailing, "How did you know it was me?"

As the years passed after this incident in which I disguised myself as a peddler of fish, the spontaneity and creativity of the child I was disappeared. Gradually the whole of my life took on the guise of a performance in which I learned how to blend into my environment and how to fit in with what was expected. In *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, the author speaks of a "one-time and significant theft" which many people experience: "a robbing of one's spirit, a weakening of the sense of self... the loss of a feeling state and a state of being... [which is] cohesive, soulful... passionate and instinctual" (Estes, 1995, p. 283-4, 286). It is the loss of the genuine, authentic Self. In my own experience, I believe this loss took the form of a gradual eroding away of that state of authenticity. Eventually the masks fit so well, I forgot they were not the real me and forgot that I had thoughts and opinions of my own, other than those of the people around me. I described myself in a poem twenty-five years ago as "the two-dimensional, mirrored reflection of a world no one's bothered to explore", adding that sometimes in relationships we are "convinced we have been real, deceived by our skill at the game." The charade may have been more obvious to others, but I admit it sometimes had me fooled. I began to

believe this mask was the real me.

My mother did not believe in giving children positive reinforcement. She confessed once, "I never told any of you that you were pretty or did things well, because I thought it would give you swelled heads." I spent years as a child, report-card in hand, trying to call attention to my accomplishments, while being chastized for "blowing my own horn", and years struggling to become whatever was worthy of some small word of praise that never came. *"Perhaps if I am good enough, agreeable, obedient, compliant, perfect, she will notice,"* my inner voice reasoned.

It is only recently that she has been able to voice what I have waited all my life to hear: "I'm proud of the way you turned out." Notably, in the dream with which I ended the last chapter, I call on her now to help me extricate those parts of myself which have been trapped in the basement. One detail of the dream remains unwritten. She agrees to help on the condition I provide her afterwards with a fresh change of clothes. This is significant, I believe, and suggests she is perhaps destined to play a new role in my life, figuratively and literally, when this process is finished. I wonder as I write, if I am not perhaps already clothing her in a new way or seeing her differently in my mind.

CLEANING HOUSE

In the first of the persona dreams which herald the writing of this thesis and its attendant process of self-exploration, my maternal grandmother appears to be house-cleaning. She brings out of the upstairs hall closet a coat, which I can only describe as drab and unbecoming. It is a coat which I am told has seen "lots of wear" (Dream Journal, Feb. 24, 1998). The self-depreciating, self-effacing cloak of one who has lost all confidence in herself could not be more aptly described. This is the coat which I wore for most of my adult life. Ironically, it is a coat which my grandmother seems to have made in the dream. In life, many of my self-doubts were also her creation. I never measured up. It took me a long time to realize that my grandmother's own insecurities were at the bottom of this censure, and that she really felt that how I turned out would in large measure reflect on her. My mother, in a similar way, had never measured up, but my mother did not recover from the experience of being criticized, compared, and found wanting. She was an only child, and perhaps she had no other resources with which to confront the myth which my grandmother perpetuated.

In the same dream, my grandmother also brings out of storage a half dozen other little coats which I seem to have worn at various stages as a child. I think these may represent the childhood roles I played or personas which were less mature or less fully developed. I may dispose of them as I please in the dream, and I decide to throw them out. At the

same time, I discover an old woman going through the garbage. She is looking for wrapping paper, or that with which one would wrap a gift, she says. Perhaps it is her role in this dream to help me to find the gift, or that which is of value, in what otherwise seems to have no worth. There are flowers buried under the snow but still blooming in this dream as well: a part of me, I believe, which has managed to survive and even thrive, despite a sometimes hostile environment.

#### BREAKING NEW GROUND

I was ten when my family moved from the farm into a home of our own in the nearby town, where my father had found work. Farming as a way of life had changed forever on Prince Edward Island, and small farms in the mid-1960's were being swallowed up by larger, more specialized operations. It was time to get out. The farm was auctioned off and my paternal grandparents moved to a Seniors' housing complex.

I do not have many happy memories of our new home. This was a period of tremendous tension and conflict in the family, and more and more, I took refuge with my maternal grandparents who lived about a mile from our new home. I had always spent time with them over the years, but during this period, I gradually moved in with them, ostensibly to help care for my great-grandmother who was living with them. She was then 95 and had been blind for a number of years. If I was there, they



would be free to go out with friends and free to travel, I argued. I realize now that probably I needed to be taken care of more than my great-grandmother, but at the time I would not have admitted it. It seemed like a good deal for all of us.

My grandparents' home was quiet and tidy, their routine predictable and comforting. The ritual setting of the table for breakfast each night before we went to bed seemed to epitomize the orderliness of their lifestyle. Each morning, my grandfather went off to work at the court-house, where he was deputy prothonetary, and I went off to school a few blocks away. At times, even now, I dream that I am there. My grandmother is baking in the kitchen. My grandfather is working in the garden, tending the roses that became his pride and joy after retirement. I am in my room, reading, and all is well with the world. This is the world where I went to be nurtured and restored when life was chaotic and overwhelming as a child, and the place I still go in my dreams for the same reasons now.

This is the other side of the story of the drab and unbecoming coat. My grandmother, despite her critical appraisals of much that I did, eventually became the central mother figure in my life, escorting me to Mother-Daughter functions at church and school, teaching me to sew and to cook, taking me shopping, helping me to get dressed for the Junior High prom and a host of other occasions in my teens.

She is the woman I most tried to emulate as a young woman, and the woman whose respect I, in turn, eventually won.

