ABSTRACT

GHOSAL, LORI NERO. Vocation as a Means of Expressing Spirituality: A Life History Approach. (Under the direction of Barbara Sparks.)

This life history study explores five individuals’ journey toward spiritual growth and vocation and the implications this has for adult and higher education. In-depth interviews enhanced self-reflection and new understanding of participants’ life courses, defining moments, influencing people and experiences, as well as obstacles to spiritual growth and vocational path. Three main themes were discussed: the understanding and experience of spirituality, the influences on spiritual pathways, and the awareness and process of vocation. Conclusions indicate spiritual growth as a maturation process through exposure to diversity, awareness of interconnections, and cognitive/emotional readiness through personal growth. Adult and higher education practitioners need to recognize the importance of spiritual development in the learning process, the role of informal and self-directed learning in the development of spirituality and understand how they can facilitate further growth.
VOCATION AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING SPIRITUALITY:
A LIFE HISTORY APPROACH

by

LORI NERO GHOSAL

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APPROVED BY:

______________________________ ______________________________
Chair of Advisory Committee
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my Higher Power, whom I hope to have represented well. And to my daughter, Rani Marie, within whom this Higher Power is embodied.

Rani, I am in awe of you.
BIOGRAPHY

Lori Nero Ghosal was born Lori Beth Nero, the third of four children to Frank R. Nero, Sr. and Suzanne E. Nero on December 16, 1961. She grew up in Williamsville, New York, a suburb of Buffalo. She attended the Williamsville public schools through high school.

Her interest in the understanding of the human experience was formalized in her undergraduate studies at St. Bonaventure University. In 1984 she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology with a secondary concentration in Theology. Since then she has endeavored to marry psychology and spirituality through continued education and personal pursuit. Choosing to defer graduate school, she first began working in the human services field with at-risk teenagers. She then found her interest in human development focused in the educational sector through a career in educational publishing, first as a sales representative for an elementary and secondary school product line, then in product development management.

In 1994 Lori returned to graduate school to receive a Master of Science degree from the State University of New York College at Buffalo in Student Personnel Administration, with a secondary concentration in Counseling. She subsequently secured a position at the college working directly with at-risk students in Student Support Services, a federally funded TRIO program.

In 1998 she relocated to the Triangle area in North Carolina and secured the position of project manager for an educational test development company. Wishing to merge her business and student services careers, she enrolled in North Carolina State University’s Adult and Community College Education program to complete her doctoral
degree in Higher Education Administration with a secondary concentration in Counseling. In the fall of 2000, she joined the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness (NILIE) under the direction of Dr. George A. Baker, III in the Adult and Community College Education department at NC State University. As Director of Research, she had the opportunity to lead other graduate students in research on institutional effectiveness. Always striving for the truth and optimism for the human condition, she found her interests in psychology, counseling, and spirituality all combined in her chosen doctoral thesis.

In 2001 she married Kanchan Ghosal, a NC State University alumni and an Indian national. In blending a two-faith tradition household, they celebrated their union in both Hindu and Christian wedding ceremonies. They welcomed Rani Marie into their family November 21, 2003.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background and Statement of the Problem

Many people find themselves in mid-life feeling dissatisfied or disillusioned. Pressures of everyday work, feelings of being ineffectual, and striving toward monetary gain which may or may not be realized, leave some with a sense of “Is this all there is?” Is there another way to choose a career that represents a life path or vocation? According to Palmer (2000), vocation is a calling – that which one feels she or he is called to do, not the “work” that one goes to everyday; in fact, it may or may not have relation to one’s career. In an examination of his own journey of awareness of vocation, Palmer emphasizes the importance of listening to one’s inner truths and values, which lie at the heart of identity, as a guide to living more harmoniously. He speaks of a “native way of being in the world” (p. 21) and, regardless of which occupation he finds himself in, he is a teacher. Teaching manifests in every role he takes on. In being true to himself, he acknowledges and acts on his teaching nature. It is one’s life work that fulfills the inner or spiritual self.

Each of us has an inner sense of self, which I believe includes self-image, emotions, personality, beliefs, a value system, moral perspective, the ability to reason, and interrelationships with others and the world. The inner self is the voice within, the “gut reaction” or intuition, when confronted with a dilemma. It is that aspect of the self that one tries to "get in touch with" or “center” in meditation. It is that which is brought to prayer, the quiet stillness of the psyche. The inner self is that which one is when being truly oneself, without the need to be anything in particular or to fulfill any expectations.
Palmer (2000) calls this the authentic self, the spiritual self. It is through aligning the spiritual or inner self with the outer world of work that one finds vocation – that which one is called to do.

We are encouraged from the time we are children to choose a career that in some way tells the world who we are. “What do you want to be when you grow up?” is a familiar question to all of us. With the best of intentions, we are guided toward those occupations that appear to match our skills, interests, abilities: “You like math and science, you should be an engineer.” Or “You like animals, you should be a veterinarian.” In some cases, we are guided toward careers because of social expectations: “Your father is a doctor, so you must be, too.” For many, sense of identity is tied to career. But in stepping outside of the ability box or ego box we may find our life’s work – that which has meaning for each of us. Palmer (2000) states:

Behind this understanding of vocation is a truth that the ego does not want to hear because it threatens the ego’s turf: everyone has a life that is different from the “I” of daily consciousness, a life that is trying to live through the “I” who is its vessel ... there is a gulf between the way my ego wants to identify me, with its protective masks and self-serving fictions, and my true self. (p. 5)

Finding the vocation that expresses one’s inner self, or spirituality, is the challenge that many of us face. To answer this question, I draw on spirituality, career development, education, and vocation literature. Much of the literature on spirituality focuses on defining spirituality (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders, 1988; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; Ingersoll, 1994, 1998; Kinlicheeney, 1995; Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984; Tisdell, 2000) and models of spiritual development (Fowler, 1981;
Myers, Speight, Highlen, Cox, Reynolds, Adams, & Hanley, 1991). The counseling field is burgeoning with literature on nurturing the spiritual self though the counseling process, for spiritual wellness (Brewer, 2001; Ingersoll, 1994, 1998; Strohl, 1998; Young, Cashwell, Shcherbakova, 2000). Spirituality is gaining momentum in vocation literature as theorists evaluate the place and value of work in life and choice of vocation (Fox, 1994; Jones, 1996; Palmer, 2000) and in education, discussing how teachers integrate spirituality and teaching (Astin & Astin, 1999; Groen, 2002; Tisdell, 2000, 2001, 2003). In business, topics such as integrating spiritual practices into work (Acker, 1999; Brandt, 1996; Groen, 2002; Laabs, 1995), and personality-type models are being incorporated into finding the right “fit” between a person and job (Sharf, 1997).

What is lacking from the literature is empirical research on the process and awareness of the formation of the spiritual self and its influence on choice of vocation. This qualitative study uses a life history approach to discover how a person’s spirituality is developed, how one comes to know what one’s work is, and how individuals are able to be authentic in the world by choosing the work that most closely aligns the outer world of work with the inner spiritual self.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how people experience spiritual development and how they come to know their vocation. Research questions include:

1. How is one’s spiritual self developed? What are the influences and defining moments that nurture and develop one’s spiritual self?
2. What is the process by which a person comes to know her or his vocation?
3. What are the obstacles to living authentically? How are these obstacles overcome?
4. How does aligning a person’s vocation with work spiritually impact her or his life? What significance does this have for individuals?

Theoretical Framework

The sense of spirituality may lie dormant or unnurtured for any length of time, existing, but perhaps not acknowledged in daily life. The pressures of today’s fast-paced society may keep us from “listening” to the voice within. It is easy to be consumed with the here and now of living. It is presumed by various theorists (Fowler, 1981; Maslow 1970, 1971; Young, Cashwell & Woolington, 1998) that there is a maturation process to spiritual development. As a person matures and gains life experience, her or his self-awareness (identity) becomes deeper and interrelationships with others and the world around her or him gains dimension.

In a study of college freshmen’s view of spirituality (Nero, 2001), it was clear that young people often express spirituality as religious affiliation. This religious affiliation is often based on family values and is dependent on the teachings of authority figures, their parents, or church leaders. Fowler (1981) explains this in his faith stages, where there is little questioning of the teachings and stories surrounding young people’s families and religious traditions. Often, people do not leave this state of unquestioning acceptance and may interpret religious teachings literally. After learning more about themselves many individuals find another aspect of spiritually that goes beyond religious affiliation and structures the very core of their being. This self-learning occurs through maturation,
being exposed to diverse others, and lived experiences including conflict and crises. For these people, spirituality is less tied to formal religion and reflects what Elkins et al. (1988) define as spirituality, which is more fluid, interrelated, and includes underlying concepts of all religions without the specificity and constraints of religious doctrine and traditions.

Throughout life’s changes, one takes on multiple roles and encounters inevitable moments of crises in which one is challenged to re-think long-held beliefs. These moments may precipitate a change or shift in awareness. The result may be greater understanding, new meanings, wisdom and deeper awareness of the spiritual self. As one participant I interviewed in a previous study explained (Nero, 2000), there may be an impetus or a point at which people move to a more profound or active state of spiritual awareness; spirituality becomes more of a dominant focus. It is at this point that the nurturing of the spirit becomes increasingly important in people’s lives. For some, spiritual needs may never be strong enough to cause discontent in their present circumstance or direct their lives. For others, it may become a dominant force that demands focus and compatibility in daily life, and full integration of the spiritual self into one’s life becomes a necessity.

Significance of the Issue

With more information, opportunity, and experience available to us, people are re-examining who they are and what is important in their lives. The quest for meaning in life and vocation is growing in importance. Spirituality is being reinvented as a means of
finding very personal answers within oneself, not so much to explain the *why* of circumstances, but to determine the *how* of living one’s life.

Often people find themselves dissatisfied in mid-life. Their chosen career path may have them feeling anxious, empty, or that life has lost meaning. They may re-examine what they perceive as a sense of meaning in life: what makes them happy and makes them feel worthwhile. They may find themselves wishing to make a positive influence in the world where they pass along something to others or society as a whole (Erikson, 1968, 1980). This may precipitate a career change or a more fully developed avocation in which the spiritual self is fulfilled through other activities. For some, this takes the form of service to others – social justice work (Tisdell, 2000), volunteer work, nurturing work. It may be that one decides to stay in a career and fulfill her or his spiritual self during free time, as an avocation. And while it does not necessarily require that one change or quit a job, a person who chooses this option may find some fulfillment in being able to have her or his spiritual self manifested outside of work. While this may work for some people, Palmer (2000) sees this as a less integrated lifestyle.

Everyone must go through the journey of life. We are all on different yet similar paths. Each of us can only grow at her or his own pace, and life circumstances often dictate that pace because it seems that it is through experience, as well as other factors, that we grow. Yet knowing that we all are growing and learning constantly, our experiences, how we interpret them, together with social influences, can be construed negatively or positively, depending on our outlook. Whatever these crises and their interpretations, these experiences can have profound effects on the maturation process, emotional well being, spiritual development, and quality of life.
Individuals move through maturation stages in life, as proposed by Erikson’s (1968, 1980) identity development theory and Maslow’s (1971) self-actualization theory. These theorists depict the highest stages of growth, self-understanding and functioning, to be the last stages, typically that of an older adult. Presumably, this is because the human mind requires a certain amount of time or experiences before an individual is able to assimilate and make sense of her or his life. Organized religion has taken on the duty of nurturing human spiritual development in the past, but for some, has failed to hit the mark. Instead, centuries of rules have been imposed on people often causing them to turn away from organized religion. Some have felt they have turned their backs on their own spirituality because of it. This may not necessarily be the case. Perhaps this is actually the beginning of experiencing one’s true spiritual nature. Acker (1999) draws on transpersonal psychology and sees human development as including spiritual development. It is likely that there is a similar maturation stage for human spiritual development; thus, spiritual development is worthy of focus and assistance in maximizing its full potential. It is my belief that spirituality can be nurtured so that individuals can develop a deeper understanding of their spiritual selves earlier in life, establishing their true vocation and ultimately a sense of well being and peace.

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality takes on many connotations, but many first articulate spirituality as a sense of a higher power as well as religious beliefs and practices (Fowler, 1981; Ingersoll, 1994, 1998; Young, Cashwell & Shcherbakova, 2000). Yet spirituality is much broader than narrowly defined religion. Religion may be an outward manifestation of
spirituality, and for some, the reverse is true; religion may help to develop one’s spirituality. Certainly, religious practices are not a requirement for spirituality. I would argue that one’s spirituality is innate, whereas religion is a human-made structure. An innate aspect of being human, questions on morality, the presence of a higher power, immortality, and spiritual growth have been the subject of great thinkers, scholars, philosophers, psychologists, religious people, and the common person from the beginning of human time.

Once reserved for religious people, spirituality has moved from the religious realm to contemporary popular culture, in what is now termed “new age” spirituality. Borrowing from eastern religions, new age spirituality has integrated yoga, meditation, and astrology into mainstream life, giving an allure to these practices of “spiritual growth.” The swinging pendulum of spiritual beliefs and practices encompasses a wide range of what we think of as spiritual. But it is important to understand the difference between beliefs and practices, and inner spirituality.

Throughout definitions of spirituality (Elkins, et al, 1988; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; Ingersoll, 1994, 1998; Kinlicheeney, 1995; Tisdell, 2000), there are a great many similarities in theme, including an inner awareness of the self and a sense of a higher power. Imbedded in these definitions, spirituality appears to be how one experiences and acts in the world: a sense of wholeness, integrity, wisdom, meaning, aliveness, connection to oneself, others, and all of Creation. As Maslow (1971) discusses letting go of the ego, spirituality is that part of you without the distractions of the ego. Spirituality is not, therefore, what you practice, but rather, how you perceive the world around you and who you are.
Methodology

This qualitative study is designed to reflect the nature of the subject matter as highly personal and self-defining for each individual. Utilizing the life history approach (Cole & Knowles, 2001), it is an exploratory study, assuming the value of context and setting. This research searches for a deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences, understanding, and meaning of what spirituality means to them in their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This study relied on individualized, in-depth interviewing of five participants with two to four interviews each. Each participant was provided the opportunity to tell her or his life story in her or his own way, allowing for self-reflection and introspection. Through the interviewing process, she or he explored the significance, turning points, and interpret the meaning of each one’s story.

Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) position life history as a subcategory of narrative inquiry, and as such, adopt much of the same philosophy as narrative. Cole and Knowles (2001) explain that narrative inquiry is based on the assumption that human experience is best understood through the reconstruction of its natural narrative order, with significance given to the personal, temporal, and contextual connections honoring the complexities of a life as lived as a unified whole. The focus of the narrative approach is the individual and the belief that life might be understood through recounting and reconstructing the life stories of individuals (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Life history moves beyond the individual and places narrative accounts and interpretations within the broader context of the influence of culture, politics, family, education, and religion (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Understandings of context have importance in the search for understanding of individual or collective lives. Lives are never lived in isolation from social context, and to be human
is to have societal influences that shape beliefs, experiences, and interpretations of life (Cole & Knowles, 2001). According to Cole and Knowles,

Life history inquiry is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans. It is about understanding a situation, profession, condition, or institution through coming to know how individuals walk, talk, live, and work within that particular context. It is about understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place. It is about comprehending the complexities of a person’s day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in that life so that insights into the broader, collective experience may be achieved (p. 11).

As is clearly the case in identity development, much of the influence on a person’s spiritual development may be the social norms and the culture in which she or he lives. A person’s socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religious background, sexual orientation, and gender all play a role in the development of her or his personal identity (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). How one views society and how one is viewed by others may affect one’s beliefs and actions.

Using a life history approach, I explored the nature of individual spiritual development, the factors that impact development, and the way individuals have been able to increase awareness of, and choose, their life’s work that allows them to live an integrated life. According to Cole & Knowles (2001), elements of life history research include intentionality – an intellectual and moral purpose to advance understanding about the interaction between individual lives and societal contexts, and through consciousness
raising and exploration of the human condition. By listening to the stories of others on a similar pathway or struggling with the same issues, we can learn from their experiences and make connections to our own life, and find answers in the actions of others (Chapman, 2001; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). It is my belief that, beyond adding to the body of knowledge on spiritual development in the literature, patterns and themes will emerge that may be applied to adult education situations to advance spiritual nurturance.

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption in this study is my belief that people mature by learning, growing, and gaining insight through experiences, education, and interrelationships. Just the act of living and aging is a process by which we learn and grow and look at the world differently. As a companion to this, I believe spirituality is a maturation process. My background in psychology and counseling are both at work in my thinking. As a Catholic, there are perhaps many influences from the church working within me at all times, the impact of which I may not be expressly aware. Another assumption I hold is that people who work in conjunction with their inner self will be happier and more fulfilled in life.

Cole and Knowles (2001) challenge claims to the idea of objectivity in life history research, explaining that the researcher serves as the central instrument and along with her own complex personal history, guides and influences the study. They say although the researcher is studying others, all research is in some way autobiographical and it is the perspectives of two or more individuals that converge in life history research. That being said, no life history researcher can truly be objective. Cole and Knowles go on to say
For us, as life history researchers, to claim objectivity, or to infer that we do not hold fast to particular personal theories about the human condition, is to act in bad faith with those whom we research. Such claims or inferences are neither morally responsible nor intellectually possible in work that delves into humans’ lives. The professional is the personal. Researchers are first and foremost human. (p. 47)

My own interpretation, therefore, guided by my context, background information, beliefs, and lived experiences will be a part of the study. I can be aware of these aspects of myself and be ever alert to how they might color my objectivity. This must be acknowledged, yet it is my intention to give as much voice to the participants as possible. Therefore, each participant will have the opportunity to review her or his transcripts and the final analysis of her or his story to ensure accurate representation.

**Definition of Spirituality for this Study**

Definitions of spirituality center on themes of the individual’s relationship to the self, a higher power, and the interrelationship of the self with others and all of life, with an awareness of a transcendent dimension (Elkins et al., 1988; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984).

For the purpose of this study, a composite definition of spirituality is drawn from Elkins’ et al. (1988) and Hamilton’s and Jackson’s (1998) definitions and is used to mean a dimension of human experience that potentially exists in all persons. It is a set of values, attitudes, perspectives, beliefs, and emotions, seeing all of humanity as interrelated, with a relationship to a universal energy. Directed inwardly, spirituality is a
sense of comfort, peace, perfection, an inner resource and awareness. Directed outwardly, spirituality refers to relationships with family, others, the world, a higher power, and being in tune with the universe.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter is an overview of the literature chosen to serve as a foundation to the research questions presented: what is the pathway to spiritual development in spiritually aware people, how do individuals come to know that which is their life’s work or vocation, and how do individuals achieve congruency between vocation and the inner self? In surveying the literature, spirituality is an increasingly popular topic in various disciplines. Yet as Young, Cashwell, and Shcherbakova (2000) note, there are few well-designed and theoretically based studies examining the construct of spirituality, and of those studies, most focus on religious aspects of spirituality.

More recently, spirituality has been a topic for discussion in counseling and transpersonal psychology literature (Brewer, 2001; Ingersoll, 1994, 1998; Seeley, 2000; Strohl, 1998; Young, Cashwell, & Shcherbakova, 2000), education literature (Astin & Astin, 1999; Groen, 2002; Tisdell, 2000; Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa, 2001), and vocation literature (Brandt, 1996; Harlos, 2000; Laabs, 1995; Leigh, 1997; Rehm, 1990). Spirituality is an unusual concept: it is a universal phenomenon to all people (Young, Cashwell, & Woolington, 1998), yet it requires individualized expression for everyone. Spirituality is an amorphous subject and is expressed in a multitude of ways.

To see only one dimension, differentiated though it may be ... is limiting.

Spirituality must be held up to the light of many different lamps. The lenses
include but are not limited to cultural distinctions, professional practices, philosophical understandings, and religious beliefs (Maher & Hunt, 1993, p. 23). Yet to study spirituality, it is necessary to choose one aspect to focus on, for no study can hold all the pieces at once.

The concepts relevant to this study begin with the understanding of spirituality rooted in Carl Jung’s (1933) behavioral psychology, Abraham Maslow’s (1970, 1971) humanistic psychology, and Viktor Frankl’s (1984) logotherapy. Drawing from psychological roots is the understanding of spirituality in the counseling profession as a means of therapy and as a factor in overall wellness. Spiritual development has been significantly addressed by James Fowler’s (1981) seminal research on faith development and others who extend his work (Courtenay, 1993) and expand it to women (Tisdell, 2000, 2001) and gifted children (Lovecky, 1998).

This chapter reviews what is known about spirituality in psychology, counseling, education, and vocation literature. In an effort to design a blueprint for my conceptual framework, I draw on these themes, gathering insights from each area, carefully selecting each point to collectively form my foundation for this research. Finally a conceptual framework is presented for the study.

Influence of Psychology on the Study of Spirituality

The examination of the constructs of spirituality can be found in the roots of psychology and psychological counseling. Some of the greatest thinkers of the field – Carl Jung (1933), Viktor Frankl (1984), and Abraham Maslow (1970, 1971) – are among the pioneers in understanding the significance of spirituality in overall health (Maher &
Hunt, 1993). Their contributions to the counseling field include a transformative potential, now understood as spirituality, allowing for new levels of therapeutic insight (Maher & Hunt, 1993). Through research, introspection, and counseling clients, they have provided valuable insights in the foundation of the contemporary outlook on psychological thought.

Today the counseling field is drawing on the need for spirituality as a component in a holistic wellness model, whereas optimum wellness includes the interaction of a spiritual component within all areas of a person’s life (Goodloe & Arreola, 1992; Young, Cashwell & Woolington, 1998). Articles on the effect of spirituality on psychological wellness have been surfacing in the areas of relieving depression and anxiety (Young, Cashwell & Shcherbakova, 2000), recovery from addiction (Priester, 2000), and facilitating counseling objectives (Holden, 2000), to name a few. Benjamin and Looby (1998) discuss the intrinsic nature of spirituality and the attainment of optimum psychological wellness through the context of Abraham Maslow’s and Carl Rogers’ self-actualization theories. Through discussion of these self-actualization theories, Benjamin and Looby (1998) conclude that “by striving for self-actualization, the client is molded in spirituality and optimum wellness” (p. 93).

In researching the development of spirituality, I found spirituality represented by several different types of models. Psychology gives us developmental stage models drawing heavily on Abraham Maslow’s (1948, 1970, 1971) self-actualization theory and incorporating Erik Erikson’s (1968) ego identity development model. Probably the most well-known writing on spirituality is Fowler’s (1981) *Stages of Faith*, which is a stage
model of faith development based on Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg, again drawing on the psychological theorists.

Another finding in the literature is dimensional models of spirituality. These models do not consider how spirituality is developed, but rather describe spirituality by means of several different dimensions that are considered the elements that make up spirituality. Examples of these dimension models of spirituality are presented by Ingersoll (1994, 1998) and Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988). Ingersoll (1994, 1998) originally defined spirituality in seven dimensions garnered from exploring the literature (not based on psychological theory). Later in a follow-up study, he researched religious leaders’ reactions to these seven dimensions, rearranging and expanding them to ten dimensions. Elkins et al. (1988) developed nine components of spirituality based on the humanistic psychological writings of Maslow, Dewey, Jung, and others. These dimensions and components range from the religious to the secular. They include a sense of a transcendent force, relationships among individuals and all of Creation, a sense of well-being, and ways of experiencing and interacting with the world including a sense of commitment to the betterment of the world.

The third model of spirituality that I found was the socio-cultural model of spirituality presented by Myers, Speight, Highlen, Cox, Reynolds, Adams, and Hanley (1991) called Optimal Theory. This is an identity development model that speaks to spirituality development and incorporates feminine perspectives and the effects of race and culture.

When drawing heavily on psychological theory, it can be argued that much of the foundational thought on spirituality and spiritual development has been articulated from a
Eurocentric male perspective. In fact, “males are the dominant gender in the samples of almost all the [adult development] models” (Courtenay, 1993, p. 167). And while much of the writings of theorists such as Maslow, Jung, and Erikson are based on the majority culture at the time of their work, these theorists were also practicing psychologists where much of their insights evolved from their experiences as counselors. It is likely that a portion of their clients were women, and that some of their insights included the female experience. Yet because the theorists were all male, the Eurocentric male perspective has been considered the norm, and the experiences of women and minorities are not as well understood. More recently there has been considerable focus on women’s and person’s of color experiences and hence Optimal theory (1991) and studies on women’s spirituality (Seeley, 2000) have been gaining more attention. These are addressed in this literature review.

Developmental Stage Theories of Spirituality

Abraham Maslow’s Self Actualization Theory

The seeds of what we are now calling spirituality can be found in early humanist psychological writings. Abraham Maslow (1948, 1970, 1971) was talking about the spiritual dimension of the human experience when he developed his needs hierarchy and theory of self-actualization. In his needs hierarchy, Maslow (1971) distinguished between lower order needs and higher order needs. The lower order needs are what he referred to as deficiency values (d-values) and include all the physiological and self-esteem needs such as the need for food, belongingness, and avoidance of pain. The higher order needs are what he referred to as being values (b-values) and are those higher order needs
associated with self-actualization, including self-esteem and the need to know, understand, create. He believed that people could only focus on the b-values when all of their basic needs had been met. If a basic need has not been met, the person is not free to approach self-actualization, but rather, continues to be motivated to meet the d-values. On the other hand, those who are secure in having their d-values met can move onto the b-values and approach self-actualization, a form of transcendence beyond the physical and the ego. The words Maslow used to describe b-values correspond to vocabulary used in many of the definitions of spirituality including authenticity of the real self, identity, transcendence of time and space, the sacred, states of awe, truth, reality, justice, unity, interconnectedness, aliveness, playfulness, uniqueness, feeling of perfection, and completeness (1971).

We can see how closely Maslow’s (1971) description of behaviors leading to self-actualization parallels spirituality. Maslow believed that one could approach self-actualization by experiencing fully, selflessly, and without self-consciousness. Life choices should center on growth rather than fear; by listening to the inner self, one would choose wisely knowing her or his destiny and mission in life. The self is to be listened to and nurtured. This includes an awareness of the physicality of our existence (i.e. I am tense) and can be addressed through activities such as yoga and meditation. One should strive for self-understanding – finding out what one likes and does not like, understanding and accepting one’s biological nature. There should be honesty and simplicity in one’s life and one should take responsibility for looking within the self for answers. There should be an awareness of the sacred in life, including the sacred in the self.
Maslow (1971) felt that oftentimes b-values are a result of having what he termed a ‘peak experience’. A peak experience is the growth toward full humanness and can be described as

... a loss of self or of ego, or sometimes as a transcendence of self. There is a fusion with the reality being observed ... a oneness where there was a twoness, an integration of some sort of the self with the non-self. There is universally reported a seeing of formerly hidden truth, a revelation in the strict sense, a stripping away of veils, and finally, almost always, the whole experience is experienced as bliss, ecstasy, rapture, exaltation. (p.62)

These experiences can come from profound aesthetic experiences including creativity, sexuality, parental love, childbirth, dance, artwork, and music. The awareness and reverence of the body and the physical engagement of the body are good pathways to a peak experience. Maslow (1971) felt that peak experiences are moments of self-actualization. They are moments of ecstasy, insight, awareness, and connectedness. Self-actualization is a process, not an end state. It is working to do well the thing that one wants to do.

It is clear that Maslow’s (1971) ideals address looking to the self for wisdom, guidance, and nurturance in life. While he does not specifically state an awareness of a higher power, he implies that the sacred is within each of us, and it is up to us to access it and gain its benefits. Maslow’s needs hierarchy has been the foundation from which generations of theories in many disciplines have emerged. It is very human-centered and shows a commonality of the human experience with an eye toward higher values and ideals rather than secular concerns of pathology. From this foundational theory,
spirituality is alluded to. Others have taken flight with these concepts and applied them in multiple areas that, taken together, make up a patchwork upon which spiritual development and spiritual growth can be further discussed and researched.

The psychiatrist Gerald May wrote an article in 1974 with a follow-up in 1977 examining the construct of spirituality and its impact on people. May (1974) conceptualizes spirituality as direct experience where one feels in harmony with all things in Creation, has a personal awareness of a higher power, and feels a sense of belonging that is deeply meaningful. He relates this to peak experiences. May (1974) is convinced that the ego cannot exist simultaneously with the peak experience and that, in fact, spiritual experience goes beyond need-satisfaction associated with the ego. May (1977) further states that the ego acts as a clarification of perception of how-things-really-are dealing with the most basic perceptions one has of oneself in relation to reality. He believes the path toward fulfillment lies in allowing our preconceptions and images of the self to simply go away. When one is in the midst of a spiritual (or peak) experience, “one’s ego, sense of identity, self-image seem to evaporate almost magically. And one is left, just simply being” (1977, p. 87). These types of experiences are what Maslow (1970, 1971) refers to as “peak experiences” or moments of transcendence.

May (1974, 1977) reflects a similar sentiment as Maslow in his explanation of the spiritual dimension of humanness and implies the necessity of the peak experience. May (1974, 1977) believes that human beings have a primary need for the spiritual. The spiritual need runs counter to other needs gratification, such as the need for belonging, which tend to make the individual crave more of the same. Rather, the spiritual “high” is an integrated spiritual experience that moves an individual away from need-satisfaction
goals and deals with the perception of oneself in relation to reality. Spirituality is a direct feeling level experience, the ground of being, an awareness of the process or flow of the universe. It is an experience in which one feels at one with Creation, in union with all things. This is a loss of ego identity and one has a feeling of simply being. This occurs through direct experience and also refers to the belief in God or prayer – being in harmony with the universe, a feeling of deep, real belonging.

*James Fowler’s Faith Development Model*

Perhaps the most widely known research on spirituality is James Fowler’s (1981) *Stages of Faith*, which is one of the foundational theories of spiritual development. Fowler’s model is an age-related stage model, tied to an individual’s cognitive maturation. Grounded in psychological theory, Fowler’s faith development model is based on Piaget’s cognitive stages, Kohlberg’s moral stages, and draws heavily on Erikson’s (1980) ego identity model.

The developmental nature of this model serves as a good foundation for thinking about individuals’ spiritual development. Fowler’s (1981) model assumes that faith development depends on identity development. Yet Fowler’s model seems to be overly structured in the cognitive domain and Erikson’s life stages, which only tells part of the story. Additionally, Fowler (1981) assumes a foundation of traditional religious beliefs, stories, and practices as a necessary step in faith development. Yet in actuality, this foundation may act as a means of slowing spiritual development because of the necessity of “unlearning” assumptions taught in childhood.

It has been my observation, through discussion on their views of spirituality with 18 and 19 year-old college freshmen (Nero, 2001), that in many cases, young people can
be found in Fowler’s faith development model somewhere between stages three and four. It is during this time when the new freshman living away from home for the first time begins to critically analyze her or his long-held beliefs and values provided by her or his family. The viability of these beliefs and values are then tested out while the freshman is being exposed to new experiences, new people, and new ideas. Fowler’s stages are highly cognitive in nature, yet he acknowledges the influence of family, society, and experiences. Something else must happen besides maturing and thinking and experiencing, but what that is, is not necessarily something tangible. Fowler (1981) himself expresses this in his defense of the use of the term “faith,” for which he has been criticized because of its religious connotation: “There simply is no other concept that holds together those various interrelated dimensions of human knowing, valuing, committing and acting that must be considered together if we want to understand the making and maintaining of human meaning” (p. 92).

Looking at faith development as only a cognitive, experiential process creates a degree of rigidity in understanding spiritual development that does not allow for the intuitive, affective, and serendipitous nature of spirituality that must be a present condition for faith development. Fowler’s (1981) description of faith moves beyond his stages and includes this intangible aspect in his description of faith as people’s evolved and evolving ways of experiencing self, others and world (as they construct them) as related to and affected by the ultimate conditions of existence (as they construct them) and of shaping their lives’ purposes and meanings, trusts and loyalties, in light of the character of being, value and power
determining the ultimate conditions of existence (as grasped in their operative images – conscious and unconscious – of them). (p. 92-93)

In this description there is the experience and the construction of meaning and knowledge from that experience which is a highly individual process, interacting with the individual’s relationships with others, self, the world around them and most likely affected by their emotional states and ways of experiencing. Fowler also includes the awareness and response to a transcendent power as a factor in faith.

Fowler’s (1981) six stages of faith are progressive and developmental, with one stage building on the next, and a requirement for moving to a higher stage. Beginning with the highest stage, they are identified as Universalizing Faith, Conjunctive Faith, Individuative-Reflective Faith, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Mythic-Literal Faith, Intuitive-Projective Faith, and Undifferentiated Faith.

Universalizing Faith (Stage 6) constitutes an enlarging awareness and vision of the universal community typified by trust, courage, and hope. If a person reaches this stage, there may be a transformation of worldview and actions. A person in Conjunctive Faith (Stage 5), usually occurring in mid-life, sees many sides of an issue simultaneously. This stage displays the ability to attend to the interrelatedness in things, move beyond the boundaries of identity, integrate the conscious and unconscious, and strive to unify opposites in mind and experience. In it, the person can appreciate symbols, myths and rituals because of the understanding of the depth of reality to which they refer.

Individuative-Reflective Faith (Stage 4) usually occurs (if at all) in young adulthood or as late as the 40s. This stage is when the adult must take seriously her or his own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. Individuality versus group
membership for definition becomes a focus, as is subjectivity of unexamined feelings 
versus objectivity and critical reflection, self-fulfillment or self-actualization as a primary 
concern versus service to or being for others. Identity is no longer defined by the 
composite of one’s roles or meanings to others. Synthetic-Conventional Faith (Stage 3) is 
typical of adolescence and can become a permanent place for adults. The person’s 
experience of the world extends beyond the family, and includes peers, school or work, 
society, and religion. Faith must synthesize values and information and provide a basis 
for identity and outlook. It is a conformist stage, tied into the expectations and judgments 
of significant others, but not enough autonomy to construct an individual perspective. 
Beliefs and values are deep, yet not examined. Authority lies in traditional authority 
roles. Exposure to others with different outlooks is perceived as differences in types of 
persons, but may ultimately precipitate the examination of self, background, and values 
that encourage transition to the next stage.

Mythic-Literal Faith (Stage 2) is typical of the school-age child, and sometimes 
found in adolescents and adults. In this stage the person takes on the stories, beliefs, and 
observances that symbolize belonging in the community. Beliefs include literal 
interpretations, moral rules, and stories that become a narrative construction of meaning. 
There is no reflective, conceptual exploration of meanings. Intuitive-Projective Faith 
(Stage 1) is typical of the child from age 3-7, the fantasy-filled imitative phase when the 
child is influenced by examples and stories of the faith of parents and other significant 
adults. This stage includes first awareness of death, sex, and the taboos that family and 
culture create. The imagination is uninhibited by logical thought and produces long-
lasting images and feelings that will have to be sorted out when the child is cognitively
more mature. Undifferentiated Faith (Stage 0) is formulated in infancy and is the infant’s foundation of trust, love, hope, and courage. If the foundation is not fulfilled, the infant must contend with the deprivation of these virtues.

Courtenay (1993) reviews and critiques Fowler’s (1981) faith development model as “the most outstanding model of faith development” (p. 156), drawing on the psychosocial models of human development including cognitive, personality, and moral development theories, having the greatest impact on faith development. And while Fowler’s model emerges from cognitive, personality, and moral models, his faith development model is more contemporary, drawing from a larger body of research of human development including theology and philosophy. However, Fowler’s faith development model does emphasize self-identity and growth in “hierarchical stages that range from the simple to the complex, from rigidity to flexibility, and from narrow to comprehensive perspectives” (p. 161) in a life-span development. This means that persons are assumed to evolve throughout their lives and that they progress through stages in sequence, which may be a potential flaw. Another criticism is that while Fowler (1981) does include an equal number of male and female participants in his study, males tend to score better than females. Fowler does not explain this finding (Courtenay, 1993, p. 167-8).

Interestingly, in speaking about the developmental stages of Fowler’s (1981) faith model, two studies should be noted. Young, Cashwell, and Woolington (1998) reviewed the relationships among spirituality, cognitive development, and moral development and found that spirituality is closely related to the psychosocial and role functions of individuals. And although spirituality is thought to be related with chronological
development and overall maturation or life-span development of the individual, little is known about the effect of psychological maturation on spiritual development (Young, Cashwell & Woolington, 1998). Young et al. (1998) discuss Fowler’s (1981) assertion that cognitive development is important to faith development – resulting from the individual’s ability to make meaning. They point out that this is an important point because Fowler’s model “assumes the interrelationship of faith development to normal human development” (p. 64). Yet in their findings Young et al. found there was a relationship between spirituality and moral development and between spirituality and purpose in life, but found no relation between cognitive development and spirituality. They suggest that the inability to think in a highly analytical or abstract manner did not affect respondents’ ability to develop “a viable spirituality” (p. 66). Later they indicate that the majority of the participants in their study (ranging in age from 18-29 years) discussed spirituality within the context of religion. This leaves unanswered questions about the influence of cognitive development and maturation on spiritual development, and whether spirituality is more or less religious-centered based on cognitive development.

Lovecky (1998) examined the spiritual development of gifted children. She positions her research on the development stage supposition that people “require a differentiated and autonomous self that can reason abstractly” (p. 180) and therefore young children are not “capable of achieving the self-transformation upon which spiritual development, in its highest stages, depends” (p. 180). In her study there are some gifted children who appear to have early interest in spiritual matters and questions of meaning. “Children more focused on intuition and emotion may be unusually self-aware from an
early age and seek that which is transcendent in self and others” (p. 82) and for these
gifted children, there may be asynchronous development of emotional and cognitive
structures. This shows that these children are developing their spirituality out of
developmental sequence as postulated in the developmental theories. While not all gifted
children show this heightened spiritual awareness, some do. This may indicate that higher
cognitive functioning may be a factor in spiritual development, or perhaps spirituality is
affected more by intuitive or emotional development.

Socio-Cultural Model of Spirituality

*Linda Myers et al. Optimal Theory*

Many of the models of spirituality do not take into consideration the effect of
social and cultural aspects of the individual on spiritual development. Optimal Theory
Applied to Identity Development (OTAID) introduced by Myers, Speight, Highlen, Cox,
Reynolds, Adams, and Hanley (1991) is one theory that takes into account all of the
socio-cultural constructs of identity development. Optimal Theory is built on the
awareness that a person is made up of many aspects of the self and it takes into
consideration age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the like. Each of these
aspects of the self has an influence on identity and an individual may identify more with
one or another identity. Society will see an individual as such identities, with whatever
interpretations they may make. Myers et al. (1991) state that identity development is a
continuous process of interaction between individuals and the socio-cultural environment.
They indicate that spiritual development is an integral part of identity development that is
affected by the oppression of the social cultural constructs of the self. Optimal theory
postulates that as individuals come to understand the various aspects of the self, they learn to move from stages of a lack of awareness of the self as separate, through the process of individuation and conflict with society (which may hold a negative view of the self), toward an acceptance of the self as different and others who are different. As self-understanding continues, individuals move toward the higher stages of integration and a return to the self as part of the whole, yet with a transformative view of seeing all of personhood as interconnected, connecting the self with the infinite (Myers et. al., 1991).

“Optimal theory posits that self-knowledge is the basis of all knowledge; in this context the process of spiritual and identity development is one of people coming to know themselves more and more fully as spiritual-material beings that we are” (Myers et al., 1991, p. 57). Self-knowledge is a more holistic and integrated sense of self, a fuller and deeper understanding of the true essence of the self, including all aspects of personhood. Schafranske and Gorsuch (1984) describe spirituality as the courage to look within and to trust a deep sense of belonging, wholeness, connectedness, and openness to the infinite.

This identity development theory answers the criticism of other Eurocentric identity development models and makes clear the impact of multiple aspects of identity. Tisdell, Tolliver and Villa (2001) state:

Spirituality is implied in some of the early racial/cultural identity models because of its implicitness of Spirit in the definition of self. Myers et al. (1991), however, conceptualize identity development as a process of coming to know self as expression of Spirit, thus explicitly situating spirituality as integral to self. Identity development is seen as a continuous process of interaction between the individual and the socio-cultural milieu, a holistic approach encompassing all
aspects of self, not just race or culture. It is thus more comprehensive than earlier racial identity models, and posits that oppression results in individuals perceiving themselves in limited ways, alienated from their intrinsic value and connection to others, past and present. As individuals increase their self-understanding and re-member their spiritual essence, they transcend the bondage of oppressions. This can result in action supporting social transformation” (Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa, 2001, p. 4).

Myers et al. (1991) draw on Jung’s belief that people are born with a wholeness, a spiritual essence, and it is our task to develop this inherent spiritual wholeness to the greatest degree of differentiation, coherence, and harmony. Optimal Theory is a way of seeing how society and the environment may affect the self-identity process. Looking back to Elkins’ et al. (1988) definition of spirituality, “Spirituality ... is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the ultimate” (p. 10). We see that Optimal Theory agrees with this definition, but Optimal Theory relates the values of self, others, nature, life, and the ultimate to peace, love, harmony, and justice (Myers et al., 1991).

Like Fowler’s (1981) faith development model, Optimal Theory is a developmental-stage theory, but rather than a hierarchy, it is more like an expanding spiral. In this spiral the beginning of the identity development process is similar to the end of the process, yet individuals must still progress from one stage to another in sequence.

Myers et al. (1991) Optimal Theory begins in infancy with an Absence of Conscious Awareness (Phase 0), which is a sense of innocence. Life is accepted without
judgment, there is no sense of self as separate. Individuation (Phase 1) is a lack of awareness of any view of self other than originally understood. There is no meaning or value assigned to any aspect of identity. Family values are all important in understanding of personal identity. There is no awareness of devaluing of self by others and is an egocentric view of self.

Dissonance (Phase 2) is a stage of conflict or crisis that includes an exploration of aspects of the self that are devalued by others. There is dissonance between what individuals believe they are and a false image of self that would be inferior. Individuals may internalize socio-cultural values that hold negative views of the self. There may be anger, insecurity, guilt. In the Immersion phase (Phase 3), individuals may prefer to be with others “like me” who may be devalued from society (high school students not part of the “in” crowd, racial groups banding together). This stage encourages learning about and appreciating the devalued aspects of themselves and gives a sense of belonging. The dominant group may be seen negatively.

Internalization (Phase 4) now includes the acceptance of different aspects of the self, which are seen as components of identity. Increased sense of security and tolerance of others result. In Integration (Phase 5), the sense of self has increased to inner security. Relationships and perceptions of others reflect inner peace. Sense of community has expanded to a more diverse group and there is an understanding that anyone can oppress or be oppressed, depending on one’s beliefs. Finally, in Transformation (Phase 6), there is a shift in worldview. The self is redefined as interrelated to all: ancestors, those yet unborn, nature, the community. There is an understanding of interrelatedness and interdependence of all things and all people. Reality is redefined on spiritual awareness
rather than external environment or circumstance. The universe is orderly, rational, personal, unified.

Hart and Holton (1993) exemplify the tenants of the higher stages of Optimal theory when they say

it is the belief that, ultimately, diversity and interdependence, multiplicity and interconnectedness are inseparable, unifying all forms of life beyond the many artificial separations created by our culture among people of different races, sexes, ages, etc., and speaking to the existence of a profound spiritual connection among all living things (p. 242).

Dimensional Models of Spirituality

*David Elkins’ et al. Humanistic-Phenomenological Spirituality*

The humanistic-phenomenological study of spirituality of Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988) is a dimensional model of spirituality. In their research, Elkins et al. reviewed major writers such as Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Viktor Frankl, and others who had written about spirituality from a phenomenological approach. Elkins et al. (1988) found that none wrote a clear definition of spirituality. Yet there was a great deal of overlap among the writers and certain elements began to emerge. Elkins et al. synthesized, added to, and refined these elements into what they consider to be nine elements of spirituality. From this they formulated the following definition of spirituality:

Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, *spiritus*, meaning “breath of life,” is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in
Elkins’ et al. (1988) nine components of spirituality include (1) a transcendent dimension or believing in an unseen world; (2) meaning and purpose in life, that life is deeply meaningful and has purpose, which varies from person to person; (3) a sense of vocation or mission in life; (4) a sense of awe, reverence, and wonder, which does not dichotomize life into sacred and secular, but that there is sacredness in the ordinary. They suggest that one (5) does not seek satisfaction from material values or use them as a substitute for spiritual needs; (6) has a strong sense of social justice or altruism, a sense of being a part of the common humanity; (7) possesses high idealism and being committed to the betterment of the world; (8) has an awareness of the tragic, of pain and suffering, which gives depth and the ability to appreciate joy and life; and (9) that spirituality has an effect on one’s relationship to self, others, nature, life, and the Ultimate; or, the fruits of spirituality.

