

Befriending the Darkness:  
A Creative Exploration of the Shadow

Jennifer Finn

Submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy from Prescott College  
in  
Sustainability Education

May 2014

Joan Clingan, Ph.D.  
Dissertation Advisor

Celeste Snowber, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

David Greenwood, Ph.D.  
External Expert Reader

Leonard Fleischer, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

Copyright © 2014 by Jennifer Finn

All rights reserved.

No part of this thesis may be used, reproduced, stored, recorded, or transmitted in any form or manner whatsoever without written permission from the copyright holder or her agent(s), except in the case of brief quotations embodied in the papers of students, and in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Requests for such permissions should be sent to:

[jenny@jennyfinn.com](mailto:jenny@jennyfinn.com)

“The dark has its own light.”  
~Theodore Roethke

“Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness.  
It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift.”  
~Mary Oliver

“You can only come to the morning through the shadows.”  
~J.R.R. Tolkein

Dedication

To the light inside the dark,  
to the voice within my body,  
that lifted me from despair  
and brought me home

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to those who have walked with me on this journey. I could not have done this without them. To my family, Andy, Andrew, and Lizzie who have supported me every step of the way, I love you and words cannot express my gratitude. To my family of origin, my mom Kathy, my sister Jill, my brother Jeff, and to my father John who now lives beyond the stars, you have taught me so much. To my friend Jenny who helped me to not take myself so seriously and to be rigorously honest with myself throughout the whole process. To my beloved cohort and faculty in this program, Molly, Dan, Abigail, Nicky, Linky, Kerri, John, Coral, Rick and Pramod—you have held my hand when I cried, danced and sang with me in celebration, and loved me through every moment I was filled with self-doubt. To my dear committee, Joan, Celeste, Len, and David, who through their commitment and rigor, kept me true to my heart and encourage me to let go of my old stories to live into the new. To all of my teachers who have led me back home to myself, I would not be here without you. To those I interviewed, I am inspired by each of you, and hold so much hope for our collective transformation because of your work in the world. And finally, to the light inside the dark, thank you for giving me the courage and direction to be myself in the world.

### Abstract

Living wholeheartedly is an act of service to the world, and living wholly as I explore in this dissertation, means welcoming the darkness. This dissertation explores the transformative value of the darkness and the power of facing the personal shadow, what it means to live a wholehearted life, and the light of knowing that connects us to ourselves and each other, and is found in the darkness of one's experience. The stories of those I gathered, including my own, are at the heart of this dissertation. This study takes an heuristic, auto-ethnographic, narrative approach and continues the ancient conversation about the transformative power of seeking wholeness through stories of my own, and those of six teachers, devoted to living an engaged and wholehearted life.

*Keywords:* darkness, light, wholehearted, shadow, creativity, courage, transformation

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Reconstructing Darkness: The Site of Alchemy and Transformation.....	1
Time to Go Into the Dark.....	2
Shadow Defined.....	5
Darkness Transformed.....	10
Implications of Ignoring the Darkness.....	19
The Dark Earth.....	20
Privileging the Light: Oppressing the Dark.....	23
Where Dark Meets Light: Molly and Me.....	30
Black is Beautiful.....	35
Befriending Death: The Greatest Darkness.....	38
Wholehearted Living: Welcoming What Is.....	41
Chapter 2. Methodology and Method: The Map and the Walking Stick.....	45
Heuristic Methodology: An Intimate Map.....	45
Narrative Inquiry: The Gathering of Stories.....	49
Critical Indigenous Pedagogy: Going into the Shadow.....	51
Social Constructs of the Light and Dark: Unexpected Tension.....	54
Methods: The Walking Stick.....	59
Auto-Ethnography: The Study of the Self and the Whole.....	59
Intuitive Inquiry: To Listen from Within.....	62
Autobiography.....	67
Arts-Based Inquiry as Method.....	69

Flaneur: The Art of Walking and Wandering.....	70
Chapter 3. Living a Wholehearted Life.....	74
Sense of Place.....	76
The Body: Our First Home.....	77
Integration: The Dance of Body and Soul.....	79
Honoring Limits: The Privilege of Living Our Years.....	81
Earth: Having a Sense of Place.....	86
The Wound: How Comfort Can Disconnect.....	88
Sacred Connection: Heaven on Earth.....	91
Teachings from the Earth.....	93
Sense of the Sacred: Leading a Mystical Life.....	98
Mysticism: Experiencing the Sacred.....	99
Sustaining the Mystical: Living Out a Call.....	103
Choosing the Sacred.....	106
Self Study.....	109
Relationship: Strengthening Self through Connection to Others.....	117
Mentor: The Gift of Being Guided.....	126
Presence: The Gift Offered.....	131
Creativity and Spirituality: Reclaiming the Wildness of the Soul.....	139
Holding to the Difficult: Welcoming Wholeness.....	148
Difficulty: Owned and Unowned.....	150
The Gifts of Facing Difficulty.....	155
Resiliency.....	155

Humility and Reverence.....	159
Interconnectedness.....	165
Vulnerability: Reflections on Openness, Engagement, and Acceptance.....	169
Pedagogy of Vulnerability.....	171
Holding Two Truths: Navigating Ambiguity.....	179
Telling the Story of Ambiguity through Jungian Archetypes.....	182
Traversing Complexity and Chaos.....	185
Chapter 4. Inner Knowing: My True North.....	189
Knowing from the Inside Out.....	191
Getting Perspective: The Relationship Between Brokenness and Wholeness.....	196
Following the Call: Acting from Center.....	201
Future Directions.....	205
References.....	208
APPENDIX A. Biographical Statements of those Interviewed.....	237
APPENDIX B. Wordle Application for each Interview.....	243

## Chapter 1. Reconstructing Darkness: The Site of Alchemy and Transformation

I learned to turn within for wisdom at a young age. Through devoted teachers and practices that kept me close to myself, I learned that the light of understanding rests within the darkness of my own experience. When I moved toward my loneliness, it turned into devotion. When I stopped numbing my pain and breathed with it, it moved through me. I have devoted my life personally and professionally to this wisdom that is so complex and pervasive, that the Celt's call it "the Life of all life" (Newell, 1997, p. 76). In this dissertation, I tell my own story as a teacher, mother, partner, daughter, friend, sister, and student. I also share the stories of six teachers who have been reclaiming intimacy and fostering wholeness through their teaching for decades.

Melissa was my teacher. She held my hand for years as I danced my way back into my body. She is a force for wholeness. Jessica is a dear friend and colleague. She reminds others of their beauty daily through yogic philosophy and her own lived integrity. She is one of the most trustworthy people I know. Carl inspired me as an academic; not sacrificing one iota of his heart and soul in his writing. His words gave me the strength to write this dissertation in the way that I have. Melanie's voice and heart moves mountains; mountains of racism, fear, disconnection, and scarcity. Her vibrancy for life is palpable, and her compassion runs deep. Manulani speaks from wisdom rooted in the Hawaiian land that she loves and the ancestors she relies on. She encourages a holistic way of knowing that requires bold and determined choices to face the truth in one's life. Lauren is called to reweave the connection between human beings and the natural world. Everything she does is in service to this call. I have been fortunate enough to spend the past months with the words and work of these engaged teachers. I am deeply grateful for their time and care in this inquiry and I respect their personhood and work immensely. As a result of

the intimacy and depth I experienced with these teachers, I will be referring to them by first name throughout my dissertation (see Appendix A for full biographical statements). The data from the interviews will be cited throughout the dissertation with the first name of the interviewee following the data in parentheses.

The flow of this dissertation is as organic as the inquiry itself. The journey begins with an exploration of the darkness and its relationship to the personal shadow. In Chapter two, I describe the methods and methodologies used in this study including a way of being I call radical wholeheartedness, that emerged in this process. In Chapter three, I describe how, after my conversations with these teachers, this exploration of the shadow became a treatise on what it means to live a wholehearted life. And in Chapter four, I conclude by describing the knowing that we ultimately find as treasure in the darkness of our inner experience. This inquiry is intimate, magical, and earthy. It brings to the conversation how courageously facing the personal shadow affects the ways in which we live in the world. This has been a transformational journey for me that has deeply explored the question: Do I have the discipline to turn toward the darkness of my inner experience and face the whole of the human experience with courage and creativity? How does this act affect my relationship to the planet and its people? The stories that I gathered here, including my own, speak to this question.

### **Time to Go Into the Dark**

When I was growing up I taped plastic Christmas candles to the windows. They were crowned by bright orange old-fashioned bulbs that would get so hot I could smell them, as they pressed up against the purple metal Venetian blinds in my bedroom. As the day turned into evening, I would lay in my bed and watch as the orange light grew brighter. We did not have window sills in our suburban home so many days were spent taping the neck of these faux

candles to the freezing cold windows. Often I would hear a thunk, only to find a fallen candle with its orange shadow spreading out across the floor. I would tape the candle back to the window to the point where there would be three or four layers of tape on the window. As a child, I wanted to make sure that anyone who passed by our windows could glimpse that orange glow. It was a mission that I never gave up on. I have always wanted to share with others, the light that I love so much.

I love light—how it shines brighter in the dark and how it warms me and makes things grow. I like to be able to see and make sense of things. I love to feel expansive, like the light of the sun taking up the whole sky, and I love to be seen. I have always felt safer in the light of day than alone in the middle of the night, and like most of us, I like to know where I am headed. In the light we can see what is in front of us so it is easier to get around. Because of this ease of relationship with the light, I privileged it over the dark; valuing expansion over contraction, the fullness of summer more than the starkness of winter, and favoring the reach of a tree over the hidden roots that make the reach possible. I loved the light so much that I lost connection to the dark earth of my body, and when I asked Melissa why she agreed to be interviewed in this study, she spoke to my love of light in her response.

I am so thrilled with where you have gone with your life. I remember when you first came in [to work with her in a year-long apprenticeship], there was so much orientation toward light and spirit; very powerful, true, but not fully anchored. And I've watched you...go through a lot of different phases like all of us, there was a phase of imitation, and there was individuation and expansion, and I would never have predicted this is where you would land and do a dissertation; land so deeply that you would do your dissertation in these realms. So there was just this pure delight and curiosity and honor. I honor what

you've done with yourself Jenny, because for you to land here, tells me you've really been on a transformational journey. (Melissa)

I longed for a sense of humility and reverence that is often lost when roots are not honored. I longed for wholeness that is so often sacrificed when the light is privileged over the dark. On my journey I have remembered, through many great teachers including the Earth herself, that the light is known in the dark. That like body and breath, we cannot have one without the other.

I never learned to navigate the unknown. The darkness scared me and I avoided it at all costs; particularly the darkness within me. I neglected what did not feel good and put my difficult feelings and experiences away somewhere deep inside of me where even I could not find them. My anger, my joy, and eventually my essence, retreated into the darkness of my consciousness, and the deeper they sank, the greater effort it took to reclaim them. This hidden place within us, that Carl Jung (2006) named the shadow, must be explored to experience wholeness. The descent within is where I, and those I have interviewed, have come to know wholeness. Tarrant (1998) writes "Before we can rise up, we must go down and through" (p. 28). It is a choice to go within and reflect on what is real; to drop the masks and be with the creatures calling from inside. Celtic scholar John Philip Newell (1997) writes that we must "clearly identify the shadow within our own hearts and do battle with it there" (p. 63). From my experience and from the experience of those I interviewed, it is clear that to better know ourselves, we must enter the guarded and unknown places within.

It was not until I had the courage to turn toward myself that I understood the power of the darkness. It was not until I learned creative ways to be with what scared me that I came to know that avoiding, numbing, or projecting my pain was ineffective. When I closed my eyes and turned toward the darkness of my inner experience I felt empowered to be in the world, rather

than being a victim to it. Living wholeheartedly, or living from the wholeness of who I am, began simply by closing my eyes and turning toward the darkness that is within me. Those I interviewed for this study have taken the journey inward, and continue to take it, as well as lead others to do the same. Through dance, poetry, wilderness rites of passage, yoga, song, and indigenous wisdom, the six people I interviewed are committed to wholehearted living by accepting all that lives within; and that includes the places that are unknown, uncomfortable, and even painful. We are all called to wholeness, and wholeness does not come from simply standing in the light, or in the places that we know and feel comfortable with. Wholeness comes from traversing the ground that we are not familiar with; the places within that we have left behind. This dissertation explores what it means to befriend the darkness and examines what it means to relate creatively and courageously to the shadow.

### **Shadow Defined**

When light shines on form, a shadow is cast. Because we are both form and formless, dark and light, the shadow is always with us. Robert Bly (1988), author of *A Little Book on the Human Shadow* writes,

We notice that when sunlight hits the body, the body turns bright but it throws a shadow, which is dark. The brighter the light, the darker the shadow. Each of us has some part of our personality that is hidden from us. Parents and teachers in general, urge us to develop the light side of our personality...to become successful. The dark part then becomes starved. (p. 4)

The shadow is that which has been denied or repressed in our individual psyches. Over the years, many of us receive praise for certain qualities or behaviors, and are criticized for others. We learn to hide the criticized parts of ourselves and to live out of the places within us that shine. We

collect what has been denied in a “long black bag” (Bly, 1988), and to reclaim these aspects of ourselves, we must open the bag and explore what lives in the darkness. This is shadow recovery. If a person has not learned the tools to navigate darkness (or even for those who have), this inner landscape can be uncomfortable at best, and terrifying at worst. This is why we so often avoid it.

In this study I explore the power of facing the personal shadow, and how courageously and creatively facing the unknown affects our lives, and relationship to the world around us. The shadow can be personal, communal, and even national (Bly, 1988; Huebl, 2010) and there are well-developed resources available to help navigate the shadow on these levels. But the research in the area of shadow recovery is scant (Espada, n.d.; McClary, 2007; Meredith-Owen, 2011).

To enter the shadow is to enter the darkness of the unknown and to meet the limits of one’s humanness. When I close my eyes and enter into relationship with the darkness of my inner experience, I have no idea what I might encounter. I might meet repressed feelings (Greenspan, 2003), memories that have retreated to the recesses of the psyche, or “blood memories” (Melanie)—memories that rest in the body born from one’s ancestry. There are various approaches used to engage the personal shadow (Bly, 1988; Brown-Taylor, 2014; Brown-Taylor, 2014; Casement, 2006; Ford, 1998; Jung, 2009; Jung, 2012; Meredith-Owen, 2011; Richo, 1999; Zweig, 1990). Creative expression is one of them (Bly, 1988; McClary, 2007), as is reclaiming projections, where we take back what we have disowned onto others (Casement, 2006; Jung, 2012; Richo, 1999; Zweig, 1990). Both of these practices require a deep level of self awareness and the willingness to ask deeper questions of oneself as Lauren speaks to here.

I think as we grow up we’re affected by things, and subconsciously, they end up in our shadow; as Robert Bly calls it that long black bag we drag behind us. And if you’re

taking the time out to stop and really explore kind of the deeper questions of life. Who am I? What am I doing here? Why am I here?, the things that are getting in our way of being truly connected, of being powerful, of having a voice, of following our longing, of taking risks, but conscious risks not just taking a risk to be a rebel, the things that stop us from achieving that, is usually the stuff that is in our shadow. Not always. Sometimes it's a very healthy sense of responsibility that keeps us from saying, I want to just quit my job tomorrow, but it can also be a shadow aspect to it. I don't really think I'll succeed if I really, really do what I want to do. I'm not good enough. Or my art's not good enough. Or how could I ever imagine that I could do this, that, or the next thing. So I think that shadow comes up almost as soon as we begin to explore these deeper questions. But then the question is do we recognize it or not? And that's part of the Animas [Animas Valley Institute where Lauren guides wilderness rites of passage groups] commitment is to really attend to that piece of ourselves so that we recognize it. The whole idea of shadow is that you can't see it, but you can certainly recognize the manifestation and elements in the ways in which it affects your life. So then you can be more proactive and conscious about decision-making knowing that it's there. The more I understand about my own shadow the more helpful I could be to the people in my world and to the world itself because I'm moving from a place of more conscious intention, instead of being pulled around by this or that shadow. (Lauren)

Finding our way in the darkness is a path that must be chosen and requires the light of consciousness. Joseph Campbell (2008) the great mythologist calls this the hero's journey, where those who choose to depart the habit of their lives, enter the "belly of the whale" (p. 74), and return to share the wisdom they have received with the world. Bly (1988) calls this exiling,

hunting, and retrieving the shadow. Committing to this journey does have an effect on the way in which we live. When we shine light into the darker corners of ourselves we lighten our load in many ways.

The more we explore the shadow creatively and courageously, the less dense it becomes. When we choose to become vulnerable we tear open the shadow to let light shine through, and from my experience, the light does not rest once it is known. It leads us more deeply into the darkness to know it ever more fully. In shadow recovery, the journey is not linear. We spiral inward toward a deeper knowing that is first known personally and grow into a wider sense of connectedness with the world. “[T]ruly to grow...is the capacity to grow inward, grow down, into the moss of our soul and let it become the soil for our blossoming” (Snowber, 2009). This is in stark contrast to what we are seeing today in the world. Connection to the outer world begins with connection to self, and we cannot have connection without a willingness to be vulnerable (Brown, 2012). Relating to oneself means taking the “time to go into the dark” (Whyte, 2007, p. 348), and lean into the darkness of one’s inner world.

We need [shadow work] in our lives; in our family relationships, and in our community and we need it of course worldwide. Ultimately the acknowledgement of shadow is a way of acknowledging that we are all interconnected. That everything is interconnected....And it’s that sense of connectedness that I would like poets in particular, and philosophers, but I would love poets to take up that sense of the connectedness, of the connectedness to everything, everywhere, for all time, so we could actually begin to begin making some sense of the craziness that emerges around so many of the racist, religious, and so many of the kinds of ways in which people hate other people because they are other. And that whole notion of the other, that’s probably for me, what I’m most concerned about these

days. Wanting to acknowledge how the other isn't actually other at all. But that the one we think of as other is in fact with us, related to us, related to me, related to, so that we get away from the I and the you as setting up a relationship of distinct difference. And we begin to see how through vast connections we are all of us, connected. And all of us responsible for one another and responsible for responding to one another.

So beginning with attending to the shadow, the vulnerability, the wounds, the past, the many hopes that have not worked out, the sense of loss and grief that comes with death or with growing old, not accomplishing certain things that one might have hoped at one time to accomplish, all of this needs to be embraced as a part of human life and all people especially need to, well on the one hand old people need to be listened to, but old people need to take on the responsibility for speaking from that perspective of old age and sharing the stories that are stories of encouragement as if their stories are almost being spoken from the future back to people who are younger. (Carl)

The personal can become interconnected when we go deep enough to touch that which includes our personal story, but goes beyond it at the same time.

Even an organization can have a shadow. When I asked Lauren, who works in an academic institution about the shadow of the academy, after some pause she responded.

I mean I think there is generally not enough honest self-reflection. There's too much image engaged, and the entire system of tenure and how people get tenure especially at an elite institution...does not allow for people to be outside the box. There is a very clear path to tenure and professorship and brilliant people are doing amazing work, but I wonder how much more would happen if there wasn't such, immense peer pressure, and immense systemic pressure, to tow the line and to be inside the box at all times. What

you see is the professors as they get older they don't give a shit anymore and then they can really, really do some super creative and fantastic stuff. But when they're younger they pretty much have to tow the line or they are not going to succeed in the academic environment. And that's sad because many of them are so brilliant and could do so much stuff if they were free to kind of do it in a different way. I mean what did Einstein say, it was imagination not brains that were really important for huge breakthroughs. (Lauren)

Whether we are talking about the personal or organizational shadow, we are talking about darkness. Whatever is hidden away from the light of day is in the shadow, and if left unaddressed, it will come forward in other ways (Neumann, 1990). It became clear quickly that in this study, I could not separate the shadow from its dark nature. Therefore how I perceive the darkness deeply affects my willingness to engage the shadow within.

### **Darkness Transformed**

You darkness from which I come,  
I love you more than all the fires  
that fence out the world,  
for the fire makes a circle  
for everyone  
so that no one sees you anymore.

But darkness holds it all:  
the shape and the flame,  
the animal and myself,  
how it holds them,  
all powers, all sight

and it is possible: it's great strength  
is breaking into my body.

I have faith in the night.

~Rainer Maria Rilke

I visited northern India during *Diwali*, the Festival of Lights, in Calcutta; a region named after the goddess of darkness Kali (Kali-Cut). There they honor the light by honoring the goddess of darkness. Throughout the streets of Calcutta there were neighborhood shrines set up with people surrounding them, sipping chai tea out of clay cups. A man walked around with a silver pot of tea and chanting filled the air. Kali stood tall with a necklace of skulls hung around her neck. She was at least 10-feet tall, made out of paper mache, and intricately painted. When the neighborhood celebration was over, Kali was put into the back of a pick-up truck and everyone followed the truck to the Hooghly River; a branch of the sacred Ganges. When we got to the river, six men picked the statue of Kali up and threw her into the river. I could see other paper mache statues floating down the river, where people were gathering drinking water, and bathing. We danced on the edge of the river; celebrating the light by honoring the darkness. Darkness is the birthplace of transformation. I came from darkness. You came from darkness. All life is born from darkness. Ignoring, degrading, or avoiding the darkness, the place where all life originates, has tragic consequences; some of them being the oppression of others, living small, and ignoring the planetary costs of our comforts. The darkness is simply the unexplored, unknown, unseen territory within and around us, and when we celebrate it like in Calcutta, we welcome wholeness.

Difficulty arises in the darkness for lots of reasons. I drove home one night on the Blue Ridge parkway and it was dark as dark can get. I could not see a thing. My breath shortened, I panicked that I might not find my way home, and I felt scared. All because I could not see. Darkness impairs visual perception. In an over-illuminated culture that relies heavily on the ability to see to feel safe, it makes sense that many of us see the darkness in as bad (Jessica) (Steidl, Werth, & Hanke, 2010). The negativity surrounding darkness has a lot to do with being unable to see with our eyes, and therefore make sense of the physical plane (Edensor, 2013). When we

cannot see, we bump into things, and are more awkward because of it. We might even get hurt, and sometimes what we meet in the dark has been there for a long time so we don't know it that well, and it scares us. It could be a new skill to learn, a memory to recover, or a feeling to feel, but whatever it is, befriending the darkness is about befriending the unknown. When I turn my focus to what I cannot see—close my eyes and study myself, ask an ancestor who has died for help, notice what is behind me, breathe into a feeling I would rather not, or am open to what I do not know—I embrace the experience of the dark and learn to trust what I cannot see. This is an excerpt taken from my interview with Jessica that describes this beautifully.

JP: We are a culture that says we have to see it to believe it...but the reality is most of what we believe, if you really get down to it, are not seeable things. They are felt things...We don't believe what we see so much as we feel something, then we believe it, then we look to see it around us. To the exclusion of anything that would be contrary, or would challenge it, or would complicate it, deepen it, make it richer. And when you first started to ask the question, immediately what came to me in my mind, was again having grown up in the wilderness a lot, spent much of my time in the woods day and night, is a honed comfort with night vision. The moon is always full. The only difference is in our understanding of new moon, full moon, half moon, is how much light it is reflecting. And the darkness, the darker the night, when you go out on a new moon night, the first few moons of a cycle, you can acclimate to that vision and you will see things that in the light of day would look so different. But you begin to see the patterns...that's how I feel shadow works, is not in pinpointed details of the light vision, but in patterns. Which is why I think it is hard for us sometimes..like when we go through grief and there's the singularity, the event that you are grieving right now, and yet there is this whole territory

of a pattern of how grief has moved through one's body, moved through one's family, what it feels like, what it looks like, all of that. And learning to see in constellations, in patterns, in webs is the work of shadow. Because you only see that stuff when there is a shadow. Literally. And the concrete details, I can point to this, I can point to that, I can point to this, is what comes out of that light. So, I am thinking of the way that darkness as an element or as an experience, but even as the way, like in yoga we talk about maya..maya is the illusion. This is all an illusion, but that's not all it means, because it reveals, as it conceals. By concealing a little bit, something deeper is revealed. And it's just like that idea of coming out of something that is really tragic or hard or uncomfortable, deepens and makes richer the light.

J: Because of the contrast?

JP: Because of the contrast and the relationship of it. Like the exhale to the inhale.

J: They really can't be separate.

JP: You'll never find that place where it's like..and now it's an inhale. One morphs into the other and the depth of one will make possible the depth of the other. If you have a landscape that you come to know really well, like I have. I have been really blessed that there is a place that I know really well. So, I have been in it in midday, in summer, and I have been there at midnight and in winter, and I have been there before the sun rises, and I've been able to be in it, in an exterior landscape, me a part of it in all of those lights, and I know that what's revealed to me in the darkness is just as, if not more, informative and instructive as what I see in the brightest light. Because the shadows don't just hide things, they reveal things that you can't see when it's just shining on it, happy all the time. There are things you'll miss, nuances of your substance, when its just one setting. (Jessica)

When perceived negatively, the darkness is something we choose to avoid rather than embrace. When I asked a room full of graduate students what feelings, words, and experiences came to mind when they heard the word darkness, they responded with words like fear, suffocation, loneliness, holding breath, terror, and afraid. Some responded with the words rest, peace, nurturing, snuggling and womb, but over half indicated negative experiences of the dark. Indigenous wisdom deeply values the dark, or the descent, as the site of growth and enduring wisdom (O'Donohue, 1997; Plotkin, 2008). Transformation cannot occur without the darkness—a baby from the womb, a flower from the seed, the agony of releasing a tightly held grief—but it seems we have forgotten this. Even some of the most ancient forms of life thrive in the darkness.

I was just reading in the local paper recently that some scientists have discovered that there is life very deep under the surface of the Earth. It's microbes or something like that, that are absolutely ancient. You know they are deep, deep, deep in the crust of the Earth. And scientists are beginning to think that the life that is under the surface of the Earth could be the kind of life that might be available on other planets of the universe as well. And I'm just struck by the idea that in the deepest darkness in the Earth's core could be creatures that have been living for millions of years. (Carl)

The dark is defined as the partial or total absence of light but it is also defined as wickedness, evil, dismal, and gloomy (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Darkness has been defined negatively for centuries now (Brown-Taylor, 2014; Plotkin, 2008; Sherman & Clore, 2009), particularly by those of us raised in Western, or more linear, societies. Much to my surprise, this study of the shadow turned into a deconstruction of the darkness. To examine how we got to the point of degrading darkness is a tall task. I stand in the middle of a complicated woven tapestry of history and slow change. Ancient wisdom, societal transitions, and how we have moved through the

world as human beings since the beginning of time, is a long story (Berry 1988). I will not go into this story in this dissertation, but it is one that has to do with how we define the light and the dark (Eisler, 1995; Garrison, 2000). The Enlightenment, and other major historical and religious events, have contributed to the misrepresentation of the darkness by privileging the light over the dark. It is enough to say here, that the darkness was repressed and then ill defined, causing us to move away from it rather than embrace it as essential to the transformative process. Darkness is part of life (Tarrant, 1998) and welcoming it allows for the possibility of transformation.

Just like light, darkness is a quality of experience. Darkness is darkness. Darkness is not bad. It is not difficulty. It is not pain. It is an experience. We have all heard phrases that situate the dark in the negative, like “I am going through dark times” when we are experiencing difficult times, or “He went over to the dark side” when someone has taken an abhorrent action. I learned through this study that befriending the darkness is not the same as befriending difficulty. When I began this inquiry I thought they were one and the same. Darkness is an experience but it is not inherently difficult or painful. You might encounter these feelings in the dark, whether you are running through the dark forest thinking a bear is chasing you or you are running through the memories within you dodging painful memories. When I asked Melissa what she perceives me to mean when I say darkness, she responded something “potentially destructive” or “potentially negative” (Melissa). That moment shined the light on my own perceptions of the dark. Whether that is walking through your bedroom in the middle of the night and bumping into the dresser, or closing your eyes and going into the unknown within yourself and bumping into the memory of your father dying, darkness can be painful, and even scary. We can have these experiences in the dark but the dark itself is essentially not these things. This distinction is important because oppressing the darkness has repressive consequences to the individual, but it has tragic social and

planetary implications as well. Many of us have been taught to flee from pain and difficulty in this country and move toward comfort. If we flee from the darkness because we equate it with being scary, painful, or difficult, then we are fleeing from the very place where all life originates. For everything that is living, darkness is the birthplace of transformation. For those of us who see the darkness as negative, the dark is enmeshed with fear, which makes it less approachable. But when I decide to lean into it, I find a freedom in the darkness born from honoring both the dark and the light; a freedom born from wholeness as Jessica describes here.

I am not a morose person. I am not a depressed person. I've certainly had depressive periods. I am not a macabre person and I am not a dark person. I am not afraid of the darkness...The people who strike me as wallowing, you know the words that we use in our culture that are just so mean in a way, the wallowing, the stuck in something, you know she's just stuck in her darkness and this and that, I find those are the people who just have no tolerance for darkness. And it's like that difference between someone who insists on having all the lights on, and so when they try to go out into the darkness they insist on having this one beam where they can only see what's right there. Versus if you just let yourself adjust to moonlight or starlight then you can see things. And it's an intolerance or a fear of the darkness that creates that what we might call the wallowing or getting stuck in it...You might feel fear. You might feel all those things but instead of being your fear, running from it, making sure there is no darkness ever, becoming so intolerant of the shadow sides of ourselves, it gives it a kind of weight that has no transformative potential. So I really do feel like the greatest, the things that have evoked in me the greatest wisdom came out of that kind of undoing that feels in the moment like death, that feels in the moment like darkness. Or feels like tragedy, feels like you are

never going to make it. You know empty bank account, broken heart, body shutting down, all of those kinds of things. You are like this is it. It's over. And because of that something gets reborn. I feel like that's why for me. It's not just that hard things are the only way we learn but I don't, I can't separate the really joyful moments from the moments that didn't feel like joy. But they made it possible...If you want to take a really deep inhale, the exhale that comes before that is going to have to be even deeper. That shadow, that darkness, the letting go, the deaths, make the space and provide the fodder for this. (Jessica)

In many ways Western culture has privileged the light over the dark psychically, spiritually, and physically; mostly because it is easier to navigate. Whether that is through the polarization of light and dark through religious constructs like heaven and hell, or through valuing the intellect more than the intuitive aspects of the human experience, the light is privileged far more than the dark (Eisler, 1995; Tarrant, 1998; Plotkin, 2008). It is important that we not only recover the darkness from its negative constructs but also recognize that it is not separate from the light many of us crave.

Darkness invites a different way of seeing and knowing. When I am literally in the dark, I can't see, or can see very little. I have to move more slowly, carefully, intuitively, and use my body more to navigate my way than I would when I am in the light. I invite the reader to close your eyes and try to move around your space in this moment. Notice the tools you use to find your way. I am guessing they are different than those use when your eyes are open. Your breath. Your body to feel your way. Your intuition or the guidance of another person. If I choose not to navigate the dark, I miss out on its treasures; one being the light of knowing within me. To perceive the darkness as transformative requires learning a new story about darkness. Ancient

and contemporary wisdom can help with this. Celtic tradition honors the dark as natural; as equal to the light. John O'Donohue (1997) the late Celtic philosopher writes, "Darkness is the ancient womb. Nighttime is womb time. Our souls come out to play. The darkness absolves everything; the struggle for identity and impression falls away. We rest in the night" (p. 3). The light is not separate from the dark. The light is known in the dark. They are in deep relationship with each other. But when the darkness is feared, that fear trumps this understanding.

[There] is an inclusion of the light and the dark, the seen and the unseen. It's all of that. It's an integration of all of those energies that accepts the light and the dark and really integrating that and not keeping things so separate because they are not. I mean light fades into day, day fades into night. (Melanie)

To know one truly and deeply, you must know the other intimately. Restoration of wholeness will not happen by choosing dark over light or light over dark. It is when we honor both that wholeness is experienced.

I just had that with a student who was like "You're so focused on wound and trauma." Actually I'm not. I'd like us to put the word spiritual bypass in the room just so we know that that's a potential of what's going on here....I am so into going down and rising up and the middle space. I am so into cultivating all of that and they nourish each other so beautifully. But I am not into just going down. I'm not into it. That just doesn't work for me at all. Because I love the expansive light, the levity that comes through this dance. (Melissa)

Ancient wisdom (Campbell, 2013; Harding, 1993; Newell, 1997; Kavanaugh, 1991; Woodman, 1997), contemporary scholars (Chodron, 2002; O'Donohue, 2011; Plotkin, 2008; Tarrant, 1998; Neumann, 1990), and poets and artists alike (Rilke, 2011; Roth, Whyte, 2007; Noble & Webster,

n.d.), illustrate new ways of relating to the darkness and shadow. It is possible to “to move into darkness in order to understand what beauty is....[and to] build a civilization that is aware of darkness as it is of beauty” (Lopez, 2010). Even here, Lopez positions darkness as opposite to beauty. I wonder what it might be like if we could not only accept the darkness, but value it deeply enough to consider it beautiful.

### **Implications of Ignoring the Darkness**

“The longest, most arduous trip in the world is often the journey from the head to the heart.  
Until that round trip is completed, we remain at war with ourselves.  
And of course, those at war with themselves are apt to make casualties of others.”

~William Sloane Coffin

When my son was six years old he had a nightmare. In the black night, he awakened startled and began to tell me all about it. “Mommy,” he said, “I was being chased by a gigantic praying mantis. I kept running and he wouldn’t stop chasing me.” After a few breaths and some hugs, I asked him to close his eyes and put himself back in the dream. He resisted at first but then agreed to do it. He imagined being chased and in the middle of the chase, I asked him to turn around and face the enormous insect. “Ask him what he wants,” I said. With a deep breath and a lot of courage he did, and after a few minutes he looked into my eyes and said, “Mommy, he said he just wants to be friends.” The darkness within, longs for the welcome of friendship. We usually run from the darkness of our inner experience because something pops out and scares us. Old feelings, a memory, physical pain. If we have not been taught to show up for what scares us, we will evacuate the inner experience pretty quickly. When my son breathed into the praying mantis, he chose to show up for what scares him. It was from this place of presence that he could hear what the darkness longed to teach him. Many of us have been taught to run from what is painful (Greenspan, 2003; Brown, 2012) and to turn away from the “praying mantis” and look

outside of ourselves for comfort. This collective grasping is causing serious detriment to the planet and its species.

### **The Dark Earth**

To love the Earth, let us start with our own—the earth of our bodies, of our lives. “No one becomes local from a universal location” (Friere, 1997, p. 109). At the risk of stating the obvious, to connect with the global we must start with our own experience. Where else would we start? Disconnecting from our own experience disconnects us from the world. Rilke writes “Going into yourself and meeting no one for hours on end, that is what you must be able to attain” (2011, p. 27). There are critics (Wall, 2006) who call this self-reflection navel-gazing (intense self-reflection) and it most certainly can be, if self-exploration is too weighted on personal. There is a delicate balance to be held where the earthiness of human form is respected without losing sight of the invisible web that connects us all. Leaning too heavy oneway or the other can be dangerous. Spiritually bypassing the pain of this human form or getting mired in the muck of it can cause suffering and confusion (Tarrant, 1999). Self-reflection finds its depth by descending into the human experience, not by ascending from it (Plotkin, 2008). Like the namaste blessing I heard as I traveled throughout India:

I honor the place in you where the whole universe resides.  
I honor the place in you of love, light, truth, and peace.  
I honor the place in you, where if you are in that place in you,  
and I am in that place in me, there is only one of us. Namaste.

Connectedness does not come from bypassing the heaviness and darkness of Earth. It comes by sinking more deeply into it.

As the geese fly overhead, I am reminded that no matter how much we human beings delude ourselves into thinking that we are separate from Nature herself, we are not.

Sustainability is a buzzword today that has many definitions (Varey, 2003), and as a field, tries to address this human/nature separation. But the word sustain (from the Latin root that means *to hold up from below*) speaks spiritual volumes to me. As a young person, I found sustenance in sugar, the opinions of others, alcohol and drugs, love relationships, food, being a “good girl,” and so much more. When I stopped my grasping and turned toward the darkness of my inner experience, I found the belongingness that I was looking for. *To hold up from below* sounds like roots to me. Roots run into the deep dark earth and support the form that arises. A tree with no roots dies. In this country, we are spiritually dying because we have lost the roots to our own bodily experience. We have planted our roots in an illusion of limitlessness (Meadows, Meadows, & Randers, 1992), where we are now having to artificially create the comforts of light to avoid the deep dark places. Immaterial needs cannot be met with the material (Meadows et al., 1992) as trying to do so fosters an illusion that ignores our current reality, and stunts or even kills, life.

Wholeness is way of being that happens when I feel connected to more than just myself. We are all connected, no matter how that intimacy might scare some of us. Stephen Sterling (2001), author of *Sustainable Education: Re-visioning Learning and Change*, writes that we are now living in an “age of relation” where it is of the utmost importance that we work on building relationships and fostering interconnectedness. Cultivating a sense of intimacy with life demands a level of self-awareness where one is able to acknowledge not only the aspects that one admires in oneself, but also the facets of oneself that are difficult. This is shadow work and many are called to engage in this work in creative and holistic ways (Bly, 1988; Plotkin, 2008; Woodman, 1993). According to these leaders in the field, avoidance of the shadow leads to greater human suffering and to coping mechanisms that are not sustainable such as overconsumption, addictive

and self-destructive behaviors, and the depletion of the planet's natural resources. They tell us that it is important now for human beings to embrace the shadow elements of their human experience in order to live more respectfully and wholeheartedly.

There are scholars within the field of sustainability education that are speaking to the need to foster a deeper sense of intimacy with all of life including one's own experience (Harding, 2006; Suzuki, 1997), but many are not speaking to the personal shadow and its affect on the collective. Eco-psychology speaks to the perception shift that is needed to move from separation to interconnectedness and how acknowledging one's relationship to nature is important (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2009). Environmental ethics speaks to this interconnectedness as well but with a specific focus on respecting the diversity inherent in life (Berry, 1988; Cullinan, 2011; Plumwood, 1993). And there are scholars speaking to the shadow in terms of facing the despair that comes with a challenged planet (Eaton, 2007; Macy, 1998). But in terms of living wholeheartedly, or living from a place of wholeness, or facing the shadow that we encounter as we first reconnect with ourselves, there is not much out there that explicitly links this with the current ecological challenges we face.

I work regularly with those who are struggling. They are fighting with their mothers, recovering from addiction, suffering from low self-worth, and so busy that they cannot commit to sitting for five minutes a day. When a person is tied up with their wound and conscious of it, it is hard enough to even consider a world that is struggling. But for those living straight out of their unconscious wound (or those who have not journeyed into the darkness within), it is even that more difficult (if not impossible) to consider the pain of anyone else. Un-owned pain takes up so much psychic space that there is often not much room for anything else. A couple of years ago I led an exercise with sustainability educators at a conference in California. When I proposed

leading an activity where participants partner and make eye contact without words for just a few moments, I was met with resistance. The organizer said, “I am not sure they can handle this exercise.” Fortunately the organizer of the program was brave and went ahead with it. Later she told me she had never seen such connection and lively conversation at the dinner held after the event. If we cannot look in each other’s eyes for a few moments and breathe, we have work to do. We need guides who are willing and brave enough to take us to the intimacy that we long for. This intimacy and connectedness with the planet begins with those willing to journey into the darkness of their own hearts.

### **Privileging the Light: Oppressing the Dark**

I watched one of the last Harry Potter movies recently with my son. Dumbledore the great wizard, and Voldemort the scary bad guy, were in the fight of their lives. As I watched, I thought to myself, what would it be like if the light didn't always win? Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. Cinderella and her stepmother. Aslan and the witch. Peter Pan and Captain Hook. The gospel of John in the first chapter reads, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5, New Revised Standard Version). But what if the dark did not always succumb to the light? Why is the light continually privileged over the dark? Day is not better than night. Night is not better than day. We need one to know the other. What would it be like if Dumbledore and Voldemort befriended one another? What if Peter Pan and Captain Hook figured it out? What if the mean stepmother sat at the table with Cinderella and the prince? And as the day turns into dusk, the light succumbs to the dark as much as the dark does to the light. Carl spoke to this in terms of his desire to dance with the two, rather than choose one over the other.

The darkness, the dark side, the darkness that pervades and suffuses and infuses everything. There's no avoiding the darkness. The darkness, the shadow is as present and as necessary as is the light. They are not binary oppositions. It's probably better understood as a kind of a tango, a kind of dance together. And I'm actually wanting to acknowledge that instead of living in binary positions of good and evil and love and hatred and dark and light and so on. Instead of living in those binary oppositions, I am wanting to sort out in my own imagination at least, how I am in the midst of all of it, all the time, and in the midst of it with everybody else. (Carl)

Privileging one experience over the other plays out in some serious individual, cultural, and planetary ways. If the shadow, or the places within our psyche that are repressed are ignored, we slowly forget the limits of matter and begin to think that we are limitless. We begin to act as if matter does not matter. It is through limits that I have come to know my infinite nature. When the shadow is passed over, "spiritual bypass" (Melissa) occurs, where we choose the lightness of spirit over the heaviness of being human. When the light is chosen over the dark, illusion emerges as a way to cope with our humanness, and the ways that the illusion is perpetuated are unsustainable and even destructive. This plays out with the dark Earth as well as with the darkness *on* Earth. When we make dark bad, we suffer, and disconnect from it; inside and out.

There are so many negative connotations connected to black...Africa being described as the dark continent, which is simply, totally a racial construct...I wouldn't want to be anything different than who I am as an African. It's a celebration to me. I love being a black person. I love being in the skin that I am in and I am very fortunate because there are a lot of people who don't feel that way. And there are times that I felt like I wish I wasn't walking around with a target on my head...You walk around in this skin there's is

no way to pass. You are a black person. And sometimes in a place where that is not necessarily the safest skin to be in. We have a natural fear of the dark. Most of us do. We just do, because when you can't see what is around you, we have a fear about that. There are some animals who see better in the dark. The dark is the light to them. It's like even in the ocean, the places that we think are the darkest, darkest, darkest, there's more life down there. And the light only shines in the darkest of place. All creatures are like that. It has to be really dark for their light to shine. (Melanie)

Transformation is not about privileging the light over the dark or the dark over the light.

Wholeness is about the marriage or integration of the two.

Carl Jung (2009) said that we must learn to dance with the devil. I love the dark and it is my call to do what I can to recover the darkness from its negative constructs. But I don't love it more than the light. In fact the deeper I go the more I realize, though they are different, they are not separate. If we judge the dark as bad or wrong (Sherman & Clore, 2009), it is highly unlikely we will go into the darkness of our own inner experience.

That it's not about light triumphing over darkness and it's not about saying, let's just be in the darkness. But it becomes more, I think a lot about the Demeter and Persephone, it's the seasons. There is a season for the darkness, the wintering of the soul and that's what yields the spring. It erupts. It's not gentle. Spring is not gentle. In places it's viscous and thick and uncomfortable and phlegmy and things have to fight to break through the surface. And you have the fecundity and the harvest of the summer. All of these things that we see paralleled in the natural world. It is not about one over the other. They're really, it's about the space, and it's not just about the longest day of the year and the shortest day of the year. You have three hundred sixty-two days that matter in there that

are variations of light and dark. And we don't know how to occupy that. Our language doesn't know how to occupy that. So that's why when you get people in a class it either feels good or bad and I'm like that doesn't even mean anything. Transformation can be the most painful thing you'll experience. And pain for pain's own sake can be sadistic.

(Jessica)

Because light is known more deeply in the dark, avoidance of the darkness is driving us to create artificial light through addictions of many kinds. The darkness within is the ground of my experience, where I have found the light of a knowing unique to me, yet connected to all (Lusseyran, 2014). When the ground is lost underfoot by avoiding one's inner experience, security is often found in ways that are not sustainable, and even oppressive.

In this study, much to my surprise and discomfort, I started to think about the implications of repressing the darkness within. I wondered if we repress the darkness within, might we oppress it externally as well? If we fear the inner dark, might we fear it not only in the experience of our own darkness, but in the color of one's skin or the dark Earth itself? These questions began to surface in my interviews.

M: Well I am going to differentiate, as we know, between darkness and shadow.

J: Ok, would you? That would be helpful.

M: Well, we've already said, that I don't think that shadow is just dark. I don't think it's, I guess it is by nature, it's in the dark.

J: It's dark. But what do you mean when you hear me say darkness what do you think?