#### FOR BETTER OR WORSE: AN EVOLVING EPISTEMOLOGY

Twice in one week as I begin to reflect on the writing of this thesis, I dream that I am getting married. I am committing myself to the process, and I am breaking with tradition. My dress is red, the colour of feeling and passion. The dream stories for me an obvious change within, and an evolution in the way in which I view both myself and the world around me. The old pressure within to conform to what I perceive to be most acceptable still exists, clothed in the form of a female Shadow figure in the dream. She says, "You can't wear that !" and insists that I wear white, but I insist on wearing what I please. My thesis will take the narrative form I envision.

Heshusius writes of what she calls "a participatory mode of consciousness", a sense of connection between the knower and the known, and a sense of deepening awareness and aliveness in that context (Heshusius, 1994, p. 16). It is to this experience in my own life, which I feel the dream testifies, as symbolized by the choice I make to wear the red dress. The colour is vibrant and alive. I am progressing from a position of silence and loss of voice to a position of trusting the voice within, and from a position of seeing

others as sources of knowledge to a sense of feeling that I know something for myself, as I begin to write. My conviction that truth exists not within, but out there somewhere, is undergoing a profound change. In *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*, the authors trace the evolution of a way of knowing from received to subjective and eventually to constructed knowing. Constructed knowledge by their definition involves "weaving together the strands of rational and emotive thought... integrating objective and subjective knowing" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 134). It is to this way of knowing that I aspire.

In a second wedding dream, I am to wear a dress made of lightweight homespun linen, which I am embroidering with leaves and flowers. The dress is natural, earthy, embellished with colour and detail which enhance it, and I am pleased with what I have created. It is ME. The narrative process feels natural and right.

A third wedding dream some months later, however, brings to the fore the internal conflict and ambivalence with which I also struggle as I write. The storying of my dreams and life experience takes energy and is emotionally draining at times. I am wearing a dress I have bought. It is not simple and charming, but elaborate and fussy, replete with ruffles and bows. Things feel scattered, confused and complicated. The dream speaks of something to which I obviously feel committed

but not happily. Is all of this really in my best interest? Do I really have to go there? Why am I putting myself through this? It would be so much easier to write a nice objective piece of research that contains none of me, I write in my journal.

When I was married fifteen years ago, I chose to make my own wedding dress, although sewing had never been a particular passion of mine. It had always required more patience than I could muster, but I liked the idea of wearing something I had made. The dress design was simple, floor-length, made of white crepe with a bodice overlaid in lace and seed pearls. It was important to me that my aging maternal grandmother, who had been a skillful seamstress in her day, be part of this special moment in my life and I asked for her help with some of the final details. The morning of the wedding, after reading the newspaper, she helped me sew on the last of the lace edging and pearls, oblivious to the printer's ink which was turning the white thread black as she pulled it through her fingers. No harm was done to the fabric, and in the privacy of my room, later, I redid most of what she had done that morning with the best of intentions. She had tried to help and I was touched by that.

I am immediately struck by the irony of this story however as I put it down on paper. The damage done has not been done maliciously, but with the best of intentions: done

blindly, ignorantly, and in love, with no will or thought to harm me. It is the story of my life, and all that has gone before, a metaphor for all that I have experienced as a child, which I am left now to undo alone.

#### MISUNDERSTOOD

Toxic shame, or that sense of being seen, even by the self, in some diminished way, was not a concept I had encountered when I wrote nearly twenty years ago about meeting in a dream what I now recognize to be my inner child. I described her as "a little girl no one seems to want because she is so bad" (Journal entry, July 5, 1982). I pick her up and hold her in the dream and let her know that I understand there are good reasons why she is the way she is. In response, she weeps and clings to me as though she will never let me go. I do not recognize her then as a part of myself that is desperately in need of kindness, tenderness and nurturing.

I know now that what is not integrated is often projected on others we meet, and that it was likely this unintegrated, wounded and needy child within, which I saw in Lisa (not her real name). She was six and I was sixteen when we met. I was her babysitter and she was in her sixth foster home in as many months. From the moment we met, she was labelled a "bad" child by those who introduced us, but I never saw her that way. She needed care and nurturing and I lavished that on her for the

duration of our acquaintance. When I kept her, I spent hours rocking her in the big rocking-chair in her room, regaling her with stories of my own childhood and making her laugh. At other times, I let her cry out all the grief she felt over being separated from her birth family and the pain she felt over not really being a part of the family with which she was currently living. The other children in the family were quick to remind her of this when she attempted to intervene in their quarrels, and their words frequently sent her to room in tears. I did not know her long, or recognize it, but in a very real way I feel now that I was nurturing my own wounded inner child as I nurtured her. She had a big impact on my life for a long time afterwards, in particular in my choices to pursue a career in social work and to major in Sociology at university. Somewhere along the way, however, I lost touch with both of us.

I have not had many dreams about children, but on the night I unearth the dream of the misunderstood child, from a pile of old journals, I dream of another child, a little boy of about 10 who is small for his age. He shrugs and tells me he doesn't know when I ask him about his interests, and tells me he guesses he is stupid. I kneel beside him and ask him where he got that idea, because I do not believe it to be true. This time however, I do recognize myself in him, and in his words I perceive a lie I have believed to be true of myself for a very long time.

Sometimes the animus appears in a woman's dreams as a hidden "sacred" conviction, clothed in words like "everybody", "always", "should" and "ought", Marie-Louise von Franz writes (Jung, 1964, p. 198), but until the sacredness of these convictions is questioned, true healing cannot take place. The animus figures in my dreams have appeared most often as robbers and threatening figures which have left me feeling paralyzed, powerless, passive and afraid. I have not understood until now, the power that my convictions have had over me.

