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SUSTAINING PASSION:
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by

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ABSTRACT

SUSTAINING PASSION:

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN ENVIRONMENTALIST IN A SMALL NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

By

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The nonprofit sector represents work which can "make a difference." This arena of work, however, is characterized by limited resources and unlimited need, an environment of long hours, low pay, lack of security, and constantly being the underdog–conditions which easily lead to burnout. Little is understood about how to help those working in the nonprofit sector continue to sustain their passion.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a deeper understanding of how commitment to one's passions are maintained. Specific focus was placed on environmental professionals working in the nonprofit sector. The overall research questions were: What is the experience of strongly committed environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations? What happens over time to the commitment and passion these individuals bring to their work? What role does learning play in maintaining long term commitment and passion? A process of narrative inquiry interviews provided in-depth information about the experience of work from the vantage point of the individual being studied. Participants included nine individuals working in small nonprofit organizations for at least ten years. Each participant was nominated as being exemplar in her or his work and passion.

The findings show that commitment for environmental nonprofit work is supported and sustained through a deep longing to improve the world, the continual fostering of connections to humanity and to the earth, and an openness for continual learning about the self. The research participants' strong belief systems and systemic ways of thinking drive their work and fuel a continual evolution of their understanding of who they are within their work and within the world. Three main conclusions were drawn: 1) The ability of environmental activists to sustain commitment to their passions arises from their ability to experience work as vocation. 2) Through vocation, environmental activists experience learning as a way of being. 3) By deeply engaging both conscious learning and unconscious knowing the activists continually renew and strengthen their sense of vocation. This process is a part of their learning to be who they are called to be.

This study has enhanced the understanding of the relationship between learning and passion with practical and theoretical applications for adult learning, higher education, and nonprofit management. Many questions have also been sparked, suggesting many diverse areas for further research. Such information is valuable to researchers, educators, funders, and practitioners alike in the quest to enhance the efforts of people dedicating their lives to work for the common good.

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother who bestowed upon me the gift of passion. For that I will be forever grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This past winter, I was leading an interpretive walk for children and their families through the local woods. It was a frigidly cold Sunday morning in February. In the midst of listening to the muffled sounds of a Michigan woods in winter, we looked up through the leafless branches of a great oak tree and watched the snow slowly floating down around us. It was an awesome teaching moment. As we talked about using our five senses to experience the trail, it suddenly felt incomplete. I impulsively added a six sense: heart. The scene could not be appreciated in its entirety without listening to and feeling from the heart. That addition came directly from this study.

I owe my thanks to the participants of this study for reinforcing the lessons of the heart. I owe my utmost thanks to Dr. John Dirkx, my advisor, mentor, and friend, for helping me to embark on lessons of the soul and continually push me in my thinking. Thank you also to my doctoral committee: Dr. Marilyn Amey, Dr. Ann Austin, Dr. Laura Bierema, Dr. Shari Dann, Dr. Frank Fear, and to my colleague-in-training, Andrea Beach. I have been blessed by being surrounded by good folk.

My thank you's would not be complete without a huge heartfelt hug to those who have lived my doctoral experience. Brianna, Sarah and Zachary, may your memory of this time period help embed deeply a lifelong love of learning. Mom, thank you for the gift of loving life and loving learning and for your constant support throughout my doctorate. Jeff, my soul mate, thank you for all.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

> *"To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one's true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstances into an uncongenial calling.*
>
> Dewey, 1916, p. 308

Introduction

This study is about hope. Hope, passion and commitment. Wendell Berry describes hope as a pledge to believe in and act on the possibility of healing, understanding, and compassion (Russell, 1999). As we enter the 21st century, confronting a weighty list of environmental issues, the seeds of hope rest in those people dedicating their lives to a better future: people working to protect, preserve, and restore the quality of the environment.

This study is also about learning. Learning from people who have remained committed and sustained in their passions. Through this learning, lessons can be shared to help others. For hope to grow, we must listen to and learn from these individuals.

It is recognized that as the world becomes more complex, society more diverse, and former certainties more ambiguous, even those who are well educated and trained may become overwhelmed and discouraged (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996). Environmentalists, being easily susceptible to burnout, are no exception (Cook, 1993). Yet, there are those who have chosen environmental careers who sustain commitment,

enthusiasm and determination–those who appear passionate toward their work. What can we learn from them? What keeps them going? How do their workplaces and the people in them help support their commitment, enthusiasm, and passion? Is there a role education can play in helping maintain this type of outlook and conviction? The purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the role of learning in maintaining commitment to one's passions. A focus is placed on those environmentalists who remain committed to their work in the midst of complexity and ambiguity.

The first section of this chapter outlines the specific research problem, the questions to be explored, and the research study to address those questions. In addition, the reader is introduced to the conceptual framework of the study and the intended audiences for this work. To understand my motivation in choosing this research topic, I present first a brief overview of my background.

Investigator's Background

I have been interested in environmental issues and environmental work for all of my adult life. As a teenager during the 1970s, I was greatly impacted by the new environmental movement that was sweeping the nation. I would hop the fence of the local nature center with my sleeping bag and spend the night underneath the stars, vowing to protect the forests from human impact. After receiving a master's degree specialized in natural resource economics, I became involved in the world of philanthropy where the importance of strong leadership in achieving goals became quite apparent. Through my work, I was privileged to meet with environmental leaders from all different parts of the

United States. I experienced with them the thrill of seeing activities at the community level bring about change. Yet, at the same time I also sensed a discouragement among many environmentalists as they experienced frustration in struggling to achieve both their personal and professional goals. This discouragement impacted their leadership abilities. Trying to understand how to help them as a grantor was one of the factors which brought me back to graduate school. The nagging question of whether there is a role for education in helping these individuals achieve their goals has dominated my interests throughout my graduate experience. At the same time, my involvement in community nonprofit environmental work continues to illuminate the importance of these questions. I bring to this study a strong desire to be able to observe, discuss and understand more fully the interrelationships between environmental activism, education, and sustaining commitment within the context of people working for the common good.

The Research Problem

The 1990s could be considered the decade of environmental careers. Prior to the 1970s, a new college graduate had a limited number of options for working in the environmental field, including park ranger, water and sewer worker, forester, geologist, or science teacher. In contrast, by 1998 as many as 2.5 million Americans were employed in environmental work (Doyle, 1999) with many in jobs that were unimaginable 30 years ago. Trends in the environmental professions in the 1980s included an increase growth in number of jobs, the maturing of the profession, the demand for interdisciplinary training, the continual increase in public support for environmental protection, the shift away from

federal involvement to local initiatives, and with this a new grassroots movement seeking to connect the work of environmentalism to social issues of race, poverty and power (Cook, 1993).

The increase in public interest, as well as the shift to the local level and to a grassroots movement, has provided a key springboard to the many environmental jobs now in existence, especially within the nonprofit sector. No one knows exactly how many environmental nonprofit organizations exist in the United States, with estimates ranging from as low as 4,000 to as high as 10,000 or more (Doyle, 1999). Nonprofit organizations, in general, are often seen as prime avenues for individuals interested in work which serves some aspect of our common life; work that is oriented toward "making a difference" (McAdam, 1986; Schervish, Hodgkinson, Gates & Assoc., 1995).

The nonprofit sector is a vital, growing part of the social and economic fabric of contemporary American society. Between 1977 and 1996, employment in the nonprofit sector grew by an annual rate of 3.3%, with approximately 8% of the United States workforce currently employed by nonprofit groups (Salamon & Dewees, 2001). Yet, despite the increasing importance of this sector, few studies have focused on staff working within small nonprofit organizations–those organizations comprising the bulk of the sector (Witty, 1989). These are the individuals working in the "trenches." With little known about the needs of these individuals, information about how to most effectively find, train, employ and help sustain these individuals during increasingly complex and challenging times is also limited.

Yet, with any challenge comes a mixture of benefits and drawbacks. Environmental work is no exception. In trying to paint a picture of nonprofit work, the Environmental Careers Organization suggests, "offices tend to be small, and the pace, though usually on the fast side, varies. A number of factors – the time it takes to achieve goals; chronic underfunding, understaffing, and overwork; the high level of personal involvement; and frequent encounters with people whose degree of personal involvement can wear a person down, can easily lead to burnout" (Cook, 1993, p. 24). Yet at the same time "nearly every major environmental victory of the past quarter century can be traced to the leadership or involvement of nonprofit groups" (p. 24).

The suggestion by the Environmental Careers Organization that environmental work within the nonprofit sector "can easily lead to burnout" must not be taken lightly. Environmental professionals have been found to be discouraged, working with a sense of hopelessness, and questioning their own effectiveness (Snow, 1992; Berry and Gordon, 1992; ICL, 1996; Thomashow, 1995). Snow (1992) found that many environmental groups are so busy struggling with finances, overbearing work loads, and emotionally exhausted staff that there is little time or will to look for long-term solutions to their problems. At the same time, most environmental directors of nonprofit organizations spend less than 2 percent of their time engaged in professional development of any sort (Snow, 1992). Stated reasons for this small focus on professional development include lack of development opportunities and financial resources. Many of the characteristics needed by nonprofit staff members center on trying to be effective in an environment of limited resources and unlimited need (Rubin, Adamski and Block, 1989).

The condition of limited resources and unlimited need is not new, yet changes in the role of government have placed new expectations, responsibilities and stresses on environmental organizations and the nonprofit sector in general. In the 1960s and 1970s, government supported many areas of nonprofit activity. This trend was reversed in the 1980s with a reduction of the federal role in the financing and operation of social and educational programs (Adams, 1995). This has resulted in a situation of decreased funds and increased needs, hence shifting the attention of leadership in the nonprofit sector from a mission-centered to a resources-driven focus (Adams, 1995). Directors of nonprofits are having to place a declining emphasis on advocacy and an increased emphasis on fundraising. Often the best paid, most sought after, professionals in nonprofit environmental work are fundraising directors (Doyle, 1999). Revenue-generating ability and strong management and leadership skills have become crucial features for those looking for employment in environmental nonprofit organizations (Doyle, 1999).

How these changes have impacted environmental practitioners has not been studied. Information about the nonprofit sector often emerges as fragmented and poorly defined (Weisbrod, 1988; Wilson, 1994), with environmental organizations even more invisible than many of their other nonprofit counterparts. With most nonprofit action occurring privately and locally, without significant identification or recognition, little empirical investigation has been done of paid staff in these organizations (Herman and Heimovics, 1989; Wilensky, 1995). The research that has been done has predominantly either focused on volunteers or on organizational issues, such as finances or board

development. Ways to help support and strengthen individuals choosing environmental nonprofit careers is vague.

There is little question that social change work is difficult, with environmental work easily fitting into this category. Long hours, low pay, constantly being the underdog, and the lack of security make this type of work particularly difficult. It has been found that many people throw themselves into this situation for a very short, intense period of time (Bryan, 1981). This may partially explain the current call from environmental leaders for the need for continuous personal and intellectual growth, emphasizing the need for personal refreshment and rejuvenation, rather than professional training (Berry & Gordon, 1993; Snow, 1992). The necessity to understand how to help environmental professionals in this request is reflected in the findings from the Institute of Conservation Leadership. They found that even though environmental leaders feel they are more skilled today than five years ago, a consensus exists that their overall impact needs to be greater (ICL, 1996).

Snow (1992) suggests that for environmental professionals to achieve their greatest levels of effectiveness, they need to be "strong, refreshed, spiritually active, and overwhelmingly positive in their outlook" (p. 190). Yet, very little is known about how to help environmentalists achieve or sustain this perspective. Reflecting the level of thinking in this area, one suggestion from environmental leaders in the Great Lakes region was for more "fun activities that relieve stress and reduce burnout" (ICL, 1996, p. 5). Yet, this request seems superficial when considering issues of maintaining long-term commitment in order to effectively confront complex issues and create change.

The Analytic Framework

In preparing for this study, limited documented information could be found about environmentalists working in the nonprofit sector. Thus I looked to other bodies of research to lend insight into people working for the common good. These pieces have helped me to understand my questions more fully. Examples include: *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* (Colby & Damon, 1992), *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Park, 1996), *The Call to Teach* (Hansen, 1995), *Being Called to Care* (Lasheley, Neal, Slunt, Berman, & Hultgren, 1994), and *Care and Community in Modern Society* (Schervish, Hodgkinson, Gates, & Associates, 1995). Each of these studies approached the question of sustained commitment from different perspectives. An important theme that was uncovered in each was the common conception of having a vocation or calling. Persons with vocational orientations were found to derive their rewards and motivations from internal considerations. Daloz et al. (1996) write:

> (W)e have come to believe that the answer to our two central questions–"How do people become committed to the common good?" and "what sustains them?"–is finally the same. They are sustained by the very processes that have made them who they are. (p. 195)

These individuals are responding to a deep belief system that motivates them to act. Daloz et al. imply it is not necessarily an individualistic choice to act, rather it derives from a sense of being bound to the pain of the world. Their commitment is continually reborn by their sense of being called to act. To not act would be to not listen to one's soul.

As demonstrated in these studies, however, even with a sense of vocation one can begin to lose heart. Huebner (1987) in writing about teaching as a vocation suggests that this disillusionment or burnout does not lesson the relevance of vocation but rather shows how "difficult it is to be a teacher in a school under today's conditions" (p. 18). He emphasizes the need to differentiate between the person and the context within which work occurs and asks: "How do these places and the people in them support teachers in the continual understanding of self and the world and in their continual development and meaning?" (pp. 18-19).

When disillusionment occurs, with work and identity tied so closely together, one's entire constitution as a person can come into question. To combat this, Thomashow (1995) emphasizes the need to help environmentalists reflect on how their environmentalism influences all portions of their lives, hence, providing guidance for professional and personal choices. Huebner strongly encourages that we need to better understand how one's work influences one's life.

This study expands upon the practical and theoretical work discussed above by placing the lens on the environmentalist and looking closely at the role of learning and education in sustaining passion and commitment in work for the common good. Recognizing that environmentalists in nonprofit organizations have very little preparatory training for their work, with professional development offerings limited or unaffordable, understanding the role learning plays in sustaining commitment becomes crucial. To aid in

this effort, current theoretical work in adult learning lends insight into the development of environmental professionals as they come to understand and make meaning of their work.

The Research Design, Questions and Assumptions

As an environmentalist choosing to study environmental professionals, or as a practitioner-researcher, I bring interpretive research assumptions and methods to this study. I am not attempting to prove hypotheses but rather to provide insight into the experiences of strongly committed nonprofit environmental leaders and their needs as individuals working in an atmosphere conducive to high turnover and burnout. I plan through this study to shed light on what is needed to serve as a basis for the development of supportive structures for these individuals. I also bring to this work the strong belief that the environmental movement is only as healthy as those who run it. I hope through this study to gain fertile insights which can help to maintain the health of these individuals.

Through a combination of narrative inquiry and heuristic inquiry, this study explored the role learning plays in maintaining commitment and passion to environmental work. The study design included conducting two in-depth interviews with nine environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations. A concluding focus group brought all of the research participants together to help interpret the findings. The research participants were nominated by their peers as having sustained long-term commitment and passion to their work. In the interviews the following interrelated questions were explored.

1. What is the experience of strongly committed environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations?

2. What happens over time to the commitment and passion environmental activists bring to their work?

3. What role does learning play in maintaining long term commitment and passion?

Applying a narrative inquiry approach takes seriously the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration. This process, in and of itself, is a form of social action embodying the relation between narrator and culture (Chase, 1995). Attention will be placed on both the individual experience and the social context. Heuristic inquiry takes into consideration the lived experience and positionality of the researcher.

Intended Audiences

By interviewing environmental activists about their work experiences, it is hoped information from this study will benefit a number of different audiences. First, are the activists themselves. Through the project design, an avenue has been provided for the individual to understand him or herself better. The second audience consists of those working within nonprofit organizations as well as those in leadership positions in these organizations, e.g., board of directors. The third audience includes those individuals and organizations conducting and developing formal education and professional training for environmental activists. Fourth, is the philanthropic community helping to support nonprofit organizations. Fifth, the study has been designed to provide insights for researchers studying adult learning, the nonprofit sector, and environmentalists. With a

better understanding of what helps maintain the vitality of environmental activists; foundations, universities, professional development organizations, and nonprofit organizations can work together to apply what has been learned. It is my hope that the results from this study will mutually benefit both the activists and the extended communities in which these individuals work. As Paulo Friere (1994) has remarked, "I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existensial, concrete imperative" (p. 8).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Interviewer: Describe your work on a typical day.

Patty: I don't have a typical day. (Long pause.) I could do a typical month. There is a certain schedule I follow with in terms of deadlines and newsletter but in between a lot is putting out fires. O.K. That would be typical. I put out fires. Whatever the next meeting is, is the next deadline. The only standardize portion of my job is first at the end of the month when the newsletter goes out and membership. I love those days. The first two days of the month. Then it is chaos the rest of the time. (Pilot project interview, Nov. 26, 1997)

Interviewer: Describe your work on a typical day.

Connie: That is hard. There is not a "typical day." A typical day? A day of interruptions. A day never going as planned. I look at the To Do list in the morning and it is instantly 4:00 in the afternoon. . . . I am always in recovery from traveling or planning for my next travels. . . . A typical day? Asking what's next questions, strategizing and supporting staff, and giving leadership. (Pilot project interview, Dec. 5, 1997)

Interviewer: On such a day do you find yourself thinking about your ongoing experiences?

Kathryn: Yes, a lot. . . . I feel like there is a mountain of work to be done and I am at the foothills picking away at the pebbles. When I try to go up the mountain there are many different footpaths but I don't know which one to take. I am never sure I am making the best use of my time. Then I get crabby because there is too much work. (Pilot project interview, Nov. 24, 1997)

These three women are executive directors of small nonprofit environmental organizations. (Pseudonyms have been used to conceal identity). Patty and Kathryn work

in offices with staffs of one. Connie works in an office with a staff of five. All are seen by their peers as committed, passionate, and effective in their work. In pilot interviews conducted for this research, all three expressed discontent and tension as a pervasive part of their work. In Kathryn's words: "The past two years have been the most difficult two years of my life. . . . I feel like work is a war zone." All three women also assume the emotions they are experiencing are not representative of what others feel working in similar positions. Patty suggests, "Another person might be able to do this job for another ten years and never blink an eye, not get depressed about it." Yet rather than not being representative, they may indeed be voicing the experience of many environmental leaders. As indicated previously, in the little research that has been done on environmental leaders in the nonprofit sector, feelings of discouragement, working with a sense of hopelessness, and questions of effectiveness are being heard (Snow, 1992; Berry and Gordon, 1992; ICL, 1996; Thomashow, 1995). Patty, Kathryn and Connie need not feel alone. Yet, why are these emotions occurring and how are they related to commitment and passion?

To explore these questions, I visualize dropping a pebble into a lake. Ripples go out in all directions, inherently touching the whole. Yet the location of the drop has bearing on the magnitude of the impact. This literature review, as a part of the whole study, is focused on helping to determine the most strategic point to drop that pebble. The review is divided into four main sections. First, challenges of environmental work are considered. The interrelationships between vocation, identity and the workplace are then discussed. From there, the lens is then placed on learning, vocation and the self. In conclusion, adult learning theory is discussed as a theoretical basis for the proposed study.

The Challenges of Environmental and Nonprofit Work

Many of the leading ideas, advocacy, policies and programs to protect environmental quality have emerged from the nonprofit sector during the twentieth century (Snow, 1992; Doyle, 1999). Being financially independent with a direct adherence to a cause and constituents has allowed nonprofits to play a unique and crucial role in the evolution of the environmental movement. Yet, the environmental challenges which lie ahead require new ways of thinking, acting, and forms of leadership recognizing the political, cultural, and social dimensions of environmental protection (Snow, 1992; Purdy, 2000). Snow (1992) recommends,

> The new mandate for leadership demands that virtually every institutional sector of American life–education, government, business, public communication, and the not-for-profit sector–become deeply engaged in solving environmental problems. [Environmental organizations] . . . must learn to dissolve the self-imposed boundaries that isolate them from other sectors of economic and educational enterprise. (p. xxx-xxxi)

Snow's recommendations cut to the heart of a shift that has occurred in environmental work. The industrial revolution of the early 1900s in conjunction with rapid population growth and an increasingly globalized economy has had dramatic side effects upon the natural environment. The environmental movement which began as a movement of nature lovers (hiking, hunting, fishing, birding, protecting wild areas) with the strong backing and leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, expanded over the twentieth century to tackle a variety of different issues with pollution at the forefront. President Nixon in his February 1970 State of the Union message declared that the 1970s "absolutely must be the years when America pays its debt to the past by reclaiming the

purity of its air, its waters and our living environment. It is literally now or never" (as quoted in Shabecoff, 1993, p. 112). During this time period, a definitional and substantive shift occurred from a quality-of-life agenda to a human health and well-being agenda.

With this shift, what began as a top down movement lead by national organizations (e.g., Sierra Club, Audubon Society, the Izaak Walton League) expanded to a grassroots movement. Yet this evolution did not occur linearly from a national to local focus, nor has it occurred without growth pains. With more than two-thirds of Americans now calling themselves environmentalists (Purdy, 2000) including "every serious presidential candidate, a growing list of corporate executives, some of the country's most extreme radicals, and ordinary people from just about every region, class, and ethnic group" (p. 6), misunderstandings and acrimony have become a pervasive part of the environmental movement with tensions surfacing between the many different types of "environmentalisms." For example, the oldest and most familiar version of environmentalism, romantic environmentalism, originated from the love of and spiritual attachment to beautiful landscapes and runs head on with the pragmatic and market oriented managerial environmentalism, which brings together concerns of ecology and economy. Civic environmentalism (Dewitt, 1994) or domesticated environmentalism (Purdy, 2000) tries to strike a balance between national standards and local solutions and focuses on changing the way people live their everyday lives. These environmentalisms are called to task by the environmental justice movement which focuses on issues of race, poverty and environmental harm, channeling energy to grassroots projects in inner cities and industrial areas. The ability to represent these varying interests while bridging

divisions both inside and outside of the environmental movement has become an inherent component of environmental advocacy work. Shabecoff (1993) conveys the level of this challenge:

> It is not enough for environmental groups to demand that the old-growth forests of the Northwest be preserved to save the spotted owl or call for an end to the burning of high-sulfur coal or reduce acid rain. It is also incumbent upon them to come up with carefully worked-out, politically acceptable, economically viable, and timely programs for preserving the communities that depend on logging and to make sure that displaced coal miners are protected against economic disaster. Environmentalists need not put jobs, housing, discrimination, drugs, or homelessness at the top of their list of priorities. But they need to recognize that these problems are an important part of their agendas. (p. 284-285)

To gain an understanding of the future of the environmental movement through the vantage point of environmental leaders, the Conservation Fund surveyed over 500 environmental activists working in nonprofit organizations nationwide (Snow, 1992). From the study, it was concluded that the movement consists of a number of capable leaders who have "done great things against great odds," yet their leadership is being squandered in organizations which are not up to the challenge. Among other things, it is suggested the most debilitating features of the environmental movement are "xenophobia and internecine strife" (p. xxxi). Caught in a crisis management mode, the study suggests that two crucial solutions, planning and training, are underused. It was submitted,

> Many of the patterns of operation that have made the flagship conservation groups so successful will prove to be impediments to the new leadership that must emerge if environmental reforms are to continue–and, indeed, if new issues of unprecedented magnitude are to be addressed. (p. xxxiii).