M: It has a potentially destructive.

J: Ok.

M: Potentially negative.

J: I was just going to say that word. Ok. That is an interesting thing that I hope to unpack in this dissertation.

M: Great. I hope you do too. That would be good.

J: Because we have learned that culturally. That the darkness is negative, destructive or bad. Many of us have.

M: Yeah, and this gets right to your question, the other thing in terms of race, it's a real issue.

J: Well, it's a huge issue and I think it's time that we really look at how the light has been privileged over the dark and the ways in which we can undo, redo, rework, rethread, reweave, that relationship.

M: Yeah, it has to do with disconnection from the body actually. (Melissa)

Melissa speaks to the inkling I had about how repression of the inner dark leads to oppression of the outer dark; in terms of race relations, our relationship with the dark Earth itself, and even the dark earth of the human body. When I stumbled into this uncomfortable territory, where words like racism, white privilege, and colonization live, I wanted to retreat. But it was too late, as one of my committee members reminded me. I was already too far in.

Apples, oranges, grapes, and kiwi  
 Monkeys, mangoes, spiders, and leaves on trees,  
 Smiles, fingers, hands, and toes,  
 Grass, sand, webs, and sky,  
 means magic is afoot.

The great alchemist breathes,  
 and makes holy all that is,  
*all that is,*  
 not just what you prefer.  
 Sacred difference is what we are immersed in.  
 The orange peel  
 and the peach fuzz.

The marshmallow  
and the stick.  
The tick on a cat's head.  
What our eyes see  
will die and change,  
there is no living thing that exactly mirrors another.

Trying to hold onto what shifts and changes  
is like trying to hold onto water.  
Trying to make the diversity of life into  
one form is oppression.  
Trying to find unity in the shape of  
what breaks, aches, laughs, and smiles  
is like getting down on your knees  
and praying that your father will never die.

Go straight into the heart  
of what you can see with your eyes  
to find the truth of what unifies.  
But be careful however,  
it is only with the fragrance of mystery that you  
will know the Great Alchemist who breathes this  
wild dance into being.  
Once you do,  
the eyelash and the finger nail,  
the right and the left,  
the blonde and the brown,  
become one.

It is only with the unseen that this magic can happen.  
Otherwise the mission will forever be  
to force what tends toward diversity  
into the barbed wire walls of conformity.  
Then, through all of the eons of his-tory  
the Great Alchemist patiently continues to wait,  
to be seen by the rare few  
who are brave enough to be found.

In my conversations with Melanie, a black vocal artist called to “tightening the weave of community” (Melanie) through song, and Manulani an indigenous epistemologist from the Big Island of Hawaii, I faced this discomfort head on.

M: Deconstructing whiteness [is] almost like asking Western conscious mainstream thinking, to look upon itself as its own epistemology...And believe me, you think spirituality is a bummer of a topic in academia, walk in with this. This is a door closer.

J: I've been diving in for the past 20 years into this deep exploration of the light and the dark...My PhD program soul sister in my cohort is from Zimbabwe and her skin is black as night. And I am white as white. And we walk together arm and arm, and that relationship has healed me...We have sat on the bed and we cried. She tells me of her stories of being shot at in Macheke, Zimbabwe, by white people; by people who were colonizing them. And I cry and I tell her, I'm little white Jenny from Detroit where we would go in and eat at the boat club with all black people serving us, and white people sitting at the table. And I have forever been confused about all of that and I think that has a lot to do with what our relationship as people is to the darkness. And I am not talking about just psychic darkness. I don't think we like darkness very much. On a psychic level and on a real, skin level. On a Earth level. And we are afraid of it for some reason....So I am looking at privilege. I am feeling like I've had a lot of material privilege, I mean still now, but not like I did when I was a child. But by God I did not have a lot of emotional, embodied, spiritual privilege. I didn't have a frickin' clue who I was in the world until something inside of me woke me up. So I want to hear from you, in our last moments together about privilege, and white and black, and light and dark and what you have to say about what I am saying?

M: Fabulous, fabulous. Now you are in the center of where you are going to learn the lessons that will be of service to you and your family. What privilege is- you have to understand that every single word has its own world view. So what people are talking

about, understand your privilege, they're basically talking about understand your capitalism and its technical privileging of you. I see white people that are very wealthy as unprivileged. I see them as separate from the pulse of an organic life system. My heart goes out to that group of people. Honestly. But because of that, there is a perceived dual system that fed by a mono-crop way of being on the planet. And the mono-crop I am talking about is the exchange of goods and services via money. Ultimately it will touch the faces of how we are and how we exist in our lives. And if we only have money, as a main exchange of goods and services, we're gonna say you're privileged and other people that don't have as unprivileged, and that false duality is fed by a low level epistemology based on the accumulation, separation, even a form of literacy that's based on speed. Once we wake up and say I will not take this, I will not be subjected to what you think is the law of nature, which is the strong will eat the weak, that type of thinking.

All we're based on in this world is a type of thinking that is not sustainable. (Manulani)

As I spoke with Manulani, it was not lost on me that as I was studying the power of the darkness as a white woman from the racially tense suburbs of Detroit, my soul sister in this program is a black woman from Zimbabwe.

### **Where Dark Meets Light: Molly and Me**

On the first day of this Ph.D. program, the new cohort met to prepare for an initiatory hike. We all piled into a van and headed to Thumb Butte in Prescott, Arizona. It was a hot day; the earth was dusty and you could smell the pine baking in the sun. On the hike I began to fall behind as I usually do. Heat is not my strong suit. When it heats up, I slow down. As I walked, I found myself walking with a fellow cohort member named Molly. The first thing I noticed about her was the light in her eyes and in her smile, and when I see that kind of light, I know that

difficulty has been welcomed; or as Jung would say, the devil has been danced with. She spoke with a British accent and had skin as dark as the night. It was real the moment we connected. As I whined about the heat, and she would laugh with in a way that helped me take myself more lightly. Molly shared with me that this was her first hike and how being here felt like such a privilege to her. This is something she continually expressed—her gratitude for being here. We hiked through the heat as the rest of the group traveled quite far ahead of us. We all piled back into the van after our hike and began our journey as students together. Little did I know that this was the beginning of a friendship that would call into question much of my own privilege, and most surprisingly, the experience of being a white woman.

My skin is as white as the snow. You can see the veins in some parts of my body because my skin is so translucent. If I sit out in the sun for 15 minutes, I get burned from the sun. I am born from Irish ancestry and as I said before, I can't stand the heat. When I traveled to Ghana two years ago, I thought I was going to die from the one hundred and five degree temperature. My European ancestry was not quite used to the dust, heat, and sweat of Africa. I have experienced material comfort in my life alongside emotional and spiritual scarcity. It was confusing at best. Being raised in material affluence does not mean experiencing fullness of abundance. Emotional and spiritual needs cannot be met materially (Meadows, Meadows, & Randers, 1992).

I grew up in suburban Detroit where my father worked as a labor lawyer and my mother loved the birds. She could hold her hand out with bird seed in her hand and the blue jays would come to feed off of it. In my household, if we ever made a derogatory comment, *ever*, about a person's race, ethnicity, or religious preference, my father would scold us. The only time I ever remember my father raising a hand to my brother was when my brother made fun of someone in

a wheelchair. When as a child, I made a comment about someone being Jewish, I will never forget the look of shame my father directed toward me. It affected me deeply, so much so that I found myself as an adult taking Hebrew lessons from an Israeli Jew, and have studied the Hebrew scripture for years. My father and mother would not tolerate discrimination in our household, but as a child raised in an affluent lifestyle, I felt confused by my privileges. I knew being white had its privilege; privileges that often left me feeling strange and even ashamed.

My whiteness is even more obvious when I am standing next to Molly. I look like a ghost. Molly's skin is as dark as the night, so her white teeth and the whites of her eyes, stand out much more than mine. As strange as that sounds, I have never had a close black friend. I was raised in a Jewish neighborhood as an Irish Catholic girl, but there were not many black people in my neighborhood. The black girls always sat in their own corner in the high school cafeteria and were usually bused in from the city. So though I was opened minded, I really hadn't had the experience of being around black people. I wasn't sure— should I call people with black skin African Americans or Black or African? I didn't know, sometimes I still don't. Meeting Molly and listening to her stories opened my heart to the risk of truth and vulnerability. Allowing my feelings to come forth, and breathing into what I was hearing, allowed me to feel connected to her, even in my confusion.

One evening, Molly and I, sat and talked for a while in the hotel room with another member of our cohort from Sierra Leone. Molly referred to her as her African sister. As I sat on the bed of the Marriott hotel with these women, I could not help but feel like an outsider. I am white. Though I have traveled to Africa twice, and do not have to only imagine what parts of the African continent are like, I am not African. I know what white people did to black people in Molly's country not too long ago. I know what White people did (and do) to Black people here

in this country. So was I still their sister, this white woman from Detroit, who had never come to close to experiencing some of the events these women had experienced? And though I was not present physically to the oppression and colonization of Africa, am I still responsible for what my ancestors have done and do today? Molly began to share her story with us; British oppression, colonization, bullets being fired as she was stuck in her home, and her mother's brave return to retrieve little Molly. As she shared this story, I allowed the guilt and the shame of being white pour out of me. Tears fell from my eyes and they held my hands. They listened to my shame and confusion as I listened to theirs. Truth is a powerful connector if we are brave enough to allow it. When we tell the truth, we tap into the wellspring of abundance within us and the Love from that source spills out from our hearts. The love was palpable and remains to this day. When our cohort member decided to leave the program and I saw her for the last time, she put her hand on my shoulder and said, "I just love you." I love these women because of the depths we have gone to, not because of life events we have in common. We dove down deep into the darkness of our own experience only to see the light shining bright beneath the surface.

I have lived with great privilege because of the color of my skin; privileges that I am still not even aware that I have (McIntosh, 1988). And there are many working tirelessly for freedom, equality, and the reclamation and honoring of indigenous wisdom that has been oppressed in so many ways (Idle No More, 2014; Keduzi, 2014). My dear friend Molly pointed out to me in a conversation that I live with privilege, and at the same time, I am also negatively affected by these privileges. White privilege is not earned. It comes from having a lighter color of skin. I know the complexity of this issue and I am aware that I could write an entire dissertation and more on this subject. But in this study what has emerged is the possibility that there might be a connection between the rejection of the personal shadow and the repression of darkness on the

outside. The majority of those incarcerated in this country are people of color (Hartney, 2006), Africa is the poorest continent in the world (Vincent, 2009), and the Earth is being disrespected at an alarming rate (MacCarthy, 2008). Any structure based on this illusion of privileging one color over another is bound for breakdown. It has to be because it is based on an illusory epistemology that says the light is better than the dark or white is better than black. The way that I see us (often white people) trying to repair this, is by helping out those we see as less privileged. The Australian aboriginal activist Lilla Watson (1985) says, “If you have come to help me you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is tied up with mine, then let us work together.” She is not interested in being helped by being seen as less than. She is interested in the place where opposites meet as equals. Aid, of course, is needed in the dire circumstances that exist today. But alongside these humanitarian efforts, I propose that those who are willing, engage the roots of oppression by turning toward the personal shadow. With just this slight shift in perspective, entering one’s personal darkness becomes an act of service to the whole.

We are now living in a time of reckoning, a time of discernment as to how we are going to proceed in relationship to ourselves, and the world around us. When I choose to ignore the darkness within I choose to live in an illusion, where to experience the light I must artificially create it, rather than commit to digging deep for it. I propose that this denial of the inner darkness (most often because of a fear of difficulty) could also be a precursor to oppression. If we see dark as bad, or less than, it is likely we will try to control it. If I don’t find the light in earnest, or in the descent into my own experience, I create it on the surface. This leads to addiction of all kinds and to controlling the external to find safety within. Perpetuating this illusion causes damage on all levels and facing it is the core of not only my research, but it is my deepest call. It is time to

honor and celebrate the darkness as essential to transformation simply because it is. Life, particularly the other-than-human world, embodies this. Nothing short of transformation is called for now and “all that we do...must be done in a sacred manner” (Oraibi Nation, 2000). According to those I interviewed, trusting the value of the darkness makes us stronger and whole.

### **Black is Beautiful**

Near the end of his life, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1967) offered a speech called *Black is Beautiful*. I wept as I watched him speak with such brave truth to a crowd of people who desperately needed to hear his message. He said: “Somebody told a lie one day. They couched it in language...they made everything black...ugly and evil. Look in your dictionary and see the synonyms of the word black...always something degrading, low and sinister. Look at the word white, it is always something pure and high. But I want to get the language right tonight. I want to get the language so right tonight that everybody tonight will cry out: Yes I am black, I am proud of it, I am black and beautiful!” How is it that we made black ugly? Some of the most important things in life are dark. The Earth, the inner landscape of the Self, the unknown, the diverse colors of our skin. We were created and born from the darkness of the womb. Black is not bad. Darkness is not worthless. Choosing the light of the heavens over the darkness of the Earth causing suffering of all kinds. We, and the Earth, are slowly dying because of this choice. There is “a lot of work to do if we are going to survive on this Earth, but most of it needs to be done close to home. Small, not big. Dispersed, not centralized” (McKibben, 2010, p. 120). We can’t get any closer to home than the darkness within. If we are not connected within, where do our actions originate from? Illusions mostly; created from avoiding the darkness.

Every ounce of my being calls to the darkness as well as the light. To try to have one without the other is an illusion. It is impossible; just like separating the body and the breath or

soul. My ancestors the Celts, not only respected the darkness, but celebrated it in the festival of *Samhain*. If we leave the dark and earthy Feminine out of the equation, we will live in a world that is held captive by domination and oppression (Eisler, 1995). The feminine is accessed by closing our eyes and turning toward our own dark (Jung, 2006; Woodman, 1997). To this day, much of Africa has suffered from being oppressed; including Molly's home of Zimbabwe. As a white person, I cannot ignore the oppression of the dark by the light; inside and out. The British, white people, stormed in and turned Zimbabwe into Rhodesia. And of course there are many stories like this in Africa (NPR Staff, 2014), and all over the world, including right here in this country .

If we are operating out of the understanding that black is "ugly and sinister" (Edensor, 2013; Sherman & Clore, 2009), how could we possibly honor it, both inside and outside of us? I find it alarming that the top ten countries living in the worst material poverty are in Africa. In 2009, 60% of those incarcerated in the United States were Black or Hispanic. And there are significantly more Black and Hispanic families in the US living in poverty than white people. Like Martin Luther King, Jr. said, we have made blackness bad. In my interview with Melanie, whose great grandfather was a slave, she did not see blackness as equated with darkness (Melanie). We did not have a chance in our conversation to delve deeper into the distinction so this still remains a question for me. I do not think it is by accident that the Africa is materially the poorest continent in the world or that Black Americans are incarcerated to a higher degree than white people. Everything is a mirror back to what we know deep within our own bones; individually and collectively. If we understand darkness as scary and bad, it makes sense that that is how we would name it, inside and outside of ourselves.

In a country where we measure wellbeing by the dollar, and the Gross Domestic Product is the measure of the national state of affairs, it is understandable in the West that we might only see the poverty of the African continent and in our own lives. If wealth is based on the growth of materialism, then most of us probably experience a sense of poverty. In no way am I trying to justify, bypass or condone this material poverty. It is unacceptable. But if we only look at the material poverty in Africa or anywhere, we are missing the spiritual riches that live deeper than the surface. By seeing others who lack material wealth as underprivileged, is to miss the wholeness of a person or situation. Seeing myself as more privileged than others can contribute further to oppression, so how I understand the word privilege is very important.

It is so important that you go and do your own understanding of the lexicon of a word.

That privilege, that thought pattern is embedded in a mainstream epistemology shaped by Western thinking. And Western thinking is shaped by X, Y, Z. I mean people don't even know the right way to deconstruct standardized tests. We still think a standardized movement in education is the highest form of intelligence. I mean we don't even have the right vocabulary to even understand that! (Manulani)

We are all privileged at the very essence of who we are but our social structure does not reflect this at all (MacKay, 2014). As a country, it seems we have traveled a far distance from this deep wisdom (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2008). Wisdom is found deep in the heart of every living creature and it is what is needed for transformation to occur. Indigenous wisdom, oppressed throughout the world in for centuries, finds its roots in this understanding.

I speak quite often of the inner darkness but through this study I realized, that I must also include how we relate to the darkness externally as well. I must face the privilege and responsibility that comes with the color of my skin, and learn that like Martin Luther King, Jr.

taught, white is not the only beautiful. Black is beautiful too. In my conversation with Manulani, she said that a “deconstructing of whiteness” (Manulani) is called for today; that we white people have some coming home to do. Without this rigorous honesty, it is likely that the darkness will be held hostage inside and out, as we continue to live in the disintegration of avoiding wholeness. When we imprison the darkness, inside and out, there are consequences. The teachers interviewed in this study are examples of the leaders we need today who do not fear the darkness, or if they do, they turn their feet and breath toward rather than away from it.

### **Befriending Death: The Greatest Darkness**

As I was recovering from a breast biopsy, the tree outside my window in its nakedness, taught me a willingness to be vulnerable; to stand naked in the cold. My cat climbed slowly onto my chest and settled down slightly to the right; directly on top of my tiny incision. Her warmth nourished my wound; both from the scalpel and my fear. Death crept in again as I felt its fingers gripping my toes and crawling up my legs. My breath began to rise and settled in right above my clavicles. *I might die*. This is what waiting for biopsy results will do to a woman; to this woman. John Tarrant (1998) writes that darkening the darkness takes us into hell. After a cancer diagnosis at age twenty-four, the excruciatingly painful medical tests, the third degree burns, the radiated raw esophagus, indicated that I had entered hell. I was set free from this physical hell on April 21st; the last day of treatment. When I got home, with labored breathing, I packed up my things and loaded up my black VW Jetta. The next morning I was on my way, despite the deepest hesitation on my parent’s part. I knew if I did not leave then, I was never going to leave the family that held me close while I suffered. I thought that the ending of treatment and the driving away from that life, I would be set free. But little did I know, I still had to find my way through the shadow of death.

The only way through was to enter the darkness and get acquainted with what was present post-cancer. Tarrant (1998) writes that turning inward offers us a place “where we can know ourselves in the midst of all changes” (p. 5). I was disoriented and frightened as I experienced the backside of cancer. My body was a bit ravaged, my soul exhausted, and my spirit simply longed for freedom. Fear of death had me by the throat and trying to pry its fingers from my neck was not working. When I returned to Colorado (after being in Michigan for treatment and to be with my family) I shivered in the shadow of death. At twenty-four years old, many of my friends and even my family, could not grasp the despair that I was dealing with. It took everything in me to stay connected to my experience. I had nowhere to turn but within, and at the same time, I knew I could not navigate the unfamiliar alone. I called the local hospital cancer center and spoke to the administrative person on call. Through panic and tears, I pleaded for help. She sent me to the local hospital chaplain, who I later learned was a cancer survivor himself, a former monk, and a man of the trees. Later I would watch him as he pruned a newly sprouting oak tree into a bonsai. John would end up being one of my greatest teachers and the man who officiated my wedding.

A teacher once said to me, if we do not get to know ourselves (i.e. enter the darkness of our inner experience), we end up dying a stranger to ourselves. Those I interviewed have all encountered death, either in their own lives or with someone close to them. For Carl it was his father, for Melissa it was facing dire circumstances as she birthed her first daughter, and for Melanie it was her dying sister. Facing death is to encounter the unknown at the deepest level. There are those who are studying our avoidance of death and offering ways to approach it with courage and awareness (Sumner, n.d., *Voices of Grief*, n.d.). One of these people, is Eva Saulitis; a naturalist in Alaska in her mid-40s living with terminal metastatic breast cancer. Saulitis

reminds us that if we have forgotten how to approach the unknowns of death, the other-than-human world will teach us.

Ultimately, what I faced those hospital nights, what I face every day, is death impending—the other side, the passing over into, the big unknown—what poet Joseph Brodsky called his “wild darkness,” what poet Christian Wiman calls his “bright abyss.” Death may be the wildest thing of all, the least tamed or known phenomenon our consciousness has to reckon with. I don’t understand how to meet it, not yet—maybe never. Perhaps (I tell myself), though we deny and abhor and battle death in our society, though we hide it away, it is something so natural, so innate, that when the time comes, our bodies—our whole selves— know exactly how it’s done. All I know right now is that something has stepped toward me, some invisible presence in the woods, one I’ve always sensed and feared and backed away from, called out to in a tentative voice (hello?), trying to scare it off, but which I now must approach. I stumble toward it in dusky conifer light: my own predatory, furred, toothed, clawed angel. (Saulitis, 2014)

As I laid in the recovery room in the hospital bed, I had a strange thought: I might not ever be able to go to the grocery store again. Then my thoughts deepened as I looked at my sibling’s faces: I might never see them again. Who am I without the grocery store and my sister and brother? Who am I without my name and my favorite green t-shirt? Ultimately I do not know. The greatest darkness we face is the unknown (Whyte, 2008) and there is no greater unknown than our own death (Lynch, 1997). When we enter the unknown, we “make a voluntary return to the darkness, the source” (Tarrant, 1998, p. 222) and leaning into the unknown takes great courage. To know the light within, we must embrace our capacity to die. The light shines brightest in the darkness and that light is an inner knowing; a knowing that is so unique to each

person, and at the same time, connects us all. As Melanie said, “When we are the most enlightened, sometimes that can only come out of what we consider the darkest time” (Melanie). Every day I feel death whispering to me the truth of the matter: *You will not be here forever, so take the risk, and live the most engaged wholehearted life you possibly can live.*

### **Wholehearted Living: Welcoming What Is**

I know how to stay small. I know how to pick up a mask and wear it to cover my vulnerability. I know how to pretend that what I am feeling is not what I am really feeling. I know how to hide my insecurity—I have done it most of my life. Many of us in this country have been taught to avoid difficulty rather than lean into it (Zweig & Abrams, 1991). Because I experienced this avoidance as a child, I lacked the tools as a young adult needed to navigate more difficult places. Because I was not taught to hold to the difficult, I did not know what it meant to live a wholehearted life. I did not know what wholeness felt like. I had no idea how to dance “at the heart of [my] being” (Ashton & Denton, 2005, p. 140) and rise to my fullest potential because I had no idea how to enter the darkness of my own experience. Hiding pieces of myself in the dark left me living much smaller than what my deepest places ever intended.

To live wholeheartedly means to live courageously from the whole of our human experience. To do this, “we have to talk about the things that get in the way—especially shame, fear, and vulnerability” (Brown, 2010, p. 36). Vacating the human experience to avoid difficulty means not being home for the joy either. Taking flight from certain experiences of my life caused a sense of emptiness within me. Re-inhabiting that emptiness has been the call of the second half of my life. Brene Brown, researcher and vulnerability expert, defines living wholeheartedly as living from a place of worthiness (Brown, 2012). I agree and would add that living wholeheartedly means living honestly—being in touch with the whole of oneself by

listening closely to “what is so” (Melissa). It is about learning the skills to navigate the whole, and where we usually vacate the human experience, is when we encounter difficulty. As Parker Palmer, pioneer in the field of holistic education, writes “Wholeness does not mean perfection; it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life. Knowing this gives me hope that human wholeness...need not be a utopian dream, if we can use devastation as a seedbed for new life” (Palmer, 2004, p. 5). To see every experience as worthy of our attention, including our brokenness, is to live from wholeness. When we start selectively experiencing and feeling, the personal shadow becomes denser and more difficult to navigate. Living in this fragmented way can lead to an exhaustion of a different kind. In a conversation between the spiritual teacher Brother David Steindl Rast, and the Welsh poet David Whyte, Rast said “The antidote to exhaustion is not necessarily rest...it is wholeheartedness” (Whyte, 2001, p. 132). I am exhausted when I am not living out of my truth. And to live authentically and to know “what is true about ourselves, we must meet what’s not true about ourselves” (Jessica). It takes courage and creativity to show up for what is not true about ourselves. For those I interviewed it was obvious in their personhood, presence, and in the ways they are now in service to the world, that for decades, they have shown up for whatever they encounter in their lives.

The teachers I spoke with have guided and taught many people around the globe. Though they might call it by a different name, living wholeheartedly is their call. They do this by creatively and courageously turning their attention toward what is real; in their own lives and the people that they guide. Underneath the surface, “there is in all things...a hidden wholeness” (Merton, 1979). Whether that is by dancing back to the heart of one’s life, or being engaged with the natural world, these teachers remind others of how a sense of personal integrity affects the world in which we live. For Carl, he does this through the process of writing.

The idea that everything in our lives can be transmuted, alchemically transmuted, is probably the reason why I write in the ways that I do. So, there's that fundamental belief that writing is healing. If I don't like a story, I can write another story...that the writing of lots and lots and lots of stories will contribute to laying down stepping stones that will invite one on journeys, that will be far more successful, than writing the same story over and over and remaining in that story. So I am always writing seeking some kind of new understanding...seeking a new place to stand on. (Carl)

Writing is the practice by which Carl reveals himself and continues the process of becoming. For Jessica, living fully is about descending so deeply into one's embodied life, that the eternal is touched and then shared.

I think to have a true sense of self ironically means to go so deeply into the earth of oneself that you let go of it. And there is a huge difference to me between that surrender piece, the letting go of it, knowing it's changing all the time, comes from a deep understanding and being embodied, not just transcending it; not just circumventing it. (Jessica)

For Manulani, wholeheartedness is experienced in relationships. Near the end of our interview Manulani said, "We are about wholeness. And we are looking for synonyms to wholeness" (Manulani). The "we" that Manulani speaks of is the "we" of indigenous peoples and she defines the wisdom of her people as "a wisdom that endures" (Manulani); a wisdom that is *experienced* in her people.

Living wholeheartedly is an act of service to the world, and living wholly as we have explored in this chapter, means welcoming the darkness. What began as a study of the shadow turned into a dissertation that explores what it means to live a wholehearted life; or a study of the

power of living from wholeness. And we cannot do this without embracing the darkness within.

This study continues this ancient conversation about the transformative power of seeking wholeness through stories of my own, and those of six outstanding individuals.

## Chapter 2. Methodology and Methods: The Map and the Walking Stick

When traversing new ground, a map and navigation tools are needed. In this inquiry the methodologies were the map, and the methods my walking stick, as I experienced the uncertainty of discovering something new. I gained wider perspective through a methodological lens which allowed me to take a lay of the land and see the larger patterns I was engaged with. The tools like a walking stick, assisted me in getting around, allowing me to engage the structure of the inquiry more deeply. When I was young I appreciated the light in the dark— whether it was the stars in the sky, sparkly jeweled stones wedged into the earth, or the inner fire that got me through growing up in an alcoholic family. Delving into the darkness of my own inner experience has been essential for me to live a wholehearted and authentic life. This four year program at Prescott College has been a time for me to pull together decades of work with the shadow, the voices of those who have either been my mentor or the mentors of others in this area of light and dark, and the work of those intellectual and spiritual ancestors who have inspired me along the way. I am always longing to know the human experience more deeply, and to do this, I must begin with my own.

### **Heuristic Methodology: An Intimate Map**

Journal after journal,  
breath after breath,  
story after story,  
step after step,  
I cast a shadow  
and I study it.  
In and out,  
back and forth,  
I go in,  
I wait and I wait.  
“It’s never going to come together.”  
“I don’t know what I am doing.”

“I am going to fail.”  
One breath after the next,  
the dark gets darker,  
and then like the first star  
that shines in the midnight sky,  
I know.

Heuristics comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means to discover or to find.

Clark Moustakas (1990) developed an heuristic approach, a very personal, intimate, and organic research process, that explicitly involves and honors the researcher herself in the inquiry. As I read Moustakas’ book that develops this methodology in detail, I couldn’t help but smile as one does when feeling understood. The process he laid out mirrored my journey precisely, as he included aspects of discovery like creativity, synchronicity, and intuition.

Heuristic methodology not only includes the researcher, the one who has illuminated the research question, but sees everything related to the inquiry as emergent from the inquirer herself. Like a sprout bursting forth from the Earth, the question, methodology, methods, and patterns all rise from within the researcher. Throughout this process I have felt like I was watching a flower bloom, and I learned quickly that I had to cultivate certain qualities like patience, tolerance for complexity, and hospitality toward the unknown, to give the flower (or inquiry) space enough to bloom into its fullest potential. I will speak to these qualities in depth later in this section where I write about the methodology of radical wholeheartedness that emerged from within me throughout this study. Moustakas writes “throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration” (p.11). Like living inquiry (Meyer, 2010), in heuristics the framework is wide, where everything is seen as relevant to the study. With living inquiry, Meyer suggests that paying attention with a new eye to the

“movement of daily life” expands learning and perspective (p. 86). Both living inquiry and heuristics acknowledge that when viewed connectedly, the personal can speak volumes. Within these methodologies, the researcher and those being interviewed are seen as co-researchers; both seeking every more deeply the experience of the studied phenomena. Heuristics honors the self within the inquiry, where the researcher is the home of where the question itself emerges, and also where much of the exploration is located.

Heuristic inquiry honors the question as much, if not more, than the answers. Joanna Macy (1994) speaks to doctoral research, “If we were lucky enough, we would find the right question, rather than the right answer” (p. 25). Because the question regarding the shadow and the relationship between the light and the dark is so vast and ancient, there is no way to generalize one story to many. Macy says often that because of the enormity of this kind of subject, “we tend to turn the questions off” (p. 27). Heuristics honors the space taken by the researcher to be with the question and sees that space as deep, vast, and intelligent. The question arises from within and is illumined from within as well. The practice of indwelling is an heuristic method (a practice that I have used much of my life) where the researcher holds the question in her consciousness and allows it to mingle with the intelligence of the moment (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24). Holding the space around the question is more important than finding an answer. For example, I found as I dwelled with the notion of shadow, unexpectedly I deepened into my own constructs around darkness. This led me to wonder about the constructs others had around darkness and light, and though this was not part of my research plan, I trusted it enough to follow it.

In an article describing the experience of heuristic inquiry, Kim Etherington (2004) studies the process of two students deeply engaged in their graduate research in the field of social

sciences at a university in the United Kingdom. In the article, they expressed how it felt to be immersed in such a personally transformative process within a graduate program. They indicated a sense of relief and immediate resonance when engaging with Moustakas' work; similar to what I felt when first encountering his work. Etherington writes that the understanding of a phenomenon is directly related to how deeply, and diversely, one engages with it. She writes "I noticed that it appears to be students using reflexive methodologies who reported profound changes rather than students using methodologies in which they bracketed off themselves and their own experiences" (p. 49). She defines reflexive knowledge as knowledge gained through the intimate engagement of the researcher with her project; so much so that the research process becomes transformative. This knowledge is not attained from an external source but comes from the very depth of one's engagement with self and the surrounding environment. As scholars in the field of transformative education speak to, this is radically different from what traditional educational pedagogy asserts about what it means to be knowledgeable (Chickering, Dalton, & Stiem, 2006; Darder, Boltadano, & Torres, 2003; Dewey, 1983; Glazer, 1999; hooks, 1994; Miller, Karsten, Denton, Orr, & Kates, 2004; Mirochnik, & Sherman; 2002; O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004; Parker, 2010; Mezirow, 1999; Sterling, 2001; Tompkins, 1996; Wright, 2000). In their scholarship, they encourage new ways of educating that foster connection and intimacy. Heuristic methodology names personal transformation as an integral part of the research process and transformation is a creative process. Moustakas writes,

The heuristic research process is not one that can be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk

the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey. (p. 14)

I have had the great privilege of studying a topic that I deeply love for the sake of learning. The space that this privilege allowed me led to a deeply transformative, and enriching, educational experience.

### **Narrative Inquiry: The Gathering of Stories**

Through story we share who we are with the world. Narrative inquiry is a well defined method focused on exploring the human experience through the collecting of stories (Bamberg, 2007; Clandinin, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Tierney, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988; Richardson, 1990). In this project I gathered the stories of leaders in the field of creative and courageous shadow exploration, and asked them in various ways, how facing difficulty affected their lives and those they teach. I began each interview with a series of questions.

- What was life like before your intentional work with the darkness?
- How did the darkness make itself known to you?
- What does the dark within feel like?
- What tools do you use to navigate the darkness?
- What do you experience when welcoming the darkness?
- In what ways has this work affected your relationships?

In every interview, I found myself following more of an “informal conversational interview” (Patton, 1980, p. 342); where questions arose spontaneously and intuitively as the conversation unfolded. Brene Brown (2010), in her groundbreaking research on vulnerability, tells us that “stories are just data with a soul” and it is how that ineffable soul shows up in one’s experience that I was most interested in exploring. Whether it was singing with others in community,

writing a poem about a moment long passed, or feeling the discomfort of a yogic asana, those I interviewed described their experiences of the shadow and wholeness through story. Each story was unique conveying the person's experience, and as a narrative inquirer, I was interested in how that experience felt, how it was sensed and described, and how each person recalled it in the moment. Laurel Richardson (1990) writes, "narrative is everywhere" (p. 20) and provides "powerful access to this uniquely human experience of time" (p. 22). The depth of that access depends on how vulnerable we are willing to be.

Stories connect us and vulnerability is a requirement for that connection (Brown, 2012). Intimacy is born from a sense of safety. In narrative research, safety is fostered through some level of self-disclosure from the researcher (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47). The intimacy of the conversations depended greatly on the willingness of the both people to sink beneath the surface. I noticed a pattern of reciprocity where often I would share myself more deeply in the dialogue, either in response to the intimate sharing of the other, or as an invitation to take the conversation a level deeper. Parker Palmer (2004), a pioneer within the field of holistic education, writes that the truth of the soul is like a wild animal and will only come out from the dark if it trusts the one who has invited it. The most precious parts of ourselves will always wait for a trustworthy invitation; one that has far more to do with the inquirer's presence than anything else. In these interviews we were talking about the shadow—the dark place within us that holds what we don't know very well about ourselves. It is *the place of vulnerability* where when approached, painful, uncomfortable, and awkward feelings can arise. It was important that I tended very carefully to my presence as I invited topics of a sensitive nature forward. I will speak to this later in this section where I describe the practice of radical wholeheartedness; a way of being that emerged from this study that can inform any researcher or life. Those who I interviewed have devoted to

their lives to living wholly and fully in the world, and because of this, there was great depth and intimacy in the stories that were shared.

### **Critical Indigenous Pedagogy: Going into the Shadow**

Indigenous ways of knowing cultivate cooperation, honor the interconnectedness of all things, and informed the way that I conducted this study on the darkness. The depths of myself, and another, must be respected by research that honors diversity, creativity, and intuitive ways of knowing and of representing what we know. Because this study deals with the notions of wholeness, relationship between opposites, and the human experience, the essence of this study is a return to indigenous wisdom itself.

There are pioneering scholars who speak to indigenous ways of educating in terms of research methodology (Cajete, 1999; Davis, 2009; Dean Moore, Peters, Jojola, Lacy, & Hogan, 2007; Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y. & Tuhiwai Smith, L., 2008; Meyer, 2005; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2006). In their work, they explain that research that does not adhere to a specific methodology loosens the boundaries that have historically been set by those in power. This expansion breaks down a patriarchal agenda seeking to dominate and silence voices of interconnectedness and wholeness. Indigenous wisdom, that honors all things as connected and whole, supports the very heart of this dissertation.

The recovery of what is in the shadow is the process of transformation; of reclaiming wholeness. Indigenous wisdom speaks to this recovery process through stories relevant to their people and to the land with which they live. From Native American science (Cajete, 1994; Cajete, 1999) to African teachings (Some, 1998; Some, 1999) to Celtic wisdom (Newell, 2011; O'Donohue, 2006), indigenous wisdom speaks to the power of wholeness and reclaiming what has been left behind within, and around us. My ancestral roots are Irish, and for that reason, I

have chosen to weave in mostly the wisdom of the Celts throughout this dissertation. As a trained yoga teacher, I also bring in ancient Indian teachings, as much of my own healing and teaching is rooted in these texts. Finally, I will also refer to passages from scripture and the teachings of Jesus. Though I know Christian theology has been used to dominate people and the land, I was raised Catholic and have studied Hebrew scripture and the gospels, extensively. For this reason, and because at its core these texts are an account of those seeking to understand the great mystery, I refer to these teachings on occasion throughout this dissertation.

Indigenous wisdom itself has been pushed into the darkness for many reasons. We come into wholeness by engaging *the whole of who we are*; individually and collectively. We do this by reclaiming the places that we have personally and collectively disengaged from, even to the point of oppression. What we disengage from within, we do so without, and vice versa (Jung, 2006; Tarrant, 1998; Zweig, 1991). Entering the shadow within is essential on this pathway to recovery because it is *the site of recovery*. Transformation is liberating and the intimacy and connectivity that results from it always leads to greater vulnerability. Later in the chapter on living a wholehearted life I will discuss how I, and those I interviewed, navigate the vulnerability that rises from the transformational process. Many of us simply have not learned the tools to live at that sort of depth in our lives (Brown, 2012). Indigenous wisdom in its relational and interconnected worldview, can help us to see vulnerability as a strength, rather than a weakness. Experiencing vulnerability may be one of the reasons that we collectively oppress any perspective that honors it; like that of indigenous wisdom.

In their comprehensive text *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (known for their writing of the well-known *Handbook on Qualitative Research*) partnered with the internationally known indigenous scholar and

researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008) to bring into the conversation more fully the work that is being done in the area of critical indigenous methodology and pedagogy. In it they proposed that a study rooted in indigenous ways of being resists “efforts to confine inquiry to a single paradigm or interpretive strategy” (p. 2), which affirmed the broad, yet focused way that I was going about my research process. The indigenous perspective does not seek to negate the scientific paradigm in its entirety, but rather seeks to uproot patriarchal ways of thinking by acknowledging others ways of knowing; like the reflective and connective aspects of the human experience (Meyer, 2013). Indigenous wisdom is rooted in the understanding that two truths can be held at the same time (Manulani). In relationship to research, many strands of methodology and methods can be woven together; as in this dissertation.

With indigenous wisdom or “wisdom that endures” (Manulani), lines are not drawn in such a way that the focus is more on separation, than connectedness. The Thirteenth century Sufi poet Rumi writes,

Out there  
beyond right-doing and wrong  
there is a field  
I'll meet you there.  
When the soul lies down in that grass  
the world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, languages, even the phrase “each other”  
doesn't make any sense. (Barks, 2003, p. 123)

I was invited into this way of being at the very start of my research project when one of my interviewees did not feel comfortable signing a consent form. In her email she wrote that she prefers to build relationships on trust. Her action woke me up and made me question a very familiar and appropriate Western research procedure. Also after the 5 interviews I had planned, in a study of the light and the dark, I did not have a representative from the Black creative

community. Rather than seek out a black person for the study, which felt strange and awkward, I trusted that the right person would emerge. She did and I found that her very essence embodied the central aspects of this study. There is a sense of deep trust that can come from this interconnected way of seeing the world, and when it is oppressed, we tragically miss out on the treasures that come from this enduring wisdom. As I have said in the previous chapter, I am a white woman, deeply affected by my growing up in affluent, White, Western culture. I carry great privilege because of this, and also the pain that results from a worldview that often separates and disconnects things. This pain of disconnection can be lifted by these indigenous ways of knowing and being.

### **Social Constructs of the Light and Dark: Unexpected Tension**

You are different than me.  
You served me at the table  
while I sat fancy in my chair.  
Peering out onto the water  
I asked my dad,  
Why are all of the people serving us black?  
And why are all of the white people sitting down?  
My parents shifted in their chairs.  
They knew I was asking a question  
so big and so wide  
that even the ocean I was looking at couldn't answer.  
*Don't ever judge someone for the color of their skin, Jennifer,*  
I heard my father say.  
Not for their religion  
or how their bodies work in the world either.  
But I wondered as I sat fancy,  
without saying a word,  
was I participating  
in this white and black thing,  
where I sit  
and I get served?

Naively, I did not expect that my exploration of the shadow would lead to ideas that challenge the very social structure of these times. I was so focused on studying the light and the

dark in a psychic and spiritual sense, that I did not realize this very study would lead to an examination of how Western thought privileges the light over the dark in social constructs as well. How those raised in Western culture feel about darkness does not only affect our choice to turn inward, it also affects how we structure our society. When interviewing Manulani (whose lineage is Hawaiian) with the University of Hawaii, and Melanie (whose great grandfather was a slave) a vocal activist in Oakland, CA our conversations challenged accepted mainstream ways of thinking and knowing. We discussed things like what it means to be privileged, which from their perspective differed vastly, from how privilege is defined in Western capitalistic cultures. Critical social theory (Calhoun, 1995), feminist theory (hooks, 2000), whiteness studies (McIntosh, 1988), and race relational theory (Rex, J. & Mason, D., 1986) study these tensions that began to emerge for me as I delved deeper into the psychic and spiritual study of the dark. I am exploring in this dissertation the possibility that fear of the dark leaves us strangers not only to ourselves, but to each other as well.

As my research began to turn in these directions, I felt uncomfortable; even scared. I wanted to turn back, but I knew that I could not have a conversation about the light and the dark, without addressing the social constructs around these qualities. I learned that fearing the dark not only affects our desire to turn inward, but was reminded in a deeper way, that it affects the ways in which we see the people around us. The more uncomfortable we are with whatever it is, the deeper into will go into the darkness of our own psyche, and the greater the distance between ourselves and what we have exiled. When the shadow is not attended to, worldviews of pain and separation can result. Retrieving and healing these shadow aspects of ourselves requires great courage and creativity; on a personal or societal level. This requires us to deconstruct, and reconstruct, the ways in which we interpret the world around us. In this dissertation, I am

exploring the very place where discomfort hides. This study of the shadow, slowly and surprisingly, morphed into a study of how we interpret the darkness. How I, and those I interviewed understood the words shadow and darkness varied, and awakening to those varying interpretations enlightened us all. To be conscious is to be awake and to live from the whole of our human experience. To engage in this depth of transformation, where we question the constructs of the light and the dark, we must be awake to our perceptions. There are now academic programs (*John F. Kennedy University, Masters in Consciousness and Transformative Studies*), academic journals (*The Journal of Consciousness Studies*), and even entire institutions (*Center for Consciousness Studies at University of Arizona and the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies*) that are devoted to studying how humanity can learn to live with a deeper level of consciousness. Manulani's work (Meyer 2005, 2013) is devoted to this study of consciousness through the reclaiming of an indigenous epistemology. For Melissa, she fosters this interconnectedness globally on the dance floor, and for Lauren it is by human connection to the other-than-human world. This interconnectedness does not come easy and begins with a good look at one's own limited perspective, as ancient wisdom suggests.

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", while the log is in your own eye...first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. (Matthew 7, New Revised Standard Version)

Perspective changes everything. Examining deeply held beliefs in the name of what is best for the whole is courageous. Through autobiographical writing, community singing, and breathing into a difficult posture, those I interviewed are called to look at the speck in our own eyes, to

more deeply connect with the world. Studying how the darkness is interpreted inside and out, opened me to a new way of interpreting the world around me, and looking at how I conceived of the darkness slowly led me to a new way of speaking about it.

Language is heavy with the pain of oppression and the expansiveness of liberation. When talking about light and dark and black and white, interpretation is very important. It was not lost on me that my white ancestral heritage played a large role in the privileging of light over dark. As a White woman, I had to look at the ways in which I interpret, and define certain qualities of experience. I noticed in the examination of my own personal and professional work that I often used darkness and despair synonymously. The more I awakened to that perception, I heard it not only in those I interviewed, but all around me. Darkness was constructed negatively where light was often privileged (Edensor, 2013). I wondered why the dark (which shadow naturally is) could not just be a quality of experience? I was surprised when this inquiry began leading to questions like, what are people referring to when they say darkness? Or, what does it mean to be privileged, when having more than enough materially in my life, did not necessarily mean that I had what I really needed? These questions began the deconstruction of how familiar mental constructs around light and dark had been held personally and societally. For example, when I would say darkness in an interview, how it was interpreted became clear to me through the responses of those I was interviewing. Some would interpret the dark in a more neutral manner as a quality of experience, while others interpreted the dark through a less neutral lens, as I had also done. My research compelled me to look more thoroughly at how I construct the darkness and the light and how this affects not only my relationship to myself, but to the world around me.