In a dream, I absentmindedly leave my purse unattended, while shopping. A man who is not well-dressed is fumbling through its contents when I go to retrieve it, and I watch from a distance, trembling. He removes and pockets, not the money I expect to lose, but documents which have to do with my identity, which he expects to somehow use to misrepresent me. I am furious. The side of me that he represents appears slow-witted and again, is likely representative of the way in which I see myself. The image is exaggerated, as dream images sometimes are, but it is effective. I feel "poorly dressed", inadequate, stupid, ineffective. I am becoming aware of the way in which this self-image disempowers me, and robs me of my identity.

## LEARNING TO LISTEN

I am a counsellor whose identity, as such, has been a long time in the making. My father's sister died when she was younger than I am now. I remember the time of her death as a confusing one, a time of whispering among the adults and unexplained emotion I did not understand. Aunt Betty had not been well, I know now, but then I was five, and no one was talking. The arrival of a trunk full of Aunt Betty's possessions and the sombre mood that accompanied it are what I remember best. The implications of the delivery were lost on me at the time. I did not realize there would be no more hand-knit sweaters or letters asking for drawings from Vicki. I did not know that the trunk's arrival meant that I would not see her again.

It was probably not until the night my grandmother held me and wept for Betty, and the two other little boys she had lost years before, that I knew. We were curled up on the kitchen couch after supper, in the dark. In silence, we were watching the flames from the wood-stove, making patterns on the ceiling. She began to cry. I asked her to tell me about the children, to share with me what would eventually be a story told many times over and one which I never grew tired of hearing, night after night, in the dark, on the kitchen couch. I did not know then that she was giving me a glimpse of a side of herself which no one else would ever see, or that I was



intuitively doing what a grief counsellor would do to facilitate her healing. In my mind now, I believe the first seeds of my counsellor-self were being sown in this re-storying with my grandmother. I was learning the art of listening.

#### PREMONITIONS

As I look back, it is not surprising either that I came to work in prison. Given my maternal grandfather's line of work and the amount of time I spent in the court-house as a child, visiting him, it seems a natural evolution. He was a Deputy Prothonetary or clerk of the county court, as I have mentioned, and I amused myself by the hour with the rubber stamps, official seals and adding-machines in his office. Sometimes I played in the vault or under the counter in the Motor Vehicle department. Sometimes I visited the sheriff or played with the keys in the jailer's office. Apart from the basement which housed the jail, or the court-room when it was in session, I had the run of the place. My one visit with those in the basement lock-up was brought to a quick close, when the sound of laughter alerted someone to the fact that the basement door was open and I was missing. The consequences of that one trip down-stairs to the cellblock are not memorable and obviously did not dissuade me from a career which took me "inside" on a regular basis.

On the week-ends, when the police made arrests, my grandfather was summoned to the courthouse to read the accused their rights and to finger-print them. I went along. This did not present a problem, until the day, shortly before my grandfather retired, when the man brought in turned out to be my teacher from the previous year. He was being charged with sexual assault perpetrated against some of his former students, and the encounter was embarrassing for both of us. I had not been one of his victims, but some of my class-mates had gone for drives with him at recess. I had always wondered why I was excluded from these outings, but I suspect, given my connections, he had his reasons for not turning his attentions in my direction.

The experience that afternoon at the courthouse may be linked with my eventual decision to work with perpetrators and survivors of sexual abuse, or this choice may be linked with another event which preceded the final move in with my maternal grand-parents. In either case, it was not a link which was consciously made. At the age of twelve, I was accosted in a department store by a man who was obviously intoxicated, and I came to understand the experience of sexual assault first-hand, although I did not name it as such for a long time afterward. The shame and the absurd feeling that somehow I was responsible for this turn of events kept me silent for nearly thirty years. It was not until I was doing group therapy with sex offenders in prison that I was able to

get in touch with the feeling of violation with which this had left me, and to name the experience abuse and myself a victim. The revelation shook me to the core. I must have had significant dreams during this period of time, but I did not document them and have no memory of them now.

#### THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

The one significant dream which falls into the category of a persona dream in this time period involves my developing self-confidence in the counsellor role and my growing perception of myself as a capable human being and my husband's equal. In this dream, my husband is wearing a neck-tie made of little tiles from a Scrabble game. The image is puzzling until I recognize the play on words it represents, and then I laugh out loud: "The game is a tie."

The perception of myself as less than adequate has been a difficult one to shake, but I know something is happening when, in a dream, I find myself visiting a man who calls himself "a recovering person". He is not someone I recognize, but presumably represents a side of me which is getting well, recovering, by its own admission. He is a healthy "animus" figure, and according to Jung therefore a side of me capable of being "enterprising, courageous, and truthful" (Jung, 1964, p. 207). In the dream, we are in a farm-house on a road which the occupant says is not often used. In the course of

conversation, I confess that I have spent my life conforming to what I have perceived was expected. As a daughter and grand-daughter, and as the wife of a pastor, I have spent my life trying to be what I have thought people wanted me to be. In the dream, I am suddenly very, very angry. "Being myself has never been on the list," I rail at him (Dream Journal entry, July 30, 1998). I have not spoken this conviction aloud, or with such emotion, till now. My anger surprises me. This really is a road, as he says, that has not seen much traffic. On the same night, I dream about the partially dismantled church (the de-construction of a sacred story). The dismantling has not been done carefully, and some of the pieces have been ripped away and damaged beyond repair in the process. They will have to be replaced. It takes time to realize when I wake up that this is a good thing, and that what it signals to me is the beginning of my own personal restoration.

I was not happy in the role of pastor's wife, and wrote in my journal at one point that the experience was "like living on a desert island... No one knows I'm here". My solution to the problem was to reach out and call together the ministers' wives of all denominations around me. I hoped in this way to break the isolation I assumed we all felt: that we would be able at least to let down our guard with each other. It became obvious fairly quickly, however, that this was not going to happen. My own self-disclosure was met with a stony

silence from the group, and my words hung in the air for several long minutes before one of them acknowledged that she too felt very alone. The subject never came up again, although we met several times after that. Without warning, my one supporter in the group died a few months later, at the age of forty-two, and with her death, the meetings ended. I could see no point in our continuing to meet.

