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LEARNING THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE CRISIS OF FAITH, HEALTH, AND VOCATION IN THE EXPERIENCE OF AMERICAN WRITERS

By

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ABSTRACT

LEARNING THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE CRISIS OF FAITH, HEALTH, AND VOCATION IN THE EXPERIENCE OF AMERICAN WRITERS

By

Warren Davis Berryman

This is a study of the relationship between autobiography and self-directed learning. Autobiography, as "self life-writing," is an endeavor to create retrospective text in which the author and the object of study are one and the same. Self-directed learning is an endeavor to understand both what motivates a person to learn and how it is he or she undertakes the learning process. The two are interrelated.

Six autobiographies form the core of this study. An author who both reflects upon and interrogates past experience wrote each autobiography. These reflections and interrogations were then brought together in the form of a written text. The books I used can be categorized as follows. Two deal with learning that transpired through participation in a religious pilgrimage. These are Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life by Patricia Hampl and The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem by Samuel Heilman. Two deal with learning that transpired through the experience of illness. These are An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness by Kay Redfield Jamison and A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing by Reynolds Price. Two deal with the learning that transpired through the experience of career change. These are The Cliff Walk: A Memoir of a Job Lost and a Life Found by Don Snyder and A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned by Jane Tompkins.

The results of this study highlight the importance of autobiographical learning to the field of adult education over the course of a life. Each author extracted a story from his or her particular situation. It was a story that helped them understand the past in light of the present in order to live for the future. Through the process of writing and learning, the authors experienced a transformation that left them different persons. Each author changed his or her world to word in order to act upon it.

To my wife, Terryl,

With deepest love and gratitude

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I would also like to recognize family members and show them what they have done and invite them to find themselves within these pages.

- Mom and Dad, your presence underlies all of this. How often I reflect upon summers at Lytle Shores and the Rockies, while simultaneously hearing Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor emanating from the Church of the Heavenly Rest playing in the background. It doesn't get much better than that.

- Anne and Emmett, you both are in here too. Every conversation we have takes me in new directions and frees me from some constricting thought pattern. The soul cannot flourish if the mind is stuck.
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- Jessica, Johanna, Jeanna, and Jefferson, you are my motivation. This will undoubtedly make a little more sense as you get older. For the time being, let me at least say that meaning and understanding begin at home, and you all helped me see this . . . at long last.

And last, but far from least, Dr. Steve Weiland, my advisor and in many respects my spiritual director. Steve, you have been to me what Donnie was to Patricia Hampl and Menachem Reichler was to Samuel Heilman . . . one who could guide without prescribing, one who could suggest without mandating, and one who helped me understand that experience does indeed precede language. Thanks for believing in me.

John Steinbeck's East of Eden always has been one of my favorites. On many occasions I have wondered where I might use the dedicatory remarks that Steinbeck made to Pascal Covici at the front of the novel. Now I know. You remember he said:

Dear Pat,

> You came upon me carving some kind of little figure out of wood and you said, "Why don't you make something for me?"
> I asked you what you wanted, and you said, "A box."
> "What for?"
> "To put things in."
> "What things?"
> "Whatever you have," you said.

Well, here's your box. Nearly everything I have is in it, and it is not full. Pain and excitement are in it, and feeling good or bad and evil thought and good thought—the pleasure of design and some despair and the indescribable joy of creation.

And on top of these are all the gratitude and love I have for you.

And still the box is not full.

John

Well, Steve, here's your box. And still . . . it is not full.

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. . . .
A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. . . .
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

(Eliot, 1970, pp. 207-208)

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INTRODUCTION

Background of This Study

Several books have had a profound influence on my thinking in recent years: Gardner's (1998) Extraordinary Minds, Taylor's (1996) The Healing Power of Stories, McAdams'(1993) The Stories We Live By, Gosse's (1958) Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments, Ackerley's (1968) My Father and Myself, and Merton's Seven Story Mountain. As I read through these books, it appeared that significant learning took place in the lives of some people as they reflected on their pasts and attempted to weave a story from significant events and relationships. Although they were never referred to as learning per se, or undertaken in an attempt to satisfy specific learning objectives, these autobiographies and stories still accomplished a larger purpose, that being one of learning from and through life experience. As a result of my experience with these authors' works, I became intrigued by a larger question related to learning that takes place from and through the textual creation of autobiography.

Overview of This Study

This research was a joint study of self-directed learning and autobiography. I looked at autobiography as a self-directed means of learning from and through life experience. In this study, I interacted with six authors in order to look into the ways in which they learned from the experiences they encountered and how this learning both redirected the course of their lives and helped redefine who they were.

What united these authors was the individual texts they created. Each autobiography was an undertaking by the author to create a story from his or her unique situation (Gornick, 2001b). Each story in turn was a story about learning. As such, it

vividly and imaginatively expressed details about the author's own experience and the learning that resulted. In each case, the autobiography was the "research text" with which I interacted.

What makes the genre of the autobiography unique is the fact that, not only is it (the autobiography) the report of a life lived, but it also is the reconstruction of a life story. "True memoir (autobiography) is written, like all literature, in an attempt to find not only a self but a world" (Hampl, 1999, p. 35). This "discovery" process is both reflexive and dialogic (Cohler, 2000), is creative by nature, and calls for the use of one's imagination (Freeman, 1993). In addition it is reflective and self-directed, and when done well it results in a work of art.

> A life is a work of art, probably the greatest one we produce. It is not simply art in the living. For we do not live our lives in any naked sense, save when we are caught aback and leave our faces behind. Rather, the art is in the telling—the telling after the fact to ourselves and others. But it is not a fiction, life, nor is it, for that matter, the real thing. It is some amalgam of the two—both theater and what theater's about. (Bruner, 1999, p.7)

What method is available to the researcher to investigate the personal experience and truly look at and understand the "experience-in-itself"? The answer to this question for Clandinin and Connelly (1994), as well as the six authors I selected, was the creation of a story. For these people, experience became the stories they lived and told. It was in the telling of their stories that they affirmed them, modified them, and created new ones. As Freeman (2000) said, the "storying" process is a rewriting of the individual self.

It is also worth noting that the ability to describe and portray the life experiences that constitute each autobiography may be as critical to this research project as the actual life experiences themselves. It is to this phenomenon that Bruner (1995) referred when he wrote,

> The "rightness" of any autobiographical version is relative to the intentions and conventions that govern its construction or its interpretation. . . .Though it may seem a strange way to put it, we may properly suspect that the shape of a life as *experienced* is as much dependent upon the narrative skills of the autobiographer as is the story he or she tells about it. It is probably in this sense that Henry James intended his famous remark that adventures happen only to people who know how to tell them. (p.163)

Life experience, memory, and language are the tools available for this autobiographical construction of the life story. "Lived experiences gather hermeneutic significance as we [reflectively] gather them by giving memory to them. Through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life" (VanManen, 1990, p. 37). Stories, an interpretive act, are a significant way people construct and express meaning (McAdams, 1993; Mishler, 1986: Taylor, 1996). Throughout recorded history, people have made sense of their experience by telling stories of that experience. There is little doubt that "retrospective accounts are both records and interpretations of experience" (Weiland, 1998, p.16).

McAdams (1996) said one of the primary concerns of this postmodern era is self-identity. Individuals today are confused about the self, what it is, and specifically how to construct it. Regarding this self-construction, he asked, "What form does such a construction take? A growing number of theorists believe that the only conceivable form for a unified and purposeful telling of an individual life is *the story*" (p. 306).

Ricoeur (1991) shed further light on the subject of narrative when he claimed that language is essentially the tying together of three worlds—that of the word, that of the sentence, and that of the text wherein the word and the sentence are situated. Through the use of words and sentences, an individual can create a text, a story of sorts, in an effort to draw together and clarify personal experience(s).

Abascal-Hildebrand (1999) believed that explanation relates to understanding through the means of narrative. Or equivalently, description and understanding find themselves related through the structure of narrative. Individual lives are sets of actions that a person attempts to describe and understand. Narrative is the channel through which the individual seeks to describe and understand these actions, as well as to discover the meaning inherent in these actions.

> Therefore, explanation (description) and understanding (prescription) together constitute the ground for our becoming aware of who we are as persons, how we relate our actions as persons to others, and how we project ourselves as the persons we would want to be. (p. 9)

Why Autobiography?

Throughout this study, I use the term *autobiography* to mean some combination of the terms *self, life,* and *writing*. Inherent in this definition is the idea of story and personal narrative. Autobiography, in this sense, is not the recounting of persons, places, things, or ideas in the form of journal entries. Rather, it is the weaving together of these elements in the form of a unique narrative or story. As Taylor (1996) wrote, "A story is the telling of the significant actions of characters over time" (p. 15). In this sense, autobiography becomes an author's writing of his or her story, a story that includes significant actions, thoughts, and feelings.

VanManen (1990) identified seven characteristics of story. He maintained that the significance of story for human science is that:

1. story provides us with *possible human experiences*;
2. story enables us to experience life situations, feelings, emotions, and events *that we would not normally experience;*
3. story allows us to broaden the horizons of our normal existential landscape by creating *possible worlds;*
4. story tends to appeal to us and involve us *in a personal way*;
5. story is an artistic device that lets us turn back to *life as lived*, whether fictional or real;

6. story evokes the quality of vividness in *detailing unique and particular aspects of a life* that could be my life or your life;
7. and yet, great novels or stories *transcend the particularity of their plots* and protagonists, etc., which makes them subject to thematic analysis and criticism. (p. 71)

But autobiography is more than a story. In fact, it is distinct from a story and may very well consist of numerous stories. The fiction writer has a story to tell. By comparison, the "memoirists (autobiographers) wish to tell their mind, not their story" (Hampl, 1999, p. 18). Embedded in this statement is the idea that for the autobiographer there is a whole world of idea, sensation, thought, and meaning that extends above and beyond the actual telling of the story.

The very act of writing is as important as the end product—the written piece. Writing is a form of "thinking and discovery and selection and order and meaning" (Morrison, 1987, p. 111). But it also carries with it a sense of "awe and reverence and mystery and magic" (p. 111). It is a sort of literary archeology in which the author attempts to reconstruct a memory edifice using some memory and some imagination as his or her tools (p. 112). In a sense it is a form of fiction, due to the nature of the imaginative act. But it is also a form of truth in that recollection is used to help reconstruct events, relationships, and feelings that really happened.

Gornick (2001b) gave emphasis to this "form of truth" that Morrison ascribed to the autobiography as she looked at the relationship between the situation and the story. She said,

> Truth in a memoir [autobiography] is achieved not through a recital of actual events; it is achieved when the reader comes to believe that the writer is working hard to engage with the experience at hand. What happened to the memoirist is not what matters; it matters only what the memoirist *makes* of what happened. (p. viii)

Bruner (1995) shed further light on the nature of truth in the autobiography when he wrote,

> A memoir [autobiography] is a work of sustained narrative prose controlled by an idea of the self under obligation to lift from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform event, deliver wisdom. Truth in a memoir [autobiography] is achieved not through a recital of actual events; it is achieved when the reader comes to believe that the writer is working hard to engage with the experience at hand. (p. 91)

In addition to the autobiography being both constructive and imaginative in its process (Morrison, 1987), as well as truthful and believable (Gornick, 2001b), it is also an instrument that can be used to both discover and define the self in prose. Gornick clarified this by saying,

> Inevitably, it is a story of self-discovery and self-definition. The subject of autobiography is always self-definition. That is, definition out in the world, not in the void. The memoirist [autobiographer], like the poet and the novelist, must engage with the world because engagement makes experience, experience makes wisdom, and finally it's the wisdom that counts. Every writer has to persuade the reader that he or she knows something and is writing as honestly as possible to arrive at what that something is. (p. viii-ix)

When writing autobiography, the author fulfills two roles simultaneously. These are the roles of observer and participant, or equivalently subject and object. By reconstructing situations and relationships, the author is able to emphasize the tension between self and others, between self and environment, and most important, between self and self. When all is said and done and the autobiography has drawn to a close, the reader is left with the feeling that a successful "blending" of observer-participant, or subject-object, has occurred, and that the self in all its myriad representations is truly whole and united.

In addition, an element of explanation and recounting characterizes an autobiography. Gornick (2001b) said, "It isn't enough just to live a life; we must be continually explaining it to ourselves, sorting, remembering, casting out the less

important stuff, interpreting, sometimes justifying ourselves to ourselves" (p. 2). Chandler (as cited in McDonnell, 1998), added further clarity with the comment, "Every autobiography is a story of crisis, in that it recounts change, turning points, conversions, critical lettings-go and breaks with the past" (p. 12).

This "explanation and recounting" is constructed and passed on to the reader through the use of language. Words and their meanings are used to build the edifice and the structure. Bruner (1990) claimed,

> There is something curious about autobiography. It is an account given by a narrator in the here and now about a protagonist bearing his name who existed in the there and then, the story terminating in the present when the protagonist fuses with the narrator. (p. 121)

Eakin (1989) further illuminated the importance of language and its use in the process of self-disclosure. He stated,

> The true reference of *story* in autobiography is not to some comparatively remote period in the subject's past but rather to the unfolding in language of the autobiographical act itself. In this sense *story* in autobiography functions as a metaphor for *discourse.* (p. xiii)

Some authors writing on the subject of autobiography have attempted to differentiate between autobiography and memoir. Zinsser (1994), for example, defined the terms in the following manner.

> What gives them their power is the narrowness of their focus. Unlike autobiography, which spans an entire life, memoir assumes the life and ignores most of it. . . . Memoir isn't the summary of a life; it's a window into a life, very much like a photograph in its selective composition. (p. 99)

The definitions of autobiography contain certain key elements. All seem to agree that autobiography is imaginative, an act of creation, generated by and through the use of language, and used as a window through which to view a life under consideration. Hampl (1999) claimed that the job of the autobiography is one of "seeking the congruence between stored image and hidden emotion" (p. 30). Goodwin (1993) said, "An

autobiography represents the writer's effort, made at a certain stage of life, to portray the meaning of personal experience as it has developed over the course of a significant period of time *or* from the distance of that significant time period" (p. 11). The very act of telling does not relate experience in an objective manner as much as it re/interprets it, and creates it in the present moment.

As a process, autobiography transforms experience into meaningful narrative (Olney, 1980). It is a process of dealing with self-identity and possible changes or transformations in self-perception. Ultimately it asks, "Who am I?" and compares the response to preconceived notions of what the author thought the response might be, as well as to preconceived notions of how the author might have answered the question historically. Bruner (1987) claimed that,

> eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives. (p. 15)

The learning process and the autobiographical process are both creative endeavors (Brady, 1990; Bruner, 1995; Kearney, 1988; Nelson, 1994). Brady said of the process,

> It is the act of a creator to construct and give meaning to experience, one's own mythic tale. . . . Through imagination, the autobiographer creates the past by infusing facts and events with interpretation, direction, suggestiveness, and ultimately, human meaning. (p. 49)

Autobiography calls for both critical reflection (Brookfield, 1987; Jarvis, 1992; Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991) and self-directed learning strategies (Cranton, 1994; Knowles, 1975; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). It is an interpretive process (Bruner, 1995; Freeman, 1993; McAdams, 1993) that results in change and transformation (Brady, 1990; Mezirow, 1981, 1985, 1990a, 1990b, 1991; Nelson, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

The result of all that transpires during the course of this autobiographical process (Bruner, 1995) is learning. "Learning is a process by which human beings attempt to make meaning" (Brady, 1990, p. 43). In turn, Mezirow (1995, 1991) claimed that all meaning is based on interpretation. To make meaning is to construe or interpret experience, and the critical dimension of adult learning is reflection, or the process of validating ideas and assumptions based on prior learning. Merizow (1995) defined learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 49). In this context, he said that the word *action* is broadly used to include making a decision, revising a point of view, posing a problem, reframing a structure of meaning, or changing a behavior.

Self-Directed Learning: Some Limitations

Over the past decade, a vast amount of research has been conducted in the areas of self-directed learning and transformative learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Such research, however, continues to be framed within what Dirkx (1997) termed a "technical-rational view of knowledge" (p. 79), or what Nelson (1994) called a "rational cognitive process" (p. 397). In addition, researchers have tended to focus on the instrumental nature of learning whereby the learner is often forced into a sort of "survival" mode in order to adapt to the changing constraints of his or her environment. Much of the learning that transpires is the result of objectives established by the learner to go out and learn about something—an illness, a skill, a hobby, and so on.

But this is not the whole story. Much of the learning that transpires is the result of learning from or through something—a trip, a relationship, an illness, and so on. What makes this research somewhat problematic is that it is difficult to measure such learning,

it is difficult to reproduce it, and it is next to impossible to legislate or explain it in any way. Often the best one can do is struggle to describe it. The purpose of my study was to take this struggle a step further and look at the way learning occurred in the lives of six people who re-created and shared their individual experiences through the avenue of an autobiography.

Through self-directed processes, these authors came to view both themselves and their relation to the world in new and different ways. By fully engaging their respective experiences, they emerged as new, different, and significantly better adapted individuals. Individual situations give rise to unique stories. And these are stories that reflect the existence of significant learning and growth in understanding. As a result, the question I struggled with throughout this study was the following: "What learning takes place from and through the textual creation of an autobiography?"

Perhaps best of all, Bruner (1995) placed this study in perspective when he said,

> I have no grand conclusion to offer save that autobiography is life construction through "text" construction. To look at a life as if it were independent of the autobiographical text that constructs it is as futile a quest for reality as the physicist's search for a Nature that is independent of the theories that lead him to measure this rather than that phenomenon. (p. 176)

The creation of personal narrative in the form of written text is the means I have selected to look at the relationship between self-directed learning and personal narrative. I must confess that, right from the beginning, this is a relationship that appears to be somewhat problematic. Self-directed learning is concerned with "studying about" an individual or a process (Brookfield, 1985, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, 1999; Mezirow, 1981, 1985, 1990a, 1990b, 1991), whereas personal narrative is concerned with the "creation of" a self (Conway, 1998; Eakin, 1999; Gornick, 2001a, 2001b; Hampl, 1999; Taylor, 1996). Self-directed learning is concerned with "schemes," "perspectives,"

and "points of view" (Mezirow, 1981, 1985, 1990a, 1990b, 1991). Personal narrative is concerned with interpreting the self anew through the creation of narrative, narrative being both a process and a product of language (Conway, 1998; Freeman, 1993; McAdams, 1993, 1999).

Method

Through reading and analyzing six autobiographies, I studied what and how it was these six authors had learned from and through their various experiences. The books I selected can be categorized as follows. Two deal with learning that was effected through participation in a religious pilgrimage of sorts. These are Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life (Hampl, 1992) and The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Heilman, 1984). Two deal with learning that was effected through the experience of a life debilitating illness. These are An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness (Jameson, 1995) and A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing (Price, 1994). Two deal with the learning that was effected through the experience of career changes. These are The Cliff Walk: A Memoir of a Job Lost and a Life Found (Snyder, 1997) and A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned (Tompkins, 1999b).

Three of these, Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life, The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned, are memoirs of self-directed learning experiences resulting from events that the authors initiated. Each experience was designed and planned by the author and hence was under his or her control

The other three, An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness, A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing, and The Cliff Walk: A Memoir of a Job Lost and a Life Found, are memoirs of learning experiences resulting from events that the authors

did not initiate. An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness and A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing deal with individual experiences related to illness, whereas The Cliff Walk: A Memoir of a Job Lost and a Life Found concerns the experience of a mid-career job loss. A brief description of each book is given in the Appendix.

The interpretative and creative process of biography calls on each individual's memory not only to recount the past, but also to make sense of it. Each author is challenged to look at his or her life from afar, to enlarge the field of vision, as it were, in order to see and make connections, and to help tie life events together. An undertaking such as this is an interpretive act, resulting in an enlarged understanding of each individual self. In essence, this is what writing autobiography is all about.

This study is organized into the following chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of work that has taken place in the areas of self-directed learning and autobiography. Chapter 2 is an analysis of the learning that takes place when two authors undertake a religious pilgrimage and return to the place of origin of their respective religious traditions. Chapter 3 is an analysis of the learning that takes place when two authors recount their respective experiences with debilitating disease. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the learning that takes place when two authors recount their respective experiences with career changes. Chapter 5 is a summary and discussion of the lessons learned and how autobiographies are indeed stories of self-directed learning.

CHAPTER 1

AUTOBIOGRAPHY[1] AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Introduction

In this chapter I explore three broad theoretical areas related to both autobiography and self-directed learning. The first section, entitled, Autobiography, is focused on three areas: (a) Autobiography . . . As Narrative Psychology, (b) Autobiography . . . As Linguistic Construction of the Self, and (c) Autobiography . . . As a Means of Adult Learning and Transformation. The second section entitled, Self-Directed Learning, also is focused on three areas: (a) Self-Directed Learning . . . As a Set of Goals, (b) Self-Directed Learning . . . As a Learning Process, and (c) Self-Directed Learning . . . As Personal Attribute or Experience.

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[1]I acknowledge that not everyone is pleased with the ends to which today's autobiography has been taken. Some are raising questions pertaining to the ethical treatment of the life story (Eakin, 1999). Others are asking questions regarding its legitimacy as an art form (Gass, 1994), and still others are asking questions related to how much self-disclosure is enough (Crossen, 1997; Jefferson, 1997; Staples, 1997).

According to Gass (1994), the autobiography used to be a legitimate form of self-expression, something of value, a means of passing on to others and later generations something learned, something of meaning and value. Over the course of time, things of value have become more trivialized, the sacred has become ordinary, and we have entered an era that Gass characterized as a time of "extraordinary drama of lied-about ordinary life" (p. 51).

Gass (1994) maintained that the author of a memoir faces a dilemma. Essentially, who is talking in an autobiography?

> In an autobiography, the self divides not severally into a recording self, an applauding self, a guilty self, a daydreaming self, but into a shaping self: it is the consciousness of oneself as a consciousness among all these other minds, an awareness born much later than the self it studies, and a self whose existence was fitful, intermittent, for a long time, before it was able to throw a full beam upon the life already lived and see there a pattern, as a plowed field seen from a plane reveals the geometry of the tractor's path" (p. 51).

"The-one-who-is" attempts to talk about the "the-one-who-was" from the vantage point of "the-one-who-is." How can this be done accurately and reliably with integrity? This is the essence of verisimilitude.

Crossen (1997) maintained that "memoirs are literature's slipperiest slopes: They require neither the rigor of journalism nor the imagination of fiction" (p. A16). Following this line of reasoning, essentially, anyone can write an autobiography. The problem we face today is "figuring out how to examine and dramatize ourselves without forgetting to pay the same attention to the larger historical and spiritual forces that have made us" (Jefferson, 1997, p. B1).

Autobiography

A vast array of material has been written on the subject of autobiography. In this section I will touch on three broad areas of autobiographical theory. These areas are (a) Autobiography . . . As Narrative Psychology, (b) Autobiography . . . As Linguistic Construction of the Self, and (c) Autobiography . . . As a Means of Adult Learning and Transformation.

. . . As Narrative Psychology

Two strong advocates for the use of narrative in the field of psychology were Dan McAdams and Jerome Bruner. Both men have played significant roles in the development of the field of narrative psychology, McAdams primarily from within the field of psychology and Bruner from within the combined fields of psychology and law.

McAdams (1993, 1996) maintained that there always has been a bit of frustration when it comes to the study of the individual person. Historically, there has been a struggle to provide a broad enough conceptual framework in which to place the theory and research that have been directed toward human individuality in a cultural context. His aim was to bring together research in the field of personality with the growing emphasis in the social sciences on the narrative study of individual lives.

For McAdams (1999), "I" is the actual process of creating the self. It accomplishes this creation by narrating the "self's" experience. The "me" in turn, he viewed as the result of this creation. The "I" corresponds to the storyteller, whereas the "me" corresponds to the story the "I" tells. For McAdams, adulthood is the time when we begin to construe our lives in narrative terms. Our goal is to create an internalized story of our self that binds together three distinct elements: our reconstructed past, our perceived present, and our anticipated future. We do this in such a way as to imbue our

lives with a sense of unity and purpose. Personal identity, then, becomes the internalized and evolving story that comes about when we invoke this selective process of integration.

McAdams (1999) began by saying that that telling stories is endemic to the human condition. It is a way for us to define who we are and, in turn, to let others define for us who they are. We tend to feel that if we know a person's story, we know something about that person.

By way of comparison, Bruner (1986) made the claim that we think about the world and about ourselves in two very different and distinct ways. One of the ways he called the "paradigmatic mode," which represents thinking that is logically deduced and uses empirically validated propositions. Its usefulness is in the explanation of cause-effect relationships and as a mechanism to acquire objective data to substantiate theoretical claims.

The second way we think is what Bruner called the "narrative mode." In this mode, we use stories to make sense of our experiences. In so doing, we create plots, scenes, and characters to help us understand how it is that our intentions and desires get translated into action and how these actions play out over time (McAdams, 1999, p. 480). Whereas the paradigmatic mode seeks verification, the narrative mode is interested in verisimilitude or "life-likeness." How closely does the story come to life as it really is?

Life stories as such are structured to widen the horizon of life experience, not to limit it. They are more concerned with increasing the range of possibilities open to us than in limiting this range. These life stories depend as much on the point of view of the person telling them as on the reality underlying them, i.e., their verisimilitude. As a result, we see subject and object interconnected, the subjectivity of the storyteller intertwined with the "actuality" of the story itself.

McAdams (1999) defined a life story as "a symbolized account of human action organized in time" (p. 480). These life stories can be characterized as having prototypical components. First, each story has a setting that helps to establish a frame of meaning for understanding the story. Second, each story has a particular narrative perspective through which the story is viewed. This helps to frame the story, to put it in perspective, and to conceptualize it. Third, each story has a set of characters who are endowed with intention or will; they must be capable of acting. Finally, each story has a plot or theme of some sort, an end toward which everything moves (McAdams, 1993, 1999). McAdams defined a life story in the following manner:

> A life story is an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future. For a given person, the life story is the narrated product of the characteristic way in which the I arranges elements of the Me into a temporal sequence complete with setting, scenes, characters, plots, and themes. In modernity a person "has" a life story in the same sense that he or she has traits, goals, plans, values, and so on. All of these things may be appropriated into the Me as a result of the selfing process. . . . The adult selfing process seems to seek out opportunities for integrating different autobiographical accounts into a narrated whole, aiming to construct a Me that exhibits a modicum of unity, coherence, and purpose. (p. 307)

The purpose of a story is to take segments of human existence and to create from them an integrated, whole person. This is accomplished when the individual creates a sequence of events that are both localized in time and temporally separated from other events, and then interprets these events in such a fashion that a meaningful, integrated whole is created.

Autobiography is a specialized form of storytelling. Through the use of memory and the action of recollection, it becomes "an act of imaginative storytelling" (McAdams, 1999, p. 482). In this process, events from the past are selected and reconstructed in such a way that integration with the perceived present and the anticipated future takes place. "A good autobiography puts a life into story from, complete with setting, characters,

recurring themes and images, and the self-conscious reconstruction of human time through narrative" (McAdams, 1993, p. 32).

Individual stories differ in terms of structure (few characters and a simple plot versus many characters and a complex plot), content (themes of agency and communion), and images the storyteller uses to convey his or her story. Agency and communion were key themes for McAdams. He characterized agency as encompassing themes such as power, achievement, independence, and the expansion of the self. Similarly, he characterized communion as encompassing themes such as love, intimacy, attachment, social integration, and other forms of human connectedness (McAdams, 1996, 1999). "For McAdams, agency and communion are the central thematic lines in the self-defining stories that adults construct to provide their lives with unity and purpose" (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996).

McAdams advocated viewing life stories in the following manner. He thought that, "rather than viewing life stories as approximations of an objective but unknowable reality, it is better to conceive of them as ever-changing constructions whose reality is socially negotiated" (p. 492). He quoted Josselson, who called for empirically minded psychologists to adopt more of a "narrative understanding":

> Narrative understanding is based on philosophical hermeneutics, a tradition regnant in Europe but only recently penetrating American intellectual consciousness. Within this epistemology, there is only the text (communicated in language), which is itself about a text, and dialogue within and among these texts. There is no prior place to stand to make truth claims: there are only interpretations made from a particular historical and value-implicated stance. The "hermeneutic circle" describes a process in which understanding requires references to all prior understandings such that knowledge accrues in a circular, dialectical fashion. No knowledge can be independent of context or interpreter. The enterprise of science then becomes conversation from which emerge consensual ideas that constitute ways of perceiving and interpreting future texts. (McAdams, 1999, p. 491)

For McAdams, each life story is the result of a psychosocial construction process. This implies that, although the life story is original to each individual constructing one, it still exhibits its constitutive meanings within the culture in which it is constructed. These stories, in turn, are based on empirical fact, but they are not limited to this base. There is an element of imaginative originality in each life story. Thus, although they are based on fact, life stories are constructed in an attempt to give life meaning and coherence; as such, they are constructed by the individual in cooperation with others and the culture in which he or she is located

Jerome Bruner, too, was a psychologist, but rather than investigating narrative for its psychological healing power or as a form of therapy for patients in need, his interest was more philosophical in nature. He was interested in the process of autobiography, how it is constructed, as opposed to why it is constructed. In addition, he was interested in the concept of verisimilitude and what it is that makes an autobiographical narrative believable.

Bruner (1995) contended that there is no such thing as a "life as lived." His conviction was that life is created or constructed through the act of writing about it—autobiography. It is a way to construe experience, and as such it is a never-ending process. For Bruner, construing is synonymous with interpreting. Consequently, the process of construing is subject to the rules and boundaries that exist for the process of interpretation. "Like all forms of interpretation, life construal is subject to our intentions, to the interpretive conventions available to us and to the meanings imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language" (Bruner, 1995, p. 161).

One of Bruner's greater fears was that autobiography might become "self-sealing," cut off from the world and experience, in a sense frozen in time. The role of the

therapist, he maintained, is to awaken the patient from his or her "frozen narrative," and by so doing, give the individual the power to move on.

"True autobiography," much like a "life as lived," is nonexistent. Everything is a reconstruction, a reinvention of what happened in the past. Following this line of thinking, perceiving is a process of construction. All of us perceive things differently as a result of constructing things differently. No model for the "real" world exists. Bruner was quick to point out that the rightness of an autobiography is a function of the intentions and conventions that govern its construction and its interpretation. He also believed that the shape of a life experienced is a function of the narrative skills of the narrator. He was quick to reference Henry James's famous remark, that "adventures happen only to people who know how to tell them" (as cited in Bruner, 1995, p.163).

Bruner described the framework he employed as "constructivist" in nature. He asserted that the principal function of mind is one of "world making." Reality does not exist independently of observers, but rather observers construct their own reality by construing and reconstruing their life experiences. Stories, as such, do not happen in the real world; they are constructed in the minds of people.

There is no other way to describe "lived time" than by means of narrative (Bruner, 1986). One of Bruner's goals was to transport his constructivist paradigm from narrative in general to self-narrative in particular. In this effort, he argued that autobiography is a continual process of "world making." It is never complete, never finished, but always in process. The "tool" used by the autobiographer to construct his or her life narrative is the imagination. This is where all construction takes place in a reflexive process.

Bruner's key requirement for autobiography was that it must be communicable through its representativeness. With this in mind, for someone to reflect on himself or herself, he or she must reflect on the world in which the self lives. Throughout this process, he or she must be able to communicate what is found to others.

Bruner, like McAdams, saw the autobiographical process as a representation of the theme of agency. By this he meant that the autobiographer is in the driver's seat. He or she takes control, plays an active role in the construction process, makes things happen, and essentially becomes a carrier of his or her own destiny. One of the problems, as Bruner saw it, is that in the end we, the autobiographers, become the stories we construct.

An important concept for Bruner (1987, 1999) was verisimilitude, which he likened to "the believability of a legal brief as pled in court, but without specific benefit of the rules of legal evidence" (Bruner, 1995, p. 168). Now, of course, the autobiographer is not required to plead a case in court, nor is he or she required to cross-examine witnesses. However, the autobiographer is required to provide a convincing enough case that the reader is encouraged to embrace the narrative as representative of reality and worthy of belief. Bruner's claim was that verisimilitude does for narrative what verification and verifiability do for science and logic. It provides credibility and believability.

Bruner (1995) reminded us that autobiography is an art form. As such, "the portrait [in our case the autobiography] is an impersonation of a set of private beliefs, attitudes and identities" (p. 174). And, he maintained, impersonation is a tool the artist (autobiographer) uses to both invert and pervert all conceptions of reality in that never-ending search for truth.

Bruner related the "life as lived" to the "text as constructed." He said, "I have no grand conclusion to offer save that autobiography is life construction through 'text' construction" (Bruner, 1995, p. 176). He contended that the search for life independent of the autobiographical text is futile, for it is the text that constructs the life. As science provides the paradigms for our construction of our version of nature, so culture provides the paradigms for our construction of our lives. For Bruner, one of the key instruments a culture uses to construct its lives is narrative, in all its forms and genres. And in this construction process autobiography exists as an extension of fiction, an assumption that carries with it the idea that "the shape of life comes first from imagination rather than from experience" (p. 176).

. . . As Linguistic Construction of the Self

Mark Freeman (1993) acts as a bridge, of sorts, from the realm of narrative psychology to that which focuses on language and its usage in the construction and reconstruction of the self. In his book Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative, he examined the hermeneutical dilemma of trying to "understand" a self that is constructed by language and generated in narrative (Josselson, 1995, p. 340). He adopted a strong interpretive framework and focused on the idea of text creation and its interpretation as the means to better understanding the individual self. For Freeman, human action is a form of text in that it is a constellation of meanings calling forth the process of interpretation. In light of all of this, Freeman maintained that his point of departure from mainstream psychology was not with the life lived in and of itself, but rather with the words used to speak of this life.