An inquiry that began as an examination of what happens when we creatively and courageously embrace the shadow within began going so deep that it scared me; particularly

when those depths included questions around race and privilege. I was encouraged as I read the words of those who have been exploring this for some time; particularly the writings from Black women (hooks, 1999; Morrison, 1993; Walker, 2007). The shadow makes itself known in a lot of ways, one being those moments when we are surprised or taken aback, by inner responses that arise. When the color of my skin came to the forefront of this study I was uncomfortable. My relationship with the darkness within was far more comfortable for me to explore, than examining the relationship I have had with the darkness in the physical world; with my body, people of color, and the Earth itself. The way I had interpreted the dark broke down. I had been equating darkness with despair rather than simply a quality of experience. This study deconstructed my interpretation of the dark so much so that today I cannot refer to the darkness without explaining exactly what I mean by the word. As Melissa pointed out above, the depth of the inquiry took me to my embodied existence that includes the color of my skin and how that has affected my life.

After this study, I can see a deep need for the reconstruction of darkness, as not a negative or scary quality, but the very site of transformation. Life originates from the darkness. We were born from darkness, the Earth came forth from darkness, all life is born from the deep dark recesses of Earth. And until we reclaim it as such, we will continue to avoid it, deny it, and even more dangerously, oppress it with control and violence. Deconstructing the darkness, means also deconstructing its opposite, the light. This leads into questions like: Why is light privileged over the dark more frequently? And what are the consequences both internally and externally as a result of this? And what does privilege really mean? During our interview, Manulani surprised me by pointing out that my study had taken a different turn; where the study of the psychic and spiritual shadow led to a more complex and vast question about how we

interpret the dark and more. After Manulani named this turn of events, she said jubilantly and passionately, “Fabulous, fabulous. Now you are in the center of where you are going to learn the lessons that will be of service to you and your family” (Manulani). Having stumbled into an area I felt very nervous about, I found Manulani’s words very reassuring.

### **Methods: The Walking Stick**

As the methodology is the framework that holds the inquiry, the methods are the ways in which the inquiry is carried out. Through auto-ethnography, intuitive inquiry, auto-biography, arts-based inquiry, and the art of walking, I embarked on the deepening into this exploration of the shadow.

### **Auto-Ethnography: The Study of the Self and the Whole**

During one of my last trips to Prescott College one of the doctoral faculty asked me as we sat in circle, “Do you know that this inquiry is mostly for your own healing?” It is easy to forget that *I* am a part of this process of learning as I have been trained for decades to think that academic learning was about losing myself, proving myself, or hiding behind the voices of others. This is a common experience that scholars in the field of holistic education have been writing about for some time (Ashton & Denton, 2005; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997; Egan, 2002; Glazer, 1999; Leonard, 1968; Mezirow, 1999; Palmer, 2010; Snowber, 2011; Steiner, 1996). My research question and plan emerged from a place deep within me therefore my voice is central to this inquiry. “Everything with substance casts a shadow” (Zweig, 1991, p. 3) and I have been studying my shadow, consciously and compassionately, for nearly 25 years. Through my own alcohol, drug, and love addiction, I entered the pain of my life very deeply at a young age. Shortly after my recovery began, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Disease lymphoma, a cancer that was fatal only a decade before my diagnosis. Consequently, my shadow was not hard to

find. Turning away from the darkness of my own experience had me miserable and near death. My addictive behavior forced me to turn inward, where it was so dark, that I simply could not help but find the light. One would think that my devotion might rest with the light; the knowing within me that awakened me to my destructive ways of being in the world. It does but it also rests with the darkness that light is emerges from. They truly are one and the same; impossible to know one without the other. The more deeply I entered my body, the more clearly I could see my shadow, and to this day I continue to study that darkness deeply. I am called to this work because I know the most sustainable, creative, relevant light can only be known in the darkness of one's experience.

Auto-ethnography (Ashton & Denton, 2005; Bochner & Ellis, 2001; Butz, 2010; Ellis, 2009; Wall, 2006; Wall, 2008) is a method within the genre of qualitative research. It is an heuristic tool (Butz, 2010) that “brings forth the shifting aspects of self and creates ways to write about experiences in a broader social context” (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008, p. 22). I am not alone in my experience of trying to find clarity through addiction. Collectively we are more addicted than we have ever been as a country (Brown, 2010). Using my experience to educate others, and allowing my experience to be a part of the larger conversation on living wholeheartedly in the world, is at the core of the auto-ethnographic approach; where the voice of the researcher is central to the exploration and at the same time speaks to the whole.

As I transcribed the interviews that I gathered, I studied myself as much as I studied those I was interviewing. As I listened, I often noticed my own shadow; to the degree that it became difficult to listen to myself at times. For example during my interview with the Manulani, I found myself very reactive to my notion of the academy, to the point where I began to sound very

much like a victim. As I complained about not wanting to explain myself to others academically, Manulani responded to my reactivity by saying,

Because of your perceived privilege in a capitalistic society, you're going to take people's ideas and it's almost like you are going to resist them, if they are separate from yours. Do not see these people's ideas as separate from yours. You just think they are. So when a person says, look at your privilege, say oh my God, bow down and say wow, ok, here's what I see about privilege, here's the lexicon, here's the description, here's what I see you understand, here is what I believe that meant, but here's what I mean. So what you gotta do, whenever there is conflict you got to feed it. You got to understand what it is. Because if you don't, then you will use your privilege that doesn't cause your consciousness, but your unconsciousness. (Manulani)

Relating with those I interviewed allowed me to see aspects of myself that left me disempowered. For example, Melissa Michaels was a former spiritual teacher of mine; our relationship dating back nearly a decade. I apprenticed with her for several years, where through her offerings, I was led back into my body through dance, ritual, and community. The relationship between student and teacher is often complicated, and through this research project, Melissa and I confronted some of those complexities. We addressed issues of power, vulnerability, and collegueship in one of the follow-up conversations that we had. Only love and support emerged as a result of our honesty with each other.

I have been writing in journals since I was nineteen years old. I continued that record keeping through my cancer diagnosis, the birth of my children, the death of my father at fifty-six years old, the estrangement from my mother, my marriage, and more. I have not looked back on these journals since I wrote them until this project. In reading my very first journal, I came

across this that I wrote at nineteen years old: “Your happiness does not come from changing external things. It comes from within, if you work at it.” Reading this was an affirmation, a confirmation even that there is a wisdom larger than us, that breathes us very intimately if we let it. At such a young age coming through a period of great distance from myself, that this wisdom could still emerge, was nothing short of miraculous. Auto-ethnography is a process where the researcher’s personal story in some way speaks to the whole. The wisdom that moved through me back then, not only served me, but has served many over the years as well.

### **Intuitive and Organic Inquiry: Listening to Magic of Life**

Life is a magical inquiry where “we are never world-less” (Meyers, 2010). I awakened to magic at a young age through the darkness of an alcohol addiction, and it now permeates every aspect of my life; my writing, my mothering, my grieving, my dancing, my cooking, my petting the cat, my going to the bathroom, and my academic life. Magic is threatening because it awakens the imagination and changes things (Brueggemann, 2001). Imagining something different for ourselves and for the world, requires letting go of the old story and beginning to live anew, and this begins within each heart. This kind of change can be frightening. We cannot live our dreams without taking a risk, and we cannot take a risk without experiencing some fear (Friere, 1997). I invite my students when they are dancing to try on a new form—to move in a new way even if that means trying on the movement of another dancer. I hear myself saying to them: *See how easy that was to shift from what is known into what is unknown. Now take that ease off the dance floor.* This dissertation “invites magic” (Abram, 2010, p. 89) by listening for the heart of the stories that emerged, and listening to my own heart. Rumi writes, “knock on your inner door” (Barks, 1995, p. 255). Closing my eyes and turning inward for clarity is a method of gaining wisdom; one that can only be known, by turning toward the darkness of my inner

experience. Intuitive methods navigate the murky waters of transformation by honoring the places in a study where it is difficult to see and clarity is not yet gained. It trusts that the known becomes known through the unknown and that wisdom rises from within (Anderson, 2011; Braud, 2004; Clements, 2004).

Like intuitive inquiry, organic inquiry is discovery-oriented and embraces research as sacred, intimate, and emergent (Braud, 1998; Curry, 2006; Maffei, 2013). Throughout this dissertation, I include not only autobiographical narratives, but I incorporate learning as it emerged from within me throughout this research process. In fact, the voice within guided this research project in many ways. I was often surprised and filled with wonder by what was happening in this inquiry. Some things cannot be explained. They feel like magic; like something larger than myself is at work. Intuitive and organic methodologies not only honor this way of knowing, they rely on it. Because wisdom is always emerging, and can never be planned for in its entirety, it is important to be open to the flow of what is coming forth as the interviews are happening. From the very first interview, I knew that this would be an alchemical process, where what I asked depended more on the chemistry between myself and the interviewee, than the list of pre-determined questions that I had laid out in advance. Intuitive inquiry names this chemistry between the researcher and those being interviewed as “sympathetic resonance” calling it a “validation procedure” whereby what is happening in the relationship affirms (or validates) the wisdom rising within the researcher (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 73). It is from this resonance, that “communicates and connects directly and immediately without intermediaries except for air and grace” (p. 73), that new insights and questions begin to emerge. These moments of awakening and validation occurred in each conversation I had, where I would wake up to a new way of thinking or being, right in the moment. For example, during my conversation with

Lauren Chambliss, my perception of the Earth's role in human healing shifted dramatically when she shared this in response to my question,

J: And what do you think the outer wild has to teach us about that process? So let's say I am a student on one of your, one of your retreats, and I'm there and I'm struggling with something personal, let's say my dad just died, and I'm there and I'm struggling with that, what does going out into the wilderness, I mean there's those both aspects, the group work and going out on solos, what does that have to offer me? What do you think? Teach me, hold me, support me.

L: See I guess that's what I try to not get people to go out that way. Because it's not like I'm going to go out into the wilderness and see what it has to teach me. That's a kind of really traditional Western approach. But it's the same, as I explore my deeper truth, I am engaging in sharing it and opening myself fully to everything around me, whether it's the human in the group or the trees or the little bugs in my path that are biting me or the clouds up above, then I will receive information because I'm engaged. I will be not only offering information but receiving it. But for me it's more of a just being in as opposed to getting from or giving back directly. Like that may happen and it usually does but that's not my goal. But I can tell you that it almost always does happen that people get something back. But the goal is to just have the person be their most authentic self. Like you can't, like I don't think you can be authentic and soul connected, and not be connected to the bigger world. Because that piece for me is part of what makes us connected. So it's about engaging, about taking ourselves on a wander and saying this is who I really am and feeling the reflection of that, feeling the engagement in that all around. The world is engaging me and I am engaging the world. (Lauren)

As I read the transcript of this interview, I heard the entitlement that I have in terms of my assumption that I can just go into the outer wilderness, and expect the Earth to give me answers. The resonance experienced in each interview allowed us to stray from the pre-determined questions, just far enough that I was taken to my edge of learning, and it was on this edge that transformation occurred. I had to let go of the reigns of the study and surrender just enough so that I could be surprised by the insights that emerged.

I studied myself in this process as much as I studied those I interviewed. When I asked Jessica Patterson about self study she responded with this,

The first sutra of the second chapter, which is Patanjali's yoga sutra, the first one, of the chapter on practice, on sadhana, the first word is tapas. The first word is burn. And then the next chapter is the blessed ash. So you know, it is like what you burn up through your practice...or....the burning desire to be free from the things that make you small, act small, think small, behave small, reproduce small. So that first word is tapas and then svadhyaya. So I think of it this way you light the fire of your practice, of whatever it is, and then you study yourself in the fire. You don't study other people, you study yourself in the fire, and then the third part of that sutra is, Ishvara Pranidhanava, then you offer it up. (Jessica)

The deeper I go within myself, the more connected I am to the world around me. There have been criticisms of methodologies that include the self (Bochner & Ellis, 2001; Hamilton, M., Smith, L., Worthington, K., 2008; Wall, 2006) such as the assertion that being so focused on the self can cause one to forget the larger context he or she is in. Of course this self-indulgence can happen, but in my experience the deeper I go within, I find a perspective that gets me honest with myself in ways that I simply cannot within my own rationale.

I am not I.  
I am this one  
Walking beside me whom I do not see,  
Whom at times I manage to visit,  
And whom at other times I forget;  
The one who remains silent when I talk,  
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,  
The one who takes a walk where I am not,  
The one who will remain standing when I die. (Bly, 1997, p. 77)

Many ancient mystics and contemporary scholars speak to this knowing, or witness within, which allows for a wider perspective of the whole from a less entangled human existence (Barks, 1995; Bly, 2004; Carrera, 2006; DeWaal, 1997; Eknath, 2007; McGinn, 2006; Mayer, 2007; Newell, 1997; O'Donohue, 1997; Palmer, 1998; Peers, 1946; Tolle, 2003; Wolff, 2001).

Inner knowing is rooted in the body (Woodman, 1993). During our interview, Melissa shared that her body is a “barometer” telling her the status not only of her own internal state, but also that of her surroundings. Many scholars have written about knowing that is rooted in, and emerges from, the body (Aposhyan, 1999; Bagley & Cancienne, 2002; Caldwell, 1996; Friedman & Moon, 1997; Johnson, 2007; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Snowber, 2004). As I listened to those I interviewed, I felt what was being said, and from that place, I was guided internally to the next step. My body is the home of a knowing that is relevant not only to me but to the context I am in (Bickel, n.d.). Intuitive and organic inquiry is embodied inquiry; where my body is both the method and the methodology that gathers information and synthesizes it beyond my cognition.

I found myself bewildered and astounded often in this process. There is an aspect of intuitive inquiry called “trickster-ing” where “auspicious bewilderment may signal the beginning of renewed understanding” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 84). When I realized that I needed to add a sixth person to this study, I was overwhelmed and confused. I could not figure out how I

would find this person. I did not want to seek out a black artist as that felt forced and contrived. I also was hesitant to take on another transcription that late in the analysis phase, but I knew that this action was necessary, and that I would be led to the right person. How I found Melanie was quite auspicious. An email was sent to me by a colleague with a video of Melanie's work. Having little idea of the content of my research, this colleague sent the video just days after I had this awareness of adding another person to my project. The minute I saw the video I knew Melanie was the person I would interview. I sent a longwinded email to her introducing myself, and describing the process to which she responded with just one word, "Yes." After she agreed to be interviewed, I read her biographical statement, and at the very bottom were lyrics that Melanie wrote to a song that happened to be my favorite song to sing in the threshold choir that I was a part of (a group of people who come together to sing at the bedside of the dying). The lyrics read, "I am sending you light, to heal you, to hold you, I am sending you light, to hold you in love." I was astounded that I was about to interview someone who I had never heard of prior to this email, but whose words I sang over and over again, in my choir. It was as if I had been tricked by the Universe in the most favorable of ways.

### **Autobiography: Embodied Writing and Ensouled Language**

Embodied writing is writing that comes from the experience of being in this body and many theorists are studying this method (Anderson, R., 2001; Fels, 2011; Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo, 2009; Snowber, 1997). The body and breath are not separate. Writing from my body means writing from my soul which means writing from the truth of what is happening in the moment. This immediacy requires the writer to be present; staying attuned to the defense mechanisms that arise as vulnerable material begins to surface. To write from the heart of who I am means facing my internal stifling voices of judgment, self doubt, and fear.

Stephen Buhner (2010), author of *Ensouling Language: On the Art of Nonfiction and the Writer's Life*, writes "The first and most important thing is to recognize the existence of the wall. The second is the desire, more than anything else, to be on the other side of that wall" (p. 13). When I am writing, I must breathe into the resistance that I am experiencing, into a place of surrender and trust, that includes more than just my intellect. When I do, a clearer voice can be heard.

I tap into the intuitive and call on the unseen to guide me in what I write; to help me find the most precise words to convey the longing that I experience. Buhner writes, "The most important things with which a writer works are invisible to the eye. They cannot be seen, they can only be felt" (p. 36). Writing from a deeper place requires a willingness to take risks and be vulnerable and to write what I might be afraid to write. If I am listening closely enough, this inner knowing that rises from my embodied existence directs me not only with my words, but assists me with the timing and relevancy of my writing. I will delve deeply into the details of this process later in the section on poetic inquiry and vulnerability.

Writing from the heart of one's life, or autobiographical inquiry, is a developing research method within the academy (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo, 2009; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leggo, 2004; Leggo, 2004; Pelias, 2004; Richardson, 1994). In their book on life writing, Hasebe-Ludt et al. (2009) speak to this method as a new ethos for our times, "The new millennium needs autobiographical writing that is educative and reflective, mirroring the author's life through his or her own and other's past histories and stories" (p. 66). This form of writing is relevant not only to the writer, but to the social context of the writer as well. When I speak to my fear of death, I speak to the collective's avoidance of death. When I speak to individuating from my mother through almost a decade of estrangement, I speak to mothers and daughters all over the world invested in that transformative process. When I write about

recovering from alcoholism, I am speaking to not only my own experience of addiction, but to the hundreds of thousands in that same situation today. Intimacy in writing is called for, and thankfully there are writers today who are writing to the heart of fellow writers, encouraging us to stay true to our experiences and to write about them with purpose and care (Goldberg, 1986; Lamott, 1994).

### **Arts-Based Inquiry as Method**

Arts-based inquiry is a vast field that includes various methodologies within it (Fels, 1998; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Snowber, 2004). The heart of this inquiry is arts-based, in that I am asking of myself and of each interviewee, how their particular craft has given them more information about living wholeheartedly and facing difficulty. Carl describes the art of writing as his companion. Jessica refers to yogic philosophy as helpful language with which to talk about that which is complex and vast. Lauren seeks solace in the mystery of the natural world. Manulani finds refuge in the history of her ancestral lineage. Melanie experiences the tight weave of community through song and Melissa gains wisdom through the dance. As of late, my craft is walking. Each morning I walk the rolling hills of the Blue Ridge mountains, feeling great peace almost as if I am crossing through a pastoral painting as the day breaks. As the rhythm of my feet carry me, I get lost, and then I am found. Art is widely defined and for me, and those I interviewed, the heart of the creative process is a place that deeply informs our lives and our service to the world.

Knowledge comes in all forms; whether that is through words, song, a dance, a prayer, or a walk in the woods. Knowledge is not only acquired through the transmission of information (Sterling, 2001); where the intellect is privileged over the unseen aspects of ourselves. To include the heart of who we are we must find methods that allow for us to access what we cannot

see or make sense of rationally. Sue Monk Kidd (1995) writes, “If someone should ask me, ‘What does the soul do?’ I would say, it does two things. It loves and it creates. Those are its primary acts” (p. 208). When I dance, I learn. When I write my memories with attention to my breath and body, something shifts. And when I paint, what was once dormant within me awakens with the movement of my brush, and the color across the canvas. For me, spirituality is synonymous with creativity. Whatever allows for movement rather than stagnancy, like the very breath itself, is an educative process. Transformative learning happens when the soul of who we are is included. Arts-based inquiry, or seeking knowledge through engaging one’s craft, honors the wholeness of who we are because it includes unseen aspects of our experience.

### **Flaneur: The Art of Walking and Wandering**

As defined in a local Asheville newspaper a *flaneur* is one who “strolls around the city at a leisurely pace, exploring whatever captivates her imagination. To the casual observer, the flaneur might seem to be a lazy time-waster with nothing important to do. But she is in fact motivated by one of the noblest emotions, pure curiosity, and is engaged in a quest to attract novel experiences, arouse fresh insights, and seek new meaning” (Brezsny, 2013). I am a flaneur and have creatively explored this method through song (Finn, 2013). I connect with myself and the world by walking. I stroll the roads with no particular direction and notice what I notice. I follow certain smells, colors, and voices wherever they lead me. I have no GPS. I do not ask for directions. I wander and get lost. Getting lost is a spiritual practice (Brown-Taylor, 2010). When I allow myself to get lost, my senses are awakened, and my attention is heightened. I am no longer walking in familiar landscape and I am more alert because of it. Barbara Brown Taylor (2010), Episcopal priest, professor, and theologian writes,

If you do not start choosing to get lost in some fairly low-risk ways, then how will you ever manage when one of life's big winds knocks you clean off your course? I am not speaking literally here, although literal lostness is a good place to begin since the skills are the same: managing your panic, marshaling your resources, taking a good look around to see where you are and what this unexpected development might have to offer you (p. 72).

Whether I am lost or not, when I walk I am renewed in the fresh air, concepts come together, and the right-left rhythm of my feet takes me deeper and deeper into the places I need to go.

Walking is an art to many (Barron, 2005; Fletcher & Rawlins, 2002; Speck, 2012; Solnit, 2000; Thoreau, 2013). These authors cite everything from building community, to lessening human impact on the planet, to the connection to one's body and nature, as benefits of walking. Andrew Weil (1995), a pioneer in the field of alternative medicine, names walking as a natural path to wellness. He writes that walking is a complex integrative function and "human beings are meant to walk. We are...designed for locomotion" (p. 234). For many of us, walking is close to us, mundane even, and easily accessible. The ordinariness of walking makes the power of the practice easy to miss. I recognized that my clearest thinking happens when I am walking, and in this research process, walking became my greatest companion as I sorted through the complexity of this project. It has never been lost on me that walking is a gift not to be taken for granted.

September 28, 1960.

Your coat got stuck in the bus door.

He was drunk

and you got crushed.

Blood everywhere, pelvis crushed, life fleeting.

Siren, police officers at the gas station nearby,

rushing you to the light of the surgeon.

*This little boy is not going to live.*

Ten times, they said it,

to your mom.

*This little boy will never walk again.*

*This little boy will never have children.*

Wheelchairs, rehab, colostomies, a broken body,  
a deeply broken heart.

14 years old.

Everything that was

wasn't anymore.

September 28, 1970.

I was born.

Your first.

*The greatest and the worst day of my life,*

you would say.

Tied together

by this bodied bloody wound.

September 28, 2002.

11 days before you died.

In a wheel chair.

This time not from the bus,

but cancer.

Paralyzed

twice in one life time.

From chair to bed,

from shower to chair,

we slid you on the rehab board,

back and forth,

back and forth,

the weight of the grief

was nothing compared

to the lightness of the alchemy that held it.

They said you would never walk again.

They said I would never happen.

You cherished me,

your first.

Since I was two I could walk. I watched my dad limp his way through life, often in great physical pain. He walked out from the ash of utter despair and made a life. He helped make me and he walks with me every step of the way.

### Chapter 3. Living a Wholehearted Life

“Your life is an occasion, rise to it.”

~From the movie *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium*

A poet from Vancouver, a dancer from Boulder, a yogi from the Black Forest of Colorado, a leader of wilderness rites of passage from the East Coast, an indigenous Hawaiian scholar, and a vocal artist from Oakland, California. I had the great privilege of spending this past year with the words and work of these wholehearted people. I immersed myself deeply in the teachings of these individuals by viewing videos of their work, reading their articles, and listening to their stories. I transcribed the interviews myself, each one ranging from one to nearly two hours, which allowed for an in-depth experience of their words. I read the transcripts repeatedly, dwelling with the wisdom present in their words until themes began to emerge. The complex yet simple act of being present to the words of these teachers, was in and of itself, a transformative experience. I was stirred in these interviews to know myself more fully, and as a result, was inspired to more deeply know the world that I am an integral part of. As I heard Melissa speak of the wisdom that rises for her on the dance floor, or Carl referring to writing as his companion, or Jessica's innate sensibility to study her life and learn from it, I felt inspired. I felt hopeful. I know that there are teachers all over the world who assist others in facing the complex and confusing world of the inner landscape. But to actually sit with these teachers, to witness their passion with greater attention, and to study their work and words in-depth, allowed for a deeper understanding of wholeness, and what it means to lived connectedly and respectfully with the larger world. My heart was transformed by this research. The focus of my work was honed by this study. I feel a deeper sense of belonging in the world for having done it.

We were co-researchers studying the creative and courageous exploration of the shadow. As much as I studied those I interviewed, I studied myself even more. In the interviews, my intuition was keen and I trusted it. I experienced and noticed my feelings and sensations. I honored my body as the foundation of my entire experience. The interviews reflect this in that I did not follow a mono-structure. I kept my eye on the shadow but allowed for twists and turns along the way. The complexity of this process was rigorous on every level, as was the transcription of the interviews. As I transcribed the interviews I listened to how I navigated intimacy and difficulty. My shadow would emerge unannounced and I could hear myself returning to an old victim story, or the opposite, stories of subtle arrogance. At times I felt annoyed by my old ways of traversing familiar landscape, but throughout the study, I began to experience these shadow aspects of myself transforming. I studied my own words in journals and blogs and began to see myself from a wider perspective. The beauty of this study is that it emerged from my own experience. My entire life was and is the canvas that I devotedly study and have for many years.

Concepts that were once separate began to merge. Ever more deeply I began to know the shadow and its inner workings. Concepts of darkness, creativity, light, knowing, and more became more embodied and less abstract. Surprisingly, the more I entered the darkness of the shadow, the more I came to know the light. I realized that privileging one over the other causes suffering, sometimes great suffering. What began as a study of the shadow, turned into a study of many things; the light of knowing within, the power of creativity, what it means to live wholeheartedly, and more. Concepts began to merge together. After my interview with Manulani, I wrote to her with a follow up question about how her Hawaiian lineage perceives the darkness. She responded with this, “Discussing an idea out of context keeps that idea 'out of

context' so the dark depends on the context and construct. All depends. All depends" (Manulani). With my White Western upbringing, where I learned to separate things without bringing them back together, I could not understand where Manulani was coming from. But slowly the study itself taught me that it was impossible to separate and study the shadow on its own. The interconnectedness of all things trumped any agenda I might of had to keep things linear. What began as a study of the shadow turned into a re-interpretation of the darkness, where what ultimately emerged was not only the aspects of living a wholehearted life, but the practices it takes to actually live this kind of engaged and connected life.

In this section, I discuss the themes that emerged as I studied my own life and the lives of those I interviewed. As I introduce the themes I weave in the voices of those I interviewed, my own reflections and experiences, as well as the literature that speaks to these themes. Finally, I discuss what arose as important aspects and practices of living a life rooted in wholeness, or one that honors the shadow.

### **Sense of Place**

Whether that be connection to body, geography, or some combination of them both, those I interviewed spoke to having a sense of place or home. Taking up residence in our bodies and on this Earthly plane means taking up a relationship with the shadow. "Everything with substance casts a shadow" (Zweig, 1990, p. 3), therefore shadow work does not have to be explicit. By turning your attention to your body, or the substance of form, you are dealing with shadow. During my interview with Lauren she said, "I am not a big shadow work person, like I don't go into a group going, we have to do shadow work. It always comes up, so it's a part of the process" (Lauren). When entering the earth of our bodies, we naturally encounter places within us that we have separated from, and therefore do not know very well. It became clear through in

this study that returning to the body was essential to living a wholehearted life and that we must learn the tools needed for the journey inward. In this section I discuss a sense of place through body, soul, and finally through connection to the Earth.

### **The Body: Our First Home**

Those who I interviewed in this study are deeply aware of their sense of place, beginning with their bodies, and they foster that awareness regularly as do I. Several years ago in this program, one of my mentors Celeste Snowber said to me, “You are not *in* your body. You *are* your body.” The body is the home of experience. It is where we feel, think, sense, and intuit our lives. There are many scholars and practitioners studying this connection to the human body and how it affects the way in which we live our lives (Aposhyan, 2004; Caldwell & Victoria, 2011; Caldwell, 1996; Friedman & Moon, 1997; Johnson, 1992; Knaster, 1996; Leder, 1990; Phillips, 2006; Sheets-Johnstone, 1992; Snowber, 2004). The field of somatic psychology and embodied spirituality is vast but there are few who speak directly to the social and planetary implications of disconnecting from the body (Abram, 1996; Abram, 2010; Jardine & Abram, 2000; Mazis, 2002; Olsen, 2002). We begin with the body because as Andrea Olsen (2002), dancer and environmentalist writes, “Body is our first environment. It is the medium through which we know the earth” (p. xxi). Themes around connection to the body came up consistently in these interviews. In conversations concerning sustainability or wholehearted living it seems wise to begin with the question, how connected are we to our bodies? And if we are not, how do we cultivate the tools necessary to stay present to what we would rather avoid?

I learned at a very young age how to creatively avoid the dark earth of my body. I had no idea how to navigate its confusing, fearful, and lonely terrain. Over the years I learned, through devoted practice and dedicated teachers (like those I interviewed), how to stay in my body in

times of intensity and difficulty. When asked whether or not we can have a sense of place in the world if we do not have a sense of being in our bodies, for those I interviewed, all replied that we cannot. Those I interviewed spoke of the ways in which they, at one time, did avoid their difficult inner terrain. Every one of them, whether it was substance abuse, food addiction, a love affair, or just an acknowledgement of the pain experienced because of the avoidance of difficulty, they all had experience with the art of running from themselves. There are times that I chose to run, and when I was diagnosed with cancer, I had no choice but to face my body. The late Celtic philosopher John O'Donohue (2007) said, "Your only home in the world is the clay hut that we call the human body. When that begins to get ransacked and rifled by illness, it is the ultimate ungrounding of a person." A cancer diagnosis at age twenty-four caused the greatest upheaval of my life and the life of my family. After treatment the immense fear I had of death drove me further away from my body. My body was a constant reminder that I would not be here forever. After the treatment phase, when I left Michigan (where I was treated) and drove back to Colorado, I wrote this in my journal,

I have been with my family every day for the past 3 months. Now I am alone again. I am glad I made the break now. It had to be done, but I am afraid. I've been taken care of constantly. I haven't felt this fear in so long. It's like starting over. Here is this total crisis that took place, now I am going back. The only answer is prayer. I need God with me now more than ever. Now that radiation is over...I have to believe, have faith that the cancer is gone and not coming back. Lord be with me in this time. (Journal entry, March 4, 1995)

It took enormous effort, and the generosity of my fighting Irish spirit, to find my way back to my body through the paralyzing and sometimes debilitating fear of death. Without skills to navigate

the depth, complexity, and suffering of the human experience, I found ways to disconnect from my body. There is no shortage of ways to escape our existence. Those I interviewed teach in their own creative way, the skills discipline needed to stay present to the vast and complex terrain of our bodies. We are invited to choose each day whether or not we wish to show up for our lives. When we do our very presence becomes an act of service to the world. We can choose to numb out, avoid, or run from our embodied experience or we can learn ways to stay present to the resilient, yet unpredictable human experience. Through various creative mediums those I interviewed teach students to courageously stay present to their bodies; the ground from which a wholehearted life grows.

### **Integration: The Dance of Body and Soul**

There was a lightness of spirit and honoring of the dark Earth in each person I spoke with. Eco-psychologist and pioneer in transformative wilderness rites of passage work, Bill Plotkin (2008), distinguishes between the ascendant spirit and the descendant soul. Where spirit is about the expansiveness of the heavens, Plotkin describes “soul discovery” (p. 9) as the descent, where one turns toward the darkness of oneself to know a deeper wisdom. Plotkin goes on to say that, “In contemporary Western culture...the journey of the descent is misunderstood” (p. 244). The soul is known in dark descent into the body (Woodman, 1993) and Melissa is well versed in this practice through her rites of passage work with young people. She speaks to the contrast between the experience of body and spirit, and what it feels like to reclaim a relationship with the body after years of disconnection.

I was so disconnected from myself at a certain point. My spirit was so outrageously strong throughout my childhood. I would win awards for being most spirited child. I had a lot of leadership. My soul was always pretty good. By my body, my emotional body,

my physical body, were pretty wracked. So by the time I was a teenager...I was doing really stupid high risk things. I was moving fast and I had access to ideas. I had access to my soul...My spirit would just shine, my body was still hurting...I did wrack my body seriously. To this day I am still having to treat it...Had I not been so ripped and torn, I can't imagine what my life force would be today. I mean I have a lot of life force, we all know that. (Melissa)

The body is visible, tangible and of form. It is that which we can touch. The Spirit on the other hand, is invisible, mysterious, and formless. We cannot grasp it no matter how hard we try. For decades I have been aware of the dance between the two. Melissa speaks to the strength of her life force and at the same time acknowledged the serious neglect of her body. When either the body or the soul is neglected, or one is privileged over the other, suffering occurs. O'Donohue (1997) writes "We should avoid the false dualism that separates the soul from the body. The soul is not simply within the body, hidden somewhere within its recesses. The truth is rather the converse. Your body is in the soul, and the soul suffuses you completely" (p. 49). Lauren spends some of her time leading wilderness rites of passage retreats through Animas Valley Institute, founded by the eco-psychologist Bill Plotkin (2008). During our interview she spoke to the importance of including the soul along with the workings of the body,

We got to get our shit together and how can we, if we are acting as individual islands and not realizing our place, not feeling our place in the connection of vibrant life on this planet? I could go on a wilderness program where I hike 400 miles and stay in a beautiful place and I'm with a group of people and I think I would have some of the sense of connection and beauty, but not the same connection one gets when one is really plumbing one's own soul. And discovering what really matters to each individual person in the

context of what they want to bring to the world. Like the world being bigger than just me.

(Lauren)

For some time, the ethereal appealed much more to me than the ordinariness of life on Earth. I saw the two as separate and longed for something beyond the terribly vulnerable experience of being human. By continually favoring the ethereal world over the dark matter of the Earth, I privileged my spirit and neglected my body. I sought out the high of spirit in unsustainable ways. Over time, I returned to myself with guides who led me back to the Earth of my body. With their help, I slowly began to have a sense of what Jesus meant when he said, “The kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21, New Revised Standard Version). Melissa was one of these teachers who invited me back into the wild and organic territory of my body through dance and ritual. After years of therapeutic and spiritual work, unbeknownst to me, I had to also reclaim the home of my body to live a life rooted in wholeness. In every interview, awareness of this relationship between body and spirit or the dance between the sacred and mundane, was present in some way.

### **Honoring Limits: The Privilege of Living Our Years**

I have always known that my time here is limited. After this inquiry, the words of these wise teachers brought that understanding home to me even more deeply. Facing each day with the knowing that the body we call home will one day not be is a brave act; a knowing that for many lies in the deepest recesses of the psyche. For those of us who repress this reality, we can tend to live in the illusion that our lives will go on forever (a denial of our bodily existence). Living life out of this illusion can often be dangerous to ourselves, and the world around us. The teachers interviewed know this, and their work is dedicated to the caring for the sacredness of life.

If we honor the code of being in a body, eating healthy foods, not pouring toxins in, exercise, rest, sexuality in whatever ways are right for us, if we honor that, then we have some limits. And if we don't honor it, we also have some limits. We don't sometimes live...the motorcycle slides along the highway. We've put too many toxins in and our liver can't process them and we get sick. And unfortunately we are seeing a whole lot of that, and unfortunately some of that is out of our hands, but a whole lot of it is in our hands. [The body] can be a container...if we want to be connected to it, we have to listen to it, respect it, and it will give us so much information back. And so much incredible life source and opportunities to experience the most beautiful, sublime, imagined. (Melissa)

Paradoxically the more that we honor and pay attention to our physical limits, the more the spirit can soar. Marion Woodman, well-known Jungian analyst and founder of *BodySoul Rhythms* writes, "In the East and the West, there is a deeply rooted desire or need to transcend who we are" (Lesser, 1999, p. 269). I have found that it is not by transcending my life, or stepping around that which troubles me, that leads to a more fulfilling life. When I choose to go straight through my limits, my life becomes extraordinary. Through the subtlety and potency of poetics, Carl Leggo honors the limits of the body by sharing the intimate details of being human. During our interview, I invited him to recite his poem titled *Who's afraid of Jacques Cousteau?* As you read it please take note of the places where, through the intimate picture that Carl paints of summers with his brother and father, he honors the body and the experience of being human.

In the low summer sun my children  
are walking a yellow road across the cove  
plunging into the water away from me  
sitting on the gray beach writing  
a poem about long Sunday afternoons  
in July and August when my father drove  
my brother and me out of the city

through Gillams  
     and Summerside  
         to Wild Cove  
 so he could sit on the beach  
 and whittle boats out of driftwood  
 with jagged circles of tin for rudders  
 rigged with cereal box sails  
     (Bobby Orr with strong knees  
         laughing over a bowl of Wheaties)  
 launched without champagne  
 three or four at a time, all the same  
 while my brother and I swam  
 like Johnny Weissmuller and wrestled  
 crocodiles and buried one another  
 like the Cherokee buried their enemies  
 with just heads sticking out of the sand  
 so ants could eat their brains  
     (my brother claimed ants would die  
         from malnutrition in my head)  
 and my father baked in the sun  
 and whittled an armada of sailing ships  
 and for years Jacques Cousteau  
 shoving the Calypso through garbage  
 in the oceans of the world  
 has been cursing my father's boats  
 and now I write, the flotsam  
 of memories whittled and shaped  
 in words and set afloat.  
 What will Jacques Cousteau  
 say about my poems? (Leggo, 1994, p.66)

I was struck by the details in this poem such as “heads sticking out of the sand so ants could eat their brains,” “my father baked in the sun,” or “die from malnutrition.” When I commented to Carl on how he does not avoid the messiness of the human experience in this poem, he responded adamantly “Oh no!” (Carl), as if excluding messiness is something he simply could not do. Rather than transcending the human experience Carl celebrates what it means to be human in his writing (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo, 2009; Leggo, 2001, 2004, 2010, 2011, 2012). Interestingly, when we were discussing the ability to hold fast to the uncomfortable

details of human life, Carl spoke about aging and how that process affects his ability to be authentic in his life,

Growing old can be this beautiful opportunity to emerge into somebody that is only possible by having passed through the years. There's a kind of wisdom, a kind of temperament, a kind of character that is possible in the 60 year old, the 70 something year old, the 80 something year old, if those people are willing to actually embrace the possibilities. And those possibilities include for me a constant willingness to attend to the past, to excavate the past, to remember the past, to be always connected with the past and a big part of who one is. And so I am wanting courage around living through all of our stories...I think from my own experience I know that not speaking out the word that is calling to be spoken out...is a way of suppressing, repressing, that leads eventually to something seeping up through the ground anyway. And we would all have been far better off if we had spoken the real words we needed to speak in the beginning . (Carl)

Several others whom I interviewed spoke to how honoring their limits, particularly in terms of aging, affected their lives. Lauren said, “ I am myself in my life...I've reached the point where I am old enough now where I can be myself in my life” (Lauren). There is this connection with several of those I interviewed between growing older, and living more authentic and honest life. Carl spoke often of the privilege of having these limited number of years with which to live,

I clearly and gladly use the word privilege a lot. I will turn sixty this month, and from the perspective of looking back through six decades, I can now see what I could not always see when I was younger. Whatever challenges and disappointments and complicated turns I might have experienced, I can now see how each day has contributed to a kind of collage (or force field) of narrative and lyrical energies that have composed a lovely life.

Just recently, I was upset about a bit of a mess-up regarding a collaboratively written manuscript where my co-author misunderstood my directions. As a consequence, I had to spend a few hours redoing a project. In the beginning, I was grumpily upset, and I started to explain my exasperation to [my wife.] Suddenly I stopped, smiled at her, and observed: How amazing that I have been sharing my frustrated moments with you since I was sixteen, and you always receive my moans and groans! That is a privileged life—to live with a partner who can hold you in both joyful and grumpy moments. I spent the morning with my third granddaughter...who is 17 months old. Her mother had a medical appointment, and I am the only family member with a flexible schedule. [My granddaughter] and I walked on the dike near the Fraser River and sang to the seagulls. I am privileged professionally and personally. My goal is to acknowledge and celebrate the many privileges I enjoy, and to learn to be grateful. (Carl)

Melissa sees this privilege as a “big invitation to look at what is unexplored, unexpressed, unexamined, unintegrated as one goes into the second half of life,” as she is, “smack betwixt and between the first and the second as we speak...physically, spiritually, and psychologically” (Melissa). She also speaks to aging having an effect on her relationship with students, and how she navigates the ways in which they project both the positive and the negative onto her, “As I mature, it’s so much easier. I had so much to learn through all of those projections. At this point, I am almost unaware of them at one level. At another level, I am not. But I am totally disinterested in them and I speak to it in the room” (Melissa). She also notes the shift, as she ages, in the way in which she receives inner guidance, “I get a lot of my guidance in stillness now...that has a lot to do with my age and with a lot of things” (Melissa).

Though I am only in my early forties, having a cancer diagnosis at the age of twenty-four caused me to age spiritually and psychologically, in ways that I continue to integrate. As I reviewed my own writings, I came across a job performance evaluation given to me when I was working as chaplain resident at a hospice and major hospital in the late 90s. My supervisor, a Catholic nun whom I had grown very close to and trusted very much wrote, “Jenny is wise beyond her years. In that wisdom, she has also lost some of her innocence.” When I read it, this truth knocked the wind out of me. I noticed that as I listened to Carl, Melissa, and Lauren, who are all a decade or two older than I am, I could relate to their reflections on aging. I might not be in my later years but not one day goes by that I do not reflect on the privilege of being alive. Deeply knowing the limit of my life leads me to live every day more authentically and fully.

**Earth: Having a Sense of Place**

When Manulani asked me where I come from I responded with stories of alcoholism, affluence, and a lack of a sense of home, “I feel like I don’t know what my sense of home is, being a white person here on this planet. There’s a sense of home that I don’t feel when I hear people talking who are really connected to their ancestry and land” (Manulani). For a very long time I was rooted in pain, and from this ethereal place of emotion, I had very little ground to stand on. Manulani says,

If you stay in a place that’s specific and your knowledge is gained from that place...those mountains will have a reverberation of your memory, of your children’s singing...Whenever I sit in with white people, the question is, where is my sense of home? So it becomes the focus for the world again...a focus on your healing. And it’s all we can do, to heal ourselves, so what you experience in my discussions and my writing is my own healing on this issue...When we get into context and we do it for a few hundred

years, thousands of years, and that context then shapes your language, and your language is shaped by dreams, and your dreams are shaped by silence, and you look at a person and understand what they're saying. That's culture. And that's a culture that's been around for thousands of years. This is why indigenous sensibilities...we would look at sustainability education way more rooted. (Manulani)

Experience begins with the body, but without the acknowledgement that our bodies rise and fall back to the Earth, we truly are homeless. With the distractions and comforts of today, it is easy to forget that this planet is our lifeline. John O'Donohue (1997) writes, "The urbanization of modern life has succeeded in exiling us from this fecund kinship with mother Earth. Fashioned from the Earth, we are souls in clay form" (p. 3). When I become unconscious of the sacred nature of my life, I lose my footing. Again O'Donohue (n.d) writes that this is like standing on sand rather than solid earth. Pain is not my ancestry. I come from Irish ancestry and am deeply drawn to the Celtic traditions as it speaks beautifully to the sacredness of place. There is a "closeness and sensitivity to the natural world" (Sheldrake, 1995, p. 3) where spiritual life is deeply integrated with one's daily life. In an Irish home, the woman of the house would be the first to wake, tending to the hearth before other family members rise. The fire is honored in prayer and respected as the giver of life in Celtic tradition (DeWaal, 1997). In speaking with Manulani, I saw through my ties to suffering, and slowly began to reclaim a sense of place through my ancestral Irish roots. It is no accident that I have recently relocated to an area that was settled by Irish and Scottish people. The music, dance, and cultural heritage of the Irish people still exists here today.

I was reminded once again by my Celtic ancestors and these wise teachers, that life is interconnected. Though human beings might fear its wildness, and might not understand its

ways, we are intimately connected with the land. When we remember this, dominating and exploring the planet will begin to feel literally, like we are hurting ourselves. My pain became so great that I longed for something beyond the physical world. It wasn't until I learned that a wholehearted life was not so much about transcending my human experience, but about learning to love who I am and where I am, ever more deeply. To do that, I had to face the pain of where I came from.

### **The Wound: How Comfort Can Disconnect**

Growing up I always had enough; more than enough. I would never consider myself poor and would be ashamed to even say such a thing. Designer jeans, a two-story house in the suburbs, fancy dinners, a stocked pantry, and vacations to Disney World were all a part of my childhood growing up in suburban Detroit. I never went without. When I hear the word poverty, I have always thought of the starving children in Africa who I have seen in television commercials, with distended bellies and hollow eyes. Poverty equaled hunger of the material kind. On the surface I had plenty, but if you took a deeper look, you would have seen poverty of a different kind. This kind of poverty does not rest tangibly on the surface, so it is easy to miss, and judge. We live in a collective mentality that money and material things equals wealth. But I am not sure anymore that it is. We need enough and no one should go without what is needed to live. But an increase in material wealth, after a certain point, does not correlate with an increase in contentment. Economist Richard Easterlin writes, "Happiness and income are positively correlated, but over time, happiness does not increase when a country's income increases" (Jha, 2010). The hunger I had obviously was not for food or for clothes. It was a hunger of the soul that I was suffering from; surprisingly poverty much trickier to transform.