Given the tremendous feeling of isolation which I experienced in the role, I was not prepared, for the feeling of loss I experienced when my husband eventually left the pastoral ministry to go into chaplaincy. No longer the pastor's wife, and with no perceivable role to conform to, I didn't know any longer who I was. I went looking for work and took a position as a bank teller because it gave me an identity, and another persona or mask, to hide behind. I probably could have stayed there for the rest of my life, but I only stayed four years. I stayed until a confrontation with my own mortality and the subsequent re-examination of my life and priorities made it impossible for me to stay any longer. I was 39 and I was not well.

Marie-Louise von Franz talks about two mitigating factors which may precipitate one's coming to terms with the Self or signal the beginning of a process Jung referred to as individuation. These factors are "a deadly boredom that makes everything seem meaningless and empty" or "a wounding of the

personality and the suffering which accompanies it" (Jung, 1964, p. 169-170). In the final year of my life as a bank-teller, I experienced both. I had become gradually aware over the years of a brooding discontent with the trite and simplistic answers the church seemed to offer to deep spiritual questions. I also found myself alone, at a point when I most needed to feel supported by those closest to me. Circumstances beyond my husband's control kept him at work, and my parents, not fully appreciative of the crisis in which I found myself, asked if I could call back later, on the day I was told, "It might be cancer." In the hours spent alone during that day and evening, I confronted the possibility that my death might not be as far away as I hoped, and the certainty that there were things which I had hoped I would do with my life which had not been accomplished. I realized among other things that I was not ready to die, because I had never really lived.

#### TIME FOR CHANGE

In a dream, I find myself in a bathroom, changing out of my nightclothes and dressing for work. Bathrooms are places of elimination, where one gets rid of the garbage, the waste. I have been asleep, for what feels like "forever", I say to myself, but I am dressing for action in dressing for work, gearing up for that which involves effort. "I can do this," I say to myself. I am aware in a new way of the struggles my

clients face to change the image of themselves which they have carried within. I can tell them now that I believe for all of us there can be a light at the end of the tunnel, because I have faced the darkness and the pain and come out the other side. In my dreams, I have closets full of clothes that no longer fit. I make alterations to some of them with contrasting thread, alterations that are noticeable and obvious, but I mentally note, like the changes within, "not unbecoming" (Dream Journal entry, Jan. 16, 1999). They are obvious to those who know me.

In a final dream, I am unpacking my car, after a trip. Across a field, in the dream, I can see my uncle's house, a number of cars in the yard, and people standing about outside. A family gathering seems to be taking place, and I wave to them. In recognition, they wave back, and as I watch, the children come along the road, to meet me, in a group, singing and laughing. "These are my sisters and my cousins," I tell someone. Metaphorically, they are "related to me" (parts of me), and I am deeply moved by this gesture of welcome. One child with whom I have an exceptional sense of connection stands out, however: a dark-haired little girl, dressed in white, with flowers in her hair. With her, there is the kind of bond I believe one would have with a daughter, although, having no children, I have no experience on which to base this. The group lifts her shoulder high and rocks her, before I take her from them, and embrace her, swinging around and

around with her in my arms, whispering, "Happy birthday." In the dream, I am not the inhibited woman who can hear the music and wants to move but can't. I am free, in a way I have never been free in my life, and the child in my arms is myself.



CHAPTER 5 RE-VISITING THE PROCESS

## ESTABLISHING A FOCUS: DE-CONSTRUCTING PERSONAL MYTH

Throughout the writing of this thesis and even prior to its beginning, as I thought about where I wanted to go, I documented a series of dreams in my journal which seem now to be reflective of the thesis-writing process itself. In the first of these dreams I found myself travelling on an unknown road, and I was not in the driver's seat. I was travelling with a woman friend I would describe as creative but sometimes a little impulsive, a woman who I feel now likely represents the side of me that was in control at the beginning of this journey.

The shadows lengthened in the gold light of the setting sun as we drove, and I was anxious because the road was unfamiliar and darkness was approaching. "Is the road a dead end or does it in fact lead somewhere?" I asked myself in the dream. There was no way of knowing. However, the road eventually led to, and beyond, a sunny, sheltered cove by the water's edge, where we got out to stretch our legs. It was not the dead-end I feared. In my waking hours, I was becoming aware as well that the journey was not a dead-end. Having never previously contemplated post-graduate study, I was beginning to think about future avenues which might be opened to me by the act of having chosen to write a thesis in a

program where this was still optional. I was also becoming aware of a new way of knowing and seeing, taking shape within me.

With a camera and zoom lens, I attempted to frame a photograph of the scene before me, in the dream, but the lens was rusty and had obviously not been used for some time. There was an old fisherman, sitting on one of many granite boulders in the water, close to shore, watching me. An indulgent, benevolent presence, he made no attempt to communicate with me, and I did not try to speak with him. I was surprised to see flowers growing at his feet in what I had assumed to be salt water.

In one direction, the camera lens framed a church, and in another direction, a school. I remember now being concerned that power lines which lined the road would somehow interfere with the picture I was putting together. I see now, in that metaphor, a concern that I was not even able to voice at the time. I was afraid that the real power lines within the family would be angry that I had turned my lens in their direction and that the picture I was painting was not altogether flattering. Both the lens and the writing were beginning to bring into focus what otherwise seemed distant and far away: things I had not thought about for a very long time, among them, sometimes disturbing images that I had never fully allowed myself or anyone else to see. I was becoming aware, at

some level, of the sacred stories that would need to be told in the writing, as represented by the church image, and aware too, of the learning experience that this might be, as represented by the school.