Yet, what type of planning and training is needed to support these new leaders? What type of help is most appropriate to address the isolation, discontent, and tensions voiced

by Patty, Kathryn and Connie and others actively working in environmental careers?

Wolfred, Allison and Masaoka (1999) conducted a survey of 137 nonprofit executive directors (EDs) in the San Francisco Bay Area to study the tenure and experience of these leaders. With the assertion that an executive director must stay for at least three years to have a real impact, the study found that the tenure of directors ranged from three months to twenty six years with the majority of respondents having served as the ED for five or fewer years. The average tenure was found to be 5.95 years. More significant than length of tenure, however, was retention of leadership. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported their current CEO job as their first. Less than twenty percent were in their second position, and 15 percent had held three or more ED positions. When asked whether they wanted their next job to be as a nonprofit ED, only 25 percent responded affirmatively. Interestingly, it was found that the largest incentive cited by the respondents for taking the helm position in a nonprofit organization was the belief in the organization's mission and the opportunity to make a difference. Professional growth and opportunity were the second greatest motivator. But when asked "What do you like most about your job?" only 11% responded that this belief was at the foundation of their work enjoyment and when asked what would make them leave their job, the largest percentage (26%) ranked burnout and seeking professional or career growth opportunities. A recent study by Singleton and Cunningham (2000) also found that nonprofit executive directors rank burnout and professional growth opportunities as two top reasons they would leave their jobs.

Wolfred et al. suggest that to retain executives, nonprofit organizations should be proactive in finding opportunities for professional growth. These opportunities will both enhance the attractiveness of the job and, through enhanced skills, raise executive performance. Lacking from the study, however, was an understanding of why these tensions are occurring. When Snow (1992) suggests that for environmental professionals to achieve their greatest levels of effectiveness, they need to be "strong, refreshed, spiritually active, and overwhelmingly positive in their outlook" (p. 190), what does this mean? How is learning a component of achieving or maintaining this type of outlook?

To add insight into what motivates environmental activists to accept leadership positions in the environmental movement, Chawla (1999) recently interviewed 30 environmentalists in the United States and Norway to determine the sources of their environmental commitment. She defines commitment as a "sense of connection to the environment and dedication to protect it" (p. 16). Like previous research (Tanner, 1980), her analysis traced environmental commitment to a number of different sources. She found this commitment was predominantly established in the childhood years, with a third or less of the interviewees attributing their environmental commitment to the university years and adulthood. Chawla asked the members of the Norwegian sample what attributes a person's continued dedication to protecting the environment. She found two answers predominated: A commitment to principles of life or caring and the enjoyment of challenge and cooperative effort. This finding replicates what has been found of people working with a sense of vocation and passion (Daloz et al., 1996; Schervish et al., 1995; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Chawla's research consisted of structured, open-ended

interviews. She noted a descriptive phenomenological approach provided important insights to her research as well as a "foundation for the construction of theories that are grounded in people's own understanding of their experiences and actions" (p. 23-24). An objective of this study is to continue to build on Chawla's work by specifically focusing on those individuals who have established their professional careers in environmental work.

Vocation, Identity and the Workplace

The late John Sawhill, president and CEO of the Nature Conservancy, stated, ". . . I have the best job in America. First, I work with committed, energetic, bright people. Second, I do something that I regard as extremely important. . . . I'm motivated by the significance of the task" (Howard & Magretta, 1995, p. 118). Sawhill's sentiments could be interpreted as spoken by a person who has experienced a calling, a person who is working in his found vocation. Hansen (1995) notes that a vocation or calling provides a person with a sense of identity and personal fulfillment while also encompassing a form of public service to others. It is through this conceptual lens that he frames his study of teachers.

This appears to be an insightful way to think about framing a study of environmental professionals. In 1916 Dewey stated, "A calling is . . . of necessity an organizing principle for information and ideas; for knowledge and intellectual growth. It provides an axis which runs through an immense diversity of detail, it causes different experiences, facts, items of information to fall into order with one another" (p. 309). To help prepare and support environmental leaders in their work, gaining an understanding of

the roots of vocation and commitment may be a first step in assisting these individuals in their professional and personal pursuits.

The typical chief executive officer (typical being male) of a nonprofit environmental organization has been depicted as:

> He traces his interest in the environment back to the early years of his life. As a child, he loved the outdoors and had a parent or teacher who acquainted him with the beauties of nature and instilled in him a deep ethic about the principles of conservation, ecology, and environmental protection. It is this ethic–not careerism or the quest for power or the desire to use environmental issues as a means to effect broad political change–that lead him into his work and continues to refresh him. (Snow, 1992, p. 42)

This ethic gets at what Thomashow (1995) has labeled "ecological identity," defined as how people perceive themselves in reference to nature. As a prominent environmental educator, Thomashow suggests that one of the basic questions that needs to be at the heart of all environmental education is: What is my purpose as a human being? He contends that the environmentalist's sense of identity integrates home, community and the workplace. He has found that the most critical component when training environmentalists is their "ability and willingness to look deeply within themselves, to understand their motivations and aspirations, to clearly articulate their environmental values, and know how to apply them to professional and personal decisions" (p. xiv). He suggests that in their professional zeal and personal commitment, environmentalists are failing to adequately nourish their ecological identity by overworking themselves and denying their responsibility to their own health and well-being. He contends that while promoting an environmental way of life, involving appreciating the joys and wonders of

life, environmental professionals are also enduring stressful lifestyles, pushing their organizations and themselves to unreasonable limits.

As these contradictions are brought to the workplace, daily decisions are being made reflecting environmental values (Lemons, 1989). Thomashow indicates two types of pressures unique to the environmental professional. First is the moral stress of living up to the goals and ideals of an environmental way of life, such as becoming a role model for others and demonstrating practical alternatives for living an environmentally-conscious life. Cosstick (1994), for example, found that environmental activists internalized a theoretical commitment to their beliefs by practicing their environmentalism at home. The second level of pressure on the environmentalist is the constant awareness of global environmental stress and the knowledge of all the different ways that the planet is in distress.

Gordon & Berry (1993) suggest that environmental problems are "different enough from other human contexts to need a special kind of leadership" (p. 3). This special kind of leadership may be what Hansen is terming the practice of vocation. The bridging of public obligation and personal fulfillment can be heard in McAdam's (1986) summarization of the forces that drive people to work in the nonprofit sector: a deep-rooted concern for people; the desire for a fairly high ethical content to their work; a sense of "feeling good" about what they do; a work place with compatible and caring colleagues; and an occupation which provides an opportunity to serve others.

Though Thomashow and Gordon & Berry view the characteristics of environmental professionals as unique, when environmental work is viewed through the

lens of vocation their findings fit a pattern of people working with a strong sense of commitment. Daloz et al. (1996, p. 196-197) write:

> The people we interviewed have learned that they and all others are an integral part of the fundamental interdependence of life. Knowing this, when faced with a violation of what they know to be true, they can*not not* act [italics in the original]. Their commitment derives from knowing that we are bound to one another and to the planet; it is as untenable to turn away from the world's pain and unrealized potential as to abandon one's child or sever one's hand. As an acorn takes root or a field flourishes in the Spring, they grew into their commitments bit by bit.

With commitment and vocation so closely intertwined, Daloz et al. suggest that both vocation and commitment are a response to some outside force, implying that it is not necessarily an individualistic choice to act. For these individuals a blurring is occurring between the boundaries of their personal and professional lives. Deems (1996) suggests this blurring of boundaries can be described as a sense of one's work being the "outer expression of one's inner self," such that the meaning takes on something grander than the traditional concept of work. Berman (1994) in research on the call to care in the social services found it is the sense of responsibility that helps sustain the call. In referencing Farnham et al. (1991, p. 7) she notes that responsibility invites an "accelerating sense of inner direction."

Snow (1992) observes that environmental leaders and managers needed for the future represent a new profession for which there has been no established training, no university curriculum, no career path, and few standards. In short, he suggests the most important asset–human capital–has been ignored. Though a number of researchers have begun to study people working with a passion or with a sense of vocation, the

understanding of how environmentalism fits into this picture is limited. An aim of this research is to help expand the knowledge in this area.

Learning, Vocation and the Self

A number of studies indicate a need for a theoretical framework which incorporates the role of learning in coming to understand when studying vocation and sustained commitment. The research of Daloz, Keen, Keen and Park (1996), for example, found that learning about the self provides an important bridge between what is going on in the external world and what is occurring within the individual. The significance of this connection is underscored by their finding that when "the ability to entertain internal counterpoint is poorly developed or wanes for whatever reason, when some voices are suppressed and others amplified, burnout or destructive behavior is most likely to occur" (p. 190). Those who remained sustained in their commitments were those who were able to cultivate a stance of conscious awareness of life while also acknowledging one's limitations to oneself and others.

In a similar vein, Cherniss's (1995) longitudinal study of burnout in the helping professions found that many people eventually lose their compassion and commitment when what they see as a vocation no longer seems like a calling. He writes:

> . . . this change seemed to be caused by the imbalance between what the professionals put into their jobs and what they got out of them. When people are under great stress, when their self-esteem is threatened, and when their efforts are constantly frustrated, they become more concerned about themselves and less concerned about others. (p. 46)

In his study, Cherniss found that those people who overcame burnout were the professionals who worked in settings that encouraged staff to continue learning and growing. To benefit from this support, however, he found these individuals needed to be willing to seek out learning experiences. Recognizing the need for life-long learning not only to keep up with current developments in their field but also to maintain enthusiasm and commitment to their work was found to be crucial.

Pines and Aronson (1988) also came to a similar conclusion through extensive research on burnout in management. Three elements–control, involvement, and challenge–were found to be important buffers against burnout. They argue that these are not innate traits in an individual but rather should be viewed as a "teachable way of interacting with the environment" (p. 74) which can be learned, unlearned, and relearned.

Snow's (1992) research on environmental leaders also accentuates the need for a better understanding of the role learning about the self plays in supporting environmental work. Even though environmental leaders complain of isolation and a paucity of opportunities for midcareer training and refreshment, no clear-cut answers were found to the type of support needed. Yet, with personal and professional development both being desired, opportunities for personal growth were preferred.

Several studies have documented that people who participate in social movements can learn a tremendous amount, with regard to information and skills as well as values, beliefs, attitudes and sense of self-identity (Boggs, 1986; Foley, 1991; Kastner, 1993; Schmitt-Boshnick, 1995; Scott, 1992; Cain, 1998). Yet these studies have focused

predominantly on volunteer activists. Little attention has been given to those people whose personal and professional lives are dedicated to a social movement.

Adult Learning Theory

In 1926, Lindeman stated that the purpose of adult education is to "put meaning into the whole of life" (p. 7). In asking questions of the role of learning in maintaining long term commitment and passion, attention is being placed on the learning process in order to nudge an understanding of what actually transpires when learning occurs. With adult learning and experience seen as inextricably linked (Merriam, 1994), learning in adulthood is understood to touch both personal and professional realms. For example, in Cosstick's (1996) study of environmental activists, she found learning occurred predominantly informally and in nontraditional settings. This finding fits Brookfield's (1986) statement:

> We should conceive adult learning to be a phenomena and process that can take place in any setting. Indeed it will often be the case that the most significant kinds of learning that are identified as such by adult learners themselves occur in settings not formally designed as adult educational ones. Such settings include families, community action groups, voluntary societies, support networks, work groups, and interpersonal relationships. (p. 4)

Cranton (1996) adds to Brookfield's list such settings as self-help groups, discussion groups, civil rights movements, feminist groups, and ecology movements. Voicing what is the predominant school of thought in adult learning theory, Cranton suggests "[a]dult learning takes place in all the contexts within which people work and live" (p. 15).

Underlying the comments of both Brookfield and Cranton is an emphasis placed on the importance of self-directed learning in adulthood. Caffarella (1993) suggests that self-directed learning is in many ways viewed as the essence of what adult learning is all about. It is the recognition that adults can and do learn on their own initiative. A principal concept of self-directed learning relevant to this study is that learning can be a self-initiated process with individuals planning and managing their own learning. Personal autonomy is the hallmark of this type of learning, with the individual choosing to assume primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating one's own learning experiences (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

It is also generally agreed that critical reflection is also instrumental in learning from experience (Brookfield, 1987; Tennant & Pogson, 1995; Cranton, 1996). Thomashow (1995) suggests there is a strong need to help develop critically reflective environmental professionals–those individuals who reflect on their experiences to rigorously question their own problem solving processes. One particular level of reflection which corresponds to Thomashow's suggestion involves analyzing and clarifying underlying assumptions about professional actions and assessing their consequences, with a view to achieving a personal understanding of an individual's actions. Schon (1983) refers to this as "reflection-in-action," focusing on how professionals come to understand the subconscious thought processes and assumptions they use to solve problems.

In looking at the connections between vocation, sustained commitment, and the role of learning, transformative learning theory may lend additional insight.

Transformative learning theory focuses on the role of learning in creating change and the manner in which new perspectives are acquired in order to understand changing events (Mezirow, 1991; Clark, 1993). Dirkx (1998) outlines four different strands of thought in this realm, suggesting that woven consistently through these frameworks is the "importance of meaning in the process of learning and the role of adults in constructing and making that meaning within the learning experience" (p. 9). The strands vary from a specific focus on the individual and the meaning making which comes from experience (Mezirow, 1991) to transformative learning as consciousness-raising, calling for educators to focus on the social dimension of learning in order to address the major issues confronting our society (Friere, 1970; Cunningham, 1998). Daloz (1986) brings in a direct developmental perspective by looking at learning as a process of adult development. Boyd (1991) places the focus on transformative learning as individuation.

Taylor (1997) has found more research on transformative learning is needed concentrating on the influence of context on the learning process. Welton (1993) also stresses the importance of bringing in both a historical and social context to learning, hence understanding the social structures, institutions, and conditions of people's lives that have bearing on learning and development. These recommendations reflect well on what has been found empirically. Pines and Aronson's (1988) work on burnout in management discovered there were "few significant and consistent personality correlates of burnout but many significant and consistent job, work setting, and organizational correlates of burnout" (p. 79). Berman (1994) notes that having a sense of vocation has both active as well as reflective qualities to be studied. She writes, "[s]ustaining the call involves my

response to my initial commitment in different configurations of space, in different periods of time, and with different kinds of persons" (p. 10). In pulling these pieces together, and recognizing that research methodologists also suggest that an individual's behavior must be understood in context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), the framework for this study includes a focus on the individual learner as well as the organizational and social context of environmental work.

Summary

In the children's television program, Blue's Clues, Steve searches for Blue's paw prints to know when a clue has been given to solve a problem. The clues are then put together and Steve sits down in his thinking chair and, voila, solves the mystery. If Blue's Clues could come to the aid of the environmental community, Steve would be handed the following information: Little is known about the paid staff of small nonprofit environmental organizations. It is a profession where there has been no established training, no university curriculum, no career path, and few standards. What is known is that the complexity of the work has the potential to lead to disillusionment with leaders becoming overwhelmed and discouraged. A call has been heard from these individuals for the need for personal refreshment and rejuvenation. Yet it is not known how to best answer this call.

Knowing Steve, he would instantly set forth with his friend Blue, the big friendly dog, to figure out how to help these people. Clues would instantly appear. Clue number one: It is suggested those choosing careers in the nonprofit environmental sector have

similar characteristics to those that experience a calling or vocation to the common good. For these individuals a blurring can occur between the boundaries of their personal and professional lives, with the meaning of their work taking on something grander than the traditional concept of work.

Clue number two: Research on individuals who have overcome burnout in the helping professions indicates learning plays an active role in their ability to regain work commitment and enthusiasm. A need for continual learning, not only to keep up with current developments in their fields but also to maintain enthusiasm and commitment to their work, has been found to be crucial.

Clue number three: a theory base exists which focuses extensively on the close linkage between learning and personal and professional growth. Research and theory building on self-directed learning, critical reflection and transformative learning all can potentially lend insight into avenues to understand the experience of the environmental practitioner.

With all the clues in hand, Steve would then commence to his thinking chair. Yet, rather than continuing to solve the mystery, which is how the show ends every day, Steve would instead jump up and stop the show. In order to help prepare and support environmental leaders in their work, more information is needed. He would set off to explore further how environmentalists are experiencing their work and the role learning plays in sustaining passion.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research has been designed as an interpretive study with the purpose of developing a deeper understanding of the role of learning in maintaining commitment to one's passions. Hypotheses are not being proven but rather insight is being gained about the experience and needs of environmentalists working in small nonprofit organizations. In this manner emphasis is on increasing the understanding of what is needed to serve as a basis for development of supportive structures for these individuals. Through a qualitative approach, focus is placed on constructing a close and careful reading of the meaning-making processes of the people being studied. In doing so, an attempt is being made to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The research questions are:

1. What is the experience of strongly committed environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations?

2. What happens over time to the commitment and passion environmental activists bring to their work?

3. What role does learning play in maintaining long term commitment and passion?

In this chapter, I clarify and outline the assumptions undergirding the study, the specific methodology utilized, and discuss why I chose this methodological approach.

Articulating Assumptions and Theoretical Position

I bring to this work a blending of a constructivist and feminist theoretical perspective. Both orientations engage in interpreting human action. A constructivist orientation lends insight into my interest in learning as "meaning-making," which resides at the heart of much contemporary research and theory in adult learning. I believe that individuals construct their own views of the world in ways that are meaningful to them. By combining this with a feminist approach, I am recognizing that my positionality as researcher (e.g., gender, class, values, work and life experiences) affects how data are gathered, collected and analyzed and how knowledge is constructed and viewed (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Tisdell, 2000). I also believe that the positionality of the research participants must be a recognized component of the study.

Many different ways could be chosen to study the experiences and learning of environmental activists, with the chosen method illuminating and obscuring different elements. In designing the research, I looked to other investigations of people who have been "called to care" to both learn from these studies and to suggest where new discoveries and insights are needed. In these studies, both phenomenological and ethnographic methods have been applied. For example, Daloz, Keen, Keen & Parks (1996) applied a "modified phenomenological" model to their research of people working for the common good. They used this approach to study a particular form of consciousness, how people achieve it, and its implications. In doing so, they looked for patterns suggesting something important about human behavior and potential. Building on their findings, I will specifically focus on people working on environmental issues, hence

hoping to deepen the knowledge regarding environmental careers and environmental commitment.

Cherniss (1995) also applied a phenomenological approach to his research on burnout and commitment and caring of human service professionals. He conducted biographical interviews to delve into how professionals feel about their experiences and see their world. This type of methodology was chosen to be sensitive to the feelings expressed and the threads of meaning woven through the specific topics. The goal of his study was discovery rather than verification, with a biographical approach providing detailed accounts of the long-term process of development as well as access to some of the important beliefs and assumptions that undergird people's behavior. He writes: "Too often, structured research methods get in the way of a penetrating exploration of how people truly think and feel about their lives. It was important that the subjects be able to tell their own stories" (p. 194).

Though Colby and Damon (1992) also chose a phenomological approach to their study of lives of moral commitment, they went a step further than Daloz et al. and Cherniss in involving the research participants in the study. In *Some Do Care*, Colby and Damon included the research subjects as co-investigators in the exploration of their own lives through the use of an "assisted autobiography" methodology. The collaboration between the researchers and research subjects extended from the exploration phase to the interpretive phase of the research. Though the research subjects did not determine the interpretive framework, they were aware of the framework and how it was being applied to their lives and were given a chance to respond to the interpretations and findings.

Colby and Damon suggest this type of methodology allowed an avenue to preserve the research participants' own understandings and explanations.

Through an ethnographic approach Hansen (1995) used vocation as a conceptual lens for his research to specifically provide a mirror for teachers to view their work. His goal was to assist them in "anticipating the moral, the personal, and the intellectual aspects of the vocation . . ." (p. 152). By sharing and reflecting on the experiences of four teachers, he aimed to deepen the understanding of what creates a strong educator. As I try to understand what leads to a strong environmental professional, Hansen's use of vocation as an optimistic conceptual lens is fascinating. He has not resolved the myriad of issues in teaching but instead exposes the concept of meaningful work. With few research studies looking closely at environmental professionals and what they bring to their job, providing a mirror for activists to understand and interpret experience is a helpful model. This is similar to Cole's (1993) work in *The Call of Service*, where he offers many stories, conversations and observations about those who have lead lives of service: service to community, charity, religious and/or country. He views his role as researcher as a "witness trying to do justice through narration to lives" (p. 30).

In all of these studies, significance was placed on recognizing and listening to the individual's point of view and gaining an understanding of the inner world of the people being studied. Since both passion and learning are such individualized processes, continuing with such an approach appears appropriate. Woven through each of these studies was also an emphasis on telling people's stories. This emphasis is where I am interested in pushing further. Within these studies, the stories told rose to the surface as

part of the data collection and analysis. Yet the stories, themselves, were not the object of investigation. For this research study, a focus has been placed on the narrative itself, via a process of narrative inquiry, as the methodology to dig deeply into the research questions.

In combination with narrative inquiry, this study is also grounded in Moustakas' (1990) concept of heuristics. Applying a heuristic approach recognizes and builds upon a direct personal connection between the research and researcher. As an executive director of a small nonprofit environmental organization, I have autobiographical connections to this research. In choosing to tie narrative inquiry with a heuristic approach, I am acknowledging these connections rather than trying to keep the research separate from them, which I conceive as an impossible task. In doing so, I am purposefully trying to learn from the closeness rather than becoming encumbered by the closeness. As Moustakas (1990) notes, "All heuristic inquiry begins with the internal search to discover, with an encompassing puzzlement, a passionate desire to know, a devotion and commitment to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one's own identity and selfhood" (p. 40). The power of combining narrative and heuristic inquiry is in the strength each brings to the recognition of self-searching and the value of personal knowledge as essential requirements for the understanding of common human experiences.