Early in his academic career, Freeman discovered that psychology is grounded in empirical reality and is a slave to the scientific method. Knowledge is built on verifiable

and repeatable evidence. For Freeman, the whole realm of hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, is left untouched, and he was not comfortable with that. The life lived has as much, if not more, to offer than simply studying the mind and how it works. He identified the key to his 1993 book as "rewriting the self: the process by which one's past and indeed oneself is figured anew through interpretation" (p. 3).

Freeman called for the human world to be treated in a different manner from the world of objects. When our goal is to understand, he called for the use of an interpretative process whose aim is to understand what is said, acted, and lived. Exposition and interpretation are two sides of the same coin. Both have their purpose and place, but they are not interchangeable.

Josselson (1995) said of Freeman:

> Freeman uses the idea of rewriting the self to rethink the concept of development. Does the beginning lead to the end or the end to the beginning? Because the story of development is always written from the standpoint of some outcome or ending and the story projected backwards, the idea of development itself becomes a form of interpretation. (p. 340)

Humans are housed within the confines of language, culture, and history. The only way to understand experience ensconced within these confines is through the process of interpretation. Freeman thought the best way to study the limits of this hermeneutical inquiry was by studying the "self." The problem, as he saw it, rests with the definition and location of the self. When we seek to understand a book, a painting, or some sort of object, there is something there for us to focus our attention upon. But when studying the self, what and where is it? There is nothing upon which to fix our gaze.

When we try to interpret our past histories, we find that subject and object are one and the same. Essentially, we are interpreting that which has been fashioned through our process of reflection with the aid of our imagination. Interpreting what is outside

ourselves requires going beyond what is and creating a meaningful context within which to place what is. As such, the interpretive process is not as much an attempt to discern what is true and what is false as it is to distinguish what is better from what is worse. In light of this, rewriting the self is a process that has both an interpretive and a recollective component.

One of the crucial issues for Freeman was the role played by the written text. As he acknowledged early on, studying other lives is not a process of studying respective lives as lived, but rather a process of studying texts composed about those lives. As such, the role of a text is to recount, in written form, a lived life. The text is a unique body of words giving shape to unique human experience.

What is the relationship between text and reality, or equivalently between word and world? Steiner (as cited in Freeman, 1993) claimed that there is a "break of covenant between word and world" (p. 7). We can no longer assume that texts provide a window to the real world, an objectively verifiable, "out there" sort of world. In all actuality, texts really refer only to other texts, which in turn refer only to yet other texts, this chain of intertextuality being endless. Everything we do is linked to language and this endless link of text chains.

Another problem we face is that, not only are we dealing with texts about lives, as opposed to the life itself, but we are also dealing with texts created through the process of recollection and reflection. This takes us one step further from the actual "life-as-lived." Essentially, we are one step removed from the author, the liver of the life under study, because all we have is the text he or she composed. In addition, we are one more step removed because these texts are constructed from memory through the process of

recollection and reflection, not the most trustworthy processes when it comes to verification and reproducibility.

As we live our lives and create our texts, we discover that we remember selectively and that we weave meanings together in the pattern of a narrative. If we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that at times this narrative tends to look like fiction. But the question we need to ask ourselves is this: Just because it looks created, a product more of the imagination than the reason, is it necessarily false? We must remember that the "self" is not a "thing." It has no existence apart from me.

The logical end to this sort of analysis is an extreme form of skepticism. Freeman admitted that because the world is so bathed in language, it is complex, ambiguous, and cannot possibly be comprehended in the way an object can. If indeed the covenant between word and world has been broken, then there is no world apart from language. This implies there is nothing to get "quite right." There is only language and a social construction based on the use of this language. In this context, language refers only to language, not to the world itself. In a sense, we could ask the question, "Has anyone beheld an unlanguaged world?" If so, what does it look like, and how would we ever know if such a world exists if we have only language to describe it?

In spite of all of this line of reasoning, Freeman acknowledged that some of his claims do not do justice to the life he lives. He argued that even if his self does not exist apart from his consciousness of it, it (his self) is still real and knowable.

Freeman acknowledged that much of what he wrote was intuitive by nature and exuded elements of "faith." The task at hand was to embrace the primacy of the word without losing the world in the process. We do not have to choose between the two, in an either/or sort of thinking; rather, we can have them both, a "both/and" type of thinking.

Skepticism, for him, as outlined above, was associated with the material world, the world of things and objects. In the past, objects and things of the world have been associated with what is really real. If this ceases to be real, all we are left with are words, and all they can be associated with are other words. This has taken his skepticism too far. Interpretation and the interpretive process can and do expand the domain of knowledge without taking us to the edges of futility.

Freeman concluded his book with an interesting treatise on the role of the poet in today's society and how this role fits with the idea of narrative, memory, and history. According to Freeman, the role of the poet is to rewrite the world in such a way that the reader can find himself or herself in a position of learning, seeing, or feeling something about the world that might have gone unnoticed in any other way. Hidden within the realm of poetry is the element of discovery. The same is true regarding the realm of narrative. Both seek to uncover or discover something heretofore hidden from plain sight.

In other words, Freeman viewed poetry as having an ability or power to go beyond, to probe, to look at life in depth. Poetry takes an individual understanding of things to a deeper level. It does this through the revelatory power of language. This act of giving primacy to language helps to maintain the covenant between word and world. Language is much more than a mirror to the world. It helps to disclose the world to us. Even if we allow that the relationship between word and world is tenuous, poetry and narrative alike help to keep a complete break from occurring.

According to Freeman, narrative is more of a process than it is an end result. It helps to explode the boundaries between art and science. Narrative imagination seeks to disclose, articulate, and describe a world that most likely would not have existed were it not for the act of writing. In a sense, we can say that writing is an act of creation and that

life history is a sort of artifact of narrative imagination. We would not be too far afield were we to say that if you kill the imagination you kill the self (Freeman, 1993; Metzger, 1992).

Finally, we can say that, for Freeman, truth resided both in the text and in the self. He called for a "dialogic space of interpretation" in an attempt to open the door for further hermeneutical inquiry. He also spoke of a "hermeneutically imaginative dimension" that which calls for further elaboration and development. In short, we might say that the self, taking its cues from reality and through an imaginative process, makes a significant contribution to the body of both knowledge and truth. In essence, this is what learning in general and adult learning in particular are all about.

Complimenting work that Freeman had done, Eakin (1999) laid his work regarding the development and display of our selves against the backdrop of literature and experience. He opened his book in the following manner:

> This is a book about autobiography. Even more, though, it is a book about how we come to be the people we say we are when we write—if we ever do—the stories of our lives. Thus my concerns are both literary and experiential, for the selves we display in autobiographies are doubly constructed, not only in the act of writing a life story but also in a lifelong process of identity formation of which the writing is usually a comparatively late phase. (p. ix)

He asked the questions, "Who is the 'I' who speaks in self-narratives?" and "Who is the 'I' spoken about?" Are they one and the same? For Eakin, they were at one time, but gradually over the course of time they came to represent two separate entities. Part of the reason for his change in belief was related to his growth in awareness that the self is greater than our capabilities of knowing it completely, for "knowledge of the self is inseparable from the practice of language" (p. x).

As a result, Eakin came to think of the "self" less as an entity, a knowable thing, and more as a sort of "awareness in process." His contention was that we do not pay

much attention to this process because it is not something that can be assessed or measured. We might see the result of the process, but we cannot see the process itself.

Eakin did not let this stop him, however. He strongly believed that we can still say quite a bit, and with confidence, about the nature and origins of self-experience. As a result, he set out to look at research in the fields of neurology, cognitive science, memory studies, developmental psychology, and a host of other related fields in an effort to rethink the nature of self-experience. He did this by looking at the ways in which our sense of identity is shaped through the mechanism of our lives in and as bodies. He moved from here into social sources of identity, as reflected in both relational and narrative modes of identity formation. For him there was no single story of the self, as he once maintained. Rather, he borrowed from Howard Gardner and his contention that there is "the mind's new science" (as cited in Eakin, 1999, p. xi), and that from and through this we more accurately reflect the current state of affairs by referring to "registers of self and self-experience" (p. xi). There are a multitude of stories to tell and more than one self with which to tell them.

Eakin quoted Lejeune when he defined autobiography. According to Lejeune (as cited in Eakin, 1999), autobiography is "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (p.2). For Lejeune, a "real person" is one whose existence is confirmed by vital statistics and is verifiable. As such, this "real person" is anchored in the world beyond the text. According to Eakin (1989), Lejeune joined "others in stressing that the true locus of reference in autobiography pertains not to the level of the *utterance* but to the level of the *enunciation*, the autobiographical act, where the identity of author,

narrator, and protagonist is textually postulated, to be immediately grasped by the reader" (p. x).

Others, such as Sprinker (as cited in Eakin, 1999) in particular, have contended that this historical reference is nonsense and the task of trying to prove its validity is hopeless. Combining these two viewpoints, a commitment to the referentiality of the autobiographical text and a commitment to the fictiveness of the autobiography's subject, Eakin sought to draw these two perspectives together under what he called the "spirit of a cultural anthropologist" (p. 4). This perspective is bent on "asking what such texts can teach us about the ways in which individuals in a particular culture experience their sense of being 'I'" (p. 4).

Eakin began to reflect some of Freeman's thinking when he asked such questions as, "How much of what autobiographers say they experience is equivalent to what they really experience, and how much of it is merely what they know how to say? Is there, we should ask, a demonstrable difference between the psychological reality of selfhood and the linguistic articulation of that reality?" (p. 4).

Eakin also maintained that we tend to view autobiography as a literature of the first person. The problem this creates is the fact that the "I" writing and being written about is not singular but rather plural. There are a number of selves vying for expression. Autobiographical criticism has not adequately addressed the extent to which the self is both defined by, and lives in terms of, its relationship with others. Eakin told us that, over the course of time, a number of stories "crystallized my belief that *all* identity is relational, and that the definition of autobiography, and its history as well, must be stretched to reflect the kinds of self-writing in which relational identity is characteristically displayed" (pp. 43-44).

This proved to be important for Eakin, and it is for us, for if this is true it means that much if not all of our self-identity formation is constructed in conjunction with others. No one is an island unto himself or herself, and so who I am cannot be separated from who we are collectively. Autobiography as such becomes an interactive genre, one that is not developed or read in isolation, but rather in collaboration with others.

"Narrative identity," or identity that is formed through the process of narrative, is important to an understanding of a linguistically constructed self. Narrative and identity are so intertwined that it is difficult to speak of one without speaking of the other (Eakin, 1999, p. 100). "Narrative is peculiarly suited on the grounds of verisimilitude to the task of representing our lives in time," and we discover that both self and story are "complementary, mutually constituting aspects of a single process of identity formation" (Eakin, 1999, p. 100). Consequently, narrative is not only an appropriate form for identity's expression, it becomes an actual part of identity's content.

From this, Eakin concluded that narrative and identity are performed simultaneously. In fact, we might say each of us both constructs and lives a narrative, and we do this in such a way that this narrative actually is who we are. The narrative we construct is not merely about our self, but in some real way it is a constituent part of our self. In a sense, we create or recreate ourselves through this process, or as Freeman would say, we "rewrite" ourselves.

Conway (1998) and Dickerson (1989) conveyed similar themes in their writings but with slightly less emphasis on the way philosophical presuppositions influence our understanding. It was Dickerson's contention that autobiography defines itself as a system of voices, meaning that the author is in dialogic relationship with himself or herself, others, and the elusive nature of language itself. A tension of sorts exists between

words and voices, and between oral and written, and it is the purpose of autobiography to identify these tensions and address them accordingly. As such, autobiography is a sophisticated form of composing (Dickerson, 1989, p. 198).

Today, the only form of prose narrative that invites us to suspend our disbelief, even if only for a moment, is the autobiography, defined as an author's "attempts to narrate the history of a real life," or the biography, defined as "carefully documented historical reconstructions of lives in times past" (Conway, 1998, p. 5). We find in today's world that our own identities crave either confirmation or transformation, and that we can find this confirmation or transformation by trying on the identity of someone else and seeing what fits and what does not. Essentially, we see life through someone else's eyes. We relive their experience and are satisfied if we can confirm or disconfirm it in our own eyes. The magic of entering another's experience starts us thinking about our own (Conway, 1998).

For both Conway and Dickerson, autobiography is essentially a constructivist's project. For Dickerson (1989), "world making" is the principal function of our minds. As such, autobiography is a form of narrative that arises from the author's dialogue with himself or herself about this self, and specifically how it fits in relation to others and the cultural landscape.

The writer of autobiography voices himself or herself into being. His or her voice is engaged in the creation of itself as both subject and object. He or she does this through the use of language. The self that is created lives beyond the personal landscape and in fact finds itself embedded in the flow of history (Dickerson, 1989).

In the world Conway (1998) described, living belongs to the past whereas writing belongs to the present. The act of writing makes the historical present and enables the

recovery of the voice's originating oral power through the process of privileging the author. This is the only form of prose in which both writing and speaking jostle each other, or struggle with each other, for equal space. When writing autobiography, we hold conversations with ourselves and fictionalized others in an attempt to flush out our own voice and create ourselves.

For Conway (1998), it all comes down to words and images. She contended that memory, together with language, is what makes us human. "It gives cultural context for the miraculous power of communication" (p. 176). In addition, memory and language work together to provide each of us with an inner life plot that can guide us through life. This plot has a familial element to it, it has a socially constructed element to it, it is fed and nurtured by our imaginations, and it aids us in attempting to understand our role and place in the universe.

We begin the process of constructing ourselves by editing and interrogating the past. In a sense, we are all autobiographers and it is our job to create and sustain life stories by interrogating the past. In so doing, we assess the sequencing and interpretation of information and events and use this to create storied lives. Whether our life plot follows the script of a romance, an odyssey, or a rebel; whether we are the author or the victim; or whether our life plot is some combination of all of these elements at the same time is not what is most important. Our voice is heard, and we are understood when we can speak confidently out of our understanding of our own experience (Conway, 1998).

For Dickerson (1989), the act of creation or writing accomplishes several things. First, writing helps to create "shades of deeper meaning" (p. 140). As we listen to others, our life experiences, and ourselves, we interpret and reinterpret who we are and where we have been. We arrive at a deeper level of understanding through this interpretive process.

Second, writing serves as the point of intersection for narration and reflection, and story-telling and essay-writing. It is at this intersection that the author actually becomes the text. The two are inseparable.

At this point of intersection, the writer comes to recognize several things. Existence in the present is predicated on remembering the past and inferring the future. The present finds its existence in its relation to past and future. Finally, at this intersection, the writer discovers the power of language to appropriate the self in ways that forever transform the relationship between subject and object (Dickerson, 1989). As Freeman (1993) would say, world is changed into word in order to be acted upon.

In the next section, "Autobiography . . . As a Means of Adult Learning and Transformation," Brady (1990) and Nelson (1994) demonstrate for us just how it is that the construction of an autobiography can and does lead to personal learning and transformation. Although they did not cite authors I referenced above, there is little doubt but what their aims were similar to those of the authors cited above, that being a transformation of the world into word in order to be acted upon.

. . . As a Means of Adult Learning and Transformation

Closely related to the use of autobiography as a tool for narrative psychology, and as a means of constructing and reconstructing both the self and the past through the use of memory and language, is the use of autobiography as a means of learning and transformation in the area of adult learning. What happens when we attempt to write about our lives, or equivalently write our own autobiographies? According to Nelson (1994), people "informally and autonomously create meaning for themselves from their life experience, thereby becoming the authors of both their own life and its account" (p. 390). Becoming the author of our own life story is closely related to becoming the

authority in our own life. As a result of this creation, we become both a narrator and a creator simultaneously and discover that at significant moments we rise up to exercise authority and autonomy in the creation of our own life stories.

Autobiography helps to locate an individual within the vast array of life situations. In addition, it helps to provide some sort of structure and meaning to this life. Brady (1990) said of autobiography,

> Autobiography assumes the task of reconstructing the unity of life across time. This lived unity of thought, feeling and action is not received from the outside. It is certainly true that events influence us. Sometimes they determine us and always they limit us. . . .
>
> But the essential themes, the structural designs that impose themselves on the complex array of exterior facts, are the constituent elements of the human person. Autobiography is an important means to learning and self-knowledge because it enables the person to recompose and interpret his or her life into a kind of whole. (pp. 47-48)

Kazin (1979) explained his reason for writing in the following manner:

> So that is why I write, to reorder an existence that man in the mass will never reorder for me. Even autobiography is a necessary stratagem to gain something more important than itself. By the time experience is distilled enough through our minds to set some particular thing down on paper, so much unconscious reordering has gone on that even the naïve wish to be wholly "truthful" fades before the intoxication of line, pattern, form. (p. 88)

Whether it is "reconstructing the unity of life across time" (Brady, 1990, pp. 47-48) or "reorder[ing] an existence that man in the mass will never reorder for me" (Kazin, 1979, p. 88), the results are similar: learning and transformation in the adult life.

Brady (1990) maintained that the type of learning that occurs as a result of this autobiographical process is both self-directed and totally dependent on circumstances. There is a component of this autobiographical process that is under our authority and direction, that being the ability to look back and attempt to reconstruct the past. But there is also a component that is not under our control. This component is dependent on

circumstances. Life is characterized as a making and remaking of choices, and meaning seems to come through this self-directed and autonomous learning from experience.

Nelson (1994) defined autobiographical learning in the following way:

1. In autobiographical learning, the person develops a sense of personal autonomy and authority in his or her life. This awareness accompanies a critical review of how the person's values, feelings, ideas, and imagination have given shape to his or her life. The degree of emerging authority to shape one's life is related to the limits of personal capacities and the enabling constraints of one's culture and physical environment.

2. By discovering, in particular, one's constructive capacity to imagine his or her life as other than it is, the learner gains a sense of being the author of a life story that he or she is able to change.

3. The learning is facilitated in the process of story telling, using imaginative expressions, which engage tacit and symbolic dimensions of the person's knowing.

4. Autobiographical learning, which presupposes reflection and critical thinking, is enabled by imagination, which leads to a transformation in the person's perspective and practice (p. 391).

For Brady (1990), autobiography was the act of drawing a self-portrait with words, and it is a vitally important tool in the procedural arsenal of adult learning. Essentially, it facilitates and enhances the process of adult learning. To this extent he believed there are three ways in which this learning takes place. These are through the mechanisms of the remembered self, the ordered self, and the imagined self.

The remembered self. Reflection on our pasts is a form of thinking and learning that is most associated with autobiography. In this sense our memory serves as the

mechanism through which past "lived" experiences are relived and brought to the forefront of our minds. Essentially, memory provides a sort of conscious consciousness of experience. In essence, the "now" of consciousness is the way it is because of the interrelationship that exists between past experiences and our memories of these experiences.

Erikson (1966) made the claim that memories are a connector of meaning between what happened once and what is happening now. In a certain sense autobiography, the collection of memories, is a second reading of human experience. A new mode of being takes shape in the act of remembering. The truth of the self begins to be revealed, and new avenues of learning are opened up because of this revelation.

The ordered self. There is more to autobiography than enhancing learning through the process of remembering and understanding the past from a current perspective. According to Brady (1990), the ordered self is another way in which learning takes place. In this sense, autobiography is a way to build and order the present by way of the remembered past.

Human experience demands both understanding and interpretation. It is our desire to construct order and meaning by looking back. The end result of this is a sort of "focused unification," which is brought about through the process of remembering. Memory helps to locate us in time and place and provide a sense of continuity with our past.

The order we seek is not something that is "out there," external to us and empirically validated. Rather, this order is "interior" and engaged in a process of continually coming into being. It is the task of autobiography to reconstruct the unity of a life. It does this by focusing on the process of learning and increasing in self-knowledge

across the expanse of time. This process enables a person to recompose and interpret his or her life into a whole, unitary being.

To effect this process, we must situate who we are in the context of who we have been. Were we to consider only who we are, we would create only a fragmentary portion of our being. Consideration of the past is necessary both to put the present in proper perspective and to complete the picture of our being.

The imagined self. In a letter to his father, Yeats said, "One goes from year to year gradually getting the disorder of one's mind in order and this is the real impulse to create. Till one has expressed a thing it is like an untidy, unswept, undusted corner of a room" (as cited in Wade, 1995, p. 627). What is interesting here is the idea that autobiography is both a form of art and a form of enlightenment. The autobiographer is awakened to something new. He or she enjoys the miracle of discovery. But in order for this to be truly effected, the autobiographer must be able to communicate this event. He or she must be able to verbalize it, to wrap it in words, in order for it to be meaningful and complete.

The imaginative dimension of autobiography does not show us as we are, or as we have been, but rather it focuses us on who we believe ourselves to be and who we believe ourselves to have been. In adult education circles this is equivalent to the quest of the "idealized self-concept" (Brady, 1990).

This imaginative dimension is brought about through the act of creation. The autobiographer creates the past by infusing facts and events with interpretation and meaning and by creating images and metaphors to enhance our understanding. In a certain sense there are truths that pertain to historical facts and truths that pertain to imaginative creations. Through the use of metaphors, the autobiographer has the ability to

transform the strange into the familiar (Metzger, 1992). This act of creation, or equivalently this autobiographical act, connects us with the deep reaches of ourselves and our world of experience.

Being an imaginative process, one from which the author develops new insights and makes new discoveries, the autobiographical process is subject to an interpretive procedure of understanding, one in which the author comes to understand the emergence and development of the self. The texts themselves reveal how the author has overcome various and sundry types of constraints, or how he or she has survived or lived through various situations. The fact that learning has occurred is evident from the author's recounting how his or her life has changed, how he or she has adopted new modes of behavior, or simply how his or her individual views of the world have changed.

Autobiography is a form of metaphor (Metzger, 1992; Nelson, 1994). As such, it is important that learning be approached through the avenue of experience, and that autobiography be viewed as a metaphor through which the imaginative construction of the life of the learner can take place. The results of this approach will yield a comprehensive understanding of the process of learning in times of significant personal change (Nelson, 1994).

The imagination plays a critical role throughout this creative and reconstructive process. As a source of new meaning and understanding, "imagination functions in knowing as a persistent questioning of all that mismatches between what we see in our critical reflection on experience and what we usually name as what we know" (Nelson, 1994, p. 396). The image and the metaphor open the doors to the possibility of a new order of relationships within the individual's life situation (Metzger, 1992).

Narration is an imaginative act of creation. Through this process or act, the author interrogates his or her past in such a way that an encouraging future results from a meaningful past. By ordering and reordering events in his or her experience, the author creates a text that, over the course of time, becomes more comprehensible and understandable to the researcher or reader who is trying to follow along.

Narration is an interpretive process. Ricoeur (1984) claimed, "The task of hermeneutics is to charter the unexplored resources of the to-be-said on the basis of the already said. Imagination never resides in the unsaid" (p. 25).

Mezirow's acknowledgement that critical reflection may be aided by "finding a new metaphor that reorients problem-solving efforts in a more effective way" (Mezirow et al., 1990, p. 12) still tends to indicate that transformative learning is principally a rational-cognitive process (Dirkx, 1997; Nelson, 1994). "To understand adult learning as autobiography, it is necessary to conceive of the imagination's part in constructing and reshaping the life narrative as integral to both the formation of meaning perspectives and their critique" (Nelson, 1994, p. 397).

Self-Directed Learning

> In essence, the purpose of learning is to enable us to understand the *meaning of our experiences* [italics added] and to realize values in our lives. For the most part, we learn new meanings by spelling out an experience or an aspect of an experience that we have not yet made explicit and by seeking to validate our interpretation of its meanings. (Mezirow, 1985, p. 17)

> The concept of self-directed learning has connotations of autonomy, independence, and isolation, and it is easy to conceive of the self-directed learner as one who pursues learning with a minimum of assistance from external sources. Indeed, individual control over learning is often claimed to be the distinctive characteristic of self-directed learning. (Brookfield, 1985, p. 7)

Self-directed learning and independent learning are two concepts that are often used interchangeably with one another. Brookfield (1985) pointed out that the very

concept of self-directed learning assumes "the individual's ability to plan and conduct learning activities" (p. 14). Coupled with this is the idea that self-directed learners require little assistance from external sources to help them with their learning tasks. In fact, self-control is often thought to be the key distinction of self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975).

Independent learning, or learning on one's own, has been the primary mode of learning throughout the course of time. Research into this mode of learning, however, has been a fairly recent phenomenon. Why is this? One of the reasons Merriam and Cafferella (1999) suggested is the fact that self-directed learning has such widespread applicability. It is inherent in the process of living itself and can be seen at work in efforts that range from fixing an appliance, to freeing oneself from an addictive behavior, to helping oneself become a better public speaker.

Significant roadblocks to research on self-directed learning are the location and the vocation of the researchers themselves. In the past, researchers located within the walls of the academy performed the majority of research on self-directed learning, and their focus was on self-directed learning that took place within those walls. In point of fact, much of the self-directed learning that took place did so outside of the walls of academe.

Building on a foundation established by Houle (1961), Tough (1967, 1971) moved efforts outside the academy walls by focusing on learning projects of 66 people living in Ontario, Canada. From this research, he concluded that "highly deliberate efforts to learn take place all around you. The members of your family, your neighbors, colleagues, and acquaintances probably initiate and complete several learning efforts, though you may not be aware of it" (as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 289).

More recently, research into self-directed learning has moved from descriptive research (Brockett, 1985; Caffarella & O'Donnell, 1987, 1989), to focusing on the learning process itself (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Garrison, 1997), to focusing on the characteristics and styles of learners who are self-directed (Candy, 1991; Chene, 1983). Candy (1991) claimed there was a lack of alignment between research paradigms used by researchers and the nature of the phenomenon being studied. Self-directed learning had been studied from a positivist perspective and needed to be looked at from a constructivist perspective or through an interpretive approach. This led to a greater focus on the learning process itself. As the 20th century drew to a close, the development of self-directed-learning models was beginning to cover the self-directed-learning landscape (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Garrison, 1997; Spear, 1988).

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) mapped research on self-directed learning into three broad categories: (a) literature regarding goals of self-directed learning, (b) research that focuses on self-directed learning as a form of study or process, and (c) literature that considers self-directedness to be a personal attribute of the learner. The major difference from their work in 1991 was the addition of the category regarding the goals of self-directed learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, 1999).

. . . As a Set of Goals

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) subdivided goals of self-directed learning into three major aims or intentions. These are (a) to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, (b) to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning and (c) to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning.

Tough (1967, 1971), Knowles (1975, 1980), and Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) performed research from a humanistic perspective, meaning that one of the primary goals of self-directed learning has been the development of the learner's capacity to be self-directed. The role of the adult educator, in turn, is to help adults learn in ways that enable them to function as self-directed learners" (Mezirow, 1981).

Brookfield (1986) and Mezirow (1985, 1991) introduced the second goal, which is to see transformational learning as central to the process of self-directed learning. In the preface to his book Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning, Mezirow (1991) laid out the background for his theory:

> My approach to transformation theory, as elaborated in this book, has as its current context the insurgence of constructivism, critical theory, and deconstructivism in social theory and in all of the social sciences, law, literature, and art. Transformation theory also grows out of the cognitive revolution in psychology and psychotherapy instigated by scores of studies that have found that it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being, and their performance. (p. xiii)

The third goal relates to the promotion of emancipatory learning and social action and purports to show this to be integral to the self-directed-learning process. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) provided the impetus behind the use of adult education as the means to transform oppressed people into being critically aware of forces for liberating change. "Emancipatory learning . . . is a process of freeing ourselves from forces that limit our options and our control over our lives, forces that have been taken for granted or seen as beyond our control" (Cranton, 1994, p. 16).

Freire considered the intention of adult transformational learning to be social action designed to produce change necessary for a more just society. Initially designed to enhance literacy education for Brazil's poorest, Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) became a means of awakening any and all oppressed people to potential inequities

in their respective cultures. The philosophy encourages autonomous self-directed learning as a means of moving adults away from a concept of "banking education," i.e., accumulating knowledge, to one of active, freedom seeking, self-directed education.

. . . As a Learning Process

Merriam and Caffarella (1991) focused on the learning process. As a process, self-directed learning "is a form of study in which learners have the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences" (p. 41). The authors maintained that, over the past decade, there has been a shift of sorts from a model in which self-directed learning is characterized as a linear, step-by-step, programmed course of instruction, to a model that permits the learner greater control over his or her learning destiny. The reason for this change is the discovery of a multitude of factors that drive the learning process, not the least of which are a learner's motivation, personal circumstances, ability, and access to learning—both spatial/temporal access and technology access.

Tough (1971) and Knowles (1975) provided early conceptualization of the modeling of the self-directed-learning process. One of Knowles's key contributions was related to the issue of responsibility for the self-directed-learning process. Whose responsibility is it? Knowles described self-directed learning in the following manner,

> In its broadest meaning, "self-directed learning" describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. Other labels found in the literature to describe this process are "self-planned learning," "inquiry method," "independent learning," "self-education," "self-instruction," "self-teaching," "self-study," and "autonomous learning." (p.18)

Tough (1979) provided an operational definition of the self-directed-learning process in his study of learning projects and his use of verification studies (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). In fact, Tough's model became foundational for verification studies. Through his work, self-directed learning was shown to exist in many different forms and in many different populations. Even though he was criticized for studying too narrow a population and relying too much on middle-class sampling, as well as for the prompting techniques he used during interviews, Tough still laid down a firm foundation for the study of the self-directed-learning process.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) divided the study of the self-directed-learning process into the development of three unique models. The first model they defined as linear. The heart of the work here was related to how adults go about the process of self-directed learning, specifically, how they plan and execute self-directed learning and what resources they use in the process. Knowles (1975, 1980) helped to conceptualize this process as linear steps: decide what to learn, set goals to learn, select learning activities, and evaluate efforts. This linear approach is most likely due to the fact that early work was based on a study of teachers who tended to approach problems in a linear, stepwise fashion.

The second model, which is more interactive in nature, arose from the understanding that adult learners often do not plan self-directed-learning activities in advance. Adults frequently follow numerous paths to reach their objectives, and often there are multiple factors that enter to describe the self-directed-learning process. People's ability to locate appropriate and useful resources is often a limiting factor. Within this context, Merriam and Caffarella cited Spear's (1988) work, in which he used cluster analysis to define interactive elements that identify a learning transaction. For

him, learning activities fell into three broad clusters: knowledge, action, and environment (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Berger (1990) built on these results and concluded from her study of 20 white males with no formal degrees past high school that there was little to no preplanning of their self-directed-learning activities. The element of trial and error was apparent in an emphasis on a hands-on approach to learning.

Another interactive model was the one developed by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991). According to Brockett and Hiemstra, three streams of inquiry have developed within the domain of self-directed research. The first stream of research, attributed to Tough (1971, 1979) and his work on "The Adult's Learning Projects," has provided vast amounts of descriptive information related to the frequency of self-planning by adult learners. The second stream they identified moves more into the realm of psychology by attempting to identify, define, and measure such variables as motivation, creativity, and intellectual development. This approach has led to the development of self-directed readiness scales and tests, all designed to measure an adult's readiness to engage in self-directed-learning activities. The third stream of research centers on qualitative methods of inquiry in an effort to help explain meanings and contexts of self-directed learning in adults. In their work, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) attempted to combine instructional method processes (self-directed learning) with personality characteristics of the individual learner (learner self-direction).

The third category of models described by Merriam and Caffarella is what they called "instructional models." This category includes interactive models that attempt to create a framework in which instructors in formal settings could integrate self-directed-learning methods with their programs, activities, and curriculum. Grow's (1991) staged

self-directed learning is one such model. With this model, Grow attempted to specify how teachers can help students become more self-directed in their learning.

. . . As Personal Attribute or Experience

The third broad area of research in the area of self-directed learning is related to viewing self-direction as a personal attribute or characteristic, or as a personal experience. Several authors (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1980) have helped to lay this foundation by asserting that self-direction and autonomy are foundational to learning in adulthood. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) identified a relationship between what they called learner self-direction, a characteristic or trait of learners that enables them to assume primary responsibility for their learning activity, and a positive self-concept.

Research in this area has spawned measurement tools such as "self-directed readiness" (Guglielmino, 1997). Chene (1983) claimed there are three elements that characterize an autonomous or self-directed learner: independence, the ability to make choices, and the capacity to articulate the norms and limits of a learning activity. Others have looked at a variety of variables related to self-directed learning, such as field dependence and independence (Brookfield, 1986), autonomy (Candy, 1991; Chene, 1983), and educational level (Confessore & Confessore, 1994).