Affluence carries with it great privilege and it also can cause pain. Money will not mend a broken heart. Things will not ultimately fulfill a person. The hunger from within cannot be met with material means and too much comfort can cause the soul to wither. In this country we are living with poverty that Mother Teresa called a “poverty of the heart” (Scharper, 1997). When asked what she thought the poorest nation in the world was, surprisingly she responded, “America” (Silouan, 2011). In India, she could offer bread and water to those who were hungry. She did not know how to satiate the loneliness that she encountered when visiting the elderly and dying of this country. She saw a loneliness that was unfathomable to her. How could we be so lonely with so many of our physical needs met, and for many of us, living with so much comfort? My privilege actually was not a privilege, even though it might have looked like it from the affluence on the outside (relying more on seen than unseen.) My “privilege” actually disconnected me from the Earth and my connection to it, and that began with disconnecting from my own body. Jessica and I talked about the damage caused when we separate from the natural environment,

J: You go to a zoo...a lion, in just a stone, concrete enclosure and [you] see the sign “African Lion”. That’s a lion, look honey a lion! Is it? Because everything that yielded the species the lion has been stripped away. If you pull out the singular from the eco-system, and the complex web of everything that yielded that being in the first place, then you’re so stripped of your vision...

JF: That really moves me [I was moved to tears]. Because I feel like that’s what happened to me in relationship to the Earth...I feel like I, culture, whatever, has pulled me out, and that I really feel that separation which is why I am doing this research. (Jessica)

I was privileged growing up, but at the same time, those comforts led me away from my connection to the Earth.

The level of comfort I lived with was a blessing and a curse. It allowed me to be physically taken care of beyond measure, but the more comfortable I got, the more instantly gratified the smallest part of me became. Jealousy, envy, relentless anger, and self-disdain all became part of my emotional repertoire. I began to repress the feelings within me that I didn't understand. My anger raged as nothing outside of me could touch it; no concert tickets, no amount of money, or friends could stop it. I was lost and I knew it. I didn't know what could save me from my misery. It was even more confusing because I had so much but still felt so empty. The messages I received culturally conveyed that things and money could make it all better. My longing had to be met in ways that were creative, courageous, and went beyond the material.

Being a mother of two, I was ready for a different, more sustainable, relationship with my body. In 2005, I walked onto the dance floor with Melissa Michaels, and I walked off a different person. I was committed to studying myself at that time, but as I said earlier, I did not include my body as much as I needed to. I devoted myself to the life beyond this Earth without knowing that that very devotion was preparing me to enter the dark earth of my body. Halfway through my year-long apprenticeship with Melissa, I found myself standing frozen in the middle of the dance floor. Melissa came over to me and began to move, holding my gaze, and speaking comforting and encouraging words; a midwife to my soul. As she spoke, my body began to move, and I had a distinct experience of feeling like I was wrapped in plastic wrap. I watched as my body moved through this experience; writhing, pushing, and struggling, as if I was birthing myself. When I

came through it, I ran outside and fell onto the Earth. It was wet with rain and I wept for some time. I walked straight through my own pain into the arms of where I came from.

### **Sacred Connection: Heaven on Earth**

As I felt disconnected from the Earth in a lot of ways, there were those I interviewed that did not. Lauren spent much of her younger life on the beaches of California, Melanie grew up with extended family in the deep south, and Carl lived on the east coast of Canada in Newfoundland,

I live very close to a sense of rootedness now in Richmond, and for many years of my life in Newfoundland, but that rootedness, that sense of the backyard, that sense of being close to a particular community and location. I'm always wanting like Paulo Friere (1997), to see from that backyard, the whole world and everything in it. And with a spiritual commitment that's Christian in my part. I live in the world as if everything is an interconnected, ecologically sustainable creation. And so I see the whole of everything as created, creative, creating, and I am part of that. And that has always been a part of my life and is actually becoming more so these days. I can feel it more and more too now that I am a Papa to three little girls. So we go for frequent walks together on the dike along the river into the town of Stevesden, and as we did yesterday on Father's Day. As I was carrying yesterday Guinevere in my arms, she fell asleep in my arms...so everything is connected. I'm walking beside a river I have now known for over twenty years and a river that I chose to live beside when I first moved to BC because I wanted to be close to the water. (Carl)

Lauren describes the natural world as a place of respite for her, "I had a lot of time in nature as a child and it was always my refuge. Strong connections to animals. Both horses and cats and dogs

and just a love of nature. I was in nature a lot as a child and always felt at home there. The ocean, the creeks, even through my teen years” (Lauren). And for Jessica that sacred place is in the woods of the Black Forest where she has lived her entire life,

I spend so much of my time feeling, elated, delighted. Just in light. I mean on a daily basis I have moments especially in solitude for me, say when I am in the woods, and I realize I want for nothing, truly, like if this were it I’d be ok. If I could just be like this, meaning there’s nothing I need, and there’s nothing I need to get rid of. And that happens for me in a landscape, which is a big deal for me. It happens in a landscape because it’s much harder for me navigating social niceties and having any kind of public persona or being a teacher...all of these things that we navigate. It is harder for me to return to that landscape of I have everything I need and more in this moment. (Jessica)

Because she approaches the trees with respect and humility, the woods lead her ever more fully into the deeper, darker aspects of herself. Jessica says, “Having grown up in the wilderness a lot, I spent much of my time in the woods day and night. [There] is a honed comfort with night vision and that’s what these [she points to the owl on her necklace] are always about for me. That’s why they are important to me.” (Jessica) The forest gives her the tools to not only navigate the dark on the outside, but inside of herself as well. Jessica spoke about trees as if they were family, and again, the paradox of honoring and celebrating the seen to further know the unseen presented itself. Jessica’s keen awareness of the passing of form does not undermine her sense of reverence toward it. So when her beloved forest began to burn, her sense of security was jarred.

**Teachings from the Earth: Honoring the Cycles of Birth, Life, and Death**

I interviewed Jessica just weeks after the Black Forest fire that burned over 14,000 acres and destroyed over 500 homes. The fire did not destroy her family ranch but came close. She helped to evacuate her family,

When we got evacuated and packed the car, it's like as dramatic as you could possibly imagine. We're holding off, holding off, holding off. My stepfather raises cattle, there's a lot that goes into moving a family ranch versus a house itself. So we had already packed up stuff and they keep moving the evacuation line...and then the winds come swirling...and smoke and you can't even see down in the trees and the next thing you know they moved the evacuation line and it's time for us to go. The state patrol came down, sirens, megaphones, saying you must leave now...At the point we were saying goodbye, knowing that even if we were to return it may never be the same again. In my lifetime it will never look anything like what is once looked like. Reconciling myself...this is my childhood home, I was a baby here, I was a little girl here, I was a teenager here, I stayed the night before my wedding night here. I came here after my divorce. That period of just not knowing if you are going to have a home to come home to, means you very quickly decide, what does it mean. A fire can sweep through a land and it can burn down a home and it can destroy a forest but the land lives, and I knew that on some deep level. We fear those inner fires are going to wipe out something essential about us. But in fact, to a certain degree, they really can reveal what is essential about us. You know, cancer, divorce, all of these things, there's that period, there's just such a familiar feeling, where am I? What is this? And that it burned away everything, not

superfluous, but everything that just comes and goes. And that tethered me even more deeply to something underneath. (Jessica)

Jessica's ranch was affected only slightly and though she was grateful, she also recognized her vulnerability.

The safest place right now in Black Forest is where it has already been burned; where something has been laid clean and we're mourning it and there is so much grief. But that's the place that now will support the greatest growth. Not where we are...it's a tinder box...and it's that inevitability that life can go like that (snap.) We've both experienced that. One phone call. One doctor saying something. And yet when you've been through a fire literally and metaphorically, there's a resilience, there is something that's been tempered. And I really think that's what allows people like you and me...we don't run away so much. (Jessica)

In a 28-page transcript, Jessica used the word *fire* the most. Because Jessica “studied fire for a year” (Jessica), she honors its power and knows its purpose. She has not only studied the literal fire but has studied yogic philosophy and *tapas* (the Sanskrit word meaning “to burn”) for nearly two decades.

The first sutra of the second chapter...on practice is *tapas*. The first word is burn and then the next chapter is the blessed ash. What you burn up through your practice...the way I phrase it, the burning desire to be free from the things that make you small...act small, think small, behave small, reproduce small. So that first word is *tapas* and then *svadhyaya* [self study.] So I think of it this way you light the fire of your practice, of whatever it is, and then you study yourself in the fire. You don't study other people, you study yourself in the fire, and then the third part of that sutra is *Ishvara Pranidhana*, then you offer it

up. And that's exactly how a fire works. Light the fire, there is something that goes on in the fire. You don't look away from the fire, you study the fire, and what is revealed in the fire you let it go, you offer it up. So for me, that whole experience of the literal fire that's coming toward our land, watching my family come together, and the tensions and the stresses inevitably of having us all together...I was panicked at times, but it's there, and you freaking out and running away from it isn't going to tame it. And if you can't just put it out. And I think where I am in my life right now with feeling the pivotal transformation with me personally and in my work, it's the same feeling. There are days where I just want to put it out and just do something, ride on one's laurels...just do what's easy. And I think that's the thing about fire people, we don't do it that way. So...there's great reverence for fire. It's not just something happening to us, when those men and women are battling it, they are in a dance with it. And every part of that element is awakened in them. Spend some time around them when they are sleeping two hours a night, and it's all they are in. [There is that] recognition of the purpose the fire is serving too. (Jessica)

Denying the natural cycles of life causes us to live in an illusion. When birth is privileged over death or vice versa, we simply do not live as fully as we can. And in this culture, it is death that we often ignore and then fear (Behrendt, K., 2010; Kagan, 2012; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Lynch, 1997; Yalom, 2009). When we repress death, we repress the cycle of transformation. We compensate (through addiction, depression, and more) for the loss of an essential aspect of growth and change (i.e. we can't have spring without winter.) So the light becomes an illusion that must be created rather than the light that naturally emerges from the darkness of one's experience. Jessica's love of landscape runs so deep and wide that it includes all of its cycles; even the fires that nearly burnt her house down.

I pay tribute to the cardinal directions and this is part of my everyday work. Because in order to revere and honor fire, the way to do that is not to just be like, waters of the west, put it out! Or to say, eastern winds, go away! Or to say to the Earth, I just feel guilty, we've been awful...It was very hard for me to turn to the South and say I praise you fire, when I am literally turning to the south and seeing the plume...and to say I call upon you fire. And the words that came to me, that I'd never heard myself say before were, I knew the fire needed to burn, and what I asked is that that fire would burn through us instead of the land, would burn through us as creativity and passion and devotion and courage and all of the things that I think we are really lacking right now as a collective. And I feel like that extroverted force of the fire gave me an opportunity to think about, where is courage in you right now? And where is passion? And are you letting it burn, move through you? Or are you just holding it somewhere? (Jessica)

She does not privilege birth, life, or death over one another. She understands that just like the Earth passes through the seasons, so do we. This understanding of wholeness is ancient, indigenous, and very present in the Celtic ancestry that both Jessica and I are rooted in (DeWaal, 1999; Kirkey, 2010; Newell, 2011; O'Donohue, 2006, 2010; Sheldrake, 1995). The honoring of these cycles is also spoken to in yogic philosophy and in sacred Indian texts (Carrera, 2006; Eknath, 2007; Narayan, 1972). The sutra tells us that "clinging to bodily life" or fearing death "alienates us from the experience of the Self" (Carrera, 2006, p. 105). We find this wholeness acknowledged in the words of the Christian mystics (Durka, 1986; Girouard, 2001; McGinn, 1981; Rohr, 2001) and in the wisdom of Sufi poetry (Barks, 1995; Bly, 2004; Landinsky, 2002) as well. From the Sufi saint and poet Rabia,

Irony, but one of the most intimate acts of our body  
is death.

So beautiful appeared my death-knowing who then I would kiss,  
I died a thousand times before I died.  
“Die before you die”, said the Prophet Mohammed.  
Have wings that feared  
ever touched the sun?  
I was born when all I once  
feared- I could love (Landinsky, 2002, p.7).

To honor this cycle of life is an acceptance of the wild and organic nature of life and I found some strand of this perspective in each interview. Melissa speaks to this in terms of the repression of the wild and its liberation.

We have tried to domesticate everything that has the potential to challenge the status quo and the Western world has overlaid that on the entire planet. And the cost is the intelligence of that which is natural and wild and organic and connected between the world and connected with the invisible because that's full of light...and the good news is the Earth herself will not tolerate that. And the good news is the youth, who are developmentally at the stage of pushing back on status quo around the planet, are not standing for it. And the good news is the feminine, in men and women and anybody who identifies as some third, the fact that all those energies right now are uncomfortable and unwilling to be domesticated, to be subjugated, to be repressed to be controlled is the good news. (Melissa)

Life includes death as much as it does birth. Transformation includes the break down as much as it does the emergence of something new. Melissa distinguishes between the deconstruction that happens in the transformative process versus fragmentation that is difficult to rise up from.

Fragmentation to me is there isn't a rudder. There isn't any ground. So to be able to go through a hard spot, it's like a birthing woman, if she has no ground, she's gonna go into some disassociated state and hemorrhage like I did. But if she has ground, she can

completely be unpacked and completely go through this total shakedown, and still be grounded. And come out of it with all body parts and all systems working. That's what I'm more interested in. (Melissa)

We see this breakdown in the landscape we are a part of but somehow we have managed to collectively avoid the reality of dying. Death is a mystery; an unknown. Facing death means getting better acquainted with the world that lies beyond the one we can see. For some of us, we experience the unseen world while still being in human form.

### **Sense of the Sacred: Leading a Mystical Life**

As a nineteen year old, I had an experience that changed the entire course of my life. It was a much needed wake up call placed at just the right time. It was on a spring evening when I was at a fraternity party. I had been drinking heavily and I was quickly approaching the worst of my addiction. My boyfriend, who I had been in and out of relationship with since I was 14, walked through the door with another woman. A flash of anger ran through me and then a frightening thought passed through my head, *If I had a gun, I would shoot him to death*. A split second after that I heard a crystal clear voice from within, *Put the drinks down, you will never drink again*. It was so clear and so strong that I listened. I set the two drinks I had in my hands down onto the table and I walked down Grand River Avenue back to my house (which incidentally was the only residential house located in the center of town where all of the bars were located.) I was nineteen years old and by the grace of God I have not picked up a drink in twenty-two years.

**Mysticism: Experiencing the Sacred**

Those I interviewed were called into their work by something beyond their understanding. Melanie speaks to her experience in the New Mexico desert and how it informs her calling as a social artist.

I have had a couple of really interesting things happen to me. You remember back in '86 or something when they had the Harmonic Convergence? Well I was living in Taos, New Mexico...and I am not a person who does mind altering anything because pretty much life is mind altering enough for me and so I am standing there at Spiral Lake...a whole bunch of folks are down there, the sun's coming up, and Taos is one of those places with energetic power, aligned with Machu Picchu and the Great Pyramid, and all that stuff.

I was born and raised in the South Bronx, so I am pretty rooted. I am not a big hoo-hoo kind of person, but there are things you just know as a fact. And so I am there wide awake, there's all these people there. It's gorgeous it's a beautiful day and all of a sudden I, with eyes open, it got very very quiet and all around me, all the sky became sort of this rich midnight black, gorgeous velvety black, with all of these blazing golden points of light all around. My eyes open and I am watching all of this...there were these streams of golden light going through, the countless number of people I am seeing, and these streams of light were going through every place where the person's heart is and I could see this incredible grid of golden light glistening in this midnight black velvet endless sky and there were places where in the grid where the lines were frayed, but nowhere were the lines broken. So the grid was going right straight through us. Flat plain

and I could see all these lines, going through the heart places, the heart chakras of just people endless and endless people, and I could see the places where the threads were a little bit threadbare, you could see where they were fragile, but nowhere could you see a place where they were broken thread in a weave.

So I am looking around going wow, this is kind of interesting. And then, it came back to light of day and I thought, oh, I get it. And that's been my work from now on, is the tightening of that weave. And it was so clear as I am talking to you right now, and I am like looking around, moving my head and seeing all of this. And everything else is sort of like gone, into another dimension. It's as if I was in a whole other dimension, and like I said, I am not a person who does mind altering anything. I was absolutely awake. I was standing there in the field with a whole bunch of other people and all of that and then this happened. And I can see it in my mind the same way I saw it at that moment. And that, is when I knew that the veil is very, very thin. There are times when we are awake beyond awakening, and when that happens, we can really see the things that are truly there. Because this was going on simultaneously in the light of day...I was just seeing a different dimension. (Melanie)

Mysticism has been examined for centuries (Brainard, 1996; Happold, 1991; Hinde, 1999; Houston, 2010; James, 1928; Marshall, 2005; Meeks, n.d.; Otto, 1987; Rohr, 2009; Stahlman, n.d.; Underhill, 1990; Underhill, 2006; Wulff, 2000). To define it for the sake of conversation, mysticism is knowing the unknowable through experience. We can call that experience by many names, but to know it, we must experience it. I cannot know how a brownie tastes if I don't taste it. I cannot know my neighbor if I do not spend time with him. And I cannot know what it feels like to break a bone if it has never happened to me. I can hear about it from a

friend, but they are only pointing toward something that I have yet to know deeply in my own bones. Because of its intangibility, it is challenging to describe the capacity of this mystery. Each mystical experience is as varied and differentiated as life itself. When the great beyond is experienced in the everyday of this life it cannot only dramatically shift one's perspective, it can be the seed of a calling. It is a subtle whisper in one's life that can turn into a vocation as Melissa says, "I've had a calling. I've been called. I have known forever I've had things to do here...really nothing could stop me from following that golden thread of my own soul's manifestation" (Melissa).

These mystical experiences happen in nature (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999) but through my experience, and those of the teachers I interviewed, they can also happen in the midst of great physical and emotional pain. Like St. John of the Cross (House, 2010) or Julian of Norwich (Durka, 1986), the Christian mystics speak to opening so deeply to pain that it transforms into the sacred. I was laying on the gurney after my surgery when the surgeon came over to me and said, "Jenny, it's cancer. We don't know what kind, but it is cancer." Immediately after he uttered these words, a sense of safety and peace completely enveloped me. It started at my feet and rose up over my head. It was a peaceful state of being that I had never experienced before, one that went far beyond emotion and when it spoke it said, "You are ok. No matter what happens, you are safe. You are ok." The experience ended when my distraught and frightened family walked through the door with tears running down their faces. But I still haven't forgotten that feeling. It was with me throughout my treatment and is still with me today. Melissa had a mystical experience in a state of great physical trauma that informed her life's work in many ways.

When I had my first born...I had a near death experience, a very extreme experience at her birth...where I hemorrhaged. She was born beautifully, her water bag broke on the last push, and then I started to hemorrhage. And they had the fire department and the ambulance and they couldn't bring me back and they were about to transport me and it was actually [Melissa's partner] that said to me, "Melissa use your will and call on the mother." And I had just come back from India and had this incredible relationship with the mother. And I just cried out, "Mother!" and boom my uterus clamped shut, done. And I had lost 700 cc's of blood which is a lot of blood. And I had the most extraordinary experience of surrender to the Divine Mother...I've had these pivotal moments in my biography, in my 18 to 26 years, and that was one of them. Where the veils parted, I saw the Divine. I found a part of my path. Devotion to the mother, support of the mother, relationship to the Great Mother, Mother Earth, body. It was all in there and what happened in that moment, it was like somebody going on the mountain top on a vision quest. I saw but then I had to live it. (Melissa)

These teachers have experienced the gift of the life beyond in this life and they carry it forward through their teaching. They came off of the mountaintop and into the valley of life where their wisdom is needed. It is easy to want to stay on the mountaintop where the mystical experience happened; to set up a dwelling place and settle in. But to walk down off the mountain, allowing the experience to inform our lives without grandeur, is a skill that takes practice. The gospel of Matthew speaks to this desire to stay with the glory of the experience, and the teaching from Jesus to go back down into life humbly and gratefully,

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone

like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid. And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” (Matthew 17; New Revised Standard Version)

The disciples wanted to set up a dwelling place and live where the light shines bright. But Jesus not only brought them down off of the mountain, he encouraged them to hold their experience personal and sacred.

### **Sustaining the Mystical: Living Out a Call**

After years of hard work, I have come down off the mountaintop. The longing for that palpable experience of safety remains, but I no longer see that longing as pathological. As I stay present to the longing, it becomes the place from which the best in me rises. Over the years, as I have learned how to hold that experience humbly, it continues to transform me even more deeply. When a mystical experience deeply informs a person, it can be felt without words. Those I interviewed have come down off the mountaintop and they are using their experiences to be of service to the world in creative and courageous ways. These mystical experiences have left them, and me, with a deep respect for the world and for what lies within and beyond it. As Melanie

says, “The veil became a little bit more transparent to me. Because I know that the space between here and there is really a matter of semantics. It’s really not a space. It’s all existing at the same time” (Melanie). With that kind of perspective, everyday life can become quite miraculous and full of wonder.

Melanie speaks to how the ineffable penetrates a life so deeply, it can not only shape one’s vocation, but change how life on Earth is perceived.

My life is an extraordinary miracle to me. And today standing in front of my choir and getting them together...I talk with them about...wherever we are singing that place becomes an altar. It becomes a holy place...We are the arms that are supporting everything that is going on, so that the people, the audience, the other singers, the musicians, the band, they have a place to rest, to stand in which to be their strongest, their most open hearted self...We provide the palm for them to stand in the center in. So wherever we sing that place becomes an altar or a holy place...Who are we singing for, who are we holding up? The idea that you must include yourself in that. And then who do we know that needs to be helped up, which is everybody that’s breathing on the planet. But to really be intentional about what we are doing and to make a commitment to have our hearts completely bared and just go there and that it’s ok. (Melanie)

When the veil between the seen and unseen world thins, everything becomes sacred (Bender, 1996; Brown Taylor, 2010; Muller, 2000; Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007; Hanh, 1991). Going to the bathroom is something to be grateful for. Looking into my children’s eyes is an unexpected gift. Making dinner and listening to Bob Dylan’s *Series of Dreams* becomes heaven on Earth. Every person that I spoke with had a sense of the sacred in their everyday life and their love and gratitude for life was palpable.

Melanie says,

My life to me is an absolute miracle and I pretty much feel that way most of the time...I cannot believe how blessed I am to get to do this work...My life is just thrilling to me, and I just can't believe my life. (Melanie)

Melissa speaks about her devotion,

That wild energy when grounded and channeled is the most beautiful thing on the planet and aligned with purpose and open in the heart...I feel like my whole life is devoted to that liberation and to building ground so that it can be contained. (Melissa)

And when I asked Lauren about the quality of her life she responded, "I feel alive almost every day I am awake (Lauren). Manulani spoke about spirituality, "Anybody who doesn't speak about spirituality is unintelligent to my people....Just because people don't see it doesn't mean it doesn't exist" (Manulani). And Carl experiences the sacred in his marriage,

I now have this privilege of one of the longest love stories that I know about. And [my wife] and I were in Mexico in March on a beautiful beach, at a resort, and everything was quite wonderful and romantic, and I've just written about this in a poem, but on a number of occasions I looked at [her], who I have known since she was 13, and I thought she's the most beautiful woman in the world. And it was like this experience of growing old, as a straight man and recognizing as in the sense of acknowledging, confessing in the moment, the stunning beauty of long love...of long desire, of that which has weathered the most challenging crisis imaginable. (Carl)

When I asked Jessica about one of her favorites sayings, "As above so below, as within so without," she responded,

How one perceives something outside is all about what's happening inside...You are the expression of the Divine. I think it is sort of an alchemical invocation or possibly more of the older traditions of pagan tradition. But that's that mystical experience, that everything that is happening around and outside of me is, not just a reflection of, like it's just a mirror, but it is in direct relationship with. Because I don't believe that things are just mirrors...That denies you your dimension and I know your dimension. Your dimension and your substance is in thick, complex, regenerative, relationship with me. And you are not just a reflection of me. (Jessica)

It takes years of practice to live from the sacred place of which these teachers speak. When the sacred is experienced in everyday life, even as memory dulls the experience, it cannot be taken away. Sustaining a sense of the sacred in life comes through discipline, focus, and a deep commitment to studying oneself.

### **Choosing the Sacred**

John O'Donohue (1999), the late Irish philosopher and poet, writes that the duty of privilege is absolute integrity. As I wrote earlier, I grew up with material privilege. I have always had food when I needed it, more clothes than I need, and have always had a roof over my head. I have had ample opportunities to educate myself and I drive a car most places I go. From this physical level of excessive comfort, I learned to rely heavily on the material world to meet my emotional and spiritual needs. And the more distant I became from the world beyond the material, the more I misused my privileges; in that I overused the material to manage my discomfort and pain. When the seen world is privileged over the unseen, life becomes out of balance, as it does when the unseen is privileged over the seen. We are engaged collectively in

this country with the behavior of trying to meet our deepest needs through the material. The over-use of fossil fuels, the number of addicted people being at its highest in this country, and determining our nation's worth on monetary value alone are all indicators of this. When we are not "in right relationship with eternity" (Tarrant, 1998) we can see it through addictive and unsustainable ways of being. Mystical experiences can wake us up to the places in our lives that need awakening and these experiences obviously cannot be planned or sought out. But creating space where we can pay attention to the mystical amidst our busy lives is essential in cultivating an integrated life. Lauren sought solace for her restlessness by setting aside space for solitude, ritual, and opening to an experience beyond this world.

I had this kind of sense in my thirties, I had a kind of restlessness that I couldn't quite identify and then one day out of the blue someone called me and mentioned this thing called a vision quest and I just kind of instinctively knew that I had to go...I did follow that voice thank God, because what happened for me was just a complete kind of opening into...this depth of my motherhood. And I don't know how else to describe it, but it was not only in my connections to my children, but my connection to the world, and how fiercely I felt about wanting to protect the world. It...opened me to the deepest part of the maternal me, the kind of archetypal feminine. And I did it through, actually quite a lot of shadow work, of my own mother, and my relationship with her. So it was totally unexpected, but by leaving my children, and at the point that included an eight-month old baby at home, it just broke me open into the fullness of my mothering. And it also put me on a path that then ten years later led to me guiding for Animas Valley Institute, and that also was not deliberate, it was more like the path unfolded.

As an early mother, what happened for me, is that I kind of devoted myself to doing all of the activities of a mom. You know I was doing co-op, making baby food, and I was just doing everything like the perfect mom. But when I went on my vision quest I took some of my Mom's ashes with me, she had died a couple of years before young, and I sat with them and I had done some previous work on it, so I wasn't new to exploring this, but I did some work with just talking to her about how I experienced her indifference and her kind of lack of engagement with me, and how it had influenced my life and the ways in which I had kind of internalized and stuffed into the shadow this feeling of inadequacy and what impact it was having on my life.

So I did a really big ceremony with her ashes including talking to her about that and letting myself fully experience...the fullness of how it affected who I was...So I was doing this at the base of a tree, that was actually a dying tree. It had broken off and part of it was just below where I was, and so I was doing it at the base of this trunk where I had made an altar. And propped next to it was a walking stick I had carried, so as I did this ceremony for my mom, and really what I was really doing was allowing myself to express all these feelings that I had explored through therapy because I was very intent on releasing them and burying them and moving on to a new relationship with my mother and I defined it as that. So it was kind of not just her but the bigger mother. And I had this kind of cataclysmic moment in, I think this was probably day two of the quest. So I hadn't eaten and I was a little altered and I looked at this tree and this branch propped up against it and there was this shape, this patterning of the bark, of a madonna holding a child. Just kind of the classic madonna holding a child. And something about that image just broke me open, the tenderness I was in the shadow figure. The drawing of the wood.

I don't know what else to call it. And all that it symbolized—the protection the uncompromising love, the enduring love, the ways in which mothers have loved their children since you know the beginning of time and all of it just kind of hit me.

What happened in that moment as I was just broken open, and I realized that even though I was doing all these things for my kids and I was so supposedly engaged in their life, there was a part of my heart that I was protecting and I was not letting the fullness of my love out or their love in. And I realized I was repeating her pattern at the very deepest level even though on the surface it seemed nothing like it...I really realized how...at the most fundamental level I was no different than she had been. And I was really holding back the full extent of my love and the capacity for loving both for my children...life generally. There was a part of me that was cut off. (Lauren)

Lauren committed to knowing herself more deeply in one of the most demanding times of her life. She went into the shadow of her inadequacy and experienced a transformation of her relationship with the Great Mother because of it. Becoming more conscious with how one relates to self and the world is at the heart of wholeness. I was reminded again in this inquiry that we do not learn more about ourselves by staying in the aspects of ourselves that we already know. We grow by studying and exploring the places within ourselves that have yet to be explored.

### **Self Study**

“The unexamined life is not worth living”

~Socrates

The teachers I interviewed all understand that getting acquainted with the inner landscape requires a certain amount of surrender, letting go of the familiar, and an openness to surprise. It takes a warrior to enter the darkness of our own experience but also to stay long enough to see

what needs to be recovered and revealed to the world. Self-study means having the courage to enter the mystery of our inner lives, face what we encounter, and reclaim what has been left behind. The anger you were told wasn't nice, the power you were told to hide, the tears you were told were wimpy—when explored, these shadowy aspects hold wisdom that help us to live more wholly in the world. Liberation personally and collectively, depends on our willingness to befriend the darkness of our inner experience, and reclaim the pieces of ourselves that have been hiding within it.

To know the unknowable I began with myself. The whisper that I heard in college continued to get louder as I paid attention to it. In the late 1990s I worked as a hospital chaplain in a program called Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). This is a program mostly for those called to seminary but I decided to sign on after completing my graduate program in social work. I had studied social work theory and practice, planned and completed program evaluations and community scans, but what I longed for was to study myself more deeply. I wanted to come face-to-face with my own shadows because I knew that this would make me a more whole and honest person and practitioner. I knew that what I had to offer in the world depended on how much I was willing to go within. In CPE, deep self-inquiry is required through supervisor and peer feedback, as well as a commitment to intensive work in the hospital trauma department. CPE offered me the space to explore my inner life in a professional context and mirrored over and over to me the question: How is my inner world affecting my outer world, particularly my work in the world? This question is essential to consider especially when working with the inner landscape of others.

The importance of self study surfaced in these interviews and is a practice I have valued for decades. Each teacher spoke of how their past affected them, as Carl speaks to generally here,

“The most important thing for me is to acknowledge that whatever my past has been, that has been significant in shaping who I am but more than significant in shaping who I am, the past is very much who I am. There’s no escaping the past and there’s no undoing the past. There’s no returning and somehow repairing, fixing it up, and so on. The past is that which continues with one” (Carl). To be aware of the narratives that undergird a life is critical to living fully in the world. Whether it was the relationship with their mothers, teachers, partners and former spouses, landscapes and family members, or the unfolding of friendships, every person interviewed spoke to how studying the past can be liberating. Examining oneself requires a return to the past, to the landscape of memory, to discover and recover what we have hidden within. Through reflection and poetics, Carl was able to rework a narrative that did not serve him with his own father through the relationship he now has with his son.

In my North American privileged experience, there are a lot of challenges for men around the experiences they have had with their fathers, and fatherhood brings that up even more. And in my relationship with my own son, I’m quite struck by what is actually possible between a son and a father; that it’s not like anything I had with my own father. My son will tell me when he and his wife have had a challenging discussion, argument... and he’ll talk it through with me as a way of sorting it out and deciding how best to respond...So that sense of intimacy, that sense of honesty, that sense of trusting the other to share, is what it’s really all about, right? (Carl)

This sense of intimacy with another comes from having a sense of intimacy with oneself. Carl transformed the father-son narrative through a willingness and courage to show up differently in relationship to himself and his son. He reworked the past by tending to himself in the present.

Sacred systems of knowledge have been speaking to the power of examining one's life for centuries. I engage in self-study in various ways; the study of yogic philosophy being one of them. The yoga sutra names the practice of self-study *svadhyaya*, which is the fourth aspect of the second limb of yoga or the *niyamas*, the spiritual observances practiced by the yogi (Carrera, 2006). The yoga sutras explain in detail the pathway to truth, which for yogis, lies within. Through scripture study, honesty with oneself through devotion to a teacher, and mantric meditation, the yogi's desire is self-actualization or an intimate relationship with the Divine (Carrera, 2006, p. 100-101). Jessica sees this possibility for intimacy in her students and calls it forth diligently.

I feel like my first job is to see anyone who sits before me...as already having it and so my only task is to offer ways until they remember that they've always had it. And I feel like that's what the Earth, and everything that is happening for us, is doing for us all the time. And so we play with the architecture, we are in the story of it all, knowing that the only reason is to learn center. And then everything can and will fall away...There's something that we'll recognize, and for me, when I feel my most afraid or anxious...there's just that feeling of, it's not just me. It's not just little me isolated having to make my way. The narrative of dog eat dog world or every man for himself...For me it's the opposite. I let go, let go, let go, let go, let go in my body. I soften, create space, let muscles get soft, not try to be so hard and tough all the time, and it's a much better strategy...It feels better and things seem easier. That doesn't mean they always seem happy. But they're real. (Jessica)

In my conversations with these teachers, it was clear that the truth within was not something to be sought after externally, but to be returned to within. When I am honest enough to wade

through the illusory self-perceptions that I hold, I return continually to this inner truth. Sacred literature of all kinds speaks to this return. From the perspective of Celtic wisdom John O'Donohue (1997) writes, "You do not have to go away outside of yourself to come into real conversation with your soul...the eternal is at home—within you" (p. 90). In the Hebrew language this returning is called *teshuvah*; a coming home to that which is already whole. In Judaism, *teshuvah* is defined as "a spiritual awakening; a desire to strengthen the connection between oneself and the sacred" (Steinsaltz, 2010, p. 3). Sufi poets speak to the Divine seated within the human experience (Landinsky, 2002). From the 15th c. Indian Bhakti poet Kabir,

Are you looking for me? I am in the next seat.  
My shoulder is against yours.  
you will not find me in the stupas, not in Indian shrine  
rooms, nor in synagogues, nor in cathedrals:  
not in masses, nor kirtans, not in legs winding  
around your own neck, nor in eating nothing but  
vegetables.

When you really look for me, you will see me  
instantly --  
you will find me in the tiniest house of time.

Kabir says: Student, tell me, what is God?  
He is the breath inside the breath. (Bly, 2004)

Today one of the most wellknown tools for self recovery are twelve-step programs. Since the 1930's, the literature from twelve step spiritual programs has been guiding people who are struggling with addiction back to themselves. The steps are a process by which the addict reclaims a relationship with herself. Through the first three steps I am reminded of my powerlessness (not helplessness) and that my only way through the insanity of addiction is relationship to a higher power (which is defined by the understanding of each individual.) The next several steps guide me in how I relate to myself by inviting me to take responsibility for my

assets and flaws. Because these steps in particular bring the focus back to myself, embodying them is essential if I am to sustain a life in recovery. The steps go on to give guidance in relationship with others, and end with an invitation to carry this message of recovery to other addicted people by living it. All of these systems of spiritual knowledge point to the same thing, relationship with the Divine begins within yourself, and it takes practice to learn how to see through illusion into the truth of our matter.

Those I interviewed have studied themselves for years. In their own creative and courageous ways, they are now called to lead others toward wholehearted living by facing what is in the moment. When we tend to our wounding from the past, we can choose to rise from those wounds, and offer them as gifts (Nouwen, 1972). Melanie described growing up in the South as a Black woman and how this affects her leadership today.

My father was born and raised in South Carolina. Grandfather was a Baptist minister...He worked in trying to get the people in his community in South Carolina to vote and all of that. My father grew up with their little dirt farm being attacked, things being burned down by the Klan. When my father first joined the army it was still segregated. My father is 87 years old, 88. And when you think about it the Emancipation Proclamation was signed only 62 years before my father was born. 62 years. My great grandfather, my father's grandfather was born a slave. My great grandfather...But my mother was very very clear about dealing with people as individuals, and not...saying all white people are this, because that's what people do to us all the time. And so she was not having any of that. And you know, I just remember so many things happening and coming home to my mother when Martin Luther King was killed. When Kennedy was killed. When Robert Kennedy was killed...I remember just feeling so torn up inside, and coming home and

saying mom why do they hate us? What is that about? And my mom was saying...no matter what they do to you, no matter what names they call you, if you know....who you are, nobody can get to that. That is where the truth of who you are lies. That's the reason that we are here now. I think about my ancestors...somebody held onto who they were so that we could be standing here right now. Somebody held onto the truth no matter what was happening to them.

I work with a lot of people and singing...people feel funny singing say, spirituals. I'll ask a group of people a question and I will say raise your hands, how many of you have ever felt disconnected? Everybody in the room will raise their hand. How many of you have felt unseen? Or unheard? Pretty much every hand goes up. How many of you have felt lost? Despair? Fear of being misunderstood? I said if you have felt all of those things, that is what this music is about. And the problem is if you sing it, if you think you are singing about someone else's experience then you missed the whole point. You have to sing it because these songs speak to the human experience and the human exchange, the human longing for freedom and connection. Everybody knows what that's about. That's part of the problem...we are so removed from each other....I mean everybody knows what that's like, that longing to be connected, that longing for freedom and that longing for the veil to be lifted and to truly be seen. You know that's what all of this is about. Light and dark. Or being able to be seen and to be accepted on either one of those sides and my job sometimes necessarily is not to change the way that somebody else is thinking, but to be really clear in the way that I am walking in my life, and to give them a glimpse of what that might be like...To be able to tap into their, our collective humanity

because when it is that disconnection, it makes us scared and hate each other and when that's happening, there is disconnection that is happening in that individual.

I have had people who I've had sort of a bad experience with and I have seen when that veil in a certain way is lifted, and they begin to recognize within me...themselves...I remember my mom saying, because we have a lot of different kinds of people in my family, my mom said you know what if you are hating that person right there, you are hating one of our relatives or hating one of the people we are connected to. If you hate them, you hate your cousins. So I began to see the world, see the connections, in all of that, in those different kinds of people. All kinds of stuff has happened to me. I have been called all kinds of names and denied housing when somebody realized, oh, you are a black person...I did a residency in a little bitty down right outside of Baton Rouge in a school where literally there hung a Confederate flag...Whatever your stuff is, that's all well and good, but this is why I'm here...bring all that stuff with you that's all right. Because this is what I am doing. And if you are here in this room with me, there's a part of you that is willing for a little bit of window to be opened up. So I just have to go, this is who I am. This is what I do. If I can get you in the door, I can help you push up that window. (Melanie)

The gifts we give in service to a more connected world are often what we need the most. Melanie has experienced disconnection and she has studied it enough to know how to lead others toward connection. We give connection because that is what we needed. We give creativity because that is what will heal us. The study of the self is not just about self. It is about more deeply knowing the sacred in oneself to walk with others as they realize their sacredness.

**Relationship: Strengthening Self through Connection to Others**

Whether that is the community of my family, a meditation group, church congregation, or a good friend, having others on the path to shine the light can be helpful when my own vision is limited. They can shine this light by telling me the truth but they can also do this by simply being who they are. A teacher once told me that if I wanted to get a good sense of what was happening in my internal world, look at who I have chosen to surround myself with. As a young woman I was involved in an abusive relationship. Everyone encouraged me to leave this person but I could not leave until I learned to value and love myself. As I did, the relationship no longer worked. The abuse on the outside was happening on the inside and as that healed, the external abuse no longer resonated with my growing sense of self worth. Carl Jung (2006) calls this projection; where we project our positive and negative qualities onto each other so we can see and reclaim them. Melissa spoke of this in terms of owning her positive qualities.

There was a point many summers ago when all of a sudden I looked around the room and I said I am surrounded by some of the most brilliant young leaders on the planet, I am sure of it...I just was in New York teaching and I was with some of the most stellar future world leaders, young people, and all these really creative intelligent souls. And there was just this point where I was like, Melissa that's what you've attracted. Those are the people who want to learn from you. That's who you're working with now. Get it. That is a reflection of you and your ministry and what you're capable of serving. Own that. You're not just working with at-risk kids in the most wounded, disenfranchised. Not even close right now. You're working with really dedicated world leaders in the making...So that unowned part of myself, as just a bright light with a gift to give this world, has had to

be claimed and owned and continues to be and sometimes its having to look at what is coming toward me. That's what helped me get it. (Melissa)

When positive or negative qualities are projected onto others, it is difficult (if not impossible) to respond to the world from a place of wholeness. Through the rigorous process of self-study, what we project onto others, we reclaim as our own.

For community to be sturdy, rigorous self-reflection is often required. There are many scholars today studying the power of creating community and its ability to transform individual and collective narratives of disconnection and isolation (Block, 2008; Briskin, Erickson, Ott, & Callanan, 2009; Eisler & Carter, 2010; Hanh, 1994; Hochaka, 2010; Wheatley, 2005; Wheatley & Frieze, 2011). But in terms of self-study, relationships with others challenge us to know ourselves better, and in turn strengthens community. Carl Jung (2006) writes that there is a "lack of understanding wrought by projection" and encourages the West to "give some thought to the question of human relationship from the psychological point of view, for in this resides its real cohesion and consequently its strength" (p. 102). When I project both my negative and positive qualities onto others, I become disempowered, and blaming, disowning my power, and conflict ensues. When I project my selfishness or strength in another, I abdicate responsibility for myself. Transformation becomes almost impossible from this disempowered place. When I bring the focus back to myself, I am empowered. It is through the withdrawal of projections that we can begin to know ourselves more deeply, and community is fertile ground for this reclamation. Melissa spoke to how her community has helped her to know herself more deeply.

The phenomenal world is one of the ways we have to encounter our shadow, and...I've had the good fortune of building a really strong community that has learned to be honest with me. Because I want it. And I set up an infrastructure where everybody gets to be

honest with each other and there's something so beautiful about a grounded community that practices together and is committed to growing healthy human beings because there's a way we can reflect to each other. (Melissa)

As a person matures and develops, the community is strengthened by the self study of each individual. Community does not just provide a mirror for self reflection, as Jessica states here, relationships are rich with ways to learn about our strengths and weaknesses.

I don't believe that things are just mirrors. [Relationship is] more substantive, because a mirror suggests that the reflection doesn't have the dimension, that the reflection whether we are talking about inward or outward, like when we say relationships are mirrors for one another and that's true, and I've used that. But that denies you your dimension and I know your dimension. Your dimension and your substance is in thick, complex, regenerative, relationship with me. And you are not just a reflection of me. (Jessica)

Learning from community, whether that is through reclaiming projections or navigating the complexity of relationship, participation and a willingness to be seen is essential.

Sustaining community is a deep value for myself, and those I interviewed. Community makes healing multi-dimensional, but there was a time when I feared connecting to others authentically. When I first entered a twelve-step program in my early twenties, I decided to work through the steps on my own. I sat with my journal and barreled through them, one after the other. I felt a sense of accomplishment when I finished. As I listened to other members at meetings and read the twelve-step literature, I realized that having a witness to my self-study was essential to my recovery. Soon after, I found myself sharing more at meetings, seeking out a sponsor, and working the steps in community. When I invite a witness into my reflective process, I receive another person's perspective, and as a result my learning deepens. It is in that "thick,

complex, regenerative relationship” (Jessica) where I learn about the depths of myself. Whether it is a university classroom, a yoga class, a choir, or an extended wilderness or rites of passage retreat, all of those interviewed including myself, teach students in community. We value the power of community-based learning because it is in relationship that we come to know ourselves, and our world, more intimately. Manulani spoke to the healing power of community in the ancient Hawaiian practice of reconciliation called *ho’o ponopono*.

