

DISSERTATION

**THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
WHO PARTICIPATED IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE SECONDARY
TRANSITION PROGRAM: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

Submitted by

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2003

UMI Number: 3107062

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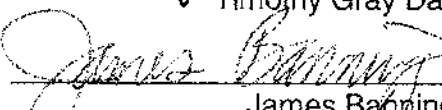
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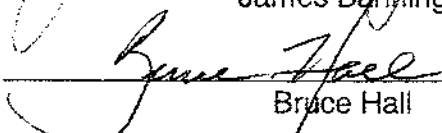
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Timothy Gray Davies



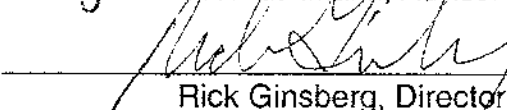
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO PARTICIPATED IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE SECONDARY AT POSTSECONDARY PROGRAM: A NARRATIVE STUDY

This study arose from personal practice and the narrator's awareness that, in current research, scant attention is given to hearing from young adults with disabilities who have successfully negotiated the transitions from high school, to community college, to employment. The method for this study is narrative. Four young adults with disabilities tell the stories of their lives and their transition experiences. The narrator, who has for many years entered into relationships with students during this critical transition time period, interweaves her experiences with those of the young adults. The four young adults and the narrator join in the recollection and reflective process. The research findings are presented as letters to the young adults, as they share their voices, actions and feelings. Layers of meaning emerged: the mundane and the sacred story, the journey towards self-determination and responsibility, the thorny transition struggle and the linchpin for success, the secondary at postsecondary transition program, formative and deformative relationships, commitments and allegiances, special education service and insulation, the emergent vision of success, and the formative nature of transition and the formative narrative experience.

Ambiguities and tensions are associated with students leaving the protective special education environment, often ill prepared and vulnerable as they transition into adult roles. The grist, the potential for successful outcomes, braced by tangible transition programming which in this case, is student involvement in a community college secondary at postsecondary transition program, guide this study. The narrator hopes those who relate to young adults with disabilities will listen to the voices of the four young adults and to her own.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Helen Endreland Madson.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project was rooted in relationships. I am deeply grateful for the relationships that developed and those that were affirmed over the course of my research and study. Within this community of support I could live and work.

This study would not have been possible without the willingness of my participants: Mark, Ellie, Eric and Meg. From my initial connection with them I was amazed at their willingness and even eagerness to share their stories. I thank them for their time, their trust and confidence and their courage to openly share their experiences. Further, I affirm their victories, carrying out their days as successful autonomous young adults even as they face further transitions.

I am indebted to my advisor, Dr. Jean Lehmann, who guided, supported and reassured me throughout this journey. Even initially, when she was unfamiliar with the methodology I chose, she supported and trusted my choice and me. Early on Dr. Timothy Davies told me, "The best thing you have going for you is having Jean for your advisor." She never failed me in that judgment. During my darkest days a connection with Jean would always propel me forward. I admire her work and commitment to the successful transition experiences of young adults with disabilities, which often takes her out of the confines of the university setting.

I am indebted to all of my committee members, several states away, whose teaching, questions, responses and counsel strengthened the work. I fervently hope that as I complete this project these relationships will not be severed.

I express my gratitude to Dr. Timothy Davies for his unwavering support and practical assistance. Dr. Davies brought a Community College Leadership Ph.D. program to a small Midwest community college cohort. He guided and taught us as a group and counseled and supported us individually as we channeled through the program requirements. Shortly before my proposal defense meeting, amidst his other intensive duties, he began his immersion into a study of narrative. His knowledge of narrative quickly surpassed mine and he guided me with suggested readings and germs of ideas. He teased my thinking, leading me to find my own way. When my writing would spill and muddy and my words drifted wayward, he would gently shepherd me, making careful indirect suggestions.

Dr. Jim Banning was a kind and creative teacher. Moreover, I will be forever indebted to him as he introduced the use of narrative for my study. For from the moment I heard the word “narrative” I sensed the linchpin between my research focus and the methodology that I had sought. He also offered the sage suggestion for the epilogue, addressing letters to the research community, my colleagues and parents. Again he helped me find the fit between my mission and the research project, which ultimately increased my learning.

Although I knew him least, I express my gratitude to Dr. Bruce Hall for first of all agreeing to serve on my committee and secondly for supporting my nontraditional method and my work. At my proposal defense meeting I spotted a sparkle in his eyes, hinting that he relished work that challenged the status quo.

I thank my other cohort members who continue this challenging and rewarding journey. As they have encouraged me, I will continue to encourage them. We began this journey as a cohesive group, and we will each complete it by affirming and supporting one other.

A special tribute is reserved for Ann Petersen who thoughtfully read the narratives and responded with both her experience and her insight. Our working relationship, as we work with students with disabilities at the community college, as with our friendship, has always sustained me.

I note with appreciation the support of Iowa Lakes Community College, especially Dr. David Nixon, the Emmetsburg campus dean, who was our cohort's most ardent cheerleader. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Lois Warner, the patient college librarian, who located a deluge of books and articles with efficiency and good spirit.

I am grateful for my family. I especially thank my husband, Jay, for his commitment to me throughout this arduous journey as I repeatedly elicited his assistance for computer dilemmas, readings, and thoughts. With his mechanical engineer's intellect he never resonated with my personal writing style, but as always he supported me anyway. Often after an intense session, he would ask if it was safe for him to go; unlike all others, Jay could not escape from me and my

intensity. I would also like to thank my daughters Monica, Emma, Laura and Hannah and sons in law, Christopher and Matthew. Even as they were experiencing many transitions in their own lives, they supported their mother with fellowship and love. Last summer Laura patiently completed the initial interview taped transcriptions, completing the last one on the day she returned to college in August.

Most of all I wish to thank my mother, Helen Endreland Madson, for her inspiration. She taught school for twenty-five years and countless years of Bible studies. She taught me by example, the story of her life. She cared for a dying woman's children to afford college. She taught school while she cared for aging parents, maiden aunts, bachelor uncles and raising her own children. Her prayers and love sustain me and the work I do at home and with my students. By observing her vivid example over the years, I came to learn that I could think better with a pencil in one hand and a book in the other. Moreover, she remained connected with my work, never ceasing to inquire about my progress as we spoke daily on the phone. She held the lantern.

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PREFACE

This narrative inquiry was designed to enhance an understanding of the transition experiences of students with disabilities who participated in a community college secondary at postsecondary transition program.

This work does not follow the traditional chapter format. Its organizational format emerged gradually and was invested with "back and forth" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I would compose a chapter, share it, make revisions, set it aside, begin another chapter, follow a similar process, and then compare it with the former chapter looking for an aesthetic whole (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Blessed both with the freedom my committee members allowed me and their consultation, I ultimately attained the harmony for which I was searching. The following sections trace my journey.

The "Prelude" records my own tentative initiation into the field of special education, my subsequent sabbatical at home raising four daughters and then a return to the field, as I became the coordinator for a community college secondary transition program. I explain the program and offer my primitive notions for students' involvement in their own programming. Connecting with the literature, I examine the lack of student voice in understanding students with disabilities transition experience. To illustrate the germ as well as the direction of the inquiry I share the story of "Mary." Mary evolved from a quiet high school

senior with neither the skills nor the attitude to succeed to become an autonomous young woman with the vocational skills and the self-determination to work and live independently. I explained how I sought to nest my research within the ongoing conversation of prior transition research. I conclude the "Prelude" section by providing the rationale for sharing the narratives in letter format.

Next, four stories are composed. These represent the four individuals who shared their stories, which I have chosen to record in letter format. These stories are the heart and the soul of my work. The letters encompass the student's words and my analysis, embedded in a "pattern of relationship and conversation" (Bateson & Bateson, 1987).

"Reflections" discloses the results of placing the four narratives aside each other and pulling out the insights that surfaced through this process. The "Epilogue" is composed of three letters addressed to: first, the research community that braced my beginnings, where I refer to my initial review of the literature; second, my colleagues in the special education/transition field; and third, the parents of students with disabilities, who like me, wish for successful outcomes for our children.

If you prefer to first read the review of the literature or the methodology used, you will find them located in the appendices.

While my goal for this study was to better understand the transition experiences of students with disabilities, my humble hope is that readers, dare I

say, want to read it. Only you, my reader, can determine if I achieved my aspiration.

March 2003

PRELUDE

My perspective on the transition experience of students with disabilities is not neutral. I have been actively involved as the coordinator of a secondary transition program at a community college for the past nine years. My training for this position, however, began much earlier.