Part of the uniqueness of self-directed learning is the intuitive dimension it exhibits. Brookfield (1987) used the term *insight realization* to characterize a learner's experience with unexpected circumstances. Chopra (1980), in turn, maintained that most people fail to focus their inner awareness or use its available power, even in the most trying of moments. Wacks (1987) asked, "Yet when are we ever taught or even encouraged to listen to, and follow, *the still small voice within*?" (p. 50). As Emerson (as

cited in Wacks, 1987) said, "To finish the moment, to find the journey's end in every step of the road, to live the greatest number of good hours, is wisdom" (p. 50)

Several authors have written about the "internal changes" that often occur and the importance of "making meaning" to the overall process of self-directed learning. Brookfield (1986) defined self-directed learning as "the mode of learning characteristic of an adult who is in the process of realizing that his or her adulthood is concerned as much with an internal change of consciousness as with external management of instructional events" (p. 58). Further on he stated, "The most complete form of self-directed learning occurs when process and reflection are married in the adult's pursuit of meaning" (p. 58). Merriam and Caffarella (1991) also pursued this idea of the importance of internal meaning-making to adult learners. For them, self-directed learning was "a form of study in which learners have the primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences" (p. 41). For Merriam and Caffarella, this was a natural consequence of the process of aging and maturing. As adults grow older and mature, there is a natural proclivity toward independence and a search for meaning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

What triggers the desire or need to learn? Aslanian and Brickell (1982) claimed that the conversion from passive learner to active learner came as the result of a specific life event or experience. This event could be almost anything, ranging from an illness to a job loss to a religious quest. Based on their work they explained,

> Every adult who learned because of a transition pointed to a specific event in his or her life that signaled, precipitated, or triggered the transition and thus the learning. Getting hired or getting fired, getting married or getting divorced, getting sick, getting elected, or moving to a new city were the kinds of events that told the adults it was time to learn. (p. 164)

Similarly, Spear and Mocker (1984) claimed that a major change in a life circumstance was the instigating force for undertaking a learning project. Based on their work, they concluded that the circumstance itself was what provided structure and organization to the learning process. They derived what they called the *organizing circumstance,* "which postulates that self-directed learners, rather than preplanning their projects, tend to select a course from limited alternatives which occur fortuitously within their environment, and which structures their learning projects" (p. 4).

It is also interesting that, although postmodernists have claimed that knowledge is socially constructed by the individual and does not exist in any form independent of the observer (Grentz, 1996), each of the authors examined in this study purported to have discovered something. Through each of their experiences, they learned and they discovered something real and something true both about themselves and about life. Each experienced this "awakening" within the confines of a different sociocultural context. Each experienced different life stories. But the fact remains, each discovered something new and fresh, and it is doubtful whether this discovery would ever have been made were it not for the "journey" each individual undertook.

In conclusion, we see that the future of self-directed learning is unclear. Which direction research should and will take from here is not certain (Merriam, 2001). Brockett et al. (2000) conducted a content analysis of some 122 articles related to self-directed learning published in 14 periodicals between 1980 and 1998. Results showed there was a steady decline in the number of articles on self-directed learning since the mid-1980s. Brockett et al.'s conclusion was that this indicator, coupled with the shift away from the learner as the center of attention to the sociopolitical context of adult education as the center of attention, might suggest that self-directed learning has reached its zenith. The

real challenge, according to Brockett et al., was how to take self-directed learning to a new level. One way to do this is to focus on the quality of the experience (Merriam, 2001). This was the purpose of my study.

My intention in the analysis that follows is not to subject each autobiography to a categorical analysis, thereby forcing each text into a mold that may not fit it very well. Rather, I have attempted to allow the texts to speak for themselves and to call for their own modes of representation. As a consequence, it is likely that some, but not all, of the six categories described above will apply to any one text.

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE

Introduction

This chapter explores learning that occurred in the lives of two authors, as the result of writing about their religious experience. Two autobiographical accounts are used in this exploration. The first is Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life by Patricia Hampl. This is a narrative account of one person's journey to extricate herself from the confines of her Catholic heritage. Instead, as she reflects and composes, she finds herself embracing her heritage in a new and meaningful manner. The second is The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem by Samuel Heilman. This is a narrative account of one man's journey to Jerusalem in an effort to find his heritage. He acknowledged early in his account that he had gone to Jerusalem as a sociologist and returned to his academic position as an Orthodox Jew. His autobiography is an account of his conversion.

I summarize the story underlying each autobiography, drawing special attention to times and substance of learning. At the end of each autobiographical section, I provide a summary of the lessons each author learned his or her their unique self-directed learning process. The final section is a brief summary of the chapter.

Both authors returned to the physical location of their religious roots. Hampl, being Catholic, returned to Italy to follow St. Francis of Assisi's steps, a religious pilgrimage often undertaken by members of the Catholic faith. Heilman, being Jewish, returned to Jerusalem and spent a year living and worshipping among various

communities of devout Orthodox Jews. Both were able to experience first hand the culture, the environment, and the life of their respective religious communities.

In each instance, a story was created from a particular situation (Gornick, 2001a). In both cases, the situation was much more than a unique journey with people of like beliefs at a particular point in space and time. Rather, the situation pertained to their respective places in life itself, characterized by memories, images, and words. But more than this, it represented for each of these authors a self-directed learning process that culminated in the discovery of meaning and significance.

In The Situation and the Story, Gornick (2001b) laid hold of the story behind Gosse's Father and Son. In her analysis of this memoir, she made this statement:

> What he does feel—and this stronger and stronger each year—is a growing love of language and of narrative: the language of the imagination, the tale of human emotion hidden in the prose. . . . Alone, within the silent embrace of his own unspoken thought, through the remarkable companionship he finds in his own growing consciousness, Gosse encounters a "self" at the center whose demands slowly overtake him. (pp. 95-96)

"Narrative: the language of the imagination, the tale of human emotion hidden in the prose" (Gornick, 2001b, p. 95). Nothing could be more descriptive of the project each of these authors undertook as each discovered a "self" that lay at their respective centers, gave it voice, and called it into being.

Through this analysis, we will see that learning was at the core of all that transpired. Each author learned from and through others during the course of his or her travels. Each reflected on different experiences and circumstances, and each created a unique and meaningful story. Through the process of reflection and creation, learning took place in such a manner that the author was left a changed person.

Patricia Hampl: Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life

In this section, I will look at the autobiography of Patricia Hampl. Learning for her was transacted through the creation of Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life. In and through this narrative, she takes us to significant people, places, and things in her life in an endeavor to show us how and why they were significant back then, and what they now meant to her. Insights she attained and learning she achieved were brought about and fueled by a pilgrimage she took to Italy to follow St. Francis of Assisi's steps. Then a year later, she took a week-long pilgrimage of sorts to Rosethorn, a small Cictercian woman's monastery in California. From and through this process of interpreting her past, she emerged a new and changed person.

Faith or Learning by Remembering

In the first section, entitled Faith, Hampl explained why it was she felt compelled to undertake this pilgrimage. Here she reflected on her upbringing and significant relationships in her past that had all worked together as motivation for this undertaking. This is the section Brady (1990) would refer to as the remembered self. She looked back to reflect, reminisce, and essentially begin the formal process of her narrative formation, of rewriting the story of herself (Freeman, 1993).

Hampl's story began, both physically and spiritually, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Born to a working-class family in a working-class neighborhood, she was raised in a strongly Catholic family. The Catholic Church in general and St. Luke's parish in particular provided the framework and guidelines for her life. In fact, it might have given her too much too soon. She said of her life:

> Mine was a Catholic girlhood spent gorging on metaphor—Mystical Body, transubstantiation, dark night of the soul, the little martyrdom of everyday life. And remember, girls, life is a journey. Your own life is a pilgrimage. Maybe we

> had too much meaning too early. It was like having too much money. The quirkiness of life was betrayed, given inflated significance by our rich symbology. (p. 6)

Hampl's struggle, as she began to reflect, was a struggle with meaning. She decided that now, some 30 to 40 years later, was the time to put things right. She confessed, "I'd come to the conviction that I had to see the old world of Catholicism" (p. 8). As she opened the window on her process of reflection and reminiscing early on, she looked back on her days as a student in parochial schools.

Hampl married rather late in life. She was past 40 when the event finally occurred (p. 13). Ironically, on the night before the actual ceremony, she experienced a dream in which she pictured herself running through a field in an attempt to catch a group of nuns heading for a monastery. The monastery proved to be farther away than it appeared. As a result, she never caught the nuns. When she finally arrived, she discovered all at once that "I can't go in there, I'm getting married" (p. 13). This was truly significant for a Catholic woman, as she had been conditioned through her parochial education to believe that becoming a nun was one of the greatest callings, if not the greatest calling, in a woman's life. The commitment to marry shut this door forever.

Of particular interest was the way that Hampl encapsulated this moment in time, and a significant moment it was, for it created a clear line of demarcation between what had gone before and what was to come after in her life. Her reflection process focused on a dream, a scene, an imaginary construction from which and through which she came both to learn and to understand a great deal about herself. She included in this first section what I chose to call the "Explanation" because it explained quite a bit to her about herself and set the stage for further discovery. The first part of her life, that part in which

she dreamed of "professional" roles within the Catholic Church, ended once and for all when she married.

Hampl fulfilled the role of an observer in the "Explanation" section of her autobiography. Here, she traveled from St. Paul to Assisi and wandered about Assisi with a lay tour group, fellow pilgrims in a certain sense. Her trip was classified as a walking tour and given the name "The Road to Assisi" (p. 10). She observed herself and tried to analyze early on just why it was she was undertaking this pilgrimage. A sense of urgency overtook her and refused to lessen its grip on her. When she asked herself why she was doing this, she responded,

> Looking for our roots, we say. But roots are buried: they're supposed to be. And the past isn't alive. Only our urgency is. Maybe this urgency *is* the past, the only juice still spurting from the source that made us. It must be this urgency, a peculiar form of desire, that makes us zoom around, looking for what time has put back in its breast pocket. (p. 9)

This sense of conviction and urgency led to two distinct but interrelated lessons that she learned. One lesson was constructed on the foundation of prayer, specifically, its efficacy and relevance to daily living. The second related to her discovery that, in order for there to be any hope of discovering meaning and significance in the drama of life, she needed to move from being an observer to being a participant. She stated poignantly with regard to the need to participate, "I knew I must set out on the trail. That, too, was instinct: I didn't know how to think about the past without going somewhere. "You're going on a pilgrimage," Donnie had said. And I had growled at her" (p. 56). What we see here is a key characteristic of the self-directed learner, that being a sense of autonomy, a sense of being in control of her own learning process (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Hampl provided detailed descriptions of others on this trip. Some of these acquaintances, such as Will and Alma, prompted Hampl to think and reflect in ways that

yielded an abundance of fruit when she spent time at Rosethorn, the retreat center she discussed in the third section.

> Will's question—"Do you believe in God?"—was not my question. *Time* magazine, too, had broken the wrong story all those years ago when it published its famous GOD IS DEAD cover. God was not at stake. Prayer was the fatality. Prayer was dead.
>
> This was what I could not accept. Whether God exists or not remains forever a fascination. But God, believed in or not, remains only the elected Official for the colossal job of mystery. . . . As the human response to this mystery, prayer, not the existence of God, is the thing to be decided. (p. 35)

This discovery, this conclusion, marked a significant moment in time for Hampl. She realized at that moment that she had been "barking up the wrong tree" for much of her life. The culture around her had invited her to ask the wrong question. She was not cognizant of an overt internal battle that had characterized her life when it came to the question, "Do you believe in God?" But she did realize this was the wrong question. This question answered itself when the issue of prayer was resolved.

It is important to take notice that this moment of insight or realization, this learning, was brought about through the re-creation of a conversation with Will. Once again, we see the imagination playing a significant role in Hampl's learning process. The insight derived was a result of the imaginative recreation of dialog between herself and Will.

It is also important to notice that this moment of deeper understanding was purely intellectual in nature. It was the result of reflecting on Will, the nature of his question, the Time magazine article, her life in general, and perhaps a whole host of other issues of which she was not cognizant. In a sense, there was no other conclusion she could draw. Prayer was the fatality and it always had been. How could she have missed this?

We need to recognize this discovery for what it is in this "Faith" section. Later, when she encountered Felix in the "Miracles" section, and then Andre at the Cistercian

woman's monastery in the "Silence" section, her understanding of prayer was further deepened and enhanced because for these two men prayer represented a way of life, a living reality. Through these men she saw prayer in action and she saw the transformative power it could have in a life.

As we saw earlier, this pilgrimage was driven by both a sense of conviction and a sense of urgency. But there was also a desire to create. Hampl looked back over her life, that which tended to be void and without form, and recognized a need and desire to create something. She did not know what, but she knew she must create. It came to a head, prompted by Alma's question, "Tell me, do you write from your life or from—or from imagination?" (p. 53). As Hampl reflected on this question, she decided and told herself, "I write from my life *and* from imagination. That's what it is to write about—or from—the past. No doubt I write about the past because I want it to *be* the past" (p. 55).

But because there was an imaginary component to what she did, this does not mean it was untruthful. As Freeman (1993) said, "Yes, self and world *are* fundamentally products of the imagination. But no, they are not to be thought of as *merely* imaginary, in the sense of being essentially fictional creations" (p. 70). Hampl went on to say:

> I started with the knowledge, like the "given" at the start of a geometry problem, that there was something Catholic about the virginal self, with its stubborn habit of trust and its taste for finding meaning in everything. Back to the Church to touch the dusty relics. (p. 56)

As Hampl reflected on her earlier years in school, she became aware of just how important literature and the world of imagination were to her. Gornick (2001a) described it as follows: "Narrative: the language of the imagination, the tale of human emotion hidden in the prose" (p. 95). When Hampl looked back on her parochial-school days, she reflected this same idea when she said, "Our real residence was language itself. Literature was the ancestral estate to which we were natural, unquestioned heirs" (p. 61).

And finally, as Hampl reminisced further, she arrived at a fundamental understanding of her life to date. This understanding awakened and redirected her. She said, "Observation alone, the life of looking. . . . Life, fundamentally, was neither active nor passive. It was contemplative. . . . Pondering was the highest vocation"(p. 62).

So we ask ourselves, what is contemplation? What it is to be contemplative? Merton (1961) shed some light on this when he said,

> Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. . . . It is spiritual wonder. . . . It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicable, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith. (p. 1)

"*You have to get in there,*" Donnie told Hampl numerous times in an attempt to share with her some of life's lessons she (Donnie) had learned. Donnie was a spiritual guide, Hampl's spiritual guide, and played a critical role in Hampl's pilgrimage. She was someone to whom Hampl could go and talk, test out ideas and thoughts, and receive help and guidance. This advice never came in the form of direct answers, but rather in the form of questions and comments to help guide Hampl along her way.

Donnie played a critical role in Hampl's narrative construction. Donnie's role was simply to ask questions and provide insight from her own experience. In this context, learning for Hampl happened as she set out to experience new avenues and meet new people. Everything she learned, every change that occurred to her, happened because she traveled away from home to encounter new places and new people.

Donnie was an enigma for Hampl, who said of her, "I can't figure her. Yet I keep going back to visit her, to sort out what I thought was the past, my dead Catholic past, only to find it isn't dead at all" (p. 7). Hampl loathed the language Donnie tried to use to capture the venture Hampl undertook. "It's called 'spiritual direction,' what we're

doing," Donnie said one day. Hampl's comment to this was simply, "Whatever we were doing, I found I required it, though I frown at the terms—spiritual direction, pilgrimage" (p. 7).

"Spiritual awakenings" for Hampl always came as a result of interactions with other people. Were Hampl to have visited a prison cell instead of Assisi and Rosethorn, it is highly unlikely she would have been challenged to learn or change in any way. It was always people, what they said or simply who they were, in these new and different contexts that stimulated her to reflect on her past and see pieces of her life's puzzle fit together in ways she had never dreamed possible.

The dawn of Hampl's awakening began when the tour group departed and she was left on her own in a monastery in Assisi for ten days. It was during this time that she began to rummage through old slides of her memories. She never saw a complete story, she said, but rather a series of memories she recalled much like a viewer would go though old slides in a slide carrousel. This ten-day experience, in which she found herself all alone in Assisi, was the beginning of a transformation that would culminate the next year when she visited a monastery in California.

But even more than the need to participate, Hampl wanted to live and to experience life. She was tired of the need to categorize and group people, places, and things. She said of this,

> I was sick with insight, fed up with versions. . . . People wished to name things now, instead of living them. Intended to be less painful, but it was curiously bloodless, this capacity to label whole episodes, years, loves. . . . I began to wonder if I had jumped from the breathtaking innocence of a girlhood where everything was a cliff-hanger. . . . Maybe I'd missed entirely the mid-stroke of maturity with its moxie of a life being lived. (p. 12)

This first section was characterized by Hampl's confession that she was tired of categorizing and naming. Theoretical constructions, although important, had served their

purpose. Her need to explain gave way to her need for understanding. At the beginning, she was driven by a sense of urgency to throw off the yoke of her Catholic upbringing. But as she finished this section, she had learned something significant. She had learned she could not disengage herself from her remembered past (Brady, 1990). She began to recognize that her identity was inextricably woven with her memories of the past (Bruner, 1987, 1995; McAdams, 1993, 1996). The transformation process began, learning and meaning started to coalesce, and all because she started to remember (Brady, 1990; Bruner, 1995; McAdams, 1996; Nelson, 1994)

Miracles or Learning, Meaning, and Connecting

The second section of Hampl's narrative, entitled "Miracles," centered on a period characterized by solitude and deep inner reflection. Hampl began to connect images and conversations (Erikson, 1996). For ten days right at the start, she was alone in a room at Poor Clare monastery of Santa Chiara in Assisi. It was during this period that she arrived at some basic understandings of herself and her role in the mystery of Life.

Hampl began this time as a good academician by assuming the role of an observer. She watched the interaction between people, places, and things and recorded her observations religiously. And then something happened, something that overtook her and began a transformation deep within. She wrote:

> Two weeks of brief encounters seemed to erase themselves, leaving real time amorphous, mistily vague as the Plain of Spoleto below the balcony of the Annunciation, where I spent most of my days alone, staring out, giving myself over to my drawings, staring some more. (p. 106)

All of this seemed to culminate in a scene on Hampl's balcony, where memories began to flood her mind. In fact, the rapidity and intensity with which these memories arrived were tantamount to a "flash flood" of sorts, in that they spilled over into her soul

and caused a change within her that would not let her ever be the same again. She stated, "But these things that captivated me as I sat on the balcony making my blurry drawings, letting the days drift by without making a mark—these things were not stories. They were brief testimonies of perception, bits of consciousness" (p. 108). This period of solitude, being alone with herself, culminated in her statement, "By the end of the first week I realized that, for once, I wished to be nobody else. . . . I was free—always had been free" (p. 108).

One of the fundamental principles underlying autobiographical theory is the idea that autobiography is a process of reconstructive discovery and interpretation, and that as part of the interpretive process it leads to greater understanding (Freeman, 1993). For Hampl, prayer was the instrument, the means, through which this process was enacted. It was not something that was done or performed for the benefit of anyone. Rather, it was a lived reality. Felix opened this door to her and showed her the reality behind prayer. This was what gave meaning to her endeavors, what allowed Hampl, or anyone, to enter in and become a participant. *You have to get in there.* Prayer was the avenue that Hampl had to tread to "get in there."

In this section, Felix was instrumental in the unfolding of her understanding of prayer. As Donnie was to Hampl in the first section, so Felix was to her in the second section. Felix played a pivotal role in Hampl's transformation because he himself had experienced a transformation. It seemed as though Felix could have been a character from the Gospel narratives. Just as people who touched or were touched by Jesus were never again the same, so, too, Hampl's encounter with Felix left her changed, never again to be the same.

When Hampl first encountered Felix in Rome, she was not sure how to interpret him. At first she wondered whether he was not just a cynic, someone whose faith had been tested in much the same way that a tornado tests the foundation of a building edifice. The building weathers the storm, but numerous windows are knocked out and its very foundation is cracked, never to be quite the same again.

This all gave way to the mysterious awareness that there was something different about Felix. In fact, Hampl concluded, "Felix was one of those who pray without ceasing" (p. 145). As Hampl reflected on this observation, she soon decided that both Felix and Donnie represented in their respective smiles something unique. That something, she concluded, was the idea that these people felt loved, not because of who they thought they were or what they did, but simply because they were. In fact, being and loving were synonymous terms.

But her realization went even further than that. As she reflected on Felix, she discovered that he was captivated by prayer in much the same way that St. Francis had been. Felix described prayer as being "crazy," sort of like being in love . . . only "crazier." He started into it and soon discovered he could not get enough of it. He craved more and more the further he went. In fact, as Hampl reflected more and more on both Felix and the subject of prayer, she soon noticed that Felix reminded her of Donnie. It was this underlying foundation in both lives that gave them radiance and set them apart from all others.

As Hampl reflected even further, she stated,

> There was no dogma to Felix, no rigidity, just the constant feints and lunges of a man observing the day tirelessly, and living it absolutely as prayer. Existence was prayer. The *day* was prayer, and he was in the day, therefore in prayer. . . . Prayer was not effort, not just something they *did*. It was something they were *in*, as obviously as they were in the world. (p. 147)

For these people, the Church was not life itself; it was just a place. All of its foibles, peculiarities, shortcomings . . . the Church was not bound by these. Rather, "life was prayer," and the goal of living for these people was to reach what Hampl called "*the life of the gaze*" (p. 147). This was the same "gaze" she had noticed earlier in her life and recounted earlier in her autobiography that the nuns at her parochial school exhibited. She recounted early on that the nuns at her school did not really look at her or at any other students (p. 65). They had a way of looking beyond them, a way of focusing on reality beyond the particulars of daily living. In effect, theirs was "the life of the gaze" as well.

A year later, after her trip to Assisi and Lourdes, Hampl traveled to a small Cictercian woman's monastery called Rosethorn. This was yet another trip orchestrated by Donnie, undoubtedly knowing full well that Hampl needed to make this trip in order to bring some form of closure to her pilgrimage. It was during this week-long stay at Rosethorn that it all came together for Hampl. She understood who she was and what she must do.

The second section, "Miracles or Learning, Meaning, and Connecting," brought to life this concept of "the life of the gaze." The revelatory power in language (Freeman, 1993) was used to shape and give form to Hampl's experience. By the end of this section, her story was beginning to take shape and come together. She was beginning to find order by remembering her past (Brady, 1990, p. 46). "Autobiographical learning" (Nelson, 1994, p. 391) was starting to take place as she reflected and wrote. But ownership requires action. Hampl had not yet taken the step that allowed her to appropriate the learning and understanding that had surfaced so far.

Silence or Appropriation

The third section of Hampl's memoir, "Silence," was the one in which she claimed ownership of all that she had come to understand and of all she had learned. During this period, she became much more comfortable with herself and who she was. She came to view life in general, and hers in particular, as one of contemplation. Understandings such as "life of the gaze" and "existence is prayer" led her to see and understand things much differently.

Hampl related her mystical experience, the one she had experienced in the Hudson Bay store as a child. It was a direct encounter with God, something she knew within the deep confines of her being was real. She related it in the following manner:

> *I reach up to touch the wool. Do touch it. And die. Or leave my body. Or fly. Something wonderful is happening. What is it? I am also imprinted on the English downs of the bone-china cup my brother is holding. I am the scuffed wood-plank floor. I am the dollar in my pocket. I have left my body. I no longer stop at my skin. It is the best thing that has ever happened. . . . Then it is over. I snap back. I am me, I am nothing. We are going out to the car. I am with them again. There's no explaining the most important thing that has ever happened to me. But if I tried, I would say: You fly, you die. You don't stop inside, you go everywhere. It's heaven.* (p. 233)

On Saturday of her week at Rosethorn, the small Cistercian woman's monastery in the "beautiful nowhere," Andre the gardener for the grounds captured the essence of Hampl's mystical experience and helped her bring her year-long journey to a close. He recounted an experience with God a friend of his had, a monk who had since died. He said of the incident:

> He got up from his desk, and he went—please, you will excuse me—he went to pee. At that instant, on the way to pee, he has—but only so briefly—this experience of God. He never gets it again. He cannot explain it. And this is not something he can use in a homily, you understand. That is the thing with such mystical experience. They write in the vernacular—the *verna*, you remember, this home-grown language slave every culture puts to hard labor. They try to express it. But there's nothing to be said. He looked right at me, reaching out his hand to indicate the walls of books that hemmed us in. (p. 234)

Hampl concluded that language was such a weak instrument to convey the reality and truth underlying experience. But it is all we have, and we are left with few options other than to try to couch and frame these experiences in vernacular that can be shared with others.

In addition to this realization that language is at best a weak instrument for conveying the deeper realities of life, Hampl was awakened to the underlying reality of life as prayer. It was in this last section, ironically entitled "Silence," that this was made manifest. It happened on a Wednesday morning as she and others entered the pristine beauty of the early morning and walked to Morning Praise. She was reflecting on some of Thomas Merton's work, writing in which he spoke of time and being and the eternity of the moment. She recounted of Merton,

> "For the birds, there is not a time that they tell," Merton wrote of this moment of the day, "but the virgin point between darkness and light, between nonbeing and being . . . when creation in its innocence asks permission to be once again, as it did on the first morning that ever was." (p. 206)

As she continued to reflect and recall specific instances, she came to the heart of her memoir. In much the same way that Elijah experienced the Lord in I Kings 19:11-13, Hampl recognized the "voice" in her own life. Elijah's experience was recorded as follows:

> The Lord said: "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the lord is about to pass by."
>
> Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.
>
> Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here Elijah?" (I Kings 19:11-13 [New International Version])

The inner voice that spoke to Hampl said, "*I can't help it, it's how I am*" (p. 207). She went on to recount this experience in the following manner:

> The words could have been "Lord, have mercy," or "Forgive me, for I have sinned." They *were* those words, in fact, those prayerful words of old, but neatly camouflaged in my modern voice that can't resist ripping the religious art off the walls: *I can't help it, it's how I am*. Finally, prayer. After all my running away from it, and then running after it to Assisi and Lourdes. (p. 208)

This was it. This was the moment where time and being met; the moment when time ceased to be messy; the time when past, present, and future, became one. In essence, it was Virgin Time. It was a moment when ultimate learning occurred, a moment when meaning swept across the human spirit and lodged itself deep within the recesses of the soul, a moment when the human condition was truly transformed, a moment when situation was turned to story (Gornick, 2001b). She continued to recount,

> At that moment of saying the words, feeling them course through me like electrical impulses as unbidden as the synapses of my brain, I understood prayer is, after all, a plain statement of fact. An admission of existence. That's all. A surrender of self to the All of history and oblivion. . . . You don't get to live Life—that thing I feared I was missing. You just live a life. This one. (p. 208)

This was that moment when Hampl actually voiced herself into being (Conway, 1998). The narrative and the narrator became one. Nelson (1994) describes this moment as the time when people "informally and autonomously create meaning for themselves from their life experience, thereby becoming the authors of both their own life and its account" (p. 390).

The Berkeley psychology professor said it slightly differently. As Hampl recalled,

> The Berkeley psychology professor has been reading *The Medieval Imagination* by Le Goff. The point, according to Le Goff, he says, is not that Christianity is dead or even moribund, but since about 1850 it has not enjoyed the "near monopoly" it once held "in the realm of ideology." Like Cecil and Donnie, trying to turn off the cold shower of dogma. *You have to get in there*. . . . He makes the same distinction Felix made in Assisi, though he uses different words: he's here, he says, to find a contemplative path within his own tradition, not a catechism, not

> even a moral code. "Secular humanism does morality just fine," he says. "It does a lot just fine. It just doesn't give you prayer." (pp. 223-224)

The last encounter Hampl related was her encounter with Edwina on the last day of her stay at Rosethorn. Hampl attempted to go off on her own to paint with her watercolors. Hampl was preparing to descend a steep and challenging precipice when Edwina came over to say her good-byes. Hampl invited Edwina to join her on this expedition, one that would take them down a steep, rocky path to the ocean floor. Hampl described it in the following way:

> It was a dizzying drop, the path barely zigzagged; it seemed to shimmy down the sheer face to a low bulkhead of boulders, giving out finally to the rare black sand of the beach and the steady beat of the sea. Easy to imagine your broken body rolling from boulder to boulder, landing in a crushed heap on the smooth washed sand. (p. 240)

Edwina confessed she was afraid of heights and did not think she could accept the challenge. After a considerable amount of verbal exchange, Hampl decided to go first. Edwina never mustered the courage to follow, and Hampl was left to venture on alone.

Upon reaching the ocean, Hampl encountered a dead seal floating innocently in the water. This encounter with the black eye holes, the skull as it floated on the water's surface, left her with an uneasiness deep within her being. "*Number your days; know that you will die*" (p. 241), she felt within her being. She attempted to pass this off and return to her painting, but to no avail. She commented, "Nature was beyond me, and I knew it—it was too much *the real world as we affectionately call it*" (p. 241). She packed her watercolors and returned to the foot of the cliff she had to scale, only to find Edwina standing at the top. Edwina could have left to return to San Francisco. She could have left to say her good-byes to others. None of these actions did she take. She waited patiently at the top for Hampl's return. After a brief verbal exchange in which Hampl asked Edwina

if she was ready to accept the challenge and descend, Hampl gave in and exclaimed, "I'm coming right up" (p. 242).

This was the moment at which the pilgrimage she had decided to undertake more than a year earlier reached its climax. The people she encountered, the places she visited, the experiences she had . . . all of these pointed Hampl to the fact that, for her, the monastery, the cloister she sought, was life itself. She could not escape this understanding, this awakening that had come to her. At the very end, she was going right up to enter her cloister. Her year-long experience had taught her the vows she must take. She was "coming right up" to take these vows, beginning with an encounter with Edwina. After a year-long pilgrimage, starting in Assisi and ending at Rosethorn, Hampl had discovered that what Donnie had said at the very beginning was true: "*You have to get in there.*"

As she reflected on her experience, Hampl realized her transformation would not be complete until she took action (Freeman, 1993) and reentered the monastery of life. She had succeeded in exploring her past, constructing a new and more solid identity, and now it was time to complete the circle by taking action. Essentially, she appropriated (Ricoeur, 1991) what it was she had come to learn.

Paramount to her understanding and to this section in particular was her understanding that life as an observer both could and would not be enough. She must be a participant in order for it to have any chance of being meaningful in any way. Donnie's comment at the very beginning, "*You have got to get in there*," proved to be instrumental in her pilgrimage. Power to "be" and to "get in there" was what she found. Her move to "get in there" was what ultimately voiced her self into being (Dickerson, 1989).

Nelson (1994) would have referred to this autobiography as the work of the imagination to bridge the gap between what Hampl said through her critical reflection on her past experience, and what she now knew (p. 396). "*You have to get in there.*"

Samuel Heilman: The Gate Behind the Wall: A Pilgrimage to Jerusalem

Learning and Time

Unlike Hampl, who used her pilgrimage to reflect on childhood events and relationships and how they seemed to take on new meaning and significance now that she was older, Samuel Heilman's autobiographical process centered on his one-year stay in Jerusalem. We come to know little about his life as a child or about significant relationships in his life.

Heilman began his narrative by identifying the ultimate antinomy he faced, the duality of human existence. In one sense, Heilman identified his attachment to "an eternal yesterday—a timeless faith and ritual, an ancient system of behavior" (p. 15). In another sense, he identified himself as a sociology professor at a university—a time-bound position in which "what is happening today and tomorrow matters far more than the verities embedded in the past" (p. 15).

However, this living in two worlds, this "compartmentalization" (p. 16) as he called it, was far from acceptable. It was a life of denying parts of himself that were vital to his wholeness and self-esteem. Accepting the challenge of his rabbi, he set out to make himself whole. As we shall see in the ensuing sections, the process of becoming whole was one that came about as the result of his reflecting and writing about his experience. In a sense, he voiced himself into existence (Dickerson, 1989) through the process of writing about his experience in Jerusalem.

All of the traits of the self-directed learner are here—one who is motivated, independent, and autonomous. In addition, we will see that, not only were these traits present when he started, but they remained strong and viable throughout his project. The inner drive for meaning and understanding served Heilman well throughout his adventure.

The rabbi of Heilman's local synagogue continually challenged him to *lern*, a word used to describe the ritualistic review and study of the Talmud. For more than a year, he dodged this challenge. However, something deep inside would not let him go. This "something" had its genesis in the teaching he had received all his life, which challenged his concept of "old" versus "new." As he said, "There is nothing so old that it cannot be made part of the modern world, no tradition so ancient that it could not be made a living part of contemporary reality. The old can be made new" (p. 17).

Even though, during his adolescent years, Heilman found the Talmud to be distant and not very applicable to daily living, he came to the conclusion that the only way to enter in and become a part of his heritage was through the process of *lernen*. He had to become an active participant, not a passive observer, in order to learn and glean from his heritage. He was now ready to "penetrate that experience" (p. 20). He summarized his struggle with objectivity and living on the "outside" in the following manner:

> I believed, more and more, that it was easier to teach a native how to distance himself from his own people and way of life and then describe where he had been than it was to make an outsider fully comprehend what it meant to be a native. . . . All the time my colleagues worried about "going native," my constant fear was "going stranger"—becoming too alienated from my own community and environment. (p. 23)

It all came to a head one Friday evening at a synagogue service when Heilman's rabbi pulled him aside and started talking to him. He spoke of the idea of study as a vocation, a calling, a way of life (p. 25). He said there was no greater call than the call to

study the Torah. "No Jew could hope to find salvation except by climbing out of the exile of ignorance and into the redemptive light of *lernen*. Study was no longer the practice just of scholars but was for everyone a lifetime mission" (p. 25).

The activity of *lernen* cannot be engaged in, in isolation. It must be undertaken in the context of a community. "Members of the *chavruse*—the study circle—could help one another reach the heights" (p. 26). Heilman's challenge was clear. He realized he must contribute to the building of "the heavenly Jerusalem." He must do this through the activity of *lernen* in the context of a *chavruse*. He realized that, even if "believing" was found to be difficult at first, the very act of obedience would result in belief.

Early on, Heilman recognized a fundamental but significant difference between learning and lernen. When learning, he was in charge of the learning activities and process. He set the goals and objectives, and determined the outcomes. When *lernen,* however, he was the one being studied. Progress was proportional to the degree to which he allowed himself to be scrutinized through the *lernen* process. As he stated so clearly, "What had begun by engaging the social scientist in me would end by awakening the Jew" (p. 30).