The water, as a universal symbol of the unconscious, contained and sustained life, which the flowers represented. This was not stagnant water, but water that was life-giving, nurturing and alive. It also appeared to be the means by which the old man (an animus figure) made his living. Metaphorically, he likely represented a side of me that was about to glean what it could from the unconscious and to story this in thesis form.

#### UNEARTHING THE MYTH

It is my contention that we all have "stories we live by" and personal myths that form the basis of our identity: "a sacred story that embodies personal truth" (McAdams, 1993, p. 34). This journey of storying dreams and personal experience has been for me about unearthing my own personal myth through the exploration of the landscape of my unconscious and the themes of my dreams.

In another dream I found myself in the prison visiting area with a half dozen inmates and their children, watching them interact. It was magical, and a surprise to me that such

magic could be found in a place like this. I was told by someone that the inmates, or those parts of me which have been imprisoned, and their offspring, were being taught to string pearls, making tiny knots after each addition so none would be lost. Metaphorically, this was the kind of process on which I was embarking as I began to write. This dream, like the one before it, drew my attention to the more disturbing images of the past, but this time, I believe I was stringing together what emerged as valuable from experiences which had once been painful. The experiences and the memory of them had chafed or grated, as the grain of sand inside the oyster's shell, but through the process of storying, of deconstruction and reconstruction, a new and less painful story was being created from the old one. A reframing and reinterpretation of experience, a re-vision of the past was taking shape within me.

I believe this is also the process of healing that my clients embark upon in the counselling process when they begin to tell their stories. It is through this process of deconstructing and reconstructing their experiences and their stories as reflections of that experience, that they come to see themselves in new, more healthy and meaningful ways. It was not the process that I personally intended to embark on when I began my thesis, but I should have known that I could not simply document my dreams objectively as reflections of life experience like some participant-observer or ethnographer

in a foreign country. I should not be surprised, nine months into the process, that I have been hijacked by the unconscious and taken places I never intended to go, but I have been and I am.

#### GETTING ON BOARD

In another dream at the beginning of the writing process, I found myself travelling again by car, this time on a newly built gravel road skirting a large city. Following the waterfront, I eventually reached a point where I had to leave the car, metaphorically, the safe and the familiar, to step onto the first of a series of escalators which would take me to who knows where. The construction was imposing, steep and frightening: a roller coaster made of endless stairways to other levels. I joined the crowd of people that had lined up, waiting to get on, and like them, hung on tightly as I rode the first of these escalators to the top. Some people were afraid to get on at all and asked for assistance. I had no idea where I was going.

Like getting on the escalator, it was frightening for me as I contemplated exposing the depths of my soul in this research: I wanted to run. *Can I do this?*" I asked myself. I am reminded now of a journal entry of long ago, in which I wrote that I was afraid to share my dreams with others for fear of what they would read into them, and what they would

see that I was not yet ready to share. As I began to write, I was frightened still, but I was on board and committed to the process wherever it took me.

It was at about this point in the writing that I also experienced the wedding dreams of which I wrote in the third chapter: the dream where I chose to wear the non-traditional red dress as opposed to the white one traditionally worn by others. It was not like me to choose a way other than the way of least resistance, but the red dress fit with who I sensed I was becoming. I believe now that the dress symbolized my uniqueness and individuality as a person, just as narrative research is a unique departure from the ordinary way of doing research. Like the dress of the second wedding dream, which was home-spun and earthy, it is natural and fitting that my research should reflect the uniqueness of who I am.

#### STORYING THE STUCK PLACES

I was not without misgivings nevertheless as I started out. I had followed the crowd all my life and it was daunting to find myself breaking with tradition, and not listening to the voice that wanted to conform, to be safe, to be accepted. I was filled with self-doubts. "Am I doing the right thing here?" I asked myself.

In a dream, I was at the prison again, only this time as

a prisoner myself. Metaphorically, I was in a stuck place. I was in a holding area, uncertain what personal items I was permitted to keep and what I was not going to be able to take with me where I was going. Likewise I was uncertain in the thesis writing what was to be kept and storied and what was to be left behind. Most of the guards in the dream were patient and polite, parts of myself which were not given to self-recrimination, but one was menacing and sinister. He leaned over and whispered, "You and I are going to get to know each other really well." It is likely that he represented a side of me which would many times question the value of what I was writing and the wisdom of sharing myself this openly. His words had a sexual overtone, and I felt vulnerable, exposed and powerless. In the dream, my husband was leaving me in this place, and I was on my own. Two other prisoners bolted for the door, were tackled and restrained, parts of me that wanted to run, but I knew I had made my bed in this place and would have to sleep in it.

#### LEAVING NORMAL

As I reflect on this feeling of vulnerability now, I am fully appreciative of the struggle my clients face as they bring their issues to my office, and of the courage it takes to share these aloud. The other side of this is that sometimes even the stuck places feel normal and safe, when we've been there long enough. The most dysfunctional

circumstances, can still feel safer than the unknown, and the world beyond the wall, when we're faced with the choice.

In another dream, it was getting dark as I got into my car for the long drive home. I had been working at the prison all day. It had been snowing and the roads were treacherous. One of my co-workers had left already, and I was following the others, but afraid I might not be able to keep up. I did not feel "in control" of the situation, and I did not feel in control of what was coming to the surface as I began to write. "Should I start out on this journey at all? Should I turn back? Can I go along at my own speed here, and take it as it comes?" I asked myself in the dream. Staying put somehow did not seem to be an option. With regard to the writing, I was already on the road, ready or not.