The important point to note in this study is that Elkins et al. (1988) specifically draw on humanistic psychology for descriptions of spirituality for use in the psychological-counseling arena. A criticism is that they, by default, also utilize a male-model in their description of spirituality by drawing on the Eurocentric, male foundation. Justification for using a humanistic psychology foundation is that a growing number of people are gravitating toward a non-religious personal definition of spirituality, and that these people’s spirituality must be validated.

In the clinical arena a humanistic spirituality can provide psychology with a legitimate, nonreligious approach to the therapeutic treatment of clients suffering
from spiritual distress. If we can see that spirituality and spiritual values belong to
humanity, this will free us to study spirituality and to find ways to treat those who
need assistance at the spiritual level. A humanistic understanding of spirituality
places it within the borders of our science and legitimizes our efforts to find ways
to heal those suffering from spiritual distress. (Elkins et al., 1988, p. 16)

*Elliott Ingersoll’s Dimensions of Spiritual Wellness*

Ingersoll (1994) was interested in defining spirituality for the counseling
profession. He first explored the correlation between spirituality and religion, discerning
the differences and focusing on the use and benefits of integrating spirituality into the
counseling session. Ingersoll emphasized a discussion of spirituality as distinct from
religion as religious direction is typically not a focus of the counseling tradition. Through
researching literature (much of which was from counseling), he synthesized seven
dimensions of spirituality. Drawing on these seven dimensions, he described the ways
spirituality can be used in counseling, paying special attention to cultural sensitivity and
awareness of clients’ religious beliefs.

In 1998, Ingersoll refined his original seven dimensions of spirituality through a
cross-traditional approach drawing on ten different religious traditions. Through
interviews and panel discussions he asked respondents to consider the seven dimensions
and reflect on them. The important aspect of Ingersoll’s (1998) second review is that it
provides a cross-cultural, cross-gender, cross-religious vocabulary for discussing
spirituality. His respondents included twelve people (six men and six women),
representing ten separate religious belief systems including Judaism and Hasidic Judaism,
Christianity, including Baptist and Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Zen Buddhism,
Afrocentric spirituality, Wiccan, and the Baha’i faith. The original seven components were modified and expanded to ten components. He included an integration of all of the components, illustrating universal beliefs in the spiritual experience that transcend individual religions.

Ingersoll’s (1994, 1998) dimensions of spirituality include a concept of divinity that could be a personal God or a transcendent being or force residing within all things, a force that transcends all, or the resistance to belief in a divinity. Spirituality includes a sense of meaning, of being at peace, or that life is worth living. This sense of meaning may become more of a concern in times of crises. A sense of connectedness or interconnectedness among others, the Infinite, the environment, and the relationships of people is an important dimension. A sense of mystery in understanding transcendent forces, meaning, and how one deals with the unexplained is another component and shows the capacity for awe and wonder. Spirituality should include a sense of freedom from internal and external constraints, of forgetting oneself and giving the self over to the not purposeful, yet meaningful activity of play. Play refreshes, allows for carefree frivolity.

Through the sequence of experience – ritual – practice, energy is directed through a process that is part of a healthy person’s life. Spirituality includes the awareness of one’s attitudes toward giving and receiving forgiveness; hope that suffering is not in vain and will not last or feeling “safe” in life; present-centeredness, or the ability to be aware of the present moment; and knowledge-learning, or an interest in increasing self knowledge and knowledge of things in life. Further, Ingersoll indicated that there should
be Dimensional Integration – all of these dimensions should function as a synergistic entity.

The curious part of Ingersoll’s (1994, 1998) study is that he began his dimensions of spirituality with definitions drawing on non-religious literature. But in designing his study, he specifically used spiritual leaders from their respective traditions with at least ten years experience practicing their religion. He states that the respondents were, on several occasions, influenced by their spiritual tradition, which colored their responses to the dimensions posed. Additionally, he used a numerical scoring technique to rate the dimensions, which resulted in statistical means, which may not properly represent the respondents’ rating. For instance, if one respondent did not rate a dimension, the mean for that dimension would be skewed. Ingersoll also began the interviews with his seven dimensions of spirituality, and asked respondents to respond to those already identified dimensions rather than identifying their own. And while he states this study is merely a starting point for a “cross-culturally affirmed vocabulary for discussing spirituality” (p.63), it is more of a cross-religious vocabulary.

Both Elkins et al. (1988) and Ingersoll (1994, 1998) researched spirituality from a psychological framework. They saw a need for counselors to provide a means of addressing their clients’ spiritual and emotional needs. While they both began with a counseling framework, Ingersoll progressed from a socio-cultural, religious-based framework, while Elkins et al. sought a non-religious approach so that those clients who were not religious would still be able to benefit from a discussion of spirituality. This distinction is important in acknowledging that spirituality is a human need, not to simply fall under the heading of religion. Elkins’ et al. components correspond to Ingersoll’s
(1994, 1998) dimensions of spirituality in many ways, yet Ingersoll’s definitions use more religious language, and Elkins et al. (1998) uses language that refers more to the individual’s experience of *being* in the world. Both discuss concepts of a divinity, or the Ultimate, or a sense of the transcendent. Both include a meaning and mission in life and an interconnectedness among all aspects of the world. Elkins et al. talk about the fruits of spirituality which include some of Ingersoll’s ideals of a sense of play, freedom, awe, and forgiveness. Ingersoll includes the religious-based ritual as important whereas Elkins et al. speak more on a sense of sacred in the ordinary. Ingersoll looks more on the individual’s personal experience within the self as related to the world, yet Elkins et al. look beyond the self and includes a sense of altruism and idealism that moves beyond the individual to an action that may impact others.

As we can see in this discussion of spirituality development, the higher the stage of human development, the more it encompasses the ideals and values of spirituality. Through the integration of Maslow (1970, 1971), Fowler (1981), Elkins et al. (1988), and Myers et al. (1991) we can see that through resolution of crises, gratification of psychological needs, and the interaction of self with others as related to society, the foundation on which the higher order of spirituality, wisdom, or the higher self, is built.

In his article entitled *Ego Meets Soul*, James Strohl (1998) discusses the background and theory of transpersonal psychology and how it addresses the effects of spirituality and consciousness on optimal human functioning. Called the “Fourth Force” psychology by Abraham Maslow in 1968, it emerged from mainstream psychology and religious studies to address states of consciousness, identity, and spiritual growth. Strohl discusses the emergence of transpersonalism as a counseling strategy that is experiential,
holistic, cross-cultural, and multidisciplinary, and relates it to spirituality and spiritual well-being. He explains that psychoanalysis or “First Force” psychology (i.e. Freud), behaviorism or “Second Force” psychology (i.e. Skinner), humanism or “Third Force” psychology (i.e. Maslow, Piaget, Rogers), each emphasize an area of human functioning, focusing on strengthening the ego and reducing pathology. The “Fourth Force” psychology, transpersonalism (i.e. Maslow, Jung), is eclectic. Transpersonalism incorporates all three viewpoints as well as expanded human qualities focusing on issues of existence, meaning and purpose in life, and the transcendence of ego identification, experiencing a sense of unity and interconnectedness with all of existence. Transpersonal counselors, Strohl explains, consider the ego the outer expression of the self. The objective is to first strengthen the ego (one facet of total identity) and then, through transcendence, let go of the ego, allowing for the full expression of the greater self. Transpersonalism is seen as the process of surrendering control to the self within, accepting responsibility and trusting ones’ inner wisdom to direct one’s life (1998).

One of the important aspects of self-actualization and spirituality is a sense of transcendence. Maslow (1971) described transcendence as the highest and most holistic level of human consciousness and “... loss of self-consciousness, of self-awareness ... It is the same kind of self-forgetfulness which comes from getting absorbed, fascinated, concentrated. In this sense, meditation or concentration on something outside one’s own psyche can produce self-forgetfulness and therefore loss of self-consciousness, and in this particular sense of transcendence of the ego or of the conscious self” (p. 269).
Career Development Theories

In examining the place of spirituality in the workplace, it is first necessary to review career development theories to form a boundary as to the current thinking in the field of career development. Pioneered by developmental psychologists, differential psychologists, sociologists, and personality theorists (Super, 1990), career development literature encompasses multiple theoretical bases heavily influenced by psychology, Erikson, Adler, and Maslow, who have all had a hand in the architecture of these theories (Sharf, 1997). There are numerous career development theories and theorists, and there are many similarities among them. Many career development theories are related to personality theories. These theories often draw on one another and can be combined for use in career counseling. It is not my intention to perform an exhaustive review of career development theories, but rather to show the relevance of this field to my study.

One of the most widely used career development theories is the trait and factor theories. Trait and factor theories analyzed individuals’ characteristics, combining groups of traits to identify types of individuals. Qualifications of jobs and work requirements could be combined to describe types of work, and then individuals could be matched with job requirements by their complementary traits and skills (Sharf, 1997). Holland’s (1966, 1973) vocational theory is a trait and factor theory. His premise is that “choice of vocation is an expression of personality” (1966, p. 2) and that “interest inventories are personality inventories” (1966, p. 3).
While this theory takes into account personality aspects, it is based on skills and abilities imbedded in the personality. The focus is on types of tasks in a particular occupation, and as such, is the least congruent with what I consider to be attuned to the spiritual self.

Donald Super’s (1990) career development theory is a life-span, life-space approach, looking at career development in terms of the past, present and future. Rather than developing a new theory, Super (1990) creatively combines contributions from multiple theorists, including learning theorists and personality theorists such as Maslow, Rogers, Jung, and Adler, along with career counseling theorists Holland, Roe, Ginzberg, and many others in his Archway Model. The components of this Archway Model include a base of three influences on the individual: the psychological, the biographical – geographical, and the societal influences. Super combines the socio-cultural environment in which an individual lives with the personality and developmental constructs of individual development. This archway model combines all of the aspects of personality development and all of the aspects of society. The model shows how these aspects work together, building on one another and interacting with one another to form the all-encompassing concept of the self. This is useful in looking at the whole person and the socio-cultural influences on the total person.

A second aspect to his theory is the Life-Career Rainbow (Super, 1990), which synthesizes the biological, psychological, and socioeconomic determinants of career development by noting the process of maturation and the change of roles throughout the life span. Super’s theory draws on the all the aspects of the personality such as needs, values, interests, and the influence of the society. Through the interaction of all of these
effects he comes close to including the inner, spiritual self in his theories, yet does not quite get there.

There does not seem to be any clear connection in career development theory to issues of spiritual nurturance or spiritual development through vocation. Present career development theories have not, as yet, examined nurturing the spiritual in career choice. Instead they seem to start from the same foundations in developmental and personality psychology and grow in a parallel path. What should be noted, though, is the possibility of one becoming more spiritually fulfilled by choosing an occupation that fits with her or his inherent personality or culturally developed skill base. Maslow (1971) talks about opening oneself up to oneself and finding out what one likes, does not like, and understanding of oneself as a step in leading to self-actualization. But can we assess certain careers as more or less spiritual? If one looks at the definitions of spirituality as Ingersoll (1994, 1999) and Elkins et al. (1988) discuss them (altruism, idealism, mission), one might point to those occupations that have a high interpersonal interaction or those that involve nurturing or caring for others or the natural world as being more spiritual careers. Yet mathematics or science careers, which may have little interpersonal interaction, may be considered spiritual by one who is involved in them, according to one mathematician who sees the universality of math to be a connection to the mystery and interconnectedness in the world (Nero, 2000). Perhaps finding that occupational environment with like others may provide one with a sense of interconnectedness with the world, a sense of meaning and mission in life. The purpose of this research is to determine how one chooses a vocation that expresses her or his spirituality. Perhaps all
vocations are spiritual if pursued by the individual for whom it expresses her or his own inner self.

Spirituality in Work as Vocation

_Spirituality in the Workplace_

Human resource development, management education, and training and development fields have been focusing on the integration of spirituality into work. According to some researchers (Brandt, 1996; Caudron, 1997; Leigh, 1997), workers wish to find meaning, personal fulfillment, and spiritual nurturance at work. These ideas for finding spiritual nurturance and meaning at work include ideas such as: writing human values into the mission statement, showing employees how their work is a part of the mission statement (Brandt, 1996; Caudron, 1997), increasing communication (Caudron, 1997), building trust and respect, and having a caring work environment (Leigh, 1997). Other ideas focus around the inclusion of nature by bringing in plants, installing sky lights, holding meetings outdoors (Brandt, 1996), providing opportunities for employees to exercise, offering courses on yoga and meditation, and getting to know fellow employees personally rather than simply in a professional mode (Brandt, 1996).

The important point is that spirituality is at once more fundamental and deeper than what is written in these articles. What is postulated by the authors as spiritual values in the workplace I see as human-needs oriented business practices. These practices are important for employee satisfaction and satisfied employees have increased productivity (the ultimate concern of the company). It is true that companies should put more effort and thought in integrating these activities into the workplace. That is not going far
enough, however, to call it integrating the spiritual into the workplace. In fact, I question whether the spiritual *can* be integrated into work from an external source such as the company. Spirituality, in its definition, is a personal construct for each of us. Tara Fenwick and Elizabeth Lange (1998) discuss human resources development initiatives for fostering spiritual nurturance at work. They are concerned that the bottom line idea in increasing a sense of meaning and spirituality at work is to make employees more satisfied, happier, and ultimately productive for the benefit of the company. “We argue here that the current positioning of HRD as it enters spiritual realms represents not a caring concern for a broken and searching humanity, but a bid for market share of vulnerable souls” (p. 65).

It seems more realistic to encourage employees to integrate their own personal spirituality into their work practices, as Groen (2002) examines in her study on integration of spiritual practices of adult educators into their work. I believe we must look at the integration of spirituality in work from the complete opposite direction – from the individual’s point of view of what is spiritual for her or him and then choosing a vocation which expresses that.

*Spirituality in Work in Adult Education*

Spirituality is a growing interest in adult education. In the last few years several articles, studies, and books have been written which focus on spirituality and adult education (Astin & Astin, 1999; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Groen, 2002; Tisdell, 2000, 2003). These publications indicate that adult education and spirituality appear to be a natural fit because many adult educators see their work as spiritual because it nurtures others.
In their book *Spirituality of Adult Education and Training*, English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) link spirituality and the historical foundations of adult education drawing on Moses Coady and Basil Yeaxlee. English et al. discuss the definitions of adult education as it relates to spirituality stating that

Education is about giving meaning to life and to living and, first and foremost, assisting the growth of the human spirit…. The goal is to help adults to grow and live abundantly as active participants in their communities and workplaces. (p. 7)

Their book focuses on several assumptions of spirituality and adult education. These include the notion that spirituality has always been a part of adult education by its very definition, spirituality can be encouraged and developed through education, and spirituality in the workplace is appropriate and valuable. They provide suggestions for practice in bringing spirituality to teaching through various approaches including bodywork, mentoring and coaching, creating sacred spaces, cultivating spiritual intelligence, providing students with space to identify their own meanings from the learning environment, and so on.

English et al. (2003) speak of eight spiritual dimensions including (1) the meaning of life and death; (2) soul and self; (3) cosmology, or the spiritual universe; (4) knowledge, or truth; (5) the “way” or journey, search; (6) focus, or spiritual seeking; (7) spiritual practices and other people; and (8) responses to spirituality. They indicate that these dimensions are more broadly defined than from a religious base, yet throughout their book they seem to compare different spiritual traditions’ – alias religions’ – aspects of spirituality. They have presented a discussion of spirituality based on others’ writings and in reading their work, it seems they take an intellectual approach to both their
definition of spirituality and means of supporting and enhancing spirituality in the workplace and the learning environment. This intellectual discussion is valuable and useful to adult educators in their practice and certainly utilizing their suggestions in the classroom is more beneficial than ignoring spirituality. Yet I believe that spirituality is not an intellectual exercise, but rather a personal experience that promotes awareness within an individual and a consuming desire to live one’s life in a spiritually congruent way.

In a study of meaning and spirituality in the work of higher education, Astin and Astin (1999) explored how college faculty members find a connection between their spiritual and work lives. Interestingly, some faculty felt their entire professional life was an expression of their spirituality. For some, spirituality had more of a religious overtone for them and use of the word “meaning” in their work lives was preferred.

Astin and Astin’s study was different than other discussions of work and spirituality. In several studies on spirituality and work, the investigation was on how respondents incorporated spirituality into their work (Acker, 1999; Caudron, 1997; Groen, 2002; Laabs, 1995; Leigh, 1997). But for Astin and Astin (1999), respondents talked about how their work gives them a sense of purpose and meaning. Many faculty members found meaning or expressed their spirituality in working with students, describing it as a sense of connectedness, “a service and a vocation,” and in the social justice aspect of making students “self-aware citizens of the world” (p. 6). When discussing their research and scholarly work, faculty spoke about feelings of awe, awareness of a sense of God found in the mysteries of the human mind, connection in the search for truth, a service through increasing a base of knowledge. One respondent found
a sense of who he was through his writing (identity). Another talked about a sense of losing the self in work (loss of ego). Many of these issues were found while working with students and doing research. As Astin and Astin (1999) point out, the faculty members in their study talked about their spiritual life and development in terms of three of Elkins et al. (1988) components of spirituality: having a mission in life, a sense of vocation or calling; a sense of altruism, sense of social justice; and sacredness or a sense of awe.

Further, Astin and Astin (1999) found that the aspects of their work that caused stress were often a sense of being personally inauthentic, regardless of the awareness or identification of this, or behaving in a way that is inconsistent with their beliefs and values. The ways faculty members were being inauthentic usually revolved around value conflicts causing them to compromise either their personal lives or the quality of their work. They felt inauthentic if they had to put on a false sense of professionalism when they actually felt unprepared or less than up to the job and time pressures.

Elizabeth Tisdell studied adult educators’ view of spirituality, culture, and how it informed their teaching over a period of five years. From this research came various articles (Tisdell, 2000, 2001; Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa 2001) and now culminates in a book (Tisdell, 2003) that carries a much more comprehensive and insightful discussion on spirituality and culture as it relates to adult educators. In her study on spirituality in adult education, Tisdell (2000) combined the factors of multiculturalism, social change, and gender to explore spirituality of adult educators, its change over time, and its influence on their work in education for social justice. As she notes, “There is clearly a lack of research-based literature about spiritual development in general. What literature that does exist gives almost no attention to cultural issues” (Tisdell, 2000, p. 313). Her
study begins to fill that gap by examining women’s spiritual development in a socio-cultural context. Tisdell (2000) focused on participants’ definitions of spirituality, the effect of spirituality on their adult education practice, and how their spirituality relates to their race, ethnicity, and cultural background.

Tisdell (2003) makes a distinction between spirituality and religion, which relates to Elkins et al. (1988) and is reflected in the participants’ expression of their view of spirituality:

Spirituality is more about how people make meaning through experience with wholeness, a perceived higher power, or higher purpose … an order to the universe, a sense of wholeness and interconnectedness, and a higher something, whether that was a higher self or a higher power (p 47).

Further, she makes seven assumptions about spirituality. These assumptions include:

1. Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated;
2. Spirituality is an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many refer to as the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit;
3. Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning making;
4. Spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment;
5. Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self;
6. Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, image, symbol, and ritual, all of
which are manifested culturally; (7) spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise (p. xi).

Tisdell (2003) contends:

It may be possible to engage in practices whereby one is more likely to experience moments of spiritual experience, such as through practicing regular meditation, listening to inspirational music, spending time in the natural world, or attending ritual celebrations. But whether or not anyone has what might be called a “spiritual experience” in any of these situations varies from person to person and almost happens as an unexpected gift. (p 35)

Tisdell’s (2000) findings indicate a process of moving away from and beyond childhood spirituality defined in more religious terms, reframing spirituality as a Life Force, interconnectedness, and wholeness, and a pivotal experience of a perceived higher power. Participants relayed the feeling that the development of this spirituality was the development of their authentic identity. Within their work, they found it necessary to have an integrated approach to living, which was displayed in their commitment to work for social change. Participants saw their work, whether paid or not, as “part of their life purpose and were also integrated with their personal and cultural history, and in many cases, an ancestral connection as well” (p. 328).

Tisdell (2003) found that for her participants, the … spiritual was found in creating a balance between inner reflection and outer action … doing social justice and cultural work that was grounded in their spirituality involved living an integrated way of life that included a way of thinking about and being in the world. (p 246)
As Tisdell (2003) points out, those at midlife are more likely to have “questioned, doubted, and explored other spiritual possibilities with openness and have gone on the journey of reclaiming and spiraling back” (p 112). She says that spiritual development is a spiraling back to one’s roots and making meaning through re-examining earlier experiences. She is careful to point out, however, it cannot be assumed that being in tune with spirituality necessarily leads to working for social action. She notes the possibility that cohort effects may be a factor because she found the spiritual dimension influencing social justice work among participants who were between 40 and 50 years of age. These participants were strongly affected by the Civil Rights and women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

As Tisdell argues, perhaps the type of work individuals do is not the issue but rather that for some, their work is congruent with their spirituality. Tisdell points out the possibility of a relationship between spiritual commitment and social action work and recommends this for future study. This current study acknowledges and examines this point.

It is not surprising that these studies of spirituality in work (Astin & Astin, 1999; Groen, 2002; Tisdell, 2000, 2003) focused on adult education and one’s work or vocation. The act of teaching is an aspect of expressing interconnectedness and a concern for the welfare of the world. The activity of learning may also be a spiritual experience, as the learner expands her or his sense of identity, gains greater awareness for others, and opens the self up to new awareness. Spirituality is gaining a focus in adult education literature in the form of emancipatory education (Tisdell, 2000) and social transformation (Tisdell, Tolliver, & Villa, 2001; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002), adult education practices
(Astin & Astin, 1999; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; English & Gillen, 2000; Groen, 2002), and transformative learning (Dirkx, 2000; Hart & Holton, 1993; Mezirow, 1994).

Tolliver and Tisdell (2002) explain their assumptions in defining spirituality in adult education as the awareness that people’s spirituality is always present in the learning environment: it is about how people make meaning, a sense of wholeness and interconnectedness of life, and the construction of knowledge through often unconscious, cultural processes. They indicate spiritual experiences often happen by surprise, invite people into their own authenticity, and are connected to culture through symbolic processes. Throughout these themes the impact of gender, race, and culture and their effects on spirituality, spiritual development, and spiritual nurturance are discussed.

How we understand the world and our place in it is influenced by our culture, cultural identity, and spirituality and sociopolitical development. This is especially evident since September 11, 2001. As adult educators who continue to work in support of a better world, it is incumbent upon us to better understand how culture, cultural identity, spirituality and sociopolitical development work together to make learners who they are, influence their thoughts about social justice, and influence their level of involvement in social action and transformational learning activities (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2002, p. 5).

To begin with, one must adjust one’s focus to seeing the inherent value of work. All work can be spiritual if one sees its value and connection in the world, as a participant in a study on integrating spirituality into work explained (Nero, 2000). Philosopher George Kovacs (1986) theorizes the value of work in people’s lives, the meaning of work, and
how work encourages self-transcendence. He sees work as an integral part of the human experience and not to be viewed as simply a process of making money, but necessary for the understanding, growth, and ultimately, transcendence of the self. There is a meaning-creating, potentiality of work that occurs through knowledge, justice, and compassion. He argues the individual is participating in self-creation through the socialization and education process occurring through the performance of work. He sees work as contributing to the psychological well being of the individual, creating meaning in the life of the worker. Through work, the individual engages in self-creation and self-expression, becoming more aware of the self and developing a sense of self-worth. He likens work to therapy leading to self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-recovery, creating meaningfulness in the worker’s life. Work is a human activity where the worker can grow from what she or he is to what she or he can ultimately become through the interconnectedness of life:

The human being is a worker, a working being, to the extent that his [sic] nature (life) is determined by the dynamic tension between what he [sic] is (already) and what he [sic] is not (yet) but still can be, by the movement from selfness to otherness, and by collaboration with the grasping of all that which ultimately is (p. 201).

Kovacs (1986) believes there is an aspect of self-transcendence that comes from the essentially human activity of work. Collaboration, a communal and social dimension of work, teaches the individual about and how to respond to the needs of others, creating a sense of unity through the exchange of services. Through the meeting with the self and others through work, work acts as a means of self-transcendence. He explains that work
is not just about the activity itself, it is always about something more, a goal or idea, in other words, meaning. Work is a way of reaching beyond oneself and touching others and the world around us. Meaningful work helps the worker to grow and expand. Through relationships with the self and others, it encourages the worker to overcome limitations or isolation. In this way, work acts as a transcendent activity, universalizing the worker. Work is meant to be a means of interrelating in the world, promoting an interconnectedness among the self and others.

While Kovacs (1986) sees great value in work as a means of transcendence, he cautions that work must not be the absolute goal: “The unbridled glorification of work and the cultivation of “workaholism” represent symptoms of inner meaninglessness, of existential frustration” (p. 199). He explains that work simply for earning a living is not the meaning of life. Meaningful work is essential because it is the meaning of work that transcends the work itself. The meaning of living is found through reflection on the challenges in life and through self-transcendence. But work is not the only way to find meaning or self-expression and must be in its right place in the worker’s life.

Kovacs’ theory on work may be a male-oriented view and the question of the meaning of work may be different for women. He does indicate the work he is referring to may be paid or unpaid, but ultimately, it is the work that provides meaning and growth in one’s life. This is the “work” I am referring to, that which is ultimately the work that is self-defining in one’s life. It is a vocation, that which one is called to do. It could be business management, teaching, counseling, social justice, painting, dancing, raising children or mathematics.
These same themes are found in various discussions of spirituality. Ellison (1983) suggests the human need for transcendence. This is the sense of well-being experienced when we find a purpose to commit to, this purpose involves meaning for life. This is a dimension of awareness and experience that he calls spiritual. And in his self-actualization theory, Maslow (1971) explained that the closer a person is to self-actualizing, the more likely she or he is motivated by truth, goodness, and justice rather than status, prestige, or dominance. Self-actualized persons are more likely to look for intrinsic value gratification in their work rather than the need to make money. Self-actualizing people are involved in a cause outside of themselves, some calling or vocation. They are working at something they love, in which there is a feeling of intrinsic meaning. The farther away a person is from self-actualization, the more she or he is concerned with gratifying the lower needs.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

There are two parts to this proposed research: the understanding of the development of one’s spiritual self and the question of how one becomes aware of her or his vocation and is able to integrate it into her or his life. After reviewing the spirituality literature and career development theories, I find that the foundation on which I would like to frame this study must be a synthesis from the two. Drawing on Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders’ (1988) nine components of spirituality and Kovacs’ (1986) philosophical discussion of the meaning and value of work, I have developed a conceptual framework on which to base this study.
Elkins’ et al. (1988) components of spirituality (believing in a transcendent dimension; meaning and purpose in life; sense of mission; awe, wonder, seeing a sacredness in the ordinary; not seeking satisfaction in the material; a sense of altruism; a sense of idealism; an awareness of the tragic; and benefiting from the fruits of spirituality) best exemplify a sense of spirituality, yet how each of these components is expressed may vary from individual to individual. Through the awareness and nurturing of these nine components of the spiritual self one perhaps becomes more in tune with her or his spiritual self and reaches a higher level of seeing the world and her or his place within it. In applying these components to the workplace, we can see how these can be used as a foundation for what Kovacs expresses as work as a transcending activity that helps to move an individual beyond the self and become a part of the greater humanity through work.

Throughout life, people are continually influenced by society and their role in society. The effects of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and religious heritage all have an influence on our spiritual development and, as such, will be considered in the progression of this research. I see Elkins’ et al. components of spirituality each as three-dimensional. While all of these components may be identifiable in one’s life, as one grows and becomes more spiritually attuned to the world, the means of expressing each component may change over time and with a deepening spirituality.
Summary

While there is great overlap in the definitions and development of spirituality throughout the literature, there are also some distinctions. These distinctions include the theories of spiritual development – with questions of whether spirituality is a hierarchical, human development process (Maslow, 1970, 1971), a developmental cognitive-identity development model (Fowler, 1981), or an expanding spiral socio-cultural identity development model (Myers et al., 1991). Additionally, there are dimensional models of spirituality that do not argue the development of spirituality, but rather, focus on defining spirituality.
These definitions and developmental models have psychological and religious underpinnings with some common themes including awareness of a higher power and issues of identity, be it in the colloquial sense, or in ego development. And there are precious few that focus on women’s spirituality and the effect of cultural constructs on spirituality.

There is a growing interest in the connection between spirituality and vocation. It seems that career counseling theories draw on some of the same psychological and personality theories as spirituality, traveling on a similar path and focusing on the inner abilities of the individual (as in the skills, interests, and in some cases, the needs). Yet career counseling theories miss the mark of integrating the spiritual needs into the theories and focus instead on more secular interests of the individual.

In the business field, while the intention may be to look at questions of meaning at work, the actions have been focusing more on employee satisfaction issues rather than the deeper questions and needs satisfaction. In adult education, we find the beginnings of a real focus on how educators integrate spirituality in their work, and these studies are more in tune with the deeper questions of the nurturance of the inner self. Yet none of these studies look at both the process of spiritual development and how a person’s spirituality helps her or him define her or his vocation. What we do know is that there is a great need for more empirical studies in various aspects of spirituality – both definitions and development – and in many applications. This study is one.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

One of the most consuming activities in life is one’s work, whether a career or an avocation, paid or unpaid. Because work absorbs so much of an individual’s time and energy, it may be a fundamental means by which people feel happiness, a sense of purpose, and value. If work requires people to spend time in ways that do not integrate their inner needs, they may feel disconnected from their sense of self and the world around them; they may be living inauthentically (Palmer, 2000). But with all the pressures of living in a complex society, how do people come to understand who they are spiritually, what is their life work or vocation, and how to align their work with their spiritual (inner) selves. In other words, how do they live authentically?

This research explores the life course of individuals who believe they are aligning their work with their inner spirituality. Rather than integrating spiritual practices into work (although certainly that is a way of achieving more authenticity), I am interested in those who have discovered their inner spirituality and, with that as their focus, chosen a vocation that facilitates their spirituality.

This chapter outlines the research design for the study. Included is a discussion on life history methodology, the criteria for participant inclusion and sampling procedure, data collection, and data analysis methods followed by a short discussion on ensuring trustworthiness in the study. Research questions include: (1) How is one’s spiritual self developed? What are the influences and defining moments that nurture and develop one’s spiritual self? (2) What is the process by which a person comes to know her or his
vocation? (3) What are the obstacles to living authentically? How are these obstacles overcome? (4) How does aligning vocation with work spiritually impact her or his life? What significance does this have for individuals?

Research Design

Qualitative research is a broad inquiry approach to the study of social phenomena; its various methodologies are naturalistic and interpretive, drawing on multiple methods of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). For the researcher, choosing the approach is an important part of designing the study as it reflects the researcher’s philosophical orientation toward the subject, substantially impacts the researcher’s views and interpretation of the data, and ultimately, the presentation of the research. Whichever methodology one uses, qualitative researchers are interested in the experiences of people in their daily lives, the complexities of their social interactions, and the meanings they attribute to these experiences and interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

This research is best served by the life history approach. A subcategory of the narrative approach, life history relies on the storied nature of lives, honoring the individuality of one’s experiences. Life history explores the personal, temporal, and contextual interrelationships that form the complexities of a life as lived as a unified whole. This approach reaches beyond the individual and places accounts and interpretations within a broader context of cultural, familial, educational, and religious influences, resulting in broader contextual meaning (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Life history ... is about understanding a situation ... through coming to know how individuals walk, talk, live, and work within that particular context. It is about
understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self and place. It is about comprehending the complexities of a person’s day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in that life so that insights into the broader, collective experiences may be achieved. Always, lives are understood within their respective and collective contexts and it is this understanding that is theorized. (Cole & Knowles, p. 11)

According to Hatch and Wisniewski (1995), life history provides the opportunity for exploring the stories of individuals and making connections to others and society as a whole. Life history approach best suits my research needs because I am interested in people’s life experiences, the social and cultural influences they recognize, and the meanings they make of these experiences. These are the stories of people’s lives. Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) surveyed several well-known qualitative researchers to obtain their perceptions of the distinctions between narrative and life history study. To illustrate the distinctions, I draw on four of the respondents. The first, Yvonna Lincoln, summarized the difference between life history and narrative inquiry as follows: “… life history is always the history of a life, a single life, told from a particular vantage point, while narrative may be a style of telling, a particular way of constructing the story of several individuals or a group …” (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 115). A second respondent, Paul Schempp, distinguishes life history from narrative thusly:

Insomuch as life histories are stories of people’s lives, they are narratives; but it is the connection of one’s life events to social events that distinguishes life history from other forms of narrative. The life is seen as being lived in a time, place, and
under particular social circumstances rather than a simple collection of events (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 115).

A third respondent, Ardra Cole, extends the distinction of life history and narrative to include the role of context:

... life history places narrative accounts and interpretations in a broader context – personal, historical, social, institutional, and/or political.... Narrative focuses on making meaning of individuals’ experiences; life history draws on individuals’ experiences to make broader contextual meaning (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 116).

Contextual information that may emerge and have an impact on the individual’s spiritual journey include family heritage, family culture, religious influences, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic conditions, health, gender, educational background, political conditions, and fundamental personal assumptions about the relationship of self to all contexts (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

Questions on how the participant understands her or his journey in life involves introspection and the ability to return to the research questions repeatedly and re-analyze the experiences from the point of view of the present context. The participant must be willing to explore and recapture her or his life story. While it is assumed that participants will be introspective and will understand certain aspects about their journey, the process of reflecting on specific aspects of their lives will undoubtedly open them up to greater insights and awareness. Reflecting on these various and personal aspects requires a sense of ease and trust between the researcher and the participant. The interview process is, therefore, a different process of self-discovery than the type of reflection in which one
typically engages. The quality of the responses is dependent on the researcher’s skill and the participant’s willingness for self-discovery. For the best possible introspection and self-understanding to occur, it requires a series of interviews with each participant to allow for the reflection and willingness to return to the topic later to modify or amend and to explore further (Groen, 2002; Jagielo, 1998). As co-researchers, the participants and I analyzed their experiences with the intention of becoming aware of the process by which they designed their lives to live authentically.

Life history is very much like a biography (Measor & Sikes, 1992). It is the telling of one’s story, one’s life, and re-creating aspects of life for the researcher to analyze and interpret. Because life history is about an individual’s lived experiences, the telling of one’s life story necessarily involves a degree of intimacy and trust between the researcher and subjects. Indeed, this relationship is central to the research. In life history study, distance and detachment could, in fact, stifle the subject’s ability to tell her or his story.

Research Participants, Sampling Procedure

This research focuses on understanding how those who are spiritually aware have developed their spirituality and how they have chosen work that authenticates their spirituality. Because I am interested in exploring how people have done this, it is necessary that participants have already been on a path of spiritual discovery for some time, having moved beyond preliminary self-exploration and be on a path of action at the time this research took place. Participants were identified through a combination of criterion-based selection and snowball sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Criterion-
based selection requires that the researcher establish a list of criteria that the participants possess; in snowball sampling, participants are named by someone who believes they fit the criteria. Snowball sampling is useful when the individuals being investigated are not identified by participating in any preformed grouping. In this case, networking through others who know individuals and believe they fit the criteria is the most effective means (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Participants were identified through my exploration and conversation with individuals. As I spoke about the objectives of my research, often people would tell me about someone they knew who might fit the criteria. Many times I was able to discern through the conversation that the suggested individual did not fit the specificity of my criteria and it would go no further. There were, however, some that appeared to fit. Another means of identifying potential participants was through the media. In several cases, individuals were brought to my attention through newspaper articles.

Once potential participants were identified, they were initially contacted via telephone or through electronic mail and introductions were made. A detailed explanation of the intent of the study and the reason they were chosen was outlined on the telephone or in the email (see Appendix A). I explained the objectives of the study and the proposed research question. If they were open to participating and felt themselves a possible fit with the criteria, I set up a telephone appointment for a few days later when we could both set aside approximately 20 minutes to talk. During this qualifying interview, I asked them qualifying questions about themselves to discern whether they would indeed fit the research criteria. Qualifying questions included: (1) What does spirituality mean to you and what role does spirituality play in your life? (2) How have you been attuned to your
inner self? (3) Tell me about your work. Why have you chosen this work? (4) If there was a change in your career, what precipitated it? (5) Do you believe your work is an expression of your spirituality and why? These questions were designed to approach the subject of spirituality and observe how articulate respondents were on the subject of spirituality, how comfortable they were talking about this aspect of themselves, and whether their answers followed the same tone as in my conceptual framework. I looked for answers that reflected several of Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders’ (1988) components of spirituality, including a sense of social justice or altruism, of being a part of the common humanity, of commitment to the betterment of the world, a sense of mission, meaning and purpose in their work, a sense of awe, wonder, or reverence in the world.

Other criteria I looked for included the following: participants needed to display a marked action in life that designated them as “spiritually aware” that they were able to articulate. This took one of many forms including a change in career or lifestyle based on spiritual awareness, increased and purposeful activity designed for personal, spiritual growth or for the good of society, or a definitive change in belief system or attitude based on spiritual awareness. Participants saw their vocations as in some way helping to make the world a better place and have a sense of interrelatedness in what they do, who they are, and how they relate within the world as a whole. Some participants had an “awakening” where they suddenly became aware that they were living inauthentically and decided that they will no longer not be who they really are. Others had a more subtle progression throughout life without a major shift but a steady movement toward their goal of spiritual integration. In any case, participants did understand and believe that their
work expresses their inner spiritual self. To ensure that their chosen vocation is not just
an idea, but truly something they believe represents their inner self, participants were
required to have been actively engaged in this activity for at least one year.

In all, I spoke with ten individuals: three men and seven women. From this group
all pre-qualified as fitting the criteria except one man, who was rejected from further
review. Lenore, Dee, Carol, David and Cheryl all fit the criteria, and were willing to put
in the time necessary. One woman was not interested in participating, and another woman
was interested but unavailable. A third woman fit the criteria, but her work was similar to
Lenore’s and she was out of state. I chose Lenore over her because of the opportunity for
a face-to-face interview rather than a long-distance telephone interview. A third man was
pre-qualified via email, with answers appearing to fall within my criteria. I began the
interview process with him, completing one interview. He was unavailable for continued
interviewing, and therefore could not complete the process.

It was my intention to identify potential participants of different race, gender,
culture, socioeconomic, and/or vocational backgrounds so that a good cross-section of
participants would be included. I was able to identify men as well as women, and a
person of color, although she was not available to participate. After final selection was
completed, all participants were of white European descent with the exception of Cheryl
who has some Cherokee in her heritage. Participants did, however, represent various
vocations, socio-economic strata, family and personal backgrounds, and life experiences.
Religious background was not a consideration in participant selection as spirituality, as
defined in this study, is not religion-dependent.
Once participants were qualified, they were told of the expectations in terms of time and depth of sharing and explained that the intention was for this to be a partnership. They would be co-researchers with me in creating their life story. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Once the criteria for inclusion were established and the person was appropriate and willing to participate fully, she or he was included in the study.

Each qualified participant received a letter that reiterated the purpose and nature of the research, assured the confidentiality of their responses, and asked for informed consent for the use of audiotaping, videotaping, the interview transcripts, and archival data in the research process and in the reporting of the research (see Appendix B).

All of the participants allowed the use of their first names. I acknowledged to them that with the use of their first names, combined with the availability of information on the internet, and the semi-public nature of their work, confidentiality could not be assured. All stated they were fine with this condition.

Participants were well grounded in their chosen vocation with experience and time behind them to validate the work they are doing truly is their vocation. Participants’ involvement in vocation ranged from four to thirteen years. Additionally, participants were between 34 and 54 years of age, and as such, are mature individuals with significant life experience.
Table 1. Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name, Age</th>
<th>Number of Years in Vocation</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lenore, 34</td>
<td>Catholic Worker and GI Rights Counselor-5</td>
<td>Less than $25,000</td>
<td>Yes - spouse is partner</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol, 49</td>
<td>Executive Director of Elephant Sanctuary-7</td>
<td>Less than $25,000</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dee, 43</td>
<td>Organic Pet food Company-4</td>
<td>$25,000-$35,000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>College graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David, 54</td>
<td>Sun Dance-13</td>
<td>Above $100,000</td>
<td>Yes-spouse is partner</td>
<td>Technical school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl, 51</td>
<td>Peacemaker-13</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes - spouse is partner</td>
<td>Technical school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carol’s elephant sanctuary and residence is a distance from me, so I offered to fly to her location and spread the interviews out over three days, one interview per day. She is a private person who confesses she has a “basic distrust” of her own kind. Because of this and her desire to protect the elephants, she is not comfortable allowing people into the sanctuary. She declined the in-person interview, preferring instead telephone interviews. Further, she is very selective to whom she gives her time and energy. I was lucky, talking to me felt right to her. She guardedly gave her time to me, but the depth and passion of her interviews was given freely.

Lenore’s interviews were held at her residence and house of hospitality. We sat outside in the front yard, under the cooling shade of a tree. Her dog, Scratch, checked on us periodically. The chickens in their pen clucked behind us. Our interviews were in June and July, usually a very hot time of year in North Carolina. But the temperatures are cooler in the country. Lenore does not use air-conditioning, but it was pleasant in the house with the windows and doors open and fresh air coming inside. I became aware that air-conditioning is a barrier modern life has between us and the natural world.
I met David and Cheryl at their farm. When I arrived, three dogs escorted my car down the gravel drive to their house. Cheryl greeted me on her front porch with open arms, welcoming me inside. I had spoken with Cheryl on the phone and via email, and she was the liaison between David and me. She was very interested in this work and open to participating. David, on the other hand, seemed hesitant to trusting my intention in this project. It seemed that he was protective of the Peace Chamber and of himself. Cheryl expressed confidence in participating, and he agreed. She took the lead on this. Once the interviewing began, David seemed to relax and believe in my sincerity and was able to be open about his experience.

I met Dee at her home and office where the interviews took place. She and her husband live with four Doberman Pinschers who met me at the door, barking loudly. Four Dobermans can be intimidating! Fortunately, they are nice dogs once they get to know you, I love dogs myself, and Dee keeps them very well behaved. Her three-legged male, Talon, spent the entire first interview with his head on my arm. Dee had a great deal of enthusiasm toward her vocation, her spiritual life, and our work together.

Data Collection Methods

Because of the personal and introspective nature of the study, it is unrealistic to believe that participants would be able to provide the depth of insight into their own spirituality through a one-time approach at an hour-long interview with a stranger. The best way to explore the subject of spirituality and its expression is through multiple conversations with a progressively in-depth and thought-provoking questioning strategy. This is best accomplished in a conversational style, over a period of several interactions,
so as to develop a climate of trust, intimacy, and free-associative thinking on the part of the participant. This would allow the participant to think and reflect from interview session to interview session. It is important to build a climate of trust so that the participant can relax and feel free to open up and take chances on telling a virtual stranger personal and perhaps intimate details about her or his life. For this to occur, I, as the researcher, acted with integrity, and did what I purported to do. I met participants at a time and location convenient for them, allowed participants to review their own transcripts and make adjustments as they wished, was careful not to make the participants feel they were in a subordinate position, and was respectful of their time, stopping the interview when the agreed time was up. The researcher must be sensitive to the subtleties of interpersonal communication, know when to ask probing questions and when to be quiet and allow the participant appropriate time and space to gather or articulate thoughts. I drew on my counseling background of listening and reflection skills, being careful not to make assumptions or lead the participant.

Interviewing took place from June to October 2003. I met with four of the five participants at their homes, which also served as their place of work. It was important for me to see them in their home and work environment for several reasons. First, I wanted the interviews to be convenient to them, but more importantly, I wanted them to have privacy and a sense of comfort. Additionally, I wanted to immerse myself in their world for the duration of the interviews so that I might gain more insight through observation of visual stimuli not only for the gathering of factual data on their vocations, but the intuitive sense of who they are and what they are about – a more personal look into their private lives. I met other family members, animal companions, and some other people in
their lives. In this way I was invited into their personal world. As a part of this, I shared appropriate details of my life and my spirituality (when asked) to convey a sense of sharing and to diminish any sense of unequal power. With all of the participants, I felt a sense of ease and warmth. I believe this was an important component for the depth with which they shared their personal, private journeys with me. Participants were open and willing to be audiotaped and videotaped, although they were more apprehensive about the videotaping. In consideration of the physicality of walking into someone’s home with a video camera, tripod, cassette recorder, and notebook, combined with the expressed apprehension of the first participant, I abandoned the idea of the video camera. The discomfort caused by the sight and the time involved in setting up the equipment swayed me to use less obtrusive audiocassette tapes. At the end of the research, as coding and data analysis took place, I again was in contact with participants for answers to clarifying questions, transcript review, and member checks.