The Research Design

This study is based on the processes of narrative and heuristic inquiry, two compatible research methodologies which both focus on gathering information in order to be able to tell and interpret the stories of the research participants.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story (e.g., an interview) or in a variety of other manners (e.g., field notes, journals, diaries, meetings). The concept of narrative and life story has become increasingly visible in the social sciences over the past 15 years. It can now be found in the theory, research, and application of a wide variety of disciplines including education, psychology, psychotherapy, sociology and history (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Narrative can be used to address real-life problems by approaching those people whose lives are directly relevant to the issue at hand with a focus on exploring their subjective, inner experience (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), hence giving prominence to subjectivity and identity (Reissman, 1993). In personal narratives, "it is precisely because of their subjectivity–their rootedness in time, place, and personal experience, in their perspective-ridden character" that they are valued (Personal Narrative Group, 1989, p. 263-264).

For this study, narrative research is particularly appropriate as it can help provide a framework to understand the past events of one's life and to plan for future actions (Polkinghorne, 1988). It is a method to be considered when "real-world measures" are needed for "real-life problems" (Bickman & Rog, 1998), giving voice to subgroups in society who often remain silent. Based on the review of the current literature, environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations fit this category.

As Lieblich et al. (1998) state: "We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (p. 7). The purpose of using narrative inquiry

for this study is to explore how environmental activists impose order on their experiences to make sense of events and actions in their lives. Narrative has also been chosen to provide a perspective on development that can enhance an understanding of learning and change throughout the life course (Rossiter, 2000). By using this methodological approach, I am studying how experience, conscious or unconscious, is organized, interpreted and reshaped through the work and life experiences of being an environmental activist. This type of methodological approach allows an avenue to explore the interrelationships of individual and cultural narratives. I am assuming highly committed environmental activists have stories to tell that others want and need to hear. Stories that others can learn from. From my earlier description of the theoretical perspective I bring to this work, and my hope that this research directly benefits those individuals being studied, a narrative approach follows closely with my desire to make heard and learn from the voices of those people working on a day-to-day basis in environmental careers.

Heuristic Inquiry

A fundamental reason for choosing to combine narrative inquiry with a heuristic approach for this study is the attention heuristics gives to the relationship between the researcher and the research. The heuristic researcher is both intimately and autobiographically related to the question. As Moustaka (1990) states: "In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated. There must have been actual autobiographical connections. Unlike phenomenological studies in which the researcher need not have had the experience . . . the heuristic researcher has undergone the experience in a vital, intense, and full way–if

not the experience as such, then a comparable or equivalent experience" (p. 14). He adds, "The heuristic researcher . . . learns to love the question. It becomes a kind of song into which the researcher breathes life not only because the question leads to an answer, but also because the question itself is infused in the researcher's being. It creates a thirst to discover, to clarify, and to understand crucial dimensions of knowledge and experience" (p. 43).

Heuristics is described as ". . . a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). Heuristic inquiry includes searching and studying an experience, becoming fully immersed in the phenomenon, and pursuing knowledge through both self-inquiry and observation of and dialogue with people experiencing the phenomenon. Getting to the heart and depths of a person's experiences through qualitative accounts, such as depictions of situations, events, conversations, relationships, feelings, thoughts, values, and beliefs, is at the core of heuristic inquiry. In deciding to combine the two methodologies, I am bringing in heuristics to enhance my understanding of what is occurring by utilizing another way of looking at and thinking about the data. As Lieblich (1998) states: "Our basic position is . . . that there is ample place for all of these approaches and methods, and that our understanding of a question, a person, or a culture is enriched by this pluralism" (p. 167).

Data Collection

Data collection was structured around the exploration of the personal and professional experiences of being an environmental activist working in a small nonprofit organization. The methodology was fashioned in such a manner as to enable the participants to express their own interpretations of the meaning of their commitment and passion and how it relates to their professional work. In designing the study, three pilot interviews of staff working in small nonprofit organizations were conducted as well as interviews with representatives of the philanthropic community and the higher education community. Based on this information and knowledge gained from the literature, methods were designed which took seriously the participants' conscious articulation of their beliefs, values and life histories with a focus on the importance the participants, themselves, assign to the events in their lives. In addition, attention was placed on how they see their commitment, passion and learning in the context of their work.

Selection of Participants

In designing the research, I was faced with the task of trying to identify highly passionate and committed environmentalists working in small nonprofit organizations. I followed the sample selection design of Herman and Heimovics (1990) in their study of chief executives of nonprofit organizations (CEO). To choose their sample of "effective" CEOs, they asked people occupying positions in which judgments about executive effectiveness were required (foundation and United Way leaders and heads of technical assistance and coalition organizations) to nominate those nonprofit CEOs whom they considered to be highly effective. The nominators worked independently. When a CEO

received a nomination from at least two people, that person became part of the sample. I implemented this type of process to identify 6 - 8 environmental professionals who have sustained long-term commitment to their work in small nonprofit organizations in Michigan. Michigan was set as a geographical boundary due to the funding criteria for my research. "Long-term" was defined as having worked in the field for over 10 years. In Michigan, a change in political leadership in 1990 found many environmental professionals leaving governmental work and entering the nonprofit sector. "Small" nonprofit organizations were defined as having a staff size of ten or less full time employees.

To select participants, I requested nominations from the funding community in Michigan as well as individual groups working at the state level who interact with those at the grassroots level (Appendix A). I received many nominations with nine individuals receiving between two to four nominations. In hoping for the involvement of six to eight participants for this study, via phone calls I requested the participation of all nine nominated, knowing the potential that someone would choose to not be part of the study or would choose to not complete their involvement. All nine agreed, however, to be part of the study and all nine stayed involved throughout the entire time period. An informed consent form (Appendix B) was shared and signed prior to the first interview. I later came to find out one of the participants did not fully meet the requirements of my study. She had recently cut her work schedule back to half time after the birth of a child. I decided to keep her in the study and to watch carefully to see if her interviews appeared to be different than the other eight. They did not and I chose to keep her as a participant.

Data Collection Instruments

A multi-step process for data collection and analysis was used. A series of semi-structured interviews were the main instruments used to collect data. A pilot interview of a staff member of an environmental nonprofit organization was conducted prior to the initial interviews in order to examine the wording and relevance of different questions in the interview format. Upon the completion of data collection via the interviews, a focus group or group dialogue was conducted with seven of the nine participants to help verify the trustworthiness of the data and to begin to interpret the findings. The focus group was designed and conducted as a semi-structured group interview.

Data Collection Procedures

The interview process was conducted as a series of one-on-one interviews. Two interviews were conducted with each nominated participant. The interviews were semi-structured, tape recorded, confidential, and lasted between one to three hours. All interviews were transcribed. Interview protocol was developed for the interviews and the focus group (see Appendix C). The interviewees were given the choice of where to meet. Six chose their office settings, two chose university meeting rooms, and one chose a local restaurant as the location for the interviews. The first interview focused on the overall experience of being an environmentalist in a small nonprofit organization. Prior to the second interview, the participant's "story," or the transcript of their interview minus the interviewer's voice, was sent to each participant for their review (Appendix D). The second interview was conducted approximately three to four months after the first interview. The goal of the second interview was to probe further into an understanding

of the participant's story. Specific questions focused on gaining a more concrete understanding of commitment, passion, identity, and learning. The second interview concluded with having the research participant design with crayons and markers the cover illustration for a handbook focused on working in small environmental nonprofit organizations. This procedure was used to illuminate and potentially capture ideas that had not been generated via the one-on-one dialogue.

The semi-structured group interview was held approximately two months after completing the second interviews and was facilitated by myself. This dialogue was used to provide another level of data collection and to have the participants assist in doing a first level interpretation of the findings from the interviews. The group interview was held in a comfortable atmosphere in a bed-and-breakfast in a central location in Michigan. The meeting was five hours in length with lunch served in the middle of the day. Different activities were conducted as part of the interview, including reflective time and a group drawing exercise designed to probe further into questions about learning.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Data were analyzed throughout the study. A preliminary analysis was completed after each interview. Data was coded and re-coded according to the constant comparative method pulling preliminary patterns together until themes began to emerge. As part of the analysis, summary vignettes for each individual or his or her "story" was written up and sent back to each participants for feedback and for corrections to be made and omissions added.

As is characteristic of both narrative and heuristic research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber1998; Moustakas, 1990), the data was analyzed from several perspectives, including both holistically and categorically. A holistic perspective takes into consideration the entire story whereas the categorical perspective focuses on separate parts of the story, irrespective of the context of the complete story. Within these perspectives, a focus was placed on content analysis as themes and patterns were discerned from the narrative. In adding in a heuristic element to data analysis, a composite depiction of the experience was also constructed. In doing this an emphasis was placed on understanding how profiles that are unique to the individuals were also characterizing the group as a whole.

In order to ensure rigor and establish trustworthiness of the results, attention was placed on working closely with my dissertation committee to discuss interviews, ongoing data analysis and the study conclusions as well as gaining feedback from the research participants via the summary vignettes and focus group. This feedback helped to establish the accuracy of my perceptions and conclusions.

In qualitative research, it is well recognized that changes in the design or method of a study can occur during the middle of the implementation phase and are seen as the hallmark of a maturing and successful inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). To accurately trace these changes, hence addressing the dependability of my research design and analysis, I have diligently kept a journal throughout the process of the study. In the journal I have included important decisions that were made about design or analysis. I

have made every effort to be objective while conducting this research. The participant review of their stories, as well as their focus group feedback, aided in this effort.

Limitations

The major limitations of this study emanate from the methods utilized. Daloz et al. (1996) acknowledge that the stories people tell about themselves may vary according to the listener and the moment in the life of the storyteller. Hence, retrospective work or drawing conclusions from stories that people have recomposed over time is fraught with risk. Choosing a number of people to be studied and looking for patterns and themes helps to increase the likelihood that the findings suggest something important about passion, commitment and learning.

Without a comparison group, I do not know about those people who are not considered passionate or committed to their work. I am not able to draw conclusions in this regard. They could be a substantially different population or very similar. This remains a grey area for another research study to discover.

An additional limitation of this study is the drawback of having one's identity too closely reflected in one's research. My work as an environmental activist is both a positive and potentially a negative for this study with regard to questions of subjectivity and bias. As Hansen (1995) notes: "Webs can entrap and entangle, of course, rather than buoy and support" (p. 136). I have struggled with this potential limitation. As an environmentalist observing environmentalists, I want these individuals to succeed. I have been cognizant throughout the research process of this potential limitation and strongly believe the

balance between entrapment and entanglement versus buoying and support is the key to discovery and to the potential value of this research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

To find fulfilling work is a gift of the soul.

Thomas Moore, 1992

Introduction

This purpose of this study is to shed light on the role of learning in sustaining passion and commitment for work in small nonprofit environmental organizations. The following interrelated questions have guided the exploration.

1. What is the experience of strongly committed environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations?

2. What happens over time to the commitment and passion environmental activists bring to their work?

3. What role does learning play in maintaining long term commitment and passion?

Upon completion of the interviews, an analysis of the interview data demonstrates that commitment for environmental nonprofit work is supported and sustained through a deep longing to improve the world, the continual fostering of connections to humanity and to the earth, and an openness for continual learning about the self. The research participants' strong belief systems and systemic way of thinking drive their work and fuel a continual evolution of their understanding of who they are within their work and within the world.

Nine individuals were nominated for this study, six women and three men, each exhibiting a strong passion for environmental work. To be part of this study, each person had to receive at least two independent nominations as being highly effective and sustained in his or her work. Most received three or four nominations. The nominators included individuals working in positions which enabled them to have a broad knowledge of the sector, such as positions in large private philanthropic foundations. To be nominated the person also had to have at least ten years of experience in working in the nonprofit sector. As a group, the number of years of experience working as paid staff in the sector ranged from eleven to eighteen years, with the average number of years being fourteen. On average, an additional three years of volunteer work proceeded their taking paid staff positions.

All of the participants were white, representing the lack of diversity in the environmental field in general. Their ages ranged from 34 to 54. Three participants were in their thirties, five in their forties, and one in the fifties. Six are married or in a long-term partnership, two are divorced, and one has never been married. Six have children, five are with children still at home.

This is a highly educated group. All participants have received a minimum of an undergraduate degree with eight out of nine having gone on for graduate work. Two of the participants hold law degrees. The undergraduate educations obtained are diverse ranging from degrees in liberal arts to degrees in the sciences, such as biology and geology. The majority of the graduate degrees, if not in law, are in the natural resources fields.

In the following discussions, the names of all participants, except Dave, have been changed and their places of employment, educational backgrounds, and ages have not been identified. Dave specifically requested to not have his identity hidden. The funding for this research was directed at gaining a better understanding of the nonprofit community in Michigan. Consequently, identity has been carefully concealed due to the small size of the environmental community in Michigan and how simple it would be to put the pieces together to identify a particular person.

Chapter Overview

The goal of this chapter is to weave together the voices of the studied participants in such a manner as to begin to untangle the mysteries of commitment and passion and illuminate the role of learning in sustaining passion. Trying to create order and meaning to the wealth of information shared by the research participants is both thrilling and immensely intimidating. The patterns which emerged were not orderly and tidy. The activists' voices have invaded my own psyche and I have been repeatedly struck by how complicated, interconnected, and evolving are all of the messages. It is very difficult to think about the findings and subsequent interpretations in two-dimensional space. They are shouting to be discovered, arranged, and communicated in the three-dimensional space in which we live.

While working with the thoughts for this chapter, I found myself literally making a paper collage of drawings and cut out images, in conjunction with the continual writing. Both my computer and a 4 x 2 poster board became my mediums for understanding.

Many images are captured on the poster, images which represent the slowly unfolding layers of understanding. In presenting this chapter, I have tried to capture the fluidity, overlapping elements, and complexity which are present in the collage. One understanding that I have come to, in the midst of cutting and pasting and crayons and computers, is that the glue that holds the picture together, or holds the person together, is learning. It has become impossible for me to think about sustaining commitment without an element of learning involved.

In presenting the findings, one participant's story is first shared in order to anchor the findings in a concrete context. From there, a composite portrait of the activists of this study is given to further depict the experience of working in a small nonprofit organization. The final piece of the chapter is a description of the aggregate findings that emerged from the interviews.

Part One: One Activist's Story

I have a very clear image of the first time I met Dave Dempsey. I was taking an environmental education course offered at a northern Michigan retreat center. As part of the course, we had outside speakers coming to present to us. As the environmental advisor to the governor, Dave was coming to talk about environmental policy issues. We were relaxed and enjoying the calm ambiance of an evening in the northern Michigan woods. In a long dark trench coat, Dave swept into the room. He was at the end of a long day of running from one meeting to another. Where we were was not on the way to

anywhere. This probably only enhanced the aura that surrounded him of having too little time to get anything done.

I don't remember what he told us about environmental policy. Instead only images have remained in my head from that evening. Images of a quiet well-liked man who seemed to care deeply about the state of Michigan's environment while being caught in the frantic pace of the political process. I remember watching him with a sense of awe that somehow he had ended up in politics and also that he had chosen to make time in his busy schedule for environmental educators.

Our paths have crossed at different times since that evening fifteen years ago, the latest being when he was nominated to be part of this research study. Dave is currently the Environmental Policy Specialist for the Michigan Environmental Council. His story has been chosen to be shared because he specifically asked to not have his identity hidden. The words are his own. Dave states that this *is* his story and it is the story he would tell to anyone who asks.

Dave's Story

I got involved by accident almost 20 years ago. I came out of college at the age of 20, in 1977, in journalism. I had no idea that I would end up working on environmental issues. I worked in politics, actually worked in Washington for about a year and came back to Michigan. While doing other things I volunteered for the Sierra Club. I think it was basically because when I was a kid my family used to go up north in the summer all the time. My grandparents lived up there and the Upper Peninsula seemed very beautiful

to me. I always wanted to do something to help protect that. I was on the board of directors of the statewide Sierra Club in 1981. That's when I started and really liked it.

I went to Pictured Rocks for my first camping trip when I was 24 years old. It was kind of almost like a religious conversion. I was with these other Sierra Club people who knew a lot more about camping than I did. But I remember just waking up on the shores of Lake Superior on a beautiful rather chilly summer morning, hearing the waves pounding against the rocks below and getting up and drinking my coffee, staring out and thinking, "You know, this is really what I want to do with my life. This is what matters. Trying to preserve these kinds of places so people after me are going to be able to feel this kind of joy and peace." So, I pretty much started thinking then about, well, how can I make this a career? I had no idea even then how I would.

From the encouragement of friends at the Sierra Club I applied for a job at the Michigan Environmental Council [MEC]. There was only one position at MEC. Salary was $17,000 and I turned back $3,000 of it because basically they didn't have enough money to pay me that much. So I worked for $14,000. I was the staff. There was me and my answering machine and a leaky roof and pigeons on the window ledge. It was sort of in the rooftop suite, so to speak.

So that's how it happened. That's how I got started. Just sort of a series of coincidences. Well, not coincidences, but things that just kind of steered me in that direction. I'm glad it did too. I am lucky.

I don't know how I did it at MEC. I guess I was so naive at the time that I didn't realize how bad it was. I mean I was literally supposed to monitor and try to influence

positively every environmental policy going through the legislature and through the DNR [Department of Natural Resources] at the time, also be the spokesperson to the press, get our member groups in line to do the right thing and write letters, talk to the right people, do a newsletter, balance the budget, write grants–you know, all this stuff. I didn't realize how formidable a job it was. It was really tough. It was really demanding. I had to learn a lot fast and I was pretty lonely. I had some good friends on the Board, but it was hard. I didn't know anything about how to lobby either. I was just thrown into it, so I had to learn the job.

In the early '90's, when I worked at Clean Water Action and at MEC later, there were about three or four staff people at both places. That's enough that you feel that you can share the burden if things get really overly demanding. But it's still pretty much everybody on their own because there is always more work than people. But there we had somebody to answer the phones, which is nice. It was just a lot saner work environment. It was kind of an interesting transition for me because I went from MEC into the governor's office and ran all the support staff. I had my own secretary. I remember back in '91 when I came back to Clean Water Action for a while, I thought, how undignified. I have to address my own envelopes and put stamps on them. I don't even think about that now.

There are two hard parts to this kind of work. One is knowing when to compromise and then the associated compromise. Most people are not brought into environmental work because they want to save half of a forest or because they want to clean up half of Lake Michigan. They want to protect everything and save everything.

But the political process is obviously not built around absolute positions. It's very, very painful sometimes to settle for half the loaf or a tenth of the loaf. The other thing, there have been times when the hours pile up to the point where, it's kind of like a bad marriage, where you give and give and give and you don't feel like you're getting much back. You're driving around the state, going to a public hearing in Traverse City and driving back and staying up until three o'clock working on something. The alienation from the physical, from the outdoors, that is required to do all this work is just really hard.

I make a point of taking outdoor trips every year and getting outside as much around here that I can, even if it's just driving to Sleepy Hollow to look for enjoyment and hiking. I actually can feel that emotional reconnecting to nature. It's an emotion, literally, an emotion. If I have a hard time in my job or in my personal life, I'll go to Sleepy Hollow and I cry. I walk around crying–but that's good. It heals the wound and let's you start over. It's outdoor therapy. I think a lot of other–mostly environmentalists and conservationists–do that too. There are a couple of places that I can go for a walk and I really feel this, I might as well say it, I feel really accepted there. You know, welcomed. It's like I know this place and I can just be me and this place is fine with that. And it is kind of a relationship. There is just a lot of peace to it and consolation. So, it's a relationship in that way.

For most environmentalists that I know, including me, there is a spiritual element to what we do. I hopefully use my rational mind in my work, but it really all stems from a love of, in my case, I guess, Michigan and wanting to see Michigan remain beautiful for other people. That's a powerful fuel. When you do get to the burnout phase, what gets

you out of bed and when you lose, defeats, what makes you rebound is you're not even doing it for yourself, you're doing it for the place that you love. If it was a nine to five job, and I thought it was the correct thing to do but I didn't have any heart's attachment to it, I would have quit a long time ago. I think there are relatively few walks of life that I have experienced where you feel that a mass of people is drawn to it because they have this emotional calling.

If you renew it, the heart is a renewable resource. If you get outdoors enough, you will always get it renewed. I didn't grow up with this understanding. I didn't know it until about 18 years ago. I'm very aware of it now. But I did grow up valuing the heart, at least as much as the head, I suppose, with poetry and literature. It's a back and forth kind of thing, trying to understand it, mysteries of life from the heart's perspective. To me the heart, or spirituality, is a feeling of reverence for creation and a hope that one's work or service is somehow honoring the creation and respecting it. It's about the mystery of life. When you're experiencing the wonders of nature, you feel there is meaning and purpose behind the universe and that there is a loving force that has created this. It's a good thing to help nurture it, cultivate it, shield it from destruction–try to perpetuate it. It is a very sensitive subject.

Everybody in the movement I think knows that most of us are at least partially motivated spiritually. To talk about it openly almost falls into the stereotype that some opponents have, it's kind of like a pagan in religion, like some sort of a dark earth worshiping thing. It's not that at all. It's not like I light candles to pagan gods. I just believe that we have a duty to the earth and that there is a right and a wrong in relation to

the earth. Our task as a species is to learn to live more doing what's right for the earth and right for us too.

If you can't get indignant about what is happening to the earth and a lot of its habitants, I don't know how you would continue either. I mean that's a spiritual thing to do. And anger, as long as it's not irrational and destructive, is very healthy and certainly called for at times when the political process tramples on the environment, on people. I don't know how to articulate this without sounding like a bad mystic or a sexist. I don't think of nature as a "she" but I do feel an emotional attachment to it and when you get angry, you feel like you're defending it. It's almost like you're defending a friend or a loved one. You know, for your husband or your children, you would do anything.

I probably wasn't as comfortable with this when I started in advocacy. I was brought up in a pretty civil rational household where when you talked about things you didn't raise your voice, but I still don't yell a lot. Generally, I think peaceful warriors are what we need to protect the environment right now, not people running out to bomb things. We need people willing to raise their voices as necessary, at least blow the whistle and try to get it to stop. I will do anything that's not immoral to stand up for the earth. That may mean raising my voice.