This was the first in a series of dreams with a common theme. Many times in the weeks to follow I found myself negotiating icy roads at night, under less than perfect driving conditions. The accelerator was stuck. My visibility was limited; the wipers were not clearing the windshield. Things were coming at me which I barely managed to negotiate my way around. Obstacles blocked my path or delayed my progress. I was in the driver's seat in these dreams, and theoretically in control, figuratively and literally, but I did not feel in control. I had never travelled this road before, and relatively few others had been here before me. I



could not see clearly where this road was leading. As I tried to block off time for writing, life continued to intervene. Clients needed to be seen. Reports needed to be written. Court dates could not be pushed back. My family was crying for attention. I worried about the choice I'd made: "What will come to the surface when I start plumbing the depths of my unconscious? How will it be received? Will my research be acceptable in a world that does not value stories?"

In my dreams, I found myself in new and previously unexplored psychological spaces, and despite my misgivings, was excited about the journey before me. This was a place where three rivers converged, a point in my life where things were coming together, metaphorically. The past, the present and the future seemed to be represented by this powerful dream image of unity and converging in the unconscious, as my dreams and life stories were woven together, storied and re-storied.

#### NAMING THE PROCESS

Until the day I picked up a book which has been on my husband's book-shelf for probably twenty years, however, I did not realize that the journey on which I had embarked had a name. I had decided if I was writing about things to do with Jungian psychology, I should begin consulting the master himself to make sure I was getting it right. In the course of my reading (a book called *Man and His Symbols* and several

other resources), I discovered the process of individuation or self-realization. Without knowing such a process existed, my psyche had been taking me through the stages Jung identified. I had wrestled with the Shadow, the Persona, and the Animus figures in my dreams, in that order, and my identity as a whole and unique person was beginning to emerge. Things were beginning to come together. In the final stage of this process of individuation, I began to encounter archetypes of the Self.

#### STAYING AFLOAT

I have been told that when life is in crisis and there is need for balance, these figures emerge in our dreams: wise old men and women and other figures who speak with wisdom and authority, symbols of wholeness and unity like circles and perfectly balanced four-point images. It is in situations of crisis that I have previously encountered such figures in my dreams.

Over twenty years ago as I struggled with whether or not to leave Prince Edward Island to pursue the rest of my studies at Acadia University, I encountered the first of these archetypes of the Self. The man who would eventually become my husband had already enrolled at Acadia the year before, and I had stayed behind, despite his attempts to persuade me to join him. I was not sure that the move was in my best interest, personally or financially. Metaphorically I was at a cross-

roads in my life.

In a dream, I found myself on a cliff, looking out to sea. A storm was brewing: the sky growing dark and forboding, the wind beginning to whip the sea into huge angry waves. I had been watching a small flotilla of sail-boats on the horizon and enjoying the beautiful warm sunny day, but as I watched now, with mounting anxiety for their safety, I was certain the little boats were no match for the elements and that they were doomed. Gradually I became aware that I was not alone as I watched them, and I turned to find a kindly old man at my elbow, following my gaze seaward. When he finally spoke, it was to say gently, "It will be all right." The sea gradually grew still, the dark clouds drifted away, and the sun returned. The little boats were safe. When I turned again to the old man, he was gone.

The dream was reassuring. I enrolled in school (not because of the dream, but because it felt like the right thing to do), and things fell into place. With bursaries, student loans and help from my grandmother, I managed to stay afloat. The decision to move away from home, in hindsight, has been my salvation. I have become aware of another way of being in the world, and the repercussions of that decision are more obvious now than ever, but leaving home was not the last hurdle. As I tell my clients, geographical solutions to our problems rarely work if we are taking the baggage with us.

## WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT

Two years later, my life had reached another all-time low. I was living in Halifax, working night-shifts in a nursing-home at a job I hated, and convinced I would be there forever. My relationship with the man I later married was turbulent and not going well. I had given up all thoughts of completing my university education and felt that I'd failed at something of which anyone else was capable. In a dream, I encountered an old woman who wanted me to impersonate her sister. I was to climb into a casket, go through a funeral service, let them bury me and say nothing, and amazingly, I didn't feel I had a choice (Journal entry, Dec. 7, 1979). I went along with it, until the absurdity of the situation suddenly dawned on me. I am giving up without a fight. I will be buried alive, and I will die. No one else is going to save me. I refused to cooperate further with the old woman's agenda.

Reading it now, the exaggeration of the dream is obvious, and humorous. "What does one have to do to get a response from you anyway?" the old woman seems to say. She is trying to make a point, but it has taken me twenty years to get it. Up until this point, I have surrendered without firing a shot.

## NURTURED FROM WITHIN

At the point when I had this dream, I also had another in which I found myself visiting a great-grandmother I never knew, who seemed to live just around the corner from my apartment. She died before I was even born, but in the dream, she was the nurturing, gentle presence I needed so badly at that time. I said to her, "If I'd known you were here, I'd have come before this." It is perhaps a play on words that she is a "great" grandmother. My real great-grandmother, until her death at the age of 99 (when I was sixteen), for all the years that I lived with and cared for her, had also been a "great" grandmother and a kindred spirit who left a huge void in my life when she died.

## UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT: RECONSTRUCTING PERSONAL MYTH

Now in the throes of thesis-writing, I begin again with increasing frequency to encounter these beings and images which Jung referred to as archetypes of the self. They are images of a whole self, a healthy self, which I have not previously known, although its potential has always been present.

In the first of these dreams, I encounter the wise old woman living in the unexplored wing of my house, of which I wrote in the chapter on the psyche. She is ageless and almost

other-worldly, a presence who seems to know all of me, and to have watched and guided me from a distance, all my life. What I am encountering has always been there and been part of me, living in the shadows of my unconscious. However, until this moment, when I finally choose to take down the walls within myself, I have not truly been aware of her presence. It is possible that she represents a capacity within for wisdom and self-nurturing, with which I am only now becoming acquainted.