The principle method of data collection for this study was a series of personal, semi-structured interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes each. Because depth rather than breadth is important, five participants were included in the study of two to four interviews apiece. Each interview extended from the previous, asked new questions, and included an opportunity for participants to return to any previous interview to expand, retract, or modify what was recorded earlier.

Interviews were not a series of questions, but instead took the tone of a conversation and began with one question, with continued probing, questioning, reflecting, and analysis of stories elicited throughout each interview. “It is as much about creating an atmosphere of security, intentional meaning making, reflexivity, and genuine
interaction around topics that are at once intensely personal yet vibrantly interesting to both parties ... where stories can be meaningfully told” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 75).

Interview questions followed the guide below, with each question proceeding in order, corresponding to the interview schedule (see Appendix C):

1. Tell me about your career path. How did you come to know what was your vocation? Tell me about how you feel your inner self helped guide or direct your vocation choice. What were the obstacles for you in choosing to live an authentic life? How did you overcome these obstacles?

2. I’d like to hear about your spiritual, or inner, development over the course of your lifetime. Think back to your earliest memory, and tell me about a defining moment that you believe influenced your spiritual development or illustrated an awareness of your inner self.

3. Reflecting on your inner self and your current vocation, how does aligning your work spiritually impact your life both positively and negatively? Compare this with other work you have done that was not necessarily reflective of your spiritual self. What significance does this have for you personally?

Probing questions focused on participants’ development of spirituality, ways participants integrated spirituality into their lives, factors that influenced their spiritual growth, life changing incidents that propelled them into more active pursuit of their own spirituality, feelings and observations about spiritual development and vocation. Because no one exists in a vacuum, and social and cultural forces influence us, subjects were asked to fill out an information sheet as part of the first interview, which included
questions on race, religion, work, and family status (see Appendix D). By making note of it, I was able to examine it and put it in proper context in each person’s life history, referring back to these dimensions in subsequent interview sessions to clarify or ask further probing questions.

I was as non-directive as possible during the interviewing process. I kept my questioning to the original base question to begin the interview, then subsequently only asked clarifying questions when needed. I tried not to direct participants to my thoughts and theories, but rather was open to being an interested listener, an observer to their respective life stories. Forcing too many questions or compartmentalizing responses during interviews would have interfered with their natural flow. When a person is allowed to speak freely without interruption or control of direction, I believe they are more likely to bring out the points that are significant to them. It is my belief that what is significant to them should be what I focus on in the analysis.

Often, people find spiritual expression or nurturance in the form of artistic or literary outlets. Artifacts and archival data are information about a life, usually speak to a particular time and place, represent much more than its obvious physical value and shed insights on a life (Cole & Knowles, 2001). In addition to the in-depth interviews, archival data from participants including information published by each on the world wide web, photographs, memorabilia, and personal items written or otherwise that they chose to share with me were secondary data sources. Each subject was asked to keep a reflective journal and record her or his observations, feelings, responses to the interview question or to keep track of ideas she or he might want to include in the next interview, but none were able to put the necessary time into it. Telephone and electronic mail contact were
Data Analysis

Data analysis is a significant part of research. It is the process by which the data, the participants’ words, are analyzed and categorized, and themes, generalities, and theories are uncovered. Marshall and Rossman (1999) emphasize that the raw data, in and of themselves, have no inherent meaning. It is through the researcher’s interpretation that an integral part of the data coding and analysis evolves. Therefore the researcher is the primary instrument through which data are collected, interpreted, and analyzed. “It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process” in the search to identify participants’ “truths” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150).

Glesne (1999) states that data analysis should be done simultaneously while collecting data. Likewise, Marshall & Rossman (1999) agree that data collection and analysis go hand-in-hand to coherently interpret the data. The researcher is guided by developing concepts and continuously adjusts them as more data are collected and analyzed.

Typical analytic procedures fall into six phases: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report. Each phase of data analysis entails data reduction as the reams of collected data are brought into manageable chunks and interpretations as the
researcher brings meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in
the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 152-3).

In this way, the researcher is better able to focus and shape the study as it
proceeds. This study incorporates the same philosophy and procedure for data analysis.
Throughout the data collection process, theoretical memos were written as to patterns and
emerging theories from participant to participant and from participant to literature. Notes
were taken and preliminary themes emerged. Since there were multiple interview
opportunities per participant, emerging themes and concepts were examined with subjects
as the data collection process continued. I was able to return to participants with
clarifying questions and obtain a more detailed description of events when necessary.

According to Polkinghorne (1995) qualitative data can be classified into two
types: diachronic and synchronic data. Diachronic data contains temporal information
and sequential relationship of events, describes when events occurred in time, and the
effect these events had on subsequent events. Synchronic data, on the other hand,
provides information about the present situation or belief of the subject and lacks
historical and developmental dimension. This life history research used diachronic data as
I was looking at paradigms of socio-cultural influences on the development of the
individual and the effects of events on spiritual development and choice of vocation.

Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining collected data. By putting
like pieces together, an organizational framework is created (Glesne, 1999). In
paradigmatic, or analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995), researchers collect stories as
data and analyze them by describing themes where stories are organized by common
elements or conceptualizations. There are two types of paradigmatic analysis: (1) where
concepts are derived from previous theory and are applied to the data and (2) where concepts are induced from the data (Polkinghorne, 1995). Both of these types of analysis were utilized for this study. Data analysis was processed through what Polkinghorne (1995) describes inductive analysis as

the recursive movement from noted similar instances in the data to researcher-proposed categorical and conceptual definitions. Through these recursions, the proposed definitions are altered until they reach a “best fit” ordering of the data as a collection of particular instances of the derived categories. (p. 13)

Audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself and an outside transcriber. To ensure confidentiality, the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement not to disclose any of the interview or identify the participants (see Appendix E). As the audiotape carries participants’ intonation, hesitations, and other means of expressing themselves, it was important that I review each transcript while listening to the recording. This ensured accuracy and acted as a reminder to me as to contextual meanings. As the words used are data, so are the way they are used to express a thought or feeling. Subtleties of expression and meaning were evoked through intonation and the nuances of speech. I noted all of this in the transcripts and throughout the data analysis. Codes were developed and meaning made based not only on the words, but the individual subtle meanings participants tried to convey in this way. Coding was recursive, moving back and forth among participants and among interviews until the most accurate interpretation possible was made. Themes evolved through data analysis that began to emerge into a theory of spiritual awakening and growth. As themes emerged, relationships were made among participants to determine if patterns exist and to identity
common denominators. Categories and supporting quotes were collected and presented in the findings, as well as connections made back to the literature. Because of the nature of the topic, it seems unlikely that the subtleties and nuances of meaning from a statement could be analyzed by a computerized database. All data analysis was necessarily accomplished individually by hand by the researcher.

After each transcript was finalized, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts and make any changes that they feel better reflected what they intended or delete anything that they preferred not to include. All reviewed their transcripts with the exception of Carol. Carol declined three offers the others agreed to: she declined to hear the interview questions up front, preferring to hear them for the first time as they occurred, and she declined both to review her transcripts and her member check of the preliminary analysis. She did not want to analyze anything she said in the interviews. She preferred an intuitive, non-intellectualized response and felt that if she reviewed and changed anything, it may be influenced by ego and not be authentic.

Trustworthiness

Triangulation is a method of pinpointing the accuracy of qualitative data by drawing on multiple sources of data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Triangulation was accomplished in this study by merging several types of sampling strategies. Subjects were identified by criterion-based selection and snowball sampling (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) so that the researcher was in a position to take advantage of new or unexpected cases. Additionally, triangulation was accomplished through the use of multiple sources of data: multiple interviews per participant, multiple sources of
information from participants including interviews, web publications, photographs, and artifacts. Finally, to ensure that the researcher is appropriately representing the subjects, participant member checks were offered as a means of confirming that the researcher interpreted their responses appropriately and represented their perspectives accurately.

Ethics and Limitations

I was respectful of interviewees’ privacy and very conscious of the fact that they were generous with their time and their personal stories. I believe I obtained good, solid data, yet I am sure had I been a more experienced interviewer, I might have been able to elicit more. I took a great deal of care not to overstep my boundaries; therefore I may not have gathered as much data as I might have. There were perhaps times when I might have questioned more. Additionally, my own frame of reference as a person of spirit and living within the socio-cultural context of my own life may have limited this research in ways I am not aware. Learning to listen and open up to another’s worldview takes some awareness. I tried to do this, but will never know those aspects that I missed.

While there is nothing about this study that could put participants at risk, whenever one is asked to share personal aspects of life, there is a degree of vulnerability. It is also possible that the act of introspection could cause some discomfort if a previously unacknowledged idea emerges or a decision is made based on the insights brought out by the research process. As in counseling, there is no way to foresee what will be brought out during the interview process. It is likely that insights and awareness would trigger a “peak experience” (Maslow, 1970, 1971) and be of a positive and spiritually enlightening type. In analyzing one’s life, certain patterns and themes may
have emerged for the participant, which may be used positively and constructively. It is also possible, however, that certain negative aspects of the participants’ life may cause a reopening of old wounds or crises. It is important for the researcher to be sensitive to this possibility and to encourage a participant who appears to be struggling with issues to seek professional counseling. Every effort was made on my part to ensure an emotionally safe and supportive environment for participants to explore their spiritual journey with me. Feedback after the conclusion of the research from participants was very positive. They reported that they enjoyed the introspection and that after reading their findings and preliminary analysis, three felt enriched by the process and that more learning and self-awareness had taken place.

As I am dependent on participants sharing their life stories with me, I am also dependent on their memories, the depth to which they wished to delve, and their own interpretation of the importance of an event. Each thought that comes to mind must first pass through their own internal screening as important and relevant to the research, and of course, something they were willing to share. They each made their own decision on what they told me and what they left out of the interview; they always had the option of not sharing aspects of their life. The questions posed to them were open-ended and the topics they chose to include were at their discretion throughout the research process. Yet each is intelligent, educated, and insightful. I feel confident they each know themselves best and was totally focused on our joint project as we were together.

Participants had the final right to amend or delete any part of their responses throughout the interview process. Confidentiality was offered by using a pseudonym for participants, but each participant opted to use their real first names. The audiotapes and
transcripts will be kept by the researcher for three years following the completion of the dissertation and subsequently destroyed.

Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven are the findings and preliminary analysis from the participants. Each chapter includes the narrative of the interviews. These narratives are for the most part participants’ words verbatim because imbedded in the words they have chosen are shades of meaning. Any paraphrasing on my part may lose some of the subtlety. Yet it was necessary to edit these interviews for organization, flow, grammar, and redundancy. This is a necessity for clarity and ease of reading.

Along with the narrative is a preliminary analysis. This preliminary analysis is meant as a means of pulling out particular points from the interviews with my interpretation. This is more of a means of highlighting points that I would like for the reader to attend. In Chapter Eight, I take all five participants as a whole and present a full analysis and interpretation. Finally, Chapter Nine is the discussion and conclusions along with implications for adult and higher education.
CHAPTER FOUR: CAROL

“This time I’m gonna do elephants!” - Carol

Introduction – The Short Story

Carol is the founder and Executive Director of an elephant sanctuary. The sanctuary currently is home to eight elephants rescued from circus or zoo mistreatment. Carol provides a home for these abused and exploited animals of “the industry,” giving them not only a safe place to live for the rest of their lives, but also offers them loving human caretakers to nurture and heal them physically and emotionally. At age 49, Carol’s vocational path spans 30 years. The first 20 years she was in the formative and development stages in which she describes herself as “asleep.” The last 10 years she has been living a life congruent with her spiritual beliefs.

Carol first began working as an animal trainer at age 19. She learned of a baby elephant that was being used for promotional purposes at a tire store. She volunteered to take care of this baby elephant (whom she later renamed Tarra) and began training her in a circus routine. Carol was able to book Tarra in circus acts and soon Tarra performed for money. Early on however, Carol found she was in disagreement with how the baby elephant was treated by her owner. Carol wanted to buy the elephant to rescue the animal from her circumstances. After several attempts, she finally was able to purchase Tarra.

Carol traveled around in the circus and in zoos performing with Tarra. Over time and exposure to “the industry” as she refers to it, Carol began to question aspects of herself, her future, and the future of her elephant. Her career in circus encouraged her ego-based outlook (the aspect of the self concerned with self-interest) on life. She found
this negatively affected her view of herself and caused problems for her as caretaker of an elephant who was growing up and being pressured to perform and live in a human world. Suddenly made aware of her ego-based life through a potentially disastrous event, she began her journey of personal growth resulting in a total revision of her career toward a vocation more spiritually congruent with her inner self.

After leaving the circus Carol went through a series of events leading her down her path until finally founding an elephant sanctuary. Her vocational path is a natural outcome of her desire for personal and spiritual growth. At no time does she profess to have organized or created her vocation, but rather believes that she had a path laid out for her by the Universe\(^1\) that she chose to follow.

Carol is well-grounded in understanding herself as a person interacting within the world. She appears to have spent a great deal of time and energy analyzing herself and the world around her. This has enabled her to better direct her own movements and personal growth to be more “on track” with who she believes she is supposed to be. “On track” or “in track” are her words that she uses to describe her place on her path. This is a path that she feels has been chosen for her, or by her, prior to this lifetime. Carol has a very positive outlook on life and describes events using words that reflect a sense of awe and wonder, such as “wonderful,” “phenomenal,” and “joy.”

Oftentimes, people are moved toward a higher plane of spiritual growth by a crisis. A crisis can be a positive or a negative event that causes one to stop and reexamine her life. It is an event that propels personal and/or spiritual growth. Carol objected to the word crisis because it carries a negative connotation for her. She prefers to simply refer to

\(^1\) Carol refers to Universe as she would a higher power, hence the capitalization.
it as an event, suspending judgment on whether the experience is positive or negative.
Throughout Carol’s journey, there were a number of events that influenced her path. These events are the stepping stones in her path of spiritual awareness and vocation.

Carol is fearless, strong, self-reliant, and determined. It is through these virtues that at age 21 she bought an elephant, went into the circus, then zoos, until finally founding a sanctuary. Yet she is protective of herself, expressing a “basic distrust of her own kind,” finding animals provide unconditional love that humans do not. She is also protective of her elephants as they are trusting, loving beings that humans have made vulnerable through captivity and exploitation.

**Carol’s Vocational Path**

Carol objects to the use of the word vocation in describing what she does. Vocation, she says, implies that she planned it, and she adamantly says she did not. Instead she says her spiritual path unfolded for her and has led her to founding an elephant sanctuary where she rescues and cares for elephants. Carol’s vocational path has been a result of her personal and spiritual growth. When she speaks of one, it is intertwined with the other.

I’m not sure that I’ve ever known what my vocation is. I’m not even sure that I could tell you what it is right now. I feel that I’m on a path. I feel like I’ve been on a path since I was about 19 when I had a sense that there was an energy going in a direction and if I didn’t fight it and sort of helped it, I would be taken in a direction that was positive. It felt positive. But I never did think of it as a vocation. I always chuckle when people ask about my vocational choice. Although I was solely responsible for all the decisions that I made, it was not that
I had a plan or a goal beyond tomorrow. And actually when I first started my career, it was that immediate satisfaction of being able to work closely with animals. That was my goal and I didn’t then and I still don’t recognize it as a vocational choice. And that just may be me personally. But when I look back and think about how my work or my career choices have impacted my spiritual growth, I would say that in the beginning my choices for a career really did not help my spiritual growth. I didn’t put myself into situations or environments that encouraged me to evaluate my actions and how they affect other people. Was this really how I wanted to be, how I wanted to act? I can only go back to how it felt. And how it felt, it was all about me. For a long time it was only all about me. So through my choices I put myself into situations that not only were not conducive to spiritual growth, but I also surrounded myself with people who were not working on themselves spiritually and somewhat ridiculed any talk that would go in that direction; any self-analyzing, any suggestions such as “I had read this book that was very powerful and it made me think.”

I remember clearly at that time in my life the goal was control. Everyone I was with, it was about control: them controlling their lives, them controlling every aspect of any influence in their life. Everything was about control. And when I started to really want and yearn for this spiritual growth, I had to let go of the control and that was very scary. And I hadn’t been in a situation where I was taught how to do that and I had never put myself in a situation where I was supported in letting go of the control. In fact I was told the opposite: I’m out of my mind for not controlling every single thing. So that is the beginning of how I
now see when these things started to fall in place. And I felt like I was on my path when I met this elephant; that is when things really clicked.

A major aspect of Carol’s pre-awareness in her career was the need to control. Once she began her spiritual growth, she learned to trust and let go of control. Through this letting go she was able to let the Universe guide her down her spiritual and vocational path.

*Carol’s Formative Spirituality*

Carol’s formative spirituality was intricately tied to her family culture. She was born the second of six children of an Irish – German ancestry. A product of a very close and loving, yet staunch Catholic, republican family. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom, whom she respected greatly for her strength. Her father was self-employed. Carol was raised to be very independent.

[my dad] instilled the belief that you work for what you get and that nothing is handed to you and nothing is free and nothing just happens. You have to work for it.

We went to church every Sunday, did all that stuff. All of my relatives, everybody was very Catholic. And I was a, sort of, sketchy believer. I questioned all the time. From the time I was growing up I questioned things and my dad would say that’s not for you to question, you just have to believe that it just is. And I found myself saying, “But why?” So when I moved away from home I didn’t not believe, I just didn’t practice. But I had a very strong connection to something. And I stopped calling it “God” because “God” felt so weird. So I just started calling it Her and I called Her the Universe.
Sent to Catholic grammar school, her formative spirituality was based on the Catholic school teachings and exposure to the nuns and priests. Carol was attracted to the nuns because of their kindness and their mysterious lifestyle, fantasizing about becoming a nun. As she was told that questioning religious teachings was wrong, Carol found answers to her questions another way: she would go into the church on school grounds and ask questions of the statues, staring at the statues until she saw them move. This movement on the part of the statues was verification, in her child’s mind, that the teachings were true. One day a Priest caught her in the church and scolded her. This is her first memory of her spiritual awareness, and ironically she was told she was doing something wrong. She eventually gave up on the idea of becoming a nun.

As her belief system began rejecting the formalized teachings of the Church, Carol found another type of spiritual connection that was more meaningful for her in nature.

Outside of school I immersed myself in nature. Now not exclusively, but if I was going to go “play,” I went outside and I would get involved, I mean really involved, to the point that I didn’t even hear anything else going around me. But it was always having to do with being out in nature, either going for a walk or going horseback riding. And I really thrived on the joy that that brought me. And what it did is, I would go in. I didn’t know that’s what was going on, but I would go in so deeply that I wasn’t even aware that anything else existed. And it really brought me a lot of peace. I’m trying to think back on what I was thinking about and I don’t remember what I was thinking. I don’t know that I was thinking about anything. But it was a very peaceful escape. I was a happy person, it wasn’t like I
was sad and trying to get away from anything in my life. I loved my family, I knew that they loved me and there wasn’t anything I was trying to escape from. It just felt good to do that. So even through high school there were some neighbors who had horses and I volunteered my time to clean up. In exchange, I got to ride horses. To me that was just the most amazing thing, you know, interacting and being with this horse. And then that would take me to this place, this just really peaceful not-on-this-earth place. It involved daydreaming and singing and just being, I think. You know, really disconnected or away from what would be considered reality, I guess. So anyway I have very, very good memories of that and when I look at it now I think, oh my God that was really being in touch with something, not necessarily myself yet. Through that time I was still very much into the religion, but I started to question some of the beliefs. And I noticed that the beliefs that I was questioning were those beliefs that were critical.

Carol mentions that she was really “in touch with something, not necessarily myself yet …” This statement indicates that for Carol, the inner self is a spirituality related to a higher power. As she moved into her 20s, Carol continued to find joy in nature. This love of nature, of trees, of animals, has sustained Carol throughout her life and has been one of the most powerful influences in her spiritual growth. It is through animals and nature that she has been able to open herself and be who she truly is. This has been the one constant in her life that has taken her along her path.

The other thing that from the very beginning has continually been a powerful influence on my life is my connection with nature and animals and my desire to spend time with them and to be alone with them. When I say alone I mean out of
the city, in nature. I have always found great joy in talking to trees. They don’t talk back, but it’s just something amazing about being immersed in nature and really feeling them, and feeling it, and know that it’s real and it’s alive. And so I learned early on, probably in my 20s, that my church was nature and my God was nature. And where I was rejecting the God that I met through the Catholic religion I was re-meeting that God with a different face.

Carol’s connection to nature and animals is something she has had to fight for throughout her young life and is what has sustained her to this day.

*The Journey Begins*

Family life was loving, secure, and comfortable. However, Carol’s longing for life with animals was a source of concern for and conflict with her parents. As a child, Carol collected traditional animal friends – dogs, cats, birds – but expanded to ducks, geese, chickens, a fox, and such animals that are not typical of residential life. Her mother, who was caring for six children, liked animals but didn’t have the time or energy for them. If Carol wanted another pet, her mother would automatically say “no.” She would express concern over Carol’s “unnatural love” for these animals, fearful that she wasn’t spending enough time with friends of her own species. Yet her father shared her love for animals and it seems that they enjoyed a special closeness through animals. Carol and her father had an agreement: she could give an animal to a family member as a gift and her mother could not refuse. “So we had this little deal going. As long as the animals were pets, he was totally supportive and enthusiastic about it.” Yet he gave mixed messages. Although he supported her in having animals as pets, he did not support her work with animals, which largely consisted of cleaning cages at the local pet shop.
eventually her mother’s worry over Carol’s passion for animals became so
pronounced that her mother felt she had to do something drastic to break Carol away
from her protective barrier of animal friends. Her mother’s perception of this action was
so different than that of a teenage girl, the effect of which was more profound than her
mother could have known at the time. She only realized what she had done to Carol when
she saw the look on Carol’s face. Unfortunately it was too late. This action became the
first event that began Carol on her pathway.

**Event One**

One weekend, while Carol was away (with human friends), her mother disposed
of all her animals in a humane way: the ducks, geese, and chickens went to a nearby
pond. Carol came home and ran to the backyard to say hello to everybody and they were
all gone. She was horrified and felt betrayed. This was a turning point for Carol. Her
parents had always been a safety net for her, but now she felt the net was broken. To
Carol no one could hurt her more than that, so there was nothing out in the world that she
couldn’t handle. This gave her a strength enabling her to move out of her parents’ house
and into the world to find her own way. Carol’s need to be with animals was so strong
that instead of diminishing her interest, this action caused Carol to break away from the
family safety net, along with family pressure, to begin her lifelong journey. Although she
moved out of their home, her relationship with her parents was not negatively affected.
Perhaps it was just the nudge out of the nest that she was looking for. In this way animals
were the catalyst for leaving home and it was ultimately an animal that led her down her spiritual and vocational path. Carol points out that it is surprising that she continued in the animal field because of all the opposition to this in her home.

*The Next Step*

Carol enrolled in college taking coursework on animal behavior. She quickly found a job in animal training. She did receive family support for training; at least it was a step above cleaning cages! But soon Carol met Tarra’s owner and Carol volunteered to take care of Tarra. Carol used her animal training to teach Tarra a circus routine and began booking Tarra for circus shows. Early on Carol found she did not agree with Tarra’s owner’s reasons for owning a baby elephant or how he treated the elephant. She was determined to buy Tarra from him, but he was not interested in selling and put up a series of roadblocks for Carol. He wanted $40,000 for Tarra and at the time elephants were being sold for $7,000. But Carol describes herself as “relentless” and finally went to an attorney to see what rights she had. The attorney pointed out that since Carol paid half of Tarra’s expenses and received half of her pay for the show, legally this classified her as a partner. As a partner she was able to file a restraining order so the owner could not take Tarra anywhere without Carol. Tarra’s owner was livid and finally agreed to sell her for $25,000. Carol wanted to rescue this particular elephant from her circumstances and it would take $25,000 to do that. So at age 21, Carol was the owner of a baby elephant and wrote a check with more zero’s than she could keep count! This was Carol’s first unwitting act of providing sanctuary for elephants.
Serendipity

Throughout Carol’s life she has been aware of events that appear to be coincidental, but believes they are organized by the Universe. I refer to these events as serendipity. Serendipity played a significant role twice in the circumstances that led to buying Tarra. Although Carol did not realize it at the time, the Universe was beginning to lead her.

That was one of the first things that when I look back now I say, “Oh that was not Carol. Carol did not do that.” Somebody took me by the shoulder and took me to the attorney and told me to say the right things because I was totally naïve. I had no idea of what to tell this guy. I mean, right now, to think about how I ended up at an attorney, I thought, how weird. How would I have ever ended up at an attorney? Because the other thing is it was so not like my family and how we were raised because my dad was always very critical of people who sued, you know? I mean, it was just not one of the things that he taught us or he believed in.

Right before I wrote the check when I met with Tarra’s owner and told him that I would give him the 25 grand for his elephant, I had just signed another contract with the park for a six-month engagement and I was going to make $25,000. Of course that just happened. The Universe did that so that I would feel confident to write the check so that I could make the next step.

Fear about how she would live – pay for herself and her elephant – never entered her mind. It all fell into place through the grace of the Universe and serendipity. Carol is optimistic, always has a positive outlook, and considers herself to be fearless. This was an asset in her decision to buy Tarra and in choosing circus performance.
When I decided to do circus, there was never any thought in my mind of any negative whatsoever. Buying Tarra was so exciting, so wonderful. People said to me, “Oh my God, the payments and this and that.” That didn’t even enter my mind. What always entered my mind is the positive. I’m pretty optimistic. And so being optimistic probably is what lends me to feel more like things don’t scare me as opposed to making calculated decisions and taking risks. So because I don’t see it as risks, it’s not such a huge leap to do. I mean it wasn’t like I had it all lined out in front of me: “This is a really risky thing, it’s only a 2% chance it’s gonna work, but I’m gonna do it anyway.” No, no. I looked at it and said “Wow, I wouldn’t rather be doing anything else! This is what I want to do. I’m gonna go do it.”

And I had no problem, no problem whatsoever. If I was short on groceries I’d get a phone call: somebody wanted to have a little elephant come out in front of their store on Saturday and they’d pay me $500 and that bill would get paid. And so every payment was paid on time and I didn’t feel any pressure. I didn’t feel like this wasn’t going to come together. So at the time I don’t think I was taking credit for it all falling together, but I didn’t even evaluate it. It was just like I was going 100 miles an hour forward and I just didn’t even look at it.

This was the first installment of a series of serendipitous events that made Carol aware of the Universe’s plan for her. This eventually became Carol’s new view of spirituality and a higher power. The God image from her Catholic school days no longer worked for her, it was replaced with a belief in the Universe as an energy force leading her down a pathway. She does not believe that she orchestrated any part of her path, rather that she is
a player in a higher scheme and has been taken along a path by this energy force, although she has absolute choice in the decisions she makes.

I very, very strongly believe that there is a greater power beyond us. But in my belief system is it’s not an individual or a thing with a body. It just is. It is this most powerful energy that we utilize, that we give back to, that we’re totally involved in. But there is an incredible power out there and I don’t know exactly what it is but I don’t put a human body onto it the way the Catholic religion does.

Carol repeatedly talks about letting go or giving up of control to the Higher Power. This is in direct opposition to her family upbringing as her father always advocated control and planning in work. Carol is a self-professed analytical thinker, when a friend pointed out to her that Carol “never feels anything, only thinks it.” Carol accepts that she is a thinker but has come to value the feeling aspect of being. She is learning that to feel your way sometimes is preferable to thinking and therefore is now practicing this approach. This “feeling” is related to her intuition, and intuition is related to the Universe or a “knowing” that comes from within. This theme is brought out continuously throughout her interviews and in many ways throughout her life.

**Awareness of the Ego: The Beginning of Self-Understanding**

Carol believes there are consequences for her actions and when she makes choices for the highest good, holding her ego in check, the Universe opens up and creates opportunities and positive outcomes. She says there is “something beyond me helping.” Alternately when making decisions based on ego, she “makes a mess of things.”

Carol and Tarra worked at an amusement park and then went on the road performing in the circus for 15 years. It was during her time working in the circus that
Carol became very egocentric. Her overpowering ego both was a blessing and a curse in many ways. Ego is what drove Carol in her work with Tarra, yet it subsequently caused some potentially serious problems that eventually carried her to a better place, a place of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and her spiritual self.

One of the things that was really obvious to me, and I started noticing it in my late 20s, is when I let my ego get involved with my decision making, what a mess! It was a mess. I would make poor decisions. Nothing bad ever happened, but it should have, you know? But I started to look at how I was really in my ego when I made this decision, and look at the results. And then in another circumstance I was doing it because I was protective of Tarra or something else and look at how much easier it was and the direction it took us in. So before I would make a decision, I learned to ask myself “where are you, where is this coming from, what is this about?”

And during that 15-year time I really had to battle with my ego because it was huge for lots of reasons. I think back on it now and I think ooh! I know it was a phase I had to go through but ooh, how ugly! I’m very strong and fearless. That just comes naturally. I didn’t work at that. That’s just how I am. And so it’s not surprising to me that the Universe would put me in an environment where I could just better myself. And that was in theater, in being a performer, being in the public’s eye. And there’s this thing that happens, I think, in any realm where you’re in the public’s eye: people put you up on a pedestal and it’s really a challenge not to buy into that. And you somehow start to see yourself as they see you, which is totally inaccurate. And it caused me to do things coming from the
wrong place. I would make decisions and my behavior and my actions would be prompted by my ego. And then I would be embarrassed by how I’d acted, wished I hadn’t done that and couldn’t figure out why each time I was in that sort of situation I would do it again. I just had to learn humility. And so I worked on that. It came in waves and Tarra was a great teacher. One of the wonderful things about me, living my life and Tarra being my mentor, is that almost like a child, I sometimes had a real selfless desire to do right by her. Most of the time it was about Tarra, but then when it wasn’t, it was ugly. But at least I could snap back into that “what is this all about?” This is about this animal, this wild animal, who can’t defend herself or take care of herself in this human world and I’m her provider and her guardian. And so that would get me back into a good space. At first I blamed circus but I realized it was just a venue that made it too easy for me to get into my ego.

I think with most people who are very strong, that ego is equally as strong. So I have to have confidence enough in the Universe, and I am part of the Universe, in myself and how I fit in to the big scheme of things. So I have to have enough confidence to be able to set the ego aside and say, “You don’t get to be in charge.” I think people can’t leave the ego until they are comfortable with another way of being because ego is easy.

This understanding of herself as controlled by her ego was perhaps the most important first step in Carol’s spiritual growth.
**Personal Growth Toward Spirituality**

Carol found that for her own spiritual growth she had to separate from the culture she was living in for the second time. This time it was the circus environment, which was impeding her personal growth. She wanted to be in a more nurturing environment. She gathered the strength to make the separation from an environment that she knew to something unknown.

My desire to grow spiritually and change behaviorally impacted my career choices. That is, my decisions on what I did in the realm of career, by the time I was 32 or 33, were very much as a result of what I wanted to do in my private, personal life. And that’s when my career choices changed dramatically. I consciously looked for jobs that would take me out of the industry. And what I was doing was getting away from my peers. And I knew the reason I was doing it is because I wanted to change. I was with them continually and there was a lack of support for any amount of change whatsoever, even the smallest increment. So I wanted to put myself in an environment where no one knew me and so whoever I chose to evolve into, that would be their first connection with who Carol is. And so there wasn’t any resistance to the difference or the change, so change came a lot easier. And I really quickly identified that and so looked toward career opportunities that were gonna allow me to grow. At the same time I was sensing that who I was when I was in the industry, although others may have thought it was good and appropriate, I did not. I no longer liked myself. So where I assumed that my career would dictate my personal growth, it did for a while. And then I decided to flip that, switch it, and it wasn’t easy at all. It was painful and it was
difficult. I must admit that I didn’t ever go completely back, but I did retreat back a couple of times to the comfort of what I knew, with the people that I knew. What I’d found is I was no longer comfortable in that environment anymore because I had changed enough that I had grown away from it. So what was fun and entertaining and comfortable a few years before, now with the amount of growth that I had done, was no longer comfortable. And so that was a good thing because it was a negative reinforcer. Why go back to a place that doesn’t feel good anymore? And then at that point I felt in limbo – and I thought well where do I belong? I don’t feel comfortable anywhere but I did have a real strong sense that that feeling was just a part of the growth and now I had the opportunity to make conscious decisions about the direction I grew in as opposed to when I was a child I just woke up one day and said, “This is who I am.”

Carol now consciously moved herself from a place of familiarity to not knowing where she was going. While uncomfortable, it was a necessary step in her spiritual growth.

She knew she had to make a change and decided to change from circus to zoos. Certainly, she thought, a zoo is a better environment for an elephant. But throughout it was Carol who was pushing Tarra, and Tarra who was made to perform and be something she was not: a human-made caricature of a natural, wild elephant. Carol and Tarra continued to perform in zoos. And Carol relates another event that was so dramatic, she had to act on the message she was sent from the Universe.
Event Two

So I started to notice that Tarra would do these little aggressive things to people and I was in denial, not my Tarra. My Tarra is perfect. She would never do that. And so I denied it to the point that she actually went after a person and smashed her up against the wall and then looked at me as if to say, “Yes, your Tarra.” Now this incident happened at a zoo. We were doing rides at the zoo and I was relentless with her. It was this sick pride, I was so proud of her. But I realize now I was proud of how she reflected on me. And so we were doing rides, it was summer, hot, it was horribly hot. And I just pushed her and pushed her and pushed her because she was so good and I would just push her more and push her more. And we were leaving the rides and this lady that worked there, luckily a very big woman, came out of the concession stand and wanted to give Tarra bread. And Tarra was in a pissy mood, and I could see it on her face. She was in a pissy mood. But you see, I never allowed Tarra to be anything but perfect. So when she was in a pissy mood I’d say, “Cut it out. You’re not allowed to be pissy. You’re not allowed to be in a bad mood. Just take that bread and be nice.” Well she took the bread and then she just lunged at the lady and slammed her into the wall and was pushing her with her head. And by all rights, the woman should have been dead.

But the woman wasn’t dead. She was hospitalized, x-rayed twice over her entire body and she was fine. Incredibly, the media never learned of the incident. Carol was allowed to continue with Tarra as though it never happened. But Carol could not simply continue. She felt that this was the Universe’s way of giving her a message.
In my mind the Universe’s lesson was not that this woman was to suffer or that she was to die or anything like that was to happen. The Universe was trying to get me to wake up, pay attention. And I’m so stubborn that I truly feel this was the only way that She could get my attention and say lookit, bad things will happen if you don’t wake up. Now this woman had no broken bones, she had a scrape on her chin, like a rug rash from Tarra’s trunk. Nothing more serious happened because that wasn’t the point. The point was, Carol, wake up, pay attention. You’re on your path but you’re kinda off the edge over there and something bad is gonna happen unless you start to pay attention. So at that point I really got it. And I said, “Okay, alright. I’ve got to get out of my own way. I am in my own way. My ego is really affecting me and I have got to put my hands up and say, show me where to go, show me what to do.” And that’s what I did. I said, “Show me what do, what do you want me to do? What is it I’m supposed to do?” And the message that I got was: Tarra needs to be in a safe place where she can’t hurt anybody. And the only thing that I could think of was to find a facility, an institution that has elephants, so she can be with other elephants where they don’t let people come in and do rides or any of that stuff. I said, “Okay a breeding facility or a zoo,” and I agreed to the Universe. I said, “If you will help me find that place, I will let her go. You know I will let her go if that’s what I have to do.” So right away I made a bunch of phone calls and nobody had heard about the incident. Nobody knew this had happened and that just blew my mind. So I found three places that were willing to consider taking her. I went to the first one and there was no way I could make her stay there because the yard was like 10’ x 50’.
She’d have to spend the rest of her life in a 10’ x 50’ yard and I can’t do that to her. So I went to two other places and the third place I went to was maybe marginal. I could do that. I haven’t even gone home yet and I get a phone call and it’s a friend of mine, a girl I went to exotic animal training school with. And she said “Carol, I heard what happened,” and at that time she was co-owners of a small zoo in Canada. She said, “We have seven elephants. We’re looking for a supervisor. You and Tarra can come here.”

And I thought, oh wait a minute. I agreed I would give her up. I agreed that I would do it if the Universe would find a place. And that’s all the Universe wanted to hear is, “Will you do the right thing?” “I’ll do the right thing.” “Okay fine, you and Tarra both get to go.” So you know, amazing, truly amazing. And my friends in the industry say, “Your life is magic.” I don’t know how these things happen because they’ll say to me, “Oh that can never happen” and boom, it happens. So we went off to this place. It was great because Tarra now was in with a bunch of other elephants. She got to see that there was more to life than being pissed off at me. There was greater things to worry about, bigger elephants to worry about, and a whole new world for her. And I got to have her in a safe place where people weren’t going to be around her. So that was a great relief for me. And that started us on this path of my saying, “I am open if Tarra’s future is not with me, if you show me the place, if it’s good for her, I’ll be willing to let go. But if I don’t have to be separated from her, I’ll do whatever it takes to be with her.”
That was my beginning of recognizing that I was on a search for a good place for elephants that was actually going to be like a sanctuary, but I didn’t even know what a sanctuary was. I was sort of building it in my mind. That building was really going on from the time she was about 13. About that time I recognized that she can be dangerous, she could hurt somebody. I really do need to protect her, how am I going to do that and what happens if I die? If I die she’s gonna go to a zoo or a circus. I will roll over in my grave. I cannot do that to her. I’ve got to make a place for her. I just figured zoos had that philosophy and then of course, sadly enough, found out they do not.

By this time Carol saw that the Universe would take care of whatever she and Tarra needed as long as she was willing to trust it and let go of her own control. She was becoming confident that the answer was clearly laid out for her. However, what appeared to be the answer actually ended up being a problem, for at this zoo Tarra was beaten when Carol wasn’t there. Carol relates how Tarra tried to tell her.

_Event Three_

And when I came back the first time, she was telling me. She was talking to me and grabbing me and telling me that something horrible had happened and I couldn’t even envision what it was. And luckily one of the other employees there, it took him a couple of weeks to tell me, but he came and he told me. And it was horrible; it was horrible. And I felt so guilty because here was the first time ever that I had ever put Tarra in a situation where other elephant people could touch her.
It seemed that the Universe was again telling Carol, “This is not the answer. Try again.”

So Carol asked the Universe for help in where she and Tarra could go, and she got a phone call from a friend in the zoo industry, another act of serendipity.

She said, “You know what? Your life is magic. I don’t understand your life. I just got a call from the director from the Wisconsin Zoo and he’s looking for somebody. I recommended you, he said he’d hire you.” At this point I was not at all surprised when these things happened because I’d learned all I had to do was put it out there. All I had to do was say, “Help me. This is what I think I need. Show me what to do. I’ll be willing to do whatever it is you want me to do, but help me.” And then it would flood in, immediately, within days it would come. So I loaded her up, we went to Wisconsin and it was really wonderful. It was wonderful for her; it was wonderful for me. We made best friends with the only other elephant that was there. Tarra adored this elephant [Rasha]. They adored each other. It was heaven. This elephant had been mistreated. She had been so mistreated and we were able to bring her out of her shell, I mean all the way to bringing her out of her enclosure and walking around in the zoo and it was pure joy. I mean it was just amazing. And then I had this sense of, “Guess what, you don’t get to stay in this place. Okay this was a little gift. Now you have more work to do.” And I begged, “Please don’t make us leave.” But I knew, I felt it, okay, we have to go.

Carol put together a proposal to take both Tarra and Rasha to a breeding facility in Canada with the hope that both elephants would become pregnant and return to Wisconsin to deliver their calves. Through a program she carefully planned, there would
be benefits for all involved. The zoo would save enough money while they were away to
totally renovate and expand the elephant habitat and upon their return, would gain
prestige in housing two baby elephants. It was approved by the zoo director and off they
got to Canada. Carol describes this adventure as “phenomenal.” At first she thought it
was her own hard work that brought about these results. Later, as serendipity kept
bringing her new opportunities, she began to see it differently.

When I look back, I know that into my middle to late 30s I still was under the
impression that I was making all of this happen. That it was my efforts and my
work that was bringing about the results. It wasn’t until my late 30s that I started
to have some realizations where I thought, you know what? There’s a big plan
here and I’m a part of it and I’m making decisions and these decisions are leading
me in certain directions. It’s not the decisions are right or wrong but I can now
start to look at and sort of understand that, well, if I decide to do this, this is what
will happen. And I have a choice, and it’s my decision, and there’s no criticism on
what choice I make. But I could then start to see that there was a greater power
than my own. The biggest struggle I had in that was to let go to the point that I
would let that greater power lead me because I was afraid from my upbringing
that if I didn’t, if I wasn’t the one making the decisions and doing all of that, that
it wouldn’t happen, that it really was up to me. And so that was sort of like the
time when I started to recognize that I was supposed to do the work. I was
supposed to do my part but there was something beyond me helping.

Not only did Carol see the Universe was helping her, but even more so there was this
work to be done and Carol was the one chosen to do it.
**Event Four**

At this point Carol was feeling very confident the Universe was on her side, and as long as she had Tarra’s best interest at heart, everything would work out. Unfortunately, lessons were yet to be learned, and the path was not complete. Carol lost control of Rasha as zoo management in Wisconsin changed hands and a new director called Rasha back, away from the breeding program, to live in chains without Tarra or Carol. Carol describes leaving Rasha in this environment as the second hardest thing she has ever gone through.

Meanwhile, Carol soon discovered Tarra was pregnant. They left Canada and found a new zoo in Tennessee that shared some of Carol’s philosophy. Tarra would be able to deliver her calf there, and they would live in a safe, nurturing environment.

**Event Five**

So by the time I made my way to the Tennessee Zoo, they bought into the philosophy. Tarra went into labor in March and she had a very, very difficult labor. And she delivered a stillborn baby. And I couldn’t have been more shocked because by that time in my life I really felt that Tarra and I were incredibly blessed and that anything relating to Tarra and trying to do good could not go wrong. And I had a very hard time figuring out how this went wrong. How could this have happened? How could this baby be dead? Why is this baby dead?

And in that time of mourning, which Tarra was mourning as well, I had a total change in attitude and direction on what I wanted to do with elephants and
how I wanted to do it. And sanctuary came on really strong. The image was in my mind. I saw it; I knew it. I knew what I had to do. And it was because of Maya’s death, because of that baby dying and not living, we were able then to take the path that we were supposed to take, which is a sanctuary. And when I think of Maya I think how sad, how sad she couldn’t be here with her mom and live in the sanctuary. But the sanctuary would not be if she was alive. She was the catalyst for that to happen. So right after that when I started to recognize that’s what was happening, I looked for property, found the property, bought it, and that was the beginning of the sanctuary. That was eight years ago.

Carol refused to describe this event as a crisis or as negative because although it was sad, she realized it was necessary to move her the last step toward sanctuary.

*The Tunnel*

Throughout Carol’s life there is a pattern of moving forward, stepping back, reassessing, followed by forward movement again. Carol asks for and receives answers from the Universe and through these serendipitous events the Universe seems to be guiding her path. Things appear to be going in a positive direction, then an event occurs. This event leads Carol further down the path taking her to another event. Eventually through the series of serendipity and events, she slowly began the awareness to develop the elephant sanctuary. Throughout her journey Carol describes an energy pattern that she has learned to recognize and predict.

There’s an event that happens and it may be an event that was very painful, very stressful, frightening, all of that stuff. But absolutely each time that there has been an opportunity for a major move, shift, growth, whatever, there’s always been a
time, a long time that feels like a dark tunnel. And it feels like it, it looks like it. I feel like I’m stagnant. I can’t get anything to move. I can’t make anything happen. Nothing’s happening. I’m feeling like, “What am I doing?” And then there is this thing that happens. And the moment the thing happens, everything shifts, the energy shifts, doors open, the light’s on and all of a sudden I better put my hands up because everything’s coming in right then. And this is a pattern. Of course I didn’t recognize it in the beginning, but now I can feel it coming. I know when I’m in it and I know what’s to follow. And that’s the great thing about it: I know what the pattern is so that I don’t have to get really stressed out about being there in that dark tunnel because I know what that’s leading to. It’s bringing all the energy to the center. It’s concentrating it. Things are going on outside of my control. They’re getting ready to just take off. And I just better be ready when the doors open, the lights turn on and it takes off again. And so it’s great for me now that I know it because I can be prepared.