There are certain emotions, however, that you have to figure out a way to vent privately, either because they're counterproductive to being an effective advocate or because they could destroy you. I mean, you can't give into fear and pessimism. If I was to sit down and look objectively at world environmental trends and population, I think I would be in total despair or fear about imminent consequences. So, either it lingers on

and you don't pay attention to that or you kind of acknowledge it in private and move on. You learn very quickly in environmental advocacy that being a gloom and doom person and saying things are really getting rotten, doesn't help. Because people either get mad at you for saying what they don't want to hear or they just say, well if it's so bad, then what can I do anyway? So it is a little difficult. You have to figure out ways to deal with your despair, fear, sadness, almost outside the public eyes. I have never found environmentalists, as a group, to be able to get together and do that. I could get together with a friend. Quite often, my friend is not an environmentalist, so I can just say, well you know, I am just overwhelmed. Problems are out of control. I wouldn't say that in a speech.

I think everybody gets to a point in their job where it's just, I can't do this anymore. There are always cycles. I think it's true of anybody, anyone, in work. It ties in specifically with environmental work, I think, when you burn out because you're not making contact with the resource. And also if you are really going to do the job right, you can do it for 24 hours a day and then you have no personal life. That's really hard. Get's burn out fast.

I guess what burns you out frequently is . . . I don't know how to put this exactly. Sometimes the work is thankless, other than the paycheck, because either no one knows when you've accomplished something because it's pretty hard to run around and tell everyone about it, if you are at all modest, or everybody is so busy doing their own thing that they just don't stop and notice. Also you can't get excited about stopping bad things

from happening. So I guess the bigger burn out factor is just there really isn't any recognition.

I did take my victory lap last year and got a couple of plaques from the Sierra Club. I've got them on my wall, but that doesn't really mean as much as–well, this is an example. When I was in the governor's office, there was a really terrible time. You have to develop kind of a crust in public life and I was still pretty new working on the staff. Every time the governor was criticized on environmental policy, it would kill me. I remember having totally bleak weekends. Often it was my own friends criticizing me and my boss. While this ugly thing was going on, a fellow environmentalist sent me a note at home. She said something like, "I know it's a hard time for you, but what you're doing is really important and people later on will thank you for it and thank the governor for it, and if you need to talk, well, just give me a call." And I've saved that. That was 15 years ago. And just last Friday, I would never do this to anybody else but I basically told people that I had a meeting. It was with this same friend. Well, all we did for our meeting was meet and go for a walk in the woods and just talk. So that kind of recognition, when friends have noticed that I was struggling or when I have noticed that they were struggling and we've reached out to each other, that's the kind of recognition that really matters. That's the kind that will renew you more than any number of honors will.

There is some of that in our community, which is good. There are a lot of really nice people in environmental policy. Sometimes to a fault in terms of getting their work done. We're not effective politically because of it but the question is always, do you want to give it up–give up your niceness and become bad and crusty and mean like the other

side–like you think the other side is sometimes? I guess the answer is no. It's better to be humane.

There are two kinds of fun in environmental work. One is the one that everybody thinks about and that's that you're making a difference. And I think most of the people that I know, whether it's in environmental groups or environmental agencies of government, are attracted to the field because they really care. You know they want to. It's not just like, well this is way I can make a living. It's something that has to do with almost their spirituality. It is for me. That they're making a difference, that it is going to help people who aren't born yet, and it is somehow tied with the belief that nature is a part of the creation that needs to be treated with respect. So there is that reward if you feel that you've made a slight advance and it is going to protect creation and help the people who aren't around.

And the other is just the kind of–which is frankly less strong–is the feeling of camaraderie and collegiality. There is this feeling that everybody is pitching in and working together to get something done. It's bigger than us individually. So there is some of that, but frankly the environment movement in this state is kind of fragmented and decentralized. Decentralized is okay. Fragmented and busy, overworked, is too hard. People really don't have time to sit down and just visit.

I have to say maybe it's just my personality, not common to other people, sometimes I feel as if I stand back a little bit from the environmental movement. Certainly I am on the calendar with all of my peers, with what they believe in, what they care about, but having not planned to be an environmental professional, I guess, I don't know. It's

hard to say. I'm both in it and out of it. I mean, it is pretty low priority to hang out with other environmentalists. It's starting to change, but I guess all I'm trying to say is I don't think of myself as the same as a lot of the other folks. I guess there are a lot of loners in the environmental movement. I think people pretty much keep to themselves, other than folks who have been around a long time. I don't know what that says.

The environmental movement, for the people in it, it's all about wounds and healing them and I think a lot of people unconsciously are trying to heal their own pain. I certainly am. I've become more conscious of it as the years pass. It's some lofty abstract-sort of healing yourself too. I became more aware of this as I got older. I mean, after you've made the same personal mistakes forty three times you begin to see a pattern, wow, maybe that's why. I am sure it is true in the other healing professions also. Make up for some kind of a loss that you had.

Even after I got into this work, I wasn't really thinking that it was a life time career. It just sort of happened. And now it's evolving again. I've enjoyed advocacy for a long time but I'm pretty tired of it right now because we aren't making much progress. I guess that I've concluded that for me having a better chance of making change happens by changing people's hearts and minds than by changing statutes. I don't know if I am ever going to see the change that I want from amending a certain house or senate bill or getting a governor to do something. Bigger change has to come from all of us. That's probably best done through the arts than through politics. I mean when you do have successes, you feel a transcended feeling. A lot of environmental books that I see really

make a mistake by trying to make it sound like it's a science. Advocacy is not a science. There are good reasons it's not a science. It's an art.

I will, one way or the other, be working on this the rest of my life. It is my life commitment. I'm committed to the earth. It's committed to me after all. The least I can do is give back.

Part Two: A Composite Portrait

Having listened closely to one participant's story, a composite sketch helps to bring the other participants into the story. The composite participant of this study is a 42 year old white female serving as either the executive director or director of programming of her organization. She is seen as a leader within the organization and a leader within the environmental community. Holding a graduate degree from a major mid-western university, she has served in her organization for a little over ten years and in her current position for the majority of the time. Her responsibilities include providing leadership, administration, and often vitality for either the entire organization or a significant percentage of programs, though she would be humble in telling you this is what she does.

The "Activist" sees her work in the environment as helping to make the world a better place by protecting and improving the quality of life for future generations. She has strong convictions and feels lucky that she has found her work and her work has found her. She grew up in a household of social activism and she sees her environmental emphasis as an avenue to work for social change. Not having grown up planning an environmental career, she is actually surprised by her own commitment and convictions to

her work. She can trace back her interests in the environment to natural experiences growing up, camping trips or special woods near her house, yet she entered college not pursuing a natural resources degree. Volunteer activities either during or after college sparked her interest in working to protect the environment.

Her organization is a membership-based advocacy group, conducting both education and advocacy work. When asked to describe a typical day, the Activist responds with a resounding, "There is no such thing as a typical day." If anything, a typical day would be described as a day of interruptions, trying to focus on getting a project done and being interrupted. The interruptions might be a phone call from a landowner calling about well water problems, a teacher wanting to understand about the toxicity of paints being used in the classroom, a citizen reporting an oil spill, or a state employee calling about endangered species regulations. A typical day would involve some writing and some reading: writing an article for a local newspaper, writing something internally, writing the newsletter, writing grant proposals, writing grant reports, writing testimony. The reading is hard to do because of the phone calls, therefore reading materials will often be taken home at night. If the phone is ringing, it has to be answered, and she is quite likely to be the one answering it. Some days might involve going out in the field, whether to do a field trip for someone, a site visit, or to check on a particular land use project. But the predominant amount of work is in the office, including staff management. The day could be described as a cycle of "phone, computer, files, meetings, phone, computer, files, meetings, phone, computer, files, meetings." A typical day would

end by not accomplishing the tasks set out at the beginning of the day. It is a process of chipping away at the bits and pieces.

When asked what is the hardest part of the work, the Activist's answer can be seen in the sign that hangs above her desk: "You have the power to say no." The hardest part is the pressing number of issues that need to be addressed and the difficulty in saying "no" to all of the requests. Combined with this is the fact that personally and professionally, the Activist cares about the issues. While victories can be very good, the defeats or the compromises feel horrendous. Correspondingly, the pace of change is so slow that it adds to the lack of sense of victories. It is difficult sometimes for her to accept the fact that her efforts and the efforts of her organization are having an impact without seeing concrete results. In specifically giving a name to the hardest components of her work, the Activist suggests: money, power, and resources. Money and resources to get the work done, power to make a difference, to make a change.

The easiest part of the work is in some ways also the hardest. Getting into an issue and really wrestling with it is something she finds compelling. She finds she can almost not *not* do it. If she gets a call from someone who says "help me," she will easily spend an hour or more on the phone talking to the person. Figuring out a way to help is challenging, and the challenge to work on something she loves is easy. She feels driven to do the work.

In talking to the Activist, a sense of a person feeling overwhelmed by the immensity of the tasks before her and the graveness of the issues comes out. She suggests you have to be able to work on your own and set your own objectives, to be

self-motivated because you are not part of an assembly line. While feeling proud of her work, she speaks quietly of times of burnout. In offering words of wisdom for others working in similar positions, she suggests remembering to have fun as well as keeping the faith that you are right in your actions when the world around you is trying to say, "No, no, you are wrong." Yet she likewise counsels to not let the confidence turn into righteousness. There is a difference between being right about the work being done and being absolutely right, knowing all of the answers. Part of keeping the faith also includes a sense of spirituality which involves a connection to the earth and a connection to humanity. She has a strong need to remain connected to the out-of-doors, with natural experiences being an important component to staying refreshed in her work. Ironically, however, at times she still looks longingly at other livelihoods. Yet she knows that no matter what she will be doing in the future, it will somehow focus on making the world a better place.

Part Three: Aggregate Findings

Parker Palmer (1997) suggests that three important paths exist in understanding the inner landscape of a teacher's life: intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. These three paths also adeptly capture the complex components of sustained commitment for environmental activist work, yet slightly different words were used in the interviews. The activists spoke about head, heart and spirituality. Head refers to the use of logic, rationale, and thinking which is employed in decision making. Heart refers to the deep feelings and emotions the activists both bring to their work and experience within their

work. Spirituality refers to the numerous connections which provide the grounding to their work and their lives. An important component of this study's findings is how the activists make meaning of the intertwining of the three, a process led by an openness to learning. Also strongly apparent through the interviews was a depth of knowledge the activists have about their own needs, their passions, core values, and strong connections to the world. As a group, the activists are well anchored in their convictions. Their determination to be effective helps fuel an openness to an understanding of what drives both themselves and others, and a willingness to always have a "beginner's mind." As they push forward in their understanding of who they are, they are continually cultivating their own commitment.

The first part of this chapter has focused on the question: What is the experience of strongly committed environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations? With the underpinning being the experience, the following sections highlights the head, heart and spirit connection in order to probe the two questions: What happens over time to the commitment and passion environmental activists bring to their work? What role does learning play in maintaining long term commitment and passion?

Passion and commitment over time

As can be seen in both the composite sketch and Dave's story, the activists of this study identify closely with their work and are working on issues which evoke strong emotions. They are systemic thinkers and feel strong connections to both nature and humanity, allowing their decisions to be driven both by emotions and information. As Dave notes, he uses his rationale mind in his work but it really all stems from a love of

nature. For others in the study, the love might be for their community or for the people of the world. A deep sense of caring is evident as the activists discuss the merging over time of head, heart, and spirit.

Head. A strongly reflective quality was evident in the way the activists talked about coming to understand issues and making decisions in their work. Within this reflection were two strong patterns of underlying unwavering assumptions that could be heard throughout the interviews. First, the activists bring to their work a clearly systemic view of the world and, second, a deep sense of being right in this view. Both of these modes of thinking are important components to their sustained commitment to their work.

Throughout the interviews, the activists were careful to note the complexity of environmental issues in the midst of world problems and the importance of identifying the various connections. Helen puts it simply, "What happens in Bonn and what will happen in South Africa has everything to do with what I eat here in my little house in Michigan. And making that connection, I think is hard. . . . This isn't about some far away abstract concept. This is about what you eat in the fish that you consume from this basin, if you consume fish. It's about what you breath, because the stuff comes through atmospheric deposition. . . . Environmentalists have to make those links." Later in the interview she spoke in more detail about this manner of thinking and understanding and the importance it has for her work.

> I now sort of see that this range of issues that I am interested in, and that I think are important in the world, justice issues and people's connection to the natural world, that they are linked. That there are a whole lot of them. That they're about the same kinds of things and so to work in one area, if we have a particular focus on one area, it doesn't mean that there isn't a

> link to another cause. So that has been an important evolution for me and it has made me feel better about the work that I do. Because I feel like it is more integrated and it's more . . . fundamental, you know, more about primary problems.

Ben describes how a systemic way of thinking pushes him to understand "how we interact with each other and . . . relate to and influence how we interact with the earth." He notes,

> Our culture and the way that we live and our disconnection has really fundamentally disrupted important life giving positive, sustaining interactions between each other . . . [T]his work is a way to start talking about that. . . . [T]hose things feel so primary and important. And to be working on them, if I put my work in that context, it feels important–sustaining.

In the interviews, the activists were careful to not identify issues as black and white and often talked of coming to an appreciation of the diversity of life, diversity of opinions and diversity of experiences. Abigail talks about the necessity to constantly step back and ask about people with opposing views, "What are they actually doing out there? Who are these people, and why are they doing this?" In applying a systemic approach to their work, the activists voiced the recognition that they don't know all of the answers. Sasha states, "You can't split things and say this is the right side and this is the wrong side because you never can tell. There is so much going on that we just don't have any idea." Yet in pursuing answers they are firmly grounded in the belief that their systemic way of thinking is the only alternative. As Steven discusses this tension:

> We often get discounted for being on the extreme edge, of being loose with the facts, not having the science down, and so it is always being suggested that out there in the world that we are wrong. And the thing is that we may not always have the proof that our various institutions require of us. We know, we know that we are right. And so I think that is an important

> way of keeping on because you have to believe that because there are so many obstacles, you'd give up. So you have to kind of know that you are right even when the world around you is trying to say, no, no, you are wrong.

When asked to give a term that would describe the underlying conviction for her work, Dara states, "It's righteousness. It's like, yeah, I might be tired, but I'm right. I might go down with the ship, but I'm right. It's not as absolute as that or black and white as that. I hope to think that I am not so rigid, but it is kind of this righteousness." Steven remarks,

> There is a difference between being right about the work we are doing and being absolutely right, knowing all of the answers. And I think it is dangerous. I hate to find myself using that word but it is at least highly problematic to be going around in this work thinking that you know all of the answers or that you know better than everybody else because then it doesn't allow any room for reexamining your assumptions. And I think some times we are not exactly absolutely right. I think we have to know that we are right about what we are advancing, but there should be an openness to reexamining the measures that you're advancing to get there.

Abigail sums up well the importance of this mode of thinking to sustaining commitment. "Even when we don't succeed, which is way too often, we still have the positives of knowing that we have done everything we could, and you know, we're right."

Heart. Though a blending of head and heart has brought many of the activists into their line of work, the acceptance of emotions as an important part of work has not been easy and has come with time and effort. It has required a confidence that both emotions and information are necessary for decision making. In this acceptance, the activists are bucking societal norms and observe it is often perilous to openly admit emotions are a part of decision making. Megan notes, "I don't think our society has changed to actually acknowledge and respect emotional responses to things. They still just, well . . . look at

the facts. I see that at school board meetings. I see that at other public hearings. So I'm not sure that we're changing as much as maybe the folks who are in the field long enough are deciding that, you know, I don't really care what the response is going to be at the other side because this is legitimate." She goes on to add:

> One of the things that I think is very, very hard for people to learn is to trust their instincts and to trust their heart and their gut. And certainly this has to make sense, it has to be logical. What I've been trying to do is add the element of emotion into some of these decisions that are being made and people are saying, "That's just emotional or sentimentalism!" I say, "Well, tough!" You know? Why is it any less legitimate? And so we're trying to sort of instill a semblance of reason as a part of, as opposed to just, it's got to be all heart or all head.

Abigail refers cynically to the use of facts rather than emotions as "playing the game." She notes, "I think we tend to shy away from these kinds of things. We feel we need to play the game that somebody else has set out there, which is we need to defend ourselves in the context that is available to us with just the factual and scientific context." She speaks at length about these issues helping to illuminate also how important it is to have colleagues who also embrace the connection of emotions to intellect.

> [There] is the desire to say we're not just emotionally connected . . . to de-emotionalize things. And one of the best types of advice that I have gotten [was from] a woman who used to be a staff person. I worked with her for many years. What was interesting, as people were trying to de-emotionalize these issues and say, we're all about science, we're all about that, we're all about this, was her saying: It does matter. It does matter that we care and we need to make sure that people understand that. There is a reason to go beyond the simple facts and to assure that we put that emotional element in there. It's not competing with the facts, but it has to be there because that's why we do this. If we pretend it's simply that we believe in the facts and that's all we care about, that's just not true.
>
> The Wilderness Bill may have done more for me in setting this kind of concept in place because the primary sponsor in congress is Congressman

Dale Kildee, who has gone to seminary and he speaks from the heart about these issues. And you could see that in the stuff that he talked about. This mattered. It mattered morally. It mattered ethically. It mattered also emotionally.

You know, caring has always been a part of our human nature and those who seek to do damage to the earth or seem not to think that it matters that they do damage to the earth, have lost something. They have lost that caring and they're arguing to get away from that because that's the only way they win. If we have no values, they win. If we care and we have values, then they always lose because people do care.

Every time we strip emotion from these issues, we lose something. Because it's not just a balance book. I mean this may be one reason why the concept of cost-benefit analysis drives most of us nuts, because we cannot calculate the true cost or the true benefits of most of the issues that we're talking about. What's the value of having your health all the time? Well yeah, somebody can put an equation to that, but it doesn't mean anything. What's the value of allowing people to reproduce because they're not ingesting chemicals that prevent reproduction? What's the value of having a beautiful forest?

As we evolve ourselves, there are still these things that are based to our being as humans and we need to recognize that there is a reason why those things are still there, why we have emotions, why we care about stuff. And information is a tool of some sort. It's used routinely as a tool for shaping things, for making things happen and emotion is part of that. Caring is part of that. And regardless of the why behind that, it's there and we need to recognize that. Now that doesn't mean you still don't have to make that argument from the scientific basis. It doesn't mean that you still don't have to make that argument from a factual basis. But it means if somebody says well you're emotional about it, I mean maybe your response should be, "Yeah, you bet I am."

Spirit. Abigail's words convey a deep caring and a deep connection to the natural world. This connection depicts a spirituality which was widely present in the words of the activists. The interviewees could be described as a group of individuals who had a strong sense of the spiritual. Many participants discussed their strong connection to the physical world, the comfort they receive from this relationship, and the motivation it provides to

their work. As Dave noted earlier, "I just believe that we have a duty to the earth and that there is a right and a wrong in relation to the earth." Dave suggests this reaction could be described as your heart opening to the issues. Emily astutely suggests that working in the environmental field is not going to make a person popular, famous or wealthy, rather her motivation is "a spiritual value. It's fulfilling." She continues,

> I think it is the spiritual value in natural systems and how they function and the moral and ethical need for human beings to live in harmony with those systems. . . . I feel it is a very deep moral ethical issue and I think it is very energizing during your work week to work at something that is primarily for myself. For an awful lot of people . . . they go to work and do whatever they have to do and then in their extra hours when they are already tired and have had enough and have other things to do, then they hope to be able to have some time to address what are those kind of issues. I think it's a real benefit to be able to do it during work hours and that's what keeps me charged.

Ben talks about his earliest recognition of connecting his love of the outdoors with spirituality.

> I was raised Catholic. I went through catechism and first communion and all that stuff. But my mom, given sort of the transcendentalist that she was, at about you know maybe-I think I was-it was before the confirmation so whenever Catholics go through confirmation at 12 or 13. We are coming home from church and she said, "You don't really seem to be enjoying it as much." And I said, "I'm not." And she said, "Well, why?" And I told her. I think the main reason was that I thought it was really–it was becoming–I was really starting to notice the hypocrisy, and you know how the most biased people in the neighborhood were really jerks and their connection to humanity and their interest in sort of following the teachings of Christ were limited to about an hour and a half on Sunday and the rest of the time they were not the kindest people that you could imagine. And so she said, "Do you want to keep going to church?" And I said, "No, I'd much rather not." And she basically said, "Well, how will you take care of your soul." And I said, "Well, you know, I'll spend time out in nature," because that's the only place, I was 12 years old, the only place that I had ever experienced anything close to the sort of magic of what spirituality is trying to teach was when I was in nature. And you know, given my mom would

> read Thoreau and Emerson to me, said it's a perfectly great place to experience God, whatever that is. So she sort of let me go. So when she would go off to church with my sister, I would go down to the swamp on the river.

As an adult Ben has purposefully set out to understand spirituality in society better, as well as his own needs as a spiritual person, and how spirituality relates to citizen involvement in community. He notes, "One thing I think is important for me to keep in mind is that, to be honest with myself, I am not doing this out of any intrinsic sort of love for nature. . . . It's that people element and how we relate to each other and how we relate back to the earth. It's sort of a psycho social thing that fuels me." Later in the interview, in describing his deep interest in spirituality, he shares:

> One of the things that I think is interesting about humans, and this might be a genetic flaw, an evolutionary flaw–is that we try to make meaning of our experience, whether it is something horrible like [a death in the family] or something like, you know, what you do for your living. . . . So, one of the things that I was looking at was okay, how do we as a species make meaning of our experience. Some people really challenge themselves to try to make meaning of that. Other people turn to other resources to make meaning, whether that be the Bible or Vanity Fair, or whether they sort of enmesh themselves in modern messages of what's meaningful or traditional messages of what's meaningful.

Though the actual term "spirituality" was not always heard in the interviews, a deep connection between people and society as a whole and between people and the environment was strongly present. Helen talks about the overlap between head, heart and spirit.

> I just have a pretty deep well of outrage about stuff. . . . I'm constantly learning new things that I find really outrageous. Outrage can come from love. Anger can to, but you know, if you can still manage outrage–you know your sense of justice, your sense of the world, you don't become so cynical that nothing generates any feeling, right? So that outrage is really

> important, but then how one acts–the impulse when used to act on it is a separate issue for me. And I think acting out of love means [pause] it's hard to describe without a specific case. But I think there are differences, that the way it manifests itself is different. You can't always tell whether someone is acting out of love or anger, except that it just–that anger burns the candle on both ends essentially. And it does wear one out. And I think that the spirit isn't as pure somehow. Acting in a sense of love is, you know, like you have a connection to other people that is critical and that's the major motivation.