I dream that I am working in a hospital, a place of healing where I find myself immersed in the present. It is situated in the centre of a square courtyard surrounded by streets which are under construction, and where (significantly) water-mains and sewer lines are being repaired (channels for the unconscious and the emission of waste/garbage). I dream that I am repairing and trying to center a beautiful round stained-glass window which has been off-center for a long time.

#### AWAKENINGS

Finally, I dream again of the old farm-house where I grew up. In this dream, the light in the cellar (the lower regions, the unconscious) is on, and the door leading there is ajar. I experience again the fear which I have always associated with this house. Do I have the courage to go down there? What will I find? Is it safe? Do I dare? There does not seem to be a

choice. I have to, I tell myself. It's now or never. This is a place where I have asked my clients to go in guided imagery exercises (also known as active imagination or the waking dream). We have gone down to the cellar to release those parts of them which have been trapped and chained to the wall for a very long time, and the experience for them has been a powerful one. Now, it is my turn. In my dream, I open the door and make my way down the steps. I don't know what I expect, but I find myself in a sparsely furnished sitting area, littered with broken and abandoned toys. Banks of straw boarded in at the sides form an insulation along the walls. There is nothing here to fear. Gradually, standing here, however, I become aware that there are people sleeping in the straw and that they are beginning to stir. Amazed, I watch as dozens of nameless, faceless forms rouse themselves from sleep, sit up, stretch and begin to move about. Metaphorically, I am witnessing the awakening of unknown sides of myself in the depths of my being, and I am not afraid.

#### RELAPSE: A NEW AWAKENING

I have not reckoned with the power of my family's eleventh commandment: Thou shalt not be aware. Sometime in March I return to Prince Edward Island for the first time in eight months for a visit. I have not seen my family since July and the visit of which I wrote in the opening chapter.

While I am there, I share with them some of what I have written. It is received without a word of response or any sign of having heard what I said. That night, I dream that my car is out of commission. I am trying to get it started, a procedure which seems to involve crossing two power lines and which seems to invite certain destruction, death or dismemberment. Somehow I survive, but the car is still not up and running.

In reality, I am surprised at the depth of the grief I feel when I return to my own home on the mainland, after visiting my family. I stop dreaming in the vivid way I have been for months, and my speaking voice returns for a time to the barely audible level of times past, a level I associate with depression and self-doubt. I cannot write and all momentum, where the thesis is concerned, is gone. It does not help that my client case-load has suddenly tripled. Everyone is in crisis, and cloning is beginning to look like a good idea. There is not enough "me" to go around.

It takes a couple of weeks before I begin to shake the heaviness. Restored to myself again, it is to dream for days of house-cleaning. Metaphorically, I am sorting my Self out: scrubbing floors and walls, washing load after load of dirty laundry. I am cleaning out the refrigerator, the "cold storage" of the unconscious, and I am throwing out the garbage that has accumulated there and in the basement. I am moving



again into another new house (a new psychological space), and I am not taking the garbage with me.

I am pursued and driven around by more dim-witted Animus and Shadow figures, in my dreams, embodying again that conviction of my own stupidity and ineffectualness, which has dogged me for so long, and I struggle desperately to reach a hospital where I can get help. Once there, I discover I am actually choking on a pill bottle. My voice is silenced by something which should be a source of healing and medication, but which is actually empty and suffocating the life out of me. I wonder aloud in the dream how on earth I managed to swallow this, and what else I have swallowed to the same end.

In a short space of time, I again go through all the phases of dreaming which have characterized the past year. The old themes surface again in quick succession, before I am able once again to take back the ground gained before my trip to Prince Edward Island and this visit which has brought everything to a stand-still. I dream that I am getting married again: this time in a crowded church where there is no room for me at the altar. I interpret this to mean there being no room for my authentic self in the "sacred story" of my own life. I am relegated to an overflow area off the sanctuary, where I can watch but not participate in the proceedings.

In another dream, I am freeing my cat Willow from a snare, and feeling caught in something myself from which I have had to be extricated. I interpret this to mean that the part of myself that I associate with Willow, that Self which I have most come to respect over the years, is in jeopardy. In a second dream, a wolf leaps out of the shadows to attack her (an untamed, powerful, and primitive Shadow figure). I pick up a stick to defend Willow and to drive it off, but the wolf turns into a playful dog when pursued and comes to me with its tail wagging. Like the wild-cat dreams of the chapter on the Shadow, this fierce instinctive side is not what I expect. It is not a thing to be feared but something to be embraced: an authentic self, a "wildness within" which I must take back, and own, once again (Chernin, 1994, p. 14). Reflecting on the visit home, I realize that I have been tamed, domesticated, bent out of shape to fit the moulds others have created for me, and I have lost my Self in the process. In my parents' house, I take on again the role of compliant, agreeable child, a child with no voice and no opinion that matters.

Weeks after my return to the mainland, resolution comes in the form of a final dream in which several new foundations are being laid in a circle. This is significant again as the symbol of wholeness and self-realization, and one of these new foundations is for a church: a new sacred story is under construction, and a new conviction being born within.

Reflecting on this experience of reawakening, I see that part of the grief experienced over these past months is knowing that a page has turned and that there is no going back. There is no way I can explain to my family what has happened. I am aware in a new way that I cannot bring others with me on this journey, just as my clients must make the journey of recovery alone. "You cannot change others; you can only change yourself," I've told my clients countless times, but the reality of the experience is something quite different. It is a leave-taking, and there is grief in the leaving: not that we want to return to our chains and the places where we have been, but that nothing will ever feel the same again, including our relationships with those we leave behind. Change is a frightening prospect, and embracing it, something that takes great courage.