You run toward what you absolutely fear the most. We learn that every time we enter a room of ho’o ponopono, where we can’t see the connection, except you just trust that there’s family members in there that will help us. If the dysfunction of these people is unconnected to others and that they are only by themselves trying to work this pain thing out, then you’ve to connect them. We’ve got to be connected. There’s so much headiness to what’s going on in the world. I actually think once you see some [pain] inside of yourself then you think that it’s over, when actually it’s just the very, very beginning. I view these kinds of dilemmas as social constructs that get worse through the unconnectedness we have with people. So, we start garden projects. We start growing food and giving food away...actual hands on project within communities have been very helpful. (Manulani)

Ho’o ponopono means to “make right” and restores relationships through honesty, support of those present in body and spirit, and ancient ritual (Meyer, 2004, 2008; Young, Gallagher, & Korby, 1996). The ritual includes prayer, silence, confession, discussion, and the eating of seaweed, signaling release. The Quaker faith has something similar to this with clearness committees, where friends help to reveal the inner resources of a person through a process of

listening and responding (Palmer, 2009). Community reminds us that we are not alone and is strengthened by our willingness to study the landscape within.

When I lead retreats I am always assisted by my colleague, who not only supports those on retreat, but through her witnessing helps to maintain my clarity as a mentor. Lauren spoke to the importance of facing your own shadow as a guide.

The most common way it shows up for guides, and I think any guide would tell you this, in any group there's likely to be people who trigger you both ways, positively and negatively. Like somebody who you just think, "Oh my God I am so in love with that person. Everything they say sounds like golden drops of honey. They're so brilliant and wise and amazing." And then someone else who you find yourself starting to tune out a little bit when they talk because they are irritating you. And those triggers are always a shadow piece and so we work with that. We're very conscious of it...Usually it's not bad, but if it's particularly bad, like if you find yourself, which guides will on occasion, going "Gosh I'm getting a terrible crush on that person" or "I'm really being irritated by that person" and "I'm not sure my guiding is that effective because I'm being affected by it", then we'll talk about it. And just own the projection. (Lauren)

Because of the vulnerability of the student, the relationship between student and teacher is complex, and projections are happening often. I noticed that the teachers I interviewed are very aware of the power they hold when working with those who are vulnerable. As I have said before, Melissa was my teacher for several years. In our interview we discussed the complexity of our relationship.

J: I want to talk about community a little bit. And I want to talk about some of the questions I have through this container in community that you brought forward as a very

important, these are my words, an important vehicle to face the shadow...because there are projections all over the place, right? I can speak to in terms of our relationship, which is really beautiful. As one who has been a student of yours, and you, my teacher. I had to face some pretty big shadow through my work with you, in particular, because you're easy to disown the light onto. So it was like, Melissa has got it. She's got it. She's got it. I don't got it. She's got it. And I can remember half way through the year of studying with you, in front...of a room full of 40 people maybe, saying I have worked so hard this first half to be your favorite, to be seen, and I can remember, this is a classic story that I have actually told around the country, I went up to you at one point, and I said, "Oh my God Melissa, we have birthdays that are really close to each other" which we do, I can't remember...

M: September 29th, when's yours?

J: The 28th....I came up because I was trying to be your favorite. Like, Oh maybe this is a good way to get her to really like me better than everyone else, which is my shadow and something I've actually done pretty well at in my life, is getting people to like me.

M: I'm sure you have (laughter).

J: And it hasn't worked out really that well.

M: And it hasn't hurt you either.

J: And it hasn't hurt me either in some ways. But as I said that to you, you looked at me and said, "Why are you telling me that?" (laughter) And I went Duh! and I felt like that little kid in me, "Oh shit, she just called me on my shit." Just with a very simple question. I have no idea how I responded.

M: It was kind of mean actually.

J: You're an intense person though. You are. And I can relate to this because I am also. And I can see now in working with some of the people I work with, that same kind of intensity. Really will people come up to me and speak their truth? Because many, as I am sure many do [with] you, I was one of them, project their light, all their light.

M: Or the other stuff.

J: Or the other stuff...and I have experienced that too. (Melissa)

We came full circle, from teacher to student, to colleagues. We continued this healing in two conversations after our interview, where we were able to speak openly to our projections and emerging collegueship. As we worked through this, I felt the rigor and vulnerability of honesty with self and other, and could see why for years I avoided it.

In our interview Carl defined rigor, and its relationship to discipline, and described how rhythm and structure are necessary to living a wholehearted life.

I do talk about the notion, that instead of rigor, I'm looking for vigor. Then I often talk about wanting a Tigger-like vigor actually...That whole notion of Tigger and his bounce and vigor...So the thing for me is that when it comes to rigor, you know there doesn't have to be a binary opposition between rigor and vigor. Because there's certain kinds of rigor that we do want to attend to, and a certain rigorous discipline around physical exercise is a very useful thing to attend to. So vigor and rigor can go together in that kind of way. There's just an emphasis on certain kinds of rigor that I think are actually counter-productive to anything useful, so that you end up of course with the off-sighted notion of rigor mortis coming up.

I live a very disciplined life in lots of ways. I get up at the same hour every morning and usually go to bed at the same hour each night. And I've been doing that for

years....there's a certain kind of discipline and rhythm and pattern to many of my days....It's like your notion of breathing. I need that rhythm. I need that measure in the course of the day. So I live this way...I now actually begin most days knowing that in the course of the day I am likely going to offend somebody, do something stupid, make some huge errors in my driving. I just assume that every day is going to come complete with things that I wish I hadn't done, hadn't said. So I'm actually living now with a sense of each day will have those moments, those experiences that are the marks of my continuing to become human. (Carl)

The discipline required for self study has allowed Carl, and all of those I interviewed, a wider girth in their living. They have given themselves more space to be human, which has allowed them to become respected leaders in their field, and live with greater integrity. The rigor, and the discipline of their lives, supports their growth and makes them stronger. I lead a disciplined life and have for years. That is the gift of addiction. I am rigorous in my connection to body and breath. I am devoted to a power greater than myself. The rigor with which I lead my life does not make me more brittle and breakable but allows me to bend when the winds blow strongly. I abstain from mood-altering substances because I wish to stay clear. I commit to a guide or teacher in my life because I need a perspective other than my own to grow. I live rurally to get quiet and connect more deeply with myself, and the world. I participate in relationship to self and other to grow closer to the breath that breathes me. The rhythm of my soul sustains me deeply, and in a world full of distractions and detours, it takes strong focus to stay with that rhythm. Manulani speaks to this rigor in terms of defining spirituality within the academy, which again made me aware of how my fear of the academy has triggered my insecurity.

You've got to find a vocabulary that really rigorously looks at the efficacy of spirituality. It's found not only in poets, but in science, in indigenous scholarship. What's happened, what's dampened the rigor of spirituality and its need within the academy is the New Age movement. The New Age spiritual movement is actually kind of like stereotyped negatively in the world of academia. So if you start to sound like them, then be very careful, you know the inward thinking idea, you must always talk about objectivity when you talk about subjectivity. You must always include the need for empiricism as a base that empiricism ultimately extends toward radical empiricism, cultural empiricism. So don't belittle the tension that you're being placed in...I have heard this from one too many students, where you know, the academy, the academy, the academy. The academy is there so that you can work through this type of tension. Paulo Friere called conflict the midwife of consciousness. So unless I have the same conflict that you had, unless, we are not going to evolve. If you didn't have this conflict you would not be talking to me. So honor the conflict, stop the misunderstanding of its role in your life, and use the tension as the birthing canal that will pull your thinking forward. But be rigorous about the role of spirituality as a growing epistemology on the planet. (Manulani)

I consistently have wanted to blame the academy for holding me back, but as Manulani and one of my committees member pointed out, today I have nothing but support. When I own my insecurity and define my experience with greater clarity, I respond to the world from a place of truth rather than fear. To do this, I must be rigorously honest with myself about what lives in the shadow, and how it affects my ways of being in the world.

**Mentor: The Gift of Being Guided**

Since I was nineteen years old, I have always had a mentor throughout my journey. When I sobered up early on in my life, it was the result of divine intervention, but it was a teacher who could tell the truth without flinching that made that mystical experience sustainable. In the midst of my alcoholism, she looked me in the eye and said, “I do not want to see you in here again until you have quit drinking.” Old patterns die hard. I headed out the door that day certain I would never see her again. My teacher at that time trusted difficulty because she had walked through her own. She knew the more confused I got, the better chance I had of finding a sustainable way through my pain. A mentor is an important part of sustaining a sense of the sacred, and the sacred is experienced when I am awake to who, and where I am. Jon Young, author of *The Coyote Guide* and founder of *Coyote Mentoring* says that mentors expose our edge, or in other words they lead us into shadow terrain or the inner places that we do not know. In his video on mentoring he says, “If I am unaware of something as an individual, it will be the mentor that calls me on that, and helps me to see that I have a blind spot” (Young, 2010). To have someone who has engaged in self study, and can hold a lantern further down the path, is crucial in learning how to develop new ways of being in the world.

Mentoring is a sacred and ancient art. In the Irish Celtic tradition the guide or teacher is called an *anam cara*, which means “soul friend,” and is an important part of learning how to live from the sacred sense within us (O’Donohue, 1997). The soul friend is there to assist the student in seeking out “the Fire that will burn...most keenly” (DeWaal, 1997, p. 137) by not just colluding with the student but challenging her as well (DeWaal, 1997). I am deeply drawn to the Celtic tradition. My ancestors hail from Ireland, I adore Irish music, and I resonate with many Irish philosophers and poets. I now live in the Blue Ridge mountains, settled by Irish and

Scottish people, whose dance and music still exist. Much of what I teach today is what the Celts lived centuries ago. The Celtic way speaks to what is deepest in us (Mary Earle, personal communication, February 2012); life, regeneration, and interconnectedness. So it is no surprise that interest in Celtic spirituality is on the rise (Sheldrake, 1995). This tradition speaks to the innate goodness and interconnectedness of life. Honoring the darkness, or the landscape of the unknown and unseen, is an integral part of Celtic ritual. One of those rituals involved Celtic monks getting into a *currach* (or canoe), without a plan, and heading out into the turbulent seas that surround Ireland. They would trust the Mystery to take care of them in the midst of the sometimes life-threatening turbulent sea. Death, the greatest darkness that we must face, was honored as a part of life. Celebrating the cycles of life—birth, life, and death—leads to transformation. Mentors who honor this wholeness are needed in these challenging ecological times; particularly those who are willing to go deeper into the human experience (Plotkin, 2008).

Jessica speaks to the transformative power of self-study and how without it, the teacher cannot truly take her seat as a teacher.

When you work with people in the depths and shadows of transformation, you must first do the work yourself. You have to know what joy is. You have to know what pain is. You have to have danced many times with both great love and terrible loss. You have to be familiar with the weight of grief and the suffocation of depression. You must have tasted exquisite happiness and ecstasy. You have to be comfortable with tears and laughter and shouts. And silence. All of it. You have to go through what you ask others to face. You have to have burned in the fire into which you invite others to cast their offerings.

Otherwise, you have no right to sit before them as teacher. (Jessica)

Jessica has studied in the Eastern tradition of yogic philosophy for decades. In that tradition there is great reverence for one's teacher, as written here in the sacred Indian text of the Bhagavad Gita, "If you seek enlightenment from those who have realized the truth, prostrate before them, question them, and serve them. Only then are you open to receive their teachings of sacred knowledge" (Eknath, 2007). After studying for years with Melissa she told me that I will only work as deeply with as others as I do with myself. To have integrity as a mentor, the discipline of self-study is required. And not only is hard work essential, the inspiration or the artistic nature of mentoring must also be acknowledged for transformative mentoring to take place. Celeste Snowber (2005) scholar in the field of arts-based research writes,

The sculptor does not just place a preconceived image and sculpt it on the face of the marble, but sits with the marble long enough to know intimately its texture, form and shape. With precision, skill, artistry and intuition, the sculptor honors the marble's innate qualities and allows the image to emerge and come to life from stone. The sculptor must honor the nature of the stone and have a certain respect for its intrinsic nature in order for new form to be released. Both the mentor and artist draw on other aspects of human nature, which contribute to art-making, leadership or mentoring. The visual artist must look intently at form or the musician must listen acutely to sound, or the choreographer must feel the movement impulse. Mentoring and art-making involve an invitation to put aside preconceived agendas and see and discern how a piece of art is taking shape." (p. 346)

Snowber encourages us to see a person as a work of art, being present as the beauty of another emerges. To see another in this way, inspiration must be sought by the mentor.

Those I interviewed seek inspiration from teachers of their own, and at the same time, guide others who seek a more engaged life. They are inspired and therefore inspire. During each interview, I was deeply moved. These teachers are present to the whole of their lives and I could feel it. Throughout each conversation, I experienced chills throughout my body, being moved to tears, and a real resonance with each person. An engaged life is learned and the teacher comes in many forms. Whether it was warm water, singing with a chorus, spending time in solitude in a cabin in the forest, or studying with a beloved teacher, those I interviewed seek inspiration and greater depth in their lives. For Carl, it is in the poetry of others and his own, that he finds solace. Carl spoke to the work of naturalist poet Mary Oliver (2007) and why it inspires him.

Her work of *Thirst*, written after the death of her partner of about 40 years, when Molly Cook died. And then *Thirst* also includes a return of some kind to a more spiritual, to a more institutionalized spiritual experience...When I read Mary Oliver...there's a sense of the seeming simplicity of being out amidst the trees and amidst the creatures of the earth...but there's never a sense for a second, for me at least, that she is simplifying a human experience, though she's been criticized that way by some for not being enough of this or enough of that. But I see the complexity of her work being represented most beautifully in the seeming simplicity, so when she writes her poems about Percy her dog, there's this beautiful poem where she suggests that Percy says to her, I like kissing better than thinking. There's this gorgeous line in one of the poems..I like kissing better than thinking. And there's so much there, in that notion, represented through the imagined voice of her beloved pet. And so that's what I am trying to understand in my own life and in my own writing. I am a Papa to three little girls, five, two, and one, and recently [my granddaughter] who is one was wearing a t-shirt that said "I heart Papa" And this little

gal, she's just the most smiling little creature imaginable...she reminds me of a smiling laughing Buddha. She's just a round chubby, long gorgeous little thing and anyway, I heart Papa. And it's not like anything is simple, right? There are lots of complications in her parent's lives...her other grandfather just died recently in his seventies after a year's illness and there are just all kinds of things that are a part of the story of [my granddaughter's] life. I heart Papa, and she smiles and smiles and she keeps saying, 'Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!' And she goes around saying it, to everybody and everything, like a refrain, like she is affirming the pleasure of being a part of the world. It's just beautiful.

(Carl)

Carl finds the ordinary to be extraordinary, and those who study his poetry are inspired by this understanding as well (Schwarz, 2006). For Melanie, it was being with a teacher of great presence that deepened her understanding of self.

We work our lives to be able to be able to be in our true selves, and sometimes we are our worst enemy, we can get in the way. And then we have those sweet moments when we are just completely connected. I had in a meditation once, I have been very lucky in my life, are you familiar with Ama Gi?

The very first place she came to in the United States was Taos, New Mexico and I happened to be there....The people in Taos made the first prayer flag for when Ama came. And the first night she came there in the center...and Ama said to me, when we did the very first Devi Baba, that's when people come and she hugs you up and it's just a beautiful thing. So Ama said to me, Melanie I want you to sing...I said, how long do you want me to sing? And she said I'll tell you when to stop. And I said, ok. So I am sitting there and I feel like I have been singing about a half an hour and Ama tells me to stop. So

I said to Cindy wow, that was really quick. And she said, what do you mean it was quick? I said, what about half an hour? And she said, no, you've been singing for 6 and a half hours...It's that place when you get out of the way and it was a trusting, well, she'll tell me when to stop...So I had no worries about it. I wasn't thinking about what I should do and I just opened my mouth. I can't even tell you what came out. I opened my mouth, played my guitar, I can't even tell you what any of it was, and it didn't matter. I was blessed enough to have complete and total trust in the moment that I was in and that spirit would tell me when to begin and when to stop. Those are the moments we live for in our lives. And that acceptance of where we are is exactly right even if it might be a little uncomfortable sometimes. (Melanie)

Knowing oneself often leads to an inspired life. Being around those who are inspired and taking in their offerings leads to greater personal integrity. It is from this integrated place of wholeness that our presence becomes a gift to the world.

### **Presence: The Gift Offered**

It was late on Saturday night as I neared the end of my term with the CPE program. I lived close to the hospital and our home was right under the path that the helicopter took to the hospital. That night I awakened to the helicopter above and I knew it was a matter of minutes until my beeper would begin buzzing. I threw on my clothes and left my husband asleep while I trekked out to the hospital. When I arrived the nurse shared with me that a 17-year old boy had just been brought in with a gunshot to the belly. I walked into the room and saw a doctor trying to save this young man's life. He had cut open his chest and was pumping his heart with his own hands. In those moments, where the veil is so thin between this world and what lies beyond it, the only thing I could do was breathe.

I returned home about an hour later with the news that this child had died. I also learned that it was by his hand. He shot himself with a rifle in his car. Not even an hour later, as I lay wide-eyed in my bed, my beeper went off again. This time it was for his mother. I walked into the hospital to find the young man's mother surrounded by police, nurses, social workers and another chaplain. I hesitantly walked up to this circle and stood next to the mother without making a sound. I listened as important information was being delivered to her; organ donation, funeral plans, hospital protocol and more. As I stood there, I felt slightly panicked. I wondered what I should be saying, if I should be saying anything?

As I stood next to her, I breathed. I was called to offer her my presence. Presence to that kind of pain comes from a strength deep within and it is something that cannot be faked. I could stand with this mother's suffering because I have learned how to stand with my own. But in that moment I doubted, was my presence enough? After all of the information and paperwork was delivered and signed, this young mother looked over at me and said, "Thank you." She took my hand and led me into the room where she was to view and identify her son's body. We walked in together, no words, held hands, and witnessed her dead son. After a few moments, she nodded and we left. In that moment, I felt a deep sense of faith; one that I have not forgotten to this day. It was a sense of coming home and living from it.

Whether that is through writing from the heart of oneself, dancing through despair, or singing truth and liberation, those I interviewed have been teaching others how to become more intimate with themselves and consequently all of life, for decades. Presence is offered when a personal sense of intimacy flows outward. Just like the form of the tree, the form of our bodies allows us to be present in the moment, and gives us the container to connect with our inner resources. From this grounded place, we can stand next to each other without the fear of losing

ourselves to each other. The Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran's (2002) writes, "Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart. And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow" (p. 15). We begin to learn and recognize that we are all different expressions of the same Source, with nothing to fear, only wholeness to gain. The greatest gift a teacher could offer is tools to cultivate one's presence because "presence that empathy requires is not easy to maintain" (Rosenberg, 2005). Lauren spoke to the power of presence in her interview.

The more I can lead by example, or just bring my full awareness into the room, that in and of itself causes kind of stuff to happen that I can't see, just the same way as when I walk out into a field. There's all sorts of things going in response to my being there but I have no idea. The more people who come into conscious engagement, the better the world will be. (Lauren)

Presence breeds intimacy. Intimacy is complex and has been written about in the mainstream for decades (Lerner, 1989; Nouwen, 2009; Osho, 2001; Prager, 2014). Many of us fear not only getting close to ourselves, but also to others because "to do so is to risk losing our objectivity, our distanced, our cherished belief" (Isaac, 1999, p. 5). I have learned this most deeply in relationship to my mother. I have always felt responsible for my mother's well being. I learned to shrink to give her space and to grow larger to cheer her on. She was my focus, and no matter how hard I tried, I could not take her pain away. I grew up trying to make those around me happy. It took years of being mentored in all kinds of ways to learn that it is not my job to make other people happy or even to make them feel better. In a culture that rubber stamps care-taking the feelings of others as noble behavior, it took me a long time to learn that shrinking to make

someone else happy does not serve anyone; nor does hoisting people up on my back and carrying them through their difficulty. When I do this, I get muddy and they remained unscathed.

Befuddled, I would often wonder why it is others relied on me so much, and why I felt so resentful most days. Carrying others through life by abandoning myself does a disservice to not only me, but to those I am carrying. Attempting to save others from their pain is not only born from fear, it is not a sustainable way to cultivate self worth. When I try to take responsibility for another person's contentedness, I am robbing them of the opportunity to find it for themselves. Being in relationship with others begins with taking exceptionally good care of myself. When I do this, I fill up with love and it naturally spills out. I feel full and those around me are served by that fullness. There is no need for shrinking or carrying another. When we meet others with our presence, “we reweave the world into wholeness” (Wheatley, 2005, p. 220). We are rooted and breathed by something infinite, and the more deeply I know that and devote myself to it, the more I trust that we are all supported and I act accordingly.

When talking with these teachers, I learned that there is a fine balance between keeping the focus on oneself and when that can go too far.

I’ve always studied myself and no one mirrored that for me. I can honestly say [a family member] maybe becoming increasingly interested in the introspective, self reflective, but she’s of a certain generation and went through very different experiences that yielded in her more of a, “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps!” and just be tough. She doesn’t go into her emotions much which is probably why I have very little tolerance for that in my life—the “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps!” and just get it done. I won’t. I don’t have bootstraps. I wasn’t built with them. (Jessica)

The rugged individualism taught in the past is no longer effective when a sense of disconnection prevails (Perry, 2014). Self-reliance can disconnect us from ourselves if privileged over relationship. Brene Brown (2010) vulnerability expert writes, “One of the greatest barriers to connection is the cultural importance we place on ‘going it alone.’ Somehow we have come to equate success with not needing anyone” (p. 20). Where there is integration of intimacy with ourselves and with those around us, we find connection.

Carl spoke of the balance between connection to self and to the world.

I am seeking not so much communication but communion. I am always seeking readers who will attend to my words, not with a dismissive swipe, but with a willingness, even eagerness to join the conversation. The challenge is not to drown in the self, but to offer it forth. Empathy and assertion gain equal ground; listening and telling become synonymous. (Schwarz, 2006, p. 70-71)

When balanced, the act of getting to know oneself does not lead to self-absorption, it leads to connection. Offering one’s presence is a profoundly transformational practice in any relationship (Geller & Greenberg, 2011; Hanh, 1992; Moustakas, 1969; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004, 2005; Scharmer, 2014) and is offered by embodying what is known deeply to a person. In the Twelve Step program, there are traditions that guide the groups, and steps that guide the individual. Tradition 11 states that twelve-step group policy is based on “attraction rather than promotion” (Alanon Family Group Headquarters, 1997). Those who find their way to a recovery program do so because they are moved by the quality of personhood that those in the program carry. The gift of presence is not forced onto another. It is asked for and received or is a surprise that awakens one unexpectedly. Jessica related the power of presence to self-study.

It's not my job to prosthelytize. And not everybody wants to go into that fire, but when they do and I know this from my own experience, you want someone with you who has been in the fires. And that's why I think there are so many people who just parrot whatever they've read or been taught. And bless them, it's not because they have bad hearts. There's nothing wrong with them but they haven't themselves done the work that would then allow people, and people know innately whether they could ever express or be cognizant of it on the conscious level, when they are in the presence of someone who has done that. And if they are facing that, whatever that it is, fire, the flooding of something, they know when they are in the presence of someone who can be...cool and calm about it, not to fix it for you...It's not chaotic, like when I think of the gunas for example...that rajasic energy that's so lauded in our culture...the kick my ass in class, get me up into a handstand, go, go, go. You say you are really busy and everyone goes like this (clapping)...the lauding or the giving privilege to rajasic energy, the busy people, the active active go, go, go, and that has a fiery element. So I could just as easily say that if a class is overheating or something is going to far over into a rajasic place that's not going to be transformative or healing. It's going to be destructive because the next time the person won't even go this far, right? It leaves an imprint. So say you were in my class and I keep pushing you and pushing you and I am pushing all the buttons of you know, envy of the person next to you, and competition, and I am praising other people, and then instead of you...fire can burn the house down or fire can keep the hearth. (Jessica)

Being an effective teacher has less to do with imitation, and more to do with responding to the world from a vital, creative, and grounded place. The agenda, if there is one, is simply to "sit with what is so" (Melissa). Effective leadership, like that of those I interviewed, is about walking

the talk your self and trusting that awakening is contagious. Last year, I asked a student who flew in from Texas what brought her to my retreat and she responded, “You.” She had met me once in Wyoming, wasn’t even sure of the content of the retreat, but had flown from another state to be there. The only credit I take from her response is that I am devoted to something more powerful than my own will and she saw it. There is a quality to the Divine that when experienced in a person, we want more of it, but it can get tricky when we mistake the teacher for the Divine. The late teacher and founder of the *5 Rhythms* dance movement Gabrielle Roth (1998) writes,

Identifying completely with one specific way is not spiritual freedom but imprisonment...You make the teacher into a god, the teaching becomes absolute truth, and you end up unable to see the value and meaning of anything else...A particular system can take over your persona...Rather than being a path to somewhere else it becomes an end. Rather than enhancing your own unique life, it becomes a way of life to which you subsume your unique self. (p. 184)

When I asked Melissa what she does with someone who does not wish to pursue the work that she offers, her response was rooted in humility.

I’d say what a great aspiration. Let me know how that goes. I’m serious. If I can’t offer what I have to offer, I bless you on your path. I’m so interested in what you learn. Period. I just had that with a student who was like “You’re so focused on wound and trauma.” Actually I’m not. I’d like us to put the word spiritual bypass in the room just so we know that that’s a potential of what’s going on here. I’m not saying that’s what you’re doing because I don’t know enough about what you’re doing and you could be on to something that I don’t know about. But I am so into going down and rising up and the middle space. I am so into cultivating all of that and they nourish each other so beautifully. But I am not

into just going down. I'm not into it. That just doesn't work for me at all. Because I love the expansive light, the levity that comes through this dance. And I just created such an open space for this guy and I just hung out and he left the work and...it was all good. I am here whenever. It's so ok. And there was such a permission that he came running back. Oh my God. I just heard what you've been trying to say to me. Thank you. And I'm so interested. (Melissa)

When I remember where my gifts come from, I teach from a place of humility and am much more effective.

The teachers I interviewed are deeply devoted to the sacredness of this life and I could feel it in their presence. Presence is defined as the act of being present. There is no agenda. We offer who we are, knowing that the love present will transform. The most important thing to the teacher becomes caring for the vessel that one is, and then getting out of the way of the love wanting to come through.

My job...is not to change the way that somebody else is thinking but to be really clear in the way that I am walking in my life, and to give them a glimpse of what that might be like...That's really it and to be able to tap into our collective humanity. Because when it is that disconnection, it makes us scared and hate each other, and when that's happening there is disconnection that is happening in that individual. (Melanie)

While I was watching a video of a community sing that Melanie led in Colorado Springs (Voices of Grief, 2013), I noticed how her presence affected those around her. I brought this up to Melanie during our interview.

J: When I was watching you in that community sing at First Congregational Church, you were on the chancel, and you moved in and everyone was singing with you, and I can't

remember what you were singing. It was a couple of phrases and people were singing them over and over again. And you walked in and I knew. As I watched you moving through the crowd I saw you going up to different people and gazing with them....I saw you naturally with great presence going and connecting with people and you had your had on one man who actually used to be the pastor of that church.

M: Oh I remember him. He started crying, I remember him.

J: He started crying. I knew he was crying and you were standing there and I thought oh my God this man needs to cry. I mean he has worked his ass off for social justice and just has been out there fighting the good fight. And I could see his whole body from behind just soften, softening with the song and with your presence. And it was powerful...I was moved. I mean I am moved by you now. You have quite a presence Melanie and I am absolutely certain that is not the first time you've heard that but you have a a really powerful presence.

M: Oh thank you. My life to me is an absolute miracle and I pretty much feel that way most of the time. I feel like I cannot believe how blessed I am to get to do this work. And you know it's pretty amazing to me...My life is just thrilling to me, and I just can't believe my life. (Melanie)

Presence emerges from being present to what is happening whether we like it or not. When we meet people who practice that level of presence, we meet wholeness.

### **Creativity and Spirituality: Reclaiming the Wildness of the Spirit**

My dad loved musicals. When I was ten, he took me to see *A Chorus Line*; a musical about what it is like to try out for a Broadway play. As I sat watching with my dad, dancers in leotards stretched and practiced on dance bars hoping to get their big break. Without him even

knowing I desperately longed to be one of those dancers, and I always felt like what I hoped for, was far out of my reach. I wanted to be a real artist on stage dancing and singing, but I never thought I was good enough. As a child I danced and played piano, and later, I wrote music. The ivory keys of the piano held my tears as my parents divorced, my pride as I played Christmas carols for my family, and the desire I felt for my first love. I knew that taking my feelings to the piano would transform them. Practicing allowed my mind to stay focused. The flow of the music kept what was inside of me moving. Whether it was jazz, tap, or ballet, I loved the feeling of being in my body as a child. I could run, twirl, shuffle, and bend. To take all of that up on stage in a costume was icing on the cake. Dancing and playing piano brought me joy and gave me a way to express my feelings, but even with my commitment and dedication, I somehow never felt like an artist.

Life is creativity. Things are always changing, growing, moving, and shifting. To create (from the Latin word *creatus* meaning to bring forth) is natural. It is what we are made of. As the sun rises each day, we are invited to bring forth who we truly are. Celtic philosopher John O'Donohue (2004) writes "The human self is not a finished thing, it is constantly unfolding. Experience then is essentially creative" (p.142). Being human is an art. We cannot avoid being creative but many of us have been taught otherwise. Often when I ask a room full of students if they are artists, less than a quarter raise their hand. We have learned that artists are those who show their paintings in galleries, go to the Julliard School of Dance, or are in a famous rock band; that artists are exceptions not the norm. It takes a lot of commitment and dedication to reclaim the artist within. Jessica says, "To study what is true about ourselves, we must meet what's not true about ourselves" (Jessica). Many of us have lived the lie that we are not creative. But as O'Donohue writes experience itself is creative and we are experience. Through writing,

Carl confronts what does not serve the authentic expression of him self and spoke to how his relationship with writing has transformed through the years.

Writing is the experience that I claim has been most significant in guiding me to the places that I currently am...In high school I was told I would never be a writer by an English teacher. So I call myself a wounded writer...and I share that story frequently in my writing classes...When I went to university in adolescence and early 20s, and took various studies in English literature and in Education, I did not know myself as a writer. I did not know myself as a poet. And I wrote academic essays hoping for the A grade and that kind of thing. It was actually in my later 20s and life was in turmoil. There were crisis around marriage and spiritual commitment. It was then that I began writing in a journal and really began to hear a voice that I liked in my writing, a voice that I had never heard before. And it was then that I began writing in ways that courted the darkness, that invited the darkness in, that invited in the struggles, the crises, the trials...invited all of that into my journal writing and then sought to write poetry out of what was emerging in the journal...I would then go on to do an MA in creative writing...and a PhD with a focus in writing as well. Writing has always been the companion, the one that goes along side me, that beautiful word companion has to do with sharing bread together...Writing is the staple of my life. I'm almost always writing something. In a journal, working on drafts of poems, papers or book.

When I came for an interview at UBC in 1990 I went to my department of language education as it was called then, and in the interview process was a whole circle of people who would be become my colleagues. I said to them, I am not really interested in doing the kind of research that most of you do here. I said that in my interview. I said I

am not really interested in empirical research. I want to research experiences of desire and schooling and I am looking for a home for my poetry...When I left the interview and flew back to Newfoundland where I was living at the time, I thought, well they will never hire me. They'll never be interested in me with the kind of things I just said. And then I berated myself, why was I so honest in saying what I really wanted? Why didn't I just sell them some kind of line that would give me a better chance of being hired? But anyway, they did hire me. So when I came to the department, I came with a sense of real openness that I figured they hired me based on having told them exactly what I was looking for and who I wanted to be in academic life. So writing is always there and I came to UBC as a poet and it's that role of poet that I've continued to live out all of these years. And so I've lived then again this privileged life of pursuing almost always research and writing and teaching that are exactly what I want to do. (Carl)

Baz Luhrmann director, screenwriter, and producer writes "Creativity in its essence is facing some kind of fears" (Wallace, 2014). Many years ago, I went to visit a hospital in Florida to study their holistic healing program. I sat down to play the piano in the lobby next to a wall mosaicked by hospital staff and patients. As I played, a man sat next to me on the piano bench, and started playing. My fingers froze and I stopped playing. I told him that I can't play with other people and that I can only play by myself. Thankfully, he did not believe me, and put my hands back up on the keys. I took a deep breath and faced my fears of failing, looking like I don't know what I am doing, and trusting someone else to create with me. With the movement of my fingers and the softening of my body, we created something together, and people gathered around the lobby to hear it. Telling myself that I am not creative is one of the most dangerous

lies I have ever told myself. Reclaiming my innate creativity has therefore been one of the most liberating things I have ever done.

After speaking with Manulani, what I have always felt about creative expression was confirmed through her indigenous Hawaiian perspective.

We now know creativity is synonym for spirituality. If we are not creating ideas, knowledge, napkins, gifts to give away...see typical Western constructs of healing, [are] very necessary, but it has to be combined with the spiritual and physical aspects. And so mental must be combined with physical...So to give people tools, beyond mental construct tools. When you hear and can actually touch stone to a place of feeling then you've gotta do something. You can't be thinking more. You've got to do something. Getting...us connected to building, doing, cleaning, anything...there's a trillion things, volunteering, volunteering, volunteering, gets the energy moving also in the person. So mental, physical, spiritual, the trilogy's got to happen in the healing world or else it is just a two-dimensional healing. (Manulani)

Creativity, or a bringing forth, is always present; whether or not we are aligned with it is the question. Aligning with creativity means aligning with the unseen, to where our actions are then born from the energy flowing through us. Creative expression makes what is unseeable seeable, and like Lauren says, if people could "just access that part of themselves that is creative and wonderful, it would be better" (Lauren). Recently I asked a group of young people their thoughts on spirituality. One of the young women, a visual artist who finds great solace in drawing, said that she is not spiritual. She allows intricate, meaningful, inspiring drawings to come through her on a daily basis, but does not see herself as spiritual. Creation itself has been separated from its source, and as a result, inspiration is seen as a product of self-will alone, rather than emergent

through us from something larger. Celtic mythology deeply honors, and relies on, the world that lies beyond what we can see. The Tuatha De Danann, a Celtic mythological people, were deeply connected to the inner world and had a rich sense of physical place as well. They lived in relationship with the dimension of life that is known by descending into that which cannot be seen. The story goes that they repeatedly fought off barbarian invaders in order to protect the sacredness of the land. But on the third invasion they were outnumbered. As the invaders approached over the hill, the Tuatha “turned sideways into the light” (Kirkey, 2010, p. 75). They trusted the invisible dimension of our world so deeply that they bet their lives on it. When the time of massacre was at hand, they turned toward what they couldn’t see, and it saved them. If my eyes are only seeing the world of form, I will myself through life. I lose the ability to experience the magic and wonder of life, and my actions become uninspired, and even ineffective. When the world is lackluster, it is my vision that is lacking, and only through spiritual practice can I know otherwise. Spiritual practice means aligning with the wild within or reclaiming that which flows free in me.

Melissa spoke of the wild often in her work, as do the others I spoke with. Creativity is wild and many of us have not been taught to be in relationship with the wild (Griffiths, 2006; Louv, 2005; Nash, 2001; Oelschlaeger, 1991; Shepard, 1982). Like a tree, creativity needs roots to manifest with greater clarity and integrity.

Energy is creativity....[It] is what will allow us to come back and live in community with one another, with ourselves in communion, and in a way that restores and remembers the natural order of life and death...So what about the wild? Yeah, there’s a place where the wild is disembodied and can be destructive. And I know in myself I’ve been there...and some of it is healthy exploration, but if there’s no container and there’s no...internal

compass, one can go so far out that you can't find your way back in. And I work with that every day with kids, and I want to give young people in particular, and all of us where we can explore those edges and feel where it's no longer useful. Where it's becoming a compulsive habit where we are moving from use to abuse. And whether that's around sexuality, and even around substance use, which I am vehemently not interested in or supportive of but I understand it's out there. I have tons of kids who are exploring all kinds of things. Whether it's around travel or crazy skiing or you know, there a million ways this can happen.

I understand what people are looking for, they are seeing how far out they can go, and have an experience of something bigger than themselves, and exercise those muscles that don't get exercised when you are sitting at a desk at a public high school with two windows in the building being told to prepare for a test...We're way more interesting than all of that. And the good news is there's an uprising and the bad news is we're also just getting more and more sophisticated and slick and sick in how we repress it. When I was growing up there wasn't medication, now everybody's getting medicated. But...that wild energy when grounded and channeled is the most beautiful thing on the planet and aligned with purpose and open in the heart. Not just aligned with purpose, with life giving purpose, to me is glorious. And I feel like my whole life is devoted to that liberation and to building ground so that it can be contained. Well utilized. Creatively utilized. (Melissa)

When the world reflects disharmony, we are being called to include the wildness of the soul in our leadership. Those I have interviewed, in their own ways, are responding to the call of the wild. Celtic scholar John Philip Newell (1999) writes "when fear suppresses the energies in us

that have their origins in the wildness of God, they will be turned into forces of death rather than vitality. Between us this leads to apathy or violence. Within us it means a dearth of creativity” (p. 22). The experience of this wildness is unique to each person, which makes it difficult to talk about due to a lack of common language. Consequentially, wildness is often left out of the mainstream conversation on social change, and transformation is therefore stifled. Creative expression gives us another language to connect to ourselves and each other and there are many scholars in the field of creativity and transformation speaking to this (Capacchione, 2001; Fox, 2002; Ganim, 1999; Halprin, 2000; Halprin, 2003; May, 1975; Robinson, 2001; Roth, 1989). Leading others toward the inner wild happens with leaders who are committed to the “hero’s journey” (Campbell, 1990) of recovering and grounding their own wildness. For Melanie that process is through song.

Music has the ability to break through...before our minds kick in and we start analyzing and wondering...Music can get you right away like that before you realize...That’s why...music is the rallying point in every major movement on the planet. I can pull a whole bunch of people together in three minutes as opposed to a thirty-minute speech. You can get everybody on the same page despite ourselves...Get out of the way and let the song go there. There is something about it that just can realign us even when we are feeling just nuts and completely out of control and things are happening in our bodies that are just weird and our minds are twisting up. And people with Alzheimer’s (Sleepy Moose, 2012) and all kinds of stuff, you hear a song and that is the moment of clarity in their life. They might not even remember their own name or how to go to the bathroom but they’ll remember that song...I had a experience of singing, I went to a pulmonary unit and most of the folks in this pulmonary unit were in comas and there was...one young

woman probably in her thirties, one of those kind of conditions where she couldn't move but only her eyes could move, couldn't speak. And I started singing. I don't even remember what it was, but I went into each individual room and sang for them, started singing and I was looking in her eyes and she was so excited and she recognized the song and there was so much joy there. And I knew that she was just dancing and twirling in her mind and...for that moment, she was completely mobile. And I knew that it was the song that did it. That's that thing that can remove that veil, that space between here and there. And it can bring you in a moment right to where you need to be. And in that moment and in that second you are completely liberated. There is nothing holding you back, there is nothing keeping you from being in your biggest and best self. We all have those moments and song to me is one of those things that can do that. We are all just looking to find our own voice and so many of us are afraid to hear what that sounds like. So when I create a spontaneous choir people get to, for those moments...feel completely connected. It's a beautiful thing. (Melanie)

As awkward and illiterate as the people of this country may be in the area of spirituality or creativity (May, 1975; Molzahn & Shields, 2008; Robinson, 2006), its inclusion is essential if enduring change is to be made. When I asked Lauren about this she responded,

I think ultimately not a lot will change until we change our fundamental systems of how we are as humans. But, I don't know how that happens. But yes, I really hear you. There's almost no attendance to the emotional or spiritual well being of people, it's well whether or not they have enough food in the era of climate change, you know can we grow enough food to feed 9 billion people? So yeah, I think you have put your finger on something that is really critical. And no, I don't think it will change. Otherwise I would

be running like Outward Bound programs where I am just taking people out in nature to kind of conquer it or survive it. But I don't really think that gets at the root of the issue.

(Lauren)

Those I interviewed, not only honor the wild, they invite it. Collectively, we have kept the power of the spirit in the dark for so long (Eisler, 1995; Garrison, 2000; Jensen, 2004; Palmer, 2004; Woodman, 1996) that we have become inept at speaking about it or exploring our relationship to it in the public sphere. A pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 2003) is needed to support this level of social change where "emotional labor" is "part of the radical work of changing social relationships" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 131). Discomfort is an undeniable aspect of change; the greater the change, the greater the discomfort. The teachers I interviewed are some of the brave and wild leaders willing to take this on in the name of the rooted wild.

### **Holding to the Difficult: Welcoming Wholeness**

"Perhaps all the dragons of our life are princesses,  
who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave.

Perhaps everything terrifying is at bottom  
the helplessness that seeks our help."

~Rainer Maria Rilke

*No one gets out of childhood without a wound*, my mentor said. No matter how much I want to escape my suffering, I cannot escape the brokenness of my life. Life is vulnerable and how I move with that vulnerability is mostly determined by how I have been conditioned to move with it. I am formed by my relationships and the shape that I take in this life depends on my experience—on what I was taught about the vulnerability of being alive. Potential is determined by so much, but how fully I live, is determined greatly by my experience as a child. Recently I heard a loving mother say to her emotional daughter as she dropped her off at elementary school, "Ok, now it is time to stop crying." I watched the 6-year old shore up her

tears; stuffing them deep inside in a place that she will find down the road only if she stops to take a look. I saw myself in this child as I grew up learning by example that crying was acceptable. In our interview, Melissa spoke to the difficulty she faced as a young person.

I felt really bad about myself. I didn't like myself. I felt ugly, unlovable and I was grieving my own story and grieving things that were going on around me, but I had no way of expressing it. And most importantly, I was angry. I was just so angry and I didn't all the way know why. And basically the adults around me didn't know what to do with me because I was sort of supposed to be the good child.

The masculine that I grew up in had a certain patriarchal authority and an incredible objectification...not just the women but the men too...But I really grew up with the guys with the suits and the ties. My father was a homeboy from Russia and Mexico and he decided to make it in the white man's world and he did. And I grew up in sort of a first generation of that...I was this hairy, overweight young woman and I saw my dad with these like beautiful movie star blonde women, and it was just complicated. And just for the record my dad is eighty-nine and he is definitely one of my closest people on the planet and I am sure for my whole lifetime. He is one of my deep, deep soul partners and there is nothing we don't talk about, including all of this. So, it's been a hell of a journey.(Melissa)

Growing up is complicated and childhood is an experience peppered with moments of joy, delight, suffering, and pain. It's not perfect, and the degree of brokenness we experience varies. Melissa came full circle with the difficulty she encountered as a young woman to where she now counts her father as one of her greatest allies.

**Difficulty: Owned and Unowned**

In each conversation I had, these teachers honored pain, even to the point of seeing it as sacred. When pain is owned and honored, transformation becomes possible. Feeling pain is difficult enough to face it alone is daunting. These teachers all provide communal support and rituals that honor pain to help us be with what hurts. Melanie spoke to the importance of holding pain sacredly and how this culture is challenged in doing so.

In a lot of indigenous cultures, collective moaning, which is a very, very deep part of the African American community, it comes from slavery, and before that it comes from Africa. The idea of collective mourning or moaning, in song...You do it together. It's the rocking. It's the moaning. It's the crying. It's the tearing of the clothes and the pain, but collectively. It's the same thing in the Jewish culture, sitting shiva...You together spend time being in that sorrow, and the person who has lost someone, their job is to simply be in mourning. People bring them food and for all of that time they are there and it's not matter of you need to get over this, or buck up, or it was all for the good, none of that bullshit, excuse my language. It's about we are here to support you, to give you time and space to be in mourning. We are not here to talk about something different, none of that. We are here to support you and give you the space so that you don't have to worry about eating or getting food for yourself. We bring it for you so that you can be in this moment; to be in this time of dealing with your loss, of dealing with that pain. So it's that making space, and again in the Western culture, it is you need to get over that, or buck up, all that kind of stuff instead of just being in that space...It's just acknowledging and not brushing aside.

That's the thing that is so incredible about threshold [choirs that sing to those who are dying.] People die and it's hard. It can be ugly. It can be beautiful. Whatever it is, it doesn't matter. We as singers, is to be there, to make a space for however that person decides to do their journey. It's not our job to change their journey for them. Our job is to just make a space for them to decide how it is that they need to do it...As a singer, when I am singing at a bedside, I'm just trying to make for that person to do whatever it is that they need to do, in that moment...to not deny them or dictate to them how their death should be. It is just to give them a palm to stand in, so that they can decide what it is. My job is to just keep my heart open, not to fix anything. It's just to really be there and to be witness, and to stay out of there way, and to help them make their way...however that is.