Helen continues on to suggest that "the only way you can do this work in a sustained way is out of love. And I use that word very advisably, and I mean it most sincerely, that love is what must drive the work. And love is what drives the work in the people that I most admire and then the people who stay in it over the long term." She describes love being for "the people who you work with and the people who . . . live in these places, and your own family, and your children if you have them or your nieces or nephews and new babies being born to your friends and also the place where you live and the stream that you know and the tree that you know and then, you know, also more abstractly sort of love of humanity or whatever." Helen's words fit precisely Dave's definition of passion: "The ability to invest emotionally in what you're doing. It's not just an abstract duty or obligation, but a feeling that this is good and you really believe in it from the heart. Passion is, you know, the fuel, whether it's from anger or love that makes the work possible." Over time he has come to recognize that his sense of spirituality grounds him in his commitment to work stating, "[I]t's a feeling of reverence for creation and a hope that one's work or service, as I would think of it, although we are paid for it, is somehow honoring the creation and respecting it. It's about the mystery of life."

Passion. Throughout the process of this research, I have grappled with the question, "What actually is passion?" A general dictionary definition defines it as "any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling; strong affection; love." Being passionate is defined as "influenced or dominated by intense emotion or strong feeling; expressing or revealing strong emotion" (Random House Dictionary, p. 972) Within the group interview, a definition used by the group interjected an active component to the Random House definition. A summary definition which arose during the day described passionate as "being engaged with more than your mind–being engaged with your body, your heart and your spirit . . . sort of having a fire." As one participant remarked, "I don't sustain [passion]. It's like the internal flame."

The convergence of head, heart and spirit: Leading meaningful lives

Palmer writes, "Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on each other for wholeness" (1997, p. 15) One of the pieces that emerged from the interviews was the importance of the activists' work to their sense of leading meaningful and authentic lives. The importance of their work being directly linked to their passions, to their very being of who they are, their identity or their self, appears to provide a grounding to sustain commitment. This may be what Palmer is referring to as "wholeness." Dara expresses this sentiment. "In that soul searching that I've done, this has felt really right and good for me. . . . It hasn't felt like, oh, there are other rungs of the ladder that I want to continue to climb, so therefore I've got to leave the nonprofit and the environmental world. It's like you know in this world, this has been good for me."

The career mirror. An indicator of the synergy between the activists' work and who they are materialized in their discussion of career, specifically as a reluctance to apply the term "career" to their work. Some almost shunned the term as if it negated commitment. In Abigail's words,

> You're compelled to do this work. Career is almost an understatement. Career almost makes it sound like it's getting yourself to a point and–I mean you know-it sort of sounds like a gold watch at the end of the chain and your pension and that's all. And this is different because you would do it regardless and getting paid to do it is pretty amazing.

I asked Dara at what point she realized her professional life as an environmentalist had become a career. A veteran in the environmental movement, Dara looked surprised by this question and laughed, "You know what's funny? I probably still don't think of it as a career, so to speak. . . . I have to sit back and say, yeah it is. I don't think it has dawned on me." She proposed that her conception of "career" probably comes from her guidance counselor many years ago in high school where for-profit work was the focus. "A career was not working in nonprofits. It wasn't the definition." In this same mode, Ben bluntly suggests, "Working for a little nonprofit and having an office that's the size of a janitor's closet is not what people envision for themselves, you know, when they're on the cusp of potential future greatness." He adds,

> I think part of it really comes down to how do we see ourselves in terms of the world of work. And because the environmental work and even nonprofit work is not respected in our culture, you know, it's not like kids grow up–"I want to be an environmentalist"–you know, it's like doctor, lawyer. On that list of things to do, environmentalist is not on the list. And so I think part of it is just a sort of cultural ignorance. It's not really even known as an option until you've spent some time working and learning and following your passion, and becoming exposed to a lot of different ways of being.

Megan adds that in defining career there is the element of for whom the work is oriented. She states,

> I am dedicated to the work that I am doing and to the cause, but the word "career" for me means that it's totally for yourself. You know, that you're doing your career in order to accomplish your own personal goals which would be money presumably and stature and power that you see as relevant, but being dedicated to work, I think, is a little different. That's just sort of to accomplish particular objectives for other people. So I feel that I am dedicated to this place. I am dedicated to the environment and I am dedicated to, you know, on a personal level living simply and those kinds of things. So I feel that I am dedicated to the work of water quality protection and the environment, but I am not career motivated. It's not as a career, you know. I am an environmental protection person.

Interestingly, as the activists told their stories it became evident that many were surprised to find themselves years later still in environmental work. Their stories also indicated that choosing a path that does not meet societal expectations is not always easy and requires a strong understanding of what drives them in order to push forward. Helen laments,

> There isn't much respect for it. And so, you know, one year I was voted most likely to succeed in my little high school. And all my colleagues, you know they are physicians who have appointments at teaching at universities and one friend of mine is the second top lawyer at [a] university and the other one is one of the heads of [a major corporation]. I mean these are people in my small school, right? All these people have gone onto these more classic, you know . . . work lives and have all the trappings associated with that. And so . . . I think that remains a crisis. You know, what is the public recognition for this kind of thing?

As Helen is suggesting, the underlying motivations for a career working on environmental issues are not money, power, prestige. At a mid-life point in her own development, Abigail talks about these struggles.

> At the age where a lot of my friends, a lot of relatives, are reexamining their work, they're saying now maybe I want to shift careers and do something else and going back to school or whatever. . . . Every time that happens, I sort of go back and do a little bit of a mental accounting. Do I want to do this? Even things like the potential applying for a different kind of job within the environmental community and doing something in a different way. And I go back and do an accounting, not terribly consciously, but just sort of, is this what I want to do? I mean, I didn't get trained in this. I just sort of am here for a lot of reasons, but it wasn't a conscious choice. And each time that I step away from that, I say, I still have work to do. I have things that I care about. I have this agenda, even though I can't tell you what the end point is on it, there are things that I want to accomplish in this work and they take a long time. They're measured in decades as opposed to a few years. My perception of myself in work is pretty much intertwined with those issues that, while I don't think it is essential that I be there for those issues to be carried out, I know that if I'm there I will work on them and I will make them happen if I can. So the two do sort of get tied together. And that can be a problem at times. [For example, if] your grant lapses . . .well, you know . . . we're going to do this anyway, aren't we? . . . I mean you're compelled to do this work.

A wholeness. As can be heard from the voices above, the activists of this study like their work and their jobs and strongly identify with their work. Their work blends their personal and professional identities with, for the most part, little conflict between the two. A wholeness exists. A deep love and caring for humanity as a core value has revealed itself as work in the environmental field. There is a strong sense of the work filling a need to be directly connected to the world and a desire to work for the common good. Abigail suggests, "I needed to do something like this in order to feel fulfilled personally. And so, for me, that is probably the main reason that I am in this for the long haul." When Sasha states, "I'm about this whole slew of things . . . and my interest and passion has become manifested in environmental work," she appears to be giving voice to

what many others have also experienced. Steven talked about how his personal and professional values and commitments blend.

> There is a way in which being in this line of work blurs the lines. It is a way of life. Whether you are getting paid for it or not, you'd probably go to that meeting that took you away from your family or other things that you might be doing because you actually cared about whether your neighborhood or your community or the woods far away were going to be affected by some action.

The blurring of the lines between personal and professional can also be heard in Dave's statement about choosing environmental work. He notes, "It's not about, you know, it's not a calculation, it's a bit of home." For these activists, the convergence of the head, heart, and spirit has found itself in meaningful work. Illuminating a wholeness in this convergence, Dara questions the motto "service above self." She cautions, "Service above self is a great career . . . but you don't sacrifice oneself in that whole process. Some self is absolutely essential and some service to self is absolutely essential." It appears finding this balance is a matter of continually uncovering who you are and who you want to be in a culture that often works against this process. In this uncovering process a continual eye to the future could be heard in the activists' stories.

The future. The activists of this study, all long term environmentalists, surprisingly did not stand united in their feelings about necessarily being in their current jobs or profession for the long haul. As can be heard in Abigail's previous sentiments about mid-life questioning, a continual "checking in" of the self could be heard. All the activists described a continual growing and expanding of their interests. For some, this growing continues to fuel their interests in their present activities. Emily notes that she doesn't

necessarily picture always doing all the day-to-day kinds of things in her work, she is not even sure whether she will be living in the same place, but she is confident wherever she is she will be working on local environmental issues. For others, however, they do not have this same confidence. Some voiced the desire to draw upon more creative sides of their beings, while others shared an interest in working outside of the environmental movement. Dave states, "I don't think I'm going to make the 30 or 40 years [in this field] because I want to write books." He does add, however, that one of his greatest dreams is to devote his writing to environmental causes and stories. Dara sees herself applying her current experiences and skills to another service organization in the future. While she notes it may not be an environmental organization, she is quick to point out it would always be a nonprofit organization. Megan questions whether "there is something more fun and exciting out there somewhere? Is this what working is all about? Is this what a job is all about?" When Helen is asked about her future she responds,

> I assume that I will be doing . . . no, actually no. I was going to say I assume I will be doing some work, but if I were able to find a way to make a living doing art work, I might do that for a while. And so I think I will always be involved in some way trying to make the world a better place. But I also think it is completely reasonable to take breaks from that and maybe essential to take sabbaticals, whatever. . . . It's not that I don't have a commitment to make the world better. I mean that. But commitment to this particular path and this particular work? No. I mean I have to reaffirm that every day. And in a way, I think that's a good thing.

What can be suggested from the words above is a continual quest for self fulfillment in the midst of working for the common good. Part of it appears to a wistful longing for a quieter more peaceful life, a more balanced and fun existence. Yet within this is also the recognition of the activist's evolving development and a continual effort to

match and integrate these changes of who they are as a person with their work. As Ben points out, "There is probably ten different things I would love to do before I die, as a career, in addition to this. So part of me is like-okay, now is the time. But another part is like-nope, I'm committed to this. There's these things that I want to see through to fruition before I leave this particular post." He adds that just knowing those ten other careers are out there, however, "provides some solace."

Deep-seated values. Regardless of their visions for their own futures, the activists did stand united in their work being based in deep-seated values. These values fuel their passions. Megan counsels, "One of the things that I think is very, very hard for people to learn is to trust their instincts and to trust their heart and their gut." Dara explains, "It's just this deep in the bottom of your soul conviction that the natural systems out there should be the template for everything that we possibly do. It's kind of a fundamental wiring inside me that just says this is the right way to go about stuff." Abigail exhorts, "When I get passionate . . . it surprises me because it's coming from a different place than the intellect. I mean when people are talking about heart or soul or whatever, it's like your whole being is saying-yeah, this matters! . . . It's much more gut level than actually intellectual." Steven shares a similar awareness,

> I do feel that I have a passion about this work and it takes commitment to stick with it, but . . . that commitment feels pretty natural. It comes from deep-seated values that I have. So what passion that I do have about my work, you know, it comes from those values. . . those fundamental values that sort of bring to it my understanding and desire, you know, desire to be on this path.

In thinking about Steven's path, and in applying Dave's metaphor, I have begun to think of the joining of head, heart, and spirit as the building of a strong home with a roof, walls, and floor. Without any one of these pieces, the home will not stand tall. For the home to provide shelter and solace, you have to enter the inner space. Upon entering, as any homeowner knows all to well, however, continual upkeep is needed. It is a continual evolution of maintenance and enhancement and with each project, the home evolves. The home is never the same as the first day you entered, but with floor, walls and roof intact, it is still home: a home which houses one's passions.

The Role of Learning: Learning To Be At Home

Learning, like passion, is an elusive topic. During the interviews I listened carefully for the patterns which described how the activists came to make meaning of their lives and how that meaning influenced their commitment to their work. Through the listening it became clear that their understanding of themselves was a process of being open to head and heart. This interplay is reflected well in a heartfelt comment made by Dara at the end of our second interview. "What you see before you and the work that I have done is really a reflection of me, my attitude, and my perceptions. . . . A lot of things conspired in the right way, and I didn't necessarily direct those. But a lot just about who I am, however, how I was raised, how I think about things, my outlook on life, all of those things are . . . my path."

Defining Learning: A Group Discussion. Interestingly, throughout the interviews there was little use of the actual term learning. Coming from an interpretive perspective, I was careful to not use the term in my own questions or in my probing. Most of what was

described was discussed in terms of knowing, with the activists at times having a difficult time depicting how they came to certain understandings about themselves. When the activists came together to help interpret the findings, however, I decided to probe one more time and directly ask about the role of learning in sustaining passion. To prompt the discussion the activists first drew their images of learning, with brightly colored markers on a long scroll of paper, in a process of building upon each other's pictures. The ensuing discussion about the pictures elevated the discussion about learning beyond what had occurred in the interviews. In the dialogue below each paragraph represents a new speaker.

> To me there is the notion of process in the images. There is a notion of pain in some of the images. Unclear directions, outcomes, origin, those kinds of things.
>
> It can be a messy process. I mean learning is not concrete, sequential when you get to be our age. Those lessons and flashes of insight come where you would least expect it and when you least expect it.
>
> I happen to be on the school board in my community. What I find is I have less and less patience with incompetence. And so I find myself having to really bite my tongue and try to listen and consciously listen where most of my life is go-go-go-go. So what I found is, interestingly enough, I'm learning something! From these people, who two months ago I thought were really incompetent! Who would have thought?! But it is only because I've forced myself to listen, so that's been great. That forces patience. I have been forced to realize that the baggage that I bring there might not be the baggage that best represents the people in the community and so I need to be really conscious of where my life begins and ends and my role as a community servant begins and ends. I find the way to integrate and mesh those is to listen and to understand before I jump off with what I think is obviously the right solution to a problem. But to listen to all sides. To me, someone who has always sort of gone through life very self-confident, to sit back and say, well, maybe I'm not right. I need to listen first and then go forward. It's been sort of a different habit for me to try to take on, to spend a half an hour debating a problem and solution and

maybe table it and let it cook, let us think and let everyone sort of spout off what they think.

I think that is a part of sustaining passion for this work. We spoke earlier about how some of us came to this working from a place of anger and you can't sustain that long term. I think back to how righteous I was, probably still am in some respects, just how righteous. That's sort of dropped by the wayside, to learn more about what I do, and to say passion has to be involved.

Yeah, righteousness is an interesting thing. Because on one hand I think it's a source of energy and propulsion, particularly early on in one's career. You know, to feel that you're right and to be convinced that yeah you should keep going because you're right. But that brings me back to sort of the Buddhist perspective that there are two minds, one is the beginner's mind and the other is the expert's mind. The beginner's mind is open, untrusting, skeptical, wanting to take it all in, wanting to listen and wanting to understand. The expert knows it all. And so the expert is closed off to the greater reality. And so in the context of this school board, I'm the beginner. And so I go into it with the beginner's mind and I've learned a hell of a lot from the other people there. Well that's what you need to do to be an environmental advocate. I think that each one of us have moved from one role to the next to have the beginner's kind of mind.

Well for me, you know, after banging your head against the wall, I mean if you're really outcome oriented and want to change the world, learning is about needing to challenge yourself and find better ways to work in a way that has that effect and outcome. And you know, the world is totally open to that concept. I mean there are some tried and true techniques, which we will continue to use forever probably, but you know, new combinations are bringing together people and resources. It just is all an ongoing challenge. And you know, I think that's a constant opportunity for learning.

You know, the other thing that I was thinking about when we were talking was what are the things that help with learning? Other people? The world? It's not just, you know, so you learn from other people. You learn from the world. You learn from these situations, right? But what you described was a change in yourself, right? And also some fundamental concepts of learning. I mean a decision that you would approach a particular situation in a different way is yet another sort of component of learning. I think that's having a beginner's mind.

I wonder if we all do have a full reality. That was my experience when I started doing this stuff. It was easy if everyone would agree with us. It was about how you bring about change and I mean we haven't learned how to do that. I think that's pretty clear. And that is a problem of learning.

I think probably where I am in learning is I'm right in the middle of not knowing. And I don't know. I'm never going to be out of there. The other thing that I was thinking when you had mentioned you were forced to learn, I think there is also the notion of being open to learning. Maybe what you're describing is the constant state of being open to learning and knowing that you are just always in that and you are never done. It's a process. You're learning all the time. It's not like you're not learning. So it's about being aware and forcing myself to consciously be open to the learning.

Exactly.

I think a lot of times we're so damn busy, we're just sort of going from thing to thing to thing to thing, without this reflection action process at all. I think for me what I've found essential in the last ten years is just time alone, quiet, where the inner voice-the inner teacher can be heard.

I think there is a sense of self.

Yeah. Some sort of sense of something and that's why you know driving down today, I thought I'll spend a lot more time sitting in the car than sitting here with you brilliant people, but I will have some time to just think and not think. That comfort with not knowing, you know, that is really powerful. It is. And from the Buddhist perspective, that's the key.

Yeah, that's a big deal.

That is a big key. To be comfortable, knowing that you don't know but being open to that and trusting yourself, that's okay. That's really powerful. And I don't think any of us were there when we got out of grad school.

Taking time for completely unproductive thinking is a key. Completely. It's really not about productivity in any way. To me it's such a crude idea to have some time in which there shouldn't be a purpose. How very important that time is. It's the key for me in the notion of sustaining passion. It's also a big piece of everything that we've talked about so far.

> You know, it's that piece of being open to the head and heart connection and the spirituality piece and opportunities for profound insight.

Pain. Unclear directions, outcomes and origins. Messiness. Flashes of insight. A beginner's mind. Listening. Challenges. Challenging yourself. Constant opportunities. Learning from other people. Learning from the world. Comfortable with not knowing. Consciously open to learning. Reflection. Patience. The inner voice. The inner teacher. A sense of self. Thinking and not thinking. Being open to the head and heart connection. All of these words illuminate myriad ways of knowing and learning.

As can be heard from the group dialogue, a general openness to learning and a willingness to acknowledge not knowing were strong messages voiced by the group. It was clearly evident that one particular formula for learning does not exist and often it was difficult to pull apart the differences between knowing and learning. The interviews revealed people with a strong understanding of their own needs, yet it was difficult at times to ascertain how they came to those understandings. What was strongly heard from the environmental activists was a continual questioning of their life's direction, while being grounded in their overall commitment to environmental work.

Learning from childhood. The participants of this study grew up in the 1960's and 1970's, a time of great change and growth in American idealism, activism, and environmentalism. Many of the participants had parents who were actively involved in local government or who incorporated activism openly in their lives and the lives of their children. Abigail's mother and grandmother were both township commissioners. Sasha grew up in the midst of politics with her father serving as mayor of their town. "Ever

since I was however old, old enough to stand at a poll by myself, I would stand at polls and pass out campaign literature and chat with people about my dad and what he believed in." Ben describes the impact his mother had on his own personal ethic.

> She was a hippy. She was . . . really involved in the anti-war movement, the anti-Vietnam movement. Very involved in the peace movement and the ecological, the environment and the ecology movement. . . . The sense that I got very clearly was–it was overtly said or was just an undercurrent of our growing up, is that we were to work and live in a way that served a good much beyond ourselves. And that service was of the highest order and that if we were to get jobs and go into careers that were–that only made money that were self-serving, then we were committing the highest of sins, which in her opinion was greed and selfishness–were the worst. And so in that atmosphere, which was on one hand sort of sounds like a dower but it really wasn't, it was great-loving, lots of lots of fun. But this ethic of serving something beyond ourselves was really, really important.

Helen similarly describes her experiences,

> I think what's important for me is that I grew up in a household of activism and that was very formative to me. My parents were involved in the civil rights movement, the grapes boycott and the anti-war movement among others. And so as a young person, I demonstrated in front of Kroger's with signs because they were selling grapes. And I remember we demonstrated in front of the [local newspaper] building because of their policy, some policy that related to blacks. And our family went to Washington DC, our whole family, even with small kids and there are six of us, for two demonstrations against the Vietnam War.

In understanding the influence of childhood experiences in sustaining passion, insight can be found in Helen's statement, "I think all of these things communicate to a young person that . . . there are justice issues that are worth struggling for and that they are a part of a faith, they're part of a broader view of life and they were integral to our life." These activists learned from a young age that they had a role in making a difference in the world. The fires were lit for lives of commitment to social change. Yet, learning to

keep those fires burning without being burned has been an important component of what Dara terms being "true to yourself."

Learning to take care of oneself. During the interviews all but two of the activists talked about severe periods of burnout. Abigail describes a time period of

> . . . absolute overwhelming stress. Anxiety at all times. Non-stop insomnia. And feeling like you could Never Get Anything Done. That the important things could never happen. I mean just classic depression symptoms. Everything. Just really bad. The worst part again is the sense that this stuff mattered. It wasn't stuff that you could let go. It wasn't somebody's dinner getting burned, and so well, hell, tomorrow I won't worry about it. This was stuff that mattered. So, the actual effects are putting stuff off, finding that you just plain can't confront even the simplest things. It's pretty serious. I'm talking about pretty serious stuff. And feeling like you have no option but to quit, because you cannot fix it. And I think that's probably the biggest problem. . . . There's always a new crisis, and there's always something that needs to be done. And there are ten more issues waiting for you. So, because of that, you cannot simply say, okay, I'm going to focus today. It doesn't happen! It doesn't happen!

Dara describes a time of burnout as "a feeling of being just totally buried and feeling that there is no way out and it's hopeless, so it's a pretty deep depression." She bluntly remarks, "I was so fried." Dave suggests, "You can't get excited about stopping bad things from happening. You want to see good things happen and they weren't. So . . . I thought I just can't do this anymore. I am going to either have a heart attack or a nervous breakdown and I just needed something that was more fulfilling spiritually." In Helen's words, "I was just tired. I felt tired. You know the hours we work and a lot of weekends and evenings and I was tired. I got to the point where I didn't want to even drive by work when I wasn't at work."

Ben suggests that the reason burnout among environmental activists is so pervasive is due to the inability to both say no and to really take care of one's self. "It can lead to leaving the field. That's when the other ten alternative career paths start looking really good." In asking Dara about the time, she notes,

> I had been way too involved. I hadn't had enough balance in my life and hadn't learned that lesson yet of what it means to create balance. So I just got burned out for it and learned a lot from that experience about balance . . . I think another aspect or what I see sort of a common thread for those of us attracted to any kind of service work is there is just a real strong need to be needed or there is a lot of award to being needed. But I think I had too many needy sides that were looking for fulfillment through that one place and that was just my thing. It wasn't the organization, it was *me* more than anything else. . . . I just had to learn to say no because I was saying yes to everything. . . . I was going through a pretty deep depression at the time. All of it related and all of it connected.