This was key to his reflective, reflexive, and reconstructive process, for it showed him that at least part of the reason behind the schism he was experiencing between sacred and secular was due to his failure to differentiate knowing from understanding. As an academic he had been conditioned to see learning as a growth in knowledge and information. But *lernen,* as he would come to see, was about interpretation, meaning, and understanding. It is a difference that pits both possessing against being possessed, and knowing against understanding.

All of his life Heilman had been conditioned to think that his being in control, or having command, of a subject area was evidence of knowing about that subject. Now for the first time, as he took a closer look at Judaism, he began to see that his goal was understanding of, and not knowledge about, the subject at hand. Learning could give him knowledge about Judaism, but it took *lernen* to give him an understanding of Judaism.

This first section sets the stage for the remainder of Heilman's autobiographical narrative. It is here that we are introduced to a self-directed, self-motivated individual. The admonition and encouragement of his local rabbi had been gnawing away at him for quite some time. We see striking similarities to Hampl's situation in that both felt a profound sense of conviction that the journey must be undertaken, and a sense of urgency that it must be undertaken now.

The journey Heilman set before himself was a journey in self-directed learning. His goal was to force a collapse of this duality of sacred and secular that he was experiencing. Although he did not look forward with a plan of clearly delineated learning objectives, he was looking back, as he wrote, in an effort to capture what it was he had learned. And he was doing this through the mechanism of narrative.

The task he set for himself was to look back on his time in Jerusalem, and through a process of reflection and interpretation, attempt to construct what it was that he had learned. He began by looking at the concept of time and the role it played in his life. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Heilman's first stop was a section of town called Shaarey Chesed, literally "gates of kindness" (p. 39).

> Time here seemed transformed as well. It was not just that I had left the Jerusalem of the nineteen eighties outside and entered what appeared to be the world of prewar Eastern Europe, but more. Even the specific time inside seemed different. On the wall across from me were two clocks resting on a handsomely carved shelf. These were old pendulum clocks, with Roman numerals on their faces. But

> one had the time set according to the watch on my wrist and a second, identical in every respect, was set at twelve. (p. 43)

Within the context of this chavruse, Heilman began to experience transformation, a transformation of both time and person. It was here that Heilman encountered "the Maggid" (p. 49), a master storyteller. The Maggid was one who was able to weave history and tradition together in a meaningful manner. Heilman said of him:

> He was a master storyteller, an actor who animated his stories with heart-cries of "Oy-yoy" that could make even the most hardened cosmopolitan into a parochial who yearned for the world of the *bes medresh* [House of Jewish study] and a past that was part of the traditional Jewish consciousness he thought he had long ago abandoned. (p. 49)

Heilman's personal transformation continued as the group within which he had located himself began to recite the *Kriyat Shma*, the Jewish credo of faith. In the Jewish faith, this is one of the central articles of prayer (p. 50). As Heilman listened to what was happening around him, he found that

> it was not long before I began to lose myself in prayer and recited these familiar words of the *Shma* with an attachment that I had not had since those days in grammar school when the first conscious motives of prayer invaded my adolescence. . . . That I could still be so moved by old prayers was a surprise to me. To be sure, I had always told people that that was why I prayed. But now what had been simply a logical argument became a psychological reality. (p. 52)

But this "psychological reality" became even more prevalent as he experienced the power available through the very act of praying. As he observed further, "It occurred to me then, as never before, that some people prayed not so much to their God as for themselves—for the transformative power of prayer itself" (p. 53).

Another observation Heilman made was related to the concept of community. During the activity of prayer, he noticed that each person waited for the previous person to stop praying before he or she started. In a sense, they "fed" each other by the very act of praying. He said of this,

> In this race to be last, each man seemed to be playing it his own way. Yet each seemed authentically to be on the track as it had been laid down. As I observed one, I was sure that he deserved to be waited for. But then I looked to the other and knew that he was the one. And while neither seemed conscious of the other, there was no doubt in my mind that neither could have gone on without the other. (pp. 54-55)

Although the efficiency and efficacy of prayer acquired new meaning and significance for Heilman, how it was they appeared to be efficient and efficacious remained a mystery until he awoke to how it was he learned. The learning he was doing, or more precisely that was happening to him and in him, was happening with the help of his imagination. He said of this,

> I had to learn exactly what sacrifices could and could not be brought, who would have to bring them and precisely how they were to be handled. But all this was not to be a part of some lessons to be intellectually assimilated. Rather, the learning I did came in through the imagination. (p. 61)

This was a major breakthrough in the life of Heilman. For an academic trained in the social sciences, where observation, data collection, and cognitive processing are worshiped and revered, to admit that the imagination was a legitimate channel of learning was no small admission. But this breakthrough, this enlightenment, was just the beginning of a major transformation in his life.

After imagination, the next ingredient Heilman found necessary to his transformational mix was memory. During the heat of Talmudic discussion, he found himself "gone from the present but not yet having arrived in the past" (p. 62). This was truly significant as he discovered he was hopelessly trapped in time, his own time. Others seemed able to travel back in time and avoid this trap. But it was not intuitively obvious to him how to do this. And then it happened. He discovered what it was that was missing. Everything that transpired, or had transpired previously, had done so in the present tense. He said of this discovery,

> Everything had been spoken in the present tense. . . . They were not just citing divergent texts; they were almost composing them afresh. . . . Instead, it had all the freshness and novelty of the original decision. . . . Only if I allowed myself to see the old as if it were fresh and new could I too share in the delight, could I come to care about sacrifices at the Temple. (p. 65)

The Shaarey Chesed experience was necessary but not sufficient for Heilman's growth in understanding. It started him on his pilgrimage, one he knew he must continue, but somewhere else. He had received as much as he could from this environment. No more was possible. The reasons for this he cited as being endemic to himself, the person he was. When the "pinch of snuff" (p. 66) was given to him, he realized he had penetrated the inner circle. No small accomplishment! But he went on to say, " I never quite got over a sense of distance from the text" (p. 66). Why was that?

Heilman cited several reasons for these limitations. First, he felt the limitations of his imagination (p. 66). Try as he might, he could not get over images of slaughterhouses, when it came to attempting to visualize rituals and procedures related to sacrifices. Those in his circle seemed to visualize this temple scene in much more inspiring ways, but not Heilman. Second, there was the limitation related to the use of Yiddish. Although he was conversant in and with the language, Heilman found it difficult to keep up with those who were fluent in it. And fluency was an undesignated requirement for full and complete understanding of this particular chavruse experience. Finally, the whole concept of time was a limitation Heilman could not overcome. As he stated just before he left, "They dealt in eternities; I was stuck in the present" (p. 68).

However, what he received from and through this experience changed him forever. This change was a change in the way in which he viewed and experienced prayer. He stated at the end of this experience, "To be sure, I had been changed by the Shaarey Chesed experience. My prayers were now slower-paced, and I stopped to think

about the meaning of all the words I used. No longer could I rush through the liturgy as I had done on that first night" (p. 68).

Reflecting on his experience at this chavruse provided Heilman with a much greater understanding of two critical factors in the learning process—imagination and memory (Brady, 1990; Freeman, 1993; Nelson, 1994). He realized for the first time the transformative power inherent in a story, especially when told by a masterful storyteller. What he also recognized from and through this experience was that learning, meaningful learning, had an imaginative dimension to it (Dirkx, 1997). It was this imaginative dimension that was needed in order to "voice himself into being" (Dickerson, 1989) and overcome the constraints of temporality.

We will see in the next section that Heilman uncovered a vast difference between learning and *lernen*. As I mentioned above, learning as an end put him in control. *Lernen* as a means asked for his control.

The Roles of Learning and Lernen

In the previous section, we saw how Heilman interpreted his chavruse experience and what he learned through it. Seeing that the roles of the imagination, memory, and time were vital to his understanding and formation, he proceeded to use them as he encountered the real meaning underlying learning.

During the course of his stay in Jerusalem, Heilman had an encounter with the men of Mea Shearim. It was here that Heilman met Reb Yosef Moshe, who serves as his guide, a sort of facilitator with respect to the happenings at Mea Shearim. It is important to remember that, at this point in his journey into and through Jerusalem, Heilman had a growing desire to engage in the process of *lernen*. But Heilman interpreted this to be a process of studying sacred texts. Everyone he had met or seen so far had dedicated

themselves to this process of studying. And more often than not, it was carried out in the midst of volumes of other texts—commentaries and expository texts related to the Torah. Enter Reb Yosef Moshe.

Reb Yosef Moshe opened Heilman's eyes to a fundamental understanding of what *lernen* was all about. He told him that the secret to *lernen* did not lie in Heilman's efforts to "grab hold" of the text. Rather, the secret lay in the text's ability to "grab hold" of him. He told him, "You see, it's the same with a *sefer*. A holy book can be worn, its pages torn along the edges, the binding not so good. But the light inside it can still shine brightly if you know how to *lern* it out" (p. 98).

Essentially, the light and life, or equivalently the meaning, of the text could be brought out through the process of *lernen*. The process was not one of coming to know more about a particular subject, although that undoubtedly did occur. Rather, the process resulted in an encounter with the text, more of a deep inner connection. Reb Yosef Moshe told Heilman, "Heaven forbid. But you must buy not to possess but in order to become possessed. You must buy those books which you wish and are able to enter" (p. 99).

After saying this, Reb Yosef Moshe took Heilman to a bookstore owned and operated by Mr. Mintzer. In the midst of Mr. Mintzer's world of books, Heilman stumbled across a book that contained a partial commentary on Genesis 25, verse 26. The commentary states, "**And after that his brother emerged, and his hand was grasping the heel of Jacob.** Why was he grasping? This comes to teach us that the kingdom of Jacob does not begin until the rule of the kingdom of Esau comes to an end" (p. 105). Heilman went on to say,

> I looked around me in this little cellar room, surrounded by the wisdom of generations of believing Jews. These books must surely now constitute the kingdom of Jacob. As I stood in Mintzer's cellar, it struck me that until now I had spent most of my life within the domains of Esau's kingdom and the only way

> that I could ever allow the kingdom of Jacob to begin was to free myself from the domination of Western and Christian ideas. . . . I would have to plunge into the world that until now I had only been visiting. (p. 105)

Here was further reinforcement to Heilman's growing awareness that understanding is built on the foundation of involvement. As Donnie told Hampl, "You have to get in there." So too, Heilman must "get in there" in order to understand. At this point in his pilgrimage he was sent to his next "station."

What we see beginning to happen is a complete remaking of a self called Heilman. Seeing that understanding depends on the imagination and the memory, he now came to learn that there is a vast and significant difference between "learning" and "*lernen*." *Lernen* is much more a state of being, a mode of active learning, of getting involved and struggling with a text. The goal is not for the learner to acquire new or more knowledge, but rather for the learner to be acquired, taken over by the text. This represented a whole new way of thinking, a whole new way of being for Heilman.

Brady (1990) said that autobiography is the process of reconstructing the unity of life across time. For Heilman, this was demonstrated by his growth in understanding as he moves from station to station. At this next "station" Heilman, was challenged to rethink the value and role of studying and learning in an individual life. In a conversation Heilman had regarding the value of a university education, he quoted Menachem Reichler as saying,

> You acquired a great deal: you learned nothing. If you have come to acquire Torah as if it were one of the subjects you learned in the university, you will never learn it. The Torah is the way to reach the Master of the Universe. It is a pathway, not an acquisition. You will never finish it; you will never get a degree. (p. 117)

Through this Heilman was encouraged not to confuse the ends with the means. Study of the Torah was a means to an end, it was not the end itself. Heilman recognized

his confusion about the terms *pathway* and *acquisition*. Menachem Reichler also helped him see the difference between the inner and the outer heart.

> Are these obstacles? You have said yourself that you wish to be searched. You know that there are two ways of saying "my heart": "*leb*'" and "*levavi*." The first refers to the outer heart, the sort we show to one another, the one from which the love of one man for another can come. But "*levavi*," the heart of which the psalmist writes, is the inner heart, the one into which the love of God may reach. That is what must be purified. (p. 118)

Menachem further said,

> You are right: you must not *lern* Torah alone. The Rebbe also taught us that there is a soul in the world through which all interpretations of the Torah are revealed. That is the soul of the teacher. But to find a teacher whose soul can be attached to your own, you must find out first what is the character of your own soul—and that is not easy, because, as the Rebbe explained, anyone who wishes to understand the Torah must bring forth an interpretation from his own heart. (p. 120)

During the course of his journey, Heilman entered into the synagogue of the Bratslaver Hasidim, in an attempt to find Menachem Reichler. While waiting for him to appear, Heilman wandered among the vast volumes of books and began to immerse himself in the teachings of those books. It was not long before he found himself in a circle in which someone was reading text from Reb Nahman's stories. He was captivated when he heard this reader read the text, "If you believe yourself capable of destruction, then believe you are capable of repair" (p. 127). Heilman went on to say,

> The line from the text startled me from my reverie. I thought I hadn't been listening or following, and suddenly here was something that had penetrated my consciousness. I hadn't meant to do so, but almost instinctively I responded: "And how does one carry out the repair? (p. 127)

The reader's response to this question was, "It depends what it is that one needs to repair—himself or the world? Repair, however, must always begin with the person himself, for only when we are all repaired and made whole can we hope to make over the world" (p. 128).

The reader went on to explain that sometimes this process of repair is one of growing, and at other times it is one of diminishing. He said, "So you see, for some people repair requires them to shrink from what they have been before the holy spirit can enter them, while others must fill themselves up slowly and gradually from the fountain of Torah until they have grown sufficiently" (p. 130).

All of this began to settle onto and into Heilman. This idea of "repairing" and "filling," taken together with his renewed interest in prayer and community, resulted in an internal light being pointed in the direction he must take. Now it was up to him to take it.

One of the key events on which Heilman reminisced was the celebration of the Sabbath. On the Jewish calendar this is the height of the week, a day of joy and celebration. It was an acquaintance of his from the United States who told him where to go to experience a "lively" celebration.

Heeding the wisdom in his friend's advice Heilman traveled to this "lively" celebration. Nahman was the name of the man, or cantor, who led the time of worship. He literally became a different person when worship began. He was changed, transformed, and carried away. Heilman described him in the following manner: "He seemed to have become transformed. No longer aware of anyone around him, he closed his eyes and then opened them to focus off into the middle distance. I saw that he was seeing something that I could not myself see—at least, not yet" (p. 138).

A new way had been defined. Greater understanding had begun to take place. A map of sorts had been developed. But the act of appropriation had yet to be undertaken. Heilman saw people who had lost themselves in the search for meaning and significance.

As he reflected and wrote, he recognized that although this "new way" seemed to serve others, it was not his possession.

It was experiencing the Sabbath that started to bring it all together for Heilman. He recognized the intensity of this conflict between observer and participant, and between the social scientist and the Jew. The role of the observer and the social scientist were really means of avoiding what was meaningful and significant.

Heilman proceeded to describe the turmoil beginning to take place deep within the recesses of his soul. It was the struggle between observer and participant, between the social scientist and the Jew. He said of this turmoil,

> The *neshama yetara*, that extra soul one is supposed to acquire on the Sabbath, was struggling to come out. . . . I thought for a moment about something I had once read somewhere about entities in this world which act upon us but which we do not recognize because we have never bothered to encounter them face to face. . . . My talent for turning myself into an observer, one who would distance himself from the action, was, I supposed, a way to prevent myself from having to see or feel this sort of thing. (p. 139)

Through this experience, the celebration of the Sabbath, the experience of "hearing in these prayers words I had not ever heard so clearly" (p. 140), Heilman was brought face to face with the Sabbath in a way he never before had experienced. He had celebrated the Sabbath before; that was not the issue. The issue was, he never had celebrated in this way. This had opened his eyes and forced him to look at the quintessential question, "Who am I?" He said of this experience, "The people around me now looked different too. Nahman had peeled back their veneers to reveal another aspect. I had been wrong. They were not at all like me—at least, not now. Or maybe I wasn't who I thought I was" (p. 141). We begin to see that, through the construction of this narrative, his self-identity began to change (Eakin, 1999) and the struggle within began to find expression as he reflected and wrote even more.

This struggle with the two ultimate questions any of us face—Who am I? and What is real?—led Heilman back to Menachem for further consultation. In his residence, Menachem took Heilman through a series of questions in an effort to bring closure to this self-directed learning activity Heilman had undertaken. But, as in any valuable learning experience, the closure was something only Heilman could bring to and on himself.

Heilman began by relating to Menachem his (Heilman's) desire to find a *chavruse* and to engage in the activity of *lernen*. Part of the path to finding these ends was to locate the proper teacher. Heilman said, "But you told me that only if I discovered the character of my heart of hearts would I be able to find the proper teacher" (p. 156). Menachem's response was, "And did I say I would do that for you? Did I not tell you that you had to take in the burning coals of Torah in order to purify yourself? Did you do that?" (p. 156).

The light in Heilman's heart was beginning to flicker. In a certain sense, Menachem had allowed Heilman to undergo a variety of *chavruse* experiences in an attempt to bring to light the fact that this pilgrimage was his and his alone. He, Heilman, must undertake *lernen* of his own accord. Menachem ended their time together by relaying a sort of parable to Heilman. He told him the story of a man who visited Rizhyner Rebbe in search of wisdom related to the "light" he felt when he studied and the lack of this "light" when he stopped. Rizhyner Rebbe's response was,

> That is just as when a man walks through the woods on a dark night, and for a time another joins him, lantern in hand, but at the crossroads they part and the first must grope his way on alone. But if a man carries his own light with him, he need not be afraid of any darkness. Do you understand? It is time for you to stop looking for someone else to lead you, for someone else's lantern. You must at last learn to study on your own. (p. 158)

Ownership. This is what he lacked. All of his life had been spent looking for someone else to aid in his discovery process. It was time to take up the mantle on his own and make his faith his own. Life is a process of interpretation and reinterpretation, and of

trying to make sense of and derive meaning from past experience. But these processes do not produce change or transformation until people exert their will and take action on what it is they think they have learned (Brady, 1990; Nelson, 1994). This is where the world turned to word is acted upon (Freeman, 1993).

Learning Through Appropriation

It finally came together for Heilman as he reflected on his last days in Jerusalem. He had allowed himself to become a participant. Now he had to return home, thereby taking up the role of an observer once again. Heilman's ultimate struggle with the observer-participant dichotomy occurred on his trip on bus number 9. He said early on,

> In each neighborhood, the people getting on and off the bus change. And if one allows himself to become imaginatively transformed with each turn—to become, as I did on occasion, a part of what he observes—the ride can be a sort of spiritual journey through Jewish life. Today I had joined the tour in the precincts of Orthodoxy and allowed myself to be taken away to another domain. (p. 162)

Reading Heilman's description of this journey leaves the reader feeling as though he or she is watching Waiting for Godot. In a sense, Heilman was waiting for something, but he did not truly know what that something was. He said , "And like the old folks of Bukhara, I also waited for the great salvation that was to come—although just what sort of salvation would save the likes of me I did not really know" (p. 162).

He thought the answer might be in the midst of the "right" *chavruse*, but he was never able to find the "right" one. He thought the answer might be in books, but he finally realized that "this time the library would not steady me" (p. 163). He went on to say,

> These books mainly told one how to deal with "going native"; but what I had always feared might happen had now begun to happen: I was "going stranger." My journey to Jerusalem in the footsteps of Yochanan be Zakkai, I had believed, would enable me to share in an experience that had always remained on the periphery of my life. I had not, however, expected to be swallowed up by it

> completely—to become only a participant; but neither had I supposed I would have to escape to the distance of being purely an observer. Yet now I could neither find my way in, nor could I any longer tolerate being outside. (p. 163)

This is where his situation became his story; where the narrator became the author. Heilman realized the irony and the antinomy inherent in living. He could not get inside, nor could he tolerate being outside the community. This was the tension that created a story out of his situation.

Things finally came together for Heilman when he met Ian, a gentleman who worked for the bank, performing currency exchange functions. Ian invited Heilman to Heichal Baruch, his chavruse. It was there that Heilman's struggle with various dichotomies, observer-participant, native-stranger came together. Several things the rav said during Heilman's involvement there brought light to his situation. During one session the rav said, "Gentlemen. This is not an easy piece of Gemara. We must struggle to give it meaning" (p. 176). Struggle for meaning; this was at the core of his pilgrimage. In addition, he discovered it was through the use of metaphor that this meaning could be found and that he could bridge the gap between his two worlds—the world of the Jew and the world of the university professor.

Heilman's sense of confidence grew when he was asked to comment on some text. His comment, "The commentaries of the Tosphot explain that he who does not learn the Oral Tradition will be buried by the dense weight of Scripture" (p. 183), revealed much of what happened to him while in Jerusalem. The rav summed it up when he said, "The Talmud, gentlemen, is our Jewishness; it is our mark of distinction, the emblem of our understanding. We do not *lern Gemara* simply to acquire knowledge; we do it to preserve our Jewish lives" (p. 184).

All of Heilman's steps in self-directed learning could take him only so far. He came to understand the role and importance of the *chavruse*, of *lernen*, and of the Talmud. But only he as a Jew had access to the mantle, and this was something that he had to don for himself. Self-directed learning activities could not give him understanding, an inner awareness of the truth. He had to come by this on his own. And finally, as Menachem reminded him, it was not about possessing the knowledge contained in books. Rather it is "about people who are possessed by their books" (p. 193). "How much of the Talmud has gone through you?" (p. 195).

Bruner (1995) claimed there is no such thing as a life as lived. All is a reconstruction from past events and experiences. McAdams (1996), Freeman (1993), and others would concur with Bruner on this subject. What is real is the reconstruction and interpretation. Authentic selfhood is defined in this manner.

The "autobiographical process" (Bruner, 1995) is a means of regaining authority over an individual life (Brady, 1990). To allow oneself to become imaginatively transformed, that is the secret. But we must acknowledge that it is not a once-and-for-all event. Rather, it is a continual struggle both to find and to gain meaning. The role of imagination was best described by Nelson (1994) when he said, "Imagination functions in knowing as a persistent questioning of all that mismatches between what we see in our critical reflection on experience and what we usually name as what we know" (p. 396). This is a process that requires planting before there is harvesting. Menachem said it well. "According to the effort is the reward" (Heilman, p. 195).

Summary

In both autobiographies, the writers made their discoveries through critical reflection on past experiences (Brady, 1990; Bruner, 1995; Mezirow, 1990, 1991; Nelson,

1994) and then conveyed these discoveries through the mechanism of language. The revelatory power inherent in language (Freeman, 1993), together with its ability to create "shades of deeper meaning" (Gornick, 2001a) and to unveil "inner plots" (Conway, 1998), was used to transform the writers' lives. Both authors created dialogue destined for specific ears, ears that could relate to these experiences. Lejeune (1989) referred to this as a pact. Robinson (1998) created a slightly different image in an essay on the subject of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In this essay she stated,

> Theology may proceed in the manner of a philosophical treatise or a piece of textual criticism, but it always begins by assuming major terms. And all of them, being imbedded in Scripture and tradition, behave altogether differently from discursive language. To compound the problem, Christian thinkers since Jesus have valued paradox as if it were resolution. So theology is never finally anything but theology, words about God, proceeding from the assumptions that God exists and that we know about him in a way that allows us to speak about him. Bonhoeffer calls these truths of the church "a word of recognition among friends." He invokes this language of recognition and identification in attempting to make the church real and aware of itself, with all that implied when he wrote. For him word is act. And, for him, it was. (p. 117)

Hampl and Heilman both wrote as though they were engaged in "a word of recognition among friends." Each drew on traditions, images, symbols, and language specific to both their religious backgrounds and their groups of "friends." Their styles were casual, and their intention was not to convince or argue but rather to discuss and to share discoveries they had made with whoever wanted to listen. Each performed the act of converting the world into word in order to act upon it (Freeman, 1993).

The story that resulted for both Hampl and Heilman was one of discovery, of growth in understanding of themselves and others, and of the development of deeper meanings into the activities and interactions of their respective lives. Their goal was not so much to rewrite their respective pasts (Freeman, 1993) as it was to unify their respective worlds, to collapse the sacred and the secular into one, to provide some sense

of order to their lives (Brady, 1990). Neither writer had any idea what to expect from such an undertaking. There was no outline, no set of learning objectives to be met, no goals to strive for, no plans to follow. Yet, the end result was a changed life, a change in perspective, a deeper understanding (Dickerson, 1989).

Certainly we could argue that this undertaking by both Hampl and Heilman was an undertaking in self-directed learning. Knowles (1975) described self-directed learning in the following manner:

> In its broadest meaning, "self-directed learning" describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. Other labels found in the literature to describe this process are "self-planned learning," "inquiry method," "independent learning," "self-education," "self-instruction," "self-teaching," "self-study," and "autonomous learning." (p. 18)

We saw in these autobiographies how a self could voice itself into being (Gornick, 2001a) through the "autobiographical process" (Bruner, 1995). Corrections were made, meaning was established, and learning transpired, all as a result of remembering, reflecting, and rewriting (Brady, 1990; Bruner, 1995; Freeman, 1993; McAdams, 1993; Merriam & Clark, 1993; Nelson, 1994).

But what these writers did and what happened to them, while self-directed for all intents and purposes, was not adequately characterized by self-directed learning theory alone. In a sense we might say that self-directed learning theory is necessary, but not sufficient, to the descriptive process.

So what else is needed? The answer to this question comes from the realm of autobiographical theory, particularly as it pertains to what I have chosen to call the "autobiography as linguistic construction of the self" and "autobiography as a means of adult learning and transformation."

Learning for both Heilman and Hampl took place in very similar fashions. Both writers went away from their respective homes. They returned to the historical location of their respective faith communities, and wrote about their experience. In particular, both writers walked away from their autobiographies with a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, two fundamental realities. These fundamental realities were (a) the reality that active involvement is the key to greater understanding and (b) the reality of the efficacy of prayer.

Comments Heilman made that support this idea of involvement include the following:

> As I stood in Mintzer's cellar, it struck me that until now I had spent most of my life within the domains of Esau's kingdom and the only way that I could ever allow the kingdom of Jacob to begin was to free myself from the domination of Western and Christian ideas. . . . I would have to plunge into the world that until now I had only been visiting. (p. 105)

The idea of "plunging" into this new world was corroborated by Rizhyner Rebbe when he said, "Do you understand? It is time for you to stop looking for someone else to lead you, for someone else's lantern. You must at last learn to study on you own" (p. 158). "Plunging into the world," "getting in there," and "learning to study on your own" all point to the extreme significance of becoming involved. Transformation and learning are dependent on this action. Hampl articulated this need for involvement, and in so doing spoke for both herself and Heilman when she said, "I knew that I must set out on the trail. That, too, was instinct: I didn't know how to think about the past without *going* somewhere" (p. 56).

In a very real sense for both of these writers, it was the act of creating their individual autobiographies that made them different, that transforms them and helped them see life in a new and different way. This process is what Freeman (1993) called

"rewriting" the self. Dickerson (1989) referred to it as a process of composing, the end result being to establish "shades of deeper meaning" (p. 140).

Finally, both Hampl and Heilman talked about the role of the imagination in their learning and creating processes. When Alma asked whether she wrote from her life or from her imagination, Hampl responded, "I write from my life *and* from imagination. That's what it is to write about—or from—the past. No doubt I write about the past because I want it to *be* the past" (p. 55). She proceeded to talk about reaching into her past and dusting off old relics to see what they held for her. For her, narrative formation was an interaction among memory, imagination, and language.

Heilman made a similar discovery and admission when he said, "But all this was not to be a part of some lessons to be intellectually assimilated. Rather, the learning I did came in through the imagination"(p. 61). For him as well, the interaction of memory, imagination, and language resulted in the discovery of an inner life plot (Conway, 1998) and the formation of a personal narrative.

In this chapter, we explored learning that occurred in the lives of two authors as a result of their religious pilgrimages. According to Dahlgren (1984), when people learn something they have grasped its meaning. When they verbalize the meaning, they transform it into knowledge (Jarvis, 1992). People make meaning of an experience by interpreting it, and when they use the interpretation to guide decision making or action, the meaning-making becomes learning (Mezirow, 1990a, 1990b).

In the cases of both Hampl and Heilman, the process of interpreting previous experience(s) led to learning, or equivalently meaning-making (Mezirow, 1991). In each case, understanding of the sacred and the secular was brought closer to being one and the same. In the next chapter we will look at learning that leads to a greater understanding of

living in the autobiographies of two people who dealt with major, debilitating illness in their lives.

CHAPTER 3

LEARNING THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF ILLNESS

Introduction

This chapter explores learning that occurred in the lives of two authors as the result of writing about their experience with illness. Two additional autobiographical accounts are used in this exploration. The first is An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness by Kay Redfield Jamison. This is a narrative account of one person's journey to acknowledge and accept the fact that she did indeed suffer from bi-polar disorder, a disease she inherited from her father. But more than this, it is an account of someone's realizing that this disease defined who she was, and learning to accept this. The second autobiography is A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing by Reynolds Price. This is a narrative account of one person's struggle with cancer. It was a struggle he did not choose, yet it was a struggle from which he discovered a new life, one that bore little resemblance to the old.

I summarize the story underlying each autobiography, drawing special attention to times and substance of learning. At the end of each autobiographical section, I provide a summary of the lessons each author learned through his or her unique self-directed learning process. The final section is a brief summary of the chapter.

Illness is a subject well suited for the self-directed learner and autobiographical narrative. Caffarella (1994) related her experience with breast cancer and how her role as a self-directed learner helped her navigate the learning process itself and grow in her awareness and understanding of the illness. She claimed to have learned three

fundamental truths from this experience. All of these truths closely paralleled those experienced by the authors I selected for this study.

Caffarella's first claim was that "pain, both physical or emotional, can serve as a contradictory force in the learning process" (p. 7). As such it served as a motivator, propelling her to learn more about her condition. Second, she claimed that "having as much information as possible was critical for me to make sound decisions" (p. 7). Decision making is firmly grounded on the assumption that the decision maker has adequate information upon which to base a decision. Finally, she said, "I learned that learning in adulthood does not usually happen in a vacuum" (p. 7). People were instrumental in encouraging her, directing her, and answering her questions.

All in all, narrative is a valuable and viable instrument for the process of learning from and through personal experience. Fallot (1998) showed the effect narrative can and does have in the process of recovering from mental illness. Narrative is instrumental in the structuring of human experience.

> The stories people tell about their lives call attention to the need to make sense of—to discover or construct meaning in response to—life events and circumstances. Personal narratives have the power not only to disclose the individual's core values and implicit philosophies but to shape ongoing life activities—to open up some possibilities and to constrict others. (p. 35)

Kay Redfield Jamison and Reynolds Price demonstrated how this is accomplished.

Kay Redfield Jamison: An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness

Preparation for Learning or a Story Must Be Told

Kay Redfield Jamison's situation was significantly different from that of Reynolds Price. Whereas Price was coming to grips both with a disease state he had and with the changes it had wrought in his life, Jamison was dealing with a disease state she

had. Her maniac-depressive illness (MDI) was intrinsic to her human condition. She would never be free from it. Essentially, it defined who she was.

"The Chinese believe that before you can conquer a beast you first must make it beautiful," Jamison wrote (p. 5). By writing this autobiography, Jamison accomplished this objective. She faced her "beast," wrestled with it, and in the end she made it beautiful. For her, the act of writing was the act of wrestling. And the result was the creation of a new story, a rewritten self (Freeman, 1993).

Jamison wrote as an outside observer looking back over the course of her life in an attempt to fit the pieces together and to make sense of it. She covered a lot of ground in a short amount of time. We are told about her life as though Sgt. Friday from the classic TV show Dragnet were asking the questions: "Just the facts, ma'am." Save for one significant relationship, associations with other people do not play a significant part in Jamison's story. This may be due in part to the nature of her debilitating disease. Depression in all its forms is a battle with isolation, loneliness, and self-centeredness. The victim ceases to participate in life and instead becomes an isolated observer.

The autobiography is descriptive in nature. Large expanses of time are covered in just a few pages. Jamison pulled no punches in the language she used. Terms she used to describe herself include *madness* and *psychotic*. Language was much more a tool than it was an art form for her. She was a psychiatrist by training and consequently tended to write as an objective observer, even if the subject was her own life. She did not attempt to reconstruct conversations or scenes in an attempt to help herself better understand events.

Jamison acknowledged up front that for ten years she had sensed something was wrong, but she did not seek any sort of help in attempting to understand what was wrong. In a sense, this autobiography fulfilled two purposes. One purpose was to help Jamison

avoid repeating the same mistake, which was remaining silent when she had a story to tell. The second was to derive meaning from her experience by writing about it.

Jamison said at the very beginning,

> I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues so openly will be on my personal and professional life, but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent. I am tired of hiding, tired of misspent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide. (p. 7)

This was her acknowledgement that she must make the beast beautiful; she had no alternative. In a sense she was fulfilling what Palmer (2000) called her "vocation." She acknowledged there was a gap between herself and her true authentic self. The very act of writing was what she did to make the beast beautiful and to bridge this gap. She took as her starting point Robert Lowell's essential question, "*Yet why not say what happened?*" (p. 8).

Jamison was born and raised in a military family. Her father was a career Air Force officer, first and foremost a scientist, secondarily a jet pilot. She began her narrative by reminiscing about a plane crash that took the life of its pilot. One day, out of nowhere, a plane flew devastatingly close to the playground of the elementary school she was attending. All of the children in her class ran outside, only to see the plane crash and explode in a huge ball of flames. For Jamison, the pilot became a hero. The explosion and ensuing death of the pilot seemed to implant within her a sense of duty and helped her realize that duty and meaning are closely related. Ideals, goals, and duty all came together for her at an early age and seemed to provide the basic "nutrients" for her growth in the years to come. The irony in all of this was that the pilot's loss of life seemed to open her eyes to the reality of death and helped make it a constant companion throughout her life.