(Melanie)

In a collective that fears pain (Brown, 2012; Greenspan, 2003), facing it together and in ancient ways, gives difficulty solid ground to stand upon. The more that we can stand as witness to our own pain, the better equipped we are to stand with others.

“When you find someone running toward the darkness ask them to be your teacher,” my spiritual mentor said, and teachers come in unexpected forms. In the late 1990s, I corresponded with a man living on death row. He used to say that none of us are defined by our best actions or our worst. From a man who was accused of murder in the first degree, his worst action was about as bad as it gets. Mike (not his real name) was also an artist—drawing detailed sketches in his solitary cell with pencils bought at a local drugstore. He sold these drawings to many people to be able to pay his legal fees. Amidst great challenge (which included very poor legal representation and dwindling financial resources) he awakened to who he truly was by participating in creation. By facing and owning his deepest darkness through his art, his self-

definition ran deeper than his best and worst actions. He reclaimed the beauty of himself through the color and depth of his drawings. Mike did not long to be free from prison. He wanted to live, but he did not, as he was executed. His worst action defined his physical life, but in the end Mike found freedom in the deepest of places. His last words reflected the freedom that he found. *I leave you all as I came...in love.*

I spoke with Mike weeks before his death. I assured him that I would keep up the fight against capital punishment. Within months of his death, I had slowly backed out of my commitments with the local anti-death penalty group and am no longer involved with direct efforts to end the death penalty. Every now and then I will have a ghostly feeling pass over me that whispers: *You let Mike down.* But my work is a testament to Mike's story. Every day I invite myself, and others, to turn toward the darkness of their own experience where a sustaining light can be found; a light that the Bhakti poet Kabir (Bly, 2004) calls "a lamp with no wick and no oil" (p. 10). Mike experienced this as a love that we are born with, that we die to, that renews us, and can never be defined. The great mystics of every faith have written for centuries about this love, deeply embodied in the darkness of our earthly lives. This poem by Kabir, translated by Robert Bly (2004), speaks to this concept of the sacred in the ordinary.

Be strong then, and enter into your own body;  
there you have a solid place for your feet.  
Think about it carefully!  
Don't go off somewhere else!

Kabir says this: Just throw away all thoughts of  
imaginary things,  
and stand firm in that which you are. (p. 26)

We are living in a culture on the run, and what we run from defines us in the most subtle, and the most extreme ways. Mike ran away from the difficult, but then he ran back. He took his

imprisonment as an opportunity to wake up to the whole of himself. With every stroke of the pencil, he found his way back to the truth within him. Every drawing became a prayer to the wisdom that exists in the deepest difficulty of our lives; a wisdom that connects us more deeply to ourselves and to the world we are immersed in.

When speaking with these leaders, they each spoke of the need to wake up to what keeps us on the run from ourselves. With addiction of all kinds on the rise (Johnston, O'Malley & Bachman, 1998), the climate warming due mostly to human overconsumption (in the United States primarily) (McCarthy, 2008), and dangerous emotional reactivity that includes violence in our schools and church parking lots (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2012), we cannot deny that as a collective we are on the run from ourselves. Lauren and I spoke about this disconnection in her interview.

L: The more I understand about my own shadow, the more helpful I could be to the people in my world and to the world itself, because I'm moving from a place of more conscious intention...instead of being pulled around by this or that shadow.

J: Do you see any connection between this shadow work or facing what is difficult, to see any connection between doing that or not doing that and our connection to the planet?

L: Absolutely. I think we get cut off from our own emotions and our own authenticity and then it becomes easy to cut ourselves off from the pain we're causing to either others... humans or non-humans.

J: So facing the difficulty within is not simply just for our own health and wellbeing or happiness?

L: No, ultimately it's not really about that. I mean of course that's an important component, but...it's a critical step toward really being connected. And my case was a

concrete example of that...I was not fully engaged or connected and until I made that huge breakthrough and understanding about the ways that I was protecting my heart I could not embrace my life fully, whether it was my kids, my work, or my the world. And people are afraid of the grief. They're afraid to feel, afraid to risk....We hear that all the time on programs. They say that if I let the grief in, it will never stop...My experience is just the opposite, that once we let it in, it opens us to the fullness of life. If we bottle it down, it comes out in really destructive ways. (Lauren)

Turning away from pain and keeping “secrets from ourselves that all along we knew” (Griffin, 1992, p. 4) is not natural. Rumi writes,

Don't turn your head.  
Keep looking at the bandaged place.  
That's where the light enters you. (Barks, 1995, p. 142)

Those of us who try to find solace outside of ourselves were not taught to “keep looking at the bandaged place.” Most of us thankfully do not reside on Texas death row but avoiding the darkness of our inner experience results in living in a prison of shame. We ignore the worst in us because we are ashamed of it (Brown, 2012) and this ignorance is getting dangerous. How we choose to move in the world with the worst in us determines greatly how we relate to ourselves, each other, and the planet. Investigating the “interplay between the individual, the soul, and the connection to the bigger world” (Lauren) is essential to individual and collective transformation.

### **The Gifts of Facing Difficulty**

**Resiliency.** I learned in this process, from my own experience and the stories of those I interviewed, that honoring the cycles of life develops a certain sturdiness needed to live a compassionate and wholehearted life. As embodied in the cycles of the Earth, wholeness means to welcome the entirety of life. How I live in the world has everything to do with how much I

embrace the fullness of my human experience. Life denies no part of transformation. Rilke (2011) writes, “everything living holds to [what is difficult], everything in Nature grows according to its own character...at any cost” (p. 31). Dishonoring the whole of my human experience causes me suffering, and consequentially, causes suffering to those around me. Melissa spoke to her intimate connection to the planet through its cycles.

Just to access this Earth, this capacity for the Earth to regenerate, and to replenish, and to nourish, and to provide and to sustain life in such diverse ways. And her capacity to have limits...the fact that she has limits. That she will quake and that she will die if too toxic. All of that has been a powerful, powerful teaching for me, and I don't feel separate from her. (Melissa)

The nourishment, regeneration, quaking, and even death are all inherent to life itself. This acceptance of the whole leads to a resiliency that cannot be known when life is selectively experienced.

When the wind blows, and the seasons turn cold, a tree roots down deeper to sustain itself.

When the storm comes  
Will you reject the rain  
If it falls not soft  
If it falls not tame?

When the wind blows  
And calls your name  
Will you run in fear  
Will you hide in shame?

Are you strong enough to bend? (Sollee, 2008)

Rooting down develops resiliency and allows the tree to bend when challenged. The ability to adapt applies to the human emotional experience as well (Luthar, Cichetti, & Becker, 2003; Zolli

& Healy, 2012; Zolli, 2013). Emotional resiliency refers to one's ability to adapt to stress and difficulty. We can root down into our bodily experience like a tree, to strengthen our capacity to respond, rather than react to the world. Emotional resiliency comes from the choice to stay present to difficulty (Chodron, 2002; Flach, 2003; Greenspan, 2003; Kabat Zinn, 2012; Waters, 2013). This is truly the essence of shadow work; to stay with the unknown which is often uncomfortable, difficult and even painful. Shadow work builds emotional resiliency. When we run from pain, we wither rather than strengthen, and we never know joy as fully as we could.

I would not exchange the sorrows of my heart  
For the joys of the multitude.  
And I would not have the tears that sadness makes  
To flow from my every part turn into laughter.

I would that my life remain a tear and a smile. (Gibran, 1971, p. 1)

To deny the reality of something because it is too painful, leads to living an illusion that takes enormous individual, and collective creativity to sustain. Creativity can serve the best in us or the worst in us, and these days it is easy to creatively slip out of difficult experiences in favor of an artificial, unsustainable light. Through food, sex, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, busyness, drugs, violence, shopping, power grabbing, technology and more, those of us who cannot hold to the difficult become magicians who can live in the illusionary land of feel good or feel nothing. The instant rush of the sweetness of a brownie, or the ecstasy of being in love can go awry when it becomes something I hope will save me from my difficulty, rather than just being a brownie or a person. This illusion takes constant feeding from the outside in, so it is not sustainable. When we hide the worst in us and simultaneously avoid the best in us, we project it onto the world around us (Jung, 2006; Wilber, 2008; Zweig & Abrams, 1991), and “the fact that human beings have been cowardly in this sense has done endless harm to life” (Rilke, 2011, p. 38). Disconnection

within leads to disconnection from without. With record levels of obesity, suicide, and stress-related illness, filling emotional emptiness with the material is clearly not working. The only way out is through, and what is needed most is to stop the grasping, stop the running, and summon the courage to face the emptiness within.

The teachers I interviewed find freedom from within. But in this country, as I and these teachers recognize, this is not the norm. There are those who have undergone extenuating circumstances, and found liberation amidst egregiously oppressive situations. (Frankl, 2006; Hillesum, 1996; Ilibagiza, 2006; Mandela, 1995; Sanford, 2008). Though these people are exceptions to the norm, they allowed great difficulty to mold them in a way that caused them to offer greater love to the world. Knowing the depth and breadth of one's inner landscape, which includes the more difficult terrain, leads to greater compassion and connection (Hanh, 2013). In our interview, Jessica illustrated how challenge can strengthen a human being.

The blind spots are as important as the things we are focusing on. And sometimes we don't know. You know what it reminds me of is Matthew Sanford's work...because he is paralyzed. And in a world that's like asana, asana, asana. Here's one of the most famous yoga teachers, he is paralyzed from the chest down. And yet he embodies, literally embodies yoga, more gracefully and more powerfully than almost anyone I know. Because he goes into the quiet places...He talks about it like wood. Wood isn't strong because of the wood, it's the spaces in the wood that create the strength...You look at this thing because it allows this peripheral, heretofore unexplored area of oneself, to be seen. So I might think I was going through a divorce and what I am studying is the break-up of a marriage, but in the end I can tell you that's not what I was learning about. But I had to look at and say here's the concrete thing I can focus on, here's the loss that has a cultural

context and everyone understands when I say I am going through a divorce and everyone goes, “Ohhh, I am so sorry.” But in fact, there was the liberation of it, and how you can hold that ecstasy and that tragedy or grief at the same time...So, study the thing that’s available to study in that moment. (Jessica)

Jessica speaks to the liberation that comes from studying oneself amidst a challenging life event. Because many of us have not learned the tools necessary to be with challenge, accepting life when it is less than ideal is difficult. To learn how to accept life on life’s terms leads to a liberated and surrendered life. Melissa spoke to the power of sitting with “what is so.”

I’m all about sit with what is so and I create a field where there is almost more permission than any place I have ever been to really be in the truth. And it can be as beautiful or seeming ugly as imaginable and I truly know that if we can sit with what is so, we can be liberated, and be happy. And be free. And it might mean that we are really angry, or that we are grieving, or we’re really in fear, and because I have the capacity and the commitment...to sit with my own, whatever it is, there’s an invitation for anybody around me to do the same...It’s impactful for me, in a very uncomfortable way, to be around people who are not processing and being present with themselves. It doesn’t interest me that much and it’s hard on me. (Melissa)

Those whom I interviewed see discomfort or suffering as a catalyst for growth. This is not about seeking pain for pain’s sake, but honoring pain by feeling it when it is present.

Pain is almost the match that will ignite the transformation inevitable in a person’s life...And, so the idea of pain is a construct, even physical pain. I have survived all sorts of physical pain, and then the mental pain is the hardest construct to deliver your self from. But they are necessary catalysts heading toward consciousness. Heidegger thought

that...the purpose of conflict was unity...In Hawaii we view pain as something to respect. Something to understand and something inevitably to let go. And um, in ho'o ponopono, in ritualize...truth telling, we have an old practice that is just absolutely amazing. It only works when there is pain present. It only works when there is a major misunderstanding or hatred in the room. We work through that. And so I see pain...as a necessary process to understand, deliberate, and release ultimately. It is necessary for change. But if all you view pain or conflict as suffering, if you do not get to the purpose of it, then you will just be in pain, conflict, and suffering. So, we work to understand it. And then we forgive. Once you get to what you are meant to understand, you don't talk about your pain ever again. We actually say if you talk about the pain, you are back in entanglement. It's about energy. So, if there's pain, my god you bow down, you thank it because if I did not have this suffering, I would not be the person I am today. (Manulani)

In a culture that is often looking to reduce stress, there are those who study how stress positively affects a person (Crum, Salovey, & Achor, 2013; Donatelli 2013; Sanders, 2013). Difficulty is a natural part of life. Recognizing this leads to resiliency, and at the same time, cultivates a reverence that is born from accepting the whole of the human experience.

**Humility and Reverence.** There was an essence of humility and reverence in each person I spoke with and I wondered where it came from. When wholeness is embraced, particularly within ourselves, a deep reverence (Cowan, 2000; Ives & Valone, 2007; Woodruff, 2001) or respect for life can emerge. Birth, life, and death. Fall, winter, spring, and summer. Beginning, middle, and end. Excitement, complacency, and sadness. Cycles in life are natural and holding on to one cycle over another, leads to a lack of depth and balance. The fertility of

spring is rich when we honor the nakedness of winter. Joy deepens when sorrow is honored.

Jessica spoke to the reverence for life that comes when the seasons of life are respected.

It's not about light triumphing over darkness and it's not about saying, let's just be in the darkness. But it becomes more, I think a lot about the Demeter and Persephone, it's the seasons. There is a season for the darkness, the wintering of the soul and that's what yields the spring. It erupts, it's not gentle. Spring is not gentle. In places it's viscous and thick and uncomfortable and phlegmy and things have to fight to break through the surface. And you have the fecundity and the harvest of the summer. All of these things that we see paralleled in the natural world. It is not about one over the other. It's about the space, and it's not just about the longest day of the year and the shortest day of the year. You have 362 days that matter in there that are variations of light and dark and we don't know how to occupy that. Our language doesn't know how to occupy that. So that's why when you get people in a class [her yoga class] it either feels good or bad and that doesn't even mean anything. Transformation can be the most painful thing you'll experience. And pain for pain's own sake can be sadistic. (Jessica)

A sense of awe or respect emerged from those I interviewed from simply honoring the infinite and varied aspects of life. Creating space for whatever shows up in life is essential to leading a wholehearted life. For many of us, it is the cold and starkness of winter that we wish to leave behind.

Relationships fail when we look to end the winter within by seeking summer in another. I wanted only spring and summer in relationship to my mother. I expected her to be something other than human; to save me from the starkness of my life. Slowly I realized over time that making me happy was not her job. It was mine. And now when I look into her eyes, I see a

woman with pain, wonder, joy, sorrow and so much more. The more I honor the seasons of my life, the more I accept those of my mother. Carl had a similar realization with his partner of many years.

The great critical turning point in my own life...I will just share it very briefly and it's well known, it's in some of my writing...I met my wife, when we were thirteen years old, we started dating at sixteen and engaged at nineteen, married at twenty and now we will both be sixty in the next half dozen months. And so we've had this long, long experience together, and that experience was broken when I left the home, and lived with another person for about a year in my 40s. Then I left that person and returned to [my wife], that's now about fourteen years ago. So that particular turning point in my life was the darkest, most challenging, most critical experience of my life because I went from being a person who supported a lot of people, a person who had a very good reputation for being very caring toward others, and suddenly I was hurting lots and lots of people...very terribly. So for me then my interest in writing love stories is that I now have this privilege of one of the longest love stories that I know about. [My wife] and I were in Mexico in March on a beautiful beach...I looked at [my wife], who I have known since she was 13, and I thought she's the most beautiful woman in the world. And it was like this experience of growing old, as a man, recognizing as in the sense of acknowledging, confessing, in the moment, the stunning beauty of long love..of long desire, of that which has weathered the most challenging, the most challenging, crisis imaginable. And [my wife] and I actually know no one in our extensive network of friends, we know no one who has ever returned from separation and near divorce. [My wife] and I have this story that is not like any story that we know. (Carl)

A “stunning beauty” (Carl) comes forth when the cycles of a marriage (or anything) are valued. Carl was looking for something that he thought he could find in another person, and with writing as his companion, he ended up finding that sense of contentment in himself. Connection with others begins with connection to oneself. Without connection to oneself relationships become self serving, where we try to get what we need from another, rather than offering to others the love we have already cultivated.

Reverence emerges from a sense of relationship and interconnectedness with self and other. Albert Schweitzer (2002), physician and theologian, devoted much of his life to the study of reverence and how it inspires people to care deeply for each other. Schweitzer had a reverence for life where he was in awe of the gift that life is. He felt that “reverence for life was the attitude that...offered hope to a world beset with conflict” (Des Jardins, 2006, p. 132). Schweitzer was interested in a change of attitude, a change in one’s values toward an ethic of care; an attitude change away from separation and toward reverence. For me, this connection begins with my breath. Breathing is an intimate act. Paying attention to my breathing brings me back to the moment and fundamentally awakens me to the gift that life is. The breath is the “first principle” (Edwards, 2004, p. 48) and we can awaken to the gift that life is through the first principle of breathing. “Every breath is a sacrament, an essential ritual” (Suzuki, p. 63, 1997) which is why our ancestors referred to spirit as synonymous with the breath (Abram, 1997). The breath breathes and pulses through this living planet. The breath is not just a metaphor for interconnectedness, it *is* the invisible web that connects us to each other. In our interview Melissa said, “It’s a devotion to the natural order of things. It’s a devotion to the in-breath and the out-breath. To birthing, to living, and to dying, again and again, many different ways. Always orienting toward life except at death” (Melissa). Life is connected. Lauren said,

It's a pretty simple formula. Group work and solo work with the natural world. In other words, first you are doing something with the community of humans and then you're going out in the community of the wild, generally on the same journey. And so we facilitate it by doing this exploration of individual soul or psyche, and through that moving out into the wider world. (Lauren)

When I remember the gift of my breath, not only am I filled with gratitude, but I am filled with the courage needed to stay connected to my life.

Carl acknowledged that humility has everything to do with connection to the Earth. At its root, humility means dirt or earth. When I am present to my humanness, I know my place in the world, and am deeply awed by it.

It takes courage and humility to live well in the world. And I checked the etymology and courage is connected to the word heart and humility is connected to the word humus, or earth. And once I had those two words, heart and earth, it was like suddenly, I was just so delighted for example how heart and earth have the same letters with just the H at the beginning of heart moved to the end for Earth. (Carl)

When I learn to love my limits, I find greater reverence for the infinite places within me. Being in deep relationship with my humanness paradoxically connects me more fully to the infinite source that animates life.

My work is loving the world.  
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird –  
equal seekers of sweetness.  
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.  
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.  
Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?  
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me  
keep my mind on what matters,  
which is my work,  
which is mostly rejoicing standing still and learning to be

astonished.  
The phoebe, the delphinium.  
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.  
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,  
which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart  
and these body-clothes,  
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy  
to the moth and the wren, to the sleep dug-up clam,  
telling them all, over and over, how it is  
that we live forever. (Oliver, 2007, p. 1)

Carl faced his humanness by admitting how his actions caused pain to those he loves. In facing his limitations, Carl was astonished by the beauty of his wife after many years and through great struggles. Forgiveness and reconciliation emerge from a place of humility. When I am humbled, I accept the limitations of being human. Jessica spoke to this humility as needed for reconciliation to happen in relationship to the planet.

The discomfort of going into what we are calling shadow, and by that we both mean, it's basically all the stuff that generally is uncomfortable, or elicits or evokes feelings that we don't think are the good feelings. And part of the problem with the unwillingness to go there or the hyperbolic, it's all about that one thing is, it doesn't allow for reconciliation...which requires responsibility. If I hurt somebody unknowingly, unwittingly, or knowingly, in a moment in meanness, my unwillingness to return to the landscape, and not atone...that paralysis of guilt that doesn't help anything. But to recognize, to re-cognize, as maybe John O'Donohue would say, to re-cognize, to know something again, or to revise it and see it in a new way...We're so afraid of taking responsibility for what we call the negative, we just avoid it all together. And yet when we step into something and meet it and have a relationship with it, there's a spaciousness that is possible. So people deny global warming as if you were to acknowledge it, somehow the universe is going to come crashing down on you for being bad. And so

there's not that space for reconciliation, that says something, or a relationship that is not going well. (Jessica)

Reconciliation was a consistent theme throughout these interviews. We reconcile, or reconnect, when we make space for our limitations. Humility is taking responsibility for the best and the worst in oneself, and everything that lives in between.

**Interconnectedness.** Indigenous wisdom and sacred scholarship was woven throughout every conversation I had. From yogic philosophy to Hawaiian indigenous knowledge, interconnectedness is the truth these teachers live out of. There is no story of innate brokenness in the yogic tradition. The yogic story, like Celtic wisdom, is one of interconnectedness not separation. They are stories of goodness and potential, not fundamental wrongness and failure. For those of us who feel a sense of disconnection, we need to be recalled to these ancient truths, and reminded that we belong and what we have to offer is needed on this planet.

We are so removed from each other...Everybody knows that longing to be connected, that longing for freedom and that longing for the veil to be lifted and to truly be seen. You know that's what all of this is about. Light and dark. Or being able to be seen and to be accepted on either one of those sides. And my job...is not to change the way that somebody else is thinking, but to be really clear in the way that I am walking in my life and to give them a glimpse of what that might be like...To be able to tap into our collective humanity...Disconnection makes us scared and hate each other and when that's happening there is disconnection that is happening in that individual. I have had people who I've had sort of a bad experience with and I have seen when that veil in a certain way is lifted, and they begin to recognize within me, or somebody like me, themselves. And they realize that they have the same kinds of needs. (Melanie)

Yogic philosophy tells us that underneath illusion and limiting inner voices (in Sanskrit, *chitta vritti*), we are unified with all that is. Jessica spoke to the innate interconnectedness of life and how we are never separated from it.

In the methodology of yoga as I had practiced it...you can't be separate from it. It's impossible...You're always in direct relationship with the Earth and with others. But how well you access that, and how deeply one can feel that much less embody or transmit that, it's like pathways. The paths are there you can't get rid of them. But a lot of crap can grow up in the way that can make you forget you ever had them...It's a choice. But...if you were to question someone enough, you would find deep connection to the Earth...A relationship that feels sustainable, where you feel you are plugged in and you are not just giving, you are receiving in equal measure, not always all the time, but there's a sense of sustenance, nourishment. And other methodologies, strategies of I don't want to deal with the overgrowth. I don't want to deal with the discomfort of being seen or seeing...the sustenance, the nectar of the relationship isn't felt as deeply. But it's not that it's not available. It's not that you're separate from it. But the pathways to hearing, receiving, feeling, embodying, and transmitting, they're clogged...You distract yourself. You are the earth. (Jessica)

The word *yoga* itself comes from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means union or to yolk together. The sutra teaches that practice (*abiyasa*) leads to remembering who we truly are. We are union. We are life. We simply forget, and to remember, we must practice new ways of knowing our place in the world. Practicing yogic asana (the physical postures) gives me an opportunity to get better acquainted with what limits me. I lower my hips in chair pose (*utkatasana*), and almost

immediately I hear from within, “I hate this. I can’t do this. I am not strong enough.” I sweat and shake and want to give up and avoid what is difficult.

To hear the truth from within can be challenging when many of us have not been taught how to be with difficulty. Clarity is out of reach when limiting voices cloud a deeper wisdom. Many of us have been taught to seek wisdom outside of ourselves (Brown, 2012) rather than experiencing its emergence from within. When I asked Lauren about what how the outer wild teaches us about connection, her response surprised me. Rather than simply being as engaged as I can with the world around me, I often wait for it to give me what I need; whether that is a person or the Earth itself.

I try to not get people to go out that way because it’s not like I’m going to go out into the wilderness and see what it has to teach me. That’s a kind of really traditional Western approach...As I explore my deeper truth, I am engaging in, sharing it, and opening myself fully to everything around me, whether it’s the humans in the group or the trees or the little bugs in my path that are biting me or the clouds up above, then I will receive information because I’m engaged. I will be not only offering information but receiving it. But for me it’s more of a just being in, as opposed to getting from, or giving back directly...That may happen and it usually does but that’s not my goal...The goal is to just have the person be their most authentic self...I don’t think you can be authentic and soul connected and not be connected to the bigger world. Because that piece for me is part of what makes us connected. So it’s about engaging, about taking ourselves on a wander and saying this is who I really am and feeling the reflection of that, feeling the engagement in that all around. The world is engaging me and I am engaging the world. (Lauren)

For Lauren connection means engagement with oneself, each other and the Earth; about a way of being rather than any particular action or seeking outwardly. For Melanie, connection means staying awake to her life.

My job my whole life is to try and be awake enough to notice when those moments happen. Because we all have that. I was talking to someone about...the difference between Jesus and Buddha and Krishna and Allah and Guru Mai and Ama Gi, and us. I said the main difference is that they remember all the time of what's the real thing, we have moments of that. What makes them the light is that they don't forget...It's the job of any teacher to remind people of all the things that they already have...You start with, I have everything inside that I need in order to do that I just need somebody to show me. I am capable of doing it I just need someone to show me how to do it...Tightening of the weave, that breaking down of the barrier between you and me, then and there, this and that. That's what I feel like my work is when I am starting a spontaneous choir to be able to get to through all that crap and let's just get right to the thing that connects us. Which means that is an acceptance that we are all human beings...We are connected to each other. Despite all of that other stuff, be it black and white, here and there, and you know Muslim, to the heart of who we really are, and that's that place where the veil is really thin, that's the place where we know each other. That's the place, where we recognize, I know you. My heart knows that. I feel you. (Melanie)

Because these teachers are engaged, they have a deep sense of belonging. Many of my students share how empty, frightened, and alone they feel in the world. When I ask them how they spend most of their time, they share that they mostly pass time with their limiting voices. The link is rarely made between the quality of the inner life and the outer. Manulani spoke to this.

Once you stop seeing it as individual awakening and see it in the interconnected ways..or actually I am convinced you can see it in any way you want, but ultimately the interconnections of how we are all doing the same thing differently will surface and it will be recognized. But how you get there is our own, kuleana [Hawaiian word meaning responsibility]. It's your own responsibility. (Manulani)

Like Hawaiian tradition, Celtic wisdom also honors the diversity of expression where God is the web that connects everything or "the Life of all life" (Newell, 1997, p.76). Living a holy life is to lead an engaged life where one is awake to all that is, including the difficult experiences. To live sacredly is to live connectedly and it was obvious that each person I interviewed practices this deeply.

### **Vulnerability: Reflections on Openness, Engagement, and Acceptance**

Those I interviewed have learned how to embrace their vulnerability. With each conversation their openness to life was apparent and went beyond an openness to life on Earth. They consistently named, and even called in, the power of the world unseen. Melissa began our session with a prayer and the ritual of lighting a candle,

I would just like to ask all of your ancestors and my ancestors to come join us in this conversation and that may the sharing of our energies and our lineages be of great service to what you're bringing through Jenny, and the work that our two souls have been woven together to do collaboratively even if far, far apart physically for the well being of everything that is in transition and transformation and waking right now. And I devote this time to just what you were speaking to, life, to the life force. (Melissa)

The caliber of the people I spoke with, and their willingness to engage life, amazed me. In our conversation, Manulani spoke of the rigor of being awake, conscious to the whole of life, and the

“efficacy of spirituality” (Manulani). She closed our time together with a sacred Hawaiian blessing and spoke to Hawaiian indigenous wisdom throughout our conversation. Carl said, “taking risks is probably absolutely essential for most of us to living well in the world...What I am seeking essentially is to be open to everything” (Carl). Carl’s words are at the heart of this study. It is risky and brave to live an engaged life where we are open to whatever we encounter, and at the same time, it is natural.

You can’t take me away from everything that yielded me in the first place, and that’s what I think we are missing so often; this sustainable relationship. Whether you are talking about a marriage, a friendship, a community, or relationship with the non-human which is most everything, is that recognition that it’s all allowing and inviting out, and instigating and supporting, holding, giving breath to, giving fire to, giving water, and emotion and life and movement to, allowing to come into form who we think we are. So I think that the relationship with the land, that first yoga sutra the way it was taught to me, that now is yoga, as it has been observed in the natural world. That part...suggests that by the deep studying of what is, which is the natural what is right here, right in front of you every moment. Immerse yourself in that and you will know yoga. (Jessica)

Yoga means union; being unified with life itself which requires an openness and engagement with life beyond measure. This unity is natural and vulnerability is the natural state of being human (Abram, 2010). But many of us were not taught to face and navigate that reality.

I learned very young to hide my vulnerability. Don’t cry (you might never stop.) Don’t be angry (it’s not nice.) Don’t be nervous (stay comfortable.) Being truthful about how I felt would have been like planting a new sprout in the middle of a busy Manhattan sidewalk and expecting it to live. Vulnerability was a landscape that I avoided at all costs and I created masks as I grew

up to hide the truth of who I was. I learned how to please authority, to wear hip clothing in order to be accepted, and to shine in front of the class so that I got the most attention. I hid who I truly was because revealing my shaky inner truth felt dangerous and weak.

Brene Brown, who became wellknown recently through her TED talk on vulnerability, has shed new light on how this country navigates emotional vulnerability. Brown (2012) writes “The perception that vulnerability is weakness is the most widely accepted myth about vulnerability and the most dangerous” (p. 32). Because of this collective denial of vulnerability, not only do we not know its profoundly transformative power, we do not have many guides to lead us safely into emotional vulnerability (Plotkin, 2008). It is obvious that in this country we are craving this guidance, when Brown (who expected about 500 hits) received over one million hits worldwide on her talk on vulnerability. Jean Vanier (1998), French philosopher writes, “We have disregarded the heart, seeing it only as a symbol of weakness, the centre of sentimentality and emotion, instead of as a powerhouse of love that can reorient us from our self-centredness, revealing to us and to others the basic beauty of humanity, empowering us to grow” (p. 78). Leaving these limiting cultural messages behind, and reclaiming the power of vulnerability, takes the focused discipline of a warrior. When we come to know that what society has deemed “weak” is actually a place of empowerment, we begin to move toward the human experience of wholehearted and authentic living.

### **Pedagogy of Vulnerability**

I want to say here, that I realize that there are many in this world who experience the vulnerability of hunger, poverty, pain, violence, and war on daily basis. They do not have the luxury of choosing the experience. They live it every day. To have the safety to be able to feel fully is a privilege (Boler, 1999) and those of us who live with greater physical comforts have

that privilege. To be sitting comfortably in my home, or to have the financial resources to go on a retreat, allows me to explore my emotional landscape in ways that others might not. Threats to physical safety, service inaccessibility, or limited financial resources can make it much more difficult (but not impossible) to navigate vulnerability deeply. With privilege comes an increased number of choices to explore and deepen into the human experience. John O'Donohue (1999), the late Irish philosopher writes that "We are privileged, and the duty of privilege is absolute integrity" (p.101). Because culturally we continue to be silent around issues of shame and vulnerability (Brown, 2012), it is clear that we are not maximizing our privilege toward greater emotional health. And in a culture where many of us are quite comfortable, where we have plenty of choices to engage emotionally with our lives, we often choose not to. It is only those who have chosen to traverse the edgy territory of vulnerability who come to know its profoundly transformative power. When I asked Melanie about her willingness to be vulnerable she responded, "I think that it is something that I always knew, but you have to learn how to do that. And it's not something that I can do all the time. But I have moments, and we all do. My job, my whole life, is to try and be awake enough to notice when those [vulnerable] moments happen." (Melanie) Like Melanie pointed out, we cannot be laid bare all of the time. There are moments of expanding and contracting, or opening and closing like a flower. There is a time to reveal and conceal oneself. Melissa, Lauren, and Jessica spoke to the dance between the two, and how vulnerability must be respected. Jessica spoke to the importance of bringing consciousness to what is revealed to us from within.

It's not just about burning, it's about studying and in an embodied way...What am feeling? What is the physicality of this? What is the emotion of this? What is the story that is starting to go through my mind, the whole intellectual story? I can't, I shouldn't,

I'm not enough, whatever iteration of that. But the last part is that you offer, you make an offering...You take this thing, whatever it is, you are making your offering, you put it into the fire. It doesn't stay the same, but it's not gone. It's been reduced down to its elements and we watch as smoke ascends, there's a release. There's an offering and there's an offering. And then it's offered back. That's why the blessed ash of the third chapter sutra makes sense to me. You offer something, you offer it up, and it burns and it changes, and it's offered back to you in a whole new way. So the fine line for me is bringing the consciousness to the burn. So there's the burning, physically or the literal fire, but not to just react to it, run, douse, or just keep throwing, like I'm going to burn everything. Because that's that muscling through rajasic energy...It can look really sexy. I'm going to pike up into [a yogic posture], I'm going to do all that, but it's just pure burning for burning sake...What I certainly try to do in a class is, you're burning and it's uncomfortable, let's look at what it's revealing. Because there's that opportunity and it's such a juicy, juicy place...I remember being with you at Soma [my private studio in Colorado] and you saying that our instinct when something is happening, we go out and we get all up in here [pointing to her head], instead of being like [she takes a breath in] what am I feeling? The fire gets ignited, and stuff gets stirring, and we get frantic around it and a teacher's job is to be like I know you are frantic, study it, not because you have something to achieve and I am going to go like this (clapping) on the other end. And not because you are missing something by being frantic, but this experience you are having, and who you are is completely whole with the frantic, with something falling out from underneath you, with the sense that you will never recognize yourself, and all of that is whole...You are completely in participation with what is, which means you can handle it,

and whatever rises up for you rises up for you. It's not good or bad. It's not to be fixed.

It's not to be solved. (Jessica)

Being open to what rises up from the depths is transformative in its own right and some situations are more conducive to welcoming vulnerability than others. When I asked Lauren about her willingness to be vulnerable in her academic position she responded,

I can be myself in my life and my job is not inconsistent with that. Is it welcome?

Definitely not always. Sometimes it's very powerfully effective, sometimes it's powerfully ineffective. I don't bring it all, all the time. But I would say to be honest, not enough, still. It's never enough. I'm vulnerable. I'm way more willing to share most parts of myself that are vulnerable. I think I'm able to stand on my own in a cleaner way than I was when I was less attuned. So that if I'm pushing back against something, I am doing it from a less reactive place and a cleaner place. I don't feel like I have to compromise myself to be here. (Lauren)

When many of us have been taught to hide our vulnerability, to invite it forth is edgy work, and great care must be taken. When teaching Carl encourages his students to "write about personal experiences" and that essentially, what it comes down to for him is the "need to love students" (Carl). Loving those we guide is tricky, but essential, in the transformative process. In fact, it is love that instigates change, and shows up when we are willing to be vulnerable. The rawness of what has been hidden, sometimes for decades, must be handled with humility and respect. It is important for a teacher to know her limits and to check her agenda when guiding others into this vital territory.

I don't owe the world any steak and lobster meal every time I walk into a room. You know? I can offer a rice and beans meal that nourishes everybody and the work still is

good enough. And I'm not willing to put myself, or my community of leaders, or my students in risky positions that I think I did more of in the past. Yeah. I think my work is still powerful, is still edgy, I mean who the heck am I to bring 75 people up to the Star House? I'm a little bit nuts...I've really learned to teach to the vulnerability in the room, because of my deep understanding of how trauma works and unwinds. Those are massive organizing principles, way more than anything else in my rooms, because I am just not interested in fragmenting people and sending them out into the world. It doesn't interest me. It's irresponsible, it's narcissistic, and I'm not interested. (Melissa)

When people choose to engage vulnerability, those who guide them must be prepared to walk with whatever shows up. But sometimes we don't choose to be in contact with our vulnerable nature. Life delivers that reality to us.

Every person I interviewed, like most of us, have experienced the unpredictability of life; some in very big ways. The death of a parent, a life-threatening illness, an addiction, or the loss of a job can often leave us standing on very different emotional ground. We do not have a choice as to when, if, and how these situations will happen in our lives but we do have a choice as to how deeply we wish to engage the fragility of these human experiences. When we choose to dance with each experience fully, we begin to know in our bones the rich, textured learning that comes from diving into the depth of that experience. Carl spoke to the power of being open to whatever we encounter.

For me its all about being open to whatever is coming along and whatever might come along. And that openness then opens up the possibilities for attending to the dark and the light...So I guess what I am getting at there Jenny is, I am growing more and more into a sense of eagerness to embrace openly as much of creation as I can. (Carl)

I hit rock bottom in my alcohol and drug addiction at nineteen, faced a cancer diagnosis at age twenty-four, and lost both of my parents in my early thirties as I was birthing my first son. I know vulnerability because life directed me toward it many times without any warning, and though its landscape is as varied as each person's description of it, it is the place where I feel most alive and honest. When I am aligned with the truth of the moment, I can feel my heartbeat. I know I am alive, and paradoxically, from this shaky place I am empowered.

All of those I interviewed have practiced facing the truth of themselves for decades, so much so, that it has become a way of life. We cannot know the truth of who we are without experiencing vulnerability. It is a natural human experience (Brown, 2012.) Vulnerability is not pathological. Rumi writes, "Kiss the snake to discover the treasure" (Barks, 2002, p. 85).

I have a hope for being a certain way but I know I won't meet that hope every day. I know that I will frequently make mistakes...I offer what I offer as gifts and if those gifts are received that's lovely and if they are not received then so be it. I don't expect the gift to be, in offering the gift I don't expect it to be reciprocated. I'm no longer looking for somebody to tell me that that was wonderful or that was just what I needed and so on. I'm offering because this is what I have to offer and I know no other way to be and this is the way of my being integrally in whatever the experience might be that I am in. So that includes sitting on various academic committees, sitting in the examinations of graduate students, being in classrooms, and so on. So in whatever I am doing, I am seeking to do it with a sense of integrity to living in the world lovingly. And then however that is taken up and received, I regard that as largely out of my compass or control and my concern even. (Carl)

Many of us run from the snake, not because we do not long for the treasure, but because we were never taught to kiss it. In fact in this country, through word and deed, many of us were taught to run. Activist and teacher, Joanna Macy (1998) writes “Many of us who grew up in the dominant society or operate within it, hide our pain for the world, even from ourselves” (p. 31). Today we are told through painkillers, food, sex, the enticing distraction of social media, and more to move away from that deep, vital space within us. As we continue to experience less and less of our lives, we slowly become emotionally illiterate (Greenspan, 2003). As we become more skillful at hiding, the masks that we wear then start to become rigid and slowly over time, we begin to forget what is truly living within us.

Discovering the treasure that Rumi speaks of has compelled me toward, rather than away from, being vulnerable. I crave the raw experience of being alive and I find it when I get outside of my comfort zone. When I notice that I am coasting through life, my soul gets restless. Again, I have the privilege of coasting through life, but comfort is not always what it is cut out to be. The experience of discomfort is a rich site for learning and transformation. Megan Boler (1999), author of *Feeling Power: Emotion and Education*, writes that to engage discomfort pedagogically leads us to “inhabit a more ambiguous and flexible sense of self” (p. 176). Throughout my life, I have had guides, teachers, ministers, therapists, and monks who have affirmed the gifts that arise from being uncomfortable. I know myself more deeply, and experience a deeper sense of belonging in the world, because of jumping fully into the deep waters of vulnerability. The Welsh poet David Whyte (2007) writes,

Those who will not slip beneath  
the still surface on the well of grief  
  
turning down to its black water  
to the place that we can not breathe

will never know  
the source from which we drink  
the secret water cold and clear

nor find in the darkness  
the small gold coins  
thrown by those who wished for something else. (p. 71)

The small gold coins are found when I am willing to be vulnerable enough to find them. This process of discovery is tricky because the only way to learn from vulnerability is to dive into its depths but the discomfort, fear, and even despair, can deter so many of us away. With many options to ignore, negate, divert, and distract from it, some days it might seem easier to sit on the couch or take a nap than to summon the courage it takes to dive in.

The dog chased the cat again this morning.

And the cat ran.  
She always does.

Today I said to her,  
Why don't stop in your tracks  
and face her head on?

She looked at me for a moment,  
and then moseyed off toward the bedroom,  
maybe to contemplate the courage it would take,  
or simply to just take a nap.

Once we kiss the snake and recover the treasure, it is hard to not want to return to the landscape of vulnerability. Transformation involves breaking free from the old to step into new ways of being, which requires stepping out of one's comfort zone. Taking a new way to work, trying out Ethiopian food, or telling the truth to the one person we never could, all have the potential to take us into new and potent learning. I find myself often packing my metaphorical (and sometimes literal) backpack in search of a raw and real landscape— whether it is signing up

for a year of dancing my prayers, sitting out next to the Snake River by myself with a bear 20 feet from me, or trying on a new creative medium like poetry for a month, I long for the vitality that traversing the unknown brings to me. The known is not inherently bad, but when I set up camp in the familiar the lackluster quality of complacency can slip into my life, often unnoticed.

O'Donohue (n.d.) writes that the unknown is the language of the soul. Choosing a new form is to engage the soulful territory of vulnerability where I come to know new parts of myself, and the world. Recently I went hiking in my favorite place, where trees line the paths, a creek moves underneath ice, and a buck stands on the side of a mountain at full attention. The place is alive. I began walking on the path that I always walk on, distracted in thoughts about the emails that I still needed to send, and phone calls that I needed to return. And all of a sudden my attention was drawn to a new path. The inner dialogue began: Should I take it or should I just go the way I always do? I don't know where this new way goes. What if I get lost? What if I can't find my way out? What if there are wild animals in that part of the park? What if I die? In spite of the fear, I watched my feet as they changed direction, one foot in front of the next, onto the new path. I found myself winding around bends I had never experienced, seeing deer that I had never seen, and facing irrational fears that I did not know lived inside of me (like a mountain lion was going to attack me on the hillside). Choosing the new path invoked the experience of vulnerability and there was no more mulling over emails and phone calls. My attention to the moment was heightened because I had chosen to step into the unfamiliar.

### **Holding Two Truths: Navigating Ambiguity**

Decades ago I worked as a Planned Parenthood volunteer. I escorted women from their car to the clinic, with screaming protesters surrounding the building. I took a deep breath, put my bullet proof vest on, and linked arms with the women I led. I prayed constantly for love to

surround all involved. One particular sunny day, it was crowded on the sidewalk surrounding the clinic as both a Catholic church, and Operation Rescue had shown up for the protest. There were billboards filled with gruesome pictures, women holding imitation aborted fetuses, and people consistently shouting at the women entering the clinic. “Hey lady, don’t kill your baby today!” “Hey lady, you don’t have to do this. Come talk to us!” I breathed in love with every step I took. A Catholic priest led others in a circle as he prayed the rosary, and at one point he turned toward us raising his hand in blessing and said, “I pray for all of you involved in this tragedy.” A fellow volunteer reactively grumbled to me, “I don’t need his prayers.” I responded, “I need all the prayers I can get.”

We were divided. We sat on different sides of two extreme polarities, but I somewhere deep inside of me, I sensed a middle ground. Several weeks after this experience at Planned Parenthood I went to a protest at the federal prison where a prisoner was to be executed after almost a decade-long hiatus of executions in Colorado. As we pulled up to the prison, we encountered a prison guard who asked us, “Are you for or against?” As I looked to the right to see a more celebratory group I confusedly responded, “Against,” and turned left into a parking lot of people holding candles. We began to walk through the crowd, singing and praying, and I would look into the eyes of those I passed and silently nod; grateful that I did not stand outside of that prison alone. As I quietly walked along, I raised my gaze to meet the eyes of who I thought was a stranger. I met the eyes of the priest I had seen weeks before; except this time he was on my side.

Extremes exist and many of us live out of them. I was amazed at the ways in which the teachers I interviewed can hold polarities without living out of them. Jung speaks of the “third thing which unites opposites” (Smith, 1990, p. 62) where wisdom rises when two truths are held

simultaneously. As I stood next to the priest who prayed for me a few weeks before, sides became more of an illusion than a reality. Lines never stay static. They change depending on the context. I could be on the opposite side of a person one day, and in an instant the line shifts, and we are united.

Out there beyond  
right-doing and wrongdoing  
there is a field, I'll meet you there.  
When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, languages, even the phrase "each other"  
doesn't make any sense. (Barks, p. 36, 1995)

When lines blur I think about where I stand and why. Because of this encounter with the priest, I found myself in a place of ambiguity, unsure how to navigate it. Many of those around me held on tightly to their sides, but that did not seem to be the road that held the most potential.