Initiation

In 1972, my first year as a special education teacher, mainstreaming was the buzzword. That year I was responsible for a group of fifth and sixth grade students with mental disabilities who, for the first time, were removed from their basement, self-contained classroom, and thrust into regular classes with me trailing along. It was a roller coaster ride of a year for the students and me; they with their revised status, deprived of previously held advantages such as first off and on the bus and a doting elderly teacher, and me in the murky domain of experienced teachers' rooms. Together the students and I had to learn to navigate in the "mainstream." The students' math and reading scores shot up; my self-esteem shivered. Only by taking up the gauntlet and doggedly demonstrating my strengths while congruently displaying my vulnerability to the other teachers did I reach my goal of being considered an equal.

My next teaching assignment, three years later, was to initiate one of the pioneer learning disabilities resource rooms. Again I witnessed significant

changes; nine-year-old boys, previously unsuccessful reluctant readers became novice enthusiastic learners and readers as the resource room environment exposed them to both different teaching methods and positive learning expectations. During those years I reaped the benefits of involving parents in setting positive expectations for learning. Serving as a resource for regular education teachers, I demonstrated and advocated for positioning students for success.

My next learning environment was on the domestic front. For fifteen years I chose to stay at home and raise four daughters. Early on, my husband and I decided we did not want to raise what he labeled, "helpless hair-brains." We tried to maintain a home for our daughters that promoted self-reliance and responsibility, braced by the security and the assurance that we were there and loving them unconditionally.

Our little girls knew we could not go to the swimming pool until they had watered the trees or picked the strawberries. They could not have friends over until the laundry was folded. Job lists were an integral part of their day even as preschoolers. Mealtime honored predilections for family dialogue and as time went on, for negotiating complex activity schedules. Our daughters were expected to do things for and with grandparents and elderly relatives and assisted with much of the preparations as we frequently entertained family and friends. Books were requested and beloved gifts, trips to the public library a weekly event, bedtime reading a ritual and television use was selective. Even as youngsters, the girls were expected to call to set up their orthodontist and

optometrist appointments and later, school car-servicing appointments. If they had been ill or were planning to miss a day of school for a trip or an appointment, they would write the school note and their father or I would sign it. As they grew older curfews were established and then lengthened and sometimes phased out as they earned and kept our trust. As the girls sensed our belief in them, they early on developed an internal locus of control, realizing they had control over the environment (Glenn & Nelsen, 1989). My years of child rearing shaped my philosophy and set the expectation of raising capable, self-reliant, responsible, contributing, caring young adults.

Partnerships

I assumed my current role as the coordinator of a secondary transition program at a community college Fall 1993, the same year my youngest daughter started kindergarten. The secondary transition program is operated in a small Midwest town. The program, a collaborative effort of the community college, the area education agency, and local school districts was initiated August 1993 just prior to my hiring. Students ages 16 to 21 with mild disabilities are referred for participation in the secondary at postsecondary transition program by their resource teacher, an area education representative, high school counselor or other service agency representative. The final decision on student participation comes through the IEP (Individual Education Plan) meeting and planning process. The community college secondary transition program is considered an extension of the student's high school special education program and is designed to help the student complete unmet IEP goals. Once enrolled, the

student receives vocational training in a specific community college vocational program and special education assistance and support through the transition program while remaining on the rolls as a secondary special education student. Special education dollars fund the students' program, which helps students develop the vocational, daily living, and self-advocacy/ self-determination skills necessary to become self-sufficient adults. Students live on campus and take vocational program classes, participate in work experiences and receive special education assistance and support by the secondary at postsecondary transition programming and staff. The students previously received special education services either in a resource room program or a special class with integration program. The fall the transition program was initiated I worked with two students. The program grew; Fall 2003 there were 52 students enrolled.

Commitment to Change

Returning to the special education field after a lengthy absence I observed significant changes that challenged me with a steep and uncomfortable learning curve. Changes precipitated by special education legislative mandates included increased IEP paperwork as well as mystifying IEP meetings. In order to better learn and understand the IEP process I forced myself to attend numerous IEP meetings in various school settings. Attending these meetings, I witnessed a glaring absence of student involvement in the meetings as well as the student's nonexistent participation or ownership in the planning process. Observing, I ruefully questioned, whose plan was it? Unequivocally I vowed to change the directorship of this process in the

secondary transition program at a community college from the “professionals” to the student. Could this absence of student voice and ownership at IEP meetings be precursors for the unsatisfactory outcomes many students with disabilities experience?

Roots of the Inquiry

Absent from the pool of literature related to factors necessary to promote the successful transition of students with disabilities is the students’ voices qualifying their understanding of their transition experience. Silenced from the dialogue are the voice and the experience of the young person as he/she navigates through the murky waters of the transition process. Additionally the students’ voices and the views are overlooked in most education and work reforms. Students’ experiences and insights elicit valuable resources for improving and refining reforms (Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Neiri, 1995; West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen & Martin, 1993; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996).

More to the point we have not heard the stories of those who work hard to achieve without attaining eminence, those who successfully navigated transitions and quietly go about their business, making contributions in workplace, community and home (Reiff, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1997). As I sought to connect prior research with my own question, I considered the dynamics and the complexity of successful transition experiences from high school to community college to employment for students with disabilities. Specifically, I wanted to understand the successful transition experiences of students with

disabilities who had participated in a secondary transition program at a community college. Using narrative inquiry, I sought to understand this experience.

Three glimpses of Mary, a former secondary at postsecondary transition program student, illustrate the impetus as well as the direction for this inquiry. Mary's story and others like it inspired considerable reflection about the nature of what happens in the contexts in which students learn and live. I will share the story as I recall it. Further, I note that pseudonyms are used throughout my stories.

Mary

An area education agency consultant provided me with Mary's background information. Mary had traveled to the Midwest from her West Coast home with her birth mother and two of her mother's male friends when she was about twelve. On the way, Mary's mother died and the two men and Mary had to bury her. After arriving in the Midwest, Mary lived in a house with the two men. At some point social services got involved and one of the men left. Later, the man she lived with married a woman who was blind, due to complications of diabetes, and the couple adopted Mary. The stepfather also had health problems, and when I first met Mary, he had recently been diagnosed with cancer.

Our first glimpse begins as I am invited to attend Mary's spring IEP meeting. Mary was a high school senior with the label of mental disability. The area education agency consultant believed Mary could benefit from the transition

program. Previously the consultant and Mary had visited the community college. Mary was interested in a vocational program; however, the consultant knew Mary would need special education assistance to successfully complete the program.

I want you to visualize the scene. Mary's IEP meeting was held in the high school principal's office. As I entered the room, the principal did not rise but instead remained sitting much like a reigning king behind his large old desk, situated at a higher level than the rest of the room. There he prevailed for the duration of the meeting. Mary perched on a folding chair in the middle of the room; her resource teacher sat on another folding chair near by. Mary's stepparents and the guidance counselor sat at a small folding table in a far corner of the large office. The area education consultant and I were seated at another small table by the rear door. When the resource room teacher requested to shut the door because of the noise in the hall, the principal told her to keep it open. I do not recall Mary saying more than a few words during her meeting which focused on: the principal's misgivings concerning justifying the utilization of the transition program and paying for it, her father's lack of finances to support her postsecondary education, and the area education agency consultant's compelling concern about contacting her supervisor to gain permission for Mary to participate in the transition program.

Our second glimpse occurs a year later. Mary was now a secondary at postsecondary transition program student. She had struggled academically in

her chosen vocational program yet successfully persisted and prevailed. She needed another year, however, to complete her vocational program.

Beginning with the first transition program student, for reasons mentioned earlier, I have students assume responsibility for preparing for and leading their IEP meetings. Implementing this process, I had no other choice but to inform Mary that her principal in communication with the area education consultant was questioning a second year of funding. Of course Mary shared these worries. Mary and I talked and talked as I provided her with all the information I had at my disposal but told her that she would have to sell her cause, continuing in the program for another year, at the meeting. We "rehearsed" how, if questioned she would state "her case."

The day came. When the area education agency consultant arrived shortly before the meeting time, she was just as concerned as we were and expressed her apprehensions. As the three of us visited, the principal arrived; Mary took charge. Mary met and greeted the principal at the door of the community college with the words, "Mr. Johnson, how are you? May I show you the way to the conference room?" Mary accompanied and led him to the conference room; the area education agency consultant witnessed this interaction with a gapping mouth. Mary seated herself at the head of the table, established the tone by firmly but warmly welcoming the IEP team, made introductions, and proceeded to inform her team how she was progressing in her vocational program, and the reasons she needed their support to continue the following year in order to complete the program. Mr. Johnson sat there perfectly

relaxed as though a fellow professional rather than an eighteen-year-old student was conducting the meeting. He brought up no questions or disputes about Mary continuing in the program. Moreover, the questions he did ask all related to her vocational program. Mary handled his questions with thoughtful and thorough answers. Mr. Johnson, in turn, affirmed Mary for her successes in the program. As a result of Mary's "performance," the principal became a firm supporter of Mary and the transition program.