Carol believes this energy pattern had been occurring all her life, but she only started recognizing it about the time she started the sanctuary. Recognizing it is of major importance because she can prepare for it and relax during the dark times, confident that the energy is shifting and a positive outcome will occur. She relates good-humouredly that it took her until about age 40 to recognize it; she was only semi-conscious before that! She relates that it is only through growing spiritually that she even recognizes it at all.
Finally Carol begins to know that what she needs for Tarra is sanctuary. Once she understood this she began to envision it in her mind to the point where she saw every tree, every leaf before she ever set foot on the piece of land.

When I first started the sanctuary I saw it very clearly. It was a picture in my mind. I actually saw it and felt it with every fiber of my body that’s what it was. It was 110 acres and seven elephants. And indeed when we started, that is what it was. And if the picture would have been any bigger, any grander, any more complicated, it would have been much too frightening. So I understand completely why the Universe doesn’t give me the whole picture. She only gives me what I’m able to deal with in the moment. And now the picture keeps getting bigger and bigger and I can deal with it now. So when somebody says to me, “What’s the future of the sanctuary?” I haven’t a clue because She’s not letting me know and it’s probably very wise of Her to not let me know. But the sanctuary has gone from this dream that I saw, this picture that I saw of 110 acres and seven elephants, to now 2700 acres, building our third barn, bringing in another species of elephants which was never in the picture, and being very comfortable with knowing that we could house a hundred elephants. So I don’t know what the sanctuary is going to be. I do know that I’m very, very honored to be involved with this project. And that’s why I have to use the word ‘involved’ because it’s beyond me. It’s way beyond me, but I am the person who believes, you see.

When I think about the sanctuary, I don’t think in terms of goals and objectives, of goals I want to reach. That’s the way I used to think and I don’t do
that anymore. And it’s because I have learned this different way of being, which is trust and believe. And because I’ve been fortunate to be in this situation for almost 10 years of being able to believe and it happens, believe and it happens, I now don’t even think twice when a situation comes up and it’s incredibly horrendous and very stressful and I could spin out of control on this one. Because as long as I stay on my path and I’m doing my work for the right reasons, then everything comes together as it is supposed to. It doesn’t mean that it’s easy, but it will come together. Nothing is going to fall flat on its face unless it wasn’t supposed to be. So that’s my belief and to me there’s no explaining it, there’s no need to have to defend it. It simply is. And my reason for living is that I can truly believe that what I’m doing is sound. What I’m doing, if it never benefits more than seven elephants, that’s exactly what it was supposed to do then. If it benefits 100 elephants, that’s what it was supposed to do. Whatever my work does is exactly what it was supposed to do. And if I establish ego-based goals, then I’m off track. And I’ll feel it. I will actually physically feel I’m going in the wrong direction and I have to pull myself back over and go rip! you’re supposed to be going this way.

The sanctuary and Carol are one. There is no distinction. It is her vision, her passion, her life mission. Through her daily work at the sanctuary, she is living out her spirituality. She relates that her work with the sanctuary is interspecies, it’s interconnected, and the sanctuary is sacred ground to her.
Career Change

At about the time Carol became aware that she needed to get Tarra out of performing and away from the public, she also needed to grow personally and spiritually. She learned about some land in Ojai, California that would be perfect for her and Tarra to live on. She purchased a small amount. Unbeknownst to her, Ojai is a town known for spirituality, and people there are very much working on their spiritual growth. This environment was ripe for her to make a change from the superficial world of circus performance to a more authentic inner spiritual life.

Carol needed to work to support herself and Tarra, but realized that she needed a career change. She had an interest in chiropractic because of problems she had with her back through circus performing, and took a chance on a school in Ojai to train her in therapeutic chiropractic. A short conversation on the telephone and a down payment for the six-week course committed her to the training and career change. When she got to the class however, it turned out to be massage therapy, not chiropractic. She was horrified and felt that she made a terrible mistake. But through a wonderful teacher and a sudden understanding that this was therapeutic, she “got it.” This was transformational for her – massage provided a service and a spiritual outlet to connect with other people through touch and through healing. She excelled in schoolwork for the first time in her life. She credits this experience as giving her confidence and a new career that took her out of performance and began her inner spiritual journey. Again serendipity plays a part: from where she lived in Ojai, there were hot springs 10 miles away from her home in both directions. Vacationers would come and request massages. She became the on-call
massage therapist. In this way she was able to work in a spiritually congruent way and still pay the bills to care for Tarra.

So of course by this time I was very entertained by the Universe and her plan and how she did everything. I found it to be so cute. I just thought it was the best thing in the world that if you looked you could see there’s a grand plan here and you are a part of it but you know come on, I couldn’t have orchestrated that if I’d tried. I didn’t even know those hot springs were there! So what that did was allow me then to make a shift out of that career which was not feeding me the way that it needed to or not allowing me to grow and not depriving Tarra in the least. There were a lot of wonderful things that happened during that time and I think the credit all went to the environment that I was in, being able to really learn more about myself and being in an environment with people who were very supportive to that growth.

*Her Inner Spiritual Journey*

Besides an opportunity for her career change, Ojai provided Carol with a nurturing community. She became involved with a community of women actively working on their spirituality. At first she was suspicious because “they all have bizarre names and they dress weird and they’re walking around like airy fairy and they just don’t have a mean word to say. There must be something wrong here!” But she was attracted to their peaceful natures and wanted to learn more. She became friends with one of the women who asked her to attend one of the group meetings.

And I was so uncomfortable and that feeling that you get in your gut that run, run, this is not the place for you! I was so uncomfortable but I stayed because I wanted
to prove that I was tough, I could sit through all of this. And they were talking about stuff I never experienced and didn’t have an interest in experiencing. I felt totally on the outside and totally, totally disconnected. I couldn’t wait for the hour and a half to be over. And of course then to top it off, they said they were gonna sing but they didn’t sing, they chanted. And I thought, “Okay, alright, it’s a bunch of witches and here I am in the midst of all this. What in the world is going on?”

So I was incredibly uncomfortable and I went home and I sat with it and I went out in the woods and I asked, “Why am I feeling, what is it, you know? They’re not bad, these people aren’t bad, why am I so uncomfortable?” And the message that I got is: “Because it’s not what you’re used to. You’ve been running away from this all your life.” And how what I call the Universe helps you to avoid things is to make it feel uncomfortable, so that’s what’s going on.

So she went back, perhaps out of curiosity, perhaps to prove she was tough, or perhaps out of an inner knowing that this is what she needed. This time when she went back they had a series of rituals that included celebrating springtime with a birthing ritual and a foot-washing ritual. She continued to be “shocked and appalled” and so very uncomfortable. In the process she realized it was all very intimate and suddenly she had another transformational experience.

And bingo! I mean, I had worked very hard to guard that part of me and not have to be in touch with that. So after the foot washing, I don’t know what happened, I agreed to start going back. So finally I joined this group and it was very painful the first few meetings because I just felt so out of my element and out of place. Then I was happy that I stayed because this was life changing. This group was life
changing for me. It was twice a month and that was what brought me to consciousness about my spiritual path. I went from totally, totally having no respect for the feminine, and that was it, my disrespect for women was a reflection of how I felt about my feminine. I was afraid to let it out. I was afraid to be soft, to be vulnerable. It was much easier for me to be hard and callous and all controlling. That came easy to me. It felt safe to me. It just felt way too vulnerable to be feminine. And what it did was it showed me that what I hated was my feminine, not every other feminine. I hated myself and that’s why I was letting my masculine just run over the rest of me. And as soon as I identified that and worked through that and allowed my feminine to have a voice without taking completely over, then it was much easier for me to deal with that control that I wanted over my ego. Because I found that my ego was my masculine part just running over everything and everybody.

So I stayed in that woman’s group, well, I didn’t leave ‘cause I wanted to, I left ‘cause I moved. But it was incredibly powerful. And it was during that time that I started on what I would call my spiritual journey. That’s when I started to do some work and start to find out who I was. And to me it was like the blinders were taken off and I was amazed at the big huge world that was out there. And you know really what I felt from this group is powerful women, incredibly powerful women, all individuals coming together for two hours. And the energy that you would get from that was amazing. And it was like the best example that a person could have is to look at these powerful women who know themselves, who are continuing to work on themselves, who are accepting themselves for who and
how they are. What better example for those of us who are struggling to find out who we are? So it was excellent. And there was always at least one statement made that I believed was the reason that I would go. I came to look forward to that one statement or one sentence that somebody said that I was meant to hear that moved my personal growth forward. And it happened every single time. So it was a very positive experience. It was very hard work because here I’m seeing things about myself that I didn’t want to see or in the past was not willing to see. Then the next couple of weeks I would ponder on it, work on it, think about it. And the growth was rapid. I mean it was really rapid and I was primed. I was ready. I wanted it. So the woman’s group was the thing and it brought me so much understanding. Through the woman’s group we’d pass books around and just, amazing books I would have never read. And so through my time living in Ojai, which was about nine years, it felt good to find what then I realized was my spiritual connection.

Carol says she “was primed, ready.” This is an important point because as she was ready, she was willing to do the self-work to make the growth she needed and wanted. Carol sees her personal growth as spiritual growth. This women’s group was another form of separation from her familial culture and thereby expanding her growth. It not only helped Carol accept a part of herself she had previously not accepted, it also grounded her one of her main spiritual beliefs.

And one of the things that I felt got me back on track is a conversation I had about reincarnation. And of course when I was growing up in the Catholic religion that was taboo. You didn’t talk about it. It was sinful, it wasn’t real, it wasn’t true.
And I analyze things a lot; my brain is always going. So when somebody started talking about reincarnation, I was very curious to hear what the conversation was about. It caught my interest. I started listening and then I started asking questions. And so by the end of the conversation the feeling I had was that I had just connected back in. That I heard a belief system that made sense to me. I had always said what is the purpose of living 60, 70 years and then dying, and then going to heaven? What is that purpose? Number one, it feels very selfish. It feels like, okay you spend all that time living but then you get to go to heaven, your little person gets to go on to heaven and there you are. I thought, “You know what? If I’m going to believe something, it’s gotta make sense to me. It’s gotta feel real.” It seemed like a whole lotta waste of energy. You know, what about all the time this person spent, all the things that they learned, everything? So in hearing about reincarnation the way this person explained it to me I went, “Oh my God, this makes perfect sense.” Absolutely. The energy just doesn’t, poof, go up to heaven or disappear. The energy goes on, and carries on, and the idea of what we do in this life affects our next. And that we have a choice. Our souls do sit in a place where we can stay there, in a nonhuman form. We can stay there but we’re encouraged to grow. So we’re encouraged to go back and try again and the things that we worked through here and we learned here we’re not going to have to repeat, but if we don’t work through them here, and it’s our choice if we don’t want to, we have total choice, but if we choose not to, that lesson will come up again and we will choose it again. And people say to me, “How have you had such a blessed life?” Well, I really don’t know but I’m sure I was sitting up there
looking down going, “Okay this time I just want to have a grand adventure, I just wanna do something that is soooo, ummmmm, feeds my soul and, I want to do elephants. That’s what I want to do. I want to do elephants.” And I mean I really believe that I picked it. Now I do also believe that following this very blessed life that I’m living I’m going to have to choose a hard one. I’m gonna have to, there’s just no other way around it. So I better learn a heck of a lot this time around, because when I come back the next time, it’s gonna be a tough one. But I’ll have this to help me to make it more bearable. So that’s my belief system now, is that it isn’t all about me, meaning it isn’t all about us. There is a huge, huge existence out there and we are a part of it but we’re really just a grain of sand, you know? We’re not important, but our actions are important. And I really don’t feel like we can get away with doing things that are hurtful to anybody else without paying the price. And I think that we may not even pay the price in this life. I think we pay the price in the next by either having to come back and have to do it again or now I’m gonna choose to be in that person’s shoes. I’m gonna come back and be the person that I was so bad to and just see how it feels to be like that. So that is very, very contrary to the religious beliefs that I grew up with. But I will tell you that it resonates with me. And because it resonates I want to know more about it, and I want to get even more involved, and I want to be a part of it. So now keep in mind that my career choice and now my affinity for reincarnation is going to cause my family to be quite concerned. So there was a time where I could be me in front of everybody else except my family.
This denial of her inner self by her family became an important point for Carol to be aware of, enabling her to emotionally separate from their judgments.

**Cultural Influences**

Carol had to leave her culture of origin and become exposed to new people and new experiences to open up and find her true self. At one point she felt that it was too hard to live in this new way and wanted to go back to where she was before, but found that she no longer fit there.

And as I exposed myself to different things in this world, I got out of that rut of the Catholic girl raised in a large family: “This is how you live.” When I took a right turn or a left turn and did a detour and just exposed myself to other things and other people and other ways of thinking, then I found I had an interest here. Oh, I would have never been exposed to these things such as different religions. I was not exposed to that while I was going to school. It was unacceptable that you went and found out about other religions. But I had an interest and through reading and speaking to other people and living in a community that was very diverse, I was exposed to other religions, which was very interesting to me.

She believes we choose our family and the life we live before we are born so that we can learn the lessons and make the connections that we are meant to make.

It is who we are when we’re born. Absolutely, I have no doubt. People call it destiny, call it whatever. We are born who we are. And I also believe that I chose that family. I chose to be born into that family because they were incredibly loving and caring but also judgmental and critical and very opinionated about what is acceptable and what isn’t. And I was going to be an individual that was
going to break all those molds. And because they love me, my life, my beliefs has helped them to grow. Because I love them, their lives have helped me to grow.

But I am who I am regardless of what family I grew up in. I have always felt that we are who we are when we’re born.

Carol’s growth and her family’s growth have been interdependent. She continues this idea through her discussion of obstacles to spiritual growth.

**Obstacles to Spiritual Growth and Vocational Path**

Fear has been a main obstacle for Carol to overcome in pursuing her spiritual self. As part of that, she makes the point that often it is the people closest to you who are the biggest obstacles to your spiritual growth. This is because they have fear and are afraid for you. She explains her experience with fear and how she handles it.

For myself, fear is the key factor and what I’d learned to do was not deny that the fear existed, but not let it control my decision making. And to recognize it for what it is. To me, fear is not something that you should ignore, but I do believe it’s an excuse to not do something. You’re afraid of it so you don’t do it. And a lot of people think well, this is the reasonable thing to do, if I’m afraid I shouldn’t do it. No, I see fear as the black force that keeps us from doing what we should be doing. And that if we allow ourselves to be affected by the fear, that is the negative: let me help you envision the very worst. Let me give you an excuse to not make that leap of faith. So I don’t deny that it’s there but I give it no power whatsoever.

I don’t even remember being fearful until I was an adult. And then when I started to have situations where I experienced fear, it ticked me off. What is this,
you know? I just see it as a really undermining force. Now many of my colleagues will say well, that is stupid. That is the way to get yourself hurt, to not pay attention to what you’re afraid of. But what I’m afraid of doesn’t keep me safe. What I’m afraid of prevents me from doing what I should do. My intuition keeps me safe. I don’t have to be afraid of a situation to recognize that that’s not a healthy situation. Now when I’m around the elephants, I don’t wait to feel fear before not doing something. I follow my intuition and say, “You know what? This isn’t the right time for me to do this” or “this is the right time.” So the biggest thing for me is to not let fear determine my decision making and to not let it undermine me and cause doubt. The other thing is the people who care the most about you can be a real distraction to pursuing your dream because people are afraid for you. And it’s like I’m not afraid, why should you be? You could be happy for me or curious for me but to afraid for me is a strange thing. So early on I learned that I would not give people power over me if they didn’t buy into my dream. If they didn’t buy into it, that’s fine and I didn’t discuss it with ‘em. Or if I did discuss it with them, I made sure that my heart was shut down so that what they said didn’t get to me. Because I knew that for whatever their personal reasons were, they couldn’t buy into my dream. But it’s not theirs, it’s mine. So all along the common thread for me has always been to try and listen to my intuition, to pursue what is my vision and my dream, not somebody else’s, not try and make it be what somebody else thinks it should be, to go ahead and honor the vision that I see and to not let fear have any effect in all that.
An important point Carol makes is she remembers what is her dream and does not listen to others who can not buy into her dream. This faith and belief in her dream gives her a sense of purpose and self-reliance.

**Spiritual Influences**

Carol’s spiritual growth has been an outgrowth of her analytic nature. She analyzes and tweaks apart everything that she is going through so she can learn from it and better herself. In addition to this aspect of her personality, she credits animals and nature as her most significant spiritual influences. She firmly believes that if she lived in a city without animals she would not have progressed past the age of 24 when it was “all about her.” She expresses that animals provide unconditional love, and that has given her a safe place to allow her inner self to open.

Animals have provided me with an environment of unconditional love. Being in that environment teaches it to you or allows you to learn what it is, and allowed for me to practice to do it. And I’m not good at it. I feel like animals opened doors in my heart and my mind that were not open to people and still are not open to people. When I’m around animals I feel safe, I feel emotionally safe. And in that place of feeling emotionally safe I can open up. And unless I open up I’m not gonna be able to be receptive to spiritual growth. But when I’m with people I protect myself and I’ve done that ever since I was little. I had this sort of distrust of my own kind and I personally feel it is because our species doesn’t practice unconditional love. And elephants have been the catalyst throughout. Tarra being of course, the number one.
Carol is able to be truly herself with animals and has become a protector of animals in return. In this way she is living a spiritually congruent life.

**Effect of Living a Spiritually Congruent Life**

Living a spiritually congruent life has changed Carol and certainly how she feels about herself, others, and the person she presents to the world. When I asked her what it is like to live her life congruently, she explained.

Well pretty exciting actually, very exciting. This is my assessment of where I am right now. I feel that I am on track. I’m on track or in track. I’m doing exactly what every fiber of my body came here to do. That’s how I feel. People say, “How can you tell?” I don’t know how to describe it. It is not that life is any easier. In fact probably the challenges are equal or more extreme than anything I could have experienced before. The stress level is real high and that’s because of my expectations of myself and my work. But the good thing is now the two are married. Who I am and what I’m doing is one. And it’s very interesting because I hear this recording in my head of several different times in my life of people, be it a teacher or a colleague or at a conference, saying: “Don’t be a workaholic, have an outside life, have outside interests, have outside things that you do. Your job should not be your life.” And my job is my life, it’s not a job. And so for a while there I found myself defending that this is me. The sanctuary is me. What I’m doing is me. I found that I’ve had to defend that and I finally got to the place where no! Obviously those people who have to make a separation between what they do for career and what they do to feed their soul, in my mind, they’re not on track. That they are still not doing their souls’ work, what they came here to do,
which will feed them and make life so glorious. They’ve not found it yet. They’re doing what so many people do, which is to substitute a job for that, and I totally understand. You have to have a job. You have to earn an income. But what happens is people get hooked into that job. And if the job becomes too cush, not in that you enjoy it but in what you get for doing it, the money, the benefits, the time off, then there’s this tradeoff that people make. So people take a job instead of living their dream, and they probably don’t even know what their dream is yet, but they take a job and then tell others who are totally one with what they’re doing, they tell them that what they’re doing is wrong. So it’s taken me a couple of years to work through that and realize I do not have to apologize for being a very, very lucky person in being able to identify what it is that I want to do and being able to do it in a way that makes me feel so good about myself and what I’m doing. I don’t want to apologize for the blessed life that I have. I don’t want to have to try and explain this belief thing that I couldn’t possibly explain if I tried. And I don’t think there’s any reason that I should have to.

Conclusion

Throughout her life Carol took steps that progressively resulted in separating from her culture of origin. The first cultural separation was from her family culture by choosing to work with animals and move into the circus business as a performer. Later she found herself separating from the circus culture to that of a more spiritually grounded community. Each change required her to leave one cultural milieu and move on to another.
An important theme is Carol’s self-awareness brought about by hard work and an honest look at herself, taking inventory of who she is and what she dislikes about herself. A self-professed disciplinarian who felt she was too strict to be a good parent, she turned the mirror on herself and took stock of who she was in her late 20s, early 30s, and did not like what she saw. Recognizing that she wanted to improve herself, she took action, making significant changes in her work, her attitudes, and her social circle to be more authentically herself and to interact within the world in a way that was more reflective of whom she wanted to be. It is a hard thing to do, to look in the mirror and say, “This needs to change,” and then actually change it. It is through this desire to change herself and grow spiritually that caused a change in her career and put her on the path of spiritually congruent work.

Throughout Carol’s life story she seems to define herself based on aspects of the self: self-awareness, growth, ego, her personality, strengths, weaknesses, and how she has learned to mold herself into a more authentic being. She gives credit to the Universe and to the part animals and nature play in her life path. She focuses little on relationships with people and speaks about her “animal companions” as others would speak of people in their life. She says Tarra was her greatest teacher who helped her learn humility and selflessness. She relates with a sense of absolute confidence what her elephants may be telling her, or thinking, or feeling. Carol simply knows. Is it her empathic connection with elephants, her knowledge of them personally that causes her to believe she understands what they are saying? Or have she and the elephants together created an interspecies language unique to them?
She relates, with some degree of amusement, the first half of her life she was asleep, living her life moving “100 miles an hour forward” without a plan or a “goal beyond tomorrow.” A “controlling, demanding personality,” she found an opportunity in circus as a performer, with her star attraction, Tarra. The circus was a field that was just right for her ego to take hold and thrive. Circus performance, however, impaired her spiritual growth. Paradoxically, it was through the circus that she saw the influences on her and the person she was becoming – a person she did not care to be. Because of the person she was becoming through the circus, she became more self-aware and decided to make a major change in herself. This change included a concerted effort for personal growth through self-awareness and an awareness of and reduction of ego. Moving her into a more spiritually grounded place, this personal growth resulted in a change in career focus ultimately taking her further down her (vocational) path.

One paradox in Carol’s life is her ambivalence with women. She spoke of her dislike of women and self-hatred of the female aspect of her self. As a result, she let her ego, the more masculine side of her, run unchecked for so many years. At the same time her most valued companion is a female elephant. In fact, she only provides sanctuary for female elephants and has a special affection for female elephants that have been abused because they are female. During the interview, she also spoke of respecting her mother a great deal, and of a very special female dog in her life. Most obviously, the people who have had the most spiritual influence on her have been the women from the Ojai women’s group. After her exposure to the women’s group, she began to see that it was her own self-hatred and hatred for weakness that she was reacting to and learned to appreciate all things female, including the sensitive, vulnerable side of herself. But even
before her involvement with the women’s group Carol was nurturing relationship with
the feminine – with Tarra, that others referred to as a mother-child relationship which
Carol objected to, preferring instead to calling it a trainer-animal relationship. She also
nurtured relationships with the female in her other animals and with her connection to a
higher power she referred to as “She.” It seems all along Carol desired acceptance for the
female others in the world and for the female side of herself. In actuality, her journey
toward sanctuary for Tarra was at the same time a journey toward sanctuary for her own
inner feminine.
CHAPTER FIVE: LENORE

“I’ve always felt it important to push the boundaries of my own social circle and to reach out to people whose lives and experiences are very different from my own so that I can better understand them. I feel greatly enriched in the process.” - Lenore

Introduction – The Short Story

Lenore is a 34-year-old Catholic Worker who, together with her husband, Steve, runs a house of hospitality in the country outside of rural Siler City, North Carolina. Along with two other individuals, they provide a haven for women and families who need a place to stay until they are self-sufficient. As part of her desire to live congruently with her beliefs and the world, Lenore is vegetarian and does subsistence farming, growing her own vegetables and raising chickens for the eggs. One of Lenore’s and Steve’s beliefs is to advocate for and live in fellowship with the poor. They have taken this vow seriously – to the point of making legal arrangements to relinquish ownership of the house they live in and from which they offer hospitality to the poor in their county. To this end, they are in the process of signing over the house to a trust serving the poor in Chatham County.

As part of her vocation, Lenore and Steve participate in various types of political activism, mainly protesting against war and the injustices of our political and economic systems. Concurrently, they both work on the GI hotline providing counseling services to military people in conflict with serving in the military and wishing to be discharged. This is the only activity for which they are paid; they take no income from the house of hospitality.
Advocating for and living in community with the poor is a main value in Lenore’s spirituality. She believes you cannot truly begin to understand another unless you put yourself in the other person’s circumstances. Although she grew up privileged, she chooses to give up much of her privilege to live close to the land and closer to the people she wants to help. Living naturally includes subsistence farming, renouncing many material goods, making rather than purchasing goods such as clothing, and keeping societal input to a minimum, such as obtaining news from print material or radio rather than television. Lenore does not own a television because she feels it can be a negative influence. She despises the sensationalism of the media, does not have internet access, a cell phone, or any of the new technology many in society commonly use. She does own a car and uses a telephone and the ground mail service. She and her community produce a newspaper called *the catholic radical* on a manual typewriter instead of a computer and look for opportunities to simplify their lives.

While this research focuses on Lenore, how she lives, her vocation, her lifestyle, and values, I would like to note that all Lenore does she does in conjunction with her husband, Steve. As her life and vocational partner, he is an important player. At the time I met with Lenore, Steve was incarcerated for political activism in Washington, D.C. where he, along with others, was arrested for trespassing at the Pentagon. He was in prison for six months and returned home in September (since then they have welcomed a baby girl into their family). Throughout this interview, Lenore refers to their activism as something they “take turns” at demonstrating, which puts them at risk of incarceration. This, of course, has an effect on their lives and their work.
Lenore lives her life simply. Her activities revolve around the basics of living: cooking, cleaning, pulling weeds, caring for the house and the guests of the house, and being present in her daily life. Most importantly, she provides what she calls Christ’s love and care to those in need. Usually this comes in the form of hospitality, sometimes it comes in more aggressive means such as demonstration on the steps of the Pentagon. Regardless, all of her activities reflect her inner self.

Lenore is happy and at peace with her life and her vocation. Although her vocation reflects her inner self, she never had a plan. She has simply listened to her inner self and allowed her intuition to lead her. Now she is living what she feels is the best life she can live, congruent with her beliefs.

Lenore’s spirituality is socially connected; it is about living in community with and advocating for people in need. As such, her vocation has grown out of her spirituality. Her family culture has also had a significant influence on her spirituality. As a child of a very loving family, Lenore was raised Catholic, and family life included attending church every Sunday and participating in church activities. Religion was an important part of her life growing up, and it forms the foundation of her spiritual beliefs, her sense of spirituality in her inner self, and has shaped her vocational choice and her lifestyle.

Lenore was raised with all the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church. As she grew older, she began to question some of the teachings, for instance she asked her father one day, “How do we know that what we believe is right?” While he did not discourage her from questioning, he focused on and reinforced the family’s religious beliefs. But he never denigrated other religions in the process. Lenore was taught to love others and be
kind, caring, and helpful. These teachings became the foundation for her chosen vocation and reflect her inner self.

There has been some strife and difficulty in her relationships with some members of her family and people around her because she has taken her beliefs (while traditionally based) to a level with which most people are uncomfortable. Consequently, she had to separate from her family’s restrictions, concerns, and pressures to conform as much as if she had chosen a lifestyle completely divergent from her religious roots.

*The Catholic Worker*

Lenore draws no distinction between her vocation and her inner self. Because of this interconnection, her interviews are not segmented in terms of her vocation and her spiritual development; they flow from her faith formation to her college experience to her ultimate vocational path. Lenore makes the point that she did not choose her vocation; rather, her work has grown out of her spirituality. Her spirituality developed first; then by listening to and following her inner self, her vocation emerged. It was not something she intellectualized or planned, but something she felt. The sensation of feeling comes up in Lenore’s language throughout the interviews and plays a major role in her decision making.

Lenore and her husband have been running their own house of hospitality for five years, and prior to that she worked in that field since 1991. Lenore explains that the Catholic Worker movement was started by Dorothy Day in the 1930s and was an attempt to break down the barriers that separate people. So there was a commitment to voluntary poverty because we were to live in solidarity with each other and
because where we stand in this world is so important to how we see the world.

And there was also a really strong commitment to nonviolence and pacifism even through WWII. And up to this day the Catholic Worker has always taken a strong stance against war, in part because it saps so much money and resources away from poor people, and because poor people suffer the most from war when it occurs. We also value all human life and believe that every person is a child of God, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they do.

*Effect of Living a Spiritually Congruent Life*

When Lenore decided to act on her spiritual beliefs, it became necessary for her to change her entire lifestyle and purpose. She makes references to her values and belief system that have provided the framework for her vocation:

I think it’s hard to live and work so closely with the poor without questioning the root causes of poverty. And the Catholic Worker Movement has traditionally tried to do that. Even as we offer hospitality and meet the emergency needs of the poor, we also try to address those root causes. And one of the major ways in which we see a lot of resources being taken from poor people is through militarism and war making. Everyone who lives here at this house are all actively involved in opposing militarism and working nonviolently for peace and justice in the world. And I think also our work with the poor here has just made us very sensitive to the needs of poor people around the world and the role that our government plays in creating situations where people are not able to get what they need to survive and to live. And so that has made us very active in speaking out on U.S. foreign policy in particular, as well as policy here in this country. So part of our work is
doing that as well. Another thing that my husband and I do is – and I think it is the extension of all these values and other aspects of our work – we are counselors for soldiers in the military who are trying to get discharges. It’s been really great for us too, because we are involved in doing so much work around militarism. It’s been very helpful for us to be talking to soldiers and to hear what they go through and how they are also victims of a military that is not necessarily looking out for their needs. So, it’s been very fulfilling work for us and has fit really well with the rest of what we’re doing here.

Living in community and having the support of the community has been helpful in Lenore’s vocation because of the things she and Steve do and the extreme lifestyle she leads with her activism. Having a supportive community to share feelings and activities with helps her through the hard times. Within this community the couple also participate in demonstrations and speak out on their beliefs. This is centered on the government and militarism and sometimes results in extreme personal consequences. They have chosen this work and are prepared for the consequences. Lenore feels it is important to be open to embracing the pain that comes from this separation from her husband and to the growth that comes from that:

I think it forces both of us to deal with losing control over our lives. For him it’s obvious – he’s lost all control over where he goes and what he does. And for me it’s been just because I don’t have him to support me, and there’s a lot of work, and things happen, and it’s my loss of control. Just accepting that I can’t micromanage my life necessarily everyday because I just can’t; it’s just things are going to happen and I’m going to have to cope with them as they come up, and I
won’t have him there to get me through it. I’ll have to just deal with it. And I think living in community with other people has been a real big support in that way. So, just recognizing that we’re not in control of our lives has been big. Also, I think just opening ourselves to the pain that we feel going through this experience and the sadness of not being together, just allowing ourselves to feel that and not try and push it away or deny it has been important. I think one thing we’ve been able to do is just trust that this is going to be okay and it’s going to work out.

Lenore emphasizes her need to embrace and understand her own pain of separation from her husband caused by his incarceration. She compares this to military people’s serving in the war on terrorism. She feels, as a conscientious Christian, she is helping to support those negatively affected by war and is sharing in community with others in strife through activism. Not only does her sharing in the suffering of separation from her husband make her feel closer to those families with a loved one serving in the war, but she also is action-based in striving for eliminating war to better conditions for all of humanity. She feels that she gains a lot of personal power by acting on her beliefs and not succumbing to the pressures of society and international governmental policy with which she disagrees:

I think we were trying to make a similar commitment and say that we believe very strongly in our work, we see this as part of our work, and we’re willing to make a sacrifice for that work because we believe that it’s necessary for us to change the world. And so I feel really lucky to have the example and support of other people who are committed to doing this work; so I think it’s gonna be part of our lives.
And I think when you get to that point, you have a level of power because if you’re willing to take the risks – if you’re willing to go to jail – it really takes a lot of power away from the opposition. And I’m willing to suffer the consequences for my actions because I believe in what I’m doing and I think that’s a very powerful thing to be able to say.

This movement to activism resulting in adverse consequences has been difficult for Lenore not only because being arrested is “unpleasant and scary,” but because it has caused such conflict in her family. Coming from a very loving and close family, her relationship with her parents and her grandparents was strained for a time because of her activism. She continually speaks of how difficult it has been for her to act on and fulfill her inner beliefs because it has caused great pain and has been a source of conflict with some of the people she loves the most. But over time they have come to accept what she does and, while they don’t necessarily agree with the extent she performs civil disobedience, they have been supportive of her. She speaks of how it was easier when she was living and performing activism in a separate state from her parents because they didn’t see the actions and the consequences. When she first moved back to North Carolina, it was harder for her to do the same things living closer to them because they became aware of what she was doing through the news. Lenore has had to find the strength to say, “This is who I am and this is what I do,” regardless of whether others approve or not. In this way, Lenore has had to separate from her family of origin’s culture and bond with another culture, that of the Catholic Worker and political activist. While Lenore has been able to make the separation from her family culture only in terms of activism and her beliefs, they remain a very close and loving family. In pulling away, she
has continued her growth down her spiritual path and believes she has encouraged the growth of her family through her association with them. She talks about how difficult it was when she first relocated back home:

It’s one thing to get arrested and do things in another state where nobody that you knew growing up was ever gonna hear about it. Now that I’m home, that was uncomfortable at first. But now everybody knows that my husband’s in prison, and that’s what we do. And it’s been such a relief, it’s like coming out in a way. It’s like, this is who I am and this is what I do. I think, as a kid, I just always really wanted to please other people; and so I've just had to overcome some of that and recognize that not everybody approves of it. But I think people can at least respect that we’re doing it out of our convictions and our beliefs and our faith. And I feel like we’re in a good place now.

One of the important things that has helped Lenore to grow spiritually and live her vocational path has been not only by separating from her culture of origin, her family, but also by trying to separate from the society of privilege that she was born into as a white, middle-class, American woman – though she is quick to point out that it is impossible to fully disassociate herself from all of her privilege. She now lives in community with people she would not otherwise have come into contact with; and other aspects of her work have also brought her into contact with different segments of society. She finds all of this a valuable experience.

I think when we work with guests we are in touch with other agencies and service providers. We do our vigils and our resistance work. We’re in touch with people on the street. When we do our counseling on the hotline, we’re in touch with
soldiers. And that was one of the beautiful things about taking on the hotline work was it put us in touch with a whole segment of society that we’d only known kind of on the other side of the fence through vigils and things like that. And it puts us in touch with this wider circle of people who have been supportive of our work, who wanted to participate in it in different ways. I’ve always felt it important to push the boundaries of my own social circle and to reach out to people whose lives and experiences are very different from my own so that I can better understand them. I feel greatly enriched in the process.

An important and recent experience for me in relating to others in the world was going to Iraq last year. This was a huge step for me in overcoming fears and acting in order to understand “the enemy” and share that understanding with as many here in the U.S. as I could the stop the invasion. The trip also brought me in touch with families of 9/11 victims; and this connection helped me understand their pain as well as their need to prevent another war.

Living spiritually congruently for Lenore means knowing who you are, standing up for your beliefs, even in the face of personal sacrifice or discomfort. Once Lenore became spiritually aware, she simply could not live any other way.

*Lenore’s Formative Spirituality*

To understand the depth of Lenore’s vocation, it is important to understand her faith formation and its impact on her spirituality. Lenore’s family has had a significant influence on her spirituality, starting with her grandparents who are very traditional Catholics. Her parents, though, were more progressive than traditional in their beliefs, stressing the social aspects of church as worship and community. In this way, church was
an important part of her spiritual life while growing up. This has been a source of some
pain for her in her vocation at times because certain members of her family have not
supported some of her activities. She relates that she has gone through hard times in her
relationship with her parents and grandparents because they didn’t agree with her choices
at times and were afraid for her safety and security. But through all this, her family was
loving and close. She valued that fact while growing up and continues to value it today.
She relates the religious environment and foundation of her faith system as a Catholic:

I was the youngest of three daughters in a very, very loving family. I was given a
lot of support all my life and encouraged to go be whatever I wanted to be, to care
for other people, to love other people, and to look for other people who might
need help. All the values that I feel like I’m living out now were definitely rooted
in what I was taught as a child. My family always went to church, every Sunday.
And it was something that we all took pretty seriously – I mean I never thought,
“Maybe we won’t go this week,” ’cause we always went. And I think from a
pretty early age I was taught about God, and I think I took that somewhat
seriously. I had this belief in a God – kind of as this father figure, and I said
prayers every night, and my family prayed before the evening meal. There was
definitely someone there that I felt like I had a relationship with and so I had this
sense of some greater being out there. I think I probably asked all the questions
that kids ask, like “Why do bad things happen to good people?” And I think my
faith formation really came at a later date. And I don’t know, looking back now I
think probably learning the stories that we learned as kids and learning about God,
as a parental God figure – all that gave me something to latch onto; but it wasn’t
something that was gonna really sustain me as an adult. But it was probably important at the time to give me something to latch onto as a kid so that there would be some roots there for when I grew up.

Lenore found that as she was maturing, she was reexamining her faith and her belief system. While the concept of the parental God figure did not work for her any longer, she was still very much attached to her religious base. Yet her internalization of her religion was starting to change with her expanded awareness of society.

When I got older and in high school, or really in college, I started questioning my faith a little bit and trying to figure it out, feeling like that parental God relationship wasn’t exactly doing it for me anymore, wanting something more than that. But I couldn’t let go of my faith completely because I was raised so much in this culture of being Catholic. And so it wasn’t something I could just throw away. It just hung onto me. But nonetheless there was still this culture, I think, that I lived in that was more than just going to church. There was something about being Catholic that I experienced. And it was just so ingrained in me that when I got older it kept me searching for meaning in my relationship with God, even when I didn’t feel like I was experiencing much meaning.

Lenore’s family was committed to attending church; but when they became dissatisfied with a particular priest or church community, they tried another. So Lenore’s parents were searching periodically for a church that felt right to them. For a while, Lenore’s parents took the family to another church across town that was primarily African-American.
That was one of my earliest interactions with people of color. I didn’t get that at school, I only got it through the kids being bused in from across town into our neighborhood – our very nice, middle-class neighborhood. And it was mostly kids from a poorer background than me. So that was a very unequal relationship with the children. And I didn’t have friends who were kids of color. But at church it was kind of a middle-class parish, but very mixed racially. And that was good. That was the one time in my life when I just wasn’t really conscious of race. We just went and interacted with folks, and it was good because at school you’re much more conscious of these are the ‘other’ coming into our place. At church, that didn’t happen.

Lenore remembers this as a very positive experience both spiritually and culturally. There are two important points here. First, her parents showed Lenore that it is okay and right to search for a spiritual base that fits. Second, this was the first time she had relationships on an equal footing with children from another race.

As an adult, Lenore’s belief changed from the childhood image of the father-figure God to a less personal, more all-encompassing image of a higher power. She began to see this Higher Power as a universal connection to everyone. This has laid the foundation for her spirituality; and now seeking out and serving others has become an integral component of her understanding of spirituality.

You know how churches have a social justice committee a lot of times? To me that makes no sense – having a committee where we relegate social justice. To me, the church is all about social justice. And it doesn’t mean that it’s not also about a personal relationship with God, which I think is also important. But I
think, to me, spirituality takes place in that context. Christianity calls us to be socially just. And what it means to be Christian is working for that in the world. At the same time that I was developing a social awareness, my personal relationship with God was also becoming really troubling to me because I had this image in my head of G-O-D in black letters, like in the sky, and it was that kind of parental male-God figure that I grew up with that served me for a really long time and was very important to me. But then it just didn’t make sense anymore. And I think I spent many years trying to figure out how to wrap my head around God, or the Higher Power, or whatever. And I think using those terms doesn’t really work necessarily so much for me. I use them because it’s so easy. But I do very much believe in – I can’t even find words to describe it – that indescribable something that is love and that is what we’re all a part of – this Higher Power – whatever. I mean, I can talk about it now to this extent because I’ve spent so many years trying to replace that childhood image. I’m just listening to these tapes by Richard Rohr, a priest, and they’re the most helpful for me in describing it. He would say that we find God by going out of ourselves to the margins of society, to the poor, and the oppressed. We also find God by going deep into our own selves and to our own brokenness and the places of pain and sadness inside of us. And that God essentially is the marginalized – whether it’s out there or in here. So that has a lot of meaning for me. I think as I began working with the poor, I was just seeing the face of God in the face of the people that we were able to serve. I think that made a lot of sense to me. And it’s only been in more recent years where I’ve also started to understand we’re all personally connected to God. We are, that’s just...
the way it is. And whether or not we can fathom that or understand it is kind of the spiritual work. And I think I’ve been trying to work with meditation, or centering prayer, or whatever you want to call it to try and know that connection between myself and God, whatever it is. And it’s hard, it’s a challenge. I greatly appreciate the discipline that it takes to work with meditation whether you’re Buddhist or Catholic, or whatever religion. I mean, I have a real hard time with that because my mind is always active and I’m always so action oriented. And I think this is where my work is: to sometimes stop and just exist. But I think part of the reason I’ve never lost faith in God was partly because growing up in that culture, it was so ingrained in me; I couldn’t let go of it. But also I think it’s been easy for me to see God in the natural world. I mean I could never stop believing in some kind of being because there’s too much wonder in the world. So that’s been kind of like an anchor for me, too, in some ways.

Lenore has come to see God as synonymous with the poor and oppressed. She sees all of creation as interconnected with this Higher Power. Her spiritual awareness came to her through a series of defining moments.

*Stages of Spiritual Awareness*

Lenore felt constrained in school, pigeonholed by others’ perceptions of her and by teenage pressures until she went on a theology seminar for a week one summer. This experience prompted a whole new way for Lenore to experience her faith. She speaks of being “challenged” and having a new awareness of the high school culture and peer pressure. She suddenly found that there was more in life to think about.
The theology seminar was something I just really latched on to. It was like a week and I just felt all this stuff fall away from me. And high school is such a hard time where there’s so much pressure on you to conform to be a certain way, and I just constantly felt stereotyped by people around me. I was pretty smart and had good grades, so I just felt shoved into this category, and it was really hard to break away from that. And when I went on theology seminar and was challenged, it just really moved me. I went away from it realizing that all this stuff that we think is so important just isn’t that important. I had been introduced to questions of poverty and violence and nonviolence, and that just seemed so real and important. And I just realized that being Christian could have a lot of other dimensions to it than I had been exposed to previously. I didn’t really do much with that for a couple of years, but it really had an impact on me. And I think that was probably the first time that I really felt challenged intellectually in my faith and realized that religion could have an intellectual element to it. It wasn’t just pure belief or feeling good but that there could be something really challenging about it. And that was exciting to me, because then I realized that there were implications for the way I lived.

Lenore’s spiritual growth blossomed through education. She was awakened by intellectual discussions of her Catholic faith system. It was through education that she moved through several stages of awareness that later combined to form the foundation of her vocational path.
Stage One: The Poor

There was an incredible priest from out west who was there [at the theology seminar] and a woman who had worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta for a year or so. And she showed us her slides of working with the poor in Calcutta and Mother Teresa and told us about that experience. And I was completely blown away by that level of poverty, that it could exist in this world. And I just had this really strong sense of what can I do about this? and went to her and said, “What can I do?” And her answer, I think, was a little disappointing at the time. It was like, “Well, you need to figure out your role in the world and do it; and you need to find your path and follow it.”

The other thing was, that was the first time I was exposed to Gandhi’s nonviolence stance. We spent a lot of time together and had some great discussions about nonviolence and pacifism. And there was a young man there who was getting ready to go into the military. And the ways in which we were able to talk with him about that – in the context of this discussion of nonviolence and pacifism – was just incredible, now that I look back on it, without alienating him and making him feel like he was making the wrong choice. I don’t know what happened to him, but his presence there enriched our discussions because it brought in the hard reality of making the choice to be nonviolent in the world.

And those things just really stuck with me.

Although Lenore was looking for something more concrete to do to help those in need, the woman who worked with Mother Teresa said something profound that actually
proved to be true. Lenore’s second stage of awareness occurred through the experiences of seeing her country from an outsider’s point of view.