It was suggested during the interviews that environmental work is similar to working in social services, with the work involving healing the wounds of the earth. It was ventured that environmentalists choose their work to fill a personal need, potentially trying to heal their own wounds as well. Dara continues,

> I started out with a real desire to be of help, of service, but with that was the need to be needed and it was welcomed. "Oh my gosh you want to do this, you want to volunteer, you want to give? Great. That's wonderful." And I chose environment more than any other human service or social service work because I was more comfortable with that, had more connections with that than I did with people. But as I have grown and as I have learned that I don't quite need to fill that neediness any more, maybe that is how it has become a career and more of a choice as opposed to a way to fulfill some holes in my life.

At the times of the interviews, all of the participants talked about their burnout in past tense while cautioning that future periods of burnout were always looming close by. They spoke of the coping mechanisms used to survive and grow from these time periods. A

large component to coping was to impose a pause in their lives, removing themselves from the environment and reflecting on how to move forward. Dara calls it "taking time to dig yourself out." Abigail describes such a time period.

> I knew that I didn't want to quit, and I knew that if I quit, all it would do is mean I would have to go find another job. And I doubted I would find one that I liked as much. And the goods were important enough to keep. But, it was essential to go back and recover. . . . I just said look, I want you not to pay me for three months, and then I'm going to come back. But, right now, I want to be gone. And they were happy to do it. . . . It took a month before the phone could ring without me jumping. Literally. I learned a lot of the importance of developing that that space, getting back to where you are able to do what you want to do, without always feeling anxious. I didn't do much. I mean I read, I read fiction.
>
> My kids were in school [at the time]. And in fact I had contemplated taking the summer off, and it was like, no. I want to have this time for me. I don't want to end up being mom at home with the kids. As much as that would be a good thing to do, I want to have this time for me. And I took a two-week camping trip by myself and went to visit friends that I knew. It was really important to get away. After three months, I went back to work, and I was much better. Things had really gone back into a better perspective.

Abigail talks about getting to a similar point of being overwhelmed again five years later. She cut back to half-time and also sought out counseling.

> I knew there were things going on there that I needed to address. And so that was important as well. I think everybody needs to recognize there are limits. . . . When you're in an intense business like this, you cannot get away from it. So it's going to build and build, until there's a point where you cannot stay, you just have to stop. You have to figure out how to get back.

Megan described a comparable time period as "blasting through the wall."

> I just blasted through the wall realizing that the work is important and I enjoy the work and it isn't going to be any better anywhere else. . . . I took [maternity] leave. And so you know, it was sort of like I was away from the job and I realized that there was more to life and that it was a job and

> that I enjoyed the work and I enjoyed the place and I loved this environment and I needed to do what I could to protect it and I knew I was going to stick around.

Changing jobs, changing responsibilities within their organizations, taking leave for extended periods of time with or without pay, and looking for outside learning opportunities were all utilized by the participants in times of overwhelming stress. What was evident in all of these discussions was a longing to listen to the symptoms which created the burnout, to be attentive to what the burnout was indicating, to take the necessary time away, and to move forward. Part of the moving forward entailed a level of acceptance of the enormity of the tasks ahead and to recognize that the activists' own needs were important and valid and that it is important to step back from the work at times. In describing this stepping back, the need to find balance in their lives was often discussed. Megan speaks about coming to understand the different components of balance for herself and for her staff.

> Everybody's balance point is different. What I've learned as a manager is that I can't worry anymore about [a staff person] and his imbalance because it's balanced for him. See, that's the whole point. It works for him. And even though it seems absurd to me to work 80 hour weeks, you know, it's what he wants to do and he's inspired by it. So everyone's balance is different. My balance is that I want to work for environmental protection and I mean I want to have a positive result of my work. I don't just want to work just to, whatever, solve things. And I want to do it in a place that I feel really safe and comfortable and I love being and I want to have recreation and family life.

As Ben observes, "I really feel that each one of us are given some very unique and beautiful talents at birth. We're just given them. And part of the task of being a human is to figure out what those are and to really go for it. And as relates to that, is also being

honest with ourselves what we're not good at and to not beat ourselves up by that."

Megan talks about sharing a similar insight with her staff.

> I don't remember what it was. They were really bummed out about it. And I said, you know what? You're not going to win 'em all. You're just not going to. Just accept it now because you're going to drive yourself nuts if you think that you have to make everything perfect and that you have to win every case and every issue. . . . You know, it's just things are going to come and things are going to go. Life is going to go on without [our organization]. Life will go on without you here. Life will go on without me here. The water resources, the earth is going to abide. You've got to have a bigger picture. You've just got to or you drive yourself crazy in environmental protection.

Steven voiced what many also remarked on, the importance of having fun while working to make a difference.

> Having fun is sort of the opposite side of reducing stress. [It] is actually making sure that you actually enjoy your work. That you don't always feel that it is a burden, like if I don't do X then the world is going to collapse. You know if you are always under that kind of pressure, burnout will be coming soon. You probably won't last long in this business or else you will have to take lots of long vacations, which I don't necessarily discourage anyone from doing if they have the means. Maybe that is the more effective way of doing it but I think being around on an on-going basis is probably more effective in the long run than being on a little crazed burnout path for a short period of time. You know, obviously feeling like you are making a difference which is part of survival, part of effectiveness is going to be a part of keeping people in this business, realizing that they are making a difference even if it doesn't feel like it.

Readjusting expectations. What is evident in the above stories of burnout is the deep caring the activists bring to their work. In many ways, what they care about is defining who they are. This deep caring can lead to a divergence between their experiences and their expectations which at times has resulted in being overwhelmed, discouraged, and depressed. Being confronted with these emotions has forced a process

of learning about themselves and a reevaluation of their own personal needs. This process calls upon their ability to reflect upon and balance head, heart, and spirit. Their openness and willingness to continually learn about themselves in order to push forward in their work is an important finding of this study. The activists have come to know themselves via their experiences and have had to readjust their expectations: expectations for their lives, expectations for what they are capable of achieving in their work, and their expectations of others. Their ability to adjust expectations while still pursuing their life's calling appears based in their ability to listen to what they have termed head and heart. In Megan's words, "[It's] negative to have work that you really care about because then it's an emotional investment. The same thing relates to marriages and to relationships. . . . You don't just leave [when] you hit a wall." Dara routinely questions, "What's my authenticity? What is true for me? What works for me, what doesn't?" Abigail suggests,

> "It's like an ecosystem. We've evolved in place and we've picked up stuff as we go along and our unique experiences hinge on each previous experience, as opposed to having just sort of, boom, things suddenly happen. That's not the case really. It is an evolutionary process, that we're having it go from beginning to end is a little more rational for explaining . . .why somebody becomes active and stays active."

Partners in learning. Tennant and Pogson (1995) in writing about learning and change state, "The individual is considered a changing person in a changing world" (p. 93). This simple sentence conveys an important message heard throughout the interviews. If you dig your heels in as an environmentalist, you are going to get stuck in the mud. The world will keep changing and you won't be part of it and won't be able to help have an impact. Each of the activists had stories about needing to stay on the cutting edge, finding

new ways to get the work done, needing to build new coalitions. Their examples illustrated a willingness to think outside the box, to work with people with different world views, to have the confidence that a grassroots group has the right to be at the table, and to have supportive work environments. Helen remarks,

> I think there is some interesting mix of humility and pomposity that is required in this job. The pomposity is to believe that you can sort of call up the president and demand something, you know, literally. . . . You must believe that you can get meetings with important people, that you can make a difference. So, you know, it's more than self-confidence. It's kind of like self-aggrandizement or sort of fully larger than life belief in one's self. Anyway, and also humility. I think humility is very important in this work, to remember that it's not about one's own self. The work is about the content and so it's not about personal advancement. In our work nothing ever happens because of a single individual. I don't think really much happens because of a single individual anywhere, but particularly organizing by definition. If you've done something on your own, it doesn't have much staying power. So understanding all of that is really important. So there is a sense in which humility is also important. So those two things in combination. It's an interesting combination, I think, to be effective.

Emily also points out that believing in yourself can only go so far. "There aren't really very many heros. . . . If there is an ego issue, I think this is the wrong field. I don't think it attracts a whole lot of people that are on ego trips."

In an environment which can easily crush self-esteem, the activists talked about the importance of connecting with people, both within their organizations and outside of their organizations. The importance of working within organizations with supportive and committed staff and volunteers was evident in most of the interviews. Megan and Ben, respectively, describe their working environments:

> It is very easy to work for and with qualified, intelligent, dedicated people. I mean it's just, you know, this organization is just full of it. Every single person is incredibly competent and the board is remarkably supportive.

> And the community, as a whole, is very supportive. And so it is real easy to be proud of the work that you do.
>
> There is just really, great, great people that I get to work with here at this office. Brilliant people who are mission driven, who are committed to the work, who are from a cultural standpoint very undervalued from given how much we are able to pay them and given environmentalists are not up there in terms of the pinnacles of our culture from our cultural value system.

Helen describes the importance of her organization's structure to her learning.

> We have a structure where we don't have the traditional top down. A lot of people think, well, that just means people can stay and sort of fester. But actually people can have the flexibility to define their work lives, to change and grow and that's what allows people to stay here, I think. We have a lot of responsibility here, we do fund-raising to keep ourselves you know around, but we have the flexibility to adjust our work lives. That's enormous. It's just enormous.

Ben shares similar sentiments.

> I've worked here for ten years. You know, what I found was that, yes indeed I had a chance to work on those very local issues with citizens who care. And then also get, really get, a feel for all of the challenges of that. The other thing though that is great about working here is that as my interests changed and as I had ways of working on those issues that involve much larger scales, the organization here through the director and the board was willing to let me-let me be creative, let me exercise my talents, let me take risks and do crazy things.

Helen emphasizes that the support doesn't have to come internally from the organization. She speaks of being rejuvenated in her work from the development of an international coalition of activists working on similar issues. The professional and personal support gained from these individuals, the developed sense of community, has proven to be paramount to her current satisfaction in her work. The importance of this sense of community was heard from many of the activists. Dave mentioned the significance of the supportive note sent to him by a fellow environmentalist when he was

in one of his greyest times and her willingness to meet and just talk. Many of the participants mentioned "people" as one of the easiest components of their work and talked about the "niceness" of those within the environmental movement. Some mentioned that this niceness is at times a fault considering the often confrontational components of their work. Not withstanding, a strong sense of community seems to exist. In describing a meeting of others working on similar issues nationally, Abigail shares, "I can't even begin to describe how exciting it is to come together with those folks. Being able to work with people like that and learn from them is just amazing. I mean that's the kind of thing that makes you say, gosh, yeah, I could do this forever. This kind of stuff is really good."

In community and alone: Learning to be. Though working within supportive work environments and communities of caring individuals, the activists still describe an ongoing challenge of feeling alone in their work and their struggles. An indication of these struggles can be heard in the many stories that were shared of feeling different, alone, and unique. They often spoke with assuredness that what they were voicing was probably different than what was heard from others in the study. They looked almost enviously at others in the movement as having more energy, passion, and commitment. Often the "others" were also people being interviewed for this study, people expressing the same sentiments. Though working together on many issues, there was little sense that they were talking to each other about these feelings. Some also described having different views and values than their family members and society in general. In their words:

> Sometimes I feel as if I stand back a little bit from the environmental movement. Certainly I am on the calendar with all of my peers with what they believe in, what they care about, but having not planned to be an

> environmental professional, I guess-I don't know. It's hard to say, I'm both in it and out of it. . . . I guess all I'm trying to say is I don't think of myself as the same as a lot of the other folks. I guess there are a lot of loners in the environmental movement. I think people pretty much keep to themselves, other than folks who have been around a long time. I don't know what that says. (Dave)
>
> There are people that I run across, in my own family–extended family and others that, yeah, we don't get each other very well. We don't quite understand what makes each other tick-we don't quite understand that. And of course, in the work day world where people so easily want to box you and put you into a little corner like you're the Reagan tree hugger. . . . It feels a little more patronizing most of the time when you run into that. I also run into people who are generally envious of me, you believe in something. (Dara)
>
> I've always been different and it wasn't just a little "ah-ha" oh, you're different. Okay, once again I'm different. (Sasha)
>
> I've grown into the issues, as opposed to starting off concerned about the issues. I think I'm somewhat different than most folks in that. (Abigail)
>
> I feel like my answers are out there in terms of your cohort. . . . In a way, I didn't have an infinity for a lot of the work, which is sort of unusual when you're working in a movement that I don't-I didn't feel strongly attached to. (Helen)

During the interviews, I gained the image of salmon swimming upstream, constantly battling the current and the undertow, being drawn to swim upstream without even knowing necessarily why, and not realizing that there are nearby salmon also fighting the same current. They just keep swimming. Yet the tremendous amount of discussion during the interviews about the importance of people and community in getting work done and in staying motivated to do the work does not fit with this image. The sense of being different, unique and alone presents an interesting contradiction to the desire and necessity

voiced for working within communities of practice. Their comments may be illuminating the ongoing struggle of learning to be who they are called to be. Megan remarks,

> What does your heart tell you? . . . It took years and years and years for me to even be able to know . . . what does my heart tell me as opposed to my head? I mean it's hard to even figure that out. For some people, it's just natural. They instantly know exactly how they feel about something. They know what feels right for them. They know exactly what decision they want to make. But for a lot of folks, it's a struggle.

Dara comments,

> I think everybody kind of reaches a point, and then mid-life comes along too at the same time, and you reach a point-okay, it's time for this post check and the self-analysis and whatever. I just have not been real good at self-awareness, so these things don't come to me dramatically or like light bulbs. It's a little bit slower. It's like, okay, this feels better than that did. So I must have made the right choice. And that's me.

Though feeling unique and alone, the interviews strongly portrayed a group of individuals longing for a sense of community–a sense of not being alone in their feelings of the meaningfulness and importance of their work. As Emily suggests, "It is just a lot easier to keep flailing away if you have the feeling that there are other people who are working that hard and are that committed." As has become evident through these findings, passion both takes it toll and provides strength. Dara laughs when she tells the story of her sister suggesting that her environmental activism is like giving up a member of the family to the priesthood. Abigail brings the discussion to a close by acknowledging,

> You know, caring has always been a part of our human nature and those who seek to do damage to the earth or seem not to think that it matters that they do damage to the earth, have lost something. They have lost that caring and they're arguing to get away from that because that's the only way they win. If we have no values, they win. If we care and we have values, then they always lose because people do care.

Chapter Summary

The activists of this study grew up in homes of social caring or activism or both. They graduated from college knowing that they wanted to work in the nonprofit world, though not necessarily in the environmental field. Through experience they came to understand that aspect of themselves. In choosing paths contrary to societal norms, they constantly struggle with being overwhelmed in the midst of feeling a strong sense of righteousness. Some of the characteristics of these individuals which emerged include: persistence, independence, confidence, self-aware, reflective, open to others, an ability to learn from experience, systemic thinking, and a strong value system. They are comfortable with who they are, yet this does not stop them from longing for something else in the future: a quieter more peaceful life, more balance, and the ability to call on different parts of their interests. Yet they are drawn to following their passions which includes serving with both head and heart. To serve requires a continual evolution of finding meaning in work by learning to listen to their passions.

To conclude my findings, I would like to pick up on a reference Dara made to two key figures that have recently entered environmental folklore: Julia and Luna. Luna is a 1000 year old redwood in California that was to be cut down by loggers. Julia Butterfly Hill stationed herself in the tree for two years in order to protect the ancient redwood. Dara talked admirably about Julia's commitment to the cause. A quote by Julia ties together many pieces of this study. Julia is asked whether she has any advice for those who can't live in a tree for two years but want to preserve what they think is important. She says, "The . . . thing I always ask people when they ask what they can do is 'what do

you *love* to do?' Because if you find a way to use what you love to do for the causes you care about, then you last forever. And you find strength for when the times are hard." (Mastrocola, 2001, p. 107).

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS

UNLESS someone like you
cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better.
It's not.

Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of how commitment to one's passions are maintained. The activists of this study, individuals who were nominated as being exemplars in their work and passion, share strong beliefs that humans are on a swiftly destructive path which is altering all life as we know it. These beliefs are based on statistics, science, and experience all suggesting little room for optimism. Yet, rather than expressing sentiments of hopelessness, instead they expressed the necessity of hope. They are working with the hope that they can change the direction the world is heading and they have integrated this belief into their work. With their drive to work being based on both passion and hope, both encompassing emotions, it is impossible to separate emotions from their work or to separate head and heart from how they base their decisions and actions. Their support structures are the deep connections they feel to the earth, to people, and to their communities. These connections encompass

their sense of spirituality. When these support structures begin to break down, so do they. They talk about the importance of balance in order to meet the deep challenges they face. Balance appears to be the ability to stay connected. Many times their work is overwhelming, hence leading toward severe periods of burnout. They have learned that they must rebuild these support structures, the connections, in order to be able to move forward, hence taking time to pause, reflect, reconnect, and recharge. Getting through these time periods, and reestablishing the connections, provides a deeper sense of themselves, almost a renewed sense of who they are within their work and within their lives. As they push forward in their understanding of who they are, they become stronger. Through learning about themselves, they push forward in their commitment.

The activists interviewed for this study represent individuals working at the grassroots level–those individuals in the trenches of nonprofit work. Their determination to be effective helps fuel an openness to learning about themselves and about others. As can be heard in the preceding paragraph, they demonstrate a deep knowledge of their own needs, passions, core values, and strong connections to the world. Through this understanding a model of learning has emerged which includes an intimate dynamic between the activist's conscious learning and unconscious knowing. This dynamic is a vital part of the activist's being, influencing their sense of self and sense of who they are in their work and in the world. Coming to understand this process contributes to the theory building in adult learning by placing the lens directly on the practitioner in a context where emotions and spirit are an inherent part of the person in his or her work.

Three main conclusions can be drawn about the experience of sustaining passion and commitment for work in small nonprofit environmental organizations. 1) The ability of environmental activists to sustain commitment to their passions arises from their ability to experience work as vocation. 2) Through vocation, environmental activists experience learning as a way of being. 3) By deeply engaging both conscious learning and unconscious knowing the activists continually renew and strengthen their sense of vocation. This process is a part of their learning to be who they are called to be.

Experiencing Environmental Activism as Vocation

A guiding question of this study has been: What is the experience of strongly committed environmental activists working in small nonprofit organizations? One answer to this inquiry is that environmental activists experience their work as a sense of vocation. As the analysis of the interview data demonstrated, commitment for environmental nonprofit work is supported and sustained in part through a deep longing to improve the world. This intense longing can be interpreted as passion. By pursuing their passions through meaningful work, the activists experience their work as a calling or as a vocation.

The concept of vocation

To think of the activists' work in terms of vocation addresses the relationship between the person and his or her work. The term *vocation* has historically signified a personal calling, most commonly with religious connotations. To have a vocation originally meant "to be addressed by a voice" (Storr, 1984) or to have a sense of a life's calling (Cochran, 1990). Modern associations of the term are connected with finding

meaning in life through one's work–work that is often oriented toward a broad social purpose–and which helps provide a sense of self-identity (Rehm, 1990). Fox (1995) suggests that work as vocation represents finding what we are naturally inclined to do, what we feel joy in doing. In his writings he makes a clear distinction between a job and work. A job enables food to be put on the table. Work is a personal expression of oneself, it allows you to be you, including creativity and uniqueness to the individual. Buechner (1993, p. 119) adds vitality to these definitions by reflecting that vocation is ". . . the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks (1996) found in their study of highly committed individuals working for the common good that commitment and vocation are closely intertwined, implying that it is not necessarily an individualistic choice to act. The individuals they interviewed expressed they *cannot not* act when faced by a violation of what they know to be true. They are bound to the pain of the world, with commitment continually reborn by the sense of being called to act. Palmer (2000) describes vocation at its deepest level as, "This is something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself but that are nonetheless compelling" (p. 25). Berman (1994) in research on the call to care in the social services found it is this sense of responsibility that helps sustain the call. In referencing Farnham et al. (1991, p. 7) she notes that responsibility invites an "accelerating sense of inner direction."

To understand the nature of a sense of vocation as it is lived over a lifetime Cochran (1990) closely studied twenty narratives of individuals who clearly had a mission in life. He writes, "A sense of vocation is partially an invention, partially a discovery,

partially deliberate, partially involuntary, partially in control, partially beyond control. . . . For one who has achieved a sense of vocation, person and work are united. A person could not change his or her work without a change in being" (pp. 2-3). Cochran's finding helps to understand the experiences voiced by the activists of this study regarding the merging of their professional and personal lives as they work toward their desire for a better world. Deems (1996) suggests this blurring of boundaries can be described as a sense of one's work being the "outer expression of one's inner self," such that the meaning of work takes on something grander than the traditional concept of a job. This is an evolving process. As Hansen (1995) found in his study of teaching as vocation, ". . . a person cannot 'will' a sense of service into existence, nor wake up one day and 'decide' to be of service. Those dispositions grow and take shape over time, through interaction with people and through the attempt to perform the work well" (p. 4).

The experience of vocation

These descriptions of vocation as a developing sense of oneself in one's work helps to interpret the findings of this study. The activists willingness to invest head, heart and spirit into their work illuminates their inability to keep their work at arm's length. They have invested their whole self into what they are doing, with their work being a natural extension of their identity. In doing so, they are bridging their "deep gladness" with the world's "deep hunger" (Buechner, 1993). Their aspirations push them forward despite the self doubt that is exhibited at times and amidst the immense challenges described. They are grounded in their commitment.

As the discussion of career illustrated, the activists' have a larger sense of their work than the term *career* denotes. With this a strong sense of personal fulfillment is evident in their descriptions of the experience of being an environmental activist. Many had not planned on having environmental careers and were actually surprised to even think in these terms. Their understanding of themselves in their work is still evolving. They are not satisfying a well planned out–climbing rungs on a ladder–type of career development approach to life. When the going has gotten tough they have not chosen to change from one job to another but rather have found avenues to learn from their experiences and to plug forward in the activities they felt necessary to accomplish their goals. In working from their core passion, with the self and work intimately bound together, they are experiencing an evolving sense of vocation.