Do you see the sharp contrast between Mary's role at this meeting and the one held the previous spring? At the earlier meeting the only words she uttered were that she wanted special education assistance as she attempted the vocational program, and the remainder of the time she sat on her folding chair removed and disconnected.

Our final glimpse of Mary comes a year later, after her second student led IEP meeting, an unsuccessful and a very successful on the job experience, and the death of both of her stepparents. An area education agency transition coordinator and I took Mary to the state capital for a planned visit. Mary was fearful of large cities, but in order for her to obtain full time employment and benefits in her vocational area I knew she needed to move from this small Midwest town. We showed Mary where she could stay in DVRS (Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services) housing at the state capital for several months until she was financially able to pay for independent living. After the visit Mary made phone calls from my office to set up interviews for potential jobs in the state capital.

Before she completed the transition program, Mary had secured full time employment in her vocational area in the state capital. She lived in DVRS housing for two months and then moved into a small apartment. Five years later, Mary is married and is still full time employed in a job where she has benefits.

I reflected on my rich experience with Mary. The experience resonated with my prior experiences and learning as a mother, a teacher, and a program coordinator. Tacitly, my understanding of students' transition experiences have been shaped by stories like Mary's. The story provides tangible testimony that students with disabilities, like my own children, can become successful, capable, responsible, contributing, self-sufficient young adults. Unless previously developed, however, these characteristics need a venue for initiation and fostering. Moreover, from these experiences I came to know that students could develop and practice these characteristics by participating in the fertile ground of a community college secondary transition program.

Vehicle for the Journey

Mary's story, as well as others like it, continued to propel me, and I found myself returning to it repeatedly. The dominance of the plot line in which the student emerged from a position marked by lack of power and control and then, when provided with an alternative route, even amidst difficulties, gained power and control and attained a positive outcome. It posited the markings of a sacred story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995; Crities, 1971) strongly embodied within the characters and powerful enough to eschew change.

With Mary's story as catalyst, I pondered anew questions about the successful transition experiences of students with disabilities who participated in a secondary transition program at a community college. What synergistic interplay contributed to this outcome? Protecting and honoring what seemed a sacred story, I considered the genesis of other stories. Therein lay the directive and the trajectory for my inquiry.

As I sought to position my inquiry within the ongoing scholarly conversation of prior research, I considered the dynamics and the complexity of the successful transition experiences from high school to community college to employment for students with disabilities. Specifically, I wanted to understand the successful transition experiences of students with disabilities who had participated in a secondary transition program at a community college. Using narrative inquiry, I aimed to better understand these experiences.

In my inquiry I explored the transition experiences of four young adults who had participated in the secondary at postsecondary transition program and now were employed and living independently. I collected and recorded their stories and wrote narratives of their experiences. In understanding their transition experiences, however, as a narrative researcher, I took into account their life's story and layers of meaning found within that life story. Therefore, my work also includes an examination of my participants' life histories, present situations and the intended futures arising from their stories from past and present (Rose, 1997) which I chose to share in letter format.

Introduction to the Letters

For both logical and visceral reasons I chose to share the narratives in letter format. The New Oxford Annotated Bible distinguishes the terms “letter” and “epistle.” Where letters are “private missives” dealing with present concerns epistles are more public, permanent and sophisticated literary efforts. While in no way comparing or aligning myself to sacred inspired writers, perhaps my “letters” share a similar literary form with many of the letters in the New Testament, a combination of a letter/epistle. The Oxford Annotated Bible contends this form, “combines the advantages of conversation and a treatise; in such format it is possible to communicate truth, not only abstractly, but in close relation to the personal circumstances of the recipients” (p.206 NT).

While some may find this format “too damn personal,” I sanguinely counter that meaning is conceived and nourished in the personal arena. Years ago when both of my parents retired, I set a goal to write them a daily letter. During my initial feeble attempts to maintain this communication commitment I would include a “daily joke” and add a few brief words. When that strategy yielded no response from either of my parents, I shifted and instead mailed a daily postcard, permeated with descriptions of my, my husband’s and our four daughters’ daily activities. Since then our daughters marvel how Grandpa and Grandma so intimately know how and what they are doing. My parents both now in fragile health continue to anticipate and relish my daily post cards. Knowing the details of their daughter’s and granddaughters’ lives keeps them thinking and

caring in their diminished world. Letters therefore can both elucidate and soothe transitions and can touch the core of both the reader and the writer. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) expand my thought, "In letters, we try to give an account of ourselves, making meaning of our experiences, and attempt to establish and maintain relationships among ourselves, our experience, and the experience of others (p. 106)."

I join with other investigators (Mickelson, 1995; Rose, 1997) who chose the letter format to disclose their research findings. Just as the letter format easily transfers from an individual to a collective audience I felt the letter format provided a snug fit between narrative inquiry and my personal authenticity. I want the reader to be aware of the three voices: the distinct indented voices of Eric, Ellie, Mark, or Meg; mine as entrenched in the current dialogue and the analysis; as well as my voice emerging from the portal of my experienced history working with the individuals, their parents and their school staff. While the latter two voices were easy to blur, I sought to clarify in the narrative when I was speaking from past experience with the individual. I could have scrupulously separated those two voices with brackets or notations each time I transposed from one voice to the other. However, since it was my intention to produce a work that profited from the juxtaposition of my prior and present experience, I submit my attempt at clarity and coherence.

These narratives, in letter form, are personal, addressing particular issues in each of these four individuals' lives. Concurrently through this genre I strive to elicit something more public and universal, an exposition of the transition

experiences of individuals with disabilities. My dynamic for writing these letters is my commitment to telling their stories; this work is my testament.

MARK'S STORY

August 12, 2002

Dear Mark,

Truly I appreciated your reverent reflections as you retold and reexamined experiences in your life. After spending time with you, I recognized you were a reflective person; reflecting was very much an extension of your job and your family life.

When I chose you as one of my four participants, intuition held sway over reason because perhaps I knew you the least. You were never labor-intensive or troublesome like many of our students could be and were. Other than meeting with you early in the school year to remind you of the secondary at post secondary transition program room attendance responsibilities and again toward the end of the year when I had you call your school and parents to inform them, "I got in trouble," your maintenance was minimal. While you attended the secondary at post secondary transition program, you followed the rules, respected our staff and your instructors and excelled. Yet despite your exemplary behavior and college performance I knew that you carried extensive responsibilities and cares at home that could have negatively impacted your performance and thus resulted in far different outcomes for you. I sensed I could learn much from your narrative.

You were on time for our first conversation, Mark, but I looked for you in the community college hall needing to direct you because we had not pinned down a meeting room during our earlier phone conversation. You spotted me and smiled, much like you did when I last saw you at your community college graduation just over a year ago. You were 25 pounds lighter (it was brutally hot in your welding shop and you work perhaps even longer hours than when you attended college) and had markedly thinner hair than on that graduation day. Your hallmark smile, however, had not changed. Gatorade in hand on this 90 plus degree-day you appeared ready for our work session.

From our conversations and from my analysis of the transcripts of those interviews I have learned about your family, school, and work experiences: as a mischievous young boy, confused preteen, adventurous young teen, grown up junior and senior in high school, community college student, and now an employed family man at age twenty-one. Hence, through your stories and my analysis I came to understand the roots, the journey and the results of your transition experience. Your transparent self-descriptions for each of these chapters or stages became my heading titles. Mark, what could your narrative tell us about your transition experience that had early roots?

During our first conversation when you told me your life story in chapter format you did not disclose how you decided to attend the community college or the explanation of how the secondary at post secondary transition program assisted you or did not assist you: details I coveted considering my narrow and shallow perspective. This deficiency was confirmed as I read aloud the transcript

of our first conversation. The research gristle omitted during our first conversation you remanded via your story's lucid dynamics. Ultimately, I felt more nourished than if you had served "my answers" on a silver plate. Therefore, the explicit specifics in regard to truly understanding your transition experience came as you responded to my orchestrated questions during our second and third conversations.

Mischief: Ages One to Nine

When we initiated our first conversation, Mark, I asked you to share a significant memory from the first chapter in your life. You caught me off guard with your candor as you immediately answered succinctly:

I'd have to say mischief, a lot of it. Oh, my brothers and I in the backyard, we'd always steal my parents lighters and burn, er like when we got our BB guns and seemed like we were always getting in trouble, taking off on our bikes to the pool when we weren't supposed to or somepin'. I think that's about it.... We used to jump off of the ah hum train trestle in Roland. I just remember.