Jamison saw herself as fairly well adjusted, happy, and the possessor of many friends in her growing-up years. She noted that when both she and her sister were forced to deal with their respective psychological demons, her sister saw these demons as being internal to herself, part and parcel of her life, her family, and her world. Jamison, on the other hand, saw her demon, MDI, as being external to herself, something at war with her true self. This difference in perspective seemed to be instrumental in Jamison's ability to come to grips with her disease and tell her story. She set out on a journey of sorts to tell the story of her battle with MDI. She ended up acknowledging that MDI was very much a part of who she was, and she learned to accept this. She made the beast beautiful.

Part of the reason, and undoubtedly a very large part, Jamison was able to deal with her MDI was her relationship with her mother. She described her mother in the following fashion: "My mother . . . was always the one my friends wanted to sit down and talk with: we played with my father; we talked with my mother" (p. 17). Her mother's belief that "it is not the cards that one is dealt in life, it is how one plays them" proved to be significant in Jamison's battle with MDI and her survival over the subsequent decades. She described generations on her mother's side as being people who were "reliable, stable, honorable, and saw things through" (p. 19). Jamison built on this foundation and further described her mother as one who could "love and learn, listen and change" (p. 19). This ability of her mother, coupled with her desire to never give up, was the driving force behind Jamison's ability to fight her MDI.

In this section Jamison identified a compelling reason or force that was driving her to tell her story (McAdams, 1993, 1996) and create her narrative (Bruner, 1987, 1995, 1999). It was something that demanded her attention and would not let her alone until she acted on it.

Learning Through Change

As Jamison developed her autobiography, she began to understand why she was the way she was. Family background, genetic links, geographical movement, and the actual experience of MDI episodes all came together to help her define who she was.

Jamison provided a brief glimpse into her background and the changes that happened to her and around her as she grew up. As she looked back over her life, she focused on herself at the age of 15, as the time when things began to change. Her father decided to leave the Air Force and head off into industry. This necessitated moving from Washington, D.C., to southern California. Jamison found herself in a new environment and was extremely unhappy. It was during this period that she noticed several things. First, although they were living together, her parents were essentially estranged (p. 34). In addition, she began to see her father's struggles with moods and what she called the "blackness of depression" (p. 34). Finally, as she watched her father struggle with these black moods, she discovered that she, too, was a victim of such moods. She was a senior in high school when she experienced her first episode of MDI. She recalled not knowing what it was, but simply knowing she traveled emotionally from a state of extreme energy and feeling "high" to one of extreme fatigue and despair and feeling very "low."

Jamison described the oscillation she experienced between manic and depressive states as beyond imagination. She described certain times as when "my mind had turned on me" (p. 38). She vaulted from a state of total exhilaration and high enthusiasm to one of deep, dark despair in which thoughts of suicide plagued her (p. 38).

After high school, Jamison entered the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) (p. 41). Her introduction to research, particularly medical research, occurred during a freshman psychology class. It was during this class that she came to experience

the lack of clearly defined boundaries between what she called "bizarre and original thought" (p. 47). Responses she gave to the Rorschach, imaginative responses she called them, oscillated between bizarre and clever, so much so that her professor ended up giving her a lab assistant position in his research lab. This turned out to be the beginning of her academic career and of her journey to authentic selfhood.

Environment played a critical role in Jamison's journey and struggle with MDI. Journeys she took to England and Scotland to study and do further research always turned out to be periods of refreshing and times when she was able to put things in perspective. She took the first trip two years after entering UCLA. She applied for and obtained a grant to study at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland (p. 48). As she recalled, "I leaned a lot, and had great fun as I did so" (p. 50). The enthusiasm and renewed energy she received from this experience permitted her to return to the States, finish at UCLA, complete her Ph.D. work, marry, and divorce. In addition to all of this, as she entered the professorate, she decided she was "ravingly psychotic" (p. 63).

But "ravingly psychotic" was not the half of it. Up to that point, Jamison's experience with "ravingly psychotic" had been what she read in textbooks and case studies. Now she began to experience this state of being personally. The wild, uncontrollable swings between the extreme highs and the extreme lows were unimaginable. She described this experience in the following way:

> *When you're high it's tremendous. The ideas and feelings are fast and frequent like shooting stars, and you follow them until you find better and brighter ones. Shyness goes, the right words and gestures are suddenly there, the power to captivate others a felt certainty. . . . But, somewhere, this changes. The fast ideas are far too fast, and there are far too many; overwhelming confusion replaces clarity. Memory goes. Humor and absorption on friends' faces are replaced by fear and concern. Everything previously moving with the grain is now against—you are irritable, angry, frightened, uncontrollable, and enmeshed totally in the blackest caves of the mind. You never knew those caves were there. It will never end, for madness carves its own reality.* (p. 67)

In 1974, Jamison joined the faculty of the Department of Psychiatry at UCLA. She recalled both meeting her future psychiatrist at the Chancellor's garden party and being relatively "normal" for almost a year. And then it returned. Her mind started to run at an increasingly faster rate. Ideas besieged her from everywhere. She became more and more ecstatic. She undertook huge spending sprees. She recalled spending upwards of $30,000 during two of her manic attacks. Then her emotional roller coaster reached the top of the hill, and she started the descent. Darkness began to enter her mind. She remembered pulling out her old Rolling Stones albums and sinking further into depression. She recalled hallucinations taking hold of her. She saw visions and finally concluded that she was insane (p. 82). It was at this point in her experience that she crossed the line between doctor and patient. She became a patient, entered into psychotherapy sessions, and began taking lithium.

Changes in her condition left her feeling helpless. For Jamison, this disability was always in the way. She saw it as something she must defeat and overcome. It would take an encounter in a loving relationship before she would be able to accept her condition and act accordingly. As she reflected on her experience, Jamison used memories in an effort to reconstruct events and situations and procure some sort of additional insight (Brookfield, 1987; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Learning Through Love and Acceptance

In this section, Jamison came face to face with her illness. She continued to recount these horrific episodes of highs and lows. It was during this period that she entered into a relationship that changed forever both her view of others and that of herself.

Her states of euphoria and uncontrolled bliss were states of being she recounted with some pleasure. She talked at one point of being so ecstatic that she felt as though she were flying past the rings of Saturn (p. 90). She said of this experience, "I saw and experienced that which had been only dreams, or fitful fragments of aspiration" (p. 90). In fact, these episodes of euphoria were so overwhelming that she attributed them to her initial reluctance to take lithium. The periods of depression that followed these "highs" were worth enduring for the sake of the highs themselves.

Acceptance of this disease state was not easy for her. Early on, she fought acceptance quite readily. She was reluctant to take lithium, and when she started to do so, finding the right dosage was problematic. The social stigma of admitting she had the disease was not easy for her to accept. Through all that she experienced, she became much more understanding of the patients with whom she had to deal. The "subtle, and not so subtle, resistance to treatment shown by many patients with manic depressive illness" (p. 105) became real and understandable to her because she experienced it first hand.

The years 1974 through 1981 were important in Jamison's life because they marked a key entrance into the academic community and a key acceptance of her personal situation. During these years, Jamison worked for and attained tenure at UCLA. Also during these years, she divorced her first husband, attempted suicide, acknowledged she was "psychotic," struggled with lithium levels, grew very close to her mother who helped her through her struggles, and started the UCLA Affective Disorders Clinic.

The act or process of falling in love started Jamison on her way to making her beast beautiful. It was David, a visiting professor at UCLA, a psychiatrist on leave from the Royal Army Medical Corps, who awakened her to this process. He arrived at UCLA

six months after Jamison's faculty appointment began, and they hit it off immediately. She recalled the meeting and the relationship vividly. They found they had many interests in common. They liked each other immediately, and as a result she found herself opening up to him quite easily.

Over the course of 18 months, Jamison and David corresponded with each other, thereby keeping the relationship alive. During this time, her marriage finally ended, and she wrote David a letter telling him about it. One day, she returned to her office to find David sitting there waiting for her to return. They spent several days together, after which he returned to England, but not before inviting her to spend several weeks with him. She accepted his invitation and traveled to England to fulfill her dream.

It was during this visit that Jamison began to sense some changes in her medical condition. As she reflected on this time, she sensed that perhaps these changes in her mental condition were the result not only of drugs, but also of a change in her environmental situation, including that of a loving, accepting relationship. One day when she was visiting David in England, Jamison opened her purse and spilled all her lithium tablets on the floor of a great cathedral. When she hesitantly opened up to David and told him of her MDI, his comment to her was, "I say. *Rotten* luck" (p. 144).

David's acceptance of Jamison and her disease in some ways changed her acceptance of herself. His acceptance of her enabled Jamison to accept herself. But David died. At his funeral, she was reluctant to step forward at his gravesite. However, step forward she did, and in so doing she said, "He again pushed me forward to watch, to take it in, to believe it to be so" (p. 150). David proved to be the person who accepted her as she was and who saw her as a person of intrinsic worth. To him she was a person with MDI, and not a MDI case who happened to be a person.

David's impact on Jamison's life was profound. Shortly after his death she said, "The accumulated pain and uncertainty from David's death, as well as from my own illness, for several years very much lowered and narrowed my expectations of life" (p. 153).

In light of this loss, Jamison decided to take a year-long sabbatical in England, ostensibly to study mood disorders in eminent British artists and writers and also to begin work on a textbook related to MDI. During her stay, she visited David's grave in an attempt to put this relationship behind her and move on. What she learned was that her relationship with David has affected her far beyond her awareness of it. She offered significant insights into this change by saying, "David had loved and accepted me in an extraordinary way; his steadiness and kindness had sustained and saved me, but he was gone. . . . And now, four years after his death, I found a very different kind of love and a renewed belief in life" (p. 159).

Because of her relationship with David, and because of this time of reflection at his grave some four years after his death, Jamison was able to pull herself together and go on. With this renewed vigor, she entered into a new relationship with someone she had met several years earlier on one of her previous journeys to England. Because of the depth and beauty of this new relationship, she was able to cut back on the amount of lithium she was taking (p. 161). This very act of reducing her lithium intake changed her perspective. She said of this, "A few days after lowering my dose, I was walking in Hyde Park, along the side of the Serpentine, when I realized that my steps were literally bouncier than they had been and that I was taking in sights and sounds that previously had been filtered through think layers of gauze" (p. 161).

Learning Self-Acceptance, or This Is Who I Am

In this section we see things come together for Jamison. Through the powerful use of words and images (Conway, 1998) she brought herself into a new state of being (Dickerson, 1989). The world that she had made into word now asked to be acted upon (Freeman, 1993).

The personal acceptance Jamison received helped her redefine herself and accept herself and her disability. The combined experience of living in England for a year and being part of a loving and accepting relationship renewed her heart and mind. She claimed, "Life had become worth not losing" (p. 163). With this new attitude, she moved into a new modus operandi and began to do research, write, and read autobiographies of patients struggling with MDI. She also arrived at a new understanding of love. This became a precursor to her falling in love and marrying a neuropsychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health. She said, "I was late to understand that chaos and intensity are not substitutes for lasting love, nor are they necessarily an improvement on real life" (p. 170).

Her newfound experience with and understanding of love and loving relationships carried over into her professional life. She recounted her experience of talking with a Danish psychiatrist, Mogens Schou, who told her of his own family's struggle with MDI and how this had provided an impetus for him to study the disease. She said of this encounter,

> Talking with Mogens was extremely helpful, in part because he aggressively encouraged me to use my own experiences in my research, writing, and teaching, and in part because it was very important to me to be able to talk with a senior professor who not only had some knowledge of what I had been through, but who had used his own experiences to make a profound difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. (pp. 189-190)

Because of this encounter, she was encouraged to be open and freely discuss her illness. However, this encouragement did not come without some struggle and hint of reservation. She talked of how others might perceive her if she was open and honest regarding her struggle with MDI. But her biggest fear was suffering a loss of meaning and significance if she was too open and honest. She said,

> Finally, I am deeply wary that by speaking publicly or writing about such intensely private aspects of my life, I will return to them one day and find them bleached of meaning and feeling. . . . I am concerned that the experiences will become remote, inaccessible, and far distant, behind me; I fear that the experiences will become those of someone else rather than my own. (p. 202)

She proceeded to acknowledge that by doing this she was laying down her "cloak of academic objectivity" (p. 203). By doing this, she donned the cloak of the participant and became an experiential learner as well.

It is interesting that what started out as a need on Jamison's part to "let the cat out of the bag" regarding her struggle with MDI ended up being an exposé on the subject of love and its importance to living with the disease. As a matter of fact, she ended her autobiography with a definitive statement that she would not change anything. This disease was a part of who she was, and it was critical to her definition of herself. She said,

> That darkness is an integral part of who I am, and it takes no effort of imagination on my part to remember the months of relentless blackness and exhaustion, or the terrible efforts it took in order to teach, read, write, see patients, and keep relationships alive. (p. 210)

Her experience with MDI, the wars she had fought and would always fight, were a real part of who she was. And ironically, she concluded that she would not change anything.

> The vividness that mania infuses into one's experiences of life creates strong, keenly recollected states, much as war must, and love and early memories surely do. Because of this, there is now, for me, a rather bittersweet exchange of a

> comfortable and settled present existence for a troubled but intensely lived past. (p. 211)

What Jamison learned through this self-directed learning process was that the roles played by love and acceptance were critical. In fact, they were what gave meaning to the whole experience. They were what enabled her to say, "It's OK. This is who I am."

> We all build internal sea walls to keep at bay the sadnesses of life and the often overwhelming forces within our minds. . . . But love is, to me, the ultimately more extraordinary part of the breakwater wall: it helps to shut out the terror and awfulness, while, at the same time, allowing in life and beauty and vitality. (pp. 214-215)

Finally, regarding the writing of this autobiography, Jamison said,

> When I first thought about writing this book, I conceived of it as a book about moods, and an illness of moods, in the context of an individual life. As I have written it, however, it has somehow turned out to be very much a book about love as well: love as sustainer, as renewer, and as protector. (p. 215)

The irony in this autobiography was established right there. What Jamison thought was to be a book about moods, hers in particular, turned out to be something quite different. Also, what she thought was to be an endeavor with primary emphasis on description turned out to be an endeavor characterized by evaluation and judgment. Through the process of writing and creating, she came to see and interpret herself and her situation quite differently.

Brady (1990) asserted that "learning is a process by which human beings attempt to make meaning" (p. 43). Autobiography, in turn, is one channel through which learning can flow, for through it an individual author is able to recompose and reinterpret his or her life.

For Jamison, the effort to reconstruct her past and to tell her story was an exercise in self-directed learning. We see this to be the case as some of the characteristics of the self-directed learner are independence and autonomy (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991) and

individual initiative (Knowles, 1975), all of which characterize Jamison and her endeavor. The very act of writing, of recreating her past, of reliving her past, enabled her to accept who she was (Nelson, 1994).

Despite all her suffering, would Jamison change anything? Her response was, "I have often asked myself whether, given the choice, I would choose to have manic depressive illness. . . . Strangely enough I think I would choose to have it" (p. 217).

This phase of her journey was complete. Narrative and reflection had come together to create something new. And learning is apparent because we see its shape reflected in the establishment of meaning and significance.

An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness is the story of a woman who came to grips with the fact that she suffered from a disease that always had been and always would be with her. In the next section, I review A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing. This is an autobiography in which Reynolds Price wrote about his struggle with cancer, a disease he contracted in his middle years and ultimately defeated. As such, it was not a chronic illness, but rather one that left lifelong scars.

Reynolds Price: A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing

Lifelong Learning and the Role of Exceptional Human Experience

Spear and Mocker (1984), Aslanian and Brickell, (1982), and Mezirow (1990b) discussed the existence of a disorienting event in an individual life as a possible means through which learning that transforms or changes a person's view of the world can occur. Human disease falls within this category, and proved to be the impetus for changes that occurred within Reynolds Price.

Price began his autobiography by stating clearly and succinctly what it was he planed to do: "This is a book about a mid-life collision with cancer and paralysis" (p. vii). He went on to say regarding his purpose,

> That aim is to give, in the midst of an honest narrative, a true record of the visible and invisible ways in which one fairly normal creature entered a trial, not of his choosing, and emerged after a long four years on a new life—a life that's almost wholly changed from the old. The record is offered first to others in physical or psychic trials of their own, to their families and other helpers and then to the curious reader who waits for his or her own devastation. (p. vii)

Because he was unable to locate a document such as this during his time of trial, Price decided to create one.

"It was the best of times," or so it seemed to Price as he entered his 51st year. He had just published a new play based on his 12th book, A Long and Happy Life. He had been teaching English literature at Duke University for some 26 years. Everything was going his way. And then he was asked the question that would change his life forever, "Why are you slapping your left foot on the pavement?" (p. 3).

More and more symptoms begin to manifest themselves. He discovered he could not run (p. 6). He discovered moments of inexplicable paralysis (p. 6). He discovered difficulty in walking in general (p. 8). All of these symptoms led to a dreaded diagnosis —a foreign body of some sort crowding the upper portion of his spinal cord (p. 13). The foreign body turned out to be a malignant tumor (p. 27).

In the meantime, Price began a journey—a journey that would leave him a changed man, a journey that would last well over four years, a journey that would be worse than anything he had ever experienced until that time. But it would be a journey that Price would not want to exchange for anything. It would be a journey that would become a part of him; it would define who he was, and it would leave him new and different.

The change in him and to him began to manifest itself during one of Price's early stays in the hospital. He acknowledged, perhaps for the first time, that life was much bigger than he was and perhaps had more control of him than he did. In a certain sense, he found himself gliding on "auto-pilot." As he awaited the results of medical tests, he said, "Someway I stayed even-keeled after that. The legacy of physical dread I'd got from my hypochondriac father had suddenly left me. . . . Inquisitive to a fault though I'd been all my life, some deep down voice was running me now" (p. 11).

Price described this as a sort of "unfolding" process. He grew in awareness and understanding and acceptance. This new understanding or awareness had an emotional price tag, though. As he came to grips with this "deep down voice" taking over as his "pilot," he said, "I was with two people I trusted as much as anyone alive; they'd never done me the slightest harm. For the first time yet, I broke down and wept" (p. 17).

Coupled to Price's emotional release was a renewed sense of the existence or presence of God. He did not try to develop or understand doctrinal positions, or seek answers to the "Why me?" types of questions. He did not find himself trying to talk himself into a state of belief. Rather, his awakening was an awakening to, or an acceptance of, the existence of God. He found himself attempting to open channels of communication to, and dialogue with God. This seemed to be a natural state of affairs. Belief in and the existence of God were natural presuppositions for Price. Several statements he made early on pointed to these dual ideas of communication channels opening to God and the need to turn his "flight plan" over to the "control center." He said,

> I don't recall indulging in any hard fear or deep soul-searching. Doubtless I prayed for God's will to be worked, and I'm sure I added the usual clear postscript reminding him of my wishes in the matter—he mustn't act on an insufficient sense of my needs. (p. 18)

Pre- and postsurgery, Price related episodes of awareness in which he was cognizant of the difference between his mind and his body. These did not appear to be paranormal or out-of-body experiences as such, but they did constitute marked points in time when he was aware that his body was distinct and separate from himself. Just before surgery he said, "I was gliding at the end of a very long tether, farther out than I'd ever been from my body or mind and entirely at ease (a bedtime dose of Valium, the first of my life, may still have been active)" (p. 25). And right after surgery, as he began the recovery process, he recounted the following:

> And late in the afternoon each day, I'd be overwhelmed by a rising sense of dissociation from my whole body. My mind would seem to lead out, rise above my trunk and limbs and gaze down at them from a helpless nearness. *When can I live again in my body? And where am I now?* (p. 31)

As Price began the process of recovery, a clear and distinct act of war, his awareness of what surrounded him and his understanding of his "self" took some decided turns. Shortly after his surgery, as he began the recovery process, Price recounted his reaction to works by such composers as Bach, Vivaldi, and Handel. He said of their works, "They were pieces I'd known for years, but now I was hearing them as if for the first time" (p. 36). He went on to recount and "wonder" whether perhaps this new awareness of music contributed to his understanding and acceptance of the fact that the tumor was real and a part of himself. He did not identify himself with the tumor, but he did begin to understand that it was a "part" of himself, much like any other organ was a "part" of himself. This understanding that the tumor was "separate from" yet a "part of" himself likely marked the beginning of his road to recovery. He described this awareness in the following manner:

> I wonder now, though, if the steady presence of music around me didn't contribute importantly to my sense of the cancer as a thing with its own rights. Now it sounds a little cracked to describe, but then I often felt that the tumor was

> as much a part of me as my liver or lungs and could call for its needs of space and food. I only hoped that it wouldn't need all of me. In any case, along with the few short poems I was able to write in those early weeks, the music of others—heard as intently as if I'd made it—was the first big weapon in my battery of healing, my own campaign to outlast the eel. War started in earnest when I went home on June 22nd. (p. 36)

As Price began his recovery process, he noticed that he was beginning to experience some strange new sensations. In some respects he saw himself as external to his own body, watching what was going on. He stated, "The strange new sense of being suspended outside my body was also growing more frequent and lending my days an eerie unreality" (p. 38).

Then on July 3, he experienced something, or perhaps more precisely, he encountered someone in a close and intimate manner. He laid the foundation for the recounting of this experience by describing his understanding of the existence of a "merciful power" and the role his parents played in this understanding.

> But I grew no firmer; and on the morning of July 3rd, I had the single strangest experience of my life till now. I've mentioned my tendency to pray, convinced as I am that my life is intended by a sometimes merciful power that's at least connected to, if not identical with, what I believe is the maker of all we know. My means of thinking about that power and its intentions were formed in my early childhood by the texts and rites of an unchurchly Christianity which was passed to me by my parents. (p. 39)

Finally, he came to the experience itself, a personal encounter with Jesus in which Price was assured he would make it through this ordeal.

> So by daylight on July 3rd, morning thoughts of a stiff sobriety were plainly in order. But in the midst of such circular thinking, an actual happening intervened with no trace of warning. I was suddenly not propped in my brass bed or even contained in my familiar house. By the dim new, thoroughly credible light that rose around me, it was barely dawn; and I was lying fully dressed in modern street clothes on a slope by a lake I knew at once. It was the big lake of Kinnereth, the Sea of Galilee, in the north of Israel—green Galilee, the scene of Jesus' first teaching and healing. (p. 42)
>
> I was in my body but was also watching my body from slightly upward and behind. I could see the purple dye on my back, the long rectangle that boxed my thriving tumor.

> Jesus silently took up handfuls of water and poured them over my head and back till water ran down my puckered scar. Then he spoke once—"Your sins are forgiven"—and turned to shore again, done with me.
>
> I came on behind him, thinking in standard greedy fashion, *It's not my sins I'm worried about.* So to Jesus' receding back, I had the gall to say "Am I also cured?"
>
> He turned to face me, no sign of a smile, and finally said two words—"that too." Then he climbed from the water, not looking round, really done with me.
>
> I followed him out and then, with no palpable seam in the texture of time or place, I was home again in my wide bed.
>
> From the moment my mind was back in my room, no more than seconds after I'd left it, I've believed that the event was an external gift, however brief, of an alternate time and space in which to live through a crucial act. (pp. 42-44)

From that point forward, no matter what pain or sorrow he might bear, Price knew he would always be aware of and remember this experience in Kinnereth. In fact, he claimed this experience confirmed two strongly held convictions (p. 45). One was the conviction that Jesus bore some mysterious relation to the Creator. The second was the conviction that the Creator paid closer attention to some creatures than to others.

Jesus' two words, "that too," provided assurance to Price that he would survive. He was not yet aware of all the pain and suffering he must endure. But he knew from that point forward that he would survive. Additional support for this conviction came from two friends, Laird Ellis and Jeff Anderson, who told him without any reservation that he would survive.

We see in this section that the "exceptional human experiences," the encounters Price told us he had with God, provided the strength and the stamina for all that he was about to face. As he continued to reflect and compose, a new self was constructed (Freeman, 1993) and an inner plot discovered (Conway, 1998).

Learning Through Reflection and Friends

Price was given to periods of melancholy. During one of those periods, experienced while he looked into the lives of certain artists and writers who had died at relatively young ages, he noticed that the question "Why me?" never really bothered those people. In fact, the question "Why not me?" seemed more problematic to him. He acknowledged that "fairness" was something he never really expected in his life.

As Price reflects on this, he concluded that this perspective most likely came to him from his parents. He claimed that handed down to him was the idea that a normal life was also sacrificial. In addition, this sacrificial life was to be lived for one of two reasons, either on behalf of others or perhaps for some unknown reason.

The war Price waged against cancer he called a "patch of fate," and he acknowledged that this "patch" felt to him like sacrifice (p. 54). In conjunction with arriving at this understanding or awareness, he acknowledged his use of prayer in yet another manner, that of substitution. He said,

> In prayer I even occasionally tried to offer my trials in substitute for certain others whom I valued and saw in serious pain of their own, but a victim needs to be braver than I to take much comfort from that thin gruel—thin and mysterious (you'll never know if your pain is credited to another's account). (p. 54)

Price's dialogue related to fate and prayer ended with yet another description of that "mysterious" presence he had encountered earlier in this war with cancer. He described this as another "means of what felt like prayer." In his description, he recounted times of waking in the night and feeling as if there were a "patient listener" behind a screen in his room. He told of being able to see the faint outline of a head against the screen. He thought the purpose of this "patient listener" was to help him discover his own "minimal needs and feasible hopes" (p. 54). He described its role in the following manner: "Its reliable presence seemed only to say that I had somehow to build

my life on radical uncertainty, knowing only that I was heard by something more than the loyal but powerless humans near me" (p. 54).

Personal and professional friends, both known and unknown, played significant roles in Price's recovery process. He talked of friends and professionals who urged him to get angry and to bellow his rage (p. 55). Later he talked of an Indian doctor who helped him use the tool of visualization, a tool that enabled him to picture himself well and fighting the disease . . . and winning.

Price spoke of his physical therapist, Diana, as providing further encouragement by relating a dream she had in which she saw Price walking again. He referenced this incident by saying, "And the fact that a highly trained woman had dared to confess to that much concern for my ongoing life was a real contribution to my self-respect, a faculty that every disease aims at and pummels hard" (p. 60).

Letters and communications from friends and colleagues claimed an important place in Price's overall healing process. He spoke of the uplift those pieces of communication brought to him, and just how much all of that meant to him personally. Most important, through all of this communication, he realized how much his "continued presence was wanted apparently by more than myself and the household company" (p. 61).

All that Price experienced to that point—the efficacy of communication from friends and colleagues, the awareness of the presence of God, and the renewed role of prayer in his life—were, in a sense, preparation for a major act of willpower he needed to exert very soon. Pain reached a zenith in his life. Steroids created a sort of "bi-polar" state within him, and he reached the end of his tether. The physician he had leaned on so hard through this entire ordeal recommended further surgery, and even at that he was not

overly optimistic that the surgery would have any lasting benefits. Price was close to acknowledging that the war was over.

But he did not. He acknowledged that the experience at Kinnereth, even though baffling, was very real, and it inspired him to take action. At that key point in time and space, he decided it was time to resist, and the resistance effort was to begin with the demon of pain (p. 69). This was yet another key point in his healing process, a point when he decided he would win—an act of sheer willpower.

Imagination played a significant role in his life and his road to recovery. He discovered it was a viable means of expressing what lay deep within his being. One form of expression Price had given little attention to throughout his life was art—painting and the creation of images. He acknowledged having delved into this arena as a child, but since that time some 45 years earlier he had not done much with it. During his recovery, however, art took on new meaning for him. It was a means of understanding that rational thought processes did not afford him (Dirkx, 1997; Kearney, 1988).

Price confessed that his main problem with art was his inability to capture an "inner light" that he knew existed but that he could not make visible through painting. He classified himself as a "slave to surfaces." As he started playing around with this form of expression again, he found himself painting pictures of Jesus. Whereas prayer had become somewhat rote and stagnant to him, these pictures and this painting process become a new form of prayer. He said of this, "The drawings were a sudden better way, an outcry and an offering" (p. 74).

Price had what he called a "second uncanny experience" (p. 80). During a period when he was feeling especially low, he awoke in the middle of the night. After reflecting on his condition for some time, he found himself looking at the ceiling and asking, "How

much more do I take?" (p. 80). He was at the end of his tether yet again. But as he relived this experience, he recalled ever so vividly hearing a voice saying to him, "More."

The following morning, Price asked his care-giver to call her minister at the Methodist church and ask him to come and administer the sacrament of communion. As Price reflected on the process of receiving communion, he said, "I experienced again the almost overwhelming force which has always felt to me like God's presence" (p. 81). This was yet a second encounter with the overwhelming presence of God in his life.

Time continued to work away at Price's soul. He reacted to his circumstances much like Dorothy did when she landed in the Land of OZ. She slowly looked around and languidly moved about, taking in her new surroundings and wondering just where she was. She was filled with wonder and amazement, rather than with fear. So too, Price seemed to react more like a person experiencing a new setting and a new life than he did someone who was angry at the cards life had dealt him.

What we have seen in this section is the importance Price attached to friends and imagination as he reflected on his battle with cancer. The "inner plot" that Conway (1998) talked about and the "shades of deeper meaning" that Dickerson (1989) mentioned began to acquire form as Price moved on in his reflection process.

Learning That Transforms Life

This section culminates with Price deciding there were definite lessons to be learned from his experience. Although he was not familiar with the language of Kolb (1984) and Dewey (1938), Price would readily concur that experience without reflection is not learning, and that reflection is indeed the "ability for learners to think of their past experiences in order to learn from them" (Kolb, 1984, p. 6).

During the course of an intensive four-week rehabilitation experience, Price came to the realization that walking, complete motor rehabilitation, would not be regained. Messages both spoken and unspoken from friends, doctors, and rehabilitation specialists gradually led him to this conclusion. For a brief moment he wondered whether his surgeon, Dr. Friedman, ever entertained second thoughts as to whether he should have performed risky surgery a year earlier, surgery that, had it been successful, would have resulted in Price's walking again. But Price did not allow himself to go very far down the road of wondering, for he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that what he was experiencing was meant to be. Upon grasping this realization, he said, "What happened in and to me, happened, I more than half believe, for an interesting reason that—nine years later—has begun to be visible. I rest now in that" (p. 100).

Bruner (1995) and Knowles (1980) both believed that what happens to us is not as significant as how we interpret the happening(s). What meaning and significance do we attribute to the happening(s), and how do we use these results to construct a "new" self? Price, some nine years removed from his illness, began to see why what he had gone through was valuable and transforming.

This four-week period turned out to be a turning point in Price's life. He came to the realization that walking again was not in his future and that for some inexplicable reason—beginning to make itself evident some nine years later as he wrote this autobiography—there was a reason behind all he was experiencing. What seemed to help him arrive at this conclusion was his growth in awareness that other people around him were in much worse shape than he was. He said, "Useful as those skills would prove in daily life, looking back I can see that by far the most important gain of the four weeks

came in the intimate day-and-night contact with other people as hard up as I and often much worse" (p. 105).

One of the key lessons Price learned through his ordeal was the control and power he had over his body. As the recovery process proceeded, pain and the ability to manage it became more and more important. At one point he recounted, "For the first time yet, I couldn't sit up to slide out of bed. The pain was that ferocious and frightening. I couldn't even sit up to eat but was fed by Lawrence through a straw" (p. 129).

Terror and panic attacks accompanied Price's struggle with pain. At certain times it was only the help of friends that got him through these ordeals. He began to be free from pain after he was introduced to hypnosis and biofeedback. These processes, which he was aware of in name only, were introduced to him by a psychiatrist at Duke. After eight weeks of learning about and going through these processes, Price claimed he was virtually free from pain. It was a battle of and in the mind, one of unprecedented proportions. He said,

> I can make that claim because I'm convinced that all pain has one huge design on us—to rule our minds—and therefore that the secret of living with pain is wanting hard to throw it out of central control, then finding the sane means to work that steady mental combination of distancing and coexistence. (p. 160)

Price set the stage for the final chapter of his autobiography, the chapter where it all came together for him, by recounting his week-long experience in New York City. It gave him an opportunity to look back and reflect over the last four arduous years of his life. He stated,

> With all that newness, still the full week was a last confirmation that after four subterranean years I'd really come through to the other side of my old life and was certified now as a new thing—certified by a city that shows a minimal mercy and by the friends I'd gone without for four long years; a new man who nonetheless bore enough likeness to their former friend to permit resumption of dialogue. (p. 172)

Price finishes his autobiography with this poignant question, "Was it a disaster—all that time from my slapped-down sandal in spring '84 through the four years till I reentered life as a new contraption, inside and out?" (p. 178). His response was a resounding "NO." He claimed there was no way he would exchange anything. What he experienced was crucial to his definition of himself, and a whole new definition at that. His following comment is evidence of this:

> But if I were called on to value honestly my present life beside my past—the years from 1933 to '84 against the year after—I'd have to say that, despite an enjoyable fifty-year start, these recent years since full catastrophe have gone still better. They've brought more in and sent more out—more love and care, more knowledge and patience, more work in less time. (p. 179)

As Price looked back and reflected on what his experience meant, he discovered several truths. One of these related to the importance of people and the whole realm of relationship. This discovery led him to state, "In that deep trough I needed companions more than prayers or potions that had worked for another" (p. 180). He discovered that people with whom he could share his struggle, and who in turn were able to share in his struggle, were a great need, more so than prayers or any sort of preconceived formula that seemed to have worked for others. Friends were available, but not companions. Of friends he said, "But again their care is often a brake on the way you must go . . . (they were trained like you, in inertia)" (p. 183).