**Stage Two: Cultural-Political Awareness**

I had another experience in high school. I won an essay contest, and I got to go to Berlin for a month; and then someone from Berlin came back and lived with me for a month. I lived with a family that was very critical of the United States and U.S. foreign policy, and I was blown away by that. It was the first time I had really been exposed to someone who didn’t think the United States was this noble country doing good things around the world. And I was very defensive the whole time we were together. But it was just something that plants seeds, that later you realize there was some truth there.

Both of these stages occurred while she was still in high school. Later in college, her need for intellectual stimulation was met through her coursework. She went to Duke University, a prestigious, private university known for its divinity school. There she was challenged intellectually while deeply affected on a feeling level.

**Stage Three: Awareness of Privilege**

So I graduated from high school, and I went to college. And I took some classes in religion, on the historical Jesus. That had a huge impact on me ‘cause I was suddenly realizing that Jesus meant what he said when he said, “Take what you have and give it to the poor” and “Love your enemies” and that it wasn’t just stuff talking about our personal salvation. It was a plan for how we live our lives – and
I was very challenged by that. And I took another class on the historical Jesus that kinda dealt with Paul’s writings, and I think those courses just really revolutionized my own personal faith. But I think it was on a feeling level to some degree. It’s funny ‘cause you take these classes and you have to respond intellectually in the classroom. But then I found it transforming me on the feeling – on the gut – level personally. And I don’t know that that happens with every student. Although in the historical Jesus classes, I think it was hard for kids ‘cause it was only in the last class that we were starting to talk about what this means for faith. You know, this kind of intellectual approach to the history of the Bible. What does that do to our faith? And that’s a huge subject, and we just barely touched on it in our last period. For me, it had been just hitting me all semester long, like that was the implication for me. And just realizing that Jesus was part of a time when it wasn’t just about our personal, individual salvation, that there were social implications for what he did and what he taught. And that he really did live among the poor and outcast and was killed because he was seen as a threat to the powers at the time. And that he was doing things very differently from them. And all that just made it more relevant to me, I think.

These classes affected Lenore in a profound way. They were transformational. They moved her from a spiritual base of theory and faith to an action-based lifestyle in which she lives out her spiritual beliefs.

And I think that when I say “revolutionized,” what I mean is, I think it just broke out of the personal relationship with God. My faith went from being just a personal relationship with God to including that but also to having implications to
how I live my life, more so than just being considerate to people, or just thinking that I was being called to live a certain way. And then the Catholic Worker is perfect for that ‘cause I think if you want to say that there is a spirituality in the Catholic Worker, I think it’s very action based. And it’s kind of a spirituality of practice. Dorothy said it’s love in action. I think that’s what it’s trying to be. It just came at the right time. I was ready for that.

The final stage of Lenore’s spiritual development came in the form of activism on her campus.

*Stage Four: Activism*

The last semester of my years at college, the United States went to war with Iraq and there was a lot of demonstrating on campus. I was very involved in antiwar movements at the time and also very tied into a faith-based community on campus that was calling for peace. And I sat in on a class with a divinity school professor and it felt so good to be in a class where someone was speaking out directly against the war, echoing everything I was feeling at a time when you just didn’t see that happening across campus. And again it just gave me this very strong sense that I was a pacifist by that point and that I wanted to work nonviolently for peace.

Lenore makes the point that the Catholic Worker came at the right time in her life. It came on the heels of her four-stage awareness and just when she was ready to take action and do something with all that she had been thinking about. Yet she was constantly under pressure by her parents and grandparents who were trying to ensure that she would be
able to make a living and take care of herself financially. They influenced her choice of
major, but Lenore still found ways to nurture her beliefs. And those courses provided the
framework for her vocation.

It’s kinda funny that I said my parents made me believe that I could do whatever I
felt like I wanted to do, but there were some limits, and that’s fine. But I really
wanted to major in religion and history, and they said, “No way, don’t do that,
you can’t do that, you need something a little more practical that you’re able to
get a job with when you get out.” So then I said, “Okay, well, I’m gonna keep
taking these courses, but I’m gonna major in public policy.” And I majored in
public policy ‘cause I had a really amazing ethics course. And it was a course
where we just really focused on readings that talked about our other – the others –
people different from us. And we looked a lot at white privilege, we looked a lot
at class privilege and I journaled a lot during that. And in conjunction with the
historical Jesus stuff, I was again really blown away at just realizing how much
privilege I had grown up with and how much I had been benefiting from that
privilege all my life. And I came away from all that coursework just feeling very
much that I wanted to work with poor people – and directly with poor people, not
just an office that dealt with policies, but directly with them, and our own actions
and how we play into sexism. I think with racism, I feel it’s not enough just to say
that I don’t discriminate against blacks. It’s that I have to consciously look at my
life and the ways that I benefit from white privilege and work to sometimes give
that up and enable other people to approach life on an equal footing. And it’s a
question of privilege, I think. And we have to look at the ways in which we play
into privilege as white people, or as males, or being a feminist, or being a civil rights advocate. And that’s the painful part, I think, looking at our own behaviors and the ways in which we play into the dominant culture.

The four stages – awareness of the poor, cultural-political awareness of the U.S. as related to the rest of the world, awareness of race and class privilege, and exposure to political activism – combined in a unique way and are each expressed in Lenore’s vocation today. These are the values that together have become both her spiritual practice and vocation. But how does one transform spiritual values into vocation? Now that she has “found her path,” how does she follow it?

*Lenore’s Vocational Path*

During her senior year at college, Lenore began a period of exploration that took her down the road of the Catholic Worker. She learned of a Catholic Worker house in Phoenix and explored that as well as some more traditional jobs in Washington, D.C., largely because of parental pressure. Although she was offered a couple of the positions she applied for in Washington, D.C., she decided that she wanted to go out west and work with the homeless on the streets. This was the beginning of her divergence from her family’s wishes and stepping outside of her culture of origin onto her own path. This is the first of many times when she would have difficulty explaining her inner self to her family.

I know that was a very hard time for me to say to them, “No, I’m not gonna take this job, I’m gonna go do this work out west.” I just really felt that everything I had learned in college had pointed me in that direction; and I felt like at that time, to be true to my faith, I was feeling this call to go do this. Because I don’t easily
go long distances from home or make those separations easily, it had to be a pretty strong pull, or else I wouldn’t have done it. It was definitely a new experience for me to be among those people, but I just really was ready. I felt ready for that challenge. I wanted that challenge. It’s funny because, growing up, I could never picture what I wanted to be. I think for a long time I wanted to be a veterinarian. And then, at some point, I realized that if I was gonna put that much time in school, I wanted to do more with people, not just animals, even though I know there’s connection with people through animals. So I gave that up. But I never could picture my life in the future: I couldn’t picture my husband; I couldn’t picture anything. And it wasn’t like that upset me; but it wasn’t like I knew what I wanted to do when I was young. I just didn’t know. But I think being able to be open, and not worry that I didn’t know, just allowed me to be led by my passions and by my faith.

It was an amazing year because so much of our energy was put into that soup line, ‘cause when you’re cooking for 300 people you have to get a lot of food and cook it and it takes a lot of organization. But I got to know the street people by name. And we were living in this really poor Hispanic neighborhood where there was drug dealing going on in several different houses. But then there were just a lot of poor people living there, too. So it was a completely new experience for me to be living in that kind of poverty, to be on a first-name basis with homeless men and women on the streets, to feel very disconnected from the middle class that I had grown up in that would have normally been my setting. And I loved it. It was so fulfilling in many ways. It was a very hard year. Just
working the dynamics of a 10-person community was really difficult, and there were a lot of things that were hard about it. But as far as where I was and what I was doing, it felt really right. And Steve also joined the community that year, and that’s how we met.

In one sense, this was the point at which Lenore first began her separation from her culture of origin and her family expectations, and struck out into the world based on her own inner self. Yet, while it caused a lot of hardship and pain in their relationship, she always felt the support and love of her family throughout her journey. She was able to withstand the pressure from them and did not compromise in living the life to which she felt called. Yet she speaks of them as being a safety net. It is perhaps that safety net that may have actually helped her to strike out and live the life in which she believed.

Lenore felt called to personal challenges and personal growth opportunities. Oftentimes, she made choices based on moving herself out of her comfort zone and putting herself in positions where she would be personally challenged. This led her to a different socio-cultural milieu. After her year in Phoenix ended, she began a period of searching for what she wanted to do. She and Steve visited other communities and spent a lot of emotional energy discerning where they wanted to be and weighing their needs against disappointing their families caused by their moving away from home. They chose a Catholic Worker house in Rock Island, Illinois, because of its uniqueness, and again because she felt challenged by it. But throughout her time learning and experiencing the Catholic Worker lifestyle, she still was conflicted by the familiarity of a more traditional lifestyle and by the influences of the culture in which she was raised.
After spending two weeks at each of these communities, we took a little retreat at a monastery to discuss what we wanted to do, and we ended up going to Rock Island, Illinois. That was a critical moment in our lives, I think, because that community was so unique and special. There was a person who lived there named Chuck who we became very close to over the years, and he had a huge impact on us. He was definitely, probably the person who had the most impact on my adult life. It was a hard time in my life because my family was really resisting my choices. My parents wanted me closer, they wanted me to do something that was gonna provide security down the road, things that every family would want. I’m not criticizing them for that, but it was hard because I was really following my heart and feeling like I was doing what I needed to do. And it was just such an emotional thing that I wasn’t very good at articulating my needs and my wants to them. And we were living far away. So every visit was so packed, and I had so much weight attached to it ‘cause you want to have a good time, but you also have all these issues that you need to discuss.

For Lenore, trying to discover her path was not always clear cut or easy. She still struggled not knowing if she was making the right decisions and was conflicted emotionally. Lenore often made decisions based on how they felt. In some cases, she knew that it felt right, as Phoenix felt right. But the decision to move to Rock Island did not feel as good. She was concerned about living in community with Chuck.

It’s hard. It’s one of those decisions where you don’t feel immediately good about it. And I didn’t. And we called my family, and I felt terrible because I could hear the disappointment in their voices. And then we went there, and I still didn’t feel
this immediate sense of, “Yes, we’re home.” And I don’t even know that I felt like it was the right place until I went away to Philadelphia and I came back. Being away from it, I felt like that’s home. Then it became one of the most dear places to me in the world. It was a good lesson in realizing that you can make a right decision that doesn’t feel right immediately. You know how people say, “Oh, you’ll know”? Well, it doesn’t always work that way. But there must have still been enough push to say, “Okay, it doesn’t feel exactly right, but just go, do it.”

I was nervous about going there because of Chuck, because he does come across so strongly. And it almost scares you away because you realize you’re gonna be living with this really strong personality. And he turned out to be the biggest gift of that community. He was the one thing I was worried about ‘cause he was really a forceful person and obviously had very strong convictions. And he has played a big role in my life in a lot of different ways because he was so intentional about how he lived. He lived in so many ways that people would consider self-sacrificial; but for him it was just because he got so much joy out of living that way. Like he really truly did live in voluntary poverty. But he chose that, and he was joyful about it. He didn’t have a bank account, he didn’t have a checkbook; he would give money away if he had too much. He would encourage us at the house to give house money away if we got too much, just not accumulate too much money, give it away to the people who came to the door in need of it. He didn’t have health insurance, and he was so intentional with his children. He was very committed to low technology. We had a loom up in the attic, and he
built that by hand. He made his own spinning wheel; he grew flax, spun it into linen, wove it into cloth, and then made an outfit out of it. He had been in this house working, serving homeless people for, I think, 10 years by the time we got there. He challenged us to think about the technologies we were using and why we were using them. He didn’t have a TV, which Steve and I hadn’t had TVs before that either, so we just saw eye-to-eye on a lot of those issues. We made paper. He was also a pen and ink artist, and so we published *the catholic radical* there with him. And that’s where we learned how to put out this newspaper on a manual typewriter – we never used a computer. And he and Steve would do all the artwork for it; and we’d write the articles together and edit it together. And it was a great process. But I think he was not always easy to live with. He had a competitive streak, even though he would deny it, possibly. Meanwhile, we’d protest at the arsenal, which is this huge military installation, and take in families that needed a place to stay. And at that time, Steve and I didn’t know that we would be together forever; we didn’t know that we would be in the Catholic Worker forever. It was a time when we were really exploring this life that we were being exposed to.

But after making the decision to live as a Catholic Worker, Lenore still wasn’t ready to completely separate from the pressure of societal expectations that she learned and lived with growing up. They still had some hold on her.

My first thing that I did when I got there was get a part-time pay job, because I felt I needed to justify my existence somehow, like being at the house wasn’t good enough. I think it’s just part of my upbringing. And I hated those jobs, and I
think part of it was because I was trying to force myself to do something that
would give me some credibility with people in society. It just sounded better to
say I’m a caseworker than just to say I’m a Catholic Worker, ‘cause nobody really
understood what that was. And you say, “I clean the house a lot, I scrub a lot of
dishes, I cook food for people,” and I mean, it’s very menial work, but that’s what
it is. It’s very valuable work, to serve, it’s serving the poor. And the philosophy of
the Catholic Worker isn’t to be an agency giving charity; it’s to serve the poor,
and to live in solidarity with them as much as possible. And certainly, hopefully,
that will be helpful to them. But it’s also recognizing that we get so much from
that as well, that it’s not just a one-way street. We both give to each other. And
I’ve found that to be true.

After a year in Rock Island, Lenore was still exploring what she wanted to do. She
enjoyed writing, so decided to try to improve her skills by taking a yearlong internship
writing for a magazine in Philadelphia. Although she and Steve knew they wanted to be
together, she felt it necessary to try this and see how she felt.

And this is something that I remember very clearly the last two weeks before I left
Rock Island for Philadelphia. I quit my pay job and just worked at the house for
the two weeks before I left. And those were the best two weeks of my whole time
in Rock Island, up to that point, because I was trying to finish up some weaving
projects that I had been doing and I had just given myself the freedom of just
being at the house and not doing something outside the house. I just found that
very fulfilling to be there, doing the work of the house. Of course, you’re
spending good intentional time with people because you know you’re not going to
see them. But not having that other outside commitment to distract me, I really loved those two weeks there. And I just carried that with me.

At the end of that year, she realized home was in Rock Island and returned there to work at the house and be reunited with Steve. They decided to get married and to move closer to their families.

*A House of Her Own*

Lenore and Steve relocated back to North Carolina to a rural community not far from Lenore’s parents and set up a Catholic Worker house. There were several stages of preparation they had to go through before being ready to offer hospitality. Each of them took on a job to make enough money to purchase a house. Eventually, they paid off their mortgage and weaned themselves from their outside employment, so as to be in a position to devote themselves wholly to providing hospitality.

At the end of the year 2000, Steve quit his carpentry work and we were gonna start this counseling job; so it was a big income change for us. That Christmas, our friend Chuck was killed in an auto accident, and that was a huge – it was just huge to lose him in our lives. So that was hard. But it also affirmed some of our decisions about making changes in our lives and trying to get back to living the way we had lived more in Rock Island. But then we made this change where we have been doing this counseling, and that enabled us to be at home. It was less work, less money, but we also made an appeal to all the people who know us and who support us for no-interest loans so that we could pay off the bank so that we wouldn’t pay interest on the house. Within a year, we were able to get enough to pay off the bank, and now we’ve been able to pay all those people back. So the
house is completely paid off. That freed us up a lot from financial pressures. And so now we’re in the process of having the house converted into a trust for the homeless and poor of the county. So it’ll be here as a Catholic Worker house, not as Steve’s and my house. And that all feels good too, to be moving in that direction. So that enables us to live on less of a budget, and as other people have come, they’ve contributed financially to the house, too.

Lenore and Steve continue to expand facilities in the house and yard, adding on as they can. They have been providing hospitality and doing political activism for five years now and are living congruently with her spiritual beliefs and values.

Obstacles to Spiritual Growth and Vocational Path

Lenore speaks of the obstacles she has encountered during her journey. The biggest obstacle was fear. She characterizes herself as a fearful person but has learned to understand and work with her fears.

The first thing that comes to mind when I think about obstacles is my own obstacles to myself and things like fear. I think that’s also where my family was coming from was a position of fear for my security and for my future. And my fear taps into that a little bit more; I think that’s at the root of it, probably. It’s just a fear of not knowing. For a while, it was fear of deviating from what was expected of me, from maybe going in a direction where I wasn’t going to necessarily move into a place of more financial security. It’s like fear of losing people I love who may not agree with what I’m doing or fear of losing people I love because it’s a hard life, fear of losing a husband to prison or going to prison myself, and just that there are risks involved. I mean those are pretty valid fears. I
think those are okay fears to have. But I think those are roadblocks for me at times.

Lenore purposely puts herself in situations outside of her comfort zone. This is how she challenges herself to grow. Lenore was aware of her fear as a limiting factor and discussed it with both a priest and with a spiritual director with whom she was working.

I think I was expressing some fear to him [the priest]. It wasn’t just that my parents were saying: “You need security; you need to plan for your future.” I mean, I believed some of that on some level. I had fears about that too; so they would say things, and it would just bring things up for me that I was feeling. And I remember him saying, “You know, it’s probably not a good idea to make a decision based on fear,” and just really encouraging me not to do that. And I think that’s good, especially for me, because I think I am a fearful person. I think I have a lot of fears, and I’ve worked with a spiritual director for many years. And the one I’m working with now, she always says to me, “You know, I think we’ve identified that for you, fear is not really coming from God, it’s not what God’s gonna use to communicate with you, because it’s such a hurdle for you in so many ways.” If God wants me to know something, it’s not gonna be through fear. And that’s been good for me to recognize.

Another obstacle Lenore had to conquer was the expectations of society and her family. As a child, she always wanted to please others and not disappoint them. Yet in choosing her path, she initially disappointed her family – the people she loved most in life. But she found the strength to continue on her vocational path despite this hardship.
Well something that helped me with that: I think if I had stayed near home the whole time that would have played a bigger role. But because I went away to places where people didn’t know me, where I hadn’t grown up, it was definitely easier to branch off in a different direction. But it did play a role, and I felt this most when I went out west, it was my first year out of school. Everybody was pretty supportive of that for the most part. People looked at it like I was gonna take a year off and do this work, and then get on with my life. Then, when we moved to Rock Island, it started to look a little more long term and serious and like we were exploring something. And I had to struggle with society or my own views about how society viewed me. And I went out and got part-time work while I was at the house because I needed to be able to say, “Well, I’m doing this Catholic Worker thing, and I’m also part of a tutoring program at a school, or I’m also working as a case manager at this housing program.” In my mind, maybe that added some legitimacy to what I was doing; because if you asked me what I was doing at the Catholic Worker, I would say, “Well, I wash a lot of dishes, I cook a lot of food, I clean a lot of rooms” – you know, that traditional women’s work. I garden, I work on the newspaper. But it wasn’t something that I felt comfortable at the time saying that this was my life. And I think that was too bad because what I learned was that I didn’t like those part-time jobs that I had and what I really loved was being at the house and reaching out to the guests and weaving and making paper and doing all these different gardening projects. I remember a day when I had to go in to work. I was writing for a newspaper, and I had to go spend some time on the internet; and I compared that to an afternoon in the garden – and
there’s like no comparison. It was clear where I wanted to be was in the garden. And there was just this gradual process of letting go of kind of societal views of who’s valuable and who’s doing good work. And I think I was prepped for that because my mom was a stay-at-home mom and always felt very strongly that she wasn’t recognized for her work. But it’s funny when it came to me, I couldn’t really translate that same attitude towards my own work – it took a few years. And now I feel pretty free from all that. It doesn’t really bother me. But it did play a role at a time. And the other thing was, when we moved back to home, it was definitely a whole different ball game living where I grew up where everybody knew me from when I was a little kid and suddenly doing resistance work and getting my name in the paper for being arrested. We had this really tumultuous first-arrest-in-this-area episode that was really painful for my parents – and for me because it was painful for them. And it was just hard. But it was good in some ways, too, because it wasn’t as bad as what I was expecting. Like people were just more accepting than I expected them to be. And so it’s been another process of just letting go and just like saying, “This is who I am, this is what I do – like it or not.”

Lenore was arrested for activism close to home and it caused a lot of upset to her parents who didn’t know about it beforehand and learned of it from the newspaper. It was a turning point for Lenore – facing her pain and disapproval from her parents. Some people responded positively and some negatively. But, she relates that both she and her family have grown from the experience. A year later, at an action in New York City, she became even more resolute.
And there was a transition point in my life where I knew I wanted to do this kind of resistance work, and I decided that I was going to have to bring my family along with it. Like it just was gonna have to happen.

*Spiritual Influence and Spiritual Practice*

As she mentioned, Lenore has been working with various spiritual directors throughout her life. These have been very important influences to her. Beyond that, she attends church regularly, but she explains it is not what she does for a spiritual practice. Going to church doesn’t really help me spiritually. It feels important for the sense of community we find there and because it keeps me connected to the mainstream Catholic culture. But my spirituality is fed mainly by the daily work I undertake, being part of the wider Catholic Worker community, retreats and gatherings with other Catholic Workers and activists, and spiritual direction. I see a spiritual director once a month. My spirituality is largely one of practice, action, and of experiencing and seeing God in the people and world around me, not “church” based in the traditional sense.

Beyond that, she tries to be very intentional throughout the day, focusing on pulling weeds while she is pulling weeds, keeping herself centered and in the moment. These are the main ways she keeps herself spiritually in tune.

I love the work that I do. And it’s a great thing to be able to say you love your work. And not everybody can say that. But with Steve gone, I’ve found I’ve had to be pretty intentional about feeding myself, even more so. I have to do it when he’s here too, but I get up in the morning and I go running with my dog, Scratch, and I write Steve most mornings. And that’s my kind of journaling, quiet time. I
try and meditate if I can before I go [work] on the phone business. And that is where I’m strongest – taking that morning time. And the rest of the day can be a wash if I’m not real careful about it.

Conclusion

Lenore has a three-tiered approach to her vocation: living simply and congruently with the earth, living in community and providing hospitality to the poor, and speaking out against what she believes encourages oppression of the poor, especially doing political activism. Lenore’s spiritual awakening was a slowly unfolding process. The main theme apparent throughout her interviews was that she kept trying to challenge herself and put herself in situations that would provide personal growth. It was through a series of growth-inducing situations that she has moved along her spiritual path. Seeds were planted and not acted upon for a few years. Then, one at a time, her understanding and assembling of these different pieces of the puzzle helped her to make one decision, then another, and another, feeling her way until she found what she believed was the right place for her. Now Lenore says her work is her vocation, which is her self. It was through education and experiences that her understanding of who she is and her vocation took root. Also, Lenore did not talk about coincidences or serendipitous events that had an effect on her – quite the contrary. Lenore lives her life intentionally and is action-based. As part of her spirituality, Lenore speaks of the need to be open, to let go, and to trust that her passions and her faith will lead her down the right path.

Several aspects of Lenore seem incongruous. Lenore was educated at private, prestigious Duke University. Her academic abilities and family upbringing would give
the expectation that she would be living in a very different way. Instead, she has chosen to give up much of her privilege to live in solidarity with the poor, providing hospitality through the chores of day-to-day living.

In speaking with Lenore, I had a sense of her humility, sensitivity, and understanding of other people. Lenore uses words like “probably,” “possibly,” and “I think.” This might sound as though she was unsure of herself or she was showing a lack of confidence in what she thinks. Yet, I believe it was her care not to make absolute statements about herself or others – as though she understands that from where she is sitting today, this is how she sees it, but in the future she might interpret it differently. Her sense comes from gaining the awareness from self-reflection over the years and growth in self-understanding. At the same time, she does not consider herself a risk taker, yet she takes definitive action in her antimilitarism stance and puts herself at risk through her activism. She has been arrested several times and expects that she will continue to demonstrate, even with ramifications. In this way, Lenore’s actions show her sureness in her beliefs.

Lastly, Lenore is the most traditionally religious person in this group of participants, and her religious beliefs play a leading role in her spirituality and vocation. Throughout her interviews, she uses religious undertones such as “lift up” and “bear witness.” She is active in Catholicism, attending church regularly. It could be argued that her spirituality and her vocation are tied closely to her religion. In this way, she is unique – the other research participants are not tied to any formal religious practices. Her view of her spirituality, while having grown and matured from her foundational spirituality as a child, has stayed fairly close to those teachings and beliefs, with a deeper understanding
and some personal inner-guided modifications to suit her adult beliefs. Her spirituality, however, diverges from highly traditional Catholicism and has grown in a way that is uncommon. So much so, that her own church has not acted on her request to speak about her activities.

Additionally, she has grown away from the church-image of God to an understanding of this energy she calls “the indescribable something we call love.” This gives the impression of more of an all-encompassing energy force rather than the God-the-Father image. Simultaneously, she honors the literal teachings of Jesus Christ through her spiritual vocation by providing hospitality to the poor and by witnessing against oppression. It appears she is living in both worlds – not able to fully separate from the structure and beliefs of the formal Catholic Church, yet her vocation and spirituality take her far beyond the Church’s walls.
CHAPTER SIX: DAVID AND CHERYL

“I know that I am strong in who I am and I believe truly in what I believe ...

I’m sitting at the center of my universe right now.” - David

“I’ve sort of gone from being in the dark to being in the light, to being in the light

with consciousness and realizing what I do matters.” - Cheryl

Introduction – The Short Story

David and Cheryl are caretakers of a Peace Chamber they built on their land. As part of their spiritual and vocational activities, they host dances, prayer and fire ceremonies, advocate for people in need, and petition for environmental issues within their community. They pray for and support healing and peace for and among all beings while helping others do the same. Through this practice, they believe they have found a connection within themselves in relation to a higher power, and perceive all of humanity and Nature as interconnected.

Together David and Cheryl have created a farm on their land to help them live in unity with animals and Nature. They bought a log cabin and renovated it, filling in plaster between the logs in the walls, changing lighting fixtures, and making the farmhouse their own. This farmhouse is small and cozy with cats strewn lazily about on backs of couches, easy chairs, and the hearth. It is situated on 41 acres of wooded land that is home to seven cats, three dogs, one miniature donkey, four cattle, seven chickens, three ducks, four Guinea fowl, and one (widowed) goose. Cheryl calls this her hobby farm. These animals

2 David and Cheryl requested that Nature be capitalized.
are not for food; they are Cheryl’s pets and she takes great care of them. I make a point about the animals because, for Cheryl, they are important. They inspire her and help her live conscientiously with the land. Also on the land is a Peace Chamber. They refer to themselves as the caretakers of the Peace Chamber, illustrating their belief that it belongs to the world, not to them.

Since they do not derive any income from activities associated with the Peace Chamber, David also works for a company as a software engineer. David’s job pays the bills so they can do what they truly want to do, he says. Cheryl describes her vocation as “peacemaker.” David, on the other hand, prefers to say he is “just living life” without attaching a label to it. This illustrates a sense of unity between his inner self and his actions in the outer world.

Living their lives congruently with their spiritual selves has not necessarily made their lives easier. Both David and Cheryl have had some difficult times and they are still working through recovering from those. Cheryl (age 51) had been under a lot of stress for many years, and is currently battling chronic fatigue syndrome. David (age 54) feels it is necessary for him to continue to work in a job that does not feed his spiritual needs so he can pursue his spirituality outside of his paying job. However, they are more fulfilled, living happier, more meaningful lives because of their spirituality.

David and Cheryl have found answers for themselves, yet they will always be searching for more personal and spiritual growth. They mainly perform peace rituals for their own spiritual practice and to do their part in healing the world. By hosting activities through the Peace Chamber, they provide for others a place to find what they have found, if they so choose.
Cheryl’s Vocational Path

Cheryl was raised in the country and neither of her parents finished high school. Her dad was a merchant and ran a country store. He felt enslaved by the store, putting in 16-hour days. Living in the country, they had little opportunity to experience anything else in life. Because of this, her parents encouraged her to get an education, make good grades, and get a good job. They wanted more for her than they had. Cheryl bought into this and decided she wanted to have a very different life from that in which she was raised. She wanted to go to college, but her boyfriend at the time pressured her not to go to college. At first she gave in to him and only took a six-week course in data entry and computer programming. But eventually she became interested in the computer industry and did finally enroll in a two-year technical school.

Cheryl: I sort of followed my childhood programming about getting a good job with a good salary, which I did. Then I felt like I needed a nicer house, and having grown up in the country, I didn’t want to live in the country anymore. I couldn’t wait to get away from that place to a big city – and Raleigh is where I went to school, and so that’s where I wanted to live, where people didn’t know my business every minute. My family life was limited. We took some trips, but we didn’t travel a lot and not many people did in the country. Because the people that I grew up with – there just wasn’t the money. Just getting by was kinda how you lived. Nobody was rich in the country – let’s put it that way. Once I went to school, I broke up with my boyfriend and just really started seeing I wanted more out of my life than I had ever imagined there could be.
Cheryl eventually married and moved on to what she would later describe as the “perfect” life. But instead of making her feel fulfilled, this life that she craved and created left her feeling empty and unhappy. This was the beginning of her introspection.

*Cheryl’s Formative Spirituality*

Cheryl was raised in the Baptist faith, and she was disappointed in the hypocrisy she saw there as a child. As she moved into adulthood, Cheryl tried involving herself in church by attending with her first husband and by teaching Sunday school to the children. During her time teaching, she found herself increasingly uncomfortable with the dogmatic beliefs. When she was not invited to teach the following year, she felt further disconnected from organized religion and separated herself from that particular church.

Cheryl: I was baptized when I was nine and I was so excited about it. I thought everything was going to be perfect. I saw the world all differently and thought everybody was going to be different, all the Christians living as Jesus taught. I remembered when I first sinned and felt bad, and then it wasn’t such a big deal, you know? The new wore off, and then I looked around and everybody was just being normal again, and there was a lot of hypocrisy. I just didn’t feel like that was right, although I was part of it for a while. And then I started teaching little kids, and I thought, “I’ll just teach them about love and compassion like Jesus taught, and I can do that.” And I did that, and then the church didn’t ask me if I wanted the class again the next year. They just put somebody else there. I think I had the class two years, and it really hurt my feelings. And I didn’t go back to church after that – to that church.
And then I went to church with my first husband because he wanted to go. I didn’t really want or need to go, as he did. He was searching for something spiritual at that point. I didn’t feel like I needed church in my life. But I had a lot of jealousy. I had a lot of emotions that I’m glad I’m working on now in this positive way. My spiritual path has helped me with this process. Anyway, after I got divorced, I started really looking inside myself. I’d never looked inside myself. I never really knew how to do that.

Cheryl now realizes that, at the time, she was spiritually unaware and did not know she was having a disconnect with her formative spirituality or that she had spiritual needs that went beyond anything she ever learned in church. She was personally unhappy and perhaps out of touch with her own inner self. Through the experience of divorce, she had to look inside herself. Once she became aware of her inner self, she also started becoming aware of her spiritual needs.

*David’s Vocational Path*

David held the typical types of jobs at grocery stores, weekend work at farmer’s markets, and some electrical work while growing up. His first marriage was right out of high school and he then obtained a two-year degree in data processing. This became his chosen career. He continues in the computer field today, having worked his way up to network storage engineer for a large pharmaceutical company. David’s job pays the bills; it is not his vocation. His real passion is his spiritual life and the work he does around his spiritual life and the Peace Chamber.
David’s Formative Spirituality

Raised in a Baptist household and taken to church weekly, even at a young age, David was aware there was a difference in how people behaved during the week and how they behaved at church on Sunday. Like Cheryl, David found a lot of hypocrisy and inconsistency in people who purported to be Christians. Consequently, he developed a negative view of religious practices. Yet David had a strong desire for a spiritual life and cannot remember a time when he was not searching for a spirituality in which he could believe.

David: I felt like the whole thing was pretty hypocritical in a lot of ways, and I felt more of a need to have my own connection with the Spirit\(^3\) and with God than to have it through somebody else – in other words, to have a preacher that prayed for me to be saved and that I was saved some other way that was outside of my own connection with God or with Spirit. And so I spent a lot of my life really searching for my own way of believing and being.

He joined the Navy and served for four years. Throughout his enlisted time, David would go to the ship’s library and read all he could on different religions. While Far Eastern religions were of particular interest to him, none really took hold.

David: I really connected with Eastern religions, at least I thought, because you participated in your own religion. To me, it was more about your connection with your Creator or with the gods or with deities, or whatever it turned out to be. I felt stronger about that than I did the Christian religion that I was brought up in.

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\(^3\) David and Cheryl requested that Spirit be capitalized.
After the Navy, David continued his exploration and became involved in the Lutheran Church for a while. He was an active member, helped to build the church and participated in meetings. But again he was not satisfied. It wasn’t until some life-altering events took place that David found what he was looking for in the Native American tradition.

*The Influence of Relationships on Cheryl’s Spiritual Path*

Throughout her interviews, Cheryl speaks of her relationships with her first husband, with David, and with their daughter. She can identify moments of growth and awareness through these relationships. During her first marriage, she was unaware of her spiritual needs and had a sense of dissatisfaction with her marriage and her life at that time. It was only after her marriage ended and she began her relationship with David that her spiritual development began to blossom. Cheryl’s spiritual awareness and spiritual development were an outgrowth of crises, or painful life experiences through her relationships with others. David also outlines several points of difficulty in their lives that caused so much marital strife it almost broke them apart. But he relates that instead, it may have provided the seminal building blocks for a yet-to-come spiritual awareness.

Cheryl: [The first time] I got married, I got the job with the money, a new house, new car, new furniture, had everything that I was supposed to have to make me happy. And I looked around and I was miserable. And it terrified me because I obviously wasn’t happy in my relationship where I was controlled by my [first] husband. But I didn’t understand how you think about relationships. I did what I was taught to do; but I didn’t know a thing about relationships ‘cause I never saw my parents interact. And I had all the material things, but I was unhappy. And so that’s when I looked at getting out of my marriage. And my husband at the time
wanted to have children – and I didn’t, and I knew it was because I wasn’t happy in that relationship. And then I had to let go of everything we had worked for up ‘til then and start over. Then David and I met, and I was looking for what is life about, and he had a lot of answers. We just started off on this journey together ‘cause I guess we were kinda feeling the same way about life.

*Their Journey Toward Spiritual Awareness*

When they met, Cheryl reports an instant attraction to David. Some of this may be because Cheryl was looking for answers, and David, with his interest in all things spiritual, provided some answers. They married and had a baby girl. About the same time, David’s son from his first marriage came to live with them, and Cheryl became mother to two children.

Until that point, Cheryl’s job was her life. Cheryl was a perfectionist, a high achiever, always doing her best. Her identity was tied to her job. And as for many women, an upwardly mobile career and new baby are two activities that are difficult to reconcile. While at work, she was in control and very competent. She had opportunities to grow and make money, and it fed her ego. But at home with her baby, she did not feel in control.

Cheryl: And when I had my baby, it was a big wake-up call. I was terrified. I couldn’t admit this much to myself at the time because David wanted me to stay home with the baby and part of me wanted to – but part of me was terrified to do that. I didn’t know how to be a mother. I didn’t know how to be at home. And I was really afraid. And I was also afraid that we wouldn’t financially be able to make it – although looking back we could have made it easily. But I just had a lot
of fear around that and my identity – who was I, you know? I stayed home with
my baby for five months and finally I went back to work where everything felt
familiar and I was in control. And, when I was at home, I wasn’t in control. I had
a colicky baby, you know? It was scary, a scary place to be. Once I went back to
work, it was easier being at work than at home, and I had a wonderful nanny that
was like a mother – it was just so easy. And then I got an opportunity to get into
management, which was wonderful! Looking back, it’s like I was programmed
that you just climb the ladder – that’s just what you do. And that was at a point
when I was realizing I could make choices. And, of course, the higher in
management you went, the more money there was. So I was really on a money
path, I guess, more than anything. It was feeding my ego to be promoted into that
and that someone was interested in me being management material, and that
whole thing. So I went for that.

Cheryl was ambivalent about staying home with her daughter versus going back to work.
She was fearful of being home alone with a colicky baby. The need for more money
because of increased expenses associated with their new house combined with the
promise of more money won her over. Her success at work also fed her ego and sense of
identity; so she went back to work. But later she found that she was not listening to her
inner self, which caused her a lot of pain through crisis.

Event One: Day Care Crisis

Cheryl: And when we moved to Raleigh, everything turned upside down. I
couldn’t find care for my daughter and I decided to put her in day care (she was
two years old). And she went from this very safe world where she was at home, with a nanny and her little friends next door, to starting nursery school – a totally unfamiliar place where she was with a bunch of unfamiliar children. Although I tried to pick day care carefully, she was never happy, I was never happy. I cried every day that I had to leave her there, and so did she. I wanted someone to rescue me from that situation. It’s like I didn’t know how to save myself from that. I wasn’t happy. I knew she wasn’t happy, and I really wanted David to say, “Stay home.” But now we had bought our dream house, gone into debt the most we ever had, and we just really needed my salary very much. We made the same salary and cutting it in half was a lot. And so I was talking about how I felt, but I didn’t feel financially that I could quit. There again, I was putting the money first.

Cheryl now wanted to stay at home with the baby but felt she could not make the decision alone. Cheryl did not seem to have the confidence or the strength to make her own decision; instead, she relied on David to tell her to stay home, which he did not do. It was when a crises occurred that she was able to do what she believed was right.

Cheryl: And then my daughter was abused in the day care center, and I found out on my birthday. And so then I had to quit work, and I had to face her abuser alone. David wasn’t able to support me with any of that. I don’t remember any of my work that was going on during that time; I was in shock. I looked into prosecuting the woman, and I called Social Services. I finally went to a psychiatrist, and he advised me to stay at home with her until she started school to help her get through this trauma. So I tried being a mother for the first time, 24 hours a day, with a two-year-old.
Cheryl took a leave of absence and was able to obtain some contract work from home. She found herself trying to be a mother, manage a household and budget, and learn new computer languages while staying abreast with a changing industry. But this began her awareness of knowing she was not listening to her inner self and that something needed to change.

Cheryl: So I was doing different jobs, having to learn different things, trying to be a mother, keep things together, and feeling guilty. And it was awful, it was awful. And then I realized we couldn’t keep our house – we were using up our savings. So we finally had to sell this house, which was in the perfect neighborhood, and everything was perfect. So we moved further out in the country. Fortunately, we were able to build a house – our first house that we built – and I was in a neighborhood that was full of children my daughter’s age and made a lot of friends there. That’s when I got real involved in school, and that’s when my heart began to change, I think – because at that point I knew that I had put my work in front of my feelings and my intuition, not honoring that. And then, seeing what happened to my daughter, I had a lot of guilt that I’ve carried for a lot of years. So she settled down, I settled down and I was doing contract work. It was interesting because I used to say that, when I had children, I wanted to do contract programming, but I didn’t have the nerve to step out on my own and do that. But I realized I was doing what I’d always wanted to do.

Cheryl found herself living out a vision she wanted for herself years before. This is the first of two instances when Cheryl mentions she was unwittingly doing what she had always wanted to do.
During this time, David relates his own personal struggle. He was dealing with the double impact of the aftermath of his divorce and the effect of that and his daughter’s abuse.

David: There was a period of time when I was struggling with myself internally. I went through a divorce with my first wife, and it wasn’t too long after that that Cheryl and I were together. And, course, I was having some difficulty with my ex-wife at the time. I ended up getting custody of my son, so he lived with us shortly after we got married. So there was a lot of stress involved in that for us because we really didn’t know much about how to be parents and I was struggling with trying to have a good career where I was working a lot. And I was drinking at the time. So when I would get off work in the afternoon, I would drink for a while. And then by the time I was at home in the house, that quiet time, I was pretty useless. I would fall asleep and Cheryl had most of it on her at that point. So that was a difficult time in our lives. Anyway, we got through that – we didn’t get through it immediately, of course – it went on for several years. We moved back to Raleigh and during the time when Cheryl was talking about – when our daughter was in day care and going through that abuse – that was one of my worst times, I guess. I was really struggling with drinking and not being present. And Cheryl didn’t feel like she could count on me much to help her do anything; so she really wouldn’t even ask. And I didn’t volunteer to help much at all; so it was a difficult time in our lives.

There were many difficult issues happening all at once during this time, one increasing the effect of the other. Although they were living together, they were moving through life
Cheryl committed herself to raising her children and being the good mom. She fell into the Super Woman trap – believing she could have the career, be a full-time mom, be involved in her daughter’s school PTA, girl scouts, the church, and Sunday school. She found the more she focused on things society dictated she do, the more stress and dissatisfaction she felt with the superficial life she was living.

Cheryl: And then, when we moved out in the country, there was a little local church nearby that was the community church. And the children and I got involved in that, and that was a lot of fun. And I ended up teaching Sunday school. This was a Methodist church. But all this was still doing the right things and playing the right parts and living the life I was supposed to live. Although I had progressed somewhat, I was still being superficial about it all. And then I remember my daughter starting to ask me questions about my spirituality that I couldn’t really answer – because the way I had been taught didn’t feel right to me, but I didn’t have the answers – such as, what did I believe about God and Creation and this whole thing. And then I caught myself teaching Sunday school and reading the material, realizing I don’t believe what I’m teaching. So I thought, this isn’t right, I can’t do this anymore. And then I was having to fight my kids to get them ready for church, and I didn’t really want to go either. I remember my daughter saying, “Why are we doing this?” She was seven or eight, I think. “Why are we going somewhere where we don’t want to go?” And I said, “Well, to worship God.” “Well, why can’t we worship God here? Why do we have to go to church?” I said, “Well, uh, well, because you have to, you know?” I’d been taught
that you had to, but I knew that you didn’t have to. So from that point I started looking for what I really did believe in.

Cheryl was getting involved in a church again, living the life she was taught by her parents, and performing the actions without questioning her own beliefs. All the while, she was becoming aware of her disconnect from it all. Finally it was a child’s simple question “Why?” that gave her the moment she needed to ask herself the same question.

During this time, David was lost in his own world of drinking and couldn’t be reached for support. They were having trouble in their marriage. Cheryl speaks of how they were playing the “right” part and they had all the “right” things. But something was missing. They realized they didn’t have a spiritual life.

Cheryl: So we really were looking for something that we both could believe in and something that we could share with our kids – because I didn’t know what I believed. I was real intrigued by all the studying that David had done about Eastern religions because I grew up in a little Southern Baptist church and that’s mostly all I knew there was. I didn’t really know about other religions at all, and David taught me a lot about that. And I was curious, but it wasn’t a priority until our marriage was in trouble and something had to change.

Event Two: St. John, Virgin Islands

David and Cheryl began marriage counseling to make a positive impact on their marriage. At that time, David’s aunt and uncle gave them a week’s vacation in St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands. Cheryl relates this as a turning point, both in their marriage and in
their spiritual awareness. They saw a real contrast between the way they were living and life in the country. It struck a familiar and comfortable chord for Cheryl.

*Cheryl’s Awakening*

Cheryl: We got to stay at a resort, which was wonderful. We rented a jeep and we traveled the island. I felt like Robinson Crusoe. And everything was so laid back. They had chickens walking through the restaurants and cats walking through, and everything was open. There were no closed-in places except where we were staying, and no air-conditioning. I just fell in love with it, it was just so magical! In fact, I found two diamond rings in the water. It just felt magical, because on the back side of that island there’s nothing, and we drove along it just to see the beauty of naturalness. Then we came back home and realized we’re not living in naturalness – we’re living in artificial naturalness. I think I got in close contact with the land, all the elements there at St. John, which I feel here on the farm. And we are so busy living our lives that we miss that connection. Most of our life where we live is concrete and artificial grass – that is what I call it – manicured lawns and just cookie-cutter houses, you know? That’s the way we were living and doing all the right things, having all the right cars, the clothes, and everything. Then we went to St. John, and when we came back home, it just didn’t feel right to live that way. So that’s what I felt. It’s like the land was speaking to us, or maybe it was God. It’s all the same to me. And I grew up in the country running through the woods as a child. It was just like suddenly all those feelings came back – and I needed that in my life. I wanted my children to have that, and I wanted that for me. I think David and I both agreed on that. So when we came
back from our trip that’s when we really started looking for land in the country.

And this was in 1990.

Cheryl’s childhood was rooted in country living. As she grew into young adulthood, she wanted to experience new things and a bigger city and a more affluent lifestyle, which she was soon living. Gradually, she became aware that this lifestyle was taking her away from her inner self. After the vacation on St. John, she felt a strong need to return to her roots, that is, live the simple, country lifestyle in which she was raised.