Your mischief at age eight was never a solo enterprise but always a duet with your 14-year-old brother, Steve. Seven year-old Sam must have been designated as younger brother and thus initially not included. You defined "mischief" synonymously with "trouble." Mischief, much like the train that so dynamically affected your parent's lives and ultimately yours, did not stop:

Oh, we'd get in trouble, especially if we came back muddy, which we always did. Or if something started on fire, it was always our fault. Then we had just a little bit of an incident when, just after we got our BB guns, the neighbors said we shot out of the window, but we didn't but my parents thought we were lying so they took it away from us.

Why did this collaboration relentlessly continue? It appeared that your parents' expectations were irrelevant, inconsequential and moot to your personal agendas and motivations. The claws of your parents' expectations failed to grasp and control the fervor of your shenanigans. You solemnly confessed what kind of a person you were during that stage:

Not good. In one ear, and out the other. If it wasn't at home, you know I was probably at school or at a friend's house with his parents or something. A lot of them didn't want their kids to play with us because we would always get 'em into trouble....Yeah. In school we'd always mess around- spit wads, picking on other people, and just not doing what we were supposed to....(Referring to Steve) Yeah, I'd always run into him in the hallways and we'd take off. Of course Sam, yeah, he would he would too. He'd always follow us in school or at the swimming pool. They always put us in the, oh I can't remember what they called it then, in like the time out so we couldn't swim. For snapping towels or something. We had always had to follow my brother around; we always looked up to him so we thought it was the right thing to do.... I think my mom was the only one that could deal with it, my dad couldn't. My mom was always just the light-minded person and my dad; he's got a real short fuse. We'd be grounded, or thrown in our rooms, or just yell at us.

Your trouble-making recognized no boundaries, occurring at home, at friends' homes, at school, even at the pool. Although not purposefully included, Sam began to follow your and Steve's example and joined as accomplice in your boyish petty crimes.

You considered how your parents reacted to your misdemeanors. I sensed that your mother dealt with your behaviors by unilaterally accepting them without a significant response. Her pose was in direct contrast to your dad's, who would shout and issue punishments. You assessed your parents' counterproductive discipline methods and reciprocally identified what caused

things to begin to turn around. The seed of change came in grandfather form; he took a radically different approach, one which provided subtle dividends:

No. After a while there. Hea. It wasn't till we, well once we got older, we started going out with my grandpa a lot out to the farm – dirt bikes and mopeds, that's when it started to get a little better.

As I connected with your story, I pictured you gradually relinquishing your little boy pranks and replacing the fervor of those activities with the excitement of the farm – no mention of chores although there must have been farm work. More importantly for a boy, on the farm you reveled with dirt bikes and mopeds and encouraged by a fun loving grandfather. On grandfather's farm you experienced a Peter Pan life, far removed from the demands and the expectations your dad laid on you. You did not tell me if your grandfather initially provided the bikes and the mopeds. You reported, however, that grandfather replaced those you and Steve destroyed. You identified the significant people in your life; those who promoted and supported the last vestiges of your childhood:

Probably my mom and my grandpa. They ah, they're always the one to if my dad would say something, my grandpa would always just tell him, "Ah, they're just kids. You were the same way when you were young." My mom was about the same way and my grandma. My dad was yea know, brought up hard- walked through six feet of snow to get to school. Yea, we hung out with my grandpa a lot – always went over there riding snowmobiles or he'd always buy us a new bike if we broke one or if my brother ran it over. My grandpa was always there, though, if we ever needed anything er. We'd stay the night with him, he'd take us out for breakfast, take us to the Dairy Queen at night. He used ta, we used to we'd cruse the loop in Roland, he'd take us out cruising. We'd go get ice cream, cruse the loop. A couple of seven and eight year olds and a 70-year-old guy driving around. But you wouldn't have known it though if you hadn't seen the gray hair.

Your grandpa not only defended your actions, at times he enthusiastically collaborated. That is why earlier I had asked you if the grandfather that you spoke of was your father's or your mother's father. Considering how you had described your father and his father I questioned this mismatch.

Yea, they just didn't come, they didn't meet in the middle all the time. My dad always had to have, always expected – better. (Pause) As long as we were good, then he was okay, then he was good time. Yeah. Just don't make him angry.

Your fun loving grandfather resided at one end of the behavior expectation spectrum and your disciplinarian father, dominated the other end, leaving you slip sliding from one end to the other depending where you were. Clearly, there was no such place as middle ground when it came to these two men. Then your memory twisted and turned; you purposefully navigated to recall the good things about your father:

Yeah he was, one year for Christmas, we my sister took us down to the pet store and we came back and the whole house was a mess. Chairs were tipped over, stuff thrown all over the place, and there was a note on the table with some cookies and milk gone that Santa Claus had come there and there was a storm coming and he was going to put the presents out early and our dog got a hold of them and took 'em for a hustle. So we thought. So I told the dog, "no". I figured he was attacking Santa 'cause my dad had put on a Santa Claus Skit for us.... He went through a lot, tipped over all the chairs and stuff, made it look like Sparky had Santa all over the living room. Yeah, that was funny.... He put on a Santa Claus suit; he looked like Santa Claus.... He was always an electrician and a mechanic so we were always tinkering with him, and if it wasn't with him, we'd try to, probably end up breaking it.

Perhaps your father and your grandfather were not so different after all. Obviously your dad also enjoyed participating in fanciful behavior and high spiritedness.

What most puzzled me, however, was not what you told me during our conversations but what you chose not to disclose. At the time I worked with you in the secondary at post secondary transition program, staff from your high school informed me of your mired home life. They spoke of an unemployed disabled father and described both of your parents as having significant drinking problems. They defined your home life as "unsupportive." They said your mother would frequently call before a scheduled IEP meeting to say she could not attend. Your resource teacher would tell her she had to be present. Your mother would ultimately come but accompanied by the smell and the attitude of alcohol. Your mother, a hard working woman, would put in an eight-hour shift at the local factory and then head home to drink or to the bar. You surfaced neither of these details during our first conversation, nor during our second and only addressed them during our third conversation when I pursued it and specifically asked you what your dad did. You told me he was disabled after an accident at the time you were three; a train had dragged your mother and father's car over a mile. Your mother's broken ribs healed but your father's back never recovered.

I never pointedly asked you about your parents' drinking for several complex reasons. Alcohol abuse has negative social connotations and when the amalgam included a physical disability, the image darkened. Had I confronted you with both issues when you had ample opportunities to bring them up on your own I risked destroying the respect you had for me and for my purposes. Correspondingly, just as human research committee guidelines guaranteed you a pseudonym thereby preserving your confidentiality, my personal ethics

mandated a hedge on the questioning. Furthermore, I considered your silence far more compelling than confessions. By not bringing the drinking issues forward reconfirmed your loyalty to your family and a propensity to protectiveness that you awarded to your family members and expanded to others you felt needed your protection (an example of which we talked about later when you defended a coworker.) Your silence also confirmed you had achieved a level of maturity that did not require you to point to your parents problems and make excuses for yourself or to air your dirty laundry for attention. I sensed you have constructed and established a separate identity. Furthermore, you now had your own family, Amy and Katie, and your parents' situation, although enmeshed in your care, did not necessitate your confession.

Confused: Ages Nine to Fourteen

You began your second chapter at age nine, discerning the changes that occurred at that time and the reasons. You had informed me that Steve and Linda were your parents adopted children. The dichotomy of your parents' perception of their four children was apparent. During this time period they clearly and deliberately marked and separated their two adopted out of control teenage children from you and Sam, their younger biological children for whom they sought better outcomes. Again, it was your father who had more difficulty dealing with the on-going crisis's of his adopted children.

Apart from the turmoil at home with your older siblings the positives in your life included involvement in sports and sojourns with your grandfather and father. No doubt these activities were instigated and encouraged to counter

potential negative behaviors. Your grandfather and your father must have concluded that the best defense against lawlessness was to keep you and Sam occupied.

If, from what I remember that's where I started to grow up a little bit more got into sports and lot of outdoors types stuff with my grandpa and my dad. Went on a lot of trips in that area during the summer times when before we weren't really doing a whole lot.... That might have been one of the, yeah I would have been about nine, my older brother and sister were getting in trouble all, it changed it, he was more angry at them then he was at us so that was cool, hey. So that kind of changed everything. Behaved more or less the rest of time so we didn't get into trouble and end up like they did. Yeah. Just from when they had to drag them down at night, or they wouldn't come home for a couple of days. Well it made it kind of harder for my dad to deal with because my older brother and sister were adopted so he didn't know what to do.

This chapter marked a significant transition period in you life as you witnessed horrific events in your older brother's and sister's lives which ultimately affected your own. Previously you had allowed the admonitions of others to sift unacknowledged through your consciousness as your negative behaviors continued, unabated; however, observing your siblings gave you pause to perceive the complex impact of negative behaviors.