We have a high tolerance for ambiguity and that's what indigeneity has to offer the planet. Because of the nature and the needed swing toward a scientific, predictable, and empirical world, that produced such science that the Western world needed, to stop the horror that was happening. That is a positive, that the West swung into a one-truth epistemology. Now you've really got to figure out what a one-truth epistemology means. It's an Aristotelian idea that you can't hold two opposite truths to be, two at the same time. And that, we disagree with. We can hold opposites of my truth could be your truth, and both truths are called relative truths. So when you go into the mystic traditions you just have to find more rigorous ways to discuss what the world is needing to birth and that's why a lot of this scholarship will be found in women's writing....We are about wholeness and we are looking for synonyms to wholeness. You can just be saying whole, whole, whole, holistic. You've got to find synonyms to discuss what is the perceived

polemics of today. And that is two truths we can hold opposite to be true at the same time simultaneously. (Manulani)

There is power in allowing for ambiguity. However small in number, there are those who have studied that power (Beauvoir; 1948; Boss, 2013; Busch, 2010; Empson, 1966; Hodgson, 2001; Wilkinson, 2006). And there are many ways to tell the story of what happens when opposites are held together rather than chosen.

### **Telling the Story of Ambiguity through Jungian Archetypes**

When you approach a temple in East Asia, you will most likely see a fu dog outside of it. In Western European churches, you might see gargoyles lined up on a cathedral ledge. In Ireland, you would see the *sheela na gig* situated over an archway of a stone structure. These figures represent the archetype of the masculine; a quality of energy that is action-oriented, protective, and in service to the feminine. The job of the masculine is to protect the sacred feminine; a quality of energy that is subtle, unseen, and in service to life. At the temple, the fu dog guards the door to the inner sanctuary. When we take good care of ourselves through good boundaries and healthy choices, the masculine within is protecting the heart of who we are. The archetypes, as Jung defined them, cannot be pointed to directly in our linear language. We experience the archetypes of the masculine and the feminine through dreams, imagination, and creative expression. They are helpful tools in getting to know the whole of who we are.

The archetypal masculine and the feminine have little to do with societal gender roles but live within every being where “the feminine is deeply embedded in all of us...and we must all discover the feminine within if we are to discern the patterns and energies of the psyche that empower transformation” (Garrison, 2000, p. 288). The feminine represents the soul, the breath, the emotional, and invisible aspect of the human experience. The masculine represents the body,

the focused, visible, action-oriented part of ourselves. According to Jung, wholeness happens at the point where the two merge; in the “clash and reconciliation” (Garrison, p. 291) of these polarities. For example, those of us who show up easily in the world and manifest our dreams and listen less to the interior life, embody the masculine more readily. And those who vision and daydream, deeply knowing their internal selves but have difficulty bringing their desires to life, embody the feminine with greater ease. Wholeness comes from getting reacquainted with the qualities within that are unfamiliar. This is shadow work; to recover what is not readily seen in the light of one’s consciousness. Unfortunately, we live in a culture and have for centuries, that values the masculine far more than its counterpart. “After several thousand years, during which Western culture developed in increasingly masculine and patriarchal ways, separating the opposites from each other and subordinating the feminine under the masculine, a great reversal is taking place” (Garrison, 2000, p. 291). The feminine has been wounded and this is most readily seen in the lack of care shown for our bodies, and the other-than-human world.

The whole of who we are is where the two archetypes meet. When one is privileged over the other, just like the light and the dark (another way of naming these qualities), the imbalance can be damaging. John O’Donohue (1999) writes,

There is something deeply sacred about every presence. When we become blind to this, we violate Nature and turn our beautiful world into a wasteland...We lament today the absence of God and the demise of the sacred. Yet it is we ourselves who have killed God. The world is just as full of sacred presence as it was centuries ago. With the hardening of our minds we are no longer able to feel and sense the ever-present sacred the way our ancestors did. (p. 76)

Because “the entire course of Western civilization is seen as vitiated by patriarchy, the aggressive, plundering, male domination of our society” (Berry, p. 141) there is a temptation to abandon the masculine all together. Privileging the feminine over the masculine leads to a lack of structure and boundaries that are necessary for growth. And privileging the masculine over the feminine leads to control and domination; an overuse of boundaries. The magic happens in the integration of the two, which is something that I, and all of those I interviewed are working toward in our own unique ways. This integration can be messy at best.

### **Traversing Complexity and Chaos**

All of those I interviewed including myself, understand that living a wholehearted life means being open to the experience of ambiguity, as well as to the confusion and uncertainty that goes along with it. The muddy waters of ambiguity, or integration, lead to complexity. I will not go into the broad and wide study of complexity theory (Mitchell, M., 2011; Schermer, 2012) and chaos theory (Glieck, 2008; Watluck, 2011; Wheatley, 2006) in this dissertation. When I do not hold to polarities, things are no longer black and white. Vision turns gray and murky. Ambiguity lacks boundaries and many of us can choose to return to a more polarized place out of fear of not knowing where we stand.

We are not culturally trained, and I don't think this is true in other cultures, to be able to hold the simultaneity of experience...Of any polarity. Like look at our issues with gender. Male, female. One or the other. Not always. Right? But we don't know how to accommodate that because we are just, it's light or dark. Happy, sad. Good emotion, bad emotion. (Jessica)

There is a false sense of security in holding on to one extreme over another and this sort of extremism is on the rise (Fadl, Mouw, & Halevi, 2004; Mering & McCarty, 2013). Those

involved in this study understand that true knowing comes from not knowing. Wisdom comes from getting out of the way enough, as Melanie said, so that a greater wisdom can move through us. Getting out of the way means developing a resiliency for the in-between places.

Both Melissa and Melanie bring people of diverse backgrounds together through dance and song, respectively. Melissa works with high levels of complexity, where social and political boundaries amongst people of diverse backgrounds are blurred, through community-based transformative efforts.

The work has really grown into where there's complex dynamics between class and culture and race and it's in the room we end up working it in mysterious ways that I am still trying to understand. When one unwinds one's neurology that's based on an ancestral story, then one's free to meet the other in a new way. So when I have the Palestinians, the Israeli's and Jordanians in a room, and they are...twenty years old...Are you kidding me? You weren't even a part of all of this, but now they are. Then they do this work and then they start to relate to each other from such a space of freedom and interest and love and longing for collaboration...This is world work. And I've seen it with black and white South Africans, I've seen it in really complex family systems, where the mother, the father, the stepmother, the children are all in the room and just cool, cool, cool, work. So I'm personally really excited about that frontier and will be probably be spending more time there, and I actually would love to be in some of the really complex places on the planet at this point working with some of the issues that are rising and I feel like that's part of my future. (Melissa)

Melissa's work brings young people together from extreme political, religious, and social situations around the world. Students from places like Israel, Palestine, and South Africa travel

great distances to dance in the mountains of Colorado with Melissa. She navigates this fine line between opposites creatively and courageously all over the world, and has deeply studied this unifying work in many ways (Michaels, 2006). Melanie's call is similar to Melissa's except it is through song.

My work is about really tightening that weave that is community. It's a thing that we all need. Which means that is an inclusion of the light and the dark, the seen and the unseen. It's all of that. It's an integration of all of those energies. That accepts the light and the dark and really integrating that and you know not keeping things so separate because they are not. I mean light fades into day, day fades into night...You really can't have one without the other. It's just one side of the same thing. And especially in Western culture, there's so many separations...In Western culture as a rule, everything has been compartmentalized...There is birth, there is life, there is death. But in traditional and indigenous cultures, including my own, my ancestry in Africa, there is no separation between the celebration of life and death and all of those things, it's just being. And I think that's so much a part of it...I lived many years in Taos, New Mexico, and being in a culture that is so tied to the planet and to the Earth and to cycles of things made a huge difference to me in my life. And I lost my mother when I was very young. I was 19 when my mother died and she was only 43. So the veil became a little bit more transparent to me because I know that the space between here and there is really a matter of semantics. It's really not a space. It's all existing at the same time. (Melanie)

From her roots, Melanie has learned to see connection more than separation, and for Manulani, it was the same. "Interconnections of how we are all doing the same thing differently will surface and it will be recognized" (Manulani). Holding the differences in life, rather than separating

them out, is the ambiguity required in cultivating authentic relationship. My security does not come from holding on tightly to a particular way of being or thinking. I find a sense of security by breathing into what I encounter in the moment. *Aloha* in the Hawaiian language, is for many a polite greeting or a way to say hello, but it actually means much more than that (Meyer, 2011). *Alo* means presence and *ha* means the breath of life. I stay present to ambiguity with a presence that makes itself known through my breathing. I hang out in that liminal space long enough to where a deeper wisdom rises; what Jung would call the “third thing” (Smith, 19990, p. 92) or what Eastern philosophy would call the middle way (Marinoff, 2007).

Melanie, and all of those I interviewed, live with ambiguity. Wholehearted living means having the capacity to invite more than one aspect of ourselves into our lives. They are confident that a deeper, connected knowing will rise from a place of accepting “what is so” (Melissa Michaels, June 18, 2013). Wholeness happens when the rational, emotional, physical, and intuitive are held with similar regard. Lauren spoke to this in relationship to her hopes for those she guides in the Animas Valley Institute programs.

I hope they return home with a deeper understanding and engagement with their place in the world. And like you, one of the ways that that’s most accessible to the people and certainly was for me in my own personal experience, was this dive into soul. Which is exploring what I consider my inner wild in the outer wild. Our soul speaks in the same language. It’s the language of metaphor, image and symbol and it’s our alternative, it’s what Carlos Castaneda called the alternate reality. It’s this sense of feeling and tactile understanding and imagination that gets so hugely activated when we’re in the outer wild. In addition to rational thinking brain, which I am not in any way dismissing, but in our Western culture that part of us is very well developed, where as our more intuitive,

imaginal, tactile, emotive way of learning or knowing is not as fully developed. So the programs I work on, work on developing those things...I've yet to see somebody leave a program who does not leave more engaged with the natural world, with their natural self and the natural world. (Lauren)

Rather than choosing the intuitive over the intellectual or vice versa, Lauren encourages a middle way. When I hold polarities, a relevant and clear voice speaks, and right action often emerges.

Ambiguity is nothing to fear, but it is often feared because many of us have not learned the tools necessary to navigate it. I, and those I interviewed, have experienced the power of ambiguity and know that a wisdom beyond explanation lives in this liminal place. To distinguish it takes practice, and discipline, and often depends on the steadiness and faith of the listener. This knowing is relevant to the person listening, and at the same time, respects the context of the listener. It is a knowing that goes beyond the rational but includes it. Those I interviewed are experts at being with the space necessary for this inner knowing to emerge. This wisdom sings through Melanie, dances through Melissa, writes through Carl, breathes through Jessica, walks with Lauren, tells the story through Manulani's Hawaiian lineage, and cleans the barn and plants the garden through me. This wisdom of connection, wholeness, and truth endures and is found in the deep and quiet darkness of one's inner experience.

## Chapter 4. Inner Knowing: My True North

“You already know. The Spirit is with you and the Spirit is in you.”  
John 14:17

“You are not dead yet, it’s not too late  
to open your depths by plunging into them  
and drink in the life  
that reveals itself quietly there.”  
~Rainer Maria Rilke

After twenty-five years of living in Colorado, we decided to relocate our family to the east coast. As we prepared to move, people asked us “Are you moving closer to your family?” or “Did you get an enticing job offer?” To which we replied “No, we are following our hearts to Virginia.” The fear and uncertainty we could see in the eyes of the people asking the questions mirrored back to us what we were experiencing within. It was slightly insane to uproot our family when we were so comfortable where we were. As we showed her our house in preparation to sell it, even our realtor told us she could not believe we were leaving. “This house is so perfect,” she said. As the parents of two young children we wondered if moving across the country, uncertain of the future of our small businesses, was the most responsible thing to do. Many times we asked ourselves, why are we doing this anyway?

One summer afternoon I was rocking in my favorite chair and my husband came into our bedroom and confidently said, “I think I might be done living in Colorado. How about we move to Virginia and farm?” Stunned I looked up and responded, “Virginia? Are you sure? I know nothing about Virginia.” He answered, “Me neither, I have never been there.” Magic was afoot that day. I could feel it. Three weeks after my husband’s epiphany, I answered my phone to hear a colleague inviting me to teach for a week at Ferrum College. Wondering where Ferrum was, I asked him and then I heard him say, “Ferrum is in Virginia.” Chills ran up and down my spine. What began as an inner nudge was now becoming real. I could not wait until the fall to head to

Ferrum. I gathered my children and drove across the country to Virginia. I just had to see for myself what was calling us to the east. We traveled the state for nearly two weeks. It was beautiful and lush, and when I pulled onto the Blue Ridge parkway, my heart perked up. I called my husband and said, "I am feeling it. I call you back and let you know what I find." About an hour later, we were pulling into Floyd. It was a hot summer night in July and I could hear the music playing as I pulled into town. I rolled my windows down to hear several small bluegrass bands playing on the street. Hundreds of people were milling about and there was magic in the air. We walked into the Floyd Country Store and I was hooked. People, 3 to 80 years old were dancing on the old wooden floor.

A Floyd resident said to me, "When Floyd calls you to it, a red carpet unfolds for you. It becomes really easy to move here." That is exactly what has happened for us. We have been invited to eat delicious homegrown food in the homes of strangers who are now friends. Another invited us to stay in his RV on the Little River on his farm with lambs being born right before our eyes. We milked cows under the stars and drank their fresh milk. This journey east began with an inner nudge. One step at a time, an ember turned into a flame that sparked us to move from the community we had known for decades, to something completely new. We heard the call from within and responded. My husband and I have been cultivating the skill of listening from within for a long time. We trust that voice more than we trust most things. The light of knowing is found within the quiet and the darkness of our inner experience. And the more we talk to people in this magical town of less than five hundred people, we find that our story is not so unique (Timberlake, 2007). Many people have moved here because of an inner call.

**Knowing from the Inside Out: Connecting with the World from Center**

One of my greatest teachers was a monk named John. As I was writing this section I found myself thinking often of him often. He pruned bonsai trees in his greenhouse and found pleasure in the simple things; like smiles and brownies. He always said his goal in life was to live to 100. Tragically this never came to be. After surviving cancer in his 40s, John died after falling off the roof of a dome house he and his wife were building, just weeks after his retirement from hospital chaplaincy. As I wrote this, I wondered why he was on my heart so consistently. Then I received an email from his daughter, writing to me that the week he had been on my mind, had been John's birthday. She was going through old letters from her dad, and serendipitously decided to email one to me that week, and in it were these words.

Why look for answers my child?  
Among the people you meet?  
Why believe there is fulfillment  
in your narrow life at work?  
Why sacrifice the gift of loneliness  
to fill up time with diversion?  
Look inside every living thing you find.  
Feel the energy of rocks and leaves, hummingbirds and cactus.  
Dwell for a moment in a single blade of grass.  
Discover the secret of snowflakes.  
In these patterns lie harmony, child.  
In harmony, the universe. (Wood, N., n.d.)

Intelligence lives at the heart of life and can be seen through relationships. For myself, and those I interviewed, to know from the inside out is about aligning with the intelligence that is at the heart of who we are and living from it. Manulani said, "Be rigorous about the role of spirituality as a growing epistemology on the planet and we do need non-indigenous people in this field, rigorously. (Manulani) Knowing that this intelligence is at the heart of my life is as organic to me

as my breathing. The rigor that Manulani speaks of comes when I am called to bring the knowing into the world. This dissertation points to the knowledge that runs deeper than the intellect; a knowing that is internally rooted and emerges from an unknown place.

Melissa referred to the receiving of this intelligence as “getting downloads” (Melissa) and described how she notices this deeper intelligence at play in her life through patterns in her personal relationships.

How do we know that we have a shadow? How do we notice it if it’s in the shadow? And I just want to touch on that because I am so appreciative of how well the Universe handles that. You know there’s the phenomenal world that just keeps repeating certain teachings, that cause you to just go, Huh, that’s just working out the same way again and again and that’s not totally satisfying.

I think because I had a certain kind of violence in my childhood that I surrounded myself, and so I had a false sense of who I am, I really felt like dirt in a certain way. I attracted a masculine energy that either treated me like dirt or maybe not even intentionally but just didn’t honor my true personhood. Or I would interact with them and realize that they really weren’t my match because they were not treating themselves well and they were not playing the game of life in a way that was inspiring to me; that they were in some kind of mediocre dynamic with themselves and their lives, so I would attract those false mirrors because I had a false sense of myself. And then the other part of that with the masculine is, I often attracted men that had no real potency or edge because I was so afraid of being violated again. And that was totally unconscious until it wasn’t. And I’m now with a man who has a very fierce capacity to show up in his masculine and he’s done that work of untangling his own edges around, well he’s such a

peacemaker on the planet, but he understands aggression. And it took me really healing my own wounding around being aggressed, and then of course in different ways being the aggressor, before I could really draw in somebody who was truly my match. So I really see this story of my relationships with the masculine as an incredible shadow dance where I kept finding myself again and again being in a situation that felt unsupportive or disrespectful or hurtful even. And it was because I hadn't fully integrated parts of myself.

(Melissa)

Melissa, and all of the teachers I interviewed, spoke to this knowledge that is at the heart of life; this embodied knowing that rises from the earth of one's experience (Aposhyan, 1999; Johnson, 1992; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Meyer, 2010; Snowber, 2004). It is this knowledge that is at the heart of this research.

The word used most by those I interviewed was "know" (please see Appendix B for attached Wordle documents) and to know something can mean many things. Knowledge comes from both external and internal sources, and those externally located are often privileged over knowledge found internally (Dewey, 1983; Sterling, 2001). When we speak of knowing something from an inner place, we are pointing to the intangible; to knowledge that comes from an ultimately unidentifiable source and resides within. Jessica refers to this knowledge as a "pulse," (Jessica) which is also referred to as wisdom (Mayer, 2007; Palmer, 1998) and has been spoken of for centuries by mystics and philosophers alike (O'Donohue, 1997; Peers, 1946). According to Lauren, this knowledge is not something to be gained, but is remembered when we connect with the other-than-human world.

My preference would be to go out and through some of the practices we do, that they [participants in a retreat] rediscover that which they forgot they knew on their own.

Because it's so much better when you go out and follow your curiosity and find yourself following a butterfly and realize you just lost yourself for two hours in this exquisite little meadow without feeling panic or fear or judgment or anything else. (Lauren)

According to those I interviewed, this knowing is more of an aligning with "what is so" (Melissa) than a gathering of external information. They spoke to being immersed in this knowledge and how we can never be separated from it.

You can't be separate from it. It's impossible...You're always in direct relationship with the Earth and with others. But how well you access that, and how deeply one can feel that much less embody or transmit that, it's like pathways. The paths are there. You can't get rid of them but a lot of crap can grow up in the way that can make you forget you ever had them. And then we live in a way like it's a choice. But the reality I think truly is, and in really concrete terms, if you were to question someone enough, you would find deep connection to the Earth....A relationship that feels sustainable, where you feel you are plugged in, and you are not just giving, you are receiving in equal measure, not always all the time, but there's a sense of sustenance, nourishment. And other methodologies, strategies of I don't want to deal with the overgrowth. I don't want to deal with the discomfort of being seen or seeing, whatever it is, whatever language we would use. The sustenance, the nectar of the relationship isn't felt as deeply, but it's not that it's not available. It's not that you're separate from it. But the pathways to hearing, receiving, feeling, embodying, and transmitting are...clogged...You are the earth. (Jessica)

When I am aligned with what is real in my life, I can hear my call to service with greater clarity. This inner knowing not only delivers to me my call as it unfolds, but also gives me the courage I need to follow it.

As I have explored in this dissertation, to know from within one must be present to the inner darkness and quiet of one's experience. When many of us have learned disconnection (Brown, 2012; Greenspan, 2003), there is great potency in being reminded that the very essence of who we are is intelligent and whole. It can take lifetimes, or an instant, to return to that wholeness. Like Melanie, when reminded of this wholeness as a child, it is much easier to access as we grow.

My great grandfather, my father's grandfather was born a slave. I was raised in such a way, my mother was very very clear about dealing with people as individuals...I just remember so many things happening and coming home to my mother when Martin Luther King was killed. When Kennedy was killed. When Robert Kennedy was killed. I remember just feeling so torn up inside, and coming home and saying mom why do they hate us? What is that about? And my mom was saying...this is the way that the world is but she said no matter what they do to you, no matter what names they call you, if you know...deep inside of you who you are, nobody can get to that. That is where the truth of who you are lies...That's the reason that we are here now. I think about my ancestors...somebody held onto who they were so that we could be standing here right now. Somebody held onto the truth no matter what was happening to them. (Melanie)

When aligned with the essence or wholeness, of who we are in these earthy bodies, it is more likely that we will hear the wisdom within. I and those I interviewed, have found great value in reclaiming the darkness as the site for this knowledge, so much so that we are now called to guide others back to themselves in creative and courageous ways.

**Getting Perspective: The Relationship Between Brokenness and Wholeness**

At a workshop I was teaching this year, one of the students asked me how he could possibly be joyful, in a world that was falling apart. He wondered how he could find beauty in a broken world. I happened to be teaching that day at the Philly Magic Gardens; a city block of buildings covered with mosaics. The room that we were in was covered ceiling to floor with broken tiles and mirrors. As I considered this man's question, I looked at the walls of brokenness around him. To respond to his question, I walked up very close to the wall and stared at a broken piece of tile. I told him what I saw—only brokenness. Then I stepped back all the way to the other side of the room, where I could see the whole picture, but could no longer see the brokenness. I moved a bit closer then, to where I could see the whole picture, and the brokenness that it included. He understood then, like drops of water are not separate from the ocean, brokenness is just wholeness in pieces. It was clear that brokenness was honored by those I interviewed, but no one including myself, defined ourselves or anyone else by it.

The teachers that I interviewed courageously and creatively connect with their personal brokenness and that of the world. From this wholeness, a deeper connectedness to the world emerges. When I can see my brokenness from a distance, I am seeing with a perspective rooted in wholeness. There is a shift in the way that I see things when I can dance with both my divine and human nature. Having some distance from my brokenness is important so that I can see it, but not so much distance that I bypass it.

I led a psychodrama during a retreat on the fullness of one's emotional life where participants gathered in a circle and some volunteered to represent facets of an emotional life. Anger was in the circle. Happiness and loneliness. Boredom and sadness. After we acted out the human emotional life, we processed what we learned as a group. I asked each person

representing a feeling to describe what their experience was like. During the conversation a young man in the outer circle spoke up. He brought forward how important the point of view of those in the outer circle was; the perspective of wholeness. Inner knowing is that witness below the waves of emotion. It is like sinking down into the deep, dark quiet of the ocean so as not to live only in the turbulent waves. Living from the depths, or from wisdom that lives deeper than emotion and preference, allows one to respond rather than react to the world. Wholeness does not go around brokenness. It goes through it and includes it. And like the light and the dark, there is a delicate dance between the two.

Often I feel as if I am witnessing myself from within (Tolle, 1997), and those I interviewed knew this sense of a witness, and spoke to it often in their own ways. The witness is the knowing and for Carl, the poem is the witness through which he can see himself more deeply.

I once wrote a very critical poem about my mother and I knew she would never actually see the poem, unless I sent it to her. But as I reviewed the poem, there was something about the criticism of her that felt like I needed to say it for myself but I didn't need to share it with her and I didn't need to share it widely with the world. So I ended up, when the poem was going to be published in a book of poems that I knew my mother would see, I actually revised the poem so that it became a more positive picture of her and of our relationship and interestingly that poem became the beginning of writing a number of poems about my mother that acknowledged parts of her experience that in my criticism I wasn't as ready to acknowledge. The actual writing through, what I would call writing through the difficulty, saying things that were hard to say and then deciding not to actually say them to her, all of that became part of a process of healing in the

relationship. So she's now 79 years old, so she had me when she was quite young, but she's in good health and lives alone in Newfoundland and there's something of the relationship that she and I now have that's quite satisfying and hopeful for me...A lot of that comes out of the writing I've done including the writing that started out more critically. And even when I think about it I've done that with my father as well...started writing a certain way, then the poem actually turned me another way and that was all good in the end...There are times when I am about to say something and don't, but generally it's not a decision of censorship, it's not that I've written something and now I decide that I don't want to make that public or I don't want to share that with others. It's more that the poems are showing me what I have unveiled so far, revealed so far, isn't the whole story. There's more that needs to be attended to. Writing in a certain way brings me to a place where I can acknowledge that this isn't the whole story. (Carl)

Through his writing, Carl sees his brokenness and wholeness, and it reveals to him that the journey to wholeness is forever unfolding; that nothing is ever the whole story. With wholeness, there is no place of arrival. There is always more to discover. By honoring both brokenness and wholeness, the personal journey merges with the whole, where neither one is privileged over the other.

Once you stop seeing it as an individual, trying to proceed into individual awakening, and see it in the interconnected ways. Or actually I am convinced you can see it in any way you want, but ultimately the interconnections of how we are all doing the same thing differently will surface and it will be recognized. But how you get there is your own... responsibility. How you rigorously talk about the definitive nature of spirituality is your own responsibility and how I do it is through my own understanding and how you do it

will be through your own understanding. But my footprint in is through an indigenous epistemological lens. That footprint. And my seeing is through an indigenous epistemological lens. And what that means is that there are real clear indicators that the knowledge must have function, it must be tied to the specificity of place, it must have spirituality at the core of how it endures, it is tied to the quality of how our relationships get sustained, it is tied to the union of cognition, physical seeings, and an acumen that includes the unseen quantum world. Those are the like basic of an indigenous epistemology and how we engage in those aspects is your, will be your own understanding of what knowledge is, and how it gets maintained. All indigenous means is enduring knowledge systems that have endured for specific reasons. That's all we're trying to say. This is not an exclusive movement. It is a completely inclusive movement. Whenever non-indigenous people come into the discussion all we're faced with was trying to figure out, to help you guys feel like you have a sense of home...Because you guys, that's your work, but our work is to really move fast now with like minded people.

(Manulani)

Carl experiences wisdom, as does Manulani and all of those I interviewed, as connection or relationship. Outer connection begins with connecting with the ground of one's own experience.

[It is that] sense of the backyard, that sense of being close to a particular community and location. I'm always wanting, like Paulo Friere, to see from that backyard the whole world and everything in it. And with a spiritual commitment that's Christian in my part, I live in the world as if everything is an interconnected, ecologically sustainable creation. And so I see the whole of everything as created, creative, creating, and I am part of that.

(Carl)

There is a deep sense of interconnectedness with each person I interviewed. It is a connection that they see themselves an integral part of, and at the same time, can still see their separateness.

Ancient wisdom (Carrerra, 2006; O'Donohue, 1997) understands two things: At its center, all creation is good and all life is interconnected. When I am in relationship with center, I live wholeheartedly. Center is where I have been called to live since the moment I woke up to it. Devoting oneself to center is as ancient as the day is long and needed now more than ever. When I have been taught that goodness is at my core I am more likely to dive in. And when I commit to this, as I have for the past two decades, it is the experience of that goodness that brings me back again and again. Some of us are taught intentionally or unconsciously, to move away from our inner experience. Unfortunately when we move away from the darkness within, we move away from a light that is powerfully relevant.

Some of us are taught that if we go within, we will find only brokenness. Recently, I worked with a twelve-year old boy. We sat down on cushions, lit the candle, and breathed together. As we breathed, my intuition guided. I heard from within, "Tell him he is enough. He thinks he is broken. He has already forgotten his true nature." When we opened our eyes to meet each other I asked him, "So, how many diagnoses do you have?" He counted in his head and then answered, "Eleven." When a diagnosis is a doorway to liberation from one's limitations, it can be transformative. But when it perpetuates brokenness and forgotten identity, it is stifling. There are many cultural, religious, spiritual, and psychological stories that continue to foster the belief that we are fundamentally broken. This heavily addicted country appears to be disconnected from its innate goodness (Brown, 2012). In order to align with a greater sense of worthiness, descent into the darkness of the earth of our bodies is required (Plotkin, 2008).

Turning toward the life within is essential in order to recover the seed of goodness that abides within.

### **Following the Call: Acting from Center**

When making a melon basket, the first thing I do is make the God's eye. The God's eye holds the basket together and has to be centered. If it is not, the whole basket is off. It is the same thing when throwing a pot. If the clay is not centered on the wheel, the pot will lean. The more off center, the more the lean. In a music jam, if the guitarist does not hold the beat, the rest of the musicians have no center to travel from in the song. When I wove my first God's eye, it was so off center that I had to reweave it. An important aspect of centering is going off center. I learned how to weave a God's eye by first learning how not to do it. I learned how to be human sustainably by first learning really unsustainable ways to manage my humanness. When my eye is not on the breath that breathes me, I am lost. And I am not just a little lost. I get really lost. I start thinking that a drug, a drink, a brownie, a vacation spot, or a person's opinion can save me from the vulnerability of being human. My center becomes me managing my life, rather than surrendering to the intelligence, and support of life itself. Wholeness rises from the center, whether that is a pot, a basket, a song, or me. When a compass is set to its true north, the other directions are precise. If north is off, the rest of the directions are off. There are infinite ways to come to center and the journey is one with no arrival. It is forever unfolding. Center is always shifting; moment by moment. A centered God's eye makes a stronger basket, and like a basket, when I am centered, I am a stronger vessel for the love that longs to be carried into this world. The teachers I interviewed know where center is. They devote their lives to it by leading others back to center. In her interview Melanie says,

We got the light...In this moment we are connected to each other. Despite all of that other stuff, be it black and white, here and there...to the heart of who we really are. And that's that place where the veil is really thin. That's the place where we know each other. That's the place where we recognize, where we go I know you. My heart knows that. (Melanie)

I know I am aligned with that knowing, or wholeness, when I feel connected to myself, and the world around me. I may not feel happiness or even peace in that center, but I do feel connected.

Through the eyes of Native American wisdom, the west represents death, mystery and darkness and is "wedded to the soul itself. It is the direction of self discovery and...introspection" (Plotkin, 2008, p. 53). The sun sets in the west, and then moves north, where it rests unseen in the dark of midnight. The night is dark and the north is cold. When we learn how to move competently through the dark and cold of the west, we gain a unique wisdom from within that cannot be gained otherwise. Depth psychologist Bill Plotkin writes "It takes knowledge, skill, and fortitude to thrive in the cold and dark, so the north is linked with intelligence, competence, endurance, and strength" (p. 54). The north is the seat of sacred knowledge and is the most "esteemed social and spiritual quarter of life" (p. 389). To know my true north, I head into the darkness of myself. It is there that I hear a whisper that lives deeper than the turbulent waves of preference and emotion. It is this whisper that leads me on.

Living from center is brave and takes practice. As we live from center, like those I interviewed, there is risk. Carl says, "Taking risks is good. Taking risks is probably absolutely essential for most of us to living well in the world" (Carl). The light within does not call us to greater comfort or to the areas of ourselves that we already know. Anytime I have been called from within, I am always called to know myself more deeply. This can be uncomfortable not

only to me, but to those around me. Jessica found this to be true as she navigated her college years.

I didn't unlearn it and in a way it's trial by fire...I come from a very, very academic family...Almost everybody was Ivy League graduate. And when I was leaving high school, I only applied to Cornell University, early decision, and I got in. And I had a plan. Now, if you back track and you look at my high school senior yearbook page, it's all dedicated to the Great Spirit. It's basically all a whole Moody Blues quote...It ends with when he understood that when he was feeling hurt or felt fear it was because he was not understanding...But I was like I'm going to Cornell University, I am going to be an anthropologist, I'm going to meet some awesome good looking guy, I had the plan. And I left Cornell, and I remember the feeling, no one supported my leaving, even my friends were like just give it some time...I walked away and...that began the experience of why am I doing what I am doing? Am I conscious of it? Am I doing it to please other people? Am I doing it because I had a plan? Learning to navigate from center, even when no one, no one, was saying what you are doing is the right thing. (Jessica)

Those I spoke with fundamentally rely on this "inner barometer" (Melissa) as they lead. Melissa speaks to this in terms of wounds turning into our gifts where growing up with alcoholism was difficult, but also "allows us to be great in a room full of people with needs" (Melissa). Wisdom rises from facing difficulty or as Melanie says enlightenment "can only come out of what we consider the darkest time" (Melanie). Following this wisdom is not only relevant to our personal alignment, it is also relevant to the context that we find ourselves in. Melanie spoke to this guiding wisdom that showed up for her as her sister was dying.

Sometimes...you are just really awake. You're just really present in the moment, thank God for when those things happen. So I would know...to take my psychic energy out of the room and give her the space. And you know it's funny I had a little altercation with my dad in the room and my cousin was in the room and he was really, really upset and he said I can't believe you had that altercation with your dad in [your sister's] room. And I said [to my cousin], pay attention to what I am saying, where we are and where [my sister] is is really a different place and what she knows because I know that she knows this, that she knows that I have her back. And whether or not we can communicate with her on this level, she knows. And it may be upsetting to you but to [my sister], right now in this moment she knows that no matter what happens I have her back...And here's the thing that happens in families, so many times we do things behind closed doors, we don't deal with things right in the moment. And I said [my sister] needed to know on this level, on this earthly plane, that I have her back because she cannot speak to us in a particular kind of voice right now that we can hear but I know. So...I just knew it was so and when the moment came...I pulled everybody together. I sang so that those who could not be there at the service could say collectively, all of us, goodbye to [my sister]...Then I knew that the time was coming that [my sister] was going to completely release herself and die. And what was really interesting, a moment before that I was looking at [my sister], and I realized that she needed me to turn my back but she also needed me to be in the room. But she needed to take that breath without me looking at her. And I just turned around and I heard her, (Melanie breathes) and that was it...I knew she needed me to be there. And I knew she needed that moment to lift without me looking at her. I knew it. I knew it. I knew it. (Melanie)

There is a surrender that needs to happen to hear this knowing within. Before I teach, no matter where I am, I get down on my knees and pray “Let me lose myself to find You here.” I am not looking to bypass my experience but to go straight through it, to a knowing that connects us all. As Melanie said, “If you get out of the way, we know everything we need to know. And in those moments when the veil is lifted then we know everything that we need to know. And that sometimes can only come in what we consider...the darkest of times” (Melanie). It is in the dark that I come to know the light. And it is the light that leads me deeper into the darkness. The two are not separate. One is not better than the other. They both are needed to know wholeness and live from it.

### **Future Directions**

Both Carl and Jessica used the word alchemy in their interviews. The late Celtic philosopher and poet, John O’Donohue, said in an interview that he saw a great need for further research into the experience of being called; of hearing a deeper voice from within and following it. When that call is heard and responded to, alchemy occurs. Magic happens. At its root, magic means to be able or to have power. This entire dissertation has been about reclaiming a power that lives deep within the darkness of the human experience; an intelligence that includes and goes beyond the world of form. To live magically is to live rooted from a deeper place. For myself and those I interviewed, this leads to living more fully engaged with the world; to living a wholehearted life. Magic must be reclaimed as valid in a world that often seems half asleep (Abram, 2010) and these areas of calling, alchemy, and magic draw me in for further study.

As I begin a new call as a co-leader of a project-based learning high school steeped in the principles of progressive education (Dewey, 1983), I jokingly told my colleagues that I would like my title to be the “Director of Magic and Wizardry.” In some ways, I was serious. Magic is

for real and it comes from welcoming all aspects of myself; from leaving no part of myself behind. We do not have to wait for wonder and alchemy. It is right within our grasp. As I have learned the tools needed to face difficulty, I have lived a more wholehearted life. As I have turned toward my darkness, I have found an enduring light. Living fully is about learning the skills to accept the whole of life. From that alignment or attending to what is true, a magical life can be had, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary. When I see myself as sacred, I see the world as so. Let the alchemy begin.

I walked in the woods today  
while the geese honked above me.  
My attention drew upward,  
and I was reminded of Mary Oliver's words:  
The wild geese,  
high in the clean blue air  
are heading home again.

The geese, in their wildness,  
formed a perfect V,  
flapping their wings in sync with each other.  
Who says wildness has no rhythm?

I cut part of my fingernail off last week  
while chopping chard.  
The pain didn't come at first,  
but then it came on like a vengeance.  
I washed it, wrapped it,  
bandaged it,  
and continued to chop.

My finger is healed,  
the nail is growing,  
the blood is where it should be,  
and there is no pain.

Life rallies toward wholeness  
by honoring brokenness.  
Everything eventually  
rises up for the greatest good  
of what they belong to.

Today I marvel  
at the unfettered  
and glorious intelligence  
of this life.

## References

- Abram, D. (1996). *The spell of the sensuous*. NY: Random House.
- Abram, D. (2010). *Becoming animal: An earthly cosmology*. NY: Random House.
- Alanon Family Group Headquarters. (1997). *Pathways to recovery: Alanon's steps, traditions and concepts*. Virginia Beach, VA: Alanon Family Group Headquarters.
- Anderson, R. (2001). Embodied writing and reflections on embodiment. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 33 (2), 83-98.
- Anderson, R. (2011). *Transforming self and others through research: Transpersonal research methods and skills for the human sciences and humanities*. NY: SUNY Press.
- Aposhyan, S. (1999). *Natural intelligence*. NY: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Aposhyan, S. (2004). *Body-mind psychotherapy*. NY: WW Norton and Company.
- Ashton, W. & Denton, D (Eds.). (2005). *Spirituality, ethnography, & teaching*. NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bagley, C. and Cancienne, M. (2002) *Dancing the data*. NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Bamberg, M. (2007). *Narrative: State of the art*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Barks, C. (1995). *Essential Rumi*. NY: Harper Collins.
- Barks, C. (2002). *The soul of Rumi: A new collection of ecstatic poems*. NY: Harper Collins.
- Barks, C. (2003). *Rumi: The book of love: Poems of ecstasy and longing*. NY: Harper Collins.
- Barron, A. (2005). *Foot notes: Or walking as a fine art*. Ann Arbor, MI: Scholarly Publishing Office.
- Barrows, A. (2005). *Rilke's book of hours: Love poems to God*. NY: Riverhead Books.
- Barrows, A. & Macy, J. (1996). *Book of hours: Love poems to God*. NY: Riverhead Books.

- Beauvior, S. (1948). *The ethics of ambiguity*. NY: Kensington Publishing Corp.
- Behrendt, K. (2010). A special way of being afraid. *Philosophical Psychology*, Oct 2010, Vol. 23 Issue 5, pp. 669-682.
- Bender, S. (1996). *Everyday sacred*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- Berry, T. (1988). *Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.
- Bickel, B. (n.d.). From artist to a/r/tographer: An auto-ethnographic ritual inquiry into writing on the body. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*. Retrieved from:  
[www.barbarabickel.ca/resources/from%20artist%20to%20artographer\\_jcp%20bickel%20article.pdf](http://www.barbarabickel.ca/resources/from%20artist%20to%20artographer_jcp%20bickel%20article.pdf)
- Block, P. (2008). *Community: The structure of belonging*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Bly, R. (1988). *A little book on the human shadow*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Books.
- Bly, R. (1997). *Lorca and Jimenez: Selected poems*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Bly, R. (2004). *Kabir: Ecstatic poems*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Bochner, A. & Ellis C. (2001). *Ethnographically speaking: Auto-ethnography, literature, and aesthetics*. Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling power: Emotion and education*. NY: Routledge Publications.
- Boler, M. & Zembylas, M. (2003). Discomforting truths: The emotional terrain of understanding difference. In Trifonas, P. *Pedagogies of difference: Rethinking education for social change*. NY: Routledge Farmer.
- Boss, P. (2013). Resilience as tolerance for ambiguity. In Becvar, Dorothy S. (Ed.) *Handbook of family resilience*. NY: Springer Science + Business Media.

Brach, Tara. (2003). *Radical acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of the Buddha*.

NY: Random House.

Brainard, S. (1996). Defining mystical experience. *Journal of the American Academy of*

*Religion*, Vol. 64, Issue 2, p. 359.

Braud, W. & Anderson, R. (1998). *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences:*

*Honoring human experience*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Braud, W. (2004). Introduction to organic inquiry. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*,

Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 18-25.

Brezsny, R. (2013). Aries: Flaneur. Retrieved from: [www.freewillastrology.com/](http://www.freewillastrology.com/horoscopes/20130502p.html)

[horoscopes/20130502p.html](http://www.freewillastrology.com/horoscopes/20130502p.html)

Briskin, A., Erickson, S., Ott, J. & Callanan, T. (2009). *The power of collective wisdom and the*

*trap of collective folly*. San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers.

Brown, B. (2010). *The gifts of imperfection: Let go of who you think you're supposed to be and*

*embrace who you are*. Center City, Minnesota: Hazelden.

Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live,*

*love, parent, and lead*. NY: Penguin Group.

Brown, B. (2010) *The power of vulnerability*. Retrieved from: [www.ted.com/talks/](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html)

[brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html).

Brown Taylor, B. (2010). *An altar in the world: A geography of faith*. NY: Harper Collins.

Brown Taylor, B. (2014). Barbara Brown Taylor faces the darkness. *Time*, April 17. Retrieved

from: <http://time.com/66260/barbara-brown-taylor-new-book-faces-the-darkness/>

Brown-Taylor, B. (2014). *Learning to walk in the dark*. NY: Harper Collins.

- Brueggemann, W. (2001). *The prophetic imagination*. Minn., MN: Augsburg Fortress.
- Buhner, S. (2010). *Ensouling language: On the art of non-fiction and the writer's life*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Busch, A. (2010). *The ecology of uncertainty*. Deer Isle, ME: Haystack Mountain School of Crafts.
- Butz, D. (2010). Auto-ethnography as sensibility. In DeLyser, D., Herbert, S., Aitken, S., Crang, M., & McDowell, L. (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative geography* (1st Edition, pp. 138-155). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Buzzell, L. & Chalquist, C. (2009). *Ecotherapy: Healing with nature in mind*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Cajete, G. (1994). *Look to the mountain: An ecology of indigenous education*. Asheville, NC: Kivaki Press.
- Cajete, G. (1999). *Native science: Natural laws of interdependence*. Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers.
- Caldwell, C. (1996). *Getting our bodies back: Recovery, healing and transformation through body-centered therapy*. Boston, MA: Shambala Publications.
- Caldwell, C. & Victoria, H. (2011). Breathwork in body psychotherapy: Toward a more unified theory and practice. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, November.
- Calhoun, C. (1995). *Critical social theory: Culture, history, and the challenge of difference*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- Campbell, J. (1990). *The hero's journey*. NY: Harper Collins.

- Campbell, J. (2013). *Goddess: Mysteries of the divine feminine*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Capacchione, L. (2001). *Living with feeling: The art of emotional expression*. NY: Penguin Publishing.
- Carrera, J. (2006). *Inside the Yoga Sutras: A comprehensive sourcebook for the study & practice of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*. Buckingham, VA: Integral Yoga Publications.
- Casement, A. (2006). The shadow. In Papadopoulos, Renos K. (Ed.) *The handbook of Jungian psychology: Theory, practice and applications*. NY: Routledge, pp. 94-112.
- Charmaz, K. & Mitchell, R. (1997). The myth of silent authorship: Self, substance, and style in ethnographic writing. In Hertz, R. *Reflexivity and voice*. London: SAGE.
- Chickering, A., Dalton, J., & Stiem, L. (2006). *Encouraging authenticity and spirituality in higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Chodron, P. (2003). *The places that scare you: A guide fearlessness in difficult times*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Cladinin, J. (2006). *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Clements, J. (2004). Organic inquiry: Toward research in partnership with spirit. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2004, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 26-49.
- Cowan, E. (2000). Meeting client resistant and reactance with reverence. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Volume 78, Issue 4, pp. 411-419.

- Crum, A., Salovey, P., & Achor, S. (2013). Rethinking stress: The role of mindsets in determining the stress response. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 104, Issue 4.
- Cullinan, C. (2011). *Wild law: A manifesto for Earth justice*. Devon, UK: Green Books.
- Curry, D. (2006). *An organic inquiry primer for the novice researcher: A sacred approach to disciplined knowing*. West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing.
- Darder, Boltadano, & Torres. (2003). *Critical pedagogy reader*. NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Davis, W. (2009). *The wayfinders: Why ancient wisdom matters in the modern world*. Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press.
- Dean Moore, K., Peters, K., Jojola, T., Lacy, A., & Hogan, L. (2007). *How it is: The Native American philosophy of V. F. Cordova*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y. & Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2008). *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Des Jardins, D. (2006). *Environmental ethics: An introduction to environmental philosophy*. Belmont, CA: Thomson.
- DeWaal, E. (1997). *The Celtic way of prayer: The recovery of the religious imagination*. NY: Random House.
- DeWaal, E. (1999). *Every earthly blessing: Rediscovering the Celtic tradition*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing.
- Dewey, J. (1983). *Experience and education*. NY: Rockefeller Center.