**David’s Awakening**

David felt the same as Cheryl, really connecting with Nature in St. John. The distractions of suburbia kept him from connecting with his inner self. He distinctly felt the need for a change in their lives and explains how this became an awakening for him. This restarted David on the spiritual search he had been on years before.

David: Something happened there, I don’t know what. But when we came home, we had to do something. We had to change something, and so that’s what we did. We started looking for whatever we could find to learn about spiritual things. I know that when we came back, I started going outdoors in the evening, and I made a little area behind our house in a subdivision. I wanted to sit and be, have quiet time and meditate; and it seems just about every single time I would do that, somebody would come out in the evening and flip lights on and turn dogs out; and I was so distracted by those things. I realized that with all this going on around me, I couldn’t reconnect with the tranquility that we had at St. John where you could go outside and you could see the stars, you could see the sky, you could feel those things. I realized when I got back that that wasn’t happening for me, where
we lived, anyway. After we got back, we decided to start learning whatever we could. I mean we went to different things in Raleigh. There were these little seminars that we would go to and try to find out about spiritual things – what other people were doing. And it seemed like there was a lot of that going on in little places around town.

David was reinvigorated in his spiritual search, and they read, attended seminars, and listened to speakers. All of this was his search for his spiritual connection.

Spiritual Practice and Spiritual Influence

David and Cheryl learned about workshops, centers, and retreats and participated in various seminars – yet nothing quite felt right. One thing led them to another until they attended a seminar at the Earth Center and met a Native Elder, Sun Bear. This was their first exposure to Native American spirituality, and both David and Cheryl connected with his teachings.

David: And I think the Earth Center is where we met the people that we really needed to help us get onto the path that we’re on. We met Sun Bear there at his talk in Asheville, North Carolina. His talk was mostly about survival skills, and how you need to get yourself in touch with the earth and learn about plants, learn what you can eat, and all these kinds of things. We met Joseph Rael there, Beautiful Painted Arrow, who’s been a very significant person in both our lives as far as teaching us a lot about “being.” He taught us more about how to be and how to experience what’s going on in your life, how to connect with animals and how to connect with trees, how to connect with each other, and how connected we all are. And, anyway, when we met these people, that’s when I realized that all this
Vocation as a Means of Expressing Spirituality

searching that I had been doing most of my life for the right spiritual way of being – which I had almost given up on at that time – was right there, and they were saying all the things that I felt like were the right things. And they resonated with me. And in my heart, I felt like this is really what I have been looking for. And so we got involved, really involved. And there were a lot of circumstances that led up to those involvements that were what a lot of people would consider more than coincidence. There were just some pretty incredible events that led us to be where we are now, actually, in that way of being. We got some invitations to go out West and be involved on the reservations, to be involved in some spiritual activities. And we did that. We’ve been doing it for years now, I think for 13 years. We’ve been going every year to Sun Dance on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

After all David’s searching and reading throughout his life, he finally found a way of being that felt right. He speaks of serendipitous events that led them along in their spiritual path to the West and the Native ways. These serendipitous events have occurred so many times that he now looks for them.

David: I carry that with me, too, in my every day life because I look for things. You know, when you make the kind of spiritual connection that I’ve made, I feel like I can see … I’m always watching for guidance, I guess; and I see it and I get it all the time in the smallest ways. There’s a road map that’s laid out for us. It depends on what sign that we might see – and I don’t mean like a stop sign or a written sign – it could be anything almost. But you just have to be aware of where you are, what you’re doing, how you’re feeling at the time, and what you’re thinking about when something happens that will direct you to what you need to
do next; and depending on what you do there, something else will take place. In my view, it’s definitely there. I don’t question that at all anymore.

Cheryl explains her reaction to Sun Bear and the Native beliefs. Her great grandfather was Cherokee, but until now she never explored any Native ways.

Cheryl: We’d heard about Sun Bear. He was speaking out about the earth and caring for the earth, and it was things I had never heard but resonated in my soul – the earth being our mother, how we are all connected – I was like, remembering this or something. So, from the searching, we found a place in the mountains called the Earth Center, which was a couple that had opened up their home and were bringing in Native American teachers to teach their spirituality to white people or anybody that wanted to come. And also they were building a Peace Chamber, which was a vision of the Native American, Joseph Rael, Beautiful Painted Arrow. And so I think that was the quest: I was learning the Native American way of looking at the world, and it felt right to me. And the ceremonies felt right to me, even though I didn’t understand them all. But I was just like a sponge, absorbing all this. It was really touching my heart, and it really felt right; and it was like, we’re on to something here. And then I just wanted to learn more and more about what the Indian people thought and believed. As a culture, I’m sure they had their beliefs of how connected we are to the land and the spirits and everything. And, of course, I’ve since learned that it’s the people, too. But the Native American people – the example of how they’ve lived their lives – has impacted me a lot.
This desire to live more closely with the earth resonated with both David and Cheryl. This is what they felt on St. John, and now they were hearing this as a foundation for spirituality. Cheryl uses the word “remembering” as if the earth connection was in her Spirit all along.

Jim DuBray’s (Sun Bear) teachings especially resonated with David who found in him a mentor and a friend. Sun Bear has had a profound influence on David as he has grown personally and spiritually through his association with Sun Bear. David first participated in the Sun Dance and since then Sun Dance is David’s way of spirituality.

David: And Grandfather Jim DuBray really changed my life. I think he really was focused on helping me to become a human being, become a man, rather than someone who was just mindlessly going along in life. And he spent a lot of the time that we had together doing that for me. And that is, in itself, a way of being, the Lakota way of being. It’s where you help each other, that you’re all one, that you’re in the same circle, and that you help each other in many ways – not just your spiritual growth and your spiritual life, but whatever a person needs in their life. If you see that someone needs something, you try to help ‘em out with that. And that really resonated with me. And, through that, I actually worked in some of the ceremonies, did some work there for a few years in trying to help out: carrying stones and chopping wood and doing things like that to prepare for ceremonies and to help where ceremonies were taking place. And I just get a lot stronger connection with the land and with the earth and with the Spirit of the earth and of the stones and of the trees and of the waters and the animals and those kind of things through those experiences. I believe in that way of beingness,
and so every year I still go back; for 13 years I’ve been going there. That’s where
the year ends and the year begins for me: July out in South Dakota. And we go
and we pray for the people, we pray to give thanks for what we got for this year
and to pray for a good year next year. And we also pray for the people who ask
for prayer while we’re there. It’s really praying for a vision. You’re asking the
Spirit to show you something – well, to answer your prayers. You have prayers
and you’re asking for the Spirit to show you something that will help your people.
So whatever you’re praying for, you’re asking for help for that, and you’re hoping
that you’ll receive some information from the Spirit about it. And then Sun
Dance, which is what I do, that’s my way of being. It’s a thank you, giving thanks
for all the things that I’ve gotten for this year and for all the prayers that have
been answered. I’m praying also for help for the next year. Look upon us and help
us. And that’s where my growth, my spiritual awakening, and awareness came
from. And it’s been that for years now, many years. So that really is the center of
my spiritual life. That’s mine personally, and Cheryl and I support each other in
our spiritual lives.

The focus of the Sun Dance is prayer for helping others. David’s spiritual way of being is
focused on supporting and helping others, as Sun Bear helped him. Part of David’s
vocation is to share with others the spiritual connection that he has found.

David: I have to say one thing that I believe that you should do is, if you make a
spiritual connection and you feel strongly that you need to share that with people,
then you should help them to do the same thing. Help them to see that what they
have in front of them every single day is a miracle and it’s a gift from Spirit.
When you wake up in the morning, that’s a gift to you from Spirit – just the fact that you did that. And if you learn to realize when you walk out and you see birds and you see trees and you see the sky, all of that is a gift from Spirit. And to help people realize that connection to me is what you do with your life. When you feel that and when you have that, you have to share that. And so when people come here, that’s what we do. We help them to realize that it’s nothing new, it’s nothing that we all don’t have. But most people have forgotten it, I think. At least most of the people that I’m around; it seems like they’ve forgotten it. It’s presented to them in a way that doesn’t help them to realize that they’re as important as everybody else in the eyes of Spirit – in the eyes of God, is what I’m talking about.

David’s and Cheryl’s newfound spiritual awareness caused a change in them and how they live their lives. Cheryl did not feel the Sun Dance was for her, but resonated more with Joseph Rael, Beautiful Painted Arrow. He became her teacher. After her first dance, she felt transformed. She speaks of how it helped her get through some emotional and mental blocks, but also gave her an awareness of and compassion for others in their hunger or pain that compels her to help anyone with whom she comes into contact.

Cheryl: David went to the reservation and participated or helped with the ceremonies there; and that felt important to me, to help the people. And I saw poverty like I’ve never seen it, and I realized how grateful I was for how we live and things we take for granted. It was like a third-world country. It still is. And these people have just been forgotten; and so really it’s been an education for me like I could have never gotten anywhere else. Joseph Rael had visions of dances
for people on the earth today that can help develop or strengthen a connection to Spirit, help clear emotional blocks, just help open your heart. That’s what it’s done for me. Those dances resonated with me and have helped me. It’s like therapy in a weekend dance, like a year’s worth of therapy. You fast and you pray, and you feel like you’re gonna die and you don’t. When you eat again and you drink again, I’ve never felt such respect for food and water. My first dance changed the way I saw the world forever, you know? So when I see someone hungry or an animal that’s hungry, I just have to feed it. David gets frustrated with me. I feed the dogs all along the path to our house.

Cheryl explains the purpose of the dance and what it does for the individual and all people:

Cheryl: Ceremonial dances are a form of prayer. These dances are similar to the ancient, traditional dances of indigenous people, but are created for ALL people on the planet at this point in time. When one feels the call to dance, the reason to engage in this form of prayer may not be known until after the ceremony has occurred. Others know right away what they want to pray for, such as world peace, the environment, thanksgiving, personal healing, or healing for another.

When we dance, we represent a physical manifestation of our prayer. By fasting, we become containers being emptied and refilled with Spiritual Light and heightened awareness. Truly, our physical bodies are all we have to call our own. To give of our bodies by dancing and fasting, we are making the ultimate sacrifice in order to obtain spiritual awareness, peace, and healing. On a personal level, dancers may experience breakthrough and transformation, as healing is brought
about on mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual levels. Because all life on the planet is connected to each other, the healing and peace we bring to ourselves also brings healing and peace to the earth and all life upon her. On a planetary level, the dancer’s energy merges with the energy and Spirits of the land, filling the land with peaceful and loving vibrations. The dance ceremony releases new spiritual energy to be used however it is needed for peace and healing throughout the planet and into the cosmos.

During the dances, the dancer fasts, prays, keeps silent, and moves back and forth to the sacred tree, which represents Spirit. The dance may last for several days, and during that time the dancer sleeps outside, close to the earth.

Cheryl: An important part of the dance is to focus on yourself. We’re so distracted day-to-day by anything around us; and, as a dancer, you could watch somebody and focus on them and still not focus on yourself. But we have periods of dancing and periods of rest. And for a lot of people, they can’t rest, they fidget. You’re supposed to really lie down – and they can’t. And they’ll get up and down, they’ll write in a journal. They don’t know how to be with themselves. And I think that’s one sad thing that’s happening in our society is people don’t have alone time and they don’t feel comfortable alone. And now I’m saying that from personal experience. I used to never feel comfortable doing things alone. And the dances have helped me to grow in that way.

David: I dance a different way than Cheryl does, and I have a different view of dancing and fasting – because we do talk – but while we’re dancing, we’re praying. We don’t talk while we’re dancing. We’re actually praying. And we fast
and we pray like that, because when you fast, it helps you to overcome, go beyond your physicalness and be closer to Spirit – and that’s the reason for doing that. So when you’re closer to Spirit, your prayers, you are stronger that way. You’re not focused on physical stuff or physical things. You go beyond those things.

Cheryl: Because you get past the hunger, and then you really do get to a place where you can’t go if you’re eating and drinking. You get more out of the physical and more into the Spiritual part of life.

David explains that the denying of the physical by fasting and being silent is helpful in getting in touch with the Spirit, but it is not a necessary component. He believes there are many ways to get to the same place, such as yoga or meditation, and spiritually in-tune people may be able to do that. But he believes one needs to be highly disciplined to be able to focus beyond the physical self.

Vision Quest

As part of their spiritual practice, David and Cheryl have participated in a vision quest, a Native tradition properly translated as “Crying for a Vision.” During a vision quest, the person is purposely put into what David likens as a crisis mode: left alone in the woods or on a mountain for several days and nights without food or water, staying in a small area. David relates, “You pray, and you pray, and you pray.” People do this for different reasons: to prepare themselves for something, to get help, to pray for the people of the earth, or to pray for whatever they need. He was reluctant to tell me what happens during a vision quest because it is very private, explaining, “It’s your experience with God and with Spirit, however you see that.” After the vision quest has ended, the person
then discusses what happened with her or his spiritual teacher who helps decipher the meaning. He and Cheryl describe what a vision may be like:

Cheryl: Sometimes it can be a dream and sometimes it can just be a moment in time that you just see. I’ve had a vision of a ceremony, and I’ve heard Joseph talk about it so many times saying a vision comes in a flash, it comes in a snap – and it’s all there.

David: You can know for that flash, just like that, everything – it’s like that when you have a vision. Or you can know exactly what that vision wants you to know, and that’s powerful.

Visions are generally about helping people heal themselves and about finding spiritual connection. David and Cheryl explain that when one is given a vision, it is something to be acted upon. It is not meant to simply be an insight or awareness. They emphasize that one always has the choice to act on it or not; but if it is not acted upon, one will probably miss an opportunity for spiritual growth. Perhaps there is no time limit set for acting on the vision, and we always have free will. But when the vision is completed, it will provide more spiritual growth.

*The Peace Chamber as Vocation*

David and Cheryl’s Peace Chamber is modeled on Joseph Rael’s vision. This is a place they use for prayer. In it and on the grounds they host dances, chants, prayers, and sacred fire services. This Peace Chamber is one of 70 around the world. David’s and Cheryl’s work on the farm and with the Peace Chamber is to live in harmony with the environment, help people who are searching to find a spiritual path, host prayers and dances, and help people connect with Spirit. The dances come from visions but are not
Native American dances. Events on the land include dancing, fasting and praying, fire ceremonies, and songs for peace and healing. David and Cheryl provide an opportunity for others who are moved in the same way, and ultimately it is becoming a community that is spreading throughout the world. The ceremonies require some preparation, and those who participate in the ceremonies are also invited to help with the preparations. This is yet another way to connect with Spirit.

David: We’ve been involved with Peace Sound Chambers. I call ‘em prayer chambers because I think that’s what they really are. But these are all over the world now. I think there’s about 70 of ‘em, and we have one here in our yard. People come from all over the world to be involved with us in praying this way. And the original use for the sound chambers was for praying using sound – just basically the vowels in the alphabet, the sound of the vowels which happen to be in most languages. So they’re convenient, I suppose. But the way I personally see my spiritual life is that I see the presence of Spirit and the presence of God in just everyone, everything. It’s mostly a strong awareness. You just have to become really more aware than you are of your environment and of the things around you, and then see the Spirit that’s in everything. And I feel like our society that we’re in now, the dominant society that we live in here, is not about that at all. In fact, it drives a wedge between your connection to Spirit and you. Because we’re still taught you can go and look to these people to do your praying for you – pay people money and put it in the plate – and people can pray with or for you. And it’ll be okay for another week, I suppose, until you do it again. But we disconnect
ourselves from the real spiritual life. And that’s what the animals do [connect us with Spirit]. With the animals around you, you can feel that spiritual connection. David and Cheryl very much see themselves as a part of the greater world, and perhaps that is the foundation of their spiritual practice – to pray for and help heal all of humanity through the work they do with the Peace Chamber. Through the Peace Chamber, they connect with a community of people and they pray for all. They live consciously with the earth and strive to help others see the interconnection of all of life and Nature.

David: The connection to community builds – the energy of the people builds – and when you’re together, it’s just a really nice experience, I think. No matter whether you’re dancing for four days without food and water, all the people around you are supporting you and giving you strength to do that so you can do that for the people that are helping you and for the people that you’re praying for. I think, through example, we try to teach people a better way of living and of being, as far as living consciously: in other words, when we have vegetarian food in our home, we give thanks for our food, we drink soy milk, or live in a more conscious way on this planet. I think people can see that it’s good for you and it’s good for the planet. So I think a big part of what we do is try to live by example of what we’re trying to say.

I think that’s been one of the most rewarding things that I see, that what we are able to do with people is to share that way so that they can learn, we can feel good about what we are doing, and they can feel good about what they’re doing. It’s all important. We all realize that what we’re doing is important simply if for nothing else – I mean, I’m sitting at the center of my universe right now. So
when I can share something with you that makes you happy or you can share something with me that makes me happy or helps me to do something that is better than I did before, what more can you do than that?

_Cultural Influences_

Both David and Cheryl have crossed over into another culture by being involved in the Native American ways. This has not always been easy, as they often felt judged by Native people because they are white. At times Cheryl confesses that she felt embarrassed to be a white person because of the injustices that whites have done to Native people. But now that the couple is accepted, they feel more empowered because of their ability to step from one culture to another.

David: The way we are and the way we’ve chosen to live our lives, as far as spiritually and that goes, has empowered me in this society. I get a lot of strength from it that I wouldn’t have gotten, I think, if I had followed everybody and done what everybody else did. Because in this society – this culture that we’re in right now – generally everywhere I go, it seems like most people are Christian based and that’s what’s mostly around us. And I think that believing like I believe actually has given me inner strength and empowered me, because if someone doesn’t appreciate what I have to say, it’s okay, you know? If someone doesn’t believe what I believe or they have an issue with it, I understand that’s their issue and it’s not mine. And so I get strength from that because I know that I am strong in who I am and I believe truly in what I believe. I see a lot of people who are being kind of mindless in that regard. They haven’t thought about who they are. They’ve just followed what they’re supposed to do. This is how I’m supposed to
be, this is what I’ve been told to do – there’s no question in their minds. Well, I
don’t know if there is or not. I don’t think they’ve taken the time to question a lot
of things, and so it sort of gives me strength in knowing that I’ve really looked at
it very hard and tried to experience my beliefs, not just accepted that this is what
things are like. That’s why I see people say one thing and do another as far as
their religious life or spiritual life goes. They aren’t really practicing what they
preach. I hear words come out of their mouths, but I see different actions. And so
I feel I am a better person for being what I believe and living my life the way I
want to believe is right.

David feels a connection to the Native culture and enjoys feeling accepted into this
culture. As part of his spiritual life, he was told by his spiritual mentor never to cut his
hair. He takes this seriously and maintains his long gray hair in a ponytail reaching down
his back. Yet David speaks of many ways of living a spiritual life. He believes there are
many paths to follow and many ways to get to one’s path.

David: I think there are many spiritual ways of living your life that are correct.
There’s not just one that’s the right way to be. If you connect with God,
whichever way you do it and whatever the name is for God, I think it’s perfectly
fine. In fact it’s great if that’s how you do it, as long as you’re true to yourself
about it and honest within yourself about what you’re doing.

Beyond the crossing into the Native culture, Cheryl is aware that by living on their farm
in the country, in the simple way that they do, there is a culture clash with the “suburban
society.” She has had to face her image in the “eyes of society” and has come to embrace
the description of “outrageous” that society has for her with some degree of satisfaction.
Cheryl: My mom thinks I’ve lost my mind, that I live out here this way. She always wanted me to have a little brick house in the suburbs, and here I am in this log cabin in the woods, which she’s terrified of. Yet she lives beside a busy highway and thinks that’s safe, you know? But my brother, I asked him, “Do you think I’m nuts because I live this way?” And he said “No, you always loved animals, and I always thought you’d have a farm and have animals.” I never realized that I’d made my dream come true because I did always want a farm. I had relatives that lived in the country and had farms, and I used to think that was the greatest life of all. And I realized we’ve built a little farm. It’s a hobby farm, which is – I guess, a lot of people think we’re crazy. Sometimes I think we are. But I’m learning how important passion is. We’re passionate about what we do. I am passionate about life!

This is the second time Cheryl found herself doing exactly what she wanted to be doing, without purposely setting out to accomplish it. Perhaps these, too, are acts of serendipity.

David’s Vision

During David’s and Cheryl’s marriage counseling, their counselor was growing spiritually, as well. It seems the three of them, working together, enhanced each other’s spiritual growth. As the counselor was working with David, he had what he refers to as a “vision of a 40-acre farm where they would teach values.” This was three years before they bought their 41-acre farm. They didn’t know what “teaching values” meant at the time, but now it seems clear that David had a vision of their farm and peace work that they are now doing. And David named their farm Periwinkleton, which means “sewing the seeds that nurture the heart.”
Effect of Living a Spiritually Congruent Life

Another push from her daughter caused Cheryl to reexamine another aspect of her life she lived unconsciously. Cheryl began understanding the interconnectedness of life and needed to both satisfy her daughter’s desire to be a vegetarian and live congruently on this planet.

Cheryl: When my daughter was little, she would never eat anything that would have a bone in it. So I learned that if I would take meat off the bone, she would eat it; I didn’t know any other way to be. One day I was commenting about something I had heard about how food animals are mistreated in factory farming; and my daughter was eating a hamburger, saying that she was glad we didn’t eat animals. And her brother told her hamburger was a cow. And she just threw it down and looked at me and said, “How could you lie to me?” And I felt so bad again. And so then I had to learn how for us to eat differently. I realized I was focusing on doing the right things, yet was just oblivious to important things that were happening in the world. So then we became vegetarians. The more I learned about being vegetarian, the more I learned about factory farming, what had happened to the country farms that I knew growing up, how the meat and dairy industries run the country. I just became more and more aware. And I wanted to live more consciously and simply, and I was really anti-factory farming, you know? I’ve sort of gone from being in the dark to being in the light to being in the light with consciousness and realizing what I do matters, and living my life educating people who want to hear what I have learned. I have a lot of respect for the people who raise animals humanely. I can’t save every cow from the life they
have to live, but I can give these cows, the cows on my farm, their freedom. All my animals have a happy life. That’s why I let my chickens run loose – to be free, not to live in cages!

Cheryl finds that her spiritual awareness has affected how she sees the world and the animals with whom she cohabits the world. She has taken it upon herself to make an impact on the lives of the animals she comes into contact with. Since they live in the country, this has included buying and raising two calves from the neighbor’s yard because she was knew they were being raised for slaughter, as well as caretaking the dogs in her neighborhood. There are several families who have dogs that are not taken care of and would otherwise starve. Cheryl has made friends with these country people, who were suspicious of her motivations at first, and has “donated” food for the starving dogs. With the help of a friend, she convinced her neighbors to spay their dogs. Cheryl has helped transport the dogs to and from the humane society for the spaying and, with her friend, helped care for them during their recovery because she didn’t trust they would be properly cared for at their homes. Additionally, she has anonymously donated some of the funds for the spaying and told them it was a special grant from the humane society. This shows that Cheryl has taken a proactive stance in improving the lives of the dogs with whom she is in direct contact. She will not close her eyes and look away; and she is able to accomplish it in a creative, amicable way.

With the rescue of the neighbor’s two calves from being raised for slaughter, David and Cheryl built a farm, a hobby farm. All of the animals on it are pets. These animals help David and Cheryl remember their connection to all of Nature and make their farm what it is: a sanctuary for all beings.
Partnership and Its Impact on Spiritual Growth

Both David and Cheryl express the importance of their lives together as impacting each other’s spiritual growth. David explains that it was their experiences together as a couple that were of the most influence on their spiritual journey and that they had tremendous growth through each other. It seems another coincidence that both David and Cheryl resonated so completely with the Native American spirituality. Throughout his life, David had been searching through different religions, unaware of the Native way. Cheryl, who has Cherokee in her heritage, never thought about any other religion except Baptist, in which she was socialized. But it was perhaps the combination of the difficulty in their marriage, the gift of a vacation in St. John, and hearing Sun Bear speak that caused both to open themselves up to this way of life.

Cheryl: When I’ve wanted to walk away [from our marriage], something always pulled me back. And yeah, I love the fact that we’re together and that we kinda can feed off each other. I can share my soul with him; things that other people would think were weird he listens to and supports me. I see him in action, and I’m in awe of the spiritual strength he has and how much he’s learned and how precious life is. And there’s been times when he would go on his vision quest, and when he’d come back, he would be very different. And I would have to adjust to that different person. It’s subtle, but yet it’s different. And that’s one thing we’ve learned: to accept that every time one of us goes away, there’s change. If we go away together, we both change; but we’re changing while we’re there together.

David: There was a period in our lives where we put each other through hell. And that was the most growth we ever did. It just had to be. It was the way we were,
the way I was and the way she was that caused us to do that. We ran head-on into that at one point in our relationship, and that’s what caused our hearts to open up, because we had to talk about those things in order to make it through and just keep the marriage together. And when we did that, our hearts opened up to talk with each other. We had to share our thoughts, our feelings, and all those things with each other; and so we were more capable of doing that with other people and with whatever came into our lives. And we shared a lot of things with each other, just experiences that we’ve had. We can do that now, where we couldn’t have prior to that. And if we’d have walked away from our marriage, we would never have made the growth that we did. We wouldn’t have made that leap. We would both be on our own. I mean, who knows who we might have met or where we might have gone with that. But I just don’t think we’d even be where we are spiritually.

Timing

David believes that when the time is right, that is when one grows spiritually. However, he also believes that if a person is ready to grow, the right circumstances – having the right spiritual influences present at the time – could help one along. He believes that he had been searching for many years for a spirituality he could believe in, and if he had met Jim DuBray, his spiritual mentor, earlier, he would have found his spiritual life sooner and perhaps avoided a lot of grief. But, he cautions, it may have looked different or played out differently. He also explains that his relationship with Cheryl and the experiences they had together also played a major role in his spiritual awareness and growth:
David: You need to reach a level of maturity and a level of – I don’t know, things in your life need to be at a certain point. I think for a lot of people that is true. There are events that take place in people’s lives that change them too like that – I mean a traumatic event can turn you 180 degrees from where you are, and suddenly you’re a different person. See, part of what I believe anyway is that things come into your life when it’s time for ‘em to come to your life. The other thing is, I think because I had been searching most of my life for what I really believed and what felt right to me, had that come along almost any time in my life, I feel like I would have gone there, because that’s where I belong.

Cheryl found her own personal crises have been a driving force in her personal and spiritual growth:

Cheryl: What I’ve learned in just the last few years is there was a lot of trauma in my early childhood that affected me, that I was running from. And it finally caught up with me, and I’ve had to deal with it. Maybe part of it was I felt, “There’s something missing in my life; what is it?” And it was a belief system that fit me. And, right now, I can’t say I practice this or that; I’ve learned from this person, that person, from the Swami, from different types of spirituality. But I have my own way of seeing the world: I live each day as a sacred day not just on Sunday. I am who I am all the time, and I try to act from a place of love, try not to judge – the things that I’ve learned from my teachers and seeing them do. I’m in a process now of trying to live by my heart and recover from this chronic fatigue. And you know what really is good to hear now, like having the dances, so many people are thanking us for having a safe place to be; and our intention was to have
a place that would be a sanctuary for all beings – you know, Nature, people – that could live here and pray here and find solace here. So I’m in another place now, and I really feel like I’m going to overcome this fatigue. I feel like it’s just a long rest, awareness and change that I’ve needed and to give up the Super Woman role and never having boundaries of any kind because I also never said “no.” The way I’m looking at the process is, I’m having to reprogram myself and follow my heart and have more faith than I’ve ever had. You know, giving up the “you gotta have this, you gotta have that,” and buying my clothes mostly at thrift stores and shopping at used bookstores, and finding that I don’t need things. I don’t want things really. It’s relationships and love that matter. I’m trying to save the trees behind this mountain, on this mountain behind us. I’m very passionate about the environment, too, and just living it day by day right now – very much “in the moment.” And I feel like my vocation is a peacemaker. And that’s what I’m doing now.

Cheryl makes several important points here. She understands that every day is sacred to her now, and that her newfound awareness has enabled her to let go of some of the societal (and personal) expectations she had of herself. She no longer feels a pressing need for material things and focuses on what is real to her: love, relationships, Nature, and the environment.

Obstacles to Spiritual Growth

Cheryl spent many years trying to be what she believed she was supposed to be in the eyes of society. She participated in activities in her community and tried to be the Super Woman mom, career woman, and wife. She speaks of the “artificial naturalness” of
the “cookie-cutter houses” in her neighborhood and “playing the part” she was supposed to play. These are the obstacles for her spiritual growth that she ultimately recognized and was able to overcome.

David’s searching for spirituality seemed to be an intellectual pursuit – looking for something in books but only experiencing church-based religions for himself until he found his connection to Nature. Once he found that connection in St. John, he was determined to find the spirituality that resonated with him. This time it was through the experience of meeting the right people and listening to the Native ways that made the difference.

Conclusion

Throughout David’s and Cheryl’s lives is a theme of quiet dissatisfaction and life-changing events that caused some pain to each of them separately, and together as a couple, until their spiritual awareness. Because of their shared experiences, commitment to one another, and hunger for spiritual growth, they came through these crises more solidly and more spiritually in tune with themselves and each other in their newfound belief system.

There are two aspects to David’s and Cheryl’s spirituality that stand out among the participants in this study. They both are actively involved in spiritual practices with the Peace Chamber, dances, and ceremonies that enhance and progress their spiritual lives. Their vocation revolves around the Peace Chamber, and they credit their spiritual growth through these activities. The second aspect to their spiritual growth is that their spirituality grew from the pain in their lives. They each came into their relationship with
unfinished emotional business, and, together, faced more crises. However, each worked diligently at moving through each crisis, first by recognizing the problem, then by each accepting responsibility for each one’s part in it, and finally searching for assistance in helping them overcome their obstacles. Their desire to grow personally and within their relationship motivated them to find answers. Through the search, they found their spiritual path and a closer, more fulfilling relationship with each other.

Relationships have been a large part of Cheryl’s life. Early on, she says she let men influence her and speaks of not being comfortable on her own. She even looked to David for him to “rescue her” from what was unpleasant. When he did not, she ultimately found the strength within herself to take care of her own needs. Cheryl respected David’s interest in spirituality, and that became a lifeline for her own spiritual growth. Ironically, her reliance on David’s interest in spirituality may actually have progressed both David’s and her own spiritual growth by the desire on her part to sustain the relationship. In learning how to heal their struggling marriage, they both found their spiritual connection to Nature. This connection to Nature was also the connection to each other and what ultimately led them on their spiritual journey.

David’s and Cheryl’s spiritual practice has become what I would call their avocations. They are simply going through their lives living as congruently as possible, focusing on connection of their inner spiritual lives and the outer world. As part of their own practices, they provide support, nurturance, and healing for others who want to find their spiritual connection. They have devoted their lives and their home to their spiritual practice and supporting others in their spiritual journey. In this way, they hope to help bring peace and healing to all the world.
CHAPTER SEVEN: DEE

“It’s like, bam! A wrecking ball in the forehead.” - Dee

Introduction – The Short Story

Dee is the founder of a raw, organic pet food business for dogs and cats. She started this company after having her spiritual opening and realizing she wanted to work with animals, improving animal nutrition. As part of her work with animals, she helps others learn to tune into and trust their intuition as it relates to their pets. In addition, she practices Reiki, an energy healing work. Reiki is something she is working on with humans.

Dee’s passion is her dogs, specifically Doberman Pinschers. They are like children to her. At the time of this interview, four Dobermans lived with her. Dee has been fascinated with Dobermans after one came to her in a dream. Since then, she has lived with multiple dogs at a time and considers them family. Both Dee and her husband see dogs as great teachers and mentors. They strongly believe that dogs are here to teach us something and that they continue to work with us after they have moved from this life to the afterlife.

As part of her love of dogs, Dee hosted and participated in an animal communication workshop designed to teach communication with pets. The workshop ultimately moved beyond animal communication and broached other spiritual topics. It was at this workshop that Dee had what she calls her opening. This opening was transformational; it caused her to totally change her belief system and vocational direction.
Dee went through the first part of her life spiritually unaware, living life and working in corporate America without reflection on her own personal growth or inner self. She never questioned her spirituality, largely because she didn’t know what she believed about spirituality. In fact, she never really thought about it. She was happily working in business, moving up through the ranks, over a period of 13 years. During this time, she enjoyed her job and was financially successful. When she felt she needed a change, she changed within the same company, moving up the corporate ladder. She considers herself to be very lucky, always falling into just the right situation to progress in her career. She was “happy, fulfilled” working in this way until an event at the animal communication workshop when everything changed in an instant. She knew she had to make a change in her vocation. Although she did not know exactly what she was meant to do at the time, she knew she had to take some time to determine what it was.

Dee is very enthusiastic about her new spiritual understanding, her belief system, and her vocation. At age 43, she seems the most amazed at her spiritual awakening and her new outlook on life. Previously, she did not know what she believed about faith or God, but is now convinced of her beliefs and is eager to share what she has experienced and learned. She thinks of her spirituality as her intuition or her inner self. She has learned to understand and rely on her intuition and has a very positive attitude about herself and life. She continually speaks in very positive terms, often referring to herself as lucky. She believes these attributes are important for listening to and trusting one’s inner self.
Dee’s Formative Spirituality

Dee had little spiritual foundation growing up. She was born into the Catholic religion but was not encouraged to develop a religious life. She attended catechism classes as a child where the nuns taught if she sinned, she would go to hell. This so frightened her that her parents took her out of the classes. That was where her formal religious education ended.

I think my mom must have been Catholic, because that’s what was expected. I never really thought about it; but now looking back on it, I’m thinking it probably was just her excuse not to do it [attend church] anymore. I don’t know, because we just really didn’t talk about stuff. And my sister was really kind of like my mom, my sister, and my best friend all rolled up into one. I mean she was a very important person to me. And even after I didn’t go to church with my mom – and my dad never went, I don’t think – but after my mom didn’t take me anymore, my sister married somebody who was Catholic – a farming family. They used to go to church on Sundays. I always hung out with them on the weekends and then went skiing and boating and stuff with them. So I would go to church with them on Sundays just so I could do all the weekend activities. And we always got doughnuts after church; so that was the big incentive. But it didn’t mean anything to me. I had no buy-in, no relevance. It just didn’t matter. I’d say I had a lot of experience in a lot of things, but I don’t think my real spiritual life started very much in any way. In fact, I think it was discouraged. I think – for whatever reason – and I think we choose who our parents are going to be, and all that stuff is by design. So I believe that I came in knowing that I would have no real religious
background, which is good in a way, because then you don’t have to fight. You don’t have to get rid of any old beliefs. And so I think we choose our parents, we choose our situations, we choose all these things so that, at a certain point, we’ll be ready to really become who we’re here to become and do our work, whatever that is.

While Dee believes she had virtually no religious background growing up and very little religious influence, she indicates that Catholicism was “expected.” Additionally, she accompanied her sister to church fairly often and so was perhaps more influenced by religion than she is aware. The exposure and attitudes surrounding the participation in formal religion most likely had some impact on her perceptions. Dee believes she chose her family and much of her life situations before she was born. This belief system has implications for her understanding of her life purpose and how she moves through life.

*Dee’s Vocational Path*

Dee worked in part-time fast food and convenience-store types of jobs in high school before enrolling in college. She then wanted to take some time off from college to work. So her sister hired her at the company in which she was employed. That first professional job experience was formative in teaching Dee about office skills and working in a professional setting. Dee did well and enjoyed it. After working with her sister at two consecutive companies, Dee started working for a well-known large company on a temporary basis. She says, “Luck was with me” because she was hired on as permanent, from temporary status – something that was discouraged among management. She began her career with this company. She did well there and progressed
over a period of 13 years. She emphasizes her positive attitude, how happy she was, and her sense of luck that served her well in professional life.

So this was all before I was really spiritually aware. I’ve always said that I’m just lucky – things just happen to me. I’m a pretty positive person anyway and usually look at the good – sometimes totally ignore that there’s bad in things. My goal was always just ‘go with the flow.’ Somehow about the time that I would start to get bored with the job or feel like I needed a change, something else would open up. I’d say, “Oh, that’s perfect.” I’d move right into it, and I just kinda flowed through my whole 13 years at work that way, just kind of happy. And the progress was dramatic. I started as an order-entry person; and when I left there, I was a team lead of a department of about 23 people, and I was responsible for running the department. So I really almost managed a department of about 23 people. I always loved my career, was very happy there, just really felt happy, fulfilled, enjoyed it, loved it.

Dee’s positive nature was more than simply an attitude to her. She intimates that perhaps being positive was helping to create this success she was having. Beyond that, it seems being positive is also being open to life’s possibilities. The biggest opening was yet to come.

The Opening

Dee chose a holistic veterinarian to provide health care for her dogs. One weekend, the vet was sponsoring an animal communication workshop, which became the setting for what Dee refers to as “the opening.” One theme that repeatedly appears throughout Dee’s interviews is serendipity. These serendipitous events had a positive
effect on her and seem to be what Dee would call the Universe⁴, propelling her forward to her spiritual opening.

In April ’97 we had an animal communication workshop here [at my house], and that was kind of like my spiritual opening. I really didn’t intend to have it here. It was one of those things where I signed up to go to it, and then the place they were supposed to have it fell through. The person coordinating it knew me. She was telling me that they were having a problem with the place. I said, “I have this room in the back. If you feel like it’s appropriate, I’d be happy to host it here.” And I remember, to this day, I was amazed because her response was, “That’d be great.” And I’m like, “Well, don’t you want to come see it?” “Nope. It’s the right place.” And I’m thinking, “How could you know it’s the right place – you’ve never seen my home?” I mean, she was a veterinarian and we were using her at the time. Unbeknownst to me, she did animal communication herself, and she did energy Reiki work, and we were going to her for homeopathy and natural healing kinds of things like that. But anyway she just intuition-wise knew it was the right place to have the workshop, agreed to have it here sight unseen. And so we had the workshop and that was kind of like “the opening.” I was doing obedience [dog training] and things at the time and went into it just with the expectation of really wanting to just do better in obedience, be able to communicate, like, “Okay, I want you to heel a little closer. Why do you practice so well and then when we get in the ring, you fall apart?” And so I really just wanted to make sure all my dogs were happy ’cause to me, my dogs are like my kids. And so I just wanna make sure they were happy and didn’t need anything. And my husband didn’t even

⁴ Dee refers to Universe as she would a higher power, hence the capitalization.
want to attend; but we’d only been married a short period of time. So we laugh about it, you know? He just did it to make me happy back then. And then, during that workshop, just some kind of life-altering things happened.

This was intended to be an animal communication workshop, but Dee explains that it turned into much more; the participants were all open and “ready to be blasted.” So the workshop branched off to other spiritual areas such as talking with spirit guides, totems, angels, and healing.

Dee points out the serendipitous circumstances that led to hosting the workshop at her home. Although her husband did not want to attend, it was at their home and it was important to Dee that he be there; so he agreed. Ironically, it was her husband who had an experience that would become the foundation for Dee’s opening.

So I see Jeff a few minutes later and he’s just white looking. And said, “Jeff, oh there you are, what’s wrong? Are you okay?” And he goes, “No.” And I’m getting kind of upset, ‘cause we’ve got 20 people here – how can he not be okay? I’ll never forget this: he said, “I just died in the backyard.” Now I’m really getting a little bit upset. I said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about – you’re fine, you’re standing right here. You didn’t die in the backyard. Everything is fine. We have a lot of people here, you just need to get over this.” And he goes “I just relived a past experience of death. A past-life death in the backyard.”

The location for his past-life death experience was their property. In that past life, Jeff was a Native person living on the same piece of property. He died there. Jeff, who was also not spiritually aware at this point in his life, was very shaken from the experience; and from that moment, suddenly believed in a spiritual life.
Now I’m really getting skeeved. I’m like, “Oh my God, this is really scary.” Now I’m nervous because he didn’t even really want to be here, and he’s definitely not a person that really even believed in any of this too much and was sitting in the back of the room with his arms crossed and just not open. And I truly believe when it’s time for us to open, we get what we need. You know, if it’s a kick in the butt – if you have to die in the backyard – whatever it is, it happens to you. Well for me, not a lot personally happened to me, necessarily. I didn’t even feel like I was getting communication from the animals. The other thing that happened was, we were all practicing going out getting communications [from our animals], and he went out and got something from one of our dogs who’s since passed on:

“Look through the light and all will be clear.” Looking back, it was pretty meaningful. Anybody else in the room could have said or done something and I would have questioned it. But I knew him really well, and there was no bone in his body that would have been faking or lying, you know? It was just I knew he had real experiences. And from that weekend, that moment forward, my life really was never the same because now I had this whole awareness of, I guess, Spirit in my life – or whatever you want to call it – connection. It was like, “Oh my gosh, now I have to believe or acknowledge, or feel that there’s this other thing.”

Up to this point in her life, Dee had little thought about spiritual topics. Now through her husband’s experience, she and her husband found themselves suddenly believing in a spiritually organized universe. This awareness caused her to believe in a higher power and interconnection to all of life and time. At the same time, it created a crisis within her. Suddenly nothing about what she understood about life was the same anymore.
Later, after the animal communication workshop, she was alone in bed and felt as if something very frightening was trying to suck her into a vortex. She resisted and it stopped. Although she was not sure it was something negative, it scared her and caused a crisis in her newfound spiritual opening. Therefore, the positive spiritual opening for Dee came vicariously through her husband’s experience, and her trust and belief in him caused an opening in her.

Then I kind of had this period where I was in – I’ll call it the fear period – it was like now all of a sudden I’m open, I believe. And it was very tumultuous because now, not only do I accept a whole new reality about everything, but I’m kind of afraid of it all now. It was just a time of my whole reality changing in a lot of ways. I just wasn’t very comfortable. I mean, I knew it and I accepted it, but I wasn’t comfortable. Now I’m very comfortable with everything. And I also believe that you need to always stay open, because what you believe now, things change, different realities can happen. Things can grow. You’ve got to be willing to grow and expand and let your reality change in order to continue your growth ‘cause you’ll only get what you can handle or what you can accept or move with, right? ‘Cause there’s only a few choices: You either accept things and you grow and move, or I guess you could go crazy. So I always try to kind of stay open and accept new realities. Things are different, things can change.

**Timing**

Dee was the only one of the participants to report a negative spiritual experience. As a child, Dee shied away from anything dealing with the supernatural and did not participate in childhood “games” such as séances or Ouija boards. She believes her
avoidance of all of this was for a reason. While Dee’s own personal experience was seemingly negative, causing fear in her, it also reinforced her belief that an opening occurs when the person is ready for it.

I don’t know for sure why, but I believe it’s because deep in my spirit I knew how powerful that stuff could be. And my spirit didn’t want to let me go dabble somewhere where it would be like the wrong place and the wrong time to be zapped into like an opening or whatever. I think I opened to my spirituality exactly when I was supposed to. And so the way to keep yourself from being somewhere you shouldn’t be or do something you shouldn’t do is to either have a healthy respect or some reason to not go there.

Perhaps Dee was not ready for the intensity of her spiritual opening before the workshop, so her spirit protected her from exposure before this time. She does not know, but she is clear that she believes timing is an important aspect to her spiritual opening.

I think I opened when it was the time for me to open. I think it was exactly the way it was supposed to be. Although I didn’t always feel that way then, looking back, I feel that way now. Like nothing that I did in my life was wasted. It all gave me experience, and background, and knowledge, and whatever to make the choices that I made. One of the things for me has really been trusting my intuition and being willing to do things even in the face of great fear, great doubt about how could this possibly work – that kind of thing. I think it’s being in touch with my own spirit. And when it was time for me to know something or to be able to use a piece of information, then I became aware of it. Like my spirit made sure my physical [being] became aware of it. Now how’d that really happen? Was it an
angel whispering it in my ear, was it my own spirit telling me, was it some knowledge I had from the day I was born and it just all of a sudden manifested and I knew it? I don’t really know. I do believe it came from within and it wasn’t from without. I believe that when I get just a feeling or a knowing like that, it’s usually my own spirit working with my physical [being] to make sure I get it. So I was intuitive and I did stuff kind of based on intuition. I always found myself in the right place at the right time. And so I’m lucky. But now I believe I’m lucky in a way that is kind of spiritually organized or whatever. I mean, I think intent is a big part of everything and when you intend something or you know it, and you just know it’s gonna work out, the more you believe that, the more it really does.