Closely related to this was the awareness Price developed that there was no one to come alongside him and share his or her own story of a similar battle. He said, "I needed to read some story that paralleled, at whatever distance, my unfolding bafflement—some honest report from a similar war, with a final list of hard facts learned and offered unvarnished—but again I never found it" (p. 181). But he found no one. This finding, or more correctly lack of finding, was what led to the creation of this narrative.

Price learned three important lessons from his experience, three lessons he felt obliged to share with his readers. These lessons were as follows:

1. You are in your present calamity alone, as far as this life goes. If you want a way out, then dig it yourself, if there turns out to be any trace of a way. Nobody, least of all a doctor, can rescue you now, not from the depths of your own mind, not once they have stitched your gaping wound.

2. Generous people—true practical saints, but some of them boring as root canals—are waiting to give you everything on Earth but your main want, which is simply *the person you used to be.*

3. But you are not that person now. Who will you be tomorrow? And who do you propose to be from here to the grave, which may be hours or decades down the road? (p. 182)

What Price secretly longed for, to be the person he used to be, could not be fulfilled. There was no turning back. The road lay ahead and it was a road characterized by reinventions of his self. It was also a "road less traveled." He said,

> Yet if you don't discover that next appropriate incarnation of who you must be, and then become that person at a stiff trot, you'll be no good whatever again to the ruins of your old self nor to any friend or mate who's standing beside you in hopes of a hint that you're feeling better this instant and are glad of company. (p. 183)

The question Price learned to ask was "not 'Why me?' but 'What next?'" (p. 185). The ability to move forward, to redefine himself and his purpose was a valuable asset. It was interesting to review his "text," as it were, and see the emphasis he placed on the idea of never giving up, avoiding those who encouraged giving up, and the importance of becoming a "new" self. He captured the essence of his learning experience, not with an answer, but rather with a question: "Reynolds Price is dead. Who will you be now?" (p. 184).

Summary

Both Jamison and Price came to the conclusion that their respective diseases were part and parcel of a learning process that left both of them new and transformed people. For Jamison it was a disease, manic-depressive illness, that she had to live with and that would be a part of her until she died. For Price, it was the results of a disease, cancer, that he had to live with the rest of his life.

What learning takes place from and through the textual creation of an autobiography? The process of writing, of creating text, permitted both Jamison and Price to go back and relive moments in their respective pasts. In so doing they were able to weave, from seemingly isolated incidents and occurrences, a narrative that provided a sense of coherence and identity to their individual selves (Clark, 2001; Eakin, 1999).

They began by seeing their illnesses as something "other" than themselves; something that existed "out there"; something that had to be conquered, defeated, and extirpated from themselves. When they finished their respective autobiographies, they saw their disease states as being endemic to who they were. They had embraced their conditions. In Jamison's case, she was prepared to live with it. In Price's case, he was prepared to live with the results of it. In fact, they would have it no other way.

As she drew her autobiography to a close, Jamison asked herself what she would change in her past if she could change anything. Her response was nothing. Price, on the other hand, summarized his experiences in succinct pieces of advice he passed along to his readers. He said,

> 1. I've made it clear that the first strong props beneath my own collapse were prayer, a single vision that offered me healing, the one word *More* when I asked "What now?" and a frail continuing sense of purpose, though my hungry self often worked to drown any voice that might otherwise have reached me from the mind of God or plain common sense. (p. 184)

2. Never give death a serious hearing till its ripeness forces your final attention and dignified nod. It will of course take you screaming if it must, if you insist. (p. 186)

3. And keep control of the air around you. Many well-meaning mates, lovers and friends will stand by, observing that you're in the throes of blind denial—*Give up. Let go.* Get them out of your sight and your hearing with red-hot haste; use whatever force or fury it takes. Then try to choose life. Then see who you can live with now. (p. 186)

4. Find any legal way to avoid my first mistake, which was sitting still in cooperation with the cancer's will to finish me fast....I wish to God I had—any legal acts to break the inward gaze at my withering self. (p. 187)

5. Your chance of rescue from any despair lies, if it lies anywhere, in your eventual decision to abandon the deathwatch by the corpse of your old self and to search out a new inhabitable body. The old *Theologica Germanica* knew that "nothing burns in Hell but the self"—above all, the old self broiling in the fat of its endless self-pity. (p. 188)

The autobiographical process left Jamison and Price new and changed people. Through an imaginative process of reflection and critical thinking, both authors were left with a transformation in both their perspectives and their practice (Nelson, 1994). This imaginative and creative process permitted them to fuse what had happened in the past with what was happening in the present in order to create an "idealized self-concept" (Brady, 1990) and move forward.

Both authors were well into their middle years when they "paused" to create their respective narratives; both exhibited characteristics of the self-directed learner—independence, autonomy, and self-motivation; and both had a simple goal, the telling of a story that needed to be told. It was through the realization of this simple goal that learning took place, for the result of all of this was the voice of a new being (Conway, 1998).

This chapter dealt with learning that takes place as a result of writing about the struggle with disease and illness. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate learning that

transpired as a result of writing about career transition and the influence this can have on an individual life.

CHAPTER 4

LEARNING THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF CAREER TRANSITION

Introduction

This chapter explores learning that occurred in the lives of two authors as the result of writing about the experience of career transition. Two other autobiographical accounts are used in this exploration. The first is The Cliff Walk: A Memoir of a Job Lost and a Life Found by Don Snyder. This is a narrative account of one person's journey from a position of privilege, to one of desperation, to one of hope and promise. The second is A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned by Jane Tompkins. This is a narrative account of one person's journey back to the founding experiences of her life in an attempt to discover who she is and how these early experiences helped shape her.

I summarize the story underlying each autobiography, drawing special attention to times and substance of learning. At the end of each autobiographical section, I provide a summary of the lessons each author learned through his or her unique self-directed learning process. The final section is a brief summary of the chapter.

Don Snyder: The Cliff Walk: A Memoir of a Job Lost and a Life Found

Learning Begins With a Disorienting Dilemma

Yet another form a disorienting dilemma can take is a job loss. Many things can and do happen to people as they struggle to reformulate their individual meaning schemes. Brady (1990) claimed that one of the tasks of autobiography is to reconstruct the unity of life across the expanse of time. Part of this reconstructive process—the telling—is under the control of the author. Another part of this reconstructive process—

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the circumstances—is not under the author's control. Meaning results from this self-directed and autonomous learning from experience.

Snyder began his memoir with the following statements, both of which were instrumental in setting the stage for his self-directed learning pilgrimage:

> Their names are still real to me. Percy Sergeant. Wayne Lavasseur. Paul Gaudette. And now I think of them as survivors of some kind of night journey that I never believed was out there for me. . . . Maybe this accounts for why the disillusionment is spreading into the middle class, not because the disillusionment is rising but because people like me are finally falling. Falling hard. (p. 8)

As Snyder began his reflection process, the process of looking back and trying to make sense of it all, he realized that after all he had been through, after all that he had experienced, his story was probably the norm rather than the exception. All of the running he had done was away from himself. He was caught in the trap of being or trying to be where, when all was said and done, the process of becoming was what was most real.

Born, raised, and educated in Maine, Snyder prepared himself from the beginning to live a life with society's elite. The position at Colgate was a dream come true. All the years of studying and preparation had finally paid off. He was one of the nation's elite, a professor at one of the nation's most prestigious institutions of higher education.

Snyder was one of the baby-boomer generation's elite. He attended a private college on a football scholarship. From there he headed into graduate school riding high on a "big fat" fellowship. He met Colleen while in Europe and they married there. He talked of overseas job offers early in his career. His geographical mobility was further emphasized when Snyder reminisced that, before his first child started first grade, he and Colleen had moved across 17 states, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Irish Sea. In a sense, he

entered the academy having been there and done that. Then he began to ask, "Now what?"

Snyder's reaction to this life situation of being "let go" was one of disbelief and incredulity. *"They got the wrong guy"* (p. 15). His train could not be derailed like that. Something was wrong. Through the process of reflection and writing about this event, and the situational change that resulted, Snyder invited readers to participate in his struggle with personal identity and his journey to authentic selfhood.

When Snyder arrived at Colgate, his first task was to make the dean see "*who I am*" (p. 15). Before it was all over, Snyder arrived at a new understanding of just who he was. He would cease being merely an independent observer of this thing called living, and would become an active participant in life.

When the dean announced that his contract was not going to be renewed, Snyder was astounded. However, he soon discovered that it was not nearly as difficult to accept that news as it would be to tell his wife that he had been terminated. He finally broke the news to her:

> At first she didn't say anything. Then she skated back and told me how her father had been laid off once when she was a little girl; he was so ashamed he pretended to go to work each day, and for a couple of months he fooled the family. "Your father's like all the men I grew up around," I told her. "To them, all the great enterprises of life—political elections, religion, even love itself—had no meaning unless they were holding down a job." (p. 20)

What Snyder captured here was the essence of how being a male is defined in today's society. Sheehy (1999) noted the universality of this experience:

> At the same time, a new model—postpatriarchal man—is in the process of formation. Mostly he is forming among well-educated, well-married men under 40. . . . Being a good provider is still the primary way men define themselves. What has changed so drastically is that fewer men, and more and more women, can fulfill that role. (p. 18)

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One of the primary struggles Snyder faced was that related to vocation. Throughout his pilgrimage there was a sense of "calling," a sense of vocation that played itself out in his struggle. No one wants just a job.

> We had a good last year at the university. Like anyone who has ever taught young people at any level I had experienced from time to time an extraordinary feeling of gratitude when, working with a student, something would click and suddenly I felt certain that fate was at work. Fate had sorted through our random flights across the planet so that our paths would cross at the precise moment in time when the student's life required just a nudge in order to turn toward fulfillment. It's a custodial thing—the housekeeper, while draping her coat over the back of a kitchen chair, causally turns the potted plant toward the light; it's just a half turn and she does it without a thought in her head, but it then enables the plant to flourish. This is the reason, I believe, that certain professions are still referred to as callings, and this calling, which for me had always been just a faint rustling in the grass, began, in my last months at Colgate, to turn to a steady breeze. (p. 25)

What the reader begins to see early on in Snyder's autobiography is his struggle, unbeknownst to him until now, to make his life important. And the struggle is not unique to him. In fact, it is similar to the one faced by Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman. The struggle to be liked and the struggle to make a life important are similar.

> But now I wondered if I had done it in order to prove something about myself. To prove perhaps that I deserved a celebrated life and the kind of comfortable university position such a public accomplishment would win me. I cared, of course I cared about the soldier and his family. I cared deeply. But it came to me as I drove up the interstate that I had always been someone who picked his battles carefully, always calculating what they would be worth to me in the long run. In spite of all my introspection, I didn't see anything the way it actually was, though I did have the profound suspicion that the world might have changed. (pp. 42-43)

Transformative learning theory tends to focus on the critical-reflection component of the learning process. Taylor (1997) pointed out that although critical reflection is important, it does not account for all that takes place during the learning process. Interpersonal relationships also are important, and these may help to understand learning that takes place on an affective level. In Snyder's case, the businessman he encountered

during the course of his journey played a significant relational role in his growth in understanding.

During the course of his journey, Snyder encountered a businessman at the Little League field near his home and began a relationship with him. He said of their first meeting, "It came on slowly between the two of us, the way it often does between men" (p. 64). This businessman shared a similar experience to that of Snyder. A castaway from a development company that had gone out of business, he had been unemployed for upwards of two years. His function in Snyder's life seemed to be that of a wise sage who periodically threw some words of wisdom at him. His wisdom derived from the fact that he, too, had experienced the same situation—no job, a break in the career path. He told Snyder,

> I've been there too. You've got to remember it's not your fault; you didn't screw the dean's wife, did you? No. It's the whole friggin' country now. A man can't get a break anymore. Not a *white man*, at least. Remember this—whenever you feel like blaming yourself, take a look around, it's not you, it's the damned *system*. Communism went bust, and we're all so busy gloating about that, we can't see that we're next. The civilization is in decline, my friend. These are bad times and it's not your fault. (p. 65)

The encounter with this businessman solidified in Snyder's mind his self-identity, or at least what he thought his self-identity to be. But he was going to discover a self that, at this point in his journey, he could not imagine existed. It would take years of new experiences, mental and spiritual anguish, and finally a self-directed and self-disciplined activity of writing about these experiences before he saw a new "me" emerge. "*That's who I am,* I thought. *I'm someone who's always pulled through. That's who I always was. And that's who I still am*" (p. 68).

Snyder reflected further on how he defined or saw himself in his early years:

> Suddenly I remembered all of it. How badly I had wanted to please the guests and my employers at the hotel and how, because it was the summer of 1970, this had

> placed me at odds with most of the other workers. . . . Then, wham! The doors sprung off their hinges. We don't really define ourselves by our liberties, but by our limitations, and when you're young you know who you are by the boundaries placed around you. That summer when the boundaries suddenly vanished I was just plain bewildered. (pp. 71-72)

Snyder returned to the Little League field and his businessman "guide." He said of the meeting, "He told me that I was a romantic and that I needed to come up with a single thing that I wanted to accomplish" (p. 79). He continued, "It was brilliant. In his simplicity he had tapped into the central belief that so many of us hold on to stubbornly. The belief that comprises the trusting embrace of Western civilization. The belief that the possession of a thing will bring happiness" (p. 81).

The businessman was just the beginning of Snyder's venture into the importance of relationship in his overall learning process. As we will see in the next section, his discovery that interpersonal relationships were significant led him to view and appreciate literature in a new and different manner. Both discoveries proved to be instrumental to his learning process.

Learning Through Literature

During a house hunting expedition with a realtor in Maine, Snyder had another epiphany. He recounted,

> In this one afternoon I saw it all—the life I had run from, and the life I was running toward. The low bass note of poverty, and the screeching high of prosperity. All that was required of a man in order to find his place at some sensible point between these two extremes was judgment, the moderating influence of reason. I wondered if this was something I did not possess, if I had given it up in my effort to be liked and to get ahead or lost it somewhere along the way in my rush forward. (p. 85)

Soon after this revelation, Colleen provided another insight when she let him know that the "me" he thought existed and the "me" he was showing to others were not one and the same.

"What's wrong?" I asked her.
"You sound so awful," she said.
"I was just trying to make everyone laugh," I said, turning off the radio. "I'm sorry."
"It isn't funny," she said. "It scared me. You can't see yourself, but we can, and we're all scared." (p. 86)

During one of their meetings, the businessman told Snyder, "In the new age, those entitled to the prizes were those who learned how to break the rules and get away with it" (p. 101). This marked Snyder's entrance into a life totally at odds with himself, a life of cheating and deception. He evidenced this "new life" when he applied for a life insurance policy and used a sample of his son Jack's urine for the urine test. In addition, he applied for a teaching position at Princeton and faked telephone calls to follow up on the progress of his application. He finally concluded, "Is a guy entitled to a job at Princeton who does shit like faking phone calls and cheating insurance companies?" (p. 101).

During the course of his transition, Snyder faced the dilemma of what to do about an old car that needed more repair work than it was worth. Remembering a former student whose father owned a Ford dealership in Ohio, Snyder traveled to Ohio to visit her, in hopes that she would be able to provide him with a car. During that visit he was challenged to think about reality and to recognize his inability to accept what was real, just like Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman.

The awakening began when she said she thought of him as Biff.
She knew, and her expression changed to one of pure sympathy. " But I think of you as Biff," she told me as she held out a fresh glass of scotch.
Oh Christ, I thought.
" The golden boy who gets lost?" she said.
"Why does he get lost?" I asked her.
"Because he believed all the silly sentimental ideas that Willy held out there for him." (pp. 112-113)

Snyder further recounted his gradual awakening to the internal reenactment of Death of a Salesman and to the role his former student had played in that disclosure.

She laughed. "Yes. And Charley says—I know it verbatim—Charley says, 'When are you gonna realize that those things don't mean anything? You named him, but you can't *sell* that. The only thing you got in this world is what you can sell. And the funny thing is that you're a salesman, and you don't know that.'"

I interrupted and said, rather weakly, that things like friendship and loyalty should be more than just sentimental.

"Sure," she said, dismissing me. "And Willy desperately wanted to be liked. Remember? He thought that if he was liked, he would end up fine. He wouldn't go broke or lose the respect of his sons." . . .

She smiled again, and said she knew that I was too proud to accept charity. "Just like Willy," she said. (pp. 113, 115)

Willy's desire to be liked and Snyder's desire to be respected were closely related. Both thought everything would be all right, were their respective dreams to be fulfilled. Neither thought he would endure financial hardship if his dreams were fulfilled, Willy to be liked and Snyder to be respected. Snyder's former student zeroed in on this in the following exchange:

"Willy starts to tell Charley that he always thought that if a man was impressive and well liked, that nothing bad would happen to him. And Charley says—I know this whole part too; you remember, you put it on our final exam? He says to Willy, 'Why must everybody *like* you? Who liked J.P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked.'

"I love that line, *with his pockets on.*" (pp. 114-115)

This theme of facing reality, of redefining himself, of honestly addressing the "Who am I?" question was further developed when, on his way home from visiting this former student and her father's Ford dealership, Snyder stopped to visit Bradford, an old high school friend. While they were reminiscing in the front seat of a car, Bradford confronted him with a question suitable for Willy Loman:

"How about talking about *you*, then," he said softly after a few minutes of silence. "About you not facing reality."

"That's not what this is about," I told him.

"It's not? It seems to me that's exactly what this is about. You may have to work two or three shitty jobs next year to pay your bills. Hell, you may have to live in a mobile home—plenty of decent people do. You've been expecting great big things to happen to you for as long as I can remember. For Colleen's sake, and for the kids', you're going to have to grow up." (p. 117)

Snyder had a major revelation soon after his encounters with his former student and with Bradford. He said of this revelation,

> I don't offer this as an excuse, but I think that the reason I ran around like a man chasing his hat in a gale for the rest of that summer is because I was still under the influence of the great false belief of my generation that *life is more about fate than accommodation* [italics added]. (p. 118)

The false belief that "life is more about fate than accommodation" indicated that Snyder was well on his way. The "valley of despair" was getting closer. But further breaking up of his self-image still needed to occur. Colleen told him that she was pregnant again, with child number five. That news, coupled with his angst over the inability to provide for, lead, and direct his family, forced Snyder to do what he had never dreamed he would do: lie. And lie he did, not only to his wife but also to himself. He found himself considering one of the vilest acts of mankind, selling another human being, and his own child at that. He went so far as to find a couple who would be willing and suitable for the acquisition. Colleen's announcement that she had miscarried was what prevented the transaction from actually taking place.

One of the defining moments in Snyder's autobiography was the encounter he had with Billy, one of his former students at Colgate. Billy's father called Snyder and asked him to talk with Billy, who was severely depressed and had been in and out of treatment facilities. Snyder heard Billy's story and received some strong personal insight when they began talking about heroes. Billy told Snyder that he had always admired Steinbeck's Tom Joad, and that Tom was his hero. Snyder told Billy there are no Tom Joads in life. Billy replied, "That's what my mom told me. She wanted to let me off the hook just like you do. Know there are heroes out there who don't cave in" (p. 142).

Snyder thought, "How could I deny this? I'd wanted to be one myself and even believed for a long time that I *was* one" (p. 142). This failure in his own eyes was

instrumental in carrying him further down the path of despair. As Snyder started to hunt through his books to find something that would help Billy, he realized, "It was clear to me in those moments that I had never read any of this literature purely for the sake of learning; I had always been looking for something in these texts that would make me appear clever in class or before my colleagues" (p. 143). At that point, he grabbed a garbage bag and threw away his books and numerous spiral notebooks containing his lecture notes, which he referred to as being from "an old life." The break was now complete; Snyder was stripped of every vestige from the past.

Snyder did not and could not process these revelations over night. He was being faced with something totally new. For 11 months, he was confined to his bedroom. The only relief he found was in a weekly venture to the grocery store. This was the point in his journey at which he hit rock bottom.

Snyder could do little more than shop once a week during this 11-month episode. He says of his shopping trips,

> Here was the gallery in which America's finest exhibitions of marketing and productivity were on display, and I wandered up and down the mirrored aisles like an immigrant who couldn't understand a word of the written language. . . . I chose products for their packaging, hopeful that the bright colors would pierce the darkness of my home and light our way back to a meaningful existence. At the checkout lanes it sometimes took all my powers of self-possession to keep from trembling before the cashier and just walking away from my loaded cart. (p. 167)

Other authors who have experienced depression have described it differently. Jamison (1995) succinctly depicted the state of depression in the following way:

> Depression is awful beyond words or sounds or images; I would not go through an extended one again. It bleeds relationships through suspicion, lack of confidence and self-respect, the inability to enjoy life, to walk or talk or think normally, the exhaustion, the night terrors, the day terrors. There is nothing good to be said for it except that it gives you the experience of how it must be to be old, to be old and sick, to be dying; to be slow of mind; to be lacking in grace, polish, and coordination; to be ugly; to have no belief in the possibilities of life, the

> pleasure of sex, the exquisiteness of music, or the ability to make yourself and others laugh. (p. 217)

As Snyder reflected on his experience from the vantage point of his present situation, he began to identify an "inner plot" (Conway, 1998). Conversations with other people, and conversations from literature, acted as a sort of mirror for his process of learning and self-discovery. The autobiographical process (Bruner, 1995) was beginning to unveil "shades of deeper meaning" (Dickerson, 1989). Now that he had reached the bottom, there was nowhere to go but up.

The Journey Home, or Putting It All Together

Not long after hitting rock bottom, Snyder began to see things differently. Reality took on a new form and developed new meaning. One morning as he sat reading the Boston Globe and taking in the economic news, he realized that something was being taken from them. He said, "It was just a moment, but I suddenly felt certain that something was being taken from us—something that was a lot bigger than a job or money" (pp. 179-180).

Snyder's relationship with his son Jack took on new meaning and significance as they hid in the trees and went on "golf ball" expeditions. He learned to laugh again and to enjoy the beauty of a relationship, a relationship for its own sake and not for what he might get out of it. He recounted this new understanding as follows: "For a few days he stayed at home with his mother, and I went to the golf course alone, where I discovered that his company meant more to me than the economics I'd imposed upon our adventures" (p. 183).

For a while, work took on new meaning for Snyder. He fell into a sort of "rhythm" with work, and this carried him along for a short time. But then the monotony

returned; before long, unresolved anger set in and he quit his golf-course job. As Snyder was wallowing in a certain amount of self-pity and despair, Colleen donned her Superwoman costume and rushed in "to save the day." She confronted him emotionally, and spiritually shook him by asking, "What about you? What do you want to do? You can do whatever you want to do" (p. 199). She went on to say, "I think you look down on people who just do regular jobs so they can pay their way. I don't. I've never thought one person was better than another person because of the job he does, but I think you do. I think you always have" (p. 200).

It all came together for Snyder when he landed a job helping to build a $1.5 million mansion on the shores of Maine. He had experienced the depths of human degradation, the state of being depressed. This is the point in a person's life when one hits the "Cntrl, Alt, Delete" buttons on his or her personal "spiritual" computer and essentially "resets" the entire system. When someone comes out of this state of being depressed, it is tantamount to starting over. Life is seen and experienced through a different set of lenses. People look different. Objectives change. What is important takes on new meaning. This is what happened to Snyder after his struggle with depression. It occurred the year he landed the mansion-construction job.

Snyder recalled the following scene upon returning home after his first day at work. In a sense, he captured the essence of what it means to be alive.

> As soon as we got home I went into the kitchen and took the food stamps from the cupboard, where we kept them in a glass jar. That night I threw them into the fire while Erin was watching. . . . I could almost see her recounting this scene for her investment banker husband fifteen years down the road who chuckles along with her and says, "*Baby, no wonder you guys were always so poor. Your old man was a hopeless romantic.*" It was for him, the future husband , that I continued on awhile longer, trying to impress upon my daughter that the notion of a lucky person helping an unlucky person was the only thing that held civilization together. (p. 206)

Snyder encountered frustration in finding the narrative in his work. What was the story, and how did it fit with his overall account?

> I always looked at Billy and figured he wasn't speaking to me because he was *building a house* and he hadn't figured out yet what the hell I was doing. It was like standing outside reading a book in a freezing cold wind, on a busy street with traffic roaring by, reading page after page and trying to grab hold of the meaning of the pages amid the noise and the cold, but the paragraphs just turn into more paragraphs and no story ever begins. I kept looking for the narrative in my work, something that was moving forward and that would add up to a house. (p. 216)

As he reflected on his life and priorities up to that time, Snyder thought about how Mike, the bricklayer, would have seen things:

> I was distracted, way out there, thinking mostly about how I had always tried to please people who I believed to be above me. I was thinking how someone like Mike, a bricklayer, wouldn't have tried to appease the feminists in the English Department at Colgate or anyone else. He wouldn't have spent his energy trying to insinuate himself into another life that looked better, easier. I began thinking again about *Death of a Salesman.* (p. 221)

The worst that could ever happen to someone was never to find out who she was. Snyder reflected on Biff's comments about Willy Loman at the end of Death of a Salesman:

> *Biff:* *He never knew who he was.*
> *Biff:* *Charley, the man didn't know who he was.* (p. 222)

Suddenly, it all came together for him. He began to realize that his life was not that much different from Willy Loman's. "It was plain to me at last. Like so many in my generation I had been a salesman my whole life, selling myself to whoever I thought might make me more of a success. Now, like Willy, I had a couple of spots on my hat" (p. 222).

Through all of this, Snyder realized he had been a salesman all his life, always trying to close the sale on himself, always trying to sell himself to the next level in his hierarchy. But he had begun to change and to see things differently. He realized that

those with whom he was working, and Mike in particular, were content with who they were.

> The next day it snowed again. . . . I watched Mike walking to his truck at the end of the day. He knew who he was, and like all people who know who they are, a kind of grace attended him and his work. The snow that afternoon cast a silence upon the house, and I felt changed. (p. 223)

Snyder's anger with life and with the "system" was brought to a head through an encounter with Rob at the construction site of the multi-million-dollar house. While laying sewer pipe for the new house, it occurred to Snyder that his was the one job that could sabotage the whole project. What could be worse than living in an expensive house with a sewer system that did not work? Rob came to the rescue and put everything in perspective for Snyder.

> "A year ago I think I might have turned it backwards," I said to my friend. "I don't know why, but for a long time after I was fired, I just wanted to take something."
>
> He listened patiently, a good-hearted, hardworking man who had already paid off the mortgage on his house and set aside enough money for his three kids' college education. Then he wrote me a beautiful letter that ended this way: "In doing your work this winter, you will have extracted your own pound of flesh from the rich man who will in legal title own it. But in a true sense, the edifice will always be more yours than his." (pp. 230-231)

Snyder began to emerge from this whole transitional period when he realized he was tired of talking about himself. He said of this epiphany, "I wanted to tell her all these things, but I was suddenly so tired of talking about myself that I just kept silent as we walked along the beach" (p. 243). What a state of being! He had finally arrived. The process of reflection and self-analysis had come to an end. Finally, he was "tired of talking about" himself.

Snyder settled down with his new sense of identity. He recalled this moment in the following manner:

> Later, when I thought about that moment and why I had felt so satisfied, I realized that it was because of what else I could say now—I'm just a man who paints houses for a living, and who pays his own way through this world, and who takes care of his family and fears for his children's future and doesn't try to become something else and doesn't judge others, and who lays down his tax money willingly because he can afford to help people who can't find their own way. (p. 250)

His work took the shape of a vocation when he said , "I felt all of that, the meaning of it had settled deep inside me" (p. 251). There was a sense of contentment, a spiritual, emotional, and mental coming to terms with both his place in life and life in his place. He summed it all up when he said to his son Jack, "It's the work, Jack. You do the work the right way even if you're working for a jerk" (p. 264).

Sheehy (1999) summed up the type of multi-year experience, or passage, Snyder experienced in the following manner:

> If there is anything certain about a passage, it is uncertainty. In ordinary circumstances, without the blow of a life accident, the doubts about your outgrown identity, shifting values, and the meaning crisis—all issues linked to the midlife passage—are revealed over a period of years. You have time to adjust. But when they are thrust on you all at once, . . . you cannot immediately accept them. The downside of life comes too hard and fast to incorporate. (p. 41)

But incorporate it he did. And through a process of self-directed and autonomous learning, through the instrument of autobiographical writing, he became a new and different person. The change, or transformation, in Snyder's view of the world was not an external phenomenon, something that had transpired outside of and apart from himself. Rather, it was an internal discovery, an awareness that what is truly important is not material or quantitative in nature, but rather something that is built on the value inherent in human relationships. It is difficult to explain and impossible to prescribe. At best, it can only be described. But it is real nonetheless. And the process of reflecting and writing about experience is what makes this new state of being real.

This "autobiographical process" (Bruner, 1995), the act of autobiographical writing (Brady, 1990; Nelson, 1994), resulted in change and transformation for Snyder as he critically reflected on what he believed to be significant events and encounters in his life. The result of chronicling his journey from a place of privilege to the valley of despair was both a greater understanding of who he was and a new sense of hope.

The major learning that took place for Snyder was his growth in understanding that life is more about accommodation than it is about fate. As he reflected and wrote, there was evidence of "internal changes" (Brookfield, 1986) and "autobiographical learning" (Nelson, 1994) throughout his journey. Essentially, he began to "rewrite" (Freeman, 1993) himself when, through a series of personal encounters with others, he arrived at this conclusion:

> I don't offer this as an excuse, but I think that the reason I ran around like a man chasing his hat in a gale for the rest of that summer is because I was still under the influence of the great false belief of my generation that *life is more about fate than accommodation* [italics added]. (p. 118)

In this journey from pretense to reality, Snyder discovered that life was much more about accommodation than it was about fate. Fate for Snyder carried with it a sense of living in a situation that was ultimately under his control. As he wrote his autobiography, he came to understand that much of what he had accomplished in his life before his experience at Colgate was the result of a sort of "running away from" who he was. It was fate that became his "magic carpet" and allowed him to travel over and around all the buildings of life. Fate gave him a prep school education, preparing him for a generous football scholarship and a romantic small-college experience. Fate granted him fellowships to pursue graduate education. Fate brought him into contact with Colleen while he was studying and traveling in Europe. Fate permitted him to publish books and articles. Fate finally opened doors for him at Colgate. But then fate turned on him, and

the doors at Colgate abruptly closed. And fate was no more to be found. Life became a matter of accommodation, an accommodation to the situations he encountered, situations that were totally out of his control. Through his experience inward and downward, he came to the much greater understanding that, for most people, life is much more about accommodation than it is about fate. It is more about accommodating to what is out of our control than it is to planning and controlling what our individual situations might be. And as a result of this self-directed, autonomous learning activity, Snyder emerges a new and redefined person (Bruner, 1987, 1995, 1999; Conway, 1998; Dickerson, 1989; Eakin, 1999; Gornick, 2001a; McAdams, 1993, 1996).

Jane Tompkins: A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned

The Role of Experience in Learning

A Life in School is the story of a woman who, after many years of teaching, stopped dead in her tracks and realized that her life in general and her teaching life in particular were not on the right track. But even more than that, A Life in School is the story of one person's growth in personal integrity. It is the story of a personal struggle with fear, the fear of being found out, the fear of being caught in the act of acting. It is also the story of one person's journey to self-authenticity, effected by and large through the will, the will to be.

The process of writing her autobiography permitted Tompkins to figure herself anew through the process of interpretation (Freeman, 1993). Through a process of critical reflection, aided by her imaginative faculties, she was able to interpret what had taken place earlier in her life and to use her discoveries to effect change in her life. In undertaking this project, Tompkins showed that autobiography is both a relationship among self, others, and language (Conway, 1998) and a process of reconstructing the

integrity of life across the expanse of time (Brady, 1990). Finally, this process was self-directed and resulted in significant transformation in her life.

Tompkins was 49 years old and teaching at Duke University when she realized that things were not right. She described her experience in the following manner:

> This realization followed upon a period of internal change, still going on, in which I gradually became aware that life was not as I had always taken it to be but something very different. . . . It became clear to me that I was not in my life to make a career for myself but to give something, though what, specifically, I didn't yet know. (p. xi)

She concluded that what was missing in her life was lacking in the entire educational process itself; that was a lack of attention to the inner life of the individual. Why is this so important? Because, as she had come to believe, attention to the inner life is the beginning of self-understanding, and self-understanding is foundational to a satisfying life.

Integral to this understanding was Tompkins's realization that "The experiences that have meant the most to me have taken forms that are antithetical to what we mean when we refer to learning in an academic sense" (p. xi). Turning to and learning from her own experience was at the heart of her enlightenment and, oddly enough, education had nothing to prepare her to undertake this endeavor.

This discovery or realization proved to be the beginning of a journey, one in and toward personal transformation. Tompkins quickly discovered that this journey was unlike anything she had ever experienced. She was mapping heretofore uncharted terrain. Change and transformation began to occur as she experimented with her teaching style and methods. The process culminated but did not end when she created this story.

Tompkins began her autobiography by recalling a dream she had early in her teaching career. It was a dream common to many new teachers. In this dream she saw

herself in class when suddenly the whole class walked out on her. She concluded from this dream that one of her underlying fears was failure. Even more important was her discovery that all of her education up to that point had done nothing to prepare her for this fear or to show her how to handle it. She was on her own.

As Tompkins reflected on this event and time, she decided that fuel for this fear was the tension that existed between authority and the need to be liked and accepted. As a result, she developed over the ensuing years what she called the "good-cop/bad-cop" strategy (p. 3). Divestiture of authority equated with the good cop, whereas enforcement of authority equated with the bad cop.