Understanding work as vocation can assist the individual as doubts arise over time, especially when faced with disappointments and discouragement in the face of deep adversity. Recognizing the connection between one's identity and one's work gives a language to be able to talk about what is being experienced and to help understand the internal motivations which assist in sustaining commitment. In the group interview, for example, the activists described the pursuit to integrate into their work both the reality of the pain of the world and their hope for the future. They described this as a spiritual quest, saying that people who do not merge values, action and hope, "live lesser lives." In viewing spirituality itself as a quest for meaning (Merriam & Heuer, 1996), this merging guides their sense of vocation, with vocation not representing something one has but rather a pattern of meaning one lives (Cochran, 1990). Applying vocation as a lens to

conceptualize the work of the environmental activist underscores the centrality of the person within the work. It gives voice to the learning which helps to define the self.

Vocation cannot exist as a state of mind alone, however, it requires acting on one's passions, acting in a social context. As Hansen (1995) notes, the "idea of vocation presupposes a social practice in which to enact one's inner urge to contribute to the world" (p. 5). As demonstrated from the findings of this study, in asking questions of passion and commitment, the focus is turned inward. Yet inner and outer work are not separate entities, with a grand chasm between the two. For example, in understanding the activists ability to maintain a sense of vocation, it is also important to ask questions about the organizations in which the activists work. The nine activists exhibited a strong sense of meaning and purpose, a sense of competence, a sense of self-determination, and a sense of impact–what Quinn (1996) cites as the four dimensions of empowerment based on a study conducted by Spreitzer (1996).

The importance of the work environment is well documented as helping to create empowered individuals. The activists of this study frequently mentioned the caring nature of the people within their organizations, the openness to new projects and new challenges, and the flexibility of their jobs and work schedules as all helping to nurture the individual. They acknowledged a strong sense of independence and autonomy in their work. They described the organizations they work in as having strong visions and as financially stable with strong memberships and boards of directors. In many ways they could be thought of as healthy organizations. This fact cannot be overlooked when asking questions about sustaining commitment to work. Yet, due to the small size of the organizations and staff,

it is difficult to ascertain whether the organizations have help create the people or if the people have helped created the organizations. For example, Daloz et al. found that most of the people they interviewed came to recognize and deliberately work with the formative power of context in order to influence change. Consequently, in coming to understand commitment and vocation, it may be more appropriate to conceptualize a person's inner and outer worlds through the idea of yin and yang, a close and continual intertwining of two components of the whole. The yin and yang do not conflict but rather compliment one another. As the self becomes strongly identified with one's work, this connection appears to be integral to understanding passion and commitment.

Learning As A Way of Being

In writing about vocation, Palmer (2000) suggests, "Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I *must* live–but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life" (p. 4-5). The findings of this study support Palmer's statement. Spurred by their sense of vocation, the activists determination to be effective helps fuel an openness to understand what drives both themselves and others, and a willingness to always have a "beginner's mind." They help sustain their commitment to work by approaching learning in adulthood as a way of being.

Learning in adulthood

Theories of adult learning can be grouped into several categories with a basic assumption running through the theories being the close linkage between personal growth and learning and the importance of learning from experience and through reflection (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Knowles' concept of andragogy provides grounding to these theories while providing a model of learning in adulthood. It also reflects what was heard in the activists's stories: (1) self-directedness; (2) prior experience as reservoirs for learning; (3) a readiness to learn; (4) a learning orientation; and (5) the motivation to learn coming from internal factors (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999). With learning and experience seen as inextricably linked (Merriam, 1994), attention and reflection are deemed a necessary ingredient to transform experience into learning (Dewey, 1938, Kolb, 1984, Jarvis, 1987, Mezirow, 1991). In addition, for learning experiences to be significant they need to both personally affect the learner and be subjectively valued by the learner (Merriam & Clark, 1991). These were certainly hallmarks of the types of learning described by the activists.

Building from these understandings of learning in adulthood, transformative learning theory focuses on the type of learning which can occur when one's assumptions and beliefs are examined and changed resulting in a perspective transformation (Amstutz, 1999). This type of change is defined as transformative with the idea undergirding the theory being an attempt to capture both the process and the outcome of significant, meaningful learning in adulthood (Dirkx, 2000a) in which new meanings of experience are being construed in which to guide future action. A critical part of transformative learning

involves the assessment or reassessment of assumptions. Learning becomes transformative whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, unauthentic, or otherwise invalid (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) writes, "Rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances by more diligently applying old ways of learning, [adults] discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events" (p. 3).

Environmental activists as adult learners

In exploring the role of learning in sustaining commitment, and placing the lens on the learner, I have been mindful to listen for both learning which depicts deep change as well as the acquiring of new skills or methods to do things. The learning described by the activists can be interpreted in a variety of different ways. As autonomous learners, the activists reflect an openness to learning involving an active pursuit of learning as a way of being which results in an ongoing construction of knowledge. They are continually interpreting, integrating and transforming their understanding of themselves and the world based on this knowledge (Tennant & Pogson, 1995).

An internal focus on the self and emotions could be consistently heard in the activists' stories with experience being a central component driving the process. In this process, transformative learning could be heard buried deep in the stories. It is a process they nurtured in order to stay committed through difficult times and can be heard in their experiences of burnout and in the stories of readjusting expectations to match experience. An example can help to illustrate this point. In a number of the activists' stories, they described coming to know people considered adversaries and being able to see them as

people outside of the hats they don for work. With this change, they came to realize the importance of working from a place within themselves which encompasses love for all people. Helen describes coming to understand this about herself.

> I deal with heads of multinational corporations. I mean, the chair of the board of [a multinational corporation], you know, I know him. And I don't like him, and he knows me, right? And I've–this is something that I've thought a lot about because in this project I was dealing with these people and I had to think a lot about how I felt about them, a lot about that. And I decided that was for me, [pause] an interesting–I mean that raised these same issues of love versus outrage. And I decided that I had to extend some kind of love towards them, that I needed to treat them with dignity and respect and that hating them was completely counterproductive. Not accurate even, you know. You can sort of really dislike someone but you know not hating them because of their position.
>
> I thought a lot about that. For me that is one of the places where this comes up the most, is how one feels about one's opponents and for me that this whole question is where sort of the rubber meets the road, in terms of how. And I felt that people get confused about this. So I have a reputation of being kind of in your face sort-of person. However, I have . . . tried to treat them with a lot of respect. But [I] respect them enough, and myself enough, that I don't let them get away with anything, you know. But that it's not about us. The debate is not about us at all. So we need to be in a human community and deal with each other that way, right? . . . If you think of your adversary as someone you respect, then your behavior towards them is different.

Helen's story reflects a personal change which required an inner focus on the self and a change of perspective. It illustrates a purposeful commitment to being open to learning which was based in her sense of work as vocation.

Through vocation, the activists of this study have learned and developed with a strong emphasis on understanding who they are within their work. They do not speak of having jobs as environmentalists, rather they describe themselves as being environmentalists. They express a close alignment between the deep values they bring to

their work and the hope they feel when aligning their work tightly with those values. The integration of values and actions and hope are driving forces in their lives and driving forces in their learning. A sense of self, or identity, is bound up in their work. The activists are well anchored in their convictions. Their determination to be effective helps fuel an openness to an understanding of what drives both themselves and others, and a willingness to always have a "beginner's mind." Their strong value systems and systemic way of thinking foster a continual evolution of their understanding of who they are within their work and within the world.

The activists all entered into their work in their twenties with a deep caring for the world. A difficult part of their work has been the incongruity between their desires and their experiences. Adjusting expectations with experience has been a process of learning, a coming to a new understanding between continuity and change (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). In the stories shared by the activists, the adjusted expectations were heard on many different levels; expectations for their lives, expectations for what they are capable of achieving in their work, expectations of others. The stable factor through these adjustments was the commitment to passion and the commitment to hope. An important factor in the experiences that lead to perspective changes was a connection and a willingness to learn from other people. This is demonstrated in Megan's description of a tense discussion with a local newspaper editor regarding global warming. As she states, "The conclusion after just a few of these kind of episodes is that not only am I not going to change some people's minds, but they honestly and truly believe that they came to those

conclusions logically. And it's not a matter of misinformation. It's just they really and truly believe that and so I have to respect that."

Clearly lacking in the stories shared by the environmental activists was an emphasis placed on formal learning activities as important pieces in their personal and professional development. Only Ben was an exception in this regard. For the rest, if professional development activities were alluded to at all, the activists were most impressed by being given the time to reflect in the midst of their busy lives as well as interact and build connections with others working on similar problems. More often heard were self-directed activities, such as reading the writings of environmental and social activist authors, or reflection on actions and emotions. All of these activities are representative of adult learners and parallel well Knowles' concept of andragogy.

A perpetual search for pattern, meaning, and purpose in life could be heard as an active part of the activists' stories and an active part of what pushed their learning. This is a personal quest that is centuries old (Tennant & Pogson, 1995), hence I do not want to suggest it is necessarily unique to environmentalists or for people working with a calling. With the ages of the nine activists being between 34 and 54 a potential part of what was heard could be part of life's progression and mid-life questioning (Hollis, 1993). Yet being open to personal growth all throughout life has been found to be a distinctive feature of those working with a deep sense of purpose in their work (Colby & Damon, 1992; Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Hansen, 1995). An ability and willingness to accept change is at the heart of Daloz, Keen, Keen and Park's (1996) findings of people working for the common good. Personal evolution, integration, and reflection were all found to be

important "habits of the mind." A readiness to learn and a learning orientation were clearly portrayed in the findings of this study and appeared as an ongoing commitment to self-knowing and a willingness to change. Interestingly, Colby & Damon (1992) identified a paradoxical mix of lasting commitment and sustained capacity for change in the moral exemplars they investigated. They state,

> Even as the exemplars' grip on their core ideals remained unwavering, they continued to reexamine their most fundamental attitudes and choices at frequent intervals. . . . [T]he exemplars remained true to their overarching original values, which endured the flux of frequent change and growth, and in a fundamental sense contributed to the shape of that change and growth. (p. 184-185)

This paradox was evident in the nine activists of this study. A strong sense of righteousness was often heard with regard to underlying commitments and beliefs, yet attached to this righteousness was an openness to change involving coming to understand others views, opinions and ways of being. The righteousness was not black and white but rather provided a grounding for commitment. This grounding, a component of their sense of vocation, also illuminates another ingredient to learning which involves a deep engagement with life and an integration of the conscious and unconscious parts of an individual. Through this openness to learning to all aspects of oneself and one's life, and in their quest to work toward their vocation, the activists portray learning as a way of being.

Grounded Commitment

Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996) found to "live the struggles well" a pivotal practice of those working for the common good is the ability to acknowledge, reflect upon and give voice to all parts of one's inner conversation. The findings of this study support that by deeply engaging both conscious learning and unconscious knowing the activists continually renew and strengthen their sense of vocation. The deep learning that characterizes this process involves logic, rationality, and thinking as well as complex feelings, emotions, and spirituality. Or as expressed by the activists: the head, the heart, and the spirit.

Learning and the self

As we enter a postmodern and postindustrial era, Fox (1995) advises that combating the daily grind of work requires an ongoing understanding of one's inner self. He argues that modern capitalism has resulted in a work paradigm which is tied to the Newtonian model of the machine. A mechanical view of work includes workers who have discrete roles and purposes, lacking a view of the greater purpose of their work and its contributions to human kind. One could submit that nonprofit work with its goal of working for the greater good should escape this paradigm. The activists of this study clearly portrayed a systemic view of the world, with their work fitting as a piece of the whole and providing strong meaning in their lives. These characteristics parallel Daloz et al.'s (1996) finding that recognizing and seeing oneself as part of the whole is common among individuals working for the common good, with critical, systemic thought being crucial to managing complexity. Meaning, purpose, and the self are all tightly interwoven.

Yet at the same time, as has been found in this study, the high level of personal commitment and zeal for the work can lead to an overwork situation with a denial of one's own health and well-being.

Thomashow (1995) has found that for people working on environmental issues the most critical component in nurturing their environmentalism is the ability and willingness to look deeply within themselves, to understand their motivations and aspirations, to clearly articulate values, and know how to apply them to professional and personal decisions. What is being described comes back to Fox's (1995) call for inner work. Palmer (2000) suggests when asking vocational questions, the question is not, "What should I be doing with my life?" but rather "Who am I? What is my nature?" (p. 5).

In turning the lens on learning and the self, self is not being defined as a static thing or substance but as an ongoing process of meaning making shaped by past, present, and future personal events (Polkinghorne, 1988; Kegan, 1994). As Merriam and Clark (1991) found in their study of work, love and learning in adulthood, "[A] sense of self relates to the impact of learning on the person's identity" (p. 205). One way to think critically about the formation of identity is that of entailing an overt and covert "designing of the self" (Payne, 2001). In the designing process it is important to recognize the variety of pressures impacting the activists' sense of self. For example, Dave and Dara both commented that they came to realize they were trying to "heal their own wounds" via serving others and serving the world. Dara described a painful process of coming to recognize that the motto of "service over self" was not always a healthy motto to live by. A majority of the activists expressed that in working with a sense of vocation, at times the

blurring of their personal and professional identities became overpowering, resulting in severe periods of "burn out." In the activists stories could also be heard continual struggles of measuring up to external standards or societal standards. Some have become quite comfortable with their sense of self in their vocation but, for others, the struggle continues. Jung provides insight into the difficulty of working with a sense of vocation when the collective conscious is louder than the inner voice:

> In the place of the inner voice there is the voice of the group with its conventions, and vocation is replaced by collective necessities. But even in this unconscious social condition there are not a few who are called awake by the summons of the voice, whereupon they are at once set apart from the others, feeling themselves confronted with a problem about which the others know nothing. (Storr, 1984, p. 200)

Being "called awake" is an excellent way to describe the role learning plays as the activists work on understanding and developing a deeper sense of self and sense of vocation. Palmer (2000) notes, ". . . the people who plant the seeds of movements made a critical decision: they decide to live "divided no more." *They decide no longer to act on the outside in a way that contradicts some truth about themselves that they hold deeply on the inside"* (italics in original, p. 32). As can be seen from this study, "living divided no more" confronts culture, confronts group conventions, confronts society, yet at the same time the activists communicate that they have found a comfort in who they are in their work and in the world. They are learning to be who they are called to be.

Conscious Learning and Unconscious Knowing.

The ability to learn and grow from one's inner conversation is a form of learning which can be understood as a constant process of individuation (Storr, 1984). Jung uses

the term individuation to denote the process by which a person becomes "whole," requiring recognition of both the conscious and unconscious elements of oneself. Interestingly, and especially relevant to this study, the forces and dynamics associated with individuation take place primarily in the unconscious–in the emotional, affective and spiritual dimensions of the person. The Jungian concept of Self is carefully defined as a blend of conscious understanding and unconscious influences (Moore, 1992). The unconscious involves instinctive, involuntary reactions which simply happen. A component of this dimension, the emotional/heart piece of environmental activist work, was heard loudly in the stories of the activists of this study. It was the component that they noted has to be a recognized piece of who they are in the world in order to feel whole–in order to be able to continually push forward in working toward their passions. It is also the piece which they defined as "dangerous." The part that is not well accepted in a technical rational culture. It is also not a well understood component in adult learning. Transformative learning theory pushes to include the sociocultural and personal dimensions of learning, yet the deeper emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning, those aspects which were heard so loudly in the activists' stories, is an underdeveloped component (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, Dirkx, 2000). As Hillman (1996) writes, "We are victims of academic, scientistic, and even therapeutic psychology, whose paradigms do not sufficiently account for or engage with, and therefore ignore, the sense of calling, that essential mystery at the heart of each human life" (p. 6).

A culminating finding of Colby and Damon's (1992) study of moral commitment pushes on a deeper understanding of the connection between the conscious and

unconscious in sustaining commitment. They found at a certain point when a firm unity exists between beliefs and actions, one's personal choices are seemingly predetermined by one's sense of self. They describe this as having a quality of being on "automatic pilot." Merging an understanding of the process of individuation with Colby and Damon's autopilot helps provide insight into a perplexing piece of this study. Many of the choices made by the activists seemed to be done with little reflection or self-awareness. Considering the group as a whole appeared strongly self-conscious, this finding differs from traditional thinking in adult learning where an emphasis is placed on critical thinking and reflection. What has been found can be interpreted as reflecting the involvement of the unconscious in the learning process. Values reinforce actions which reinforce values. Actions become so predetermined by a sense of self that there is little room for hesitation or doubt or reflection. You just know what to do without even thinking about how you know it. And by your actions, a sense of self is reinforced and the cycle continues. Learning occurs as an invisible bridge between current knowledge and a new awareness of oneself. Megan's comment illustrates this point perfectly: "One of the things that I have learned about myself is I don't necessarily know I'm making decisions when I am making them. . . . It's just sort of all of a sudden, Oh! I guess I did make that decision, didn't I?" Colby and Damon (1992) refer to this as a progressive uniting of self and goals. Daloz et al. (1996) refer to this process as grounded commitment. Individuals called to work for the common good are sustained by the very processes that make them who they are.

Another area of research which further helps to interpret the relationship between conscious learning and unconscious knowing is Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule's

(1986/1997) study of women's ways of knowing. They found there are avenues of developing the self outside of the technical rational expectations of our society which intertwine self concept and ways of knowing to help explain the experience of being. The self was found to be an instrument of understanding. It is part of a "never-ending search for truth" with truth "seen as a construction in which the knower participates" (p. 140). The self is experienced in connection to others. Constructed knowers are described as extremely self-conscious–aware of their own thoughts, their judgments, their moods and desires with an "opening of the mind *and* the heart to embrace the *world*" (italics in the original, p. 141). They add that becoming and staying aware of the workings of one's mind is a vital component to a sense of well-being with knowing through relations helping to weave "passions and intellectual life into some recognizable whole" (p. 141).

Belenky et al.'s work helps to interpret the strong discussion of spirituality which was heard in the activists' stories. In characterizing themselves as systemic thinkers and recognizing the infinite number of connections that abound, their spirituality encompassed those connections, providing the grounding to their work and their lives. An important piece of who they are, their identity, is bound up in the ability to keep their minds and hearts open to learning and to connecting to others. This could be considered a "framework of consciousness" (Schervish, Hodgkinson, Gates, & Assoc., 1995) or a "way of knowing" (Belenky et al., 1997). By being open to a "beginner's mind" and "comfortable with not knowing" they provide room to nurture and foster the connections. With closed minds, the connections whither. It is through the nurturing of connections and opportunities for learning that the fires are rekindled and a sense of identity and

meaning is continually reborn. Thomashow (1995) titles this sense of connectedness to nature as ecological identity–coming to understand oneself via a connection to nature. In this study, the nine activists extend his definition to encompass coming to understand the self via connections to nature, humanity, the world, and their work.

A primary indicator of losing connections was the burnout described by the activists. As in Daloz et al.'s research, the activists of this study were all seen as being highly committed and sustained in their work, yet they were not immune to being overwhelmed, discouraged and downtrodden. Through a purposeful focus on both their inner and outer worlds they are able to push forward in times when others might give up. Many researchers looking at lives of commitment have found that having a sense of vocation does not negate dark times. Hansen (1995) found that self doubt and commitment go hand in hand with a continual reassessment of ideas, beliefs and thoughts being part of an evolving sense of vocation. Through this reassessing, self care or "care of the soul" is a continuous process that will not make life problem-free but rather is focused on helping to cultivate a meaningful life (Moore, 1992). In Colby and Damon's (1992) research on lives of moral commitment, a combination of hopefulness and optimism, labeled positivity, was found to be an important component of the lives of the moral exemplars studied. They were careful to note, however, that positivity is not an unrealistic view of the world, but rather a general philosophy of finding a hopeful way to construe problems or fears. Daloz et al. found certain habits of mind steadied the individuals during challenging times. Thinking systemically and holistically are important components of these habits. Those interviewed were able to identify the connection between different

patterns, the ability to see and live life as an interconnected whole, matching well Belenky et al.'s ways of knowing.

Though the high level of personal commitment to one's work can lead to an overwork situation with a denial of one's own health and well-being, this does not lessen the relevance of a sense of vocation. Rather, these times of overwhelming stress can actually be seen as times of deep learning. For example, when Dave talked about experiencing burnout he indicated he felt he was approaching a nervous breakdown if something did not change. What he came to understand about himself was that he needed to bring back the spirituality piece of his work. In working as a policy advocate he was focused predominantly on using his intellect. He needed to be more in touch with his own creativity, more in touch with his heart, as well as more in touch with the environment. Dave appears to be struggling to become who he really is, who he is called to be. A conflict exists between his external world and internal world with both being important. The feelings of burnout gave voice to the conflict. In conceptualizing transformative learning as part of individuation, Dirkx (2000) suggest that "opening and maintaining dialogue with one's unconscious allows discovery and awareness of our own personal paths toward self-realization" (p. 2). As Dave experienced and engaged both the conscious and unconscious aspects of himself he was moving through a process of transformation. In this same vein, Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996) found that when "the ability to entertain internal counterpoint is poorly developed or wanes for whatever reason, when some voices are suppressed and others amplified, burnout or destructive behavior is most likely to occur" (p. 190). Those who remained sustained in their

commitments were those who were able to cultivate a stance of conscious awareness of life while also acknowledging one's limitations to oneself and others.

Though common values and a sense of purpose were pervasive among the activists interviewed, their personal needs were not discussed as part of a collective vision. This parallels the findings of the other studies looking closely at people working for the common good. The activists in many ways expressed that their internal satisfactions outweigh the external hardships and challenges of the work. Though at times the scale tipped in the other direction, what appears to tip it back is the tight alignment between inner values and external tasks. Yet when not aware of and nurturing their own needs, at the point they "hit the wall," they are forced to suddenly put the self first and figure out how to pull themselves back up. This is deeply painful, in part, because it goes against their values and visions to be so self focused. When understood through the lens of transformative learning and individuation, including the role of the unconscious in learning, the powerful feelings and emotions expressed can be seen as drawing attention to unconscious issues–issues that need to be voiced (Dirkx, 2000). At the point the activists decide to step out of the situation, to take time to "pause" or critically reflect on their lives and the meaning of the overwhelming stress, they are engaging both unconscious and conscious aspects of their self. This inner dialogue encompasses an important duality in their learning.