Things not boding well at home, Linda struck off to locate her biological parents. I could only imagine the scenes that precipitated that decision. Arriving at her destination, her biological parents turned her away. Concurrently you sensed that Steve experienced the verisimilitude of his adoption differently and accepted his adopted home.

Yeah, 'cause she, she had taken off to Oregon I think, to meet her mom or dad, but that didn't go over too good because they didn't want to see her. My brother he didn't know where his real parents are. He more or less

thinks my mom and dad are his real parents so that is kinda how it worked out.

You offered me a slim capsule of this period of your life. Listening to your compacted discourse I garnered that through a child's eyes and with a child's consciousness you witnessed premature parenthood, marriage and divorce. You did not tell me how old you were when Tony, your sister Linda's youngest illegitimate child, was born. You observed Linda's children treated as chattel and ultimately identified the root cause, irresponsibility. What your sister had forfeited you grasped; as a very young teenager you were thrust from the role of godfather to the untimely role of potential father, all because Linda refused to grow up and assume responsibility for herself and for her children.

And I think I would have been about eleven when I became an uncle I think. Eleven or twelve. I have two nieces and a nephew, but I haven't seen 'em for four or five years. Cause they got a divorce and she can't see 'em and he doesn't want our side of the family to see 'em so. Kinda how it works out, huh? My other nephew, he, he a, father doesn't want to know him so he lives with us. He's been living with my mom and dad since he was born. My sister can't take responsibility and I'm godfather so after my parents so far, I'm going to take him. She doesn't grow up. It's pretty bad. She had signed custody over to my parents 'cause she had went to prison 'cause she, for fraud, an' for theft, she stole my parents' credit cards and stuff.

Vicissitudes infiltrated and tarnished your life. Yet tenaciously you gripped the cherished remnants of your boyhood: sports, summer, and the pool.

That's when everything *changed*, cause watchin' Tony, and then there was school, play in sports...playtime in the summer, though, hea. Can't get rid of the summer, had to go to the pool everyday. Get good tan in.

Eager to grasp the critical change cusp, I asked you to tell me the most significant event in this chapter of your life. You circumscribed a poignant and

tragic scene; your beloved and esteemed brother taken away. Steve faced the sordid consequences of his choices, which culminated in changes for him, for you, and for your family. As you emerged from those changes you claimed a new set of roles for yourself and a different path from the ones chosen by your older siblings. You were determined to provide a better example for Sam than Steve afforded you. Furthermore, after you assumed potential responsibility for Tony, you also considered yourself Sam's caretaker. Your responsibility mounted. You recognized Steve's poor school performance, and I sensed you inserted improving your own school performance as you realigned your goals towards self-responsibility.

I'd have to say watching my older brother go away. I'd always looked up to him and he was gone for four years in a halfway house so I had to look better for Sam so he wouldn't do something, that's kind of when it all *changed*. That was a hard time, watching him leave. He hung out with the wrong crowd an' he didn't do too good in school. Of course, I did okay, as long as it wasn't in science or something. That was over my head. He came back. I was, I was thirteen or fourteen, when he came back. We didn't get to see him very often, they had him bouncing from one to another an' that's what happens you know people with drugs and alcohol an that's the way he chose to do.

You designated your dad as the significant person during your life in this chapter. Your relationship with him reversed; instead of your antagonist your dad became your associate. I sensed, however, this altered father son relationship accrued more from what was happening with your older brother and sister rather than any dramatic change in you. Yet at the same time I divined that you subtly sought the alternate emerging route of responsibility.

My dad, we got along real good during that time. We always, go up and see Steve or when Sam was in the hospital in Rochester we went up

there. Me and him are really good buds. Heh. We were always doing, he wasn't hollering at me anymore. He stuck real out in that area at that point.

My heart grieved for you, housed with out of control teenagers and parents who could not or did not find a remedy. I grappled with how you experienced all of this and became what you are when I know how natural it would have been to continue the pattern and the path your older siblings set and followed. You deliberately reflected upon the kind of person you were at this time:

I don't know how to put it in words. Hum. Confused. Just everything that was going on. Ah, I didn't know what to do. 'Cause it was that whole, at that time Roland, it was it was getting pretty bad, we'd always like with my sister, er my brother they would always have people outside, you know they was always getting in fights out in the street. Something was always going on. It was just real confusing when you're that age, watching all that. Kind of spooks you a little bit.

I considered the profound tensions occurring around your home and questioned what was happening at school. Therefore, during our second conversation I inquired how and why you began receiving special education services. Your description of "confused" could also have epitomized your experience as a student during this chapter. You identified your mother as a key player in your mission of understanding.

Yea. I was can't remember what grade I was in but I was having a lot of, I don't know, like problems just getting stuff done. Or doing it right. I really wasn't understanding a whole lot of what they were teaching us in school when I was younger. So I talked to me mom, it was during a parent/ teacher conference meeting or something. They brought something up so we had talked about it. I decided that, you know it would help me out. I think it might have been in third grade.

Adventurous: Ages Fourteen to Seventeen

Your next chapter began when you were a fourteen-year-old seventh grader. You initiated this chapter at this tenuous transition point that included a move. Fortunately you quickly connected with friends and athletics. You also revealed your competitive nature.

My mom had been working at Sky Craft for five years and it was getting to be a long drive so we moved to Story City and that was a good thing. Scary at first. But it turned out to be good.... Got to start off, make new friends, an' try to play football and wrestling as good as they did, so I just didn't look like some hot shot coming in from another town or somethin'. Those were good years of wrestling, hey. Wrestling and weight lifting. Everybody got into the weight lifting thing real hard. They put you up on the wall for whoever did this and that. Far as I know, I am still on the wall. I got the one of the MVPs for the year, along with a couple of other kids but- most valuable wrestlers.

Then you accomplished a young man's dream; you received your driver's license and your own sets of wheels, obviously with your parents' support. Consequently, you could now cruise the loop without grandpa.

And then getting my driver's license. That was cool. My mom and dad went, went ta, well actually I think I had a couple cars before I had the one I wanted. Putting in my car stereos an'. 'Yea cause it worked out good 'cause after I got my drivers license it was, I was old enough to drive myself around the park, cruising the loop. That was pretty fun.

Cars, gas and stereos all required money so you took it upon yourself to get not one but two jobs and thereby staked out even more independence.

I had two outside jobs so. Tried to keep the tan as much as possible. I needed some money. I did landscaping for the resorts. I was working at Bay Park prior to that, picking up garbage. I didn't feel like everybody's garbage so somebody else could do that. I always liked doing outside stuff.

The notion of hands-on, headstrong activity was predominant; you appeared to crave high-energy activities. Mischief and trouble were replaced by cars and all they entailed, outside physical work, earning and spending money, and daring activities. You even described the kind of person you were during this time in those terms:

Um, adventurous, even though it might a gotten us into trouble a couple of times. Like, ah, we went bungee jumping when they had it at Little Wall Lake one summer, got into trouble for that, heh. Yeah, they thought I was nuts. But there was a helicopter ride; they thought I was nuts for doing that. I was always spending money on my stereo equipment. They didn't mind that too much. My dad was always helping me with it, but he thought I was crazy for spending that much money.

I listened to the tape repeatedly and carefully to hear your phrasing and to grasp the meaning of this next section. You did not specify but I assumed that when you spoke of getting into trouble at this time you were speaking of drinking. You admitted you got into trouble a couple of times but consciously you chose to avoid drinking as an ongoing activity. Living in a home where there had been more than enough trouble to go around, first your early antics with Steve and then all of Steve and Linda's problems, you spared yourself and your family of more trouble by occupying yourself with other endeavors.

There wasn't much, a lot of the other kids, they always like to go to all the high school, um, at the end of the year, the senior parties and stuff an' I was pretty much like, my dad was just, you know, get into trouble after, get into trouble so much before. I got into trouble a couple of times but otherwise I'd, me and my buddies, we'd go down and cruise the loop or listen to the stereo and try to look good for girls. And find some stuff, rent waverunners, never did get to do the parasailing thing, didn't have money to do that.

Amidst this relentless activity analog you identified the most significant person in you life during this chapter as Amy, first a friend and not much later, mother of your little girl. Amy was not only your first friend in Story City, but she was also the conduit for meeting and making other friends. Those friends helped make a difficult move in the midst of adolescence a bearable if not agreeable one. You described Story City as less violent and with more opportunities than Roland; however, perhaps more importantly, you were further removed from the environment and the memory of Steve's and Linda's troubles.

She's the first person I met when we moved there so she helped me out a lot. Now she is my wife. Yeah, first person when we moved. I think that was the summer of '94. Yeah she helped me out a whole lot, she was the one, you know, "you gotta come here, it's the only way you are going to meet anybody." Then there is, I had some real good buddies in high school. They, ah, they always helped me out, or ah, do somepin'. That was a friend year. Yeah. So if it wasn't for the friends I made, I don't know how that move would've went. I thought it was going to be a tough one, but I'm glad I'm glad we've moved up here (pause) It's not as violent as Roland was or is (pause). There's a lot more things to do, oh, more opportunities up here than there is over there.