#### COMMITMENTS AND INVESTMENTS

Throughout the writing of the thesis, I have had dreams about making investments and managing them wisely. Early on, and beginning to invest myself in the writing, I dreamed I was buying a house from a fellow graduate student in Education who had already completed her degree. My husband was not part of this transaction, just as he would not be part of the investment of self which has been part of my writing, but it was assumed (correctly) in both that he would be understanding and supportive of what I was taking on. Over the months, I

have dreamed of significant increases in the value of these investments, and about the wise use of resources so that I would not be over-extended; at the same time, in the work I do, finding a balance is often a challenge. I am frequently over-extended and exhausted by the heaviness of the issues with which my clients wrestle.

Toward the end of the writing, I dream I am living in a huge rambling old house that I need to scale down and make manageable. I am renovating my house for the thousandth time since I began writing a year ago, and this time I am removing wings of the house which I feel I can live without. The changes will not take away from the charm of the structure, but it will be easier to heat, I tell myself in the dream. Metaphorically, I am feeling over-extended and feeling a need to do something which will enable me to conserve energy.

In other dreams, the clothes I am wearing are too big and literally swimming on me. Is the role I am playing more than I can handle? I am shopping, but cannot find clothing for women. Does this represent the sense I have that at the end of the day, I have no energy left for the role of wife and homemaker? The lights keep flickering out in the store and people are fumbling in the dark for what they need. What is it that I need at this point in my life? In what sense am I fumbling in the dark? Is the darkness symbolic of the heaviness which weighs me down right now at work?

I am reminded of the Chernobyl dream. This experience is not all that different. I could not turn it off, at the end of the day then, and I am waking in the middle of the night, unable to turn it off now. I dream I am in a large city, and there is a sniper on the roof of a tall building. It may be significant that I do not see him, although I know he is there, because as much as I hate to acknowledge it, this destructive image is a side of me which I have difficulty seeing: a Shadow side, a self-sabotaging side which must be held accountable. A woman in coveralls saves the day (an efficient, take-charge side of myself which also appears to exist within). She commandeers a telephone company van, a vehicle of communication, and somehow things are brought to a peaceful conclusion. I talk to my husband and to colleagues about my struggles to balance work and home. In the dream, others are calling loved ones from pay-phones in a hotel lobby to say, "I am safe." I tell myself in the dream that there is no one to call, because no one knows what I have been through. The dream tells me that I am feeling even more isolated and overwhelmed by my work than I realized. This, too, I need to share with someone.

I dream that a woman executioner has me bound and I am facing electrocution. I fight to extricate myself from the cords and wake up from the dream with the awareness that there is something about the current, the electricity or the current

situation, which threatens my life (probably not physically, but at least psychologically). I am drained by too many extreme situations that demand my full attention. In response to this obvious message to myself, I book a couple of weeks of vacation. If I do not take care of myself, I will be no good to anyone. I need to model the principle of healthy self-care for my clients.

#### FULL CIRCLE: A NEW BEGINNING

I dream I am sitting in a circle and conversing with others: sometimes intelligent and well-educated women at the university, sometimes community resource people called together to problem-solve, sometimes a circle of healing and therapy. In one of these groups, I am presented with a tapestry which I am told represents my writing: the weaving together of dreams and stories and life experience. The tapestry is done in a variety of mediums and stitches, ranging from coarse, bulky and rough, to tiny, dainty and intricate. It is done in shades of beige and gold, and is about two feet square in size. These are the contours of my story. It is not an evenly spaced continuous weaving without its flaws. It is a tension of differences.

In yet another dream as I approach the final days of this thesis-writing, the gift given (this time by a woman who has been a sort of mentor) is a quilt in the form of a semicircle.

I am told it is to hang on the wall of my office. The squares are of houses, ranging from the primitive to the exquisite and finely detailed, and done in earth-tones (greens and browns). I wake up with the sense that the evolution of my psyche or my Self, over many months, is depicted in these squares. It is interesting that in the dream, my tiny one-room office has expanded into a work-place which includes a second, much larger and as-yet-unfurnished adjacent room. It is in this second room that the quilt is intended to hang. The additional space likely represents again an expanding concept of my Self, particularly with reference to the work I do and to the work to which I feel called.

#### IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE: THE FINAL HOME-COMING

I return to Prince Edward Island unexpectedly in the closing days of thesis-writing. My father is in intensive-care and recovering from a heart attack. He has never been ill before, or so I believe. Actually, he has stoically kept it to himself and kept it from all of us, when he has experienced chest pain before, we eventually discover. He is known at the hospital, but not by his family.

Two months ago, he told my husband that he had been thinking about things and that he felt he had failed me. He could not tell me that himself, and it is the closest I will

come to an apology. He cannot open up that box with me, but it is all right. The message has been relayed, just as he hoped it would be, and today as he lies in his narrow hospital bed, we exchange one of those knowing winks that have always signalled our mutual affection for each other.

I spend time with my mother and speak with a candour I have never used in her presence before: about the things I remember, and the way I see her now in my dreams, about the changes in her life and their life together, which will have to take place now that my father is not well.

I spend time with one of my sisters and share my writing with her. To my surprise, I discover that I have managed after all to bring someone with me on the journey. She is keeping track of her dreams and journalling. She has resolved, as I have, that these will be the best years of her life.

Once again I find myself at a cross-roads my thesis supervisor will remember, because it was the subject of a card she sent me a year ago. Mary Engelbreit's sketch depicted someone heading down a road that was named "Your Life". The other fork led in a direction labelled "No Longer an Option". Wherever the road leads, I think of Kim Chernin's words in *Re-inventing Eve* as applicable to myself: "The future is blank, an empty page in an open book. But the pen is in her hand and



that hand belongs now to a woman who has freed herself of what she has been taught to be." (Chernin, 1994, p. 12).

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