Palmer (2000) talks about the lessons that can be learned from nature with regard to the process of living and dying. He uses the metaphor of the seasons to illustrate how periods of dying are actually when the seeds are being planted for the next life. It is part

of the cycle. Palmer proposes we need to accept both the darkness and the light to find wholeness. It is in this acceptance that we are able to sustain ourselves. With regard to burnout, the people who have sustained commitment and passion are those that have grown during these times of deep stress. They have been forced to confront inner work, to recognize their own needs, to understand who they are in their work, and have grown from the experience. And, as has been suggested by the activists, they have come away even stronger in their convictions and their understanding of self. In this transition a paradox exists. When they can't make meaning of something, they fall apart or lose control (Kegan, 1994). Yet, in the falling apart, they experience meaningful change (Flach, 1997). Passing through this paradox of stress, or what Jung refers to as a cycle of alienation and inflation, actually increases the activists' knowledge about themselves and their ability to continue in their work with a sense of vocation. Burnout can be a powerful learning experience if allowed to be and can be viewed as transformative. Consequently, it may not be a matter of trying to find ways to avoid burnout but rather to help people learn and grow from the experience. It is part of learning to be who you are called to be.

Chapter Summary

Three main conclusions have been drawn about the experience of sustaining passion and commitment for work in small nonprofit environmental organizations. First, the ability of environmental activists to sustain commitment to their passions arises from their ability to experience work as vocation. Second, through vocation, environmental activists experience learning as a way of being. Third, by deeply engaging both conscious

learning and unconscious knowing the activists continually renew and strengthen their sense of vocation.

During this study, I have also tried to keep a keen eye open to the potential impact of gender on the learning experience of environmental activists. While recognizing that I interviewed more women than men, no uniform variation between the men and women emerged to indicate issues of gender were impacting how passion is sustained. In my limited ability to recognize the difference, I did not hear exclusively a woman's voice or a man's voice. Instead I heard both women and men actively engaged in learning to be who they are called to be.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is hope that enables us to live, only hope.

Edward O. Wilson

Introduction

In writing about hope, Jane Goodall observes,

> As we move toward the millennium it is easy to be overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness. We humans have destroyed the balance of nature: forests are destroyed, deserts are spreading, there is terrible pollution and poisoning of air, earth, water. Climate is changing, people are starving. There are too many humans in some parts of the world, overconsumption in others. There is human cruelty to "man" and "beast" alike; there is violence and war. Yet I do have hope . . . [H]ope lies in the indomitable nature of the human spirit. There are so many people who have dreamed seemingly unattainable dreams and because they never gave up, achieved their goals against all the odds, or blazed a path along which others could follow." (Orion, Winter 1999, p. 21)

The participants of this study belong in Goodall's reasons for hope. They are people with energy, enthusiasm, commitment and dreams. This study was about understanding how they continue to blaze paths when many others are feeling overwhelmed and hopeless. What has been discovered through this process, however, is that they too encounter times of discouragement and disillusionment, but through their passion to work toward their hope, they pull through. The pulling is a process of learning: learning to be who you are called to be.

An overall goal of this study has been to develop an understanding of the role of learning in maintaining commitment to one's passions. The intent of this final chapter is to assess the implications of this new understanding for both theory and practice. The chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first section, focus is placed on the contributions of this study to theory in adult learning. In the second part, the discussion concentrates on how these insights might be applied in higher education, nonprofit management and in practice, itself.

Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study varied from confirming previous research to adding new insight to developing theories. At times, the findings from the interviews were consistent, clear and concise. Yet, as to be expected, much of the time the murkiness was painful. At all times I was truly moved and astounded by the level of commitment and wisdom shared by the nine activists interviewed. I have highlighted the implications of two areas of findings which rose to the top during the study.

Recognition of the role of learning in sustaining passion

The activists of this study represent individuals working at the grassroots level. Their determination to be effective helped fuel an openness to learning about themselves and others. They demonstrated a deep knowledge of their own needs, passions, core values, and strong connections to the world. Through this understanding a model of learning emerged which included an intimate dynamic between conscious learning and unconscious knowing. Coming to understand this process places the lens directly on the

practitioner in a context where emotions and spirit were found to be an inherent part of the person in his or her work. While learning was found to be a critical component to sustaining meaning, formal learning experiences and critical reflection were found to be only small parts of the whole picture.

A major contribution of this study to theory development in adult learning is the recognition of both the conscious and unconscious elements involved in the learning process. Personal choices were tightly linked to the participants' sense of self and sense of who they are in their work and in the world. Commitment to work was nurtured through both an internal and external learning process with passion being a core piece within the individual helping to sustain meaning in work. Consistent with transformative learning theory (Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 2000), times of overwhelming stress became times of deep learning. A majority of the participants experienced and grew from time periods of self-declared "burnout." Overcoming these time periods required turning the focus inward, learning about the self, which subsequently enhanced the ability to continue in their work. Passion nurtured the learning process while, correspondingly, learning nurtured passion.

Experiencing work as vocation

In looking closely at the connections between learning and sustaining passion, the sense of importance placed on meaningful work was dominant. The participants' work took on a grander meaning than the traditional concept of work. This centrality of meaningfulness emerged as a sense of vocation: where one's work is the "outer expression of one's inner self" (Deems, 1996). The activists willingness to invest head, heart, and

spirit into their work, the blurriness of boundaries between personal and professional lives, the strong sense of personal fulfillment combined with the absence of perceiving work necessarily as career, all illuminated work embodying a strong sense of vocation. This sense of vocation was a stabilizing ingredient for the activists. When the going got tough, as described by each participant, avenues were found to learn from experience and to plug forward in order to accomplish long term goals. In working from their core passion, with self and work intimately bound together, their continual evolving sense of vocation contributed to their ability to continually learn about themselves and others.

Work defined in terms of vocation has theoretical implications for both adult learning and nonprofit research. Cultural norms emphasize work defined in a mechanistic sense, separating the personal and professional aspects of one's life. Yet with meaning, purpose, and self found to be so tightly interwoven, the implications of this study illuminate the importance of thinking about work beyond a means to put food on the table. This study provides evidence for thinking about the relationship between self and work in terms of vocation or as a pattern of meaning one lives (Cochran, 1990).

Implications for Practice

Implications for higher education

Insight into vocation has many positive connotations for higher education. The message that an individual has an inner drive to learn, to make connections with the self and the world, is filled with suggestions for education. The learner is ripe for learning. Yet, that is only so if the educator recognizes the value of a sense of vocation. As can be

seen as visibly lacking from this study were accolades from the activists regarding formal education. Yet, this was a highly educated group of individuals. In thinking about developing formal learning opportunities, educating with a sense of vocation in mind is critical. Career ladders, higher salaries, and public recognition were not the impetuses for seeking out education. Rather it was to promote work toward the common good. These are very different goals than what are often assumed in professional development seminars or in the development of continuing education activities.

By bringing vocation into the classroom the learner in totality, head, heart and spirit and the conscious and unconscious, needs to be considered. The educator has the profound opportunity to help the individual gain a sense of purpose in the world. This type of learning takes on an entirely different dimension than the current dominant school of thought. This type of learning is crucial in a world where it is frightening to read the morning paper due to the severe personal and social problems that exist. Creating opportunities for developing the skills to be open to all learning, to learn from oneself and others, to think systemically, to match actions with values, and to be self reflective is essential. Helping to nurture and cultivate a sense of meaning over a lifetime, to help provide a sense of directed purpose, is a significant undertaking. Reflecting back to Dewey's (1916, p. 308) opening quote in this study,

> To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one's true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstances into an uncongenial calling.

The potential role of the educator in this pursuit has enormous implications and ramifications.

I am not trying to suggest, however, that every person is going to be able to hear their calling, nor that it is the work of the educator to help every person find their calling. Yet, what I am suggesting is that to think in terms of vocation is a very different way to think about education and learning. We need to move away from thinking only of the external skills and knowledge that can be taught and instead to think of the learner holistically–head, heart and spirit. Too often, focus is placed only on the head.

In recently discussing this study with a grantmaker, she remarked that she was pleased to hear that there were certain skills that could be taught. Those had not been my words, but rather the conclusion to which she automatically jumped. This is a leap we have to stop making. As Palmer (2000) contends, "We turn every question we face into an objective problem to be solved–and we believe that for every objective problem there is some sort of technical fix." Rather, we need to create space that nurtures passion and allows the individual to begin to recognize this piece of him or herself. Challenging current conceptions of teaching and learning and designing educational programs with transformative learning theory as a base directs attention to the role that experience and culture play in shaping what we know about ourselves and our world. In doing so, Palmer's (2000) questions of "Who am I? What is my nature?" and Thomashow's (1995), "What is my purpose as a human being?" and Julie Butterfly Hill's (Mother Earth News, 2001) question, "What do you *love* to do?" can be addressed. Finding answers to these questions includes engaging with the soul and to see learning as involving a deep

interconnectedness between one's inner and outer worlds, the place where intellect and emotions meet (Dirkx, 1997).

Implications for nonprofit management and professional education

Currently a tremendous amount of thought is being given to what is needed to prepare people for nonprofit management and leadership positions. The activists of this study demonstrated a broad range of skills and interests as well as strengths and weaknesses. The common thread was the belief in what they are doing, their sense of vocation.

Recognizing that individuals working with a sense of vocation are not trying to climb rungs on a career ladder and that learning is not motivated by career growth suggests an entirely different mode of professional education than is normally considered. Traditionally, work has been thought of as a product with the focus placed on the outcomes of one's efforts. Less frequently has work been considered a process, with the person holding the central focus. This shifting of the lens impacts how issues of self, identity and motivation are interpreted. For example, borrowing theory and management strategies from the for-profit sector is arguable when asking questions of how to help sustain commitment to nonprofit work. Increasing salaries is not a long term solution to issues of tenure and burnout when individuals are saying they *cannot not* work, *cannot not* do what they feel called to do. There are clear implications for understanding the role of learning for those working for the common good. Engaging head, heart and spirit is imperative.

An important finding of this study is that linking thought and behavior with values and action in a holistic approach and emphasizing connections can reap many benefits on a variety of different levels. First, a tremendous amount of self learning occurs when connections are allowed to form with others who see and think about the world differently than themselves. Second, a strange paradox exists concerning the strength gained in working with coalitions & communities of practice while at the same time not talking to others about the emotional components of work. Building space for these discussions is crucial. Third, in order to balance head, heart and spirit, the spirit has to be continually nurtured. Spirituality for the activists included fostering connections to both nature and people, directly linking back to the focus on the person. Practicing a consciousness of connection (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996) and taking the time to nurture the connections is an important piece of sustaining commitment to the common good.

The development of learning communities, or communities of practice, to provide people with a forum where it is safe to discuss the many conflicting feelings of activism work would be an important first step in developing a consciousness of connection. The purpose of such a community would be to create cohesion and solidarity, a sense of being part of something, the development of mentoring relationships, and a space to legitimize and acknowledge the overwhelming feelings and the deep hope that is part of the work. Miles Horton speaks eloquently on the need for such an atmosphere:

> I believe we ought to do things in groups. People need the stimulation of the group. They also need the strength of the group, and they need to get ideas from other people in the group who have situations similar to theirs. Ideas that are useful can grow out of that sort of discussion. You have to

> stand up for what you believe in, but you can't do it without the support of the people. (quoted in Oliver, 1992, p. 96)

Linking places of higher education with community organizations and opportunities for students to do internships and volunteer activities would help practitioners learn about themselves and their sense of vocation while building connections. Creating mentoring environments with attention given to encouraging and supporting new professionals would help to decrease the sense of being alone in one's feelings as well as establishing connectedness.

For mid-term professionals, opportunities to renew and enrich the connections to oneself is indispensable. Funding with no strings attached to conduct the projects of their dreams was strongly suggested by the participants of this study. Organizational policies that allow for a time to pause including leaves and sabbaticals should be pursued. Each of these suggestions requires placing an emphasis on personal renewal rather than professional training in order to nurture and sustain passion. What became clear from this study is that personal development *is* professional development.

Implications for the practitioner

The personal challenge to remain sustained in one's work is great as is evidenced by the large degree of turnover and burnout that can be found in nonprofit organizations. Pursuing and preserving a strong sense of purpose in one's work is crucial to sustaining passion. At the same time, the myth of the lone warrior needs to be discarded. The participants of this study were not solitary figures working alone. Practicing a

consciousness of connections, whether that be with others working on similar or dissimilar issues, with mentors, and/or with nature, is imperative.

Being consciously aware of the importance of connections was a poignant message of this study. An important habit of the mind prevalent among the participants included approaching problems systemically and recognizing the interdependence of all living things. Discussions of feeling lonely and feeling unique exhibited a tension between living in a culture of individualism and autonomy and the strength gained from feeling connected to community, to peers, to a social movement, and to the greater world.

Activism, itself, has both active and reflective qualities. Both observing and participating is required, with an inner discipline necessary to manage oneself. Heifetz (1994) refers to this as "getting on the balcony" where attention is placed both on the dance itself and on the larger patterns on the dance floor. At the same time being on the balcony allows a time to listen to oneself. As one participant suggested:

> So many of us in social movements have this perspective that we need to change everyone else, fix this, and then the world will be a better place. But so seldomly do we ever pause and think, hey, wait a minute. What changes do I need to make in order to model and really live and be the change that I'm trying to make happen out here?

In the midst of participating and observing, an additional implication from this study is the importance of taking time to pause. Finding strategies to nurture and restore one's physical, emotional, and spiritual resources is vital. Being willing to learn from oneself and from others, or always maintaining a "beginner's mind," provides an avenue to sustain the personal stresses that come when following one's passions.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the midst of coming to understand better the role of learning in sustaining passion many questions still remain. I recommend that this study be expanded and broadened to examine a number of questions. Further exploration is relevant with respect to different populations and organizations, methodology, and theoretical interests.

This study focused on environmental professionals and their experiences in small nonprofit organizations. I recommend that the question of sustaining passion be expanded to include other nonprofit interests outside of environmental work as well as large nonprofit organizations. It would also be worthwhile to expand the examination into other sectors of society including education, government and business. Exploring differing organizational cultures would provide valuable insight into the role of context and culture in learning and sustaining passion. This study was also geographically restricted. Further explorations should not be limited specifically to Michigan or the United States.

I also recommend further examining the findings from this study as applied specifically to those individuals working in small nonprofit organizations. Since this study involved nine environmental professionals, the findings pertain to them, not the general population. It would be valuable to test the findings on other populations. For instance, what is the experience of people working in the nonprofit sector who do not feel highly passionate? Have they flourished or failed? What has been the experience of those individuals who have chosen to leave nonprofit work? Also, little gender differences were found among the three men and six women of this study. Expanding the study to

include more men would be worthwhile to test this finding. In addition, it would be valuable to investigate questions of learning and passion on the basis of race, education, and level in the organization.

Narrative inquiry provided in-depth information about the experience of work from the vantage point of the individual being studied. Further exploration should include diverse methodologies. Ethnographic studies which involve observation of the individuals in their natural work environments combined with ongoing interviews of both the participants and others working close to the participants would provide useful insight into the present findings. A long term study would also be beneficial. For instance, how does the role of learning in sustaining passion change over time?

Delving further into understanding the relationship between learning and passion in the context of the world of work will enhance the educator's ability to help those individuals choosing to follow their passions. Studies further exploring the learning processes in greater depth, especially the area of learning about the self, would enhance the understanding of how to assist individuals in sustaining passion to their work. Since so little mention was made of formal learning experiences, this study raises interesting questions to be explored further. For example, what impact do adult education activities have in sustaining passion for work? How can higher education address the needs of individuals working with a sense of vocation? What are the pros and cons of enhancing the connections between people, such as learning circles and mentoring, and their function in sustaining passion? What is the role of philanthropy, which provides much of the funding for nonprofit work, in helping to sustain passion?

This study has enhanced the understanding of the relationship between learning and passion. At the same time, many questions have also been sparked, hence, suggesting many diverse areas for further research. Such information is valuable to researchers, educators, funders, and practitioners alike in the quest to enhance the efforts of people dedicating their lives to work of the commons.

Conclusion

Salamon (1999) suggests that new models are needed for the nonprofit sector which focus on the individual, stressing empowerment, self-realization, and self-help. He suggests it is time to move away from an intense focus on nonprofit organizational management issues and instead place the focus on the self. Quinn (1996) notes, to be able to triumph in the face of change one must "know thyself." Palmer adds, "We listen for guidance everywhere else except from within" (2000, p. 5). Based on the conclusions of this study, these suggestions are precise and vital. Yet at the same time, self-empowerment and self-realization are not enough. The system has to support the person. As the implications of this study have suggested there is a need for a paradigm shift in the way we think of the world of work with a role for adult educators, nonprofit managers, funders and others to share in the responsibility. As one participant remarked, "There is no magic formula to sustaining energy and passion. This is not a punch card kind of job." Yet the more the study pushed to peel back the layers of understanding, the more which emerged to offer insight into the role that the community as a whole plays in helping to sustain passion.

In many ways the activists of this study are living with what Fox (1995) has described as a sense of awe. He writes, "Awe includes dancing with terror" (p. 98). Being able to bring into their work a reverence for the world, combined with the terror they also feel, involves an individual dance which incorporates a blurring between the boundaries of their personal and professional lives. They have found a variety of means to endure during difficult times which invariably entails caring for and coming to understand the self. Remaining passionate involves growing and learning, with the learning focused on the process of staying committed to their work. What has been illuminated by both the women and men of this study is that passion is the fuel to sustain hope.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EMAIL LETTER REQUESTING PARTICIPANT NOMINATIONS

TO: XXX
FROM: Jessica T. Kovan
RE: Research Participant Nominations

Dear XXX,

I was wondering if you would be willing to help me as I put together a potential list of research participants for my dissertation study. I am looking for people you would suggest as being highly passionate and committed environmentalists working in small nonprofit organizations in Michigan. They do not need to be the director of the organization but they do need to be paid staff (as opposed to volunteers). They also need to have worked in their career for at least 10 years but not necessarily in the same organization. I am defining "small" nonprofit organizations as those with 10 or less full time staff. My dissertation is a qualitative study and I will be interviewing the participants two to three times for probably 1 ½ to 2 hours each time.

Also, if you have any recommendations of other individuals you would suggest speaking to for suggestions, please let me know.

Thank you!

Jessica

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Statement of Consent Form

The Experience of Being An Environmentalist in a Small Nonprofit Organization

You are invited to be a participant in a research study about the experience of being an environmental professional working in a small nonprofit organization. You were selected as a possible participant by local experts in the area of environmental activism. This study is being conducted by Jessica Kovan, a doctoral student in the Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education Program in Educational Administration at Michigan State University.

Background Information.

This study proposes to investigate the experience of environmental professionals working in small nonprofit organizations, in order to gain an understanding of how to sustain passion to environmental work. The purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the role of learning in maintaining commitment to one's passions. This study hopes to shed light on what is needed to serve as a basis for the development of supportive structures for environmental professionals.

Procedures.

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things.

- Participate in two to three tape-recorded interviews that will last approximately 1½ hours each. At any time the tape recorder can by stopped.
- Write down and share reflections after each interview.
- Participate in one focus group interview that will last approximately 1½ hours.

Risks and Benefits of the Study.

There are no obvious risks to the study. Your identity will not be revealed.

The benefits of participation are minimal as well. The study may provide the time to engage in some added self-reflection.

Confidentiality.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report to be published, information that will make it possible to identify a subject will not be included. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher and her advisors will

have access to the records. The tapes will be erased after the thesis is approved. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

Voluntary Nature of the Study.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions.

The researcher conducting this study is Jessica Kovan. Please ask any questions you may have. If you have questions later, you may contact her at (517) 347-2147. Her dissertation advisor is John Dirkx. You may contact him at (517) 353-8927. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a subject of this study, you can contact the chairperson of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, David Wright at (517) 355-2180.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent.

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

_____ _____

Name Date

_____

Signature

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (90 minute interview)

(1) Do Consent Form. Is there anything about the study you would like me to tell you before we begin?

(2) I am interested in learning more about your background and your evolving interest in environmental activism. How did you get involved in env. work?
Probes: What is your position in your organization?
How did you get to that position?

(3) Describe your work. Walk me through your typical day.

(4) Describe a critical incident in your work that seems to exemplify what got you involved and why you continue to do this work.

(5) Census data: Can I ask a few more questions? Age, # of years working in nonprofit sector, # of years working in current organization, # of people employed in current organization, educational background

SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (90 minute interview)

(1) What thoughts or comments do you have about what you read in the transcripts? Is there any part of the transcript that you would like to further clarify or elaborate on? What would you like to add that is not there?

(2) After reviewing the transcripts and thinking about your work, what would you describe as the hardest part of your work? How have you struggled with it? What is the easiest part? What makes it easy?

(3) You mentioned in the first interview that you had not expected to be in this line of work when you started college. In what ways have your feelings about who you are as an environmentalist changed over time? How has your work influenced how you see yourself?

(4) Some people talk about their work in terms of passion and commitment. How do these terms apply to or reflect your experience of your work?

(5) I would like to know a little bit more about the role the people that you work with play in helping to support you in your work.

(6) Imagine you have been asked to design the cover illustration for a handbook focused on working in small environmental nonprofit organizations. The illustration should be a pictorial representation of your work and the wisdom of your years in this field. Please draw this picture for me.

APPENDIX D

CONTACT LETTER PRIOR TO SECOND INTERVIEW

DATE

ADDRESS

Dear XXX,

It was a delight to see you a couple of months ago. Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study that will complete the requirements of my doctoral degree at Michigan State University. I enjoyed our first interview and am looking forward to our second.

Please find enclosed the transcripts from the first interview. These are not the raw transcripts but instead I have taken a first stab at creating your "story." To do so I have pulled out my own voice from the interview and have also cleaned up the many irregularities of human speech patterns (e.g., the many uh's, you knows, repeated words). When you find places where words are bracketed, I have had to add in words to make the sentence or paragraph flow. Otherwise all of the words are your own.

I have also given you a new name and pulled out your organization's name from the transcripts. These are just the tiniest first steps in maintaining confidentiality. Let me know if there is a new name you have always wanted!

I would truly appreciate it if you could review the entire document prior to our next interview. I would like to start the interview with your reaction to the transcripts. Do the transcripts capture your experiences of working in a small nonprofit environmental organization? Anything you want to add, delete, change? Does it provoke any new thoughts? Were any important experiences neglected?

I look forward to meeting again this coming Wednesday (11/29) in Lansing at 12:00 noon. I will give you a call to confirm where we will be meeting. In case you need it, my phone number is 517-347-2147.

Thanks again,

Jessica T. Kovan

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