The move and the inherent transition affected your schoolwork also.

Initially you did not access special education services but experienced higher academic standards and struggled. Again you followed your traditional pattern, talking with your mother and then reporting to school personnel. You feared reentering the slow moving world of confusion:

Then I talked to my mom and we talked to the principal at the middle school and I'd gotten back in up here. Yeah, 'cause I was having problems in science and stuff. From what I was taught in Roland to here it was completely different. We were going over a lot of different things; it was a lot bigger things than what Roland had so I didn't know what to do. (Referring to the return to special education services) I wanted to. I thought before I got too confused and got too far in the slump. I think it

was okay. They helped me a lot. I mean there was a lot of kids in there so.

I asked you if you were ever teased because you attended the resource room. In your response, I sensed you made a subtle distinction; you saw yourself as needing special education assistance, but you did not see yourself as a special education individual.

They did. It made me mad. I kind of got used to it, though, 'cause I talked to my mom about that and she just told me that they were the ones with the problem. I mean it got better, like in Middle school, like when I was in sixth and seventh grade they really didn't say anything 'cause they knew I wasn't an. When we moved up here when I was in eighth grade and high school and stuff nobody really said anything.

You spoke of a favorite special education teacher who earned your admiration because she helped take you from the confused state to the understanding state:

Miss Bolman was always in there, she'd always help me with my accounting and stuff when I was taking accounting and um biology when I was struggling in that. She kinda, the way the teacher would explain it, in the 45 minute, or an hour, it was kind of hard to soak it all in. She (referring to Miss Bolman) kind just write it all down and we'd take notes and she'd kinda put it up like in sections or frames or whatever to make it easier to study. Then, um, cause we'd always get vocab tests in there you'd have to know the words and the definitions. She'd get the cards with the word, and then we'd have to tell her the definition of what it was and she'd do the opposite. I got pretty good at that. Um, I, it gave me a better opportunity to understand what the teachers were trying to jam in our heads in an hour. This ways it was easier for me to understand it when I take it down in notes and or if we miss some notes, they'd have notes for us to look at so I wasn't the best writer to keep up with teacher in class...I just, got a better chance of knowing what was going on.

Mark, your discourse led me to better understand your struggles in the general education classrooms, classrooms marked by confusion and unchecked presentation speed. You identified the resource room and more specifically

a special education teacher who helped remedy your afflictions and increased your understanding.

Grown Up Good Guy: Ages Seventeen to Nineteen

You turned the page to your next chapter at age seventeen because you saw this time as a new era, taking your schoolwork more seriously and participating in work experiences. An injury forced you to curtail your involvement in athletics, allowing you more time for schoolwork and to secure a job. Like most other teenagers you wanted things, and if they were not handed to you, you knew you had to earn the money to obtain them. Again you contrasted your life with a sibling. While you worked, Sam slept in and got into trouble. Your effervescent optimism as well as your loyalty to family came through as you voiced hope that Sam had improved.

That's where I got more into my schoolwork. Um, I made the honor roll. and, yeah it would have been would have been the year I had to have surgery on my shoulder, I didn't do the wrestling thing anymore so I had more time more time to work, worked at the hardware store, working with the appliances, an' installing them, another thing my dad showed me was refrigeration an' all the plumbing, gas lines an'.... That's when I went a little more independent. It paid well if I had enough money and didn't spend it all, I'd pay my car insurance, or what I had left on my loan. To where my younger brother was you know he was always sleeping in until two or three o'clock in the afternoon; he was a troublemaker. I think he's gotten a little better now though, I hope, hey.

Your friendship with Amy endured and together you attended two consecutive proms. Amy was a year ahead of you, and you attended her junior and senior year proms.

Not all high school students have had your opportunity to take vocational classes while attending high school. I sensed, as you took classes, that you

understood, enjoyed, and excelled in ultimately enhanced your educational outcomes.

That and we went to the two proms that year. That was fun. I got more into the like shop class and um like foundry work and took a welding class, when I was a junior. Took all the hands-on classes I could, quit takin' all the pick-up-girl classes like the cooking classes and I don't know what we were thinkin' we took ah sewing. We went to some extremes. Just to look macho, heh. That's when I learned out, I was about 18, I didn't like Algebra, ain't no good with that. Thought I liked math until then.... Work and then go home, that's when my grades started ta, that's when I started doing a lot better. I was surprised when they told me I was on the honor roll; I was student of the month and like holy cows now everybody else that used to be in my spot can look at me like I used to, like, "Oh man I wish I was that good."

Although you had previously experienced a flotilla of tragic life events revolving around your immediate family, your psyche jerked and rattled when you learned you were going to be a father. Unlike your older siblings, however, you faced and assumed the responsibility for your actions. You were increasingly thoughtful about your formative growth that coincided with the trajectory of fatherhood:

After we found out about Katie, so that was a big 360. I found out I was going to have a kid so that kind of *changed* it a little bit so I grew up quite a bit then.

During our first conversation, when you narrated the chapters of your life, your verbal momentum continued with just a word or phrase interjected from me now and then. As I listened again to the tapes, I was reminded that my words and "umms" were inconsequential to you. You were propelled by the dynamics of your story, your past experiences, and I was only a whispering conduit for your

reverie. While still at full throttle, you first mentioned the community college but only within the context theme of hands-on active work:

Couple tours. I think I went to college twice, couldn't decide what I wanted to do so I found out I liked welding. Then I always worked with all kinds of carpentry work with my dad when we moved, I ah, me and him built, took the one car garage and built it into my bedroom and put a two-car garage out back and, and we were always building somepin'. My grandpa, he'd always have to come in and investigate it, make sure it was all straight and square and, heh.

Later, during our second conversation when I sought to find the answers to my questions that our first dialogue did not reveal, I inquired specifically about how you first heard about the secondary at community college transition program. Mrs. Bell, your resource room teacher, had met individually with you, not during an Individual Education Plan meeting and told you about the program:

It was during school but over study hall; I went down there for study hall and she took me into the other room that they had across the hall and sat down and talked to me about it.

As you described the person you were during this chapter, again the effects of vicissitudes emerged, and you explained how you adjusted to the changes. While maneuvering toward assuming more responsibility and eliciting more positive life choices you were hit with impending fatherhood; you "became the good guy." That profound event could have reversed your progress. Looking back on that time you acknowledged, "it was hard." With those words, "it was hard," I paused and deliberated. Just why did you choose the road of self-responsibility when it would have been far easier to have taken an alternate route? Was your circumspect response, "grown up," the marking of your

deliberate resolve and emergent strength necessary to navigate your difficult solution?

Grown up, quite a bit hey, 'cause my parents and teachers I mean could tell it one year from the next when I'd come in, they wouldn't have to jump on me or anything. I became the good guy. It was hard. Parent instincts, they must have kicked in. If they did, they're doing okay. (And referring to Katie) Yeah, now she's daddy's girl, heh. Don't want mom. Yeah, she was born just after I graduated from school.

You purposefully drew yourself back to your unrelenting mission, hands-on engaged work. Participating in several work experiences affirmed your aspiration to become a welder; however, you needed more training. You were fortunate; the welding shop where you worked in high school provided you with considerable hands-on experience and a job offer, but the fellows in the shop assumed mentor roles and helped you prepare for further training.

That's during my senior year; I did a work exploration at the welding shop. I was working at the hardware store and I wasn't quite making what I wanted so I worked exploration and went there after school and worked. They told me I could stay there if I wanted to, but I decided then that I was going to go to school for welding so they showed me as much as they could before I left so I would look somewhat okay when I got there, hey. Giving me all kinds of tips, some them being doing it for, well the one he left, he went back to Washington, he's been doing it for 25 years so he's giving me a bunch of pointers, hey.

As you thought about the significant people in you life at that time you remembered your friends. Your reflections about friends then provided a backdrop for the dynamics of your dilemma about finishing high school and going on to college. You had to negotiate and discern the anxieties and responsibilities of becoming a father with yearning to accomplish your academic and vocational goals. You took your role the as sole child from your family to

graduate seriously. It struck me, however, that you distinguished, "mom's kids." Did you provide that label to discern your mother's specific presence and role in your educational journey? Moreover, while you acknowledged the value of your friends' and parents' support, you omitted any suggestion of support from your school.

Therefore, as I listened to your discourse I faced another conundrum. When I worked with you in the secondary at post secondary transition program, your resource teacher had labeled your parents as "unsupportive," informing me that the brace you received for your education and continuing your education came in the form of the school staff and your friends. Why this dissonance? Frequently I observed what I considered terrible parents defended and affirmed by their children. Or perhaps your resource teacher did not recognize or understand the support that your parents might have provided. Therefore, how could we find congruence from the vantage point of both home and school?