- Donatelli, J. (2013). *The positive effects of stress*. Retrieved from: [www.shape.com/blogs/shape-your-life/positive-effects-stress](http://www.shape.com/blogs/shape-your-life/positive-effects-stress).
- Durka, G. (1986). *Praying with Julian of Norwich*. Minn., MN: St. Mary's Press.
- Eaton, M. (2007). *Environmental trauma and grief*. Retrieved from: [serc.carleton.edu/bioregion/sustain\\_lc/essays/67207.html](http://serc.carleton.edu/bioregion/sustain_lc/essays/67207.html)
- Edensor, T. (2013). Reconnecting with darkness: gloomy landscapes, lightless places. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 14:4, 446-465.
- Edwards, D. (2004). *Breath of life: A theology of the creator spirit*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Egan, K. (2002). *Getting it wrong from the beginning: Our progressivists inheritance from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget*. Grand Rapids, MI: Composing Room of MI.
- Eisler, R. (1995). *The chalice and the blade: Our history, our future*. NY, NY: Harper Collins.
- Eisler, R. & Carter, S. (2010). Transformative leadership: From domination to partnership. *Revision*, Vol. 30, Nos. 3 & 4.
- Eknath, E. (2007). *The Bhagavad Gita*. Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press.
- Ellis, C. (2009). *Revision: Autoethnographic reflections on life and work*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Empson, W. (1966). *Seven types of ambiguity*. NY: New Directions.
- Espada, J. (n.d.). *The shadow from a Buddhist perspective*. Unpublished manuscript.

- Etherington, K. (2004). Heuristic inquiry. *Counseling and psychotherapy research*, 2004, Vol. 4, No. 2.
- Fels, L. (1998). In the wind clothes dance on a line: Performative inquiry, a research methodology. *Journal for Curriculum Theorizing*, 14(1), 27-36.
- Fadl, K., Mouw, R., & Halevi, Y. (2004). *The power of fundamentalism*. Retrieved from: [www.onbeing.org/program/power-fundamentalism/218](http://www.onbeing.org/program/power-fundamentalism/218)
- Finn, J. (2013). Flaneur. Retrieved from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVqUAvu-y5M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVqUAvu-y5M)
- Fletcher, C. & Rawlins, C. (2002). *The complete walker IV*. NY: Knopf Publishing.
- Ford, D. (1998). *The dark side of the light chaser: Reclaiming your power, creativity, brilliance, and dreams*. NY: Riverhead Books.
- Fox, M. (2002). *Creativity*. NY: Putnam Books.
- Flach F. (2003). *Resilience: Discovering a new strength at times of stress*. NY: Hatherleigh Press.
- Frankl, V. (2006). *Man's search for meaning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Frederickson, L. M., & Anderson, D. H. (1999). A qualitative exploration of the wilderness experience as a source of spiritual inspiration. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 19 (1), 21-39.
- Friere, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the heart*. NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Friedman, L. & Moon, S. (1997). *Being bodies: Buddhist women on the paradox of embodiment*. Boston, MA: Shambala Productions.
- Friere, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the heart*. NY: Continuum International Publishing.

Ganim, B. (1999). *Art and healing: Using expressive art to heal your body, mind and spirit*.

NY: Three Rivers Publishing.

Garrison, J. (2000). *Civilization and the transformation of power*. NY: Paraview Press.

Geller, S. & Greenberg, L. (2011). *Therapeutic presence: A mindful approach to effective therapy*. Washington D.C.: APA Publications.

Gibran, K. (2002). *The prophet*. Sydney, Australia: Phone Media.

Gibran, K. (1971). *A tear and a smile*. NY: Knopf.

Girouard, J. (2001). *Way of Saint John of the Cross: A guide through the dark night of the soul*.

Boulder, CO: Sounds True Recording.

Gladstein, R., Garavente, J. (Producer) & Helm, Z. (Director). (2007). *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium* [Motion picture]. U.S.: 20th Century Fox.

Glazer, S. (1999). *The heart of learning: Spirituality in education*. NY: Penguin Putnam.

Gleick, J. (2008). *Chaos: Making a new science*. NY: Penguin Books.

Goldberg, N. (1986). *Writing down the bones: Freeing the writer within*. Boston, MA:

Shambala Publications.

Greenspan, M. (2003). *Healing through the dark emotions: The wisdom of grief, fear, and despair*. Boston: Shambala Publications.

Griffin, S. (1992). *A chorus of stones: The private life of war*. NY: DoubleDay.

Griffiths, J. (2006). *Wild: An elemental journey*. NY: Penguin Books.

Halprin, A. (2000). *Dance as a healing art: Returning to health with movement and imagery*.

Mendocino, CA: Life Rhythm Books.

Halprin, D. (2003). *The expressive body in life, art and therapy*. London, England: Jessica

Kingsley Publishers.

Hamilton, M., Smith, L., Worthington, K. (2008). Fitting the methodology with the research: An exploration of narrative, self-study and auto-ethnography. *Studying Teacher Education*, Vol. 4, No. 1, May 2008, 17–28.

Hanh, T. (1992). *Peace is every step: The path of mindfulness in everyday life*. NY: Bantam Books.

Hanh, T. (1994). The next Buddha may be a Sangha. *Inquiring Mind*, Vol 10, No. 2, p. 41.

Hanh, T. (2013). Mindfulness, suffering, and engaged Buddhism. Retrieved from: <http://bit.ly/1eVgrBz>

Happold, F.C. (1991). *Mysticism: A study and an anthology*. NY: Penguin Books.

Harding, E. (1993). *Kali: The black goddess of Dakshineswar*. York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hayes.

Harding, S. (2006). *Animate Earth: Science, intuition and Gaia*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Hartney, C. (2006). U.S. rates of incarceration: A global perspective. *Research from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency*, November Issue.

Hasebe-Ludt, E., Chambers, C., and Leggo, C. (2009). *Life writing and literary metissage as an ethos for our times*. NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Hillesum, E. (1996). *Etty Hillesum: An interrupted life, the diaries 1941-1943, and letters from Westerbork*. NY: Henry Holts & Co.

Hinde, R. A. (1999). Religious experiences. In *Why God persists: A scientific approach to*

- religion*. pp. 185-198. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. NY: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1999). *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. NY: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Hochaka, G. (2010). *Developing sustainability, developing the self: An integral approach to international and community development*. [Self Published]: Hochaka.
- Hodgson, P. (2001). *Relax, it's only uncertainty: Lead the way when the way is changing*. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Howse, C. (2010). *Sacred mysteries: The love poetry of St. John of the Cross*. Retrieved from: [www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/christopherhowse/7919575/Sacred-Mysteries-The-love-poetry-of-John-of-the-Cross.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/christopherhowse/7919575/Sacred-Mysteries-The-love-poetry-of-John-of-the-Cross.html).
- Houston, J. (2010). *Spirituality and the meaning of mysticism for our time*. Retrieved from: [www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-jean-houston/spirituality-and-the-mean\\_b\\_620272.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-jean-houston/spirituality-and-the-mean_b_620272.html)
- Huebl, T. (2012). *Living into our greater potential*. Retrieved from: [www.newdimensions.org/living-into-our-greater-potential-with-thomas-huebl/](http://www.newdimensions.org/living-into-our-greater-potential-with-thomas-huebl/)
- Ilibagiza, I. (2006). *Left to tell: Discovering God amidst the Rwandan genocide*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.
- Idle No More. (2014). *Treaty alliance First Nations' refusal to sign funding agreements a sign of growing resistance to Canada's termination agenda*. Retrieved from: [bit.ly/ldM5gfa](http://bit.ly/ldM5gfa)
- Isaac, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*. NY: DoubleDay.

Ives, D. & Valone, D. (2007). *Reverence for life revisited: Albert Schweitzer's relevance today*.

Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

James, W. (1928). *Lectures XVI and XVII: Mysticism in The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. NY: Longmans, Green & Company.

Jardine, D. & Abram, D. (2000). All knowledge is carnal knowledge: A correspondence.

*Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 5, Spring 2000.

Jensen, D. (2004). *A language older than words*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green

Publishing.

Jha, A. (2010). Happiness doesn't increase with growing wealth of nations, finds study. *The Guardian*, December 13, 2010.

Johnson, D.H. (1992). *Body: Recovering our sensual wisdom*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Press.

Johnson, M. (2007). *The meaning of the body*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Johnston, L. D., O'Malley, P. M., & Bachman, J. G. (1998). National Survey Results on Drug

Use From Monitoring The Future Study, 1975-1997. *Volume I: Secondary School*

*Students. Volume II: College Students and Young Adults*. (Vol. I NIH Publication no.

98-4345) (Vol. II NIH Publication no. 98-4346). Washington DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Jung, C. (2006). *The undiscovered self*. London, England: Penguin Books.

Jung, C., Shamdasani, S., Peck, J. & Kyburz, M. (2009). *The red book*. China: The Foundation of the works of C.G. Jung.

Kabat- Zinn, J. (2012). Opening to our lives and the science of mindfulness. Retrieved from  
from: <http://www.onbeing.org/program/opening-our-lives/138>.

Kagan, S. (2012). Don't fear the reaper. *New Scientist*, Vol. 216, Issue 2887.

Kavanaugh, K. & St. John of the Cross. (1991). *The collected works of St. John of the Cross*.  
Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies.

Keduzi. (2014). *Change your mind*. Retrieved from: <http://keduzi.org/en/about/>

Kidd, S. (1995). *The dance of the dissident daughter: A woman's journey from the Christian  
tradition to the sacred feminine*. NY: Harper Collins.

King, M. (1967). *Black is beautiful*. Retrieved from: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?  
v=wWqeQf135qM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWqeQf135qM))

Kirkey, J. (2010). *The salmon spring: The ecology of Celtic spirituality*. San Francisco,  
CA: Hiraeth Press.

Knaster, M. (1996). *Discovering the body's wisdom*. NY: Bantam Books.

Knowles, G. & Cole, A. (2008). *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspectives,  
methodologies, examples and issues*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. NY: Macmillan Publishing.

Landinsky, D. (2002). *Love poems from God: Twelve sacred voices from the east and the west*.  
NY: Penguin Group.

Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge  
to Western thought*. NY: Basic Books.

Lamott, A. (1994). *Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life*. NY: Pantheon Books.

- Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. (2012). *Introduction to gun violence statistics*. Retrieved from: [smartgunlaws.org/category/gun-studies-statistics/gun-violence-statistics/](http://smartgunlaws.org/category/gun-studies-statistics/gun-violence-statistics/)
- Leder, D. (1990). *The absent body*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Leggo, C. (1994). "Who's afraid of Jacques Cousteau?" *Growing up perpendicular on the side of a hill*. St. John's, NL: Killick Press, p. 66.
- Leggo, C. (2001). Research as poetic rumination: Twenty-six ways of listening to light. In L. Neilsen, A. L. Cole, & J. G. Knowles (Eds.), *The art of writing inquiry* (pp. 173-195). ' Halifax: Backalong Books.
- Leggo, C. (2004). Light and Shadow: Four reasons for writing (and not writing) autobiographically. *Vitae Scholasticae: The Journal of Educational Biography*, 21.1, p. 5-22.
- Leggo, C. (2004). Tangled lines: On autobiography and poetic knowing. In A. L. Cole, L. Neilsen, J. G. Knowles, & T. C. Luciani (Eds.), *Provoked by art: Theorizing arts-informed research* (pp. 18-35). Halifax: Backalong Books.
- Leggo, Carl (2010). Writing a Life: Representation in Language and Image. *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry* 7(2).
- Leggo, C. (2011). Living love: Confessions of a fearful teacher. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, Volume 9 Number 1.
- Leggo, C. (2012). Living language: What is a poem good for? *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, Volume 10 Number 1.
- Leonard, G. (1968). *Education and ecstasy*. Berkley, CA: North Atlantic Books.
- Lerner, H. (1989). *The dance of intimacy*. NY: Harper and Row.
- Lesser, E. (1999). *The seeker's guide*. NY: Random House.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Tierney, W.G. (Eds.) (1997). *Representation and the text: Re-framing the narrative voice*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

Lopez, B. (2010). *Bill Moyers journal: Interview with Barry Lopez*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/04302010/watch3.html>

Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. NY: Workman Publishing.

Lusseyran, J. (2014). *And then there was light: The extraordinary memoir of a blind hero of the French resistance in World War II*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Luthar, S., Cichetti, D., & Becker, B. (2003). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development*, Volume 71, Issue 3, pp. 543-562.

Lynch, T. (1997). *The undertaking: Studies from a dismal trade*. NY: W.W. Norton and Co.

Mayer, E. (2007). *Extraordinary knowing: Science, skepticism, and the inexplicable powers of the human mind*. NY: Bantam Books.

McCarthy, L. (2008). *Earth impacts linked to human-caused climate change*. Retrieved from: [www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/news/topstory/2008/human\\_impact.html](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/news/topstory/2008/human_impact.html)

MacKay, T. (2014). *NASA study concludes when civilization will end, and it's not looking good for us*. Retrieved from: [www.policymic.com/articles/85541/nasa-study-concludes-when-civilization-will-end-and-it-s-not-looking-good-for-us](http://www.policymic.com/articles/85541/nasa-study-concludes-when-civilization-will-end-and-it-s-not-looking-good-for-us)

Macy, J. (1998). *Coming back to life: Practices to reconnect our lives, our world*. BC, Canada: New Society Publishers.

Macy J. & Rothberg D. (1994). Asking to awaken. *Re-Vision*, 17, 2, 25-33.

- Maffei, D. (2013). The experience of visiting sacred sites: An organic inquiry/grounded theory study. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B- The Sciences and Engineering*, Vol 73.
- Mandela, N. (1995). *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. Nelson Mandela.
- Marinoff, L. (2007). *The middle way: Finding happiness in a world of extremes*. NY: Sterling.
- Marshall, P. (2005). *Mystical encounters with the natural world: Experiences and explanations*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- May, R. (1975). *The courage to create*. NY: Norton and Co.
- Mayer, (2007). *Extraordinary knowing: Science, skepticism, and the inexplicable powers of the human mind*. NY: Bantam Books.
- Mazis, Glen A. (2002). *Earthbodies: Rediscovering our planetary senses*. NY: State University of New York Press.
- McClary, R. (2007). Healing the psyche through music, myth, and ritual. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, Vol. 1, Issue 3.
- McGinn, B. (1981). *Meister Eckhart: The essential sermons, commentaries, treatises and defense*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- McGinn, B. (2006). *The essential writings of Christian mysticism*. NY: Random House.
- McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack*. Retrieved from: [www.amptoons.com/blog/files/mcintosh.html](http://www.amptoons.com/blog/files/mcintosh.html)
- Meadows, D., Meadows, D. & Randers, J. (1992). *Beyond the limits: Confronting global collapse, envisioning a sustainable future*. Post Mills, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Meeks, T. (n.d.). *Exploring magic and mysticism*. Retrieved from:

[gnosticcross.tripod.com/archive/2001\\_06\\_2paulsimon.html](http://gnosticcross.tripod.com/archive/2001_06_2paulsimon.html)

Meredith, Owen, W. (2011). Winnicott on Jung: Destruction, creativity, and the unrepressed unconscious. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, Vol. 56, Issue 1, pp. 56-75.

Mering, S. & McCarty, T. (2013). *Right-wing radicalism today: Perspectives from Europe and the US*. NY: Routledge.

Merriam- Webster. (2013). Retrieved from: [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/darkness](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/darkness)

Merton, T. (1979). *A hidden wholeness: The visual world of Thomas Merton*. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.

Meyer, K. (2010). Living inquiry: Me, my self, and other. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Vo. 26 No. 1, 85-96.

Meyer, M. (2004). *Ho'oulu: Our time of becoming*. Hilo, HI: Ai Pohaku Press.

Meyer, M. (2005). *Remembering our future: Higher education quality assurance and indigenous epistemology*. Retrieved from: [www.win-hect.org/docs/pdfs/Jounral/Manulani%20Meyer.pdf](http://www.win-hect.org/docs/pdfs/Jounral/Manulani%20Meyer.pdf)

Meyer, M. (2008). *Hawaiian knowing: Old ways for seeing a new world*. Hilo, HI: Koa Books.

Meyer, M. (2011). *An efficacy of aloha*. Retrieved from: <http://vimeo.com/13920353>.

Meyer, M. (2013). Holographic epistemology: Native common sense. *China media research*, 9 (2).

Mezirow, J. (1999). *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace and higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Miller, J. , Karsten S., Denton, D, Orr, D. & Kates, I.C. (Eds.). (2004). *Holistic learning: Breaking new ground*. NY: SUNY.
- Mirochnik, E. & Sherman, D. ( 2002). *Passion and pedagogy: Relation, creating and transformation in teaching*. NY: Peter Lang.
- Michaels, M. (2006). *Surfing the Creative(TM): The process and potential of a body-centered rites of passage program serving youth development* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. ISBN 9780542847073.
- Mitchell, M. (2011). *Complexity: A guided tour*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Molzahn, A. & Shields, L. (2008). Why is it so hard to talk about spirituality? *Canadian Nurse*, Vol. 104, Issue 1, p. 25-29.
- Moustakas, C. (1969). *Personal growth: The struggle for identity and human values*. H.A. Doyle Publishing Co.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Muller, W. (2000). *Sabbath: Finding rest, renewal, and delight in our busy lives*. NY: Bantam Books.
- Narayan, R.K. (1972). *The Ramayana*. NY: Penguin Books.
- Nash, R. (2001). *Wilderness and the American mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- Neumann, E. (1990). *Depth psychology and the new ethic*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Newell, J. (1997). *Listening for the heartbeat of God: A Celtic spirituality*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Newell, J. (2011). *A new harmony: The spirit, the Earth, and the human soul*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley Publishing.

Newell, J.P. (Speaker). *The ancient harmony*. Arvada, CO: Colorado Spiritual Directors Conference, January 2011.

Noble, T. & Webster, S. (n.d.). *Amazing shadow sculptures by Tim Noble and Sue Webster*. Retrieved from: [www.thisismarvelous.com/i/4-Amazing-Shadow-Sculptures-by-Tim-Noble-and-Sue-Webster](http://www.thisismarvelous.com/i/4-Amazing-Shadow-Sculptures-by-Tim-Noble-and-Sue-Webster)

Nouwen, H. (1972). *The wounded healer: Ministry in contemporary society*. NY: Bantam Books.

Nouwen, H. (2009). *Intimacy*. NY: Harper Collins.

NPR Staff. (2014). *Playwright Athol Fugall looks back on aging and apartheid*. Retrieved from [n.pr/1rETzA9](http://n.pr/1rETzA9)

O'Donohue, J. (n.d.) The question holds the lantern. [Web Log Comment]. Retrieved from: <http://www.johndonohue.com/words/question>

O'Donohue, J. (1997). *Anam cara: A book of Celtic wisdom*. NY: Harper Collins.

O'Donohue, J. (1999). *Eternal echoes: Exploring our yearning to belong*. NY: Harper Collins.

O'Donohue, J. (2004). *Beauty: Rediscovering the true sources of compassion, serenity and hope*. NY: Harper Collins.

O'Donohue, J. (2006). *Wisdom from the Celtic world*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True Recordings.

O'Donohue, J. (Speaker). *Imagination as the path of the spirit*. Greenbelt Festivals, United Kingdom, 2007.

O'Donohue, J. (2010). *Four elements: Reflections on nature*. NY: Random House.

O'Donohue, J. (2012). *The inner landscape of beauty*. Retrieved from:

[www.onbeing.org/program/inner-landscape-beauty/203](http://www.onbeing.org/program/inner-landscape-beauty/203)

Oelschlaeger, M. (1991). *The idea of wilderness*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Oliver, M. (2007) *Thirst: Poems*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Olsen, A. (2002). *Body and Earth: An experiential guide*. Lebanon, NH: University Press.

Oraibi Nation. (2000). *A prophecy from the Hopi elder*. Retrieved from:

[www.communityworks.info/hopi.htm](http://www.communityworks.info/hopi.htm)

Osho. (2001). *Intimacy: Trusting oneself and the other*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

O'Sullivan, E. & Taylor, M. (2004). *Learning toward an ecological consciousness: Selected transformative practices*. NY, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Otto, R. (1987). *Mysticism East and West: A comparative analysis of the nature of mysticism*.

Wheaton, IL: Quest books.

Palmer, H. (1998). *Inner knowing: Consciousness, creativity, insight, intuition*. NY: Penguin.

Palmer, P. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: The journey toward an undivided life*. NY: Jossey-Bass.

Palmer, P. (2010). *The heart of higher education: A call to renewal*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Peers, E. (1946). *Interior Castle*. NY: Dover Publications.

Pelias, R. J. (2004). *Methodology of the heart: Evoking academic and daily life*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Perry, P. (2014). Loneliness is killing us: we must start treating this disease. *The Guardian*, February 17. Retrieved from: [bit.ly/NbT4gJ](http://bit.ly/NbT4gJ)

Phillips, J. (2006). *Divining the body: Reclaiming the holiness of your physical self*.

- Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing.
- Plotkin, B. (2008). *Nature and the human soul: Cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented world*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Plumwood, V. (1993). *Feminism and the master of nature*. London: Routledge.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Prager, K. (2014). *The dilemmas of intimacy: Conceptualization, assessment, and treatment*. NY: Routledge.
- Rex, J. & Mason, D. (1986). *Theories of race and ethnic relations*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Richardson, L. (1990). *Writing strategies: Reaching diverse audiences*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.
- Richardson, L. (1994). Writing: A method of inquiry. In Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE.
- Richo, D. (1999). *Shadow dance: Liberating the power and creativity of your dark side*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Rilke, R. (2011). *Letters to a young poet*. Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing.
- Robinson, K. (2001). *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative*. West Sussex, England: Capstone Publishing.
- Robinson, Sir K. (2006). *Schools kill creativity*. Retrieved from: [www.ted.com/talks/ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html)

- Roethke, T. (1972). *Theodore Roethke: Selected poems*. NY: Random House.
- Rohr, R. (2001). *Job and the mystery of suffering: Spiritual reflections*. NY: Crossroads Publishing.
- Rohr, R. (2009). *The naked now: Learning to see as the mystics*. NY: Crossroads Publishing Company.
- Rosenberg, M. (2005). *Nonviolent communication: The language of life*. Encinitas, CA: Puddledancer Press.
- Roth, G. (1997). *Sweat your prayers: The five rhythms of the soul*. NY: Penguin Putnam.
- Roth, G. (1998). *Maps to ecstasy: The healing power of movement*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Rudebusch, G. (2009). *Socrates*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Publishing.
- Sanders, R. (2013). *Researchers find out why some stress is good for you*. Retrieved from: [bit.ly/NZUhbB](http://bit.ly/NZUhbB)
- Sanford, M. (2008). *Waking: A memoir of trauma and transcendence*. Stuttgart, Germany: Holtzbrinck Publishers.
- Saulitis, E. (2014). Wild darkness. *Orion Magazine*, Retrieved from: [www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/8046](http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/8046)
- Scharper, D. (1997). Amid the wealth, a poverty of the heart. *The Baltimore Sun*, September 12.
- Schlitz, M., Vieten, C., & Amorok, T. (2007). *Living deeply: The art and science of transformation in everyday life*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Schwarz, L. (2006). About wishes and invitations: Four meditations on life writing with Carl Leggo. *Vitae Scholasticae*, p. 65-72.

Scharmer, O. (2014). Shifting the social field: Concentration, compassion, and collective action.

*Huffington Post*, February 17. Retrieved from: [huff.to/1jIoB4Q](http://huff.to/1jIoB4Q).

Schermer, V. (2012). Group-as-a-whole and complexity theories: Areas of convergence. *Group Analysis*, Vol. 45, Issue 3, p. 275-288.

Schweitzer, A. (2002). *Reverence for life: The ethics of Albert Schweitzer for the 21st Century*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Press.

Senge, P., Scharmer, C., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. (2004). Awakening faith in an alternative future. *Reflections: The SoL Journal on Knowledge, Learning, and Change*, Volume 5, Number 7, 1-16.

Senge, P. Sharmer, O., Jaworski, J. & Flowers, B. (2005). *Presence: An exploration of profound change in people, organizations, and society*. NY: Random House.

Sheldrake, P. (1995). *Living between worlds: Place and journey and Celtic spirituality*. Lanham, MD: Cowley Press.

Shepard, P. (1982). *Nature and madness*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.

Silouan, M. (2011). The poverty of loneliness. Retrieved from: [ocawonder.com/ 2011/11/16/ the-poverty-of-loneliness/](http://ocawonder.com/2011/11/16/the-poverty-of-loneliness/)

Sheets- Johnstone, M. (1992). *Giving the body its due*. Albany, NY: New York University Press.

Sherman, G. & Clore, G. (2009). The color of sin: White and black are perceptual symbols or moral purity and pollution. *Psychological Science*, Vol. 20, No. 8.

Sleepy Moose. (2012). *The power of music: Henry wakes up!* Retrieved from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fw7Y78aqf\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fw7Y78aqf_I)

Sloane Coffin, W. (2004). *Credo*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

Smith, C. (1990). *Jung's quest for wholeness: A religious and historical perspective*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Snowber, C. (1997). Writing the body. *Educational Insights*, 4(1). Retrieved from:  
[www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/archives/v04n01/writing.html](http://www.ccfi.educ.ubc.ca/publication/insights/archives/v04n01/writing.html)

Snowber, C. (2004). *Embodied prayer: Toward wholeness of body mind soul*. Kelowna, B.C.: Northstone.

Snowber, C. (2011). Let the body out: A love letter to the academy from the body. In *Epistemologies of ignorance and education* Erik Malewski and Nathalia Jaramillo (eds.), Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing.

Snowber, C. & Wiebe, S. (2009). In praise of the vulnerable: A poetic and autobiographical response to Salvio's abundant Sexton. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 5, February 2009. Retrieved from:  
[www2.uwstout.edu/content/jaaacs/Vol5/Snowber\\_Wiebe.htm](http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/jaaacs/Vol5/Snowber_Wiebe.htm)

Sollee, B. (2008). *Learning to Bend*. Retrieved from: [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92193202](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92193202)

Solnit, R. (2000). *Wanderlust: A history of walking*. NY: Penguin Group.

Some, M. P. (1998). *The healing wisdom of Africa*. NY: Penguin Books.

Some, S. (1999). *The spirit of intimacy: Ancient African teachings in the ways of relationships*. NY: Harper Collins.

Speck, J. (2012). *Walkability: How downtown can save America one step at a time*. NY: North Point Press.

- Stahlman, S. (n.d.) *Defining mysticism*. Retrieved from: [www.sandra.stahlman.com/james.html](http://www.sandra.stahlman.com/james.html)
- Steidl, A, Werth, L., & Hanke, E. (2010). You can't see much in the dark: Darkness affects construal level and psychological distance. *Social Psychology*, Vol. 42, p. 174-184.
- Steiner, R. (1996). *The education of the child: And early lectures on education*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.
- Steinsaltz, A. (2010). *Teshuva: A guide for the newly observant Jew*. New Milford, CT: Maggid Books.
- Sterling, S. (2001). *Sustainable education: Re-visioning learning and change*. Devon, England: Green Books.
- Sumner, C. (n.d.) *Taking death out of the closet*. Retrieved from: [www.deathcafe.com/blog/38/](http://www.deathcafe.com/blog/38/)
- Suzuki, D. (1997). *The sacred balance: Rediscovering our place in nature*. Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books.
- Tarrant, J. (1998). *The light inside the dark: Zen, soul and the spiritual life*. NY: Harper Collins.
- Thoreau, H. (2013). *Walking*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Timberlake, D. (2007). A magical hideout. *Virginia Living*. Retrieved from: [www.virginaliving.com/travel-leisure/nearby/a-magical-hideout/](http://www.virginaliving.com/travel-leisure/nearby/a-magical-hideout/)
- Tolle, E. (1997). *The power of now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment*. Navato, CA: New World Library.
- Tolle, E. (2003). *Stillness speaks*. Mumbai, India: Yogi Impressions Books.
- Tolkein, J. R. R. (1994). *The lord of the rings*. NY: Houghton Mifflin Publishing.

Tompkins, J. (1996). *A life in school: What the teacher learned*. Jackson, TN: Perseus Books.

Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (2006). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. NY: Zed Books.

Turner, B.S. (1996). *The body and society: Explorations in social theory*. London: SAGE.

Underhill, E. (1990). *Mysticism: The pre-eminent study in the nature and development of spiritual consciousness*. Bournemouth, England: Image.

Underhill, E. (2006). *Practical mysticism: A little book for normal people*. NY: Cosimo.

Vanier, Jean. (1998). *Becoming human*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press.

Varey, W. (2003). *Defining sustainability: A hundred perspectives*. Retrieved from: [bit.ly/12OKNTE](http://bit.ly/12OKNTE).

Vennard, J. (1998). *Praying with body and soul*. Minn., MN: Augsburg Press.

Vincent, B. (2009). The relationship between poverty, conflict, and development. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 15-28.

Voices of Grief. (2013). *Community sing experience: Lifted by song with Melanie Demore*.

Retrieved from: [www.voicesofgrief.org/community-sing-experience/](http://www.voicesofgrief.org/community-sing-experience/)

Voices of Grief. (n.d.). *Voices of grief: In the news*. Retrieved from:

[voicesofgrief.org/in-the-news/](http://voicesofgrief.org/in-the-news/)

Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5 (2) June.

Wall, S. (2008). Writing an autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7(1).

Wall, S. (2008). Easier said than done: Writing an autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7(1). Retrieved from:

[ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/view/1621](http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/view/1621)

Wallace, A. (2014). *Deep inside Baz Luhrmann's creative chaos*. Retrieved from:

[www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/magazine/deep-inside-baz-luhrmanns-creative-chaos.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/magazine/deep-inside-baz-luhrmanns-creative-chaos.html?_r=0)

Walker, A. (2007). *We are the ones we have been waiting for: Inner light in a time of darkness*. NY: The New Press.

Waters, B. (2013). 10 traits of emotionally resilient people. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from from: [bit.ly/1g6ZR6o](http://bit.ly/1g6ZR6o).

Watluck, B. (2011). Exploring chaos and complexity. *Journal for Quality & Participation*, Vol. 34 Issue 3, p. 20-21.

Watson, L. (Speaker). United Nations Decade for Women Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, 1985.

Weil, A. (1995). *Spontaneous healing: How to discover and embrace your body's natural ability to maintain and heal itself*. NY: Random House.

Welton, D. (Ed.) (1988). *Body and flesh: A philosophical reader*. Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell.

Wheatley, M. (2001). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishing.

Wheatley, M. (2006). *Finding our way: Leadership for an uncertain time*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Wheatley, M. & Frieze, D. (2011). *Walk out walk on: A learning journey into communities*

- daring to live the future now*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Whyte, D. (2001). *Crossing the unknown sea: Work as a pilgrimage*. NY: Riverhead Books.
- Whyte, D. (2007). *River flow: New and selected poems*. Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press.
- Whyte, D. (2008). *Jerry Wennstrom's artistic journey*. Retrieved from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8C\\_UWVmIw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8C_UWVmIw).
- Wilber, K. (2008). *Integral life practice: A 21st-century blueprint for physical health, emotional balance, mental clarity, and spiritual awakening*. Boston, MA: Integral Books.
- Wilkinson, D. (2006). *The ambiguity advantage: What great leaders are great at*. NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wolff, R. (2001). *Original wisdom: Stories of an ancient way of knowing*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Wood, N. (n.d.). *Mother's words*. Retrieved from: [www.rizarivera.com/tatergosum/archives/000347.html](http://www.rizarivera.com/tatergosum/archives/000347.html).
- Woodman, M. (1993). *Conscious femininity: Interviews with Marion Woodman*. Toronto: Inner City Books.
- Woodman, M. (1996). *Dancing in the flames: The dark goddess in the transformation of consciousness*. Boston, MA: Shambala Publications.
- Woodruff, P. (2001). *Reverence: Renewing a forgotten virtue*. NY: Oxford Press.
- Wright, A. (2000) *Spirituality and education*. NY: Routledge Farmer.
- Wulff, D. (2000). Mystical experiences. In *Varieties of anomalous experience: Examining the scientific evidence* (2nd ed.). Cardeña, Etzel (Ed.); Lynn, Steven Jay (Ed.); Krippner, Stanley (Ed.); pp. 369-408. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association,

xi, pp. 452.

Yalom, I. (2009). *Staring at the sun: Overcoming the terror of death*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Young, J., Gallagher, J., & Korby, W. (1996). *Seeing through native eyes: Understanding the language of nature*. Owlink Media.

Young, J. (2010). *The great turning: Jon Young on mentoring and awareness*. Retrieved from  
from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIV9DZSrUFE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIV9DZSrUFE)

Zolli, A. & Healy, A. (2012). *Resilience: Why things bounce back*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

Zolli, A. (2013). *A shift to humility: Resilience and expanding the edge of change*. To be  
retrieved from: [bit.ly/1fBX5aA](http://bit.ly/1fBX5aA)

Zweig, C. & Abrams, J. (1991). *Meeting the shadow: The hidden power of the dark side of human nature*. NY: Penguin Group.

## Appendix A

**Biographical Statements of Teachers Interviewed****Melissa Michaels**

Melissa (Ed.D.) is a midwife of the soul. She is the founder and director of *Surfing The Creative® International*, the first contemporary youth leadership rites of passage program rooted in dance. Her not-for-profit organization, *Golden Bridge*, has been engaged in the healing, initiating, educating, and mentoring of young people and the adults who serve them on every continent in the world. She creates movement based cross-cultural journeys focusing on the potential that is available at all of life's major thresholds. Building community through dance from conception through old age has been at the root of her work for three decades.

**Manulani Aluli-Meyer**

Manulani is the fifth daughter of Emma Aluli and Harry Meyer. Her family are from Mokapu, Kailua, Wailuku, Hilo and Kohala on the islands of Oahu, Maui and Moku O Keawe. The Aluli ohana, are a large and diverse group of scholar-activists who have spent their lives in Hawaiian education, justice, land reclamation, health, cultural revitalization, arts education, prison reform, transformational economics, food sovereignty, Hawaiian philosophy and most of all, music. Manu works in the field of indigenous epistemology and its role in world-wide awakening. Professor Aluli-Meyer obtained her doctorate from Harvard (Ed.D. 1998) by studying Hawaiian epistemology via language, history, and dreams. She has published extensively on the topic of native intelligence and its synergistic linkages to quantum sciences, transformational evaluation practices, and to liberation theology. Her book: *Ho'oulu: Our Time of Becoming – Hawaiian Epistemology and Early Writings*, is in its third printing. Her

background is in wilderness education, experiential learning, and philosophy and she has been an instructor for the Outward Bound schools, Wilderness Hawaii, Hawaii Bound, and other alternative learning systems. Aluli-Meyer helped shape the Hawaiian Charter School movement in Hawaii, worked within the prisons, and developed Hōea Ea, the Hawaii Island Food Sovereignty movement. Professor Aluli-Meyer was the International Scholar in 2005-06 at Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, the Center for Māori Research Excellence at the University of Auckland. She is an international evaluator of indigenous PhD's and a member of Fulbright New Zealand's Board of Directors. She has been an Associate Professor of Education at the University of Hawaii in Hilo and is currently in New Zealand as designer and lead teacher for He Waka Hīringa, a Masters in Applied Indigenous Knowledge for Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

### **Carl Leggo**

Carl is a poet and professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. His books include: *Growing Up Perpendicular on the Side of a Hill*; *View from My Mother's House*; *Come-By-Chance*; *Teaching to Wonder: Responding to Poetry in the Secondary Classroom*; *Lifewriting as Literary Métissage and an Ethos for Our Times* (co-authored with Erika Hasebe-Ludt and Cynthia Chambers); *Being with A/r/tography* (co-edited with Stephanie Springgay, Rita L. Irwin, and Peter Gouzouasis); *Creative Expression, Creative Education* (co-edited with Robert Kelly); *Poetic Inquiry: Vibrant Voices in the Social Sciences* (co-edited with Monica Prendergast and Pauline Sameshima); *Speaking of Teaching* (co-authored with Avraham Cohen, Marion Porath, Anthony Clarke, Heesoon Bai, and Karen Meyer); *English in Middle and Secondary Classrooms* (co-edited with Kedrick James and Teresa M. Dobson); *A Heart of Wisdom: Life Writing as Empathetic Inquiry* (co-edited with Cynthia

Chambers, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, and Anita Sinner); and *Sailing in a Concrete Boat: A Teacher's Journey*. Integral to his current creative and academic life, Carl Leggo is a happy grandfather to three darling granddaughters with the magical names: Madeleine, Mirabelle, and Gwenoviére.

### **Melanie DeMore**

Melanie is one of the most outstanding vocal artists of today helping to preserve the African American Folk Tradition through song and Gullah stick pounding. She was the subject of a documentary called *Stick and Pound* which showcases this tradition. She has a career spanning 30 years dedicated to teaching, lecturing, mentoring, conducting, directing and inspiring children and adults about the power of song as social and political change. Melanie is a sought after presenter, conductor, and soloist at national and international choral and music festivals, including Festival 500 in Newfoundland, Canada and Chorus America. She is adjunct faculty at the California Institute for Integral Studies, lead teaching artist for TEMPO at UC Berkeley, and a featured presenter for SpeakOut! the Institute for Social and Cultural Change. She was a founding member of the Grammy nominated, Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir, and has had the pleasure of sharing the stage with such varied artists as Odetta, Richey Havens, Pete Seeger, the Trinity Choir, MUSE Cincinnati Women's Chorus, and many others. Melanie DeMore is a singer/songwriter, composer, conductor and vocal activist, who believes in the power of voices raised together. She says: "A song can hold you up when there seems to be no ground beneath you."

### **Lauren Chambliss**

Lauren is communications director for the Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future (ACSF). The first addition to the staff since we opened our doors in 2008, Lauren joined ACSF

in September 2011. She oversees the Atkinson Center's communications and publicity programs, outreach, and events, building name recognition and broader awareness of Cornell's sustainability activities and contributions.

An award-winning Washington correspondent for 20 years, Lauren wrote for major U.S. and international newspapers and magazines, including the *London Evening Standard*, *The Independent*, *Working Woman*, and *Financial World*, specializing in international finance and trade, economic policy, health care, and presidential campaigns. She recently completed a 10-month stint as interim co-director of communications for Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and continues to serve as project director for CALS' energy conservation project, CALS Green. Lauren has an appointment as a lecturer in Cornell's Department of Communication.

Lauren holds a master's degree from American University in Washington, D.C. Her undergraduate studies were at the University of California, Berkeley. She is executive director of the nonprofit Sundial Center at Rune Hill, a nature preserve in conservation easement in Spencer, New York. She lives on 180 wild acres with her three children.

### **Jessica Patterson**

Jessica has been practicing and discovering yoga for over nineteen years, during which time she has had the great privilege of exploring many methods, approaches, and teachers. Her formal training as a teacher began with a 200-hour program in Colorado Springs. As her own yoga practice deepened, so too did her understanding of its profound transformative and regenerative power. She sought out more and more opportunities to learn and grow as a

practitioner and teacher, pursuing training with diverse teachers across lineage and tradition. Her dedication and commitment to nonviolence and an ecology-centered ethos led her to advance her training as the only Certified Jivamukti Teacher in Colorado Springs and a 500-hour E-RYT with Yoga Alliance, indicating 2000+ hours of teaching.

Jessica is founder and director of the 6-month RootEd Apprenticeship & Teacher Training Program, a 200+ hour program that leads small intimate groups of students more deeply into the embodied experience of yoga. She is dedicated to the intensive spirit of workshops and retreats throughout Colorado and the Southwest, specializing in revision of internal myths and women's rites of passage. She also serves as a faculty member/guest teacher for various teacher training programs, including Lahiri School of Yoga (North Carolina), Yoga Durango, cambio Yoga, and Corepower Yoga. She has taught nationally and internationally, including Taiwan and Mexico, and is currently designing an international immersion project with an emphasis on embodied wisdom and ritual.

With an M.A. in English and as a graduate of the renowned Institute for Integrative Nutrition and the Nutrition Therapy Institute, Jessica weaves together her diverse passions as a teacher, writer, nutrition therapist, and integrative consultant to emphasize integration and wholeness in all she does. Her forthcoming book is a grounded and personal exploration of how yogic teachings can help ordinary, everyday people navigate life's ups and downs (from divorces and deaths to financial uncertainty and health diagnoses). The book comes directly from her own experience as a student and teacher of yoga.

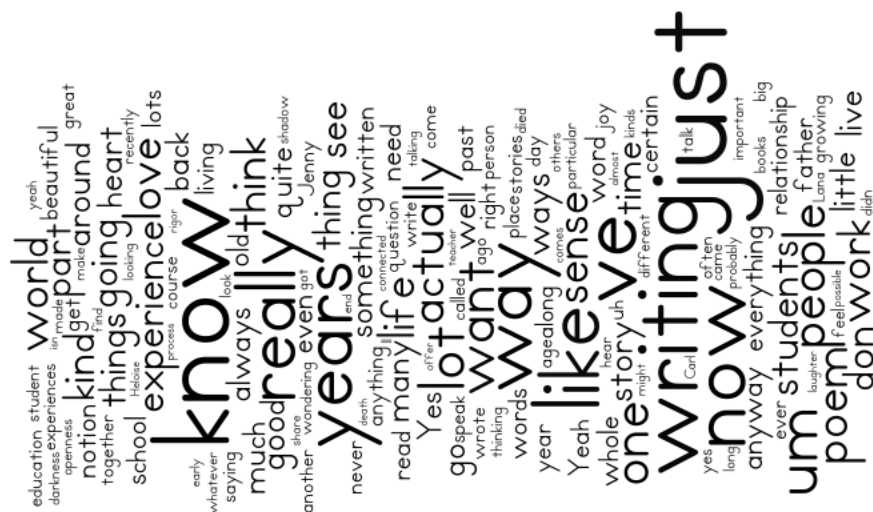
Jessica believes that the ultimate purpose of yoga is to remember and embody who and what we really are, liberating every being from suffering, and granting freedom and happiness to

all through participation with and reverence for union. The goal of her teaching is to help students free themselves from limiting thoughts and ideas. Jessica's dedication to and respect for all these practices have enabled her to infuse her teaching with deeply spiritual, physically rigorous, and truly uplifting classes that seek to liberate and bring joy to each student.

## Appendix B

### Wordle Application for each Interview

## Carl's Interview



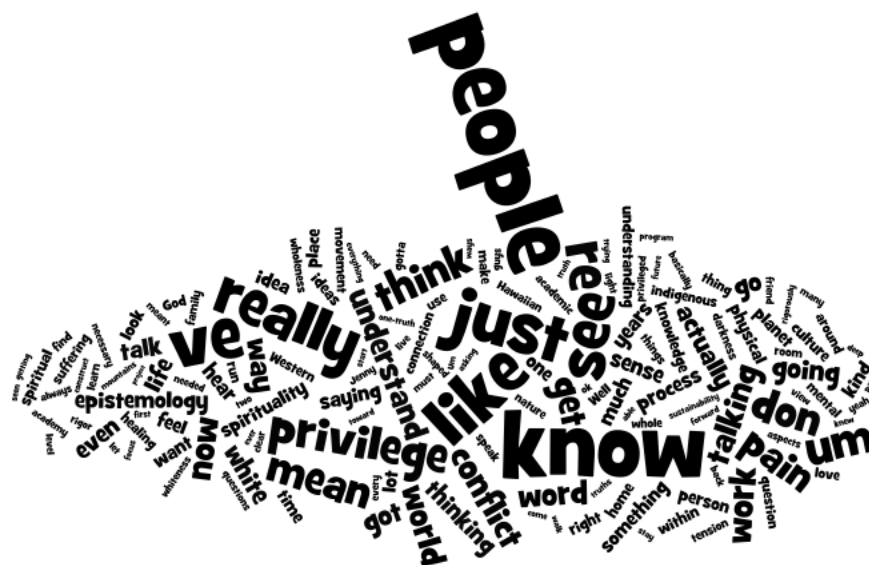
## Jessica's Interview



## Lauren's Interview



## Manulani's Interview



### Melanie's Interview