The themes of obedience and authority were key for Tompkins. Throughout her autobiography, she struggled with these issues. As a student, from kindergarten through her Ph.D. degree from Yale, she adhered to the "unwritten" plan of education that says, "This is what you must do and how you must do it in order to pass this portion of your educational process." Following close behind was the issue of authority. Obedience pertains to the student. Authority pertains to the teacher. Early in her discovery process, Tompkins learned that "obedience is the basis for everything else that happens in school; unless the children obey, nothing can be taught. That is what I learned. Obedience first. Or rather, fear first, fear of authority, yielding obedience, then, everything else" (p. 4). All of this shed light on her self-understanding; she said,

> Eventually, I became aware that childhood experiences of authority had controlled, without my knowing it, the way I exercised and failed to exercise authority as an adult, and that it was the reality of what had happened at P.S. 98, more than my present one, that had been dictating the terms of my university life, day to day. (p. 7)

As Tompkins began to reflect on her days at P.S. 98, one of the schools she had attended as a child, she struggled with an "inner voice" that said to her, "*You don't have a*

story to tell" (p. 8). She would not let this voice win, however. Rather than succumbing, she acknowledged to herself that the voice was really her own and that she must subdue it. Regarding this voice she said, "I have had to struggle to get by this censorious person, who would shut me up if she could" (p. 8) . . . and so her story began.

This first section highlighted an important discovery that Tompkins made early in her autobiography. This discovery was the importance that authority had played in her life since her days at P.S. 98. Bruner (1995) said that it is not so much what happens to us as it is the way we interpret it that makes it so significant. As Tompkins reflected on her days at P.S. 98, she recognized that her interpretation of what happened then was greatly affecting her daily life right now.

Love and Acceptance Are Missing

Tompkins portrayed her inner self as a place of great conflict and struggle. Fear and a lack of self-esteem seem to have plagued her all her life. As she reflected on her early life, she remembered being afraid of school. She recounted waking up in the morning, gripped by fear as she contemplated another day of school. Tompkins concluded from this that something was amiss in relation to her inner self. She said, "Something's the matter with me on the inside; it's as if I smelled bad" (p. 9). To add insult to injury, she blamed herself for everything she felt. Because her life was not characterized by neglect, abuse, or mistreatment, she decided, "The way it is, all the unhappiness seems to be my responsibility, my fault" (p. 11).

Fear of being late for school plagued Tompkins to such an extent that she would leave her house early enough to arrive at school before anyone else. She said of this, "On days when I walked to school I left early so I would never, ever be picked on for not

being there on time, never be caught not knowing what I was supposed to do because I'd arrived too late to hear the command" (pp. 12-13).

This self-imposed fear gripped her and would not let her go. As she reflected and wrote, she began to see a possible link or connection between her experiences as an adult and the groundwork laid for her as a child. In fact, one of the first connections she made was between fear and shame. She was fearful of school because she was afraid of being ashamed. She said, "To me, this was what school was really about—avoiding shame" (p. 22).

So what was it that fed these feelings of guilt and fear? To answer this question, Tompkins decided she must confront feelings and experiences of her early childhood. As she continued to reflect, she remembered experiences that brought to mind the feelings associated with loneliness. She recalled returning home from school in the afternoon and standing in the foyer waiting for her mother to awaken from her afternoon nap. She struggled with the strong desire to cry, but she fought back and refused to surrender (p. 34). She felt lonely and empty.

As she recalled this scene, she said , "I've been able to understand what happens to me when waiting for someone who arrives late at a restaurant or an airport" (p. 35). Because of these early childhood experiences, Tompkins began to understand that she filled her life with activity in order to avoid "dead time."

The target to which all of this was pointing—Tompkins's fear of school, her fear of feeling ashamed, her feelings of loneliness and emptiness—was the target of feeling unloved. Whatever enjoyment life brought was for someone else. She said, "The emptiness and loneliness became for me a touchstone; they betokened (I thought) a truth

about myself: that I was not loveable, that I was both *too much* and wanting in some mysterious unnamed thing" (p. 36).

This combination of fear, loneliness, emptiness, and lack of love drove Tompkins' need to feel accepted. She met this need in a number of ways, the primary one being walking behind her teachers and picking up their rooms and keeping things neat and tidy for them. This, for her, was tantamount to being loved and accepted.

As she continued to reflect on her childhood, she realized several other things. As a child, and certainly on into her adult years, she loved to read. For Tompkins, reading was a way to escape. As she said, "Books were a home away from home, *and* away from school. A safe refuge" (p. 43).

Finally, her yearning to be loved and accepted fueled her desire to be Catholic. The Hayeses were a big Catholic family who befriend her. She sensed they were connected to something much larger than themselves, and she wanted to be a part of it. Regarding Catholicism she stated, "I liked the atmosphere; it gave me a feeling of comfort, a feeling that somewhere things were all right" (p. 48). This drive and desire to be a part of something larger made her recognize a primary need in her life. She said of this realization, "I was desperate to be *something*" (p. 49). At that point in her life, she was not sure what the "something" was, but it turned out to be a major driving force during the ensuing years.

Tompkins experienced the first turning point in her life when her family moved from Manhattan to the suburbs. It was then she realized that the shape of her fear had shifted to social ostracism (p. 51). She learned later that during that time she had been given a social maturity test, which showed that, at eight years old, she had the social maturity of a 24 year old.

Ironically, Tompkins discovered during this period that relationships required a significant amount of work. It was not easy getting along with other people. She also discovered that it was not the "horizontal" relationships, those with her peers, that motivate her. It was the "vertical" relationships, those with adults and especially teachers, that provided her driving force. She interpreted this period as explaining, at least partially, why she had been motivated to be a teacher. Yet, as she reflected on this early period of her life, little did she know how lonely a teacher's life would prove to be.

Seeds of change were planted within Tompkins when she began her "new" life in a "new" school. Mr. Bowler, her geometry teacher, proved to be the planter when he asked the class to reflect on the meaning of Thanksgiving. As Tompkins recalled, "No teacher had ever asked us to think about something as if our doing so would make a difference. I felt we were being asked to put aside geometry because there was larger work to be done, and we were the ones to do it" (p. 55).

Tompkins recalled Mr. Bowler's use of the words *knowledge* and *understanding*. This was her first recollection of being challenged to think and to seek knowledge and understanding. In addition to these intellectual challenges, she recalled feeling important. Each class session was new and exciting, and she was made to feel important and valuable. Part, if not all, of this she attributed to Mr. Bowler's keeping his inner life in order.

In addition to Mr. Bowler, Tompkin's new school setting also introduced her to teachers who loved what they taught. This was important to her future direction as she was introduced to the discipline of literature during her time at that school. She said of that time, "This kind of teaching inspired me because it reconfirmed my sense that

literature really was about life, and it gave me permission to express my unbounded enthusiasm" (p. 61).

The seed planted by Mr. Bowler began to germinate and send forth roots. As Tompkins settled into the routine of her new school, certain of her classes invigorated her. As time passed, she discovered deep within herself a desire and a need to talk in class. Part of this was motivated by a certain fear, a need to perform and please the teacher. But another part, and a growing component at that, was her discovery that she loved to perform in the presence of others. And talking in class was doing just that (p. 63).

In this section, Tompkins came face to face with her own sense of fear, loneliness, emptiness, and need to be loved. She was somewhat surprised by the hold these elements had on her life. It was this "autobiographical process" (Bruner, 1995) that enabled her to reflect critically (Mezirow, 1985, 1990a, 1990b) on her experience and learn from it as she created her autobiographical narrative (Brady, 1990; Nelson, 1994). As she reflected on her time at P.S. 98 and specifically Mr. Bowler, she began to see the influence of language on how she defined herself (Freeman, 1993).

Language as a Means of Justifying Self-Existence

The realization or discovery regarding her need to perform was ontologically foundational in that Tompkins discovered during these "performance" moments that she felt like she existed. Language and the flow thereof become instrumental for her, and she found self-authentication in its use. She said of this discovery, "In that space of time, borne up by the audience's attention, my existence is guaranteed. I can't not *be*, intensely" (p. 63).

As she reflected briefly on her mother, Tompkins saw seeds of her own needs and longings in her mother as well. She said, "At any rate, my mother's need to talk and be listened to modeled my own. Talking was being; being was being listened to" (p. 64). This partial syllogism, "talking is being; and being is being listened to," drove Tompkins to need to talk, almost at any expense. But in point of fact, the need and drive were so intense that she was forced to encounter a whole new dimension of life. She said, "The desperation points to something out of place. I think that in my upbringing, and almost certainly in my mother's, talking must have been a way to substitute for things that have no words" (p. 65).

This journey through the realm of performance and the demands it makes on a person led Tompkins to conclude that "to perform in order to survive existentially is backbreaking work; to give up the burden of performance, an inexpressible relief" (p. 65).

This personal revelation Tompkins shared with readers, the revelation regarding the relationship among talking, language, and self-existence, marked the beginning of what was to be a significant life journey for her. This life journey would take her through successes and failures both within and outside the classroom. It would affect her personal as well as her professional relationships.

The first stop on Tompkins's journey was at Bryn Mawr, where she attended college and began her stint in higher education. As she looked back on these days, she noticed that it was then that she began to separate her life into "professional" and "personal" (p. 66), and in so doing began to neglect the personal in favor of the professional.

The seed planted by Mr. Bowers when she was in high school was watered when she encountered a woman named Jeannie. Tompkins recounted this relationship in the following way:

> I loved being with Jeannie, whose life, it seemed to me, went down several stories deeper than anyone else's I knew; Jeannie, who was Jewish, *named* things no one else would. . . . She was my link to something, I didn't know what, more alive and real than anything I'd yet been in contact with. (p. 67)

This period of her life, in which she pursued formal higher education at both Bryn Mawr and Yale, continued to water the seed planted by Mr. Bowers, but in an indirect manner. Tompkins characterized Bryn Mawr as a sort of "cloister" (p. 69). It was a safe environment, set apart from the mundane realities of the world and everyday life. She described it as follows: "It was a place where what I was good at counted, where I felt challenged but also felt safe" (p. 69).

Yale, in comparison, served as her introduction to the world of higher education as well as a reflection on the life of her soul. As an introduction to the world of higher education, she encountered intense competition as well as the "proving ground" mentality that dominates its organizational structure. As a reflection on the life of her soul, Tompkins discovered that the arena of the "new criticism" would not allow her into the realm of meaning. All questions were epistemological ones and had to be asked from the viewpoint of an independent observer. She could not address the subject of meaning, whether from the perspective of the author or that of the reader. Experiences to this point continued to feed her growing convictions that there was a real and intangible quality to language, and that its effective use could present meaning that might not be readily apparent.

The dramatic change that occurred in and to Tompkins was occasioned by a comment from B. K. Moran, who asked Tompkins, "Don't you believe in anything?" (p. 84). Tompkins's response to this was, "It was feminism that changed that" (p. 84).

In 1966, Tompkins received her Ph.D. and entered the higher education workforce. Reflecting on that period, she attributed her growth both as a woman and as a teacher to experience. No one teaches either how to be a woman or how to be a teacher. For two years she struggled intensely with teaching and what it means to be a good teacher.

But in all actuality, the struggle was with herself and who she was. Early on, she defined herself as an entertainer and the source of all wisdom and truth (p. 87). She needed to have all the answers and to be conversant in so many areas in order to be effective in the classroom. The need to feel accepted and intelligent was paramount. She admitted, "And smart was the most important thing to be" (p. 89). But it was not just "being smart" that Tompkins craved so desperately. She needed to feel accepted. She said, "In return for the hard work I put into my classes, I wanted them to love me, to love the material I taught, and to talk about it in a sophisticated way so that I would look good by extension" (p. 90).

As she moved through that period, she proceeded to do battle on two fronts. One front was her battle with the fear of being found out. Everything she did, every project she undertook, was designed to disguise the vast reservoir of ignorance she believed lay within her. The other front was the battle of discovering just who in the world she really was. Battle on this latter front led her through depression, that "dark night of the soul," divorce, and a job termination. During one of her darkest moments she stated, "There must be *something* good about me" (p. 92).

Oddly enough, it was when Tompkins walked out on her husband that she began to feel authentic, for she felt as though she had acted, made a willful decision, and carried through with it for the first time in her life. She said, "I left my husband and moved to Hartford. As I drove up I-91 with my suitcases in the trunk, I felt I was *acting* for the first time in my life. It felt pure. Not because what I was doing was good, but because it was completely self-willed" (p. 93).

The positive results of this act of self-authentication were short lived, however. From this point forward, Tompkins's journey took her over some fairly rough terrain. She landed a teaching position at Temple University (p. 93), where she experienced an emotional high as she prepared for and taught classes. But she also experienced the depths of depression as she discovered the political nature of the tenure process, went through a second divorce, and worked with her third psychiatrist.

In the next section, we see Tompkins begin to find an outlet for her inward struggle with meaning. Literary criticism that she had studied at Yale and that had influenced her thinking ever since had proven to be empty and void of meaning for her. During her visit to the Modern Language Association annual meeting, Tompkins's eyes were opened to new work taking place that granted legitimacy to the reader and the context within which the reading was taking place. Women's studies and work related to how meaning is conveyed from the written word to the reader's head captured her attention. Freeman (1993) worked with this theme when he sought to understand the self that is constructed by language and generated in narrative (Josselson, 1995).

Language as a Mechanism to Establish
Meaning and Understanding

And then it happened. A major change in Tompkins's worldview occurred, a change that resulted in a new and different interpretation of herself and her relationship to, and with, other people. The change began at a meeting of the Modern Language Association. As she said,

> At the meetings of the Modern Language Association, I became aware that things were starting to happen in literary studies. There was women's studies, which I hadn't yet awakened to, and something else, something to do with how people read books, how the meaning gets from the words on the page into the readers' heads. (p. 99)

She went on to say,

> I think I had been waiting for something like this all my life....To people who studied literature, this new mode of thought meant that the meanings of words could change depending on their context, which included who happened to be reading them. (p. 101)

From that point forward, new vistas began to open in Tompkins's life. She began by walking out on her second marriage. As she worked through the psychotherapeutic process, she discovered, "It was as though there was a lesson I was supposed to be learning but it was up to me to guess what it was" (p. 103). In a sense, there was learning taking place outside the classroom, and all her training and education to date had not prepared her for that.

Her greatest need, Tompkins decided, was to be accepted and to be taken seriously (p. 105). She simultaneously entered both her third marriage and postmodernism. Her entry into postmodernism liberated her from viewing literary text in and of itself, and allowed her the freedom to view context and meaning, something she had been longing to be able to do.

She referenced a T-shirt a student gave her with the inscription, "Organic Intellectual." She said of this gift, "I was honored by this designation, for it put into words exactly the kind of person I wanted to become" (p. 106). And in a certain sense her story was one of the development of just such a person, an "organic intellectual." The designation "organic intellectual" and the reawakening of her literary soul gave Tompkins the courage to "feel" in new and different ways, and to read previously read material in new ways.

This became even more real to her after she had a dream in which the characters and the interpretation she gave to them led her to realize that she was isolated and alienated from herself and that she longed to be back and united with herself. This interpretation was confirmed by a woman Tompkins came to know as they commuted together to Philadelphia. When Tompkins asked, "Well, how's life treating you?" the woman replied, "I don't exist" (p. 111). This described Tompkins's feelings of herself, as well. Tompkins felt nonexistent.

Slowly but surely, the change within and outside of her continues. She and her husband accepted positions at Duke and began the process of "settling in." She noticed early on that her introduction to postmodern criticism and feminism had given her both a desire to fight and an increased understanding that she was right. As she reflected on this increased desire to fight, she noticed that it was situated in a bed of intense anger. She discovered that she was angry at everyone and everything. The seed Mr. Blower had planted way back in high school was continuing to grow. The anger and need to fight manifested themselves physically as she began to struggle with migraine headaches. As she said, "The headaches were a knock on the door of my life telling me I had to change" (p. 117).

This point of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical fatigue marked the beginning of a new stage in Tompkins's journey. Up to that point, the inner volcano, as it were, had been boiling and burning and throwing out bits and pieces of molten lava. It was now time for this volcano to erupt, and erupt it did. It began its "emptying out" process when Tompkins realized, "The real change was taking place in my heart, in my soul, somewhere between me and the trees in the forest where I walked" (pp. 117-118).

This change process manifested itself in Tompkins's teaching life, when she began to realize she needed to listen to the needs of the learner and focus her attention there, as opposed to focusing solely on content and delivery. As she slowed down and began to listen, she continued the "emptying out" process by trying a new teaching technique, one she referred to as "no-frills" teaching (p. 120). This was simply a means of transferring classroom authority from the teacher to the learner, but for her it was a major change in her worldview.

Endemic to Tompkins's changing worldview was her changing understanding of herself. For the first time in her life, she was beginning to realize she had to be herself. She quoted Picasso as saying, "When you come right down to it, all you have is your self" (p. 121). Together with this, she began to sense the need to quit acting and attempting to portray a self that was not there.

Tompkins recognized that she was beginning to navigate in uncharted waters. She quoted a woman who had studied with a Sufi master, who told her, "*If the cup is empty, it can be filled*" (p. 124). That, for Tompkins, was symbolic of the journey she was taking. She realized, "The moment of emptiness and terror had to occur. It was a death preliminary to the start of something" (p. 122).

Tompkins related a struggle she had with T. S. Eliot's writing during her period of intense anger, briefly described above. She spoke of identifying with Eliot everything she hated in life (p. 115). Several years later she made an interesting discovery, which she described in this way:

> It was no accident, then, that years later when I finally discovered it was not wrong to stick your chin out and to wear your heart on your sleeve, I embraced exactly the kind of literature Eliot hated: books written by women, books millions of people had loved, books that were full of feeling, books that changed people's minds by capturing their hearts. (p. 117)

As she recounted her struggles during that period, Tompkins reflected on a Christmas dinner in 1958 during which she had recited some lines from T. S. Eliot's "The Family Reunion." The following lines from that poem gripped her and would not let her go: "You are the consciousness of your unhappy family, its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame" (p. 127). She recognized that moment to be representative of what she was currently experiencing and said, "It is the moment I want most to avoid: unconsciously reenacting on a public stage an inward drama of which I have no knowledge" (p. 128).

The seed Mr. Bowler had planted continued to grow. Tompkins's introduction to postmodern thinking allowed her to embrace T. S. Eliot's poetry through the mechanism of her own feelings and longings and search for meaning. During that time, she finally acknowledged to herself that "my fear of my students and of my colleagues was after all a fear of myself" (p. 131). She had reached the bottom. The cup was empty. Now it was time to fill it.

As Tompkins described her growth in understanding, and her inner journey that was taking place, she used some interesting images to describe both herself and the process she was undertaking. With regard to herself, she reflected on different classes she

was teaching and various student responses to those classes. At one point she described herself as the teacher Robin Williams portrayed in Dead Poets Society, who was fired because he was too innovative and successful. Tompkins also was teaching contrary to the norm, and some students were responding to her approach. All of her experiences, whether in the classroom or with individual students, led her to recognize the inadequacies of narrative to explain all of this. As a result, for the first time in her life, she began to experience the magic of poetry (p. 141).

As Tompkins continued to experiment within her classroom and transfer more and more control to the learner, she also continued to struggle with fear. Coping with her new-found freedom was not easy for her. Often she found herself longing for the security associated with the highly structured classroom, symbolized by neatly aligned rows of desks and chairs. This fear and inner uneasiness led Tompkins to the discipline of karate. She reasoned,

> I thought perhaps if I mastered, or acquired some skill in, a martial art, the external competence would affect me internally, give me the ability to stand up for myself, to stop assuming all the power was on the other side, to meet confrontation firmly instead of avoiding it. (p. 156)

But through this discipline she discovered something else. Regarding the martial-arts stances and movements as well as the ritual preparation, she said, "The essence of the forms is not in the spectacle they create but in how they feel to the practitioner" (p. 157).

Tompkins compared karate with learning a Western science. Each uses a sequential, step-by-step process. But the paramount difference is that

> karate is practiced with, and in, the body. The steps alter the person who performs them; you become the tradition, you become the rules. You become your own master. . . . Though it begins and is carried on in the physical realm, it ends by training your soul. (p. 159)

Karate helped to transform Tompkins's understanding of what she was trying to do in the classroom. Up to that point in her journey, she had allowed chaos to exert more authority than it should. Her objective had been to help her students discover their "true" selves, and in so doing she had allowed freedom to reign in her classroom. What karate revealed to her was the fact that the self is liberated by imposing a set of formal constraints (p. 159). Tompkins's experience with karate led her to conclude that "To be empowering, discipline must be chosen" (p. 160).

As the seed that Mr. Bowler had planted continued to grow, a course Tompkins taught, entitled "American Literature Unbound," became the stage on which one of the final acts of her personal play was reenacted. It was one of the final acts because this was the stage on which Tompkins's greatest fear was exposed, that of being "found out." And she did not reflect on this course in a casual, "arm chair," fashion. Rather, she recognized this was an experience she needed to relive in an attempt to see what it was telling her and then, horror upon horrors, do something about it.

It was during this last leg of her journey, the time when the seed that Mr. Bowler had planted started to push through the soil, that this greatest of all awakenings occurred. Tompkins began by acknowledging that it was difficult to tell a straight story (p. 162). It became apparent to her that life is not about experiences but rather how one interprets these experiences (Kegan, 1980). She recognized, "The ego's need to be reflected *one way or the other* intrudes everywhere" (p. 163). But tell the story of this course she must. As she said, "I've realized that the story of this course is about issues that have long lain dormant in my life, at the bottom of the pool inside me, like monsters in a fairy tale" (p. 163).

Tompkins acknowledged this course to be a sort of text, "beautiful, strange, many layered, frightening—woven out of the memory and desire of every person in the room" (p. 163). But more important, she acknowledged the existence of an even deeper text. "The deep text was my own need to feel accepted by the students. To be part of something they were part of. Not to be alone" (p. 165).

Recounting this course and the events that surrounded it was not easy for Tompkins. As she ventured further into this experience, she recognized her overpowering love for Melville and the subject of language. As she reflected upon her dissertation, she noticed how passages related to anger in Melville's writings affected her. She recognized the existence of anger deep within herself, so deep, in fact, she had not been aware it was there.

But what struck Tompkins the hardest as she reflected on all of this was her recognition that this class was actually *doing* language and not just talking about it (p. 172). This was paramount for her, for part of her self-authentication came through her will. Earlier she had discussed how liberating it had been to leave her husband (p. 93), in large because she had acted. Now, she found herself and the class acting and exerting their respective wills in the process of *doing* language.

And then it happened. The students were asked to critique the class. The result was a highly critical appraisal of the class that left Tompkins deflated and discouraged. She said,

> Another person might have taken it better, not been so sensitive. But the students had unknowingly found me out. Criticism was what I'd been trying to avoid all along, criticism of any kind—literary criticism, criticism of myself as a teacher, my having to criticize them. (p. 176)

She acknowledged,

> They got me, all right, maybe in the deepest place. Taking criticism too much to heart, wanting to be free from it entirely. All along I'd known in the abstract that I taught from places inside me that needed healing. Well, here was my chance, in the aftermath of their evaluations, to forgive myself for fearing judgment so much, to forgive myself for wanting to escape. (p. 177)

Through this experience she dived "into the pool where rage, self-absorption, loneliness, the need for ego gratification, and fear of criticism lurked" (p. 178), waiting for her. She had met the enemy, and it was herself.

In the wake of this discovery, Tompkins picked herself up, looked around, and began to focus on her interpersonal relationships. Before then, her focus had been almost exclusively intrapersonal. She started by comparing the community that existed within her class to the community that existed within her department at Duke. She spoke of noticing "an absence of social and emotional housekeeping" (184). Tompkins described the university workplace as a type of "war zone" (p. 189) and quickly concluded that competition had taken the place of peace. And she recognized that her inner feeling of loneliness was only exacerbated by the lack of community at her university.

As she began to look without herself, Tompkins noticed several other things. One was the speed at which she was living her life. She said, "I was attacking things in a crouched position, hurrying, worrying, and not feeling anything—certainly not the sun, or the breeze, or how the earth felt" (p. 198). She noticed further that one of her primary motivations for doing something was to see herself mirrored in achievement (p. 199). Any activity that did not lead directly to this achievement she considered an interruption and not to be undertaken. But then she recalled a passage from one of Henri Nouwen's books, in which he shared a personal discovery to the effect that interruptions, rather than taking him away from his work, were in fact an integral part of his work. Tompkins said

of this discovery, "The acceptance of interruption *as* one's work implies a consciousness not wedded to its own purposes" (p. 200).

Part and parcel with this discovery related to work interruption and time was Tompkins's discovery that effective living is as much communal as it is instrumental. She said,

> My sense of reality has begun to change where questions of work and time are concerned. More and more I believe I am devoting myself to the moment. Less and less can I support activity that is purely instrumental—do this now so that later you can do that. (p. 205)

Tompkins concluded her autobiography by focusing on the theme of "instrumental versus communal." She lamented an educational system that had taken away students' initiative. Today, students are concerned about the future and their own employability. Education is a means to an end, that end being meaningful and gainful employment. As a result of, or perhaps driving this situation, education today provides little, if any, help in the development of students' self-knowledge.

Tompkins finished by calling for more in the way of active learning. Education today is compartmentalized, so her call was for more integration, education that is more holistic in its perspective. No one is taught how to feel, or what to do with feelings. Education is much more an information dump—knowledge about, as opposed to knowledge that. If anything, the university should be a training ground for life, and not just for career. Tompkins summed things up with this observation:

> Having a problem with yourself is the existential dilemma, the human condition. Learning to deal with our own suffering is the beginning of wisdom. I didn't learn this—that is, that I had to start with myself—until I was in my late forties. I could have begun sooner. (p. 221)

As a result of this "autobiographical process" (Bruner, 1995), Tompkins learned several significant lessons:

1. Tompkins discovered early in her writing that the learning that came from and through experience was not the same type of learning that is referred to in an academic sense. She discerned in this process that a combination of narrative, imagination, and interpretation lends itself to the process of understanding. No new information is attained, only understanding.

2. Part and parcel of Tompkins's discovery that learning from and through experience was a valid form of learning was her growing awareness of how formative her days at P.S. 98 had been. As she reflected and wrote, she came to see how significant her fear of failure and her lack of love and acceptance had been to her then and still were now.

3. Finally, through all of this, Tompkins came to recognize the importance of language and the instrumental role it plays in the construction of the self in general and her self in particular. It can be a trap or it can be used to create something new and different. Some have spoken of the use of language in hermeneutics and the interpretive process (Freeman, 1993; Ricoeur, 1984). Others have spoken of its use in the imaginative act of creating narrative (Conway, 1998; Dickerson, 1989; Eakin, 1999; Freeman, 1993; Gornick, 2001a; Hampl, 1999; Metzger, 1992; Nelson, 1994). For Tompkins, language was the instrument with which she created meaning.

Summary

We have seen in this chapter how two authors used the "autobiographical process" (Bruner, 1995) to transform their lives. The creation of life stories or personal narratives (Bruner, 1987, 1995, 1999; McAdams, 1993, 1996) enabled Snyder and Tompkins to rewrite their lives (Freeman, 1993) and identify an inner plot (Conway,

1998) through the effective use of a narrative imagination (Freeman, 1993; Metzger, 1992).

The impetus for the learning process was different for Snyder and Tompkins. For Snyder, the impetus originated in a significant change in his life circumstance (Spear & Mocker, 1984). The loss of a prestigious position at a renowned university set him on his way. For Tompkins, the impetus originated with a change of heart (Brookfield, 1986), an inner disquiet that caused her to reassess her personal strategies in particular, and the goals of education in general. For both authors, a change in their situation gave rise to a new story (Gornick, 2001a).

Whether it was searching and coming to grips with the idea that life is more about accommodation than fate, as Snyder did, or recognizing the role and limits of language in the development of self-knowledge, as Tompkins did, we see the role of self-directed, independent, and autonomous learning at work in each case. For both authors, the process of reflecting and imaginatively creating from memory enabled them to reconstruct a sense of unity over the course of time (Brady, 1990) and discover meaning (Gornick, 2001b) and purpose (Conway, 1998) in their individual lives.

Hampl (1999) said of Edith Stein that Stein refused to divulge, "even to her best friend, what she knew each person must find alone, in the locked tabernacle of the self" (p. 128). In the cases of Snyder and Tompkins, the knowing came as a result of the divulging. For them, language transformed experience into meaning, which is what learning is all about.

The irony in these two autobiographies is this. Both Snyder and Tompkins were academicians who had dedicated their lives to the pursuit of goals and dreams related to the academy and their involvement in it. Both found, however, as they created their

autobiographies, that their most significant learning had taken place outside the confines of the academy. Learning for them could not be institutionalized. In fact, learning that derives from experience and memory, and leads to meaning and understanding, defies the rigidity of any institutional boundaries.

Neither Snyder nor Tompkins spent any time studying or doing research in the field of education, nor did they avail themselves of the language endemic to the educational community. Yet both lives reflected the change and transformation that so often occurs as a result of self-directed learning activities.

These two authors used the results of their respective autobiographical processes (Bruner, 1995) to redirect their future efforts. For Snyder, this amounted to discovering that life was more about accommodation than about fate, and using this discovery to shape for himself a life of manual labor and free-lance writing, both from without the academy. His story was summed up so beautifully in one of the last conversations he related with his son Jack. He said, "'And it's the work, Jack' I said. 'You do the work the right way even if you're working for a jerk'" (p. 264). To arrive at that conclusion required little advancement in knowing about anything. But it required huge strides in the understanding of everything.

For Tompkins, using the autobiographical process to redirect her future efforts amounted to discovering that education was missing the mark. She said of that discovery, "Having a problem with your self is the existential dilemma, the human condition. Learning to deal with our own suffering is the beginning of wisdom. I didn't learn this—that is, that I had to start with myself—until I was in my late forties. I could have begun sooner" (p. 221). As for Snyder so too for Tompkins, the result of her "autobiographical

process" (Brunner, 1995) took her to new levels of understanding. But unlike Snyder, she was able to bring this learning back into the academy in an attempt to effect change.

CHAPTER 5

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING: SOME CONCLUSIONS

Self-Construction and the Revelatory Power of Language

According to Freeman (1993), the poet's role is to rewrite the world in such a way that the person who reads the poet can locate himself or herself in the poet's rewritten world. This is achieved when the reader finds himself or herself learning, seeing, or feeling something different about the world that, for all intents and purposes, might have gone unnoticed had it not been for the poet.

The same seems to hold for autobiography and personal narrative. Upon completing each of these six autobiographies, we are left with the sense that something unique has been discovered that might not have been discovered in any other way. Reflecting on, learning from, and writing about personal experience have made this discovery possible. Through the revelatory power inherent in language, there is an ability in narrative to go beyond appearance, to probe, to look at something in depth. Individual understanding is taken to a deeper level.

Through the writing of autobiographies, authors undertake a process through which they seek to redefine the boundaries between foundationalism and hermeneutics, and between science and art. Through the use of their narrative imaginations, authors endeavor to uncover, articulate, and describe a world that would undoubtedly not have existed were it not for the creation of their own narratives.

The objective that authors attempt to achieve is one of disclosure. They seize upon what is currently available to them and, through the use of the imagination and language, transform it. Their goal is to say something meaningful about the world that

heretofore has not been said, and would have gone unsaid were it not for their attempt to create their personal narrative. In the process they take both their own and the reader's understanding to a new level. Freeman (1993) referred to this as a "hermeneutically imaginative dimension" (p. 231).

Each of the autobiographies examined in this study was a sort of allegory. In each instance, a particular situation was universalized to such an extent that it became a story applicable to many lives. In fact, this may be one of the primary roles of allegory—to take a particular situation and make it into story.

According to Sayers (1963), "Allegory is a distinct literary form, whose aim and method is to dramatize a psychological experience, so as to make it more vivid and more comprehensible" (p. 202). She went on to say that an allegory

> tells a literal story which is complete in itself, but which also presents a likeness to some spiritual or psychological experience, so that it can be used to signify and interpret that experience; and the story is told, not for its own sake, but for the sake of what it signifies. At the bottom of all such stories there lies this perception of a *likeness* between two experiences, the one familiar and the other unfamiliar, so that the one can be used to shed light on the other. (p. 202)

Earlier I cited a reference alluding to a statement attributed to Henry James. The comment was, "It is probably in this sense that Henry James intended his famous remark that adventures happen only to people who know how to tell them" (Bruner, 1999, p. 163). In similar manner, Taylor (1996) claimed, "There is no story until there is a telling" (p. 15). It is the autobiographical act, an act of imaginative creation, that precipitates meaning and understanding.

In light of these comments, and as a result of this study, I concluded that perhaps learning happens only to people who know how to articulate what it is they have learned. Part of what is required is the ability to reflect on one's past experience in an attempt to see and understand how what has been experienced has helped to conceptualize and form

the present. Also, it must be noted that good autobiography depends on the narrative skills of the one writing the autobiography. The interpretive tools and skills needed to build a solid edifice of meaning and understanding are themselves developed and refined through the process of living.

The autobiography as a unique genre permits a number of transactions to take place. In this genre, scenes and events dominate the narrative, much more so than do ideas. The language used and the images created serve to "suggest" meaning and understanding. They do not demand it. In fact, it is more accurate to say that meaning and understanding are not imposed on the text, but rather they emerge from it (Howarth, 1980).