My friends (pause) like when Katie was born, going through the school thing; everybody was talking about it. They were just eh, "It ain't true, it ain't none of your business." So that kinda, they kinda helped me out a lot during that senior year. They knew I was down and a little bit shruggy. I didn't know what to say. I didn't think I could go to school and have a kid. But I was going to be the first person from our family, of my mom's kids to graduate; I was the first one to graduate from high school. I am the only one. The other, Sam, never finished his GED, Steve hasn't finished his, and Linda never took hers. So I am the only one with a high school diploma. I didn't know whether or not I was going to get it. But Amy and my friends and, my parents just kept jumping on me so. So I didn't have to worry as much as I thought I was going to have to.

Mark, I was gratified that you received the support you needed from every corner. Even though I wished you had not worried, I was thankful you were circumspect; ultimately that made the difference.

From Uncertainty to Excitement: Ages Nineteen to Twenty

Not only did you graduate from high school, you confirmed the decision to enroll in the community college welding program and to participate in the secondary at post secondary transition program. The program requirements included that the students live on campus. For you, a new father, this requirement provided a dilemma of added import. I asked you if you thought your outcomes would have played out differently had you chosen not to be a part of the program and instead made the hour commute each way each day:

Um, probably. I mean I being as far away from the college as I was, I think probably would have missed more days or missed out on some time like during a storm or something or if I like accidentally slept in. I mean that way, my alarm went off, I get up and, only had to walk a block.

You told how you made the adjustment. Again friends, your “keep dealing with it” resolve and the ripple effect of your successes provided your strength:

I was leaving a six-month at home that was kind of tough. I was doing a lot of driving back and forth, for I'd say a month or so, drive back every night. Had her meet me at her sister's place so it was just half the drive. I usually purposefully leave something at home so I drive back and get it. Then I got better as the year went on. Lots of phone cards. That and I didn't know how I was going to do it at college. I didn't know whether I was going to be the bad one in there, if I was going to be the good one or so I just went with what everybody showed me. And making friends, that was another, kind of like move from high school that live over there in the west dorms, there was Paul that I went to school with and Jason, there was a couple people over there that knew me from Story City, but I can't remember their names. It got better as it went roommates and schools going, started off okay. I didn't know whether or how long it was going to last how good I was doing, at times it just got hard knowing I was in

Randall, and Katie was in Roland. I didn't know how to switch over at first. Yeah, whether I wanted to be there or whether I didn't want to be there. Just kept dealing with it. I didn't expect to do as good as I was doing, just kept doing the assignments and it got better, got to know everybody. Decided okay I've been here this long ain't going to go back home.

But what about Amy? I was compelled to ask how Amy handled your absence. As you considered Amy and her feelings, which of course included Katie, you were magnetically drawn back to describing the momentum and the intoxication of your work and your mission in the welding shop.

I think she mighta, I think she took it a little harder than what I did. Especially when Katie started saying "Daddy" or when she started crawling. Or when she got sick and I couldn't be there. But I just kept bringing home the (welding) certification sheets, just stickin' with it. She thought that would be okay that way, just keep doing it. That was something else.... I used to stay there after, after class be over and I go to the secondary at post secondary transition room, I go back with Bob when he was there with the people from Sholaris, I'd usually be there, 9:30 or so at night, as long as Bob was there, I was there. Some guys would come in for a little bit and then they'd decide nah. Let's go back. I guess go back; I'm going to be there another couple of hours. Wasn't too long after that I started giving demos when Bob was busy. I was, became, I was the back up teacher.

Your efforts at the community college were in marked contrast to your high school experience where you repeatedly chose to sleep in instead of attend. Even illness could not keep you away from your community college vocation. Could anyone fathom your campaign to start welding early, stay late, and your pursuit to be the best?

I couldn't, I never missin' a day of class. If it were a school year of high school I miss probably 25 days or so a year. Heh. I'd wake up and if I didn't want to go to school, I'd sleep in. Not in college. I didn't want to miss out on anything; I wanted to make sure I was there for everything; and I was. Well, when I wasn't feeling the hottest, I'd still go. I just wanted to, I wanted to be the best in there is the thing. I didn't want to the one-

third, or second, or down the middle. I wanted to be the one on the top, top dog.

How well I remember what many of your peers in the welding program were doing at this time. While you were in the welding shop at night they were out drinking or driving around in their cars or finding the girls, perhaps what you were doing just a year before. Just once you slipped and got picked up for underage drinking:

Yeah, I did that once and I shouldn't have. It was getting' down to the end of the year.

Just one mistake in a year of frenzied focus. That aside, I wondered if Bob, your instructor, understood the seed he had planted when he started talking about Skills USA with you. I heard your ardent zeal as you described the treasure-trove of your year at the community college, Skills USA.

The big upper for me was the Skills USA. I'd like to do that again, hey. My mom and dad were there. They were telling me when we had to register for it, "Oh he's there's other people that are better for it. You ain't going to get first place." I was just like, "Whatever, watch me." There was a kid from Sioux Falls that I knew that took first in the high school deal when I was a senior. You know I cut his picture from the paper, better put that picture on the refrigerator, because he's not getting first. Uh, Hum. I said to my parents, you better put that on the refrigerator, I said, "You see that, he ain't going to be up there when I walk up there." We were sitting there, you know getting out there calling everybody off. They weren't saying my name, hey, when they said it, I just turned around I said, "You better go back and look at that picture on the refrigerator."

What could I do, Mark? I wanted to turn the clock back and hand you the first place medal you deserved. Do you ever not spend a day reliving that day? What experience would it take to replace that day's tension and drama for you? I could only sense to a small extent knowing the thinker that you were what

mental gymnastics you performed getting ready for "the day." How much was taking third place an anguished disappointment, and how much was it a victory of grand scale for you Mark?

Again your rendition of these events cascaded from your subconscious. To you I was there only in spirit. You were reliving your treasured day. I asked you to tell me again what place you earned in the welding competition:

Third. Bob's ended up being a three-way tie was the deal was. We were out there for about two hours and Bob says he's never seen a tie like that so for the tiebreaker they had to go to the written test so. So if anything I got third in the written tests, first in the skills...just because the person that got first placed missed none. I missed 12. There were just a couple of questions in there that, I'd never seen before. They'd thrown some real mind bogglers in there. I think there was 100 questions and you had an hour. That's what it was. Yeah my mom didn't believe me when I put that picture up there on the fridge. I remember I had to rub the medal in a little bit. When they actually said my name, I just sat there and they were like, "Go", "Yea, I'm getting".... Yeah, I got everything done as quick as I could possibly get it so I wouldn't have to drag it out. There was a lot of people who didn't come back to finish a lot of their stuff. Yeah, it was definitely something else. They, safety was definitely the first thing, hey. That was a big point deduction there. Little antsy at first, hey.... Didn't sleep a whole lot the night before that, just pretty much sat up, going through everything I could possibly find for papers, having the guys quiz me and if we weren't quizzing, we were playing football, heh. Okay we gotta get this energy out of me.

As an educator I pondered, just what could we do to replicate this power source? What could prevent me from reading this to every educator I knew and some I did not know. Would you care, Mark? I sensed you did not care; you were too busy reliving a savored, sacred moment from your past. Did Amy hear this story once a week? Did your dad hear it once a month? Did you tell anyone else this story? By the act of telling me this story did your excitement escalate

leading you to want to take your vocation one step further? Were these thoughts you mulled daily? You described yourself during this chapter:

Very excited. Not so much at first, but toward the end, you know it turned out exciting. If I had the time to go back I would. Go back for the further education of the welding. The under-water thing I kinda liked that except for the sharks. Just even owning my own business. Especially this time of year, hm. My boss gets real antsy this time of year, with all the boat hoists and, someday I wish I didn't know him.

You speak of significant people during your college year. I was vaguely reassured to hear you mention the secondary at post secondary transition program staff. We were rightfully not offered the preeminence of your welding agenda, but we were acknowledged for our assigned role as we provided that same back up educational structure and support you sought and needed in high school.

Um, Bob and you guys in the secondary at a community college transition program room. If Bob wasn't helping me out a whole lot in the shop, you guys I mean I was getting help; with whatever I need like the tests, all the tests I needed to redo.... Yeah, Bob he always talked to me in class 'cause I had told him at the beginning of the year I had a kid, he'd always asked me how it was going. Hm. Then him just letting me stay after class for another four or five hours just so I could get everything perfect, heh.