So when something happens, like Jeff’s death-reliving experience, it was like, so now what do I do with this? Do I choose to move forward with an understanding of that and a possibility of opening to there being all this stuff out there, or do I say I really don’t care, I’m closing it off, and that’s the end? And I think, from then on, I just had a lot of faith in my own intuition. And I don’t know, I guess you could say intuition could exist without some kind of higher power, but I think they’re connected; and my belief is that somehow the Higher Power is in your intuition, and messages that you get are really connected.

As Dee indicates, the important question is, what does one do with this new understanding? Opening to the possibilities of another belief system can be a challenge. Dee speaks of having faith and trust in her own intuition, her own inner self. For her, being spiritually in tune means being in tune with her own intuition, which is connected to a higher power. She explains that it is important to rely on her intuition, and to do that
she needs the courage to act on it. This requires an ability to let go of control and have faith and trust in her intuition.

This spiritual opening had a transformational effect on Dee. Until this workshop, she had been very happy in her career – just loving it, doing well, and progressing. Suddenly, she felt it was not what she wanted to be doing anymore. She had always been intuitive and what she would call lucky, but now she saw her intuition as “spiritually organized,” and she had to trust it. A short time after the workshop, she was struck with the idea that her employer would offer a paid-out program by the end of the year. This would enable certain eligible employees to leave their positions with a severance package. It was designed to encourage corporate housecleaning. No one was more surprised than Dee when it was announced, just as she predicted. Dee did not fit the profile of who they were looking for, so when she told her boss she wanted to take advantage of the program, he was shocked. But he supported her request. Concerns over finances and the uncertainty of unemployment loomed in front of her. This was also a difficult transition because her identity was tied to her professional self. As she says, “No matter what your intuition has told you, are you brave enough to act on it?”

Come the end of January, I left with my little sum of money. And I went on my merry way, still not knowing what I’m gonna do, only just a vague feeling like I wanted to work with animals. And it was really hard for me ‘cause I’d been with the company so long, and I loved it so much. And I worked really hard to get in there – a lot of my family had worked there. So it was kinda like this prestige thing in my mind. So a lot of my ego [the aspect of the self concerned with self-interest] or identity was tied up in working for this company and this job that I
loved. And so I left, and I had nothing else to replace it with. And I kind of went through a little depression, you know? Just kind of giving up that part of my identity and then not knowing what to do with myself. So I spent about a year just really soul-searching and just, kind of, letting go of concerns like, what was I gonna do? Who was I? What was I? Where was I going – you know, just a lot of that stuff. And so I spent about a year doing that. It was tough – I mean, it’s tough work to feel like you don’t have a purpose.

Dee received a lot emotionally and financially by being a part of the corporate culture. Now she had to trust her intuition that there was something more important – more fulfilling – out there, even though she did not know what that was.

The Effect of Serendipity on Her Vocational Path

At the time she gave her notice at work, she had no idea what she wanted to do. This began an approximately yearlong exploration of learning and opening herself up to possibilities. During this soul-searching, serendipity played a role. Dee visited her sister and purchased another Doberman puppy. At that time, her sister was trying the Atkins diet. Dee read the book and thought:

I don’t know whether it’s healthy for people or not, but this is the way dogs should be eating. Basically, they should be eating meat and they should be eating some vegetables; they shouldn’t be eating any grains. It made sense and I was like, okay, this is kind of what I should be looking for in a diet for my dogs, but I don’t know where to find this – where would you get something like this? So I come back from this trip where I’ve had these thoughts and read this book, and like the day after I get back, I call the veterinarian [to tell her about the new
puppy], and she tells me about a new way of feeding dogs. She told me the outline of the program: It’s a raw feeding program – you feed meat with bone, raw; you feed vegetables. It’s based on their natural way of eating – you feed them the way that they would eat if they were feeding themselves naturally, like wolves would feed themselves. Something out of a bag, cooked, highly preserved is never something they could have or would have done for themselves or would choose. So here was another sign of intuition: before she told me this, I’d been really unhappy with the nutrition I felt my dogs were getting; but I didn’t know what to do about it. This is still all during the time when I’m looking for what I’m gonna do with myself, too. By the time she finished telling me about this, I already knew that’s what I was supposed to be doing. I knew without a doubt this is what I’d been searching for. I went and bought chicken wings and vegetables and starting the next morning making their food. Just said, “This is it. I know this is what we’re supposed to be doing.” And I was really afraid of chicken bones because my parents had a dog die of chicken bones. So I grew up my whole life hearing about how chicken bones’ll kill a dog. Well, it was cooked chicken bone. And that’s what I had to get over – was the fear. Again, I had to conquer the fear, knowing that my intuition was so strongly saying, “This is exactly what you need to be doing,” but yet I had fear of making that leap of faith. But I did it. I said, “You know what, it feels right – I know I’m supposed to do it.” I said, “We’re just gonna eat this way.” And every day I’d watch ’em and I’d be kind of in a panic, “Oh my God, are they gonna die,” you know? But anyway they were fine.
Dee believed she was given a sign to her new vocational path. But to pursue it required her to work past her fear and trust her intuition again. As she researched and experimented with the feeding program, her dogs became healthier. Dee explains that this works because good nutrition “supports you from the inside out” and makes a difference at a base level so the animals’ own immune systems can work better and promote self-healing. Dee saw real health benefits providing validation that this was the right way of feeding dogs and cats.

And I started seeing remarkable, amazing improvements. I mean, it was just amazing. At the time, I had $12,000 in vet bills. And this was just ongoing, chronic illnesses – medications they had to be on. Well, I started working with the holistic vet, and we started working with homeopathy, and my vet bills went down to about $2,000. And then, I switched to raw feeding and I went down to like $500 a year in vet bills. And that was just wellness exams. I didn’t have to give meds anymore. And it was remarkable and immediate and drastic changes of my own animals. They felt better, they looked better, they acted better, their skin got better, their coats got better; everything just improved. So this is just amazing. And I was just thinking to myself, “This is what I should do [make a business out of it].” I have such a passion for it – I’ve seen it make such dramatic changes. I should do raw pet food and promote it and help people get started and help people understand that there’s options.

As part of Dee’s spiritual beliefs, she tries to live congruently with the earth and all beings. This impacts the way she does business. She insists on using the most healthful,
organic ingredients for her pet food. This is an important aspect to her work, not only for the health benefits, but because it is honoring the earth, too.

In 1998, she incorporated and took her raw pet food from her own personal passion for her dogs and began growing a business. As part of her spiritual work, Dee focuses more on tuning into and trusting her intuition. Yet it has not always been easy. Throughout the process of building this business, Dee was conflicted over whether she should continue or not. It is difficult to grow a business from the start, and her head and her spirit kept sending her conflicting messages. The head (and body) said, “I’m tired, I’m not making money, we’re pouring our money into it, I can’t do this anymore.” Her spirit, however, said, “Keep going. It’s not time to quit.”

It was strictly passion, you know? So I’ve been growing it ever since; and really in the entire time that I’ve been doing it, I’ve just really pretty much always tried to tune into my intuition and follow my intuition even when it didn't make sense. Even though there were times when I wanted to quit and I didn’t want to do it anymore ‘cause it was just such a struggle and it was so hard and it was a drain on us financially. But I knew in my heart it wasn’t time to let it go. I just needed to keep doing it – hang in there. And really even just very recently in the last few months I have even started paying myself. So I’ve been doing the business for four years basically because I believed in it and built it tremendously, from nothing to a couple hundred thousand dollars in sales last year. So I have really grown it a lot, especially considering I haven’t really done any outside advertising, haven’t really promoted it big, haven’t had any outside investments.
Dee is aware of and understands the conflicting messages between what could be called her head and her heart. Discerning where the messages are coming from and being able to tune into the heart and intuition require some awareness and trust. Knowing the head is responding to logic and society’s expectations helped her to acknowledge it and put it aside.

One of the things Dee and her husband were very concerned about was her loss of income when she began the business. They didn’t know how they would make ends meet with all their financial commitments. But, as time went on, they seemed to have enough money.

Now, never before had I not contributed anything to the household. To this day, I don’t know how it really worked – I don’t know how we managed – but we kept on going, and in about the same style we’d been living. Nothing really major changed, but somehow it just worked. We just had the money that we needed. We cut back on investments and stuff like that, but somehow our style of living, our being able to maintain living here, being able to pay Jeff’s child support, and eat, and take care of our animals, and all that just kept on going. I mean, things changed enough to make it work. And it wasn’t my doing, it just happened.

Dee was able to pay her bills and even hired a bookkeeper, temporarily at first, then increasing her to 30 hours per week. Dee was amazed that she always had the money to pay her. Again, the head gave one message, but somehow, through serendipity perhaps, it was taken care of.
Partnership and Community

Dee found herself in her own business, even though she never wanted to run her own company and had no business management background. But her intuition and spiritual self pushed her and provided the means to do this. She says it was “what I was supposed to do,” indicating that it was spiritually organized. She relates that her husband, Jeff, has been of tremendous support financially, spiritually, and emotionally. Partnership has been a huge influence on her ability to follow her spiritual path.

And my husband’s been wonderful. I mean he’s the one that makes money and pays all the bills. And when I didn’t have enough money to keep the company going, he would lend me money – we would lend the business money. But I’ve made decisions, not necessarily always good business decisions, based on my heart or my spiritual beliefs. I feel like they’ve probably always been what I needed to do; but sometimes they weren’t really good for the business – in a money-making aspect. You have to understand, I didn’t have any background in how to run a business. I never even wanted my own business. In fact, I specifically used to say I’d never want to be in business for myself. I loved working for corporate America, getting my paycheck and letting someone else be ultimately responsible, you know? But then I just was in business and that’s what I was supposed to do. And I’ve had to basically learn a lot of things the hard way; but I’ve had to intend a lot of things into being, flat-out believe, know, and intend it into being. I had nothing to prepare me for this, and I’ve just done it. It’s been one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done, and it’s also been one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. But my spirit just kept pushing me to go. And I’ll
tell you this: There was quite a number of times when things were really tough and they weren’t flowing right, and I just didn’t get it. And if my spirit wouldn’t have been in it, I would have quit or walked away. I would have just said, “You know what? It’s not worth it. We’ve invested too much of our retirement or our savings, enough is enough, let’s call it quits.” And I would have walked away. And the single reason why I didn’t is ‘cause my spirit would never let me do it. Whenever I would sit down to really just soul search and say all the physical signs seem like I should just let this go, not keep pouring good after bad into it – and every time I did that, my spirit said, “No, it’s not time, don’t give up, don’t let it go – you need to hang in there.” I still had more lessons to learn.

One of the points Dee makes is that she had to “intend a lot of things into being.” This shows not only trust and belief, but also that she took an active role and made things happen through her faith. Dee found strength through validation. When she heard from customers that her food was helping their pets, it gave her more incentive to keep the business going. She spoke of many stories of critically ill pets that had renewed energy, vitality, and extended life. This makes her feel that she is making a difference and that what she believes matters. She emphasizes the importance of a positive attitude and surrounding herself with a community of positive people.

Over time, Dee found that she could not sustain making the food herself in her kitchen anymore. At one point, she was bringing 600 pounds of chicken a week into her house. She needed a break and some distance. She took some time off, went on a trip to France with a friend, and really tuned into her intuition. She relates this trip as a very spiritual experience because they simply went with the flow and followed their intuition,
having an exciting time for three weeks. When she came home, she was ready to make a major shift when an opportunity was presented to her. The people from whom she was buying the chicken offered her the use of their processing plant at night to make the food there. This freed up her hands and her house to run the business instead of spending all her time making the food. What is important in this step is that Dee relates how, whenever she needed it, an energy shift occurred and some solution opened up. She calls this the transition she needed and believes it came from an energy force she sees as a higher power. She refers to this energy force as Grandfather from the Native tradition.

A lot of people call Him God, to me He’s Grandfather. My belief system is kind of Native American. At each point, something major has happened. There’s been a major shift needed to happen or a major thing that’s needed to change, and I’ve kinda turned it over and just said, “Grandfather, this needs to change. It has to move forward. I need help. I need to know what to do with this. However the Universe wants this to go, something has to change. So help me with this.” And really, by and large what usually happens is something just falls in my face. I mean an opportunity just is there, like the farm. So they were open to doing this. But you know, it was the transition. It was the leap.

The transition moved the business from a home-run operation to a larger, more professional business. This enabled her to handle much more product and increase production, progressing the business.

*Spiritual Influence*

Dee’s spiritual work in the pet food business reinforces her relationship with dogs and the spiritual connection she has with them. One of her dogs, Tahoe, died between the
second and third interview. She explained how she handles the sadness of their inevitable passing. Her work with animals is founded in a strong belief system that animals are “highly valued beings” who are here to be our teachers, our mentors, and to work with us in this life and beyond this life. She has a very strong relationship with her dogs and believes they come into her life for a reason, to work with her and be a part of her growth. When they leave this earthly existence, she believes they continue to work with her from the other side.

They’re the ones that help us get in tune with ourselves so that we can do the work that we need to do with the other troublemakers – the humans, not the animals. I think they’re here as a gift to us and they come in with an intent to help, to support, to show us what is unconditional love. What human do you know that can give unconditional love? I mean we all love, but unconditionally? I’m gonna tell ya, no. But they do. They come in to show us and teach us so many things. And you know there’s different journeys – like a lot of my animals came in to educate me on health and nutrition. But they’re our teachers and they’re here for us. So I’m very connected to ‘em. Animals are way more spiritually in tune – that’s what they live on. I mean they come in – and I think they never lose it. I think when humans come in, in general, we either lose a lot of our connection to the Greater Spirit, or what we don’t lose is squashed in early childhood. And animals don’t. They come in, they’re pure. They don’t lose the connection. I mean it’s really not about ego with them like it is with people. And they’re very genuine, and I think they’re just some of the greatest teachers. Every single one of my animals has been a great teacher to me.
Dee speaks of ego as a limiting force to spiritual development and notices that when she is in ego, she is not spiritually in tune. Dee says her dogs have taught unconditional love, how to let go of the ego, and have been the ones who have helped her spiritual growth. Dee spoke about another dog, Talon, whom she had years before. After Talon’s death, she had a series of unusual coincidences that occurred in relation to him. These are discussed at the end of this chapter.

_Cultural Influences_

Since the animal communication workshop, Dee and Jeff have become attracted to Native American spirituality and practices. They were introduced to it through another workshop participator, and both of them have found a connection with it. Dee explains her belief in a higher power and refers to it as Grandfather, as mentioned earlier.

I have a real disconnect with the word God. I can’t pray and I don’t know where that comes from. I don’t know if it’s because, for me, that’s connected with religion, but I’ve always had a discomfort with the word God. To me, it was always Grandfather or Great Spirit. That’s the Native: Grandfather. They say He’s an all-loving being. It’s like your grandfather, you know? And that’s what feels good to me. Creator is another one I use once in a while, but really my term is Grandfather.

She feels connected to many Native ways but stresses that she is not Native and accepts only those ways that resonate or feel good to her. Dee believes there are many truths and each of us has our own, all of which are equally valid.

When people talk about their beliefs or the way they believe things are, I either feel in harmony with it or I feel that’s right for them, but that doesn’t feel right for
me. And so when they started talking about the way the Native Americans believe everything is connected, we’re all related, I just knew in my heart that that was a truth for me. It doesn’t mean it has to be true for everybody on earth. I think that there’s a lot of different paths and truths that people can take.

And here’s another thing that I believe: I believe there’s beings on this earth that aren’t in the same truth that I’m in. Maybe they didn’t choose any of it, and they’re just here on a different kind of path, just experiencing what they were thrown into – I don’t know. I don’t think we all have to have the same truth. I think that there’s very few what I’ll call universal laws that are absolutes. There probably are a few absolutes, and I don’t know what they are, so don’t ask me.

But as far as truths that we’re living by here, I think that there’s many. I try really hard to stay open because over time some of my beliefs have shifted and changed and grown. And if I close off and say my way is the only way, then it doesn’t allow me the opportunity to now believe a new expanded truth or a different truth or a different way of looking at it. I believe there’s no coincidences. You know, everything is by design, and that’s why I say I can only control what I do. But the Universe has to control everything else. Sometimes I just think I’m so amazed at how could they create so many interactions. I mean, if you think of everything happening on earth and all these coincidences are always happening for everybody. And I have coincidences in my life all the time, and the more you recognize them and the more you believe in them, the more they happen to ya. And, in my life, it just keeps growing exponentially. Nothing is by accident. Nothing is by chance. No matter how small it may be, there’s importance to it.
These coincidences, or serendipity, have become an integral part of her belief system and spirituality. They have helped guide her through big and small decision making.

*Intercultural Connection*

Both Dee and Jeff have been adopted into the Shawnee tribe; but as Dee says, she is still a white woman. She believes her ability to move back and forth between both cultures is for a purpose, that is, to bring some awareness of Native ways to white people. She hopes to be a bridge between the two cultures, helping to enhance both through exposure to the other. This has an effect on how she sees her vocational pathway for the future. She speaks of the importance of her stepping into Native beliefs and how she sees her life and vocation impacted by her ability to walk in both cultures.

So while I’m very connected to the Native American, there’s certain things where I know I have to do it in a different way because, for me, for whatever place I’m in and for my journey, that’s kinda where I’m at. And I think that part of the prophecy of the Native Americans is that this is the time to share. The elders have not shared much with the white people in the past and the prophecies have said that now is the time for the elders to start sharing their wisdom. And the prophecy that we have heard is to mend the sacred hoop. And I believe that I’m part of that sacred hoop. I’m a part of the blending and melting between the Native and the white people. I’m a little bit of both. I’m not all Native and I’m not all white anymore either. I’m walking in both worlds. It’s like walking in the physical and spiritual world. I think I was born white with the family I was born into so that I could connect with more mainstream white people. I’m a bridge.
Although the Native American culture is a beautiful way to live, not all of it is my way. I had to honor their beliefs, find which things and ways of doing things to kinda make my own. So if we can find more of the blending and the melting and the acceptance, whether or not it’s your way, it doesn’t matter – just accept it and honor it. Then that’s partly what’s gonna heal the world. They say the truth is like a teepee. A teepee has 16 poles and they all go to the top, but each one has a different way.

Dee sees all of life as interconnected, one aspect affecting another. She sees this in her work with animals, she sees this through her cultural interconnection, she sees this through her Reiki work. This spiritual outlook affects every aspect of her life.

Dee’s spiritual pathway is “to help people open and heal”; and the pet food business, Reiki, and her Native work are simply spiritual tools to help her. Dee believes her future work will be using Native beliefs and practices to help heal people. She wants to move beyond working with animals to working with people.

Probably because the reality of it is that it’s not the animals that are killing the earth. It’s not. I mean they’re beautiful teachers, they’re healers, they’re here for great purposes, but they’re not ruining the earth. People are ruining the earth. So in order to help heal the earth, and when I say “earth” I mean the entire microcosm of everything happening, you gotta work with the people. One of my base beliefs, and you know things do change, but I believe the main thing we’re all here to do throughout our whole journey is we’re here to heal ourselves, our own individual self. I don’t mean we have to heal from cancer or we have to not have physical problems. I mean we’re here to heal our beings spiritually. And if
each person took responsibility and worked on healing themselves and being their best spiritual person and walking their path, everything else would take care of itself. So I believe that one of my main things is to walk my path; be my best being, my best spiritual person I can be; heal myself; and be an example to whoever might see me by walking my path. Then, if perhaps somebody connects to some part of it and I have a connection with them, there’s always an exchange. It’s always given and received. You never give something without receiving and you never receive without giving. And it’s always a circle. Everything’s a circle and that’s Native right? I’m here because, I believe, I walk my best path, do what I believe I’m supposed to do, trust in the Universe. The only single thing I can control is me: what I do, what I think, and who I am. So I have to turn everything over but me to the Higher Power. All I can do is, at every moment, try to walk in harmony with myself and make the best choice for that moment and do the best that I can and turn the rest over and say, “You know what? I can’t control this. So I turn it over, and I trust you to know the highest good of everything.”

*Seasons and Stirrings*

As part of their spiritual practices, Dee and Jeff periodically spend a weekend with a Native medicine man. On one occasion, he offered to host a vision quest for Dee. While she did not accept the invitation to participate in a vision quest at this point in her life, the intense consideration she gave to the possibility caused a spiritual shift in her. Natives refer to an event like this as a stirring, a time when one reassesses everything about oneself and one’s life.
I remembered, the whole drive home, I felt like my brain was in a blender. It was such a simple thing, but I felt like my whole world was upside down. I started asking the questions, “Who am I? Where am I? What am I? And where am I going? Should I do a vision quest? Is that the way for me to find my answers?” And I gotta tell ya, it scared me too, ‘cause standing out in the woods for four days by myself with nobody around through night and day, no food, in a circle – I mean, it’s not that I didn’t feel I’d be safe; but it was just something I was really torn about. Here he’s made this offer. Obviously, I need to seriously consider it. But I can’t just do it if it’s not what I should be doing. And I kinda went through a period where I really was just in turmoil.

And I’ve talked to the medicine man about it, and he says you usually have two main stirrings in your life where you really ask those questions. A lot of people that go through midlife crises are actually going through a stirring, and they just don’t know what it is. It’s really their spirit trying to get them to wake up and say who are you, what are you, and where are you going? And so there’s absolutely kind of a stirring period; and when you go through stirrings, it can be so intense that you actually feel like you could be going nuts. It’s very unsettling.

This is the second time Dee was thrown into turmoil. The first was her opening at the animal communication workshop. In both cases, Dee did not have anything happen directly to her, but the observations of her husband and the suggestion of the vision quest were each enough to send her on her own spiritual assessment. Dee continues to explain: Natives also believe that everything has a season, including people, and you go through the seasons. You have a spring, you have a summer, you have a fall and a
winter. And so a lot of everything that you do is in harmony with the seasons. So you will go through periods where a stirring often happens like in a winter time. And they believe that these last approximately a year. It doesn’t necessarily have to coincide with January to December, it’s about a year period of your life. I think stirrings usually happen in that winter period when you’re kind of going within anyway and you’re kind of reassessing. In your spring time, everything’s blooming, everything’s rosy, everything’s working, everything’s happy, and just you can’t get enough done, you can’t be creative enough. And then you’re in your summer, and that’s when all that stuff you worked on is just kind of manifesting, and it’s just abundance. And then fall is like your harvest. But you’re kind of startin’ to slow down and shed things – you start to divest of things that maybe you don’t need anymore. And then winter is a time where you go within and you kind of, you do that, like, inner soul-searching.

This is similar to Carol’s tunnel and appears to be an energy shift in one’s life. There is always a cycle of dismantling and rebuilding throughout our lives. As Dee and Carol see it, there is a spiritual component to this and it is organized by the Universe or a higher power. This is a cleaning out and rebuilding aspect to our spiritual selves.

Effect of Living a Spiritually Congruent Life

Dee sees connection with her spirit in the everyday business of life, tries to stay centered and remember her spirit. When she is spiritually in tune, she is not in ego, but more in tune with all of Creation.

I think our spiritual self is with us every second of every day. Everything we do, we’re connected with our spiritual self. It’s just how consciously we do it. So me
sitting here talking to you is my spiritual self doing this, and it happens to be a thing on spirituality. But it wouldn’t matter if we were sitting here talking about a football game, it would still be that part of me. It’s just how deeply I use it at every moment. My spiritual self is always here guiding me or looking over my shoulder. It’s always a part of me. It’s not like I disconnect from it and say, “Okay, spiritual self, go sit on a shelf for a while because now I’m gonna do something nonspiritual.” I think that happens a lot in religion. I speak for myself and my experience, so I’m sure there’s others that are not like this. But my experience is people that are truly spiritual, as opposed to religious, are more connected all the time, or at least aware of it all the time. Like when I do something that I don’t like about myself, I know I’m out of harmony. If I get really bickering or angry or take something out, it’s still me – but it’s like oooh, I need to get more in balance, I’m not in harmony with my spirit right now. I’m letting my physical act out.

Dee was a positive person before being spiritually aware. Yet she did not have the ability to see spiritual messages throughout life. Now she sees her life in a different light as a result of her increased spiritual awareness. This makes it easier for her to accept and understand events in her life.

I didn’t actually have the expansion of my awareness to look at something and say, “Okay this isn’t going right – so what’s the spiritual meaning of this?” That’s what I didn’t really have before. I’d just kinda go, “Well, okay, I believe things work out for the best in the end, so this’ll turn out for the best. I can’t see it now, but when I get to the other side, I’ll know it’ll be true.” And I would kinda look at
stuff that way or whatever. I actually used to worry a ton more. I worried about everything, particularly the dogs, and stuff like that. And one thing that the spiritual thing did for me is knowing that we don’t control things. I mean, there’s other forces working on that. So it took a lot of weight off of me to say, “I can do the best that I can, and that’s all I can really do; and the rest of it I just have to trust. I have to really trust that it’ll work out and that everybody will be protected for their highest good.” It might not always be what I want – like I’m not happy that Tahoe’s dying – but I just have to accept that and honor that that’s his journey and it wouldn’t be happening to him if it wasn’t his choice and meant to be.

Dee’s mention of letting go and trusting is another way of expressing that she believes in a higher power and that Higher Power is influencing her path. But this awareness doesn’t necessarily make everything easier. Sometimes she felt like it would be easier to go back to how things were before she was spiritually aware. With knowledge comes responsibility to do something with it.

There were times, especially right after we opened to that spiritual, I’d say, “Oh my gosh, I just want to go back to the way I was before when I didn’t think there was all this meaning to everything and life was so simple,” you know? But the farther down the road and the more mature and comfortable I’ve become with everything in my spirituality, the more I feel at peace with it and wouldn’t go back for anything. I mean, the reality of it is, you can’t because your reality changes anyway. But in the beginning it seemed simple. When I had my spiritual opening or awareness, everything seemed so different. My whole reality was so different and so changed that I had a lot of turmoil, a lot of just disconnect and a
fear. And now it’s like everything that I’ve thought up until this point is really kind of in a blender, you know? It’s just very different. So it was a lot of unsettledness. And I don’t feel that at all anymore. But I have a much greater sense of peace about my life. And now things are simple. That’s all you have to do. Pay attention along the way.

And so, over time, I’ve come to a much more peaceful place. But I think there was a lot of questioning at a certain point where I said, “Well if I’m doing everything spiritual, then bad things shouldn’t happen. I should be able to read the signs, and then my dog should be healthy and live a long time, and there shouldn’t be bad things happening in my life or things that are undesirable or sad,” you know? And I kinda went through a period then where I was upset because I didn’t understand that if I was doing what I believed was right, then why would I still have pain and sadness? Why isn’t everything rosy? And the reality of it is: We’re still here living life. So it’s what you have to do, is live life. And I don’t think there’s any wrong choices. But even if you make a choice, that’s maybe, in hindsight, you could look at and say, “I should have chosen the other road, but I chose this road,” then that’s just what you needed to learn. That’s the road you needed to go down, and there’s a reason for it.

The transition from spiritually unaware to spiritually aware, following one’s inner self, and moving toward one’s vocation is not necessarily easy. Dee points out that there are still struggles, sadness, and life’s lessons throughout the journey. There is, however, a sense of comfort and peace as she grows with it.
Serendipity

One comfort to Dee is her ability to see the evidence of a universal energy source through coincidences. Serendipity has played a large role in her spiritual life. These serendipitous events have been like pieces of a puzzle for her to put together.

You have to look at it and say it might be a coincidence, depending on how you want to define it. But the fact is, it has absolute meaning. There are no coincidences. Everything has meaning. Now that’s not to say that I take my day and dissect it into meaning in every little thing that happens, ‘cause you’d go crazy trying to do that. You gotta decide what things have meaning that you want to analyze and what things just are the way they are and you don’t need to know. I do that all the time; and when something strikes me as odd or a sign happens two or three times, it’s like, “Whoa okay, I ignored the first time;” the second time I though “Hmm,” the third time it’s like, “Absolutely, I gotta tune into this because this is a big message. They don’t want me to miss this one.” It’s actually quite an exciting way to live your life, I think. It’s like a jigsaw puzzle. You find the pieces, you look for the clues, and then you apply some meaning or some symbolism to it; and then you make a choice – and then something else fits together. I mean you still have your hardships, you still have sad things happen, you still have real life; but it’s just fun.

To Dee, there are no coincidences, and oftentimes she makes decisions based on these signs she reads throughout her life. Whether it is her spirit from within or a universal energy source from without, it is something she has come to trust and rely on.
Dee relates a series of interesting serendipitous events that occurred after another dog, Talon, passed away. Talon and Dee were both very much in tune with each other, and she felt that he was a very special being in her life. Shortly after Talon died, a friend of Dee’s was having some work done on her house. She visited Dee and told her about a piece of wood shaped like a Doberman head that “just appeared” in her house.

So I went up to visit her two weeks ago to do some Reiki work and intuitive work with her, and she said, “Dee you’re not gonna believe it. Right before you came, this dobe head just appeared on top of my pile of coins.” She said, “I don’t know where it’s been all this time. I didn’t put it there, it just appeared.” And this dobe head is not carved. It’s part of a shim in her house, and somehow this piece of wood was made like that by accident. Nobody did this on purpose. And the significance of this was, my dog Talon, who was a very, very special being – talk about angels on earth – died last September. He went with us to the power of silence workshop for the five days; and they let me bring him because we knew he was dying, and they wanted us to be able to be at the workshop. They figured they probably would never offer another one, so he was there with me. He died one week later. He sent [the shim] through my friend for me because he’s working with me right now on a very spiritual level. It was one of his clues to say, “Hey, this is how important your work is with me right now.”

A second coincidence from Talon occurred two weeks after he died, Dee received a complimentary, advance copy of a new book entitled Angel By My Side.
Two weeks to the day after he died, I walked into my office and that book was sitting on my desk. The company had mailed it to me. It’s like a review copy. Never mailed me anything else. I read the book, and it talks about how the guy’s dog was his angel and it died. So I called the company, and I said, “I got this book, is this an accident, I mean, I don’t think I ordered it.” The girl checks on it and calls me back, and she goes, “This is the weirdest thing. They mailed out these copies to just a few people to preview.” She said, “I didn’t even know this program was going on, and you’re one of the people they chose to mail it to.” Now I’d only ordered a few books from this company, ever. And this book shows up exactly two weeks after he died. So anyway it was just his way of saying, “Hey I’m here.”

Dee believes that Talon was communicating with her through those two coincidences. She believes he was sent to her in this life to help her grow spiritually and continues to work with her from the afterlife.

Obstacles to Spiritual Growth

Throughout her interview, Dee speaks of trusting her intuition, listening to her inner self, and letting go of fear. Through the process of learning to trust herself, she has allowed her inner self to guide her. She has learned to see the “pieces of the puzzle” and has chosen to see the meaning within life’s coincidences. These are the obstacles she has learned to overcome in her spiritual growth, and in so doing, she has progressed not only her spiritual growth but her vocational path. Overcoming these obstacles, especially fear, has enabled her to follow her spiritual self and has opened a whole new and exciting world to her.
Conclusion

Dee’s spiritual journey began at an animal communication workshop where she learned to tune into her intuition and experienced her opening. Through this exposure, she also began participating in Native American spirituality. After moving along her vocational path to the raw organic pet food business, she now sees her vocational journey as moving beyond animals to working with people through intuitive work, Reiki, and her Native spiritual beliefs. She hopes to help heal the earth through being the best she can be and providing example to others. She sees this as a part of total earth healing, as she believes if we each work to heal ourselves, the rest of the world will take care of itself.

Dee’s connection with Doberman Pinschers has been an underlying driving force in her spiritual vocation. She strongly believes that they are spiritual beings sent to guide her in her journey, helping her to learn and to grow. It is her dogs that prompted her first thought about animal nutrition and started her on her vocational journey to the raw pet food business.

Dee’s spiritual awareness came in a sudden flash. Until that moment, she was perfectly satisfied with her life. While she did not have a spiritual life to speak of, she did not feel it was missing. In fact, she was happily progressing in both her personal and work life. Her opening, as she refers to it, was spurred by an experience her husband went through. After that, nothing was to be the same in her life.

Dee says that before her opening, she had no “relevance” or “buy-in” to anything spiritual, yet she was always afraid of “seeing ghosts” or anything supernatural. It appears that Dee’s own fear of the spiritual may have been a limiting factor in her ability
to have her own experience. In fact, when she did have her own experience, it felt like negative energy and pushed her into a period of fear. Dee’s opening was the indirect experience of seeing someone she loved and trusted believe in his own spiritual experience; and because of her love and trust in him, she was able to allow her own opening.
CHAPTER EIGHT: INTEGRATION OF THE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings among five participants and an in-depth analysis of three main themes. These themes are the understanding and experience of spirituality among the participants, influences on their spiritual pathways, and the awareness of and process by which they have come to their vocations.

Throughout this research, participants show similarities in experiences, interpretation, and in the conceptualization of what spirituality means to them. Yet there are also differences. This illustrates that although spirituality is a universal aspect of being human, it is also a very individual and personal experience. The stories are enhanced by the juxtaposition of similarities and differences.

The Understanding and Experience of Spirituality

Spirituality is expressed in a threefold manner: a belief in a universal energy source or higher power, a moment of awareness of this Higher Power and connection to it, and the manifestation of the spiritual in one’s life. Each of the participants believes very strongly in a higher power that plays an active role in her and his life. This Higher Power is something they have re-conceptualized from their childhood image of what is commonly referred to as God. Lenore refers to it as “that indescribable something we call love,” David and Cheryl refer to it simply as Spirit, Carol refers to it as Universe with a feminine pronoun, and Dee takes the Native American image of an “all-loving being, Grandfather.”
Universal Energy Source or Higher Power

Each participant feels a deep and personal connection to the Higher Power. They also see interconnection among all the earth, people, nature, animals, and all living things within it. This Higher Power seems to reside in two dimensions, one outside of the self such as an external energy force, and one residing within the self, such as one’s inner knowing, intuition, or feeling. This is illustrated by Carol who said when she was in nature or with animals as a child, she went inside herself to a peaceful place that was “in touch with something, not necessarily myself yet.” This expresses a sense of a higher power found internally. Dee often used phraseology such as “intuition,” “sign of intuition,” or “my spirit” in reference to her inner self. It seems that she sees a higher power residing inside herself and expressed through her intuition, possessing a higher knowing than her conscious, ego-based self. This Higher Power is also found externally and is known to her as Grandfather, whom she calls on for help or advice.

Related to intuition is the sense of feeling. Each participant spoke of listening to and trusting an inner knowing through an internal feeling. This inner feeling is treated as a form of intelligence, such as a higher power, that can be relied upon. They often allow themselves to be led further down their spiritual and vocational path based on how it feels. Lenore made nearly all her decisions along her vocational path in this manner. Carol admits she used to analyze and think her way through life and has made a concerted effort to try to feel more. She is now aware of the difference in the experience between thinking and feeling. David and Cheryl also spoke about how they felt in St. John. The awareness was brought about by contrasting how they felt while they were there versus how they felt when they were at home in suburbia. This feeling is an inner
knowing of what is right for each of them and perhaps is a form of connection with their Higher Power.

Dee was the one participant who spoke of the conflicting messages from her head and her spirit in developing her business. Building the business from ground up was so difficult and the physical, emotional, and financial costs were high. Often she wanted to just give up; common sense told her it was not worth it. Yet her spirit kept her going – she believed in and trusted her inner feeling so that she had to keep trying.

Each participants’ belief system is also based on what feels right to them and is very personal and individualized. They each followed a path of questioning foundational beliefs, exposure to new beliefs, and taking as their own that which feels right while discarding the rest. Dee and David both express the Native view that there are many truths and each path, while different, leads to the same place. Dee believes there are very few universal truths and her truth doesn’t have to be someone else’s truth. I found the idea of a self-selected truth interesting. It gives a whole new meaning to the concept of free will.

**Awareness and Connection**

The second component of spirituality is the awareness of and connection to a higher power and seeing oneself as a part of the whole of Creation. Each of the participants could identify moments of awareness or enlightenment when they began to change and see the world and themselves as they relate to the world differently. Prior to this time they were spiritually unaware or asleep. In some cases this was instantaneous and for others it was a gradual awareness with progressive steps along the way. Dee’s opening happened all in an instant without prior discontent or searching. It was a sudden
awareness and insight into a spiritual world that she never knew existed. Suddenly she understood that there was a higher power and the interconnectedness of all life. At the time this was not a moment of ecstasy, but confusion and fear.

David and Cheryl had both a sudden impact of awareness during their trip to St. John, followed by exploration and finding Sun Bear and Beautiful Painted Arrow. David had been searching for years for a spiritual life without any intuitive reaction, finally both he and Cheryl found their connection to Native ways. Through life experiences including personal and emotional crisis, David says they learned to be open to each other. Through their opening to each other, they found themselves finally open to their spiritual path. In their case, the events and personal challenges they had in their marriages and their lives primed them to be ready for the awareness when it occurred.

Lenore and Carol both experienced their spiritual awareness as a series of steps taking them along personal growth. In Lenore’s case, she had seeds planted throughout high school and college through education and experience that individually would not create her spiritual awareness, but combined, would connect one to the other and develop over time. In college she was able to intellectualize her religious faith and experience new ways of understanding social justice and her place in the world and as she relates to her spirituality. It was through a process of education and intellectualization of her spirituality that brought her to a deeper understanding of her spirituality – a means for living life.

Carol experienced a series of events that caused her to reflect and examine herself and her actions with regard to Tarra. Her awareness was a steady unfolding of her inner self that was guided and nurtured through the women’s group over a period of time.
Through a combination of these experiences, she learned about the need to control her ego and transcend her own limitations. Over a number of years she felt a growing uneasiness with her inner self. She was aware that something needed to change. Through deep, directed exploration of her inner self with the women’s group, Carol found connection to her inner self.

In this study, awareness of a higher power acting in one’s life is a personal connection to that Higher Power. It seems to be the one necessary component for spiritual growth and the understanding of the interconnectedness of all. This is what has made the participants believe there was a plan and gave them the confidence to trust in that plan and that Higher Power.

Nature and animals had a profound impact for the participants in connecting with their inner spirituality or their Higher Power. Carol exclaims, “My church was nature and my God was nature. And that where I was rejecting the God that I met through the Catholic religion, I was re-meeting that God with a different face.” Dee and Carol both believe that animals provide an environment of unconditional love to them which has been the catalyst for them opening to the spiritual. David and Cheryl echo this as they say their animals help them to be more grounded and in tune with the earth. Lenore desires to live more congruently with the earth so she engages in subsistence farming and lives as a vegetarian. This is one way she finds connection with the earth.

All of the participants mentioned that their spiritual awareness came when it was their time and they were ready for it. This begs the question, is timing spiritually organized? Dee believes so as she says, “I truly believe when it’s time for us to open, we get what we need. If it’s a kick in the butt, if you have to die in the backyard, whatever it
is.” Carol very clearly wanted to improve her inner self, and says she was ready to make the changes and do the inner work necessary to grow personally and spiritually. By the time Lenore went through her four stages of awareness in high school and college, she was ready for what the Catholic Worker was offering.

David believes he would have opened earlier in life had he the right spiritual influences, but that perhaps it would have looked different. Yet not until he and Cheryl were open to each other through their crises and their pain were they able to respond to their spiritual needs with a spiritual life. He and Cheryl feel that the experiences they had throughout their relationship together gave them the growth they needed to be ready for and make the spiritual leap they did.

**Manifestation of Spirituality**

Carol, Dee, David, and Cheryl all spoke of experiences they have had that are manifestations of spirituality working in their lives, the third component of spirituality. Participants’ manifestations of spirituality include visions, stirring or tunnel, and serendipity. David and Cheryl each had visions through dances and vision quests that enhanced their inner spiritual growth and gave them a focus on how to be in the world. One of David’s visions was of a 40-acre farm where they would teach values – and it came to be as a 41-acre farm.

Carol and Dee both spoke of an energy shift opening up new opportunities or propelling them forward on their spiritual path. They described it somewhat differently, but it is essentially the same. Carol described a pattern of energy shifting as a tunnel where it seems nothing goes right and she can not make things work, then there is an
energy shift that gathers all the positive energy and finally things open up and fall into place; she receives an answer or a change in direction.

Dee saw spirituality manifested in her husband’s vision of his past-life death. Beyond that, she spoke of another time in her life when she had what is known in Native American spirituality as a stirring. She was offered a vision quest, which caused a stirring; she reexamined everything she previously understood about herself. The stirring is likened to seasons where the fall and winter are about things winding down and dismantling, followed by the signs of new growth and new opportunities in spring, and the full expression or ripening in summer. This can cause uncomfortable feelings that can be described as hard, painful, unsettled, or include a sense of fear, but afterwards there is a sense of comfort and peace. The effect of this can be profound. Oftentimes there is a spiritual shift, healing, and transformation. These descriptions of manifestations of the spiritual are a cycling to clean out and rebuild.

A third type of spiritual manifestation appears in the form of serendipity: events taking place that strategically place the person in just the right place at the right time or by having an answer given when asked for. It implies a spiritually organized plan and the participants wholeheartedly feel it is just that. It has been described as a sense of luck or magic or a series of coincidences. Dee and David actually refer to it similarly in metaphor: Dee describes it as puzzle pieces to put together and David describes it as a road signs laid out for him to read and follow. Both of them expressly said it was an exciting way to live their lives. These similarities in description of manifestations of spirituality are powerful because it illustrates that different people with different conceptions of spirituality have similar spiritual experiences. All of these manifestations
of spirituality give the participants faith and confidence in a higher power working for their highest good.

Influences on Spiritual Pathways

Spiritual growth does not occur in isolation for the participants. Each was influenced in her and his spiritual growth through events, experiences, other people, animals, nature, and/or spiritual practices. Crisis and events are also experiences that have affected several of the participants’ spiritual awareness and spiritual growth. Carol referred to them simply as events because she did not wish to attach a positive or negative judgment to them, although in many instances they were painful experiences. In each case, however, they propelled her forward along her spiritual pathway and were stepping stones to the ultimate goal of sanctuary. David and Cheryl had a series of crises in their life together. These crises were perhaps hurdles they had to learn to jump over, as David said, to open up to each other and move them along emotionally to get on their spiritual path.

Community

Carol, Lenore, Dee, David, and Cheryl all speak of the value of a community of people who have provided support and encouragement throughout their vocational path. Often this provides them with needed validation and support to enable them to gather strength and continue. Carol found spiritual nurturance and support through the women’s group in Ojai, California. Lenore finds community through other Catholic Workers across the country who provide much-needed support as she pursues the personal sacrifices of political activism. Dee speaks of the support she receives from customers
telling her about their animals’ success stories since eating her raw pet food. David and Cheryl have a supportive community through the activities surrounding the Peace Chamber.

Other individuals have been influential to the participants. Lenore speaks of Chuck, who worked at the Rock Island Catholic Worker house, as the person who has influenced her spirituality the most. She also credits various women she has worked with over the years as her spiritual directors. David, Cheryl, and Dee all have been greatly influenced by the Native American culture and spirituality. David and Cheryl also had a woman counselor who worked with them spiritually who impacted their spiritual growth. From the participants’ experience, it seems important to be willing to work on one’s own spiritual growth while having exposure to others who are skilled in their own spirituality.

**Partnership**

Partnership has played a major role for Lenore, Dee, David, and Cheryl. Each of them have found support and strength through their life partners and their vocational partners. Lenore and her husband work together as Catholic Workers and activists, David and Cheryl work together on their farm and Peace Chamber. Dee has found a spiritual and vocational partner in her husband, Jeff. Although the business is hers, it was his experience that propelled her spiritual growth forward, and his loving (and financial) support that has helped her build the business. In both Dee’s and Cheryl’s case, they have been financially freed up to pursue their spiritual vocation because their spouses are supporting their financial needs.
Animals and Nature

Animals have been of tremendous spiritual influence for several of the participants. Carol says that nature in general, and animals in particular, have been of tremendous spiritual influence on her by virtue of providing unconditional love. All of her animals, particularly elephants, have touched her heart and soul. The most important one of course is Tarra, whom she calls her mentor. Dee similarly speaks of her dogs as spiritual influences by providing unconditional love. She also believes that they come to her specifically to work with her and continue to work with her from the afterlife, as she recalls Talon who has sent messages to her.

Spiritual Practices

Spiritual practices are activities that one does routinely to get in touch with or enhance one’s spiritual life. Only two of the participants spoke of being committed to specific activities that are commonly believed to enhance spiritual growth. David and Cheryl engage in spiritual practices, preparing for and performing ceremonies including fire ceremonies, community prayers, dances, vision quests, and denial of the physical. Their spiritual practices were, at first, what influenced their spiritual growth. Now it is something they engage in often as an expression of their spirituality and a way of getting in touch with Spirit.