Also, meaning and understanding are as dependent on the receiver as they are on the sender. To arrive at the conclusion that meaning and understanding have taken place in the life of the author, the author must form a connection or "pact" (Eakin, 1989) with the reader. Through the effective use of language, the author recaptures experiences and gives them new life in such a manner that entirely new significance results. In Augustinian terms, the past surrenders to present exegesis (Howarth, 1980).

Hampl brought this point home when she wrote about a woman she remembered from when she was growing up in St. Paul. She used to pass this woman every day on her way to the local parochial school. She described her in the following manner. She was a "parish lady, part of the anonymous population that thickened our world, people who were always there, who were solidly part of us, part of what we were, but who never emerged beyond the bounds of being parishioners to become full-fledged persons" (p. 51). She continued, "The parish lady was not a nun. She was a person who prayed,

who prayed alone, for no reason that I understood. But there was no question that she prayed without ceasing, as the strange scriptural line instructed" (p. 52).

What makes this episode especially poignant is how Hampl described the "parish lady's" gaze as they passed each other on the street. She said, "It was not an invasive look, but it latched. She had me. Not an intrusive gaze, but one brimming with a secret which, *if only she had the words, it was clear she'd want to tell*" (italics added) (p. 52).

"If only she had the words, it was clear she'd want to tell" (Hampl, p. 52). This, in part, is what writing an autobiography is all about. The autobiography is not an event; neither is it an object, something to be sold at a bookstore. Rather, it is a process, a lifelong process of giving words or expression to experience (Bruner, 1995). It is a process of setting the author free from the bondage and tyranny that exist when he or she does not have the words to express himself or herself. It is a process that involves deconstruction as well as reconstruction. It is a process that is never finished, but always "just begun." The autobiographical process begins with conviction, becomes a sense of urgency, and results in scripted text. But the text takes on a life of its own. The very act of creation, an imaginative process, takes the author to a new level of understanding.

Hampl talked about discovery being a kind of miracle (p. 121). In a sense, all six of these authors encountered a change in their respective worldviews as they each made a discovery of sorts. They became new people through the agency of their autobiographies. In addition, they realized that it is out of individual perception and not blood ties that solidarity is formed (Hampl, p. 121).

Finally, Conway (1998) quoted an essay that Mabel Dodge Luhan wrote about Gertrude Stein, in which she said that Stein was "doing with words, what Picasso is doing

with paint. She is impelling language to induce new states of consciousness, and in doing so language becomes with her a creative art rather than a mirror of history" (p. 117).

Common Themes

In a certain sense, each of these autobiographies is a "work in progress." Each represents an individual author's efforts to bestow meaning and significance on experiences that at the outset do not seem to have much meaning and significance. Hone (1979) said of this endeavor,

> Every biographical study is an interim report, for the simple reason that each biographer measures another's foot by his own last. Like translation, biography ineluctably comes short of the subject. "Who do you say that I am?" was a question that of necessity elicited several points of view.(p. ix)

The same can be said of the autobiography. It, too, is an interim report of sorts, and it, too, can be viewed through any number of different lenses. Each of the six situations reviewed in this study was unique, but the stories that resulted were similar in several respects. In this section, my plan is to draw attention to some of the common aspects of these narratives.

An author fulfills two fundamental roles when writing an autobiography. As Howarth (1980) said, "The common manifestation of a strong and principled character determines the person's two didactic roles: as narrator, he teaches his prime lesson; as protagonist, he relives and learns from his days of win or error" (p. 92).

In this process, the past surrenders its soul to present exegesis. Each autobiography is a process of interpreting past experience through the interpretive structure of the present. The author functions both as narrator and as protagonist. As narrator, the author sweeps across the historical landscape and views events and relationships in retrospect. From this perspective, many events and relationships are seen

fitting together, making more sense, and beginning to reveal a sort of "inner plot" (Conway, 1998). As a protagonist, the author relives events and relationships that transpired some time in the past and begins the process of remaking himself or herself (Bruner, 1987, 1995; McAdams, 1993, 1996). It is the combination of these two roles that permits learning to take place, and such learning is based on experience.

The beauty of these autobiographies is established upon the fact that, when all is said and done, when the autobiography draws to a close, the narrator and the protagonist emerge as one and the same person. The "teaching" self and the "experiencing" self are wedded, brought together in the presence of the reader in such a fashion that the reader is forced to respond.

Each of these six autobiographies reflects a difference in situation, but a similarity in story (Gornick, 2001a). The situations vary not only in space and time, but also in the areas of meaning and significance. Each life is distinctive and comprises a unique set of problems, challenges, and predicaments. But from each unique situation a story is created. And each story shares with the others some common themes. They may vary in emphasis and intensity, but they are there. The following is a description of some of the more common themes.

Agency and Communion

McAdams (1993) talked about agency and communion as being two principal themes in personal myths. Agentic motives, he argued, are built around the themes of power and achievement. Themes of independence, mastery, and justice also are made manifest through agentic motives. By contrast, communal motives are built around such themes as love, patience, interdependence, and responsibility.

All six authors whose autobiographies were reviewed for this research exhibited a movement, no matter how small it might be, from more to less agentic motives, and from less to more communal motives. Through the mechanism of their own unique and varied experiences, they came to new and greater understandings of the need for and the meaning of community, interdependence, and responsibility. Through their unique self-directed learning processes, they arrived at a greater appreciation of both the need for and the role of community in providing needed encouragement, direction, information, and support.

Rugged individualism, to whatever extent it existed, fell apart for each author. Whether it was through making a religious pilgrimage, struggling with illness, or facing a mid-career transition, each author came to realize the importance of community in support, encouragement, and collaboration.

Gornick (2001a) wrote about the narrator being an agent who directs the reader through the narrative. In a sense, all six of these authors moved from personal themes of agency to personal themes of communion. In the process, the authors filled the role of agents for the process. Specific examples of this notion are given in the following paragraphs.

In A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned, Tompkins invited readers to join her on this reflective journey. She started seeking to possess in order to produce. Throughout her whole educational experience, for example, she obtained educational degrees in an effort to attain prestigious faculty positions and, ultimately, to hide her deep fear of "being found out." All of these were agentic motives she unleashed to meet her need for achievement, mastery, and independence. By the end of her narrative, however, Tompkins had, in a sense, recognized the "folly" of her ways. Her language and life

direction had moved in the direction of community—themes of interdependence and interconnectivity. For example, she recognized just how "unfriendly" her department at Duke was, and how not everyone was not motivated to build community.

In An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness, Jamison summarized the changes that took place over the course of writing her autobiography.

> When I first thought about writing this book, I conceived of it as a book about moods, and an illness of moods, in the context of an individual life. As I have written it, however, it has somehow turned out to be very much a book about love as well: love as sustainer, as renewer, and as protector. (p. 215)

She moved from wanting to write about MDI, thereby fulfilling the agentic role of independence and mastery, to actually sharing her experiences with the illness. This aspect of sharing helped Jamison arrive at the conclusion that her autobiography was more about love and acceptance, a communal theme.

"The necessary focus on the self, therefore, encourages a rhetoric of agency in many autobiographical narratives, especially among contemporary Americans imbued with an ethic of individualism" (McAdams, 1996). Similarly, Conway (1998) referred to voice in an autobiography as "the product of inner agency" (p. 126). She said of autobiographical creation,

> We travel through life guided by an inner life plot—part the creation of family, part the internalization of broader social norms, part the function of our imaginations and our own capacity for insight into ourselves, part from our groping to understand the universe in which the planet we inhabit is a speck. When we speak about our memories, we do so through literary forms that seem to capture universals in human experience—the quest, the romance, the odyssey, the tragic or the comic mode. (p. 177)

Active Engagement and Narrative Creation

Each author experienced both the need to become, and the process of becoming, a participant in his or her particular situation. In fact, it was this process of becoming a

participant that yielded their particular stories. Each story was an account of how one must move from the role of observer to participant in order to gain understanding and meaning. As Donnie said to Hampl on numerous occasions, "You have to get in there." Whether they chose their experience, as Hampl, Heilman and Tompkins did, or whether it was thrust upon them, as it was for Price, Snyder, and Jamison, the need to become involved was paramount in the unveiling of meaning. As Palmer (2000) said, "If you can't get out of it, get into it" (p. 84).

Some examples of this phenomenon include the following. Heilman learned early on the meaning and significance of the act and process of *lernen*. Growth in wisdom and understanding is available to any Jewish person who is willing to engage in the process. Heilman said, "No Jew could hope to find salvation except by climbing out of the exile of ignorance and into the redemptive light of *lernen*. Study was no longer the practice just of scholars but was for everyone a lifetime mission" (p. 25).

Menachem Reichler opened Heilman's understanding to the idea of the Torah as a means to an end rather than an end in and of itself.

> You acquired a great deal: you learned nothing. If you have come to acquire Torah as if it were one of the subjects you learned in the university, you will never learn it. The Torah is the way to reach the Master of the Universe. It is a pathway, not an acquisition. You will never finish it; you will never get a degree. (p. 117)

Rizhyner Rebbe emphasized the fact that individual and independent study is the source of internal light.

> That is just as when a man walks through the woods on a dark night, and for a time another joins him, lantern in hand, but at the crossroads they part and the first must grope his way on alone. But if a man carries his own light with him, he need not be afraid of any darkness. Do you understand? It is time for you to stop looking for someone else to lead you, for someone else's lantern. You must at last learn to study on your own. (p. 158)

Hampl experienced some breakthroughs in understanding and invited readers to share in some captivating insights she had attained during the course of her journey. An example of this is her insight into the concept of vocation, what it means to be truly alive. She said of this, "Observation alone, the life of looking. . . . Life, fundamentally, was neither active nor passive. It was contemplative. . . . Pondering was the highest vocation"(p. 62).

Active engagement in the process of living amounts to pondering, the process of both critical reflection and self-reflection, whereby the individual soul opens its arms to the possibility of new and variegated possibilities. In essence, life is neither active, always doing, nor passive, always receiving, but rather contemplative, actively engaging.

Also, from the standpoint of an independent observer, Donnie often reminded Hampl that she must become involved. "*You have to get in there*," was her cry. This was very similar to Palmer's (2000) injunction, cited above, "If you can't get out of it, get into it" (p. 84).

Finally, at the end of his autobiography, Price shared with readers some significant insights. One of them pertained to the call for involvement. His call, specifically related to illness, was for readers to actively "dig" themselves out of their predicaments. No one else was going to help.

> You're in your present calamity alone, as far as this life goes. If you want a way out, then dig it yourself, if there turns out to be any trace of a way. Nobody—least of all a doctor—can rescue you now, not from the deeps of your own mind, not once they've stitched your gaping wound. (p. 182)

For each of these authors, the very act of writing, of creating text, gave form to an otherwise amorphous mass of meaningless and seemingly insignificant experience. In addition, writing was a willful act that each author undertook in an effort to take his or her situation public. The very act of disclosure is liberating and transforming.

In her autobiography, An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness, Jamison invited readers to share her fear of going public. She said,

> I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues so openly will be on my personal and professional life, but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent. I am tired of hiding, tired of misspent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide. (p. 7)

The reader senses no hesitation here. In fact, the pain Jamison had harbored deep within herself by not speaking out jumps from the page and demands attention.

As she completed her autobiography, Jamison shared with readers just how different her story was because of the act of narrative creation. The very act of creating text opened her eyes to something she had not seen before. Essentially, what started as a scientific endeavor related to MDI ended as a piece of artistic self-expression related to love and the significance of personal relationships.

In her Epilogue, Jamison commented, "I have often asked myself whether, given the choice, I would choose to have manic-depressive illness. . . . Strangely enough I think I would choose to have it" (p. 217). The creation of text, the telling of her story, the extraction of meaning from her situation—all of these elements combined to enable Jamison to reflect and tell her readers she would not change a thing.

In his autobiography, A Whole New Life: An Illness and a Healing, Price told his readers that, upon discovering his illness, he had been at a loss to find any sort of written narrative by someone else who had ventured through a similar trying situation. As a result, he took it upon himself to create this documentation. He said,

> That aim is to give, in the midst of an honest narrative, a true record of the visible and invisible ways in which one fairly normal creature entered a trial, not of his choosing, and emerged after a long four years on a new life—a life that's almost wholly changed from the old. (p. vii)

Ironically, what began as a sort of objective documentary ended as the telling of a story, a story of transformation and change. Essentially, it was the account of the creation of a new life, from the ashes and burning rubble of one overrun by cancer. But from physical pain and suffering emerged emotional and spiritual strength and vitality. Price said of his "inner" change because of his "outer" situation, "First, paraplegia with its maddening limitations has forced a degree of patience and consequent watchfulness on me, though as a writer I'd always been watchful" (p. 189).

Price discovered, as did Jamison, that he would not exchange anything. The experience had been necessary and worthwhile. In fact, the creation of a "new" person from the experience contributed to an increase in his productivity.

> But the fact that, in ten years since the tumor was found, I've completed thirteen books—I'd published a first twelve in the previous twenty-two years—would seem at least another demonstration that human energy, without grave loss, may flow from one form into another and win the same consoling gains. (The question of why and how I was able to increase my rate is unanswerable, by me anyhow—a race with death and silence, a massive rerouting of sexual energy would be the easy answers. But if I was racing, I never felt chased; panic came elsewhere but never in my work. On the contrary, I sense strongly that the illness itself either unleashed a creature within me that had been restrained and let him run at his own hungry will; or it planted a whole new creature in place of the old.) (pp. 190-191)

It is highly unlikely that any steps can be taken to adequately prepare a person for life's experiences. In Yeats's words,

> For some months now I have lived with my own youth and childhood, not always writing indeed but thinking of it almost every day, and I am sorrowful and disturbed. It is not that I have accomplished too few of my plans, for I am not ambitious; but when I think of all the books I have read, and of the wise words I have heard spoken, and of the anxiety I have given to parents and grandparents, and of the hopes that I have had, all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens. (as cited in Howarth, 1980, p. 112)

The irony here is that the authors whose accounts were reviewed in this study seemed to say that their own lives had been a lack of preparation for something that did happen. The process of capturing this seemed to be what learning was all about.

As Bruner (1995) said, "I have no grand conclusion to offer save that autobiography is life construction through 'text' construction. . . . I persist in thinking that autobiography is an extension of fiction, rather than the reverse, that the shape of life comes first from imagination rather than from experience" (p. 176).

Location and Relation

Unique to each autobiography reviewed in this study was the location in which the narrative was situated. Or perhaps it was the location that gave rise to the narrative. Hampl traveled to Italy to retrace the steps of St. Francis of Assisi. Then, a year later, she spent a week in a monastery in California. It was during that time in the monastery that her story seemed to come together and take shape. When she walked out of there, she knew that what her friend Donnie had said all along was true: "*You have to get in there.*"

Heilman wrote his autobiography after having lived in Jerusalem. His experiences there enabled him to establish a number of connections with his past. These connections, in turn, enabled him to identify more closely with various communities in Jerusalem and ultimately with his tradition and heritage. The process of uncovering and making those connections was what gave rise to his autobiography or story.

Jamison used trips to England as times to pull herself together and regroup. These excursions served not only as means to escape her hectic life style in southern California, but also to refocus her thinking. Jamison also used these times in England to make some life-changing decisions. It was after her year-long sabbatical in England that she realized

it was time to leave UCLA. Shortly after returning home, she moved to Washington, D.C. with her new husband.

Location also played an important role in Snyder's autobiography. After leaving Colgate, he retreated to Maine to begin his process of pulling things together. Maine's beaches, parks and terrain provided an almost ideal setting for an autobiography of this sort. A major turning point in Snyder's story occurred when his wife Colleen rented a cottage on the beach for the family. This took place during the depths of Snyder's 11-month bout with depression, when his whole world had come to a standstill. This change in location, coupled with other events, served as a beginning to his recovery process and his personal transformation.

In her autobiography, Tompkins took her readers on a variety of excursions to numerous locations. Centered on the east coast, she traveled from Bryn Mawr to Yale to Temple to Duke in her academic career. She lived in Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. It was her final stop, at Duke in North Carolina, where Tompkins began to pull things together. In particular, it was a class that she took to a motel off campus that generated critical comments about her and stimulated some important and serious self-reflection on her part.

Finally, Price, because of the nature of his illness, was confined to one location in North Carolina. But this lack of variety in his physical surroundings stimulated him to search the confines of his memory. He recalled people, places, and things to mind in a descriptive manner. In fact, when he was at one of the lowest points in his journey to recovery, he called on his cousin Marcia and asked to stay at her house. This change in environment, together with her care, enabled him to begin the recovery process.

With respect to the theme of relation and relationship, in each of these autobiographies, as themes of agency gave way to themes of communion, so too did the importance of interpersonal relationship grow. All six of these authors recognized in their own distinct ways the importance of others to their respective journeys.

Hampl's autobiography was a continual unfolding of new meanings that she derived from past and new relationships. Donnie, for example, played a significant role in guiding her in a quiet and unobtrusive manner. Hampl said of her,

> Donnie. . . . She's been a contemplative nun since she was seventeen. Not a woman easily rattled. No doubt she sees my grouchiness as "the spiritual part." I can't figure her. Yet I keep going back to visit her, to sort out what I thought was the past, my dead Catholic past, only to find it isn't dead at all. (p. 7)

Early on, Donnie offered Hampl some sound, wise, and significant advice. "Donnie's opinion: Don't get complicated, quit trying to figure out what you believe, just follow your instinct" (p. 16).

As she moved forward in her journey, Hampl took notice of some Franciscans traveling with her tour group. As she watched them interact, she noticed how important interpersonal relationships were to them. She said, "They weren't 'living in history' with its throwaway pageant of changing characters. Rather, in this Franciscan world there was only the eternity of primal relationships" (p. 119). Further examples include Hampl's relationship with both Felix, a friar taking the Assisi excursion, and Andre, the chaplain at Rosethorn. Her encounters with both of these men left her a different person.

Heilman also placed significant emphasis on the personal encounters he experienced while traveling in Jerusalem. Each one of these people showed him something new, helped him connect with his past, or helped him appropriate a deeper understanding for himself. Heilman's significant relationships began with the rabbi of his "home" congregation, who had encouraged Heilman to journey out and forward for most

of his "growing up" life. It all came to a head one day when he gave Heilman a challenge he could not refuse to accept. The rabbi told him, "No Jew could hope to find salvation except by climbing out of the exile of ignorance and into the redemptive light of *lernen*. Study was no longer the practice just of scholars but was for everyone a lifetime mission" (p. 25).

Early into his journey, Heilman met Rav Krol. His relationship with that man was instrumental in helping to ignite within the depths of his being a hunger to study and to learn from the ancient texts. Not long after that, Heilman encountered Reb Yose Moshe, who opened his eyes and heart to the real purpose of studying. He recalled this encounter in the following way: "You see," Reb Yose Moshe began, "it's the same with a *sefer*. A holy book can be worn, the light inside it can still shine brightly if you know how to *lern* it out" (p. 98).

These are just two examples of significant relationships that dramatically influenced Heilman's life and direction. Many more can be found within his autobiography, for essentially the book is an account of relationships and their effect on his *lernen*.

Autobiography and Self-Directed Learning . . . Observations and Classroom Implications

The relationship between self-directed learning and personal narrative is not always direct. This may be due, in part at least, to both the different ways in which people writing in these areas conceptualize problems and use language. For example, those writing in the area of self-directed learning are prone to use terms the likes of "critical reflection" (Brookfield, 1985; Mezirow, 1990a), "experience" (Kolb, 1984), "meaning schemes" (Mezirow, 1991, 1995), "perspective transformation" (Mezirow,

1990b, 1991, 1995), "learning" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, 1999), "autonomy" (Chene, 1983; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), "personal traits" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, 1999), and "the learning process" (Knowles, 1975, 1980; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Tough, 1971). On the other hand, those writing in the area of personal narrative are prone to use terms the likes of "re/construction," "interpretation," "metaphor," "narrative" (both as a process and a product of construction), "recollection," "meaning," "self," and "voice" (Conway, 1998; Dickerson, 1989; Eakin, 1989; Hampl, 1999; Olney, 1980, 1998; Taylor, 1996). Language used tends to be specialized to the field of self-directed learning.

Whereas self-directed learning is concerned with the learner, personal narrative is concerned with the self (Bruner, 1987, 1990, 1995, 1999; Conway, 1998; Eakin, 1989; Olney, 1980, 1998). Whereas self-directed learning is concerned with the "process of change," personal narrative is concerned with "creating" and "calling into existence" something that is not there (Dickerson, 1989; Gornick, 2001a, 2001b; Hampl, 1999; Taylor, 1996). Whereas self-directed learning is concerned with a situation as a precursor to individual change (Aslanian & Brickell, 1982), personal narrative is concerned with interpreting one's way out of a situation (Bruner, 1987, 1995; McAdams, 1993, 1999). Whereas self-directed learning is concerned with experience as a phenomenon upon which to reflect and a component in the learning process (Kolb, 1984, 1988; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, 1999), personal narrative sees experience as having no independent existence but rather as being shaped and formed by memory and language and figured anew through the process of interpretation (Bruner, 1986, 1987, 1990; Conway, 1998; Gornick, 2001b; Ricoeur, 1991; Taylor, 1996).

All in all, I think we can safely say that, through the process of interpretation, a new identity is formed, a narrative identity of sorts (Eakin, 1999). The revelatory power inherent in language shapes and forms this identity and calls it into existence (Freeman, 1993). A new text is created from an old text. Meaning is established through an interpretive process (Brady, 1990; Bruner, 1990; Dickerson, 1989). That which is without the author becomes changed through language (Freeman, 1993) to that which is within. The result of this process is a new awareness, an increased sensitivity to things without and things within, and for all intents and purposes, a different self (Freeman, 1993; McAdams, 1993).

What this means for the classroom is tantamount to preparing for war in a war college or military academy. The military person must understand the principles of war, study and learn through case examples and the experiences of others. In addition, this individual must experience as closely as possible the "situation" of war through camps and other means of fabricating and creating "reality" as closely as possible. But nothing will replace the actual experience of war, and this is nothing under the control of the military person. Hopefully the study and training have been intense and real enough to permit intuitive, second-nature sorts of actions when the reality occurs. But only the reality of war, outside the control of the military person, will reveal the "verisimilitude" of the study and training.

So, too, is the situation with respect to personal narrative and the classroom. We can study about the subject. We can create activities (Metzger, 1992; Wuthnow, 1998) that will enable us to get closer to the subject. We can study cases of others who have encountered the subject and even engaged in the interpretive process themselves. But nothing will replace the activity of actually doing the subject, and this is something that

cannot be planned and performed in a predetermined block of time. It is a motivation that can only come from within. When the war battle does occur, hopefully the military person, because of all his or her study and training, will recall both weapons to use and appropriate times and examples of how these were used successfully. Although a weak replica of the actual war zone, the classroom or the orchestrated training field is, nevertheless, all we have to aid the process of preparation.

Autobiography and Self-Directed Learning . . . Expanding the Horizon

Writing is a form of "thinking and discovery and selection and order and meaning" (Morrison, 1987, p. 111). But it also carries with it a sense of "awe and reverence and mystery and magic" (p. 111). It is a sort of literary archaeology in which the author attempts to reconstruct a memory edifice using some memory and some imagination as his or her tools (p. 112). In a sense, autobiography is a form of fiction, due to the nature of the imaginative act. But it is also a form of truth in that the author uses recollection to help reconstruct events, relationships, and feelings that really happened.

Brookfield (1985) claimed that, in self-directed learning, "critical reflection on the contextual and contingent aspects of reality, the exploration of alternative perspectives and meaning systems, and the alteration of personal and social circumstances are all present" (p. 15). One of the challenges facing researchers in the area of self-directed learning is how to take such learning to a new level. Merriam (2001) suggested that one way to do this might be to focus more on the quality of the learner's experience. What researchers in the area of narrative psychology (Bruner, 1987, 1995, 1999; Freeman, 1993, 2000; McAdams, 1993, 1996) and writers in the field of autobiographical theory (Conway, 1998; Dickerson, 1989; Eakin, 1999; Gornick, 2001b; Kazin, 1979; Lejeune, 1989; Sprinker, 1981) have demonstrated is the fact that meaning and significance

emerge through the creation of narrative, the experience of writing about significant experiences from the past. This experience may be the point in time and space where learning actually occurs, the point where re-creation takes place.

The questions we ask, the transformation we incur, are to a certain degree bounded and limited by the answers we are prepared to give and the language we have at our command. The transformation a person experiences or what one learns is limited by the language he or she has with which to express these results. Words are defined in terms of other words. Every idea is placed in juxtaposition to another idea. Truly, there is nothing new under the sun. Yet, each of these authors demonstrated that, truly, experience does precede language, and that the reforming of our worldviews consists of experiencing before we can describe, and often describing long before we explain, if we ever can explain.

Motivation, independence, and autonomy lead to the creation of autobiography. Redirection and motivation for new and different action is the result. Robinson (1998) described the importance of action in the life of Bonhoeffer:

> Theology may proceed in the manner of a philosophical treatise or a piece of textual criticism, but it always begins by assuming major terms. And all of them, being imbedded in Scripture and tradition, behave altogether differently from discursive language. To compound the problem, Christian thinkers since Jesus have valued paradox as if it were resolution. So theology is never finally anything but theology, words about God, proceeding from the assumptions that God exists and that we know about him in a way that allows us to speak about him.
>
> Bonhoeffer calls these truths of the church "a word of recognition among friends." He invokes this language of recognition and identification in attempting to make the church real and aware of itself, with all that implied when he wrote. For him word is act. And, for him, it was.(p. 117)

For each of these authors, there was a sense that word was act for them, as well.

Freeman (1993) said that one of the roles narrative plays is to change the world into word in order to act upon it. Hampl discovered early on that life is neither active nor

passive, but rather contemplative, a term brimming with significance and meaning as it relates to action and moving forward. In fact, in the closing scene in Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life, Hampl put down her paint brush, disengaged herself from an attempt to paint a scene along the ocean shoreline, and climbed back up the cliff she had descended, in order to join her friend Edwina, who was still waiting at the top. This was symbolic for it represented Hampl's acting on the world she had recently converted to word.

Wuthnow (1998) and Metzger (1992) might provide the link or connection between self-directed learning and autobiography. Both of these authors called their respective readers to take action in their quests for authenticity. Metzger did this by giving her readers a vast array of self-directed activities that she invited them to attempt in an effort to bring out what was hidden deep within themselves. She claimed that "words not only describe reality and communicate ideas and feelings but also bring into being the hidden, invisible, or obscure. . . . Words, therefore, are the primary route toward knowing both the particular worlds we inhabit and our unique and individual selves" (p. 3).

Wuthnow (1998), by comparison, spent a great deal of time talking about and comparing what he called a "dwelling" spirituality and a "seeking" spirituality. He maintained that the secret, if there is one, lies in the practice of spirituality. His contention was that a dwelling-oriented spirituality is nigh on impossible to maintain because of the complex social realities that have come to describe contemporary American society. A seeking spirituality, although better suited to the complexities of American society, tends to result in a transient sort of spiritual existence, one whose predominant description is that it lacks significant depth.

The solution for Wuthnow was to locate spirituality in what he called a "practice-oriented spirituality":

> A practice-oriented spirituality has been part of all religious traditions. Drawing inspiration from sacred texts and from the lives of saints and other religious leaders, clergy have encouraged the faithful not only to attend public worship services but also to devote time to prayer, meditation, study of sacred texts, inspirational reading, and service. (p. 169)

Each of these six authors had a claim on the stories they told, and in turn the stories they told had a claim on them. The authors evidenced such self-directed learning traits as independence and autonomy. But more than that, they had a drive and a desire to understand, to make sense of things, and to put their respective stories together. In each case, experience informed thinking, and thinking in turn informed experience. The very act of reflecting, reconstructing, and creating order from what seemed to be chaos is an example of what Robinson (1998) meant when she said, "Action is revelation" (p. 111).

In a certain sense, all six authors reached a point in their lives when it was necessary to take the "clay" of living into their own hands, and mold and shape their inner lives for themselves. In his autobiography, Father and Son, Gosse (1958) said it so well:

> The reader who has done me the favour to follow this record of the clash of two temperaments will not fail to perceive the crowning importance of the letter from which I have just made a long quotation. It sums up, with the closest logic, the whole history of the situation, and I may leave it to form the epigraph of this little book.
>
> All that I need further say is to point out that when such defiance is offered to the intelligence of a thoughtful and honest young man with the normal impulses of his twenty-one years, there are but two alternatives. Either he must cease to think for himself; or his individualism must be instantly confirmed, and the necessity of religious independence must be emphasized.
>
> No compromise, it is seen, was offered; no proposal of a truce would have been acceptable. It was a case of "Everything or Nothing"; and thus desperately challenged, the young man's conscience threw off once for all the yoke of his "dedication," and, as respectfully as he could, without parade or remonstrance, he took a human being's privilege to fashion his inner life for himself. (p. 311)

Although none of the six authors struggled with freedom from an earthly father per se, it is evident that each struggled to be free form the authority of "life as it always has been." In a certain sense, each author threw off the yoke of his or her dedication to the way things always had been. Like Gosse, they did this as respectfully as they could, "without parade or remonstrance," in order to take the human being's privilege of fashioning an inner life for themselves.

APPENDIX

Hampl, P. (1992). *Virgin time: In search of the contemplative life.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Patricia Hampl begins her quest not to find something, but to shake off the indelible brand of a Catholic upbringing. Yet even as an adult removed from the dogma of her early Catholic training, she feels the pull of contemplative prayer. In her search, she travels to the "old world" of Catholicism, to the golden haze of St. Francis's Assisi and to the surging crowds of Lourdes with their candles and incurable illnesses. Her pilgrimage is peopled with other wanderers—crotchety English agnostics, American Franciscan friars and nuns, and the seekers that fill every charter flight. Inevitably, she finds the "old world" right at home, in the very past she had tried to escape. But what she was looking for confronts her, finally, on a retreat at a monastery near the Lost Coast of northern California in the still, virgin moments of silent prayer.

Heilman, S. (1984). *The gate behind the wall: A pilgrimage to Jerusalem.* Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.

When Samuel Heilman took a sabbatical from teaching sociology to spend time in Jerusalem, he did not know that it would become a personal pilgrimage. "Not until I had been to Jerusalem and observed and joined in the act of *lernen* the Talmud would I be able to discover its centrality to my own Jewish existence," Heilman writes. "What had begun by engaging the social scientist in me would end by awakening the Jew."
As he met with Talmudic scholars, with mystics and preachers, and with the ordinary people of Jerusalem, Heilman sensed the opening of the gate in his wall of resistance to the past. While studying the holy books he had previously put aside in the name of science, he breached the boundaries of time and place and discovered a spirit that linked his modern world with his ancient heritage.

Jamison, K. (1995). *An unquiet mind: A memoir of moods and madness.* New York: Vintage Books.

Kay Redfield Jamison is Professor of Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. She is the author of *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*, and co-author of the standard medical text on manic-depressive illness, chosen in 1990 as the Most Outstanding Book in Biomedical Sciences by the Association of American Publishers. The recipient of numerous national and international scientific awards, Dr. Jamison was a member of the first National Advisory Council for Human Genome Research, as well as the clinical director for the Dana Consortium on the Genetic Basis of Manic-Depressive Illness. She lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband, Dr. Richard Wyatt, a physician and scientist at the National Institute of Health.

Price, R. (1994). *A whole new life: An illness and a healing.* New York: Atheneum.

"This book is a book about a mid-life collision with cancer and paralysis, a collision I've survived for ten years and counting. It means to be an accurate and readable account of a

frightening painful time that ended; but while I know that any account of human realities will travel best in the form of a story, a compelling story is not my first aim. That aim is to give, in the midst of an honest narrative, a true record of the visible and invisible ways in which one fairly normal creature entered a trial, not of his choosing, and emerged after a long four years on a new life—a life that's almost wholly changed from the old. The record is offered first to others in physical or psychic trials of their own, to their families and other helpers and then to the curious reader who waits for his or her own devastation.

Snyder, D. (1997). *The cliff walk: A memoir of a job lost and a life found.* New York: Little, Brown.

Don Snyder was a professor of English, married, with three children and another on the way, when he got his pink slip. He was sure that it would be only a short stretch before he found another teaching job and was reinstated in the bright life he had come to expect—after all, he had published several books and won praise for his teaching over the years. But the wait stretched on, unbelievably, past a year, until his money and his prospects were gone. Jobs once his for the asking were suddenly far out of reach.

The Cliff Walk chronicles Don Snyder's journey from privilege to desperation to a new sense of hope. With each dispiriting change in his life—selling the family's house, standing in line for food stamps, scrawling new budgets each night inside the covers of his kids' bedtime books—he came to see his previous assumptions about work and money and America as naïve dreams. A change finally came from an unlikely place: He found a job as an unskilled laborer on a construction site, working outside through a punishing Maine winter. As he slowly learned new skills and let go of old illusions, he found grace and dignity in a kind of work he had run from all his life.

Tompkins, J. (1996). *A life in school: What the teacher learned.* Cambridge: Perseus Books.

This book tells the story of how I came to view school in a radically different way. I did not set out to change my views; experience changed them for me. Some alterations in the way I taught led to greater self-consciousness about what I was doing in the classroom. This prompted me to look back into my own past as a student, to relive the school days of my childhood. As I experimented more boldly in my teaching, and delved further into the past, my inner life began to be transformed. Remembering the past was not, as I had originally thought, just an attempt to see how I had been molded as a teacher by the teachers who had molded me; it was an exploratory mission into the depths of my formation as a person, and it put me in touch for the first time with the founding experiences of my life. It helped me to discover what kind of person I had become as a result of those early school experiences, and even more, who I had been before they worked their will on me.

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