The other participants are not committed to any specific spiritual practices. Carol takes a yoga class once a week, Lenore tries to meditate and journal, Dee spends some time with Native practices, but nothing that she does routinely. Each person reads to some degree about spiritual topics but except for David in his search prior to finding Native spirituality, not in a directed way. In all, it seems that lifelong, purposeful spiritual
practice has not been necessary for three of the participants to find their spiritual path or vocation.

In summary, it appears that one does not reach her or his spiritual self in isolation. In every case, the participants were highly influenced by significant others in their lives without whom perhaps their spiritual growth would not have blossomed.

Awareness and Process of Vocation

None of the participants referred to what they do as vocation, but rather used words such as journey, path, or pathway when referring to it. The implication is that it is not something they cognitively chose but actually is a process of learning and discovering. Lenore says her vocation has grown out of her spirituality and Carol says hers was not a vocation because vocation implies a plan and she “didn’t have a goal or a plan beyond tomorrow.” All of them see their vocational path as continuing however the Universe wishes it. Dee looks at her pet food business and Reiki as spiritual tools, predicting her journey would continue in more directions including working with people on healing the earth.

A Plan to Follow

Several participants felt that there was a plan laid out for them in their lives and their vocation was a part of the plan. In this way, they did not choose a vocation, but followed their inner self, allowing themselves to be guided by the Universe, reading and following the signs along the way. This is said explicitly by Carol when she talked about her belief in reincarnation and her choice to “do elephants” in this lifetime. David and Dee both imply this when they talk about the serendipitous signs that they read leading
them in life. They all had to learn trust, implying trust in a higher power that has their highest good planned. Trust includes an ability to let go of fear, of control, while allowing the Universe to lead. Carol speaks of the ability to ask the Universe for help and guidance, and then sits back and waits. Invariably, she receives an answer that is better and more exciting than anything for which she could have asked. Carol also found she had to let go of her ego to do this because ego was about her and not about the highest good. Ego stunted her ability to see and follow the signs of the Universe. Dee echoes this sentiment of getting outside of ego.

*Period of Exploration*

None of the participants knew what they wanted to do with their lives from early days. Each had a period of questioning, soul searching, and exploration. In some cases this was an uncomfortable time in their lives. Perhaps related to this is the influence of society on one’s choices. There are constant messages from society that tell us what is “appropriate” work, what is the “right” way to live life. This influence of our culture of origin can confound some of our own inner knowing and take some time before a person can separate himself or herself from the “eyes of society.” Lenore makes the point that while in school she could never envision what her life would be like, what she would be doing. It was something she discerned step-by-step through putting herself in new environments and opening herself to new experiences. Lenore bought into some of the socio-cultural beliefs of making money and having security for the future. While working as a Catholic Worker in Rock Island, she held a mainstream position because she bought into society’s (and her family’s) pressure to have a “regular paying job” for her own security. Dee had a crisis of sorts when she left her corporate job, knowing it was no
longer right for her, yet she did not know what she was to do. This took her on a year-
long exploration where she felt in limbo and did not know where she belonged or what to
do. This emphasizes the point that transitioning to follow one’s spiritual path to vocation
is not always clear, it is not always easy, it does not always feel good. Yet, each knew it
was what they should be doing and once they knew it, nothing would stop them from
following it.

*Obstacles to Spiritual Growth and Vocational Path*

All of the participants had to overcome obstacles to pursuing their spirituality and
their vocations. Fear came up several times with Carol, Dee, and Lenore as a potential
limitation to finding one’s vocational path. Perhaps Carol said it best when she said that
oftentimes the people closest to you are the biggest limiting factor to finding your
vocation because they are afraid for you. I think Lenore would agree with this. Family
and close friends had concerns for their welfare and security, and because of their own
fear, tried to influence Carol and Lenore away from their vocational path.

Carol, Dee, and Lenore found the necessity to let go of fear and listen to and trust
in their intuition, or their inner knowing. One of the concerns most people probably have
over career choice is how much money will they earn. Often people are fearful that if
they do spiritually congruent work, they will not be able to support themselves
financially. So how does one support herself or himself and still follow her spiritual
vocation? For the participants, the answer lies in a few different ways. Cheryl and Dee
have financial support by a spouse working in a traditional job, but Dee has now grown
her business to be self-supporting. Carol and Lenore have chosen to live on less than if
they worked in a more traditional career. And Lenore took time to work in a traditional
job to make money to be able to set herself up before turning all of her attention to the House. David found his answer by working full-time and pursuing his spiritual vocation outside of work.

One common theme among participants is that as they became more spiritually in tune, they had less need and desire for the material. They each found they were able to get along on less money than they had expected without any ill effects. Cheryl found she no longer needs or desires things. Lenore has given away much of her privilege by choosing to live among the poor, consciously avoiding material possessions. Dee found that she and her husband were able to make ends meet easily without her salary.

One point raised by Dee, Cheryl, and Carol was that serendipity also occurred on several occasions in the form of money. On several occasions Dee relays that the money has always been there – they haven’t had a financial drain as they expected. Cheryl echoes this. She and David were able to live on one salary while she stayed home with her daughter, which at first they were not sure they could do. Carol had serendipitous events with Tarra that helped to pay the bills, and now the sanctuary supports her. She is quick to make the point, however, that she does not need a lot of money to live on – and feels strongly that high salaries keep people from pursuing their spiritual work.

The role of the self, in terms of one’s conception of her or his own identity and ego, oftentimes can be an obstacle to pursuing vocation. Dee and Carol brought up ego as something that needed to be conquered for their spiritual growth, or the need to separate from ego-based needs. For Carol, it was a main point. She found that for her spiritual growth, she needed to harness and control her ego, which had been allowed to grow and run unchecked through circus performance. Dee and Cheryl both felt that their career
growth was a function of their ego and sense of identity – identity being tied into who they were when they were at work in a professional setting. This is related to the “eyes of society” because it is society that tells us what work is valuable based on the pay and incentives one receives for it. Society supports a more mainstream job by feeding the ego. Working up through the ranks to manager, taking on more responsibility, making more money and supervising people, are all socially reinforced through the ego. Once Dee and Cheryl each learned not to buy into the ego, they were able to find their spiritually congruent vocation.

It was Carol who most spoke of her awareness of the self in her spiritual development. Her spiritual growth was manifested in personal growth – and exploration of and acceptance of her own femininity and the control of, rather than outright rejection of ego (an impossible task, she says). It was through self-awareness, analytical introspection, and a desire to improve herself and the life of her closest friend and mentor, Tarra, that she nurtured her spirituality through self-improvement. And through this she found the next steps on her vocational path toward sanctuary.

*Separation from the Socio-Cultural Origin*

Several participants found the need to separate from their socio-cultural origin found within the family to fulfill their spiritual self and vocational path. Perhaps it is necessary to separate from our childhood understandings and worldviews to some extent, to be exposed to other experiences. One’s spirituality is further developed by the expanded view of interacting with others from different socio-cultural groups, as Lenore beautifully illustrates in her statement “I’ve always felt it important to push the boundaries of my own social circle and to reach out to people whose lives and
experiences are very different from my own so that I can better understand them. I feel greatly enriched in the process.”

Carol had to withstand her parents’ lack of support (and mother’s sabotage) of her love of animals, and actually found her spirituality through new experiences and interfacing with people much different from herself and her family’s cultural viewpoints. She then went on a journey with the circus, which is a completely different culture from her staunch Catholic, conservative republican family life. This started her on her vocational path, but ultimately was counter-productive to her spiritual growth. Her awareness of this was the tool she needed to make a major change in her life and her career, so that she ended up falling into another culturally different group, that of the Ojai, California spiritual community. Her involvement with the women’s group there was the impetus for her newly found self-understanding and the foundation for a major spiritual leap. All of her life experiences combined to take her one step at a time down her pathway.

Lenore had to separate from her family of origin’s culture by choosing to live and work with the poor and her work in military activism. For many years she found her lifestyle and choices in opposition to her parents’ and grandparents’ wishes, who made their disapproval known. For Lenore, her vocational path was a journey of following her heart and her spiritual beliefs even in the face of opposition from those she loved the most: members of her family. This continual commitment of her own beliefs was simultaneously a pulling away from her family culture that was “hard, painful.” But in the end she relates they are more understanding and supportive now, and she is “bringing them along” by her influence on them. Additionally society as a whole also played a part
in pressuring her to follow a more conformist lifestyle: people routinely told her what they thought of her activism work, and it sometimes was not supportive. Lenore’s upbringing and education prepared her to be a woman with a high-profile, high-paying career. Yet she went against all of this programming to follow her spiritual self.

Dee had a type of separation from her socio-cultural background in leaving the corporate world and striking out on her own based on her intuition. This was difficult for her to do because she always fit well into the corporate mold and came from a family who not only was deeply imbedded in the corporate, but ironically, several worked for the same company throughout their lives. Corporate was a part of her identity and separating from it meant finding a new identity.

Carol and Lenore both found that as they grew and their spirituality blossomed, they re-interpreted their familial culture of origin, having to “bring their families along” in growth and acceptance of their vocational and spiritual beliefs. In this way, I say they could not return to their roots, meaning, they could not live the lifestyle they were raised to live. Conversely, Cheryl had a slightly different experience. At first she separated from her culture of origin in her young adulthood, choosing to live a more upper middle class lifestyle in a large city, away from the small-town country life in which she was raised. But she found that to be a deterrent to her spiritual growth, and returned to her country roots, removing herself from the confines of what she sees as “artificial.” In her case she had to separate from her dream of living the “perfect” upscale, suburban lifestyle. However as in a spiral, she returned to her roots, but did not overlap the exact same path; she was living in a different way with a different life.
Lenore, David, Cheryl, and Dee each are aware of the special concerns of moving in and out of two different cultures, and all feel enriched by the experience. David, Cheryl, and Dee have all separated, to some extent, from the white culture by choosing to practice Native American spirituality and choosing lifestyles based more on Native ways.

Social Justice

All of the participants’ vocation included a strong sense of social justice, community, and being a part of the solution to bettering the common humanity. As each one spoke of their vocation, I heard a sense of “calling” from each of them, although none used that word. It was clear, though, that they were drawn to their work from an inner source, with a drive “beyond all reason” as Dee would say, to perform the actions they do. Each felt a sense of being a part of all of Creation and had a sense of responsibility toward all living things. A major component of this theme is the action each of the participants have taken in their spiritual journey and in their vocation. It seems that action, or doing what one professes, takes the spiritual belief system to a higher level of living it.

For this to happen, each of the participants had to act. Action was not always easy to do, and it didn’t always feel good. Often it required a sacrifice or overcoming fear. What I’ve learned from the participants is once they found their spiritual selves, it affected their relationship to everything in their lives and the world around them. Cheryl could not sit by and watch the dogs on her road go hungry or continue to reproduce. She was driven to do something about it. David and Cheryl find that having animals around them helps them to connect with the world, with nature, and with others. Their marital relationship has grown and been healed through their spiritual awakening. This
awakening has impacted the very way in which they live, where they live, and what they do. They, as well as Lenore and Dee, try to live more congruently with the earth by being vegetarian and using only organically grown food. Cheryl relates that for her, not living a spiritually congruent life affected her stress level and happiness, and has been a player in her chronic fatigue. David says that he feels empowered by his spirituality, and I believe Dee feels the same way.

Lenore is the most literal and obvious example of congruent living. Lenore’s spirituality requires her to live congruently with the earth and in fellowship with the poor; she has given up as much of her own privilege as she can (she is subject to who she was born to be and some things cannot be changed, such as the fact that she is white) in an effort to break down barriers within society. Lenore takes action very seriously through her social justice work and puts herself most at risk by her military activism. But her spirituality is reflected in taking action: she must live with and help the poor and those oppressed; she must speak out in word and deed against militarism, which she feels oppresses the poor. These are obvious examples of her commitment to her idealism and improving conditions for all of humanity.

Carol’s desire to rescue elephants shows us her altruism and her feelings of responsibility toward these animals. Carol acted on her love of animals, never letting the negative influences at home sway her, and continuing to act on her beliefs throughout her path. She was fearless in buying Tarra for a huge sum, fearless in her career choices with the circus, then in leaving the circus, fearless in making changes in her career and in herself when she found them to be necessary. She was fearless in putting everything she
had into a sanctuary and changing her vocation forever, and in listening to the Universe’s nudges for her to do that.

David and Cheryl built a Peace Chamber on their land as a commitment to their spirituality and to help bring about peace in the world. David speaks of action as a necessity for when one is given a vision, or spiritual awareness. He believes a vision is given to a person not just for a beautiful insight, but as something that needs to be acted upon. David feels it is his responsibility to share his values and what he has learned with others who may be searching to help them find their spiritual path, too.

Dee’s action was in having to overcome the fear of quitting her job based on a “vague sense that I wanted to work with animals” and subsequently believe in her intuition enough to face the fear of feeding raw to her own dogs, and then to incorporate a business when that was never something she wanted to do. Dee felt she had to share the ability to intuit with others – to teach others how to tap into and believe in their own intuition as it relates to their pets’ health. Dee’s commitment to improving the nutrition of pets and helping pet owners develop their intuition as it relates to their pets is only the beginning of her spiritual journey. During our interview, she had an awareness of her desire to move onto working with people to heal and support their spiritual growth through Native practices as a means of healing the world. She believes her life, by example, is another means of beginning healing of the world. If we live the best life we can, we influence and impact others, which begins a ripple effect, ultimately reaching around the world and to each and every one of us.

None of the participants intellectualized her or his spiritual growth or chose a vocation that reflects her or his interests. Instead each will say the focus was on spiritual
development and personal growth. From this desire to become the best one can be and become in tune with their own inner beings, each participated in activities that reflected that inner self. Over time, those activities became their vocations. In other words, vocation was not chosen by any of the participants, rather, they each backed into a vocation by virtue of following their inner selves. This is a fundamental point in this research. The implications are that we must each work on our own selves to find out who we truly are and the vocation will come from that.

Conclusion

I started this project with the assumption that people can choose a vocation that is based on their spiritual self, that it is an exploration and a conscious choice of how they want to work in the world. What I have learned is for the participants, this was not the case. Lenore said it simply, “my work has grown out of my spirituality.” When Lenore asked the woman who worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta how she could help, the woman told her to find her path and follow it. This simple statement is profound and explains exactly what the participants did. They found a connection to a higher power and nurtured their spirituality through personal growth and exposure to diverse others.

Each of the participants found their spiritual journey through the development of the self as a spiritual being in a unique way. Carol found her spiritual pathway through her own personal growth and acceptance of the female aspect of herself. Lenore found it through the intellectual and personal challenge of living out Jesus’ teachings. David and Cheryl found it through the resolution of crises and the interdependency of married life. And Dee found it through accepting a spiritual life as existing both within and outside of
herself, then developing and trusting her own intuition. Various experiences, crises, and events in their lives led them. They explored, they discerned. They exposed themselves to new ideas and influences. They trusted their inner selves. They let go of control. They came to understand their connection to all of Creation and their part in it. And step-by-step they found themselves accepting the path that they believe was laid out for them to follow. Through the resolution of their own individual struggles, they found connection to a Universal energy source and their role as an integral being in this world. All of this has taken them years to get to the place they are currently: living congruently with the world, and each in her and his own way, helping to bring unity to all living things.
CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand spiritual development in one’s life and how one comes to know and accept a vocation that reflects the inner self. Using a life history approach, I conducted multiple in-depth interviews with five individuals, four women and one man. Each has developed and nurtured spiritual growth throughout her or his life and is currently on a spiritual pathway that I describe as vocation.

Spirituality is a growing field in adult and higher education, mainly focused on spirituality of adult education or adult educators (Astin & Astin, 1999; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Groen, 2002; Tisdell, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). This study moves outside of the confines of examining spirituality among adult and higher educators because spiritual vocations may be found in every area. While there has been a growing interest in spirituality in this field, there is little empirical research on the process and awareness of the formation of the spiritual self and its influence on a person’s choice of vocation.

The Path to Spiritual Growth

The path to spiritual growth appears to be both different and similar for each individual. The differences lie in the personal characteristics of the individual’s experiences, which impact the process and progress to the spiritual path. These personal characteristics may include personality attributes, such as how open a person is or how inclined she or he may be toward spiritual awareness and spiritual growth. Other aspects
impacting spiritual growth may include particular personal struggles, experiences or crises, and the influence of others on an individual. The similarities lie in the general process of spirituality. It appears that the individual must be primed for spiritual growth to occur. This may be a combination of maturation, cognitive/emotional readiness, and timing: being open when an event occurs.

**Maturation**

It seems that spiritual growth follows a maturation process. Maturation toward spirituality includes exposure to diverse new ideas and experiences, exposure to spiritual influences, the ability to separate from the imposed limits of culture and society, and an awareness of one’s interconnection to all of Creation.

Research participants in this study ranged in age from 34 to 51, illustrating that spiritual growth took some time to develop in their lives. Exposure to the planted seeds may come earlier, but the understanding and awareness that comes from these seeds may need time and experiences to ripen. As part of the maturation process, spiritual growth may be encouraged through a desire to grow, learn, and be exposed to diverse others and diverse ideas. This may necessarily include separating from one’s culture of origin in the form of breaking away from childhood constraints and family beliefs systems and opening oneself up to new ideas.

Another aspect to maturation is participants’ ability to see the positive side of crises or events instead of becoming disillusioned when faced with adversary. This exposure to and negotiating of life’s experiences is part of understanding that one cannot control all aspects of life and acceptance that sad things happen. Through these experiences participants opened to new understandings of themselves and the world.
around them. This caused a change or shift in awareness and pushed them along their spiritual pathway. They chose to see a higher purpose to all events regardless of how sad or difficult. Exposure to a diversity of influences including lived experiences, people, events, or crises are the means for maturation for the participants.

*Cognitive/Emotional Readiness*

Cognitive/emotional readiness appears to be an important aspect of spiritual growth and may be one result of maturation. This readiness is an intentional aspect to spiritual growth that may be nurtured and developed. It is the ability and desire to analyze one’s life, the influences on it, culture, and society through the lens of personal growth and awareness including intentional self-work toward spiritual growth.

Cognitive/emotional readiness includes the ability to accept and make positive use of experiences. The individual has learned to release blocks that may be impairing progress and is more secure in and open to life.

The influence of culture and society may be subtle but have profound effects on the pursuance of vocation. The awareness of this influence is a part of the cognitive/emotional readiness. Any deviation from mainstream society may result in subliminal to overt pressure from family, friends, and the larger community to conform to their view of what is right, good, safe, or appropriate. This may include the self-awareness of one’s own inner needs that may fly in the face of conventionality and the strength to pursue them.

Culture and society may also be a positive influence on spiritual growth in the form of community support, partnership, and spiritual influences. We can expose ourselves to new experiences, consciously examine the socio-cultural influence on
ourselves, accept that which is meaningful to us, and reject that which is limiting. Exposing ourselves to alternative belief systems, practices, and cultures breaks us out of a narrow existence, expanding our view to the greater humanity and allowing us to take on what feels right to us. Without exposure to different ideas, we never know what else is available.

**Timing**

There is one other perhaps necessary component of spiritual growth: a moment when the Universe, Higher Power, one’s intuition, or however one wishes to describe it, creates a moment of awareness in which there is “a seeing of formerly hidden truth, a revelation” (Maslow, 1971, p. 62). This occurred for each of the participants in this study and came about through serendipity, crisis, or some other event. It was a moment of understanding, a realization, a sudden insight into themselves and their lives and the awareness of a higher power. This aspect of spirituality cannot be orchestrated, but requires divine intervention. While one cannot create it, one is absolutely a part of recognizing it.

The Path to Spiritual Vocation

For the participants in this study, vocation was a result of spiritual growth. Once the participants in this study began the process of developing their spiritual selves, they were able to find their vocational path. This was accomplished as a result of listening to their intuition, understanding of the self in relation to the world of others, trusting in themselves and their Higher Power, and letting go of obstacles such as fear, control, ego, material wealth, and the limitations of society. In the end, vocation is more accurately
described as the way they are living their lives; it is their spiritual beliefs in action. In every case, their vocations reflected a sense of social justice in one form or another. Their view of the self in relation to the world around them is a major player in their vocation.

Implications

*Implications for Understanding A Spiritually Grounded Vocation*

If we wish to foster the awareness and choice of vocation that reflects the inner self, it is necessary to first focus on developing the inner self. It is not simply finding that activity which one is good at or enjoys doing. It is found much deeper in the body and soul of a person. Then, it may be necessary to agree to allow the self to be guided by the Universe. This may require taking action to do what one is called to do in this life. Spiritual development, therefore, is the foundation for one’s vocation.

*Implications for Understanding Spiritual Growth*

Spirituality is about connection. It is a connection to one’s inner self or one’s intuition. It is about connection to a higher power and the connection between one’s intuition and a higher power. This connection expands outwardly to other people around the world, animals, nature, the earth, and all living things. It is about the ability to see oneself as a part of all of Creation, all at once a tiny, unimportant aspect of a greater whole and simultaneously and all-important player in the ecosystem where one personal action has a ripple effect on all. This connection is made known to each of us, whether we recognize it or not, in the various manifestations of spirituality.

Spirituality is also about intention, purposeful activity toward spiritual growth. This is about making the decision that personal growth includes spiritual growth, and the
commitment to pursue both. This may include conscious thought toward centering oneself, keeping the ego in check, and searching out positive experiences and associations to expose oneself to the spiritual in others.

The participants in this study saw their roles as divinely inspired, they had been given a plan to follow and they were given signs to lead them down their paths. Preceding spiritual awareness is a time of exploration. During this time, participants were engaged in active self-work. They learned to trust in their own intuition. They became acutely aware of others’ needs and have taken action to help answer those needs.

Each of the participants found spiritual influences in the form of other people as individuals, as community, as partnership or influences in the form of animals or nature. Oftentimes experiences led participants further down their spiritual path. Most participants spoke of events as one of many factors acting as stepping stones on which participants moved along their spiritual path. It could be argued that these events may have primed them for spiritual development, as David and Cheryl explained their personal struggles opened them up to each other and to the necessity for a change. Tisdell (2003) emphasizes spiritual development as an outcome of significant life events such as the death of a loved one or birth of a child. While events did impact participants in this study, these events appeared to be of less direct influence in their spiritual development than Tisdell implies.

In each case, however, participants were heavily influenced by others, none grew spiritually by being in isolation, rather, they each grew, making spiritual leaps through the positive influence of others more spiritually advanced than they. This begs the
question; can we influence another’s spiritual growth? The answer, I believe, is a resounding YES!

*Implications and Recommendations for Adult and Higher Education Practice*

In many instances throughout participants’ lives, self-awareness and subsequent spiritual growth came about through informal learning experiences in addition to, or instead of formal education. All were engaged in self-directed exploration or informal learning experiences that propelled their self-understanding and spiritual growth forward. Carol found personal growth through the Ojai women’s group and her own self-reflection. Lenore found her spirituality through exposure to other people, cultures, political ideals, and experiences on the streets with the homeless. David and Cheryl found their spiritual beliefs through self-directed exploration and experience through dancing, and Dee found her spirituality through the nonformal animal communication workshop.

We as adult educators must acknowledge the valuable learning that goes on in people’s lives outside of the formal classroom experience. Drawing on learners’ personal growth pursuits outside of the classroom, entertaining discussions and recognizing the value of such experiences can go a long way to validating and encouraging seeking out and participating in such experiences. Adult education is about lifelong learning; learning takes place in every moment of every day. The question is, are we learning from our experiences and progressing in our personal, spiritual development throughout our lives?

Adult and higher education instructors can draw on students’ experiences and use them in the formal classroom. Programmers can use these ideas as a means of creating new educational opportunities for students in the form of workshops and the like. The whole student can and should be accessed in the learning environment.
An aspect of spiritual growth, as shown by the participants in this study, is the intentional self-work necessary for breaking oneself beyond one’s own personal limitations. Identity development is one path toward spiritual development and Carol is the most obvious example. It was through Carol’s understanding and acceptance of various events in her life that seemed to send up flags to her that something needed to change in her interactions with Tarra. These events and her ability to make positive changes in her dealings with Tarra as a result of the understanding of these events, combined with substantial personal awareness she experienced through the Ojai women’s group, developed a spirituality based in identity development and self-acceptance that led her to where she is today.

Education around self-awareness in a supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere where persons can examine the limiting influences in their lives may be especially helpful in enhancing spiritual growth. Looking at the socio-cultural influences on each of us, where our motivations originate from and what drives us, could provide a valuable key in unlocking our own personal obstacles to our spiritual growth. This is sensitive work and should be proceeded with slowly and carefully, within a safe environment of a supportive peer group.

In Tisdell’s (2003) discussion of spiritual development in adult and higher education, she makes several assumptions about spirituality as it relates to education that fundamentally emphasize spiritual development as a means of identity development heavily influenced by culture and gender and as a way of making meaning. She likens spiritual development as a process of moving forward and spiraling back, reexamining identity as it relates to various important aspects of the self, life experiences, and the
understanding of events, painful or joyous, in one’s life. This is how we make meaning of life experiences, and this, in turn, affects our identity development. She contends that it is the understanding of life’s purpose and the ability of the adult to live within the tension of opposites in life that is part of spiritual development.

Spiritual influences in participants’ lives have been of significance in moving participants along their spiritual pathways. Several participants found themselves separating from their family of origin and the limitations imposed on them from societal expectations. In their movement away from the limiting expectations of their original home environment, they were exposed to other people, experiences, and influences. In accepting these new ways of being in the world, and bringing these ways of being home to their families, they have expanded their own, as well as their families’, world. In this way, they are redefining the meaning of home. As participants developed their sense of identity, they found themselves engaged in a vocation that express an element of social justice and action. Each sees her or his place in the world as interconnected with all the world, and felt a need to make a positive impact through vocation as an expression of the spiritual self.

Tisdell (2003) explains, “for those who value spirituality, spiritual development is strongly related to claiming a more authentic identity. It is also about the search for wholeness and integration” (p. 108). She further explains that for the participants in her study, this wholeness included an understanding of the inner self that was reflected in action. As Tisdell points out, spiritual development may facilitate the extending out to enhance the experiences of others in the world.
This is echoed by Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996). In their study, people who are engaged in work on behalf of the common good were interviewed to determine what kind of people are engaged in work such as this, how they become interested in and committed to this type of work, and how can others be encouraged to do the same. Daloz et al. found that there were several conditions that encouraged participants in their study to perform work benefiting the common good. They spoke of the importance of the home environment, specifically a loving home, the benefits of having at least one parent that models care and concern for the larger community, exposure to cross-cultural experiences, the importance of direct attention and real talk in the form of mentoring, and the opportunity to perform some service during adolescence. One of the points they make is living beyond the “tribe” or change in the meaning of home to expand to the wider community, from the family and home to the neighborhood, the community, society, and ultimately, the world.

Daloz et al. (1996) also speak of the value of partnership, community, and mentoring as important aspects to people living lives committed to the common good. Daloz et al. and I both see the benefits of exposure to influential others and positive experiences in a person’s life and the impact this can have on a person. Daloz et al. sees this as affecting their concept of home, expanding it outward to the greater world and the person’s desire to connect with others in the greater world. I see this as affecting a person’s inner development and a means to helping the person develop the inner, spiritual self. In so doing, the person sees the self as interconnected with the greater world. At a different vantage point, I see this as assisting in people’s spiritual development.
One aspect is left out of the equation. Daloz et al. (1996) imply that all of this can be nurtured and developed and encouraged by taking the steps they outline. I, too, believe this can be encouraged through these steps and that these steps are perhaps a necessary part of spiritual development and certainly, something we, as adult educators, should do. Yet, as the participants in this study each indicate, there is another factor that is important in each of their spiritual pathways: serendipity or the awareness, be it sudden or a steady progression throughout their lives, of a higher power that makes a difference in how they see themselves and relate to the world around them. This may or may not be something that can be purposely orchestrated, but may be divinely inspired and personally recognized when the person is ready. And we, as adult educators, may not be able to create it, but may be able to help people recognize it.

If we as adult educators wish to assist learners in choosing a vocation that reflects their inner self, it is first important for us to assist in the understanding and development of their spiritual selves. This can be accomplished through intentional self-work and understanding of the self through the ego-based, socio-cultural environment. Dirkx (2000) and Tisdell and Tolliver (2003) discuss the concept of transformational learning in adult education as enhancing the spiritual or inner self. Dirkx relates that transformational learning is a process of coming to “a deeper, more imaginative and profound relationship with one’s self and the world” (p. 248). In his 25 years of experience as an educator, he has seen more transformational learning taking place in a more subtle progression over a period of time rather than an all-at-once experience. This progression of self-awareness and spiritual development is depicted most clearly in Carol’s and Lenore’s stories. Their
spiritual awareness came about over a period of many years, many experiences, and many formal and informal learning opportunities throughout their lives.

What can we, as adult and higher educators, do to encourage spiritual growth among students? First and foremost, it is important for us all to understand what we mean by spirituality. Spirituality is the understanding of oneself as she or he relates to a universal energy source and all living things. It is a sense of being in tune with the universe and a sense of connectedness with all of Creation. It is a healthy, positive outlook on life, seeing unity and meaning in all aspects of life. Once we understand this, we can take steps to increase awareness and foster spiritual thinking among ourselves as educators as well as our students.

As adult educators, we have a unique opportunity to purposely enhance personal development and spiritual growth through the formal learning environment. It is my belief that the spiritual self can be intentionally nurtured through adult education and participation in growth-inducing experiences breaking outside of one’s comfort zone. By providing educational opportunities that expose students to diverse ideas and people, we can encourage a greater understanding of the self in relation to the socio-cultural environment in which we each live. We have an opportunity to provide experiences and the ability to analyze experiences to engage “learners on the personal, cultural, structural, political, and the spiritual levels” (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003) to encourage the likelihood that learning can be transformational. We can provide opportunities for experiences that push individual boundaries and “safe zones” with an arena for guided self-reflection and processing of life experiences. An integral part of this is to build awareness of life as lived within the context of the whole of Creation – that each of us is part of the greater
whole and as such, we are all interconnected. Understanding and acceptance of this is the foundation for awareness of privilege and for actions that promote social justice.

Education around diversity issues, acceptance of other cultures, other belief systems, and other worldviews is a first step. Exposing ourselves and our students to other ideas and experiences enhances awareness and understanding of others. It is important to move ourselves beyond the confines of our own belief systems and expand our thinking and experiences beyond our comfort zone. Through this exposure we may find connection to different beliefs systems. Allowing ourselves the opportunity to experience other practices, immersing ourselves in a different way of thinking, whether we find a connection to it or not, is valuable for awareness and understanding of others. This can be fostered through offering workshops, speakers, and retreats that focus on various practices such as yoga or meditation classes, or specialized, spiritually advanced guest speakers. Providing students a focused, intensive retreat could be a good starting point. Oftentimes the mere breaking of routine, exposure to a retreat-like, natural setting, and focused, intentional work with a community of learners can provide an atmosphere conducive to spiritual nurturance. As English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) discuss, various personal exercises including “bodywork, meditation and contemplation, reflective reading, journal writing, participating in rituals, and cultivating soul friends” (p. 49) may help to develop spirituality and can be encouraged in the adult education setting. I would caution, however, that yoga, meditation, and other “spiritual activities” are not necessarily going to create spiritual growth in an individual simply by practicing it. Rather, if the individual approaches the exercise with intention, it may provide the background and support for learning to listen to the inner self, to find relaxation, and
providing the inner quiet conducive for personal inner listening. It is a mistake, however, to expect once a week yoga practice (or any other activity) to result in a spiritual awakening.

There is a unique opportunity for spiritual awareness and the enhancement of spiritual growth within adult and higher education practice. Instructors, programmers, and student personnel administrators all have the opportunity to focus on and work with students on spiritual development. Expansion of awareness of the self through increased understanding of the self in relation to society and culture is one means of identity development as an influence on spiritual development (Tisdell, 2003). Through guided exploration focusing on issues of culture and gender, instructors and programmers can focus on and enhance student identity development.

Daloz et al. (1996) speak of the value of mentors and English, Fenwick, and Parsons (2003) discuss the impact of soul friends on spiritual development. In this study, all of the participants spoke of spiritual influences in their lives, people who helped them along in their spiritual growth. This connection between people can be created in adult and higher education situations by assigning students a partner with whom to discuss spiritual or personal issues. A non-judgmental, empathic listener can be helpful in allowing personal exploration to create new insights. Programmers and instructors can prepare an outline of questions to act as starting points for discussion and reflection. Personal crises or events may also be used as further discussion points.

Involvement in activities that support someone or something else in this world may be a third step in moving toward understanding of the self in relation to all of Creation. What can each of us do to improve one situation, one life, one aspect of our
world? The action itself is not enough, but reaching out beyond the self and taking meaningful action to make a positive impact is the necessary component for the action to move beyond a simple act to connection. Adult and higher education institutions can make connections to the outside community, providing students with volunteer opportunities that expose them to people, situations, or concerns beyond that of their own community. Exposure to others different than the self or those marginalized can expand students’ worldview and move them beyond Daloz’ et al. (1996) “tribe.”

And lastly, as educators, it is necessary for us to enhance awareness of our own spirituality to be able to model spiritual thinking and behaviors and to be a support to our students’ spiritual pursuit. Both educators and students need to make a commitment to continued exploration of the self in relation to the world around them as spiritual growth is a lifetime journey. If we can assist learners to be in touch with their inner spiritual selves, then vocation will take care of itself.

Implications for Future Research

It was an intentional decision to work with five participants as I wished to delve deep into their lives rather than a more superficial examination of many individuals. I strongly believe that study into one’s personal, private life experiences, thoughts, and values requires an in-depth interview – which I have done. Yet I wonder what I might have found had I the time to interview five more, or fifteen more, individuals to the same extent. Time is always a limitation. For obvious reasons, I wish there was unlimited time. I truly enjoyed the research and interviewing each person and learning from her and his life path. Although I believe participants had exhausted all that they could draw on during the interviews, if there was a longer time frame – perhaps coming back to them two years
later, or interviewing others in their lives who know them well – I am sure this would have enriched the research. Future work, therefore, could include follow-up interviews with these same participants in two to four years as well as extending the study to additional people.

The life experiences of people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds may have an impact on a person’s spiritual journey. While each of the participants in this study were all Caucasian people of European descent, with the exception of Cheryl, whose great-grandfather was Cherokee, they all moved outside of their socio-cultural and familial origins. Would individuals of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds feel the need to expose themselves to alternative cultural ideals? Spirituality among various cultural groups may in fact differ significantly. It would be especially interesting to look into Latino/a, African American, Native American, and Asian people’s spiritual journeys. Future research could extend this study to people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, different socio-economic groups, and to multiple other vocations.

One question that continually surfaced in my mind was, are certain people more likely to pursue spiritual issues and a spiritual life than others? Lovecky (1998) raised this question in relation to the possibility of some gifted children being more highly cognitively and emotionally developed, relating these factors to an inclination to be more spiritual. Clearly some people are more intuitive than others, and being in touch with one’s intuition may be a factor in realizing a spiritual connection. Therefore, are some people hard-wired for more spiritual thinking? It seems likely that intuition is something that can be fostered and developed in people. This is certainly an area worthy of further study.
Conclusion

Before I began this study, I had the hope of discovering the “key” to finding what my spiritual self wanted me to do in this life, and then, the steps to take to get there. What I have learned, though, is there is no one key to discovering one’s vocation. Vocation may be inextricably linked to one’s spiritual path. Discovering one’s spiritual path cannot be prescribed like an outline of activities one should do, checking them off, and at the end finding a spiritual path. It seems that there are some steps that one can purposely take to increase the possibility of enhancing spiritual growth, and some aspects of spirituality must come through its own process.

I approached these interviews with the mistaken assumption that once a person finds one’s vocation, all one has to do is relax and enjoy it. The search has culminated in a destination. But like the adage, it is the journey, not the destination that is important. The journey continues. There is no destination, only different steps along the way. The participants’ vocations have not been chosen by them; perhaps they would say it was chosen for them. Or, it could be argued, they found their spiritual opening, their spiritual life, and then followed it. What resulted was a vocation, or a way of being in the world. Vocation is actually an agreement to follow the process of becoming who one truly is, trusting in one’s intuition, following the signs, and perhaps saying “no” to all that comes in the way.

It seems that none of the participants was especially spiritually attuned. They are not meditation gurus, they do not light candles, handle gemstones, or rely on any crutch. They all come across as regular people simply following their lives in the best possible
way they can. But what they do all share is an interest in following their inner selves. They each have a capacity for tuning in and listening and not giving in to the pressures of society or people who try to sway them. Each one of them wants to be the best person she or he can be. They all see themselves as part of a community of all of humanity that has an impact beyond themselves.

Elkins’ et al. (1988) components of spirituality were a good starting point on which to base a definition of spirituality and how one can identify the spiritual in one’s life. The participants were chosen based on their ability to speak in these terms and they exemplified all of the components of spirituality including believing in a transcendent dimension; meaning and purpose in life; a sense of mission; awe, wonder, seeing a sacredness in the ordinary; not seeking satisfaction in the material; a sense of altruism; idealism; an awareness of the tragic; and the fruits of spirituality. Although these are components of spirituality each of the participants exemplified, each portrayed the components in a different way, with her and his own particular flavor. Yet they also taught me about how their spirituality is understood and manifested in a lived life than this simple nine-point checklist, giving me a deeper understanding of what spirituality means both generalized to all people, and specifically individualized for each one. This study moves beyond Elkins et al. by showing how all of the participants negotiated their lives through listening to their inner selves and how each event and stumbling block throughout their lives guided them one step closer to a healthier, truer understanding of themselves, ultimately guiding them to living a spiritually congruent life through their vocations.
Understanding what spirituality means and identifying key words to exemplify spirituality is not the same as being in touch with one’s true inner self. To find one’s true inner self requires so much commitment to the highest ideal of loving oneself enough to nurture one’s own growth, regardless of how difficult or painful. Nurturing the spirit in ourselves is the most loving commitment we can do for ourselves. The rewards are what Elkins et al. (1988) describe as the fruits of spirituality, or what Carol exclaims as “doing their souls’ work, what they came here to do, which will feed them and make life so glorious.”
REFERENCES


Groen, J. (2002). The experience and practice of adult educators in addressing the spiritual dimensions of their workplace (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2002).


Appendix A

North Carolina State University
INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Title of Study: Vocation as a Means of Expressing Spirituality: A Life History Approach

Dear ______________:

I am a graduate student at North Carolina State University working on my doctoral dissertation. The subject of my dissertation is exploring personal spiritual development and how one chooses a vocation that expresses one’s spirituality. You have been identified through your work at ______________/ Your name has been given to me by ______________ who suggested that you might fit the criteria of my study.

Spiritual development and choice of vocation is an exciting new topic in the field of adult education. Your participation will help further the understanding of the role of spirituality in people’s lives, and the value of choice of vocation based on the spiritual, or inner self.

I would like to meet with you to discuss my research more fully and learn about you and your work, to determine if your experience falls within my research criteria. If it is determined that there is a fit, you will be invited to participate in this research. If you choose to participate, the research would involve a minimum of 3 interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each.

I will be contacting you in a week or so to discuss this project with you. If you would like to contact me in the meantime, you may do so at

Lori Nero Ghosal
100 Carbe Ct.
Cary, NC 27519
919-363-9351
email: lori_nero_ghosal@ncsu.edu

Thank you very much, and I look forward to speaking with you!

Lori Nero Ghosal
Appendix B

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Vocation as a Means of Expressing Spirituality: A Life History Approach

Dear _____________:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this exciting study on spiritual development and vocation choice. Your participation in this research will play a valuable role in furthering the understanding of the role of spirituality in people’s lives, and the value of choice of vocation based on the spiritual, or inner self. This research will add to the research literature in career counseling, higher education, and adult education.

As we discussed, research will include a minimum of 3 interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each. These interviews will include questions on your interests, family life, beliefs, work, inner thoughts and feelings about these aspects of your life. In addition, you will be asked to keep a journal and any other means you feel expresses your spirituality, such as photographs, artwork, poetry, or any other means of self-expression.

Through the interview, you will have the opportunity to express yourself based on directed questioning and free discourse. You may find that through this process your spiritual development and vocation choice, as well as other aspects and influences on your life, may become clarified. It is also possible that the act of introspection may cause some uncomfortable feelings, however, you need disclose nothing that you feel would compromise your privacy. Otherwise, there are no anticipated physical or mental risks involved.

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential and your first name or a pseudonym will be used. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study, if you so desire.

Interviews will be audiotaped and videotaped with your permission. The audio and video tapes will only be for the review of the primary investigator. Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed.
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the principal investigator, Lori Nero Ghosal, at 100 Carbe Court, Cary, NC 27519 or 919-363-9351, or the Institutional Review Board at North Carolina State University, Leazar Hall, Box 7514, Raleigh, NC 27695.

Sincerely,

Lori Nero Ghosal
Principal Investigator
CONSENT FORM

I have read and understand the information in this letter. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study and to be tape-recorded and video-recorded.

The audiotapes, videotapes, photographs, journals, and any other materials generated for the purpose of this research will remain in the possession of the principal investigator and will be used solely for the purposes of the research. They will be destroyed after 3 years. I understand, if I choose, my identity will be kept confidential, and nothing that can link me to the study will be included in the final publication.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________

Participant’s Signature ___________________________ Date ________

Investigator’s Signature ___________________________ Date ________

I agree to be audiotaped ____________________________

I agree to be videotaped ____________________________
Appendix C

North Carolina State University
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SESSION 1:

Tell me about your career path. How did you come to know what was your vocation? Tell me about how you feel your inner self helped guide or direct your vocation choice.

What were the obstacles for you in choosing to live an authentic life? How did you overcome these obstacles?

Probing questions about career and vocation, influences and defining moments.

Probing questions about socio-cultural influences on career and vocation choice.

SESSION 2:

I’d like to hear about your spiritual, or inner, development over the course of your lifetime. Think back to your earliest memory, and tell me about a defining moment that you believed influenced your spiritual development or illustrated an awareness of your inner self.

Probing questions about early memories of self-awareness, other defining moments in life.

Probing questions about socio-cultural influences on inner self.

SESSION 3:

Reflecting on your inner self and your current vocation choice, how does aligning your work spiritually impact your life both positively and negatively? Compare this with other work you have done that was not necessarily reflective of your spiritual self. What significance does this have for you personally?

Probing questions about socio-cultural influences on vocation and spirituality.
Appendix D

North Carolina State University
INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Vocation as a Means of Expressing Spirituality: A Life History Approach

Principal Investigator: Lori Nero Ghosal
Faculty Sponsor: Barbara Sparks, Ph.D.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information from the interview will be audiotaped and videotaped, but kept strictly confidential. The audiotapes and videotapes will remain in my possession and will be used solely for the purposes of the research. If you so choose, no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study; in writing and presentation of the study, a pseudonym will be assigned to your responses.

Date: ____________________    Name: __________________________
Place: ___________________     Age:  __________________________
Time: ___________________      Sex:  __________________________
Familial Religious Affiliation: __________________
Current Religious Affiliation: __________________
Degree of Activity in Organized Religion:

Not Active  Moderately Active  Very Active

Ethnicity: _______________________________
Current Job: _____________________________
Salary Range per year:  □ Self  □ Family

Less than $25,000  □  $51,000 - $75,000  □

$25,000 - $35,000  □  $76,000 - $100,000  □

$36,000 - $50,000  □  Above $100,000  □

Family Background (first names only):

Please write any special notes in margin i.e. step parent, divorced, deceased, etc.

Father  ____________________________ Ethnicity: ______________

Mother  ____________________________ Ethnicity: ______________

Brothers  ____________________________ Your Birth Order: __________

                      _____________________________________
                      _____________________________________
                      _____________________________________

Sisters  ____________________________

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                      _____________________________________
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Residence: Born:  __________________________

Moved to/year:  __________________________

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Appendix E

North Carolina State University
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Title of Study: Vocation as a Means of Expressing Spirituality: A Life History Approach

Transcriber

I understand that the information I am transcribing is confidential in nature and will not disclose, discuss, or otherwise compromise the contents of the audiotapes. I will keep any identifying characteristics of the participants, including names, relationships, or place of work, strictly confidential.

Name ______________________________________

Signature _____________________________________  Date _____________