Earlier I asked you if you remembered any of your IEP meetings. You told me that the only one you remembered was the IEP meeting that you led while you were attending the secondary at a community college transition program. You shared your memories and you can imagine how I savored it when you related how leading your IEP meeting connected with your role as shop foreman now:

Um like, talked about how the year had started and finished and what I had accomplished in that year and um, maybe what I wasn't doin' an,

what I was doing right with the Success Center classes, how I got those out of the way and talked to Bob about how he thought I was doing. I don't quite remember everything but...I kinda liked it. I was kind of nervous but, figured I was adult enough that I could do my own meeting instead of like in high school everybody else does it for ya. I kinda do that at work now. Sit everybody down and tell them what needs to be done.

Happy: Age Twenty-one

I raced to keep up with the momentum of your monologue; within the same breath you talked about a return visit, much like a war hero, to the community college the following November:

They was kinda shocked I was down there probably November or something, walked into his (Bob's) office, hey. He turned around, "What are you doing here?" He had to get a cup of coffee so everybody in the shop turned around to look at him, he's like, "I'm going to go get some coffee, if you guys need any question, ask Mark, he graduated from here last year. He's the shop foreman at Story City Welding. "Okay, what you guys doing?" Had to walk around to see what they were building, building some go-carts or somepin I had to see if they had a toy Bob was going to build next, heh.

You returned, more educated and experienced, and were employed at the shop where you had worked while you were in high school. You told me about your quick ascent to the shop foreman position. You understood how this opportunity arose and why you were chosen: your relentless work ethic, and the bounty of your previous year's training. You did not, however, permit this accomplishment to curtail your momentum. You purchased your own welder and your father helped you hook it up, enabling you to start a small part time business out of your home:

Yeah. Yeah. They a it was last year, bout July we had a couple guys quit and another one bailed shortly after that so it was pretty much me. I was carrying my own weight. He gave me a raise. Actually he gave me a raise on September 11th. And after Christmas, he always left all the steel orders

and everything in charge of me after that, but it was after Christmas, he just handed it ALL over to me. He'd seen what I done in school last year, and what I get done during the day, and granted the guys, they were about 40 years old, it kinda upset them a little bit but, yeah, he gave me the shop foreman position and \$31,200 a year.... Yeah, get enough experience out of there and I can open my own. I got my own little thing going on the side after work, some of my, they might want a trailer built but they don't want to pay 75 bucks an hour for it so I built it a little cheaper, bought a welder before the wedding, heh, I told Amy, "If I'm going to buy anything I'm going to buy it before you won't let me." So I bought a welder and my dad and I hooked it up; it took a couple of days.

You had teased Amy about purchasing a welder before your wedding, potentially a subject of much heated discussion. After Amy's initial misgivings, she began to assist you with some of your projects. For you this small business concurrently provided a back up provision in case your other job did not work out and opened the possibility your business might launch on its own merit.

Amy didn't know what to think of it first, but now she is out there helping me. You know, I had to drill some holes in another trailer I built the other day and she was holding it down for me. So hopefully I can go somewhere with that. If work doesn't go good, but its going okay.

Mark, did your energy and drive have no bounds? Repeatedly we heard your theme of engaged hands:

I work at the welding shop during the day and it's either or I'm at my place doing my own thing or I work with my brother-in-law in Dows at night, workin' on cars. We painted my jeep after I got out of college. Right now we have two cars we're painting. Now it's a little Porsche lookin' car. The people that own the motel up here on Tom's Corner and then a chiropractor in Shellsburg has got a corvette. Getting' my hands in all kinds of toys. I didn't know bodywork was fun, I like the welding better, though.

As you spoke about the insurance and vacation benefits you received through your employer you reported the inherent satisfaction you received working at Story City Welding:

And then they're just; it's a nice place to work. I mean they are real lenient, if you have to go somewhere or if you have to run downtown over lunch and you might take off another 45 minutes, you know. I mean granted; I usually go back like if it's like the wintertime, I go back when its cooler and work for you know a couple hours. There was a couple times another guy and I, we would go home and eat supper and come back till 9:30. Not this time of year, it's too hot for that. Just six to five and that's it. Yeah 6 days a week.

Work was a driving force; family life elicited a similar passion. You explained that if you were not at work or sleeping you were enjoying Katie:

Katie's got me outside swimming in the pool or on the swing set or something. Bought her a pool for her birthday so we always have to go swimming in it. Then we got, after we went up to South Fork for the honeymoon we bought, Amy and I didn't have a bike so we bought a couple bikes and one of those strollers that hooks up to the bike. Or you can unhook it and it's just regular stroller, we got one of those. Katie doesn't like being pushed, she just likes going on the bike, getting pulled behind it. Yeah she puts her arms up there behind her head. It's like, heh I'm doin' all the work here, come on. Especially when you are going into the wind, that's not a treat.

Mark, as you described Katie sitting in her cart behind your bike with her arms and hands cupping her head, you offered a priceless unintended metaphor of your life at this time, blissfully sailing through your days while at the same time significant pedaling going on ahead. Moreover, you recognized your rich, sanguine life: work, a good wife, and a child.

Happy, hey. Doing all sorts of things keeping me busy. Everybody's got their down days but a lot of the time, you know, always laughing when you got Katie to keep us entertained. Hopin' to buy a house, but, hey. Amy's always there oh when something goes wrong, er somebody's sick or Katie's just there to keep a smile on your face all the time, heh.

As you reflected on what you have accomplished and the kind of person you were, I discovered a new layer of your strength and your pride. While you highlighted your trajectory from impending fatherhood to college success, your

energy, strength and your charismatic personality were apparent. Yet a deeper strength emerged, but not as apparent. You summoned and demonstrated an emergent strength to protect a flotilla: first, your god child Tony, your sister's child, then your younger brother Sam, possibly your parents as they live with the remnants of a tragic accident and alcohol abuse, your child's mother, your child and recently an harassed subordinate. Mark, in my estimation you have earned hero status.

Well, how I went from high school with a being a father to be, goin' to college and getting through it. You know, comin' out with pluses and thumbs up. I'm kind of an energetic, not extremely outgoing person, but I'm outgoing person. I usually get along with everybody. Er I protect. We had a guy start at work and he kind of was picked on. I kinda told 'em, knock it off or he was going to quit.

Earlier I had asked you if you ever thought in the terms of the concept of *transition*. You offered me one of your trademark grins and admitted, "Never." I could not resist, and returned to my penchant for defining terms, unlike *transition*, you could relate to the term *success*. I asked you how you defined success:

Accomplishing all your goals, settin' a goal, getting' it and goin' for another one. There is always something you gotta do better at. Like I'm trying to right now, setting a pace so I can eventually open my own shop. Getting goals set and accomplishing em, them. That's the easiest way I found that it work, one step at a time. I just can't quit, hey. I always got to keep going....

Some might have thought, myself included, that your premature fatherhood deprived you of your youth; however, you disagreed and wisely accepted that the responsibility of fatherhood was the linchpin for needed change:

No, I was to the point to where I need to grow up a bit before I got into too much trouble or somethin.

Although your high school resource room teachers and certainly those of us who worked with you in the secondary at a community college transition program would have liked to have been called to the "front of the room"; however, you gave your father, your grandfather and your mother, not us educators the credit for providing the models of goal directed behavior:

Yea. Once I got old enough to understand what they were doing, so I could sit down long enough to do something with my hands, instead of getting in trouble, heh.

Mark, during our conversations I witnessed you grow from a mischievous boy who blindly followed your older brother to become a responsible employed young man, a good husband and father. Your high energy mischievousness was replaced with energetic, relentless hands on work and goal directed behavior. Where you formerly made fun of other children, now you protect those who need your protection at home and in the work place. Your difficulties in the classroom diminished as you discovered your "hands on" aptitude and set your sights on developing them.

I found myself wondering how you became so responsible when so many around you did not face responsibility. Growing up in a family with an out of control older brother and sister and a younger brother who followed their path placed you in a position where you could observe it all; however, the decisions you made were exclusively your own. Rather than continuing the precedent set

by your siblings, you responded maturely to the vicissitudes in your life with reflection, growth and responsibility.

As we concluded our third conversation, you were still reliving Skills USA. Great to hear, Mark, but I wanted to plant another seed and so I told you: I have a feeling, Mark; you will be having other experiences like that. They may not be exactly the same, but I just have this strong feeling that there are going to be a lot of other moments like that for you.

Then I asked you to tell me what if anything you had from the process of jointly reflecting about this time in your life. You responded:

Just being able to. I mean, now I know what I've all done. I mean it just makes me think even more about it. I mean, most of the stuff, I wouldn't even think of day-to-day. But it's like a mind refresher and it just gives me more to think about.

Mark, it gave me more to think about too.

With appreciation,

Elizabeth

ELLIE'S STORY

September 19, 2002

Dear Ellie,

I pondered and construed what your narrative taught me about your transition experience. How could I reconcile my initial narrow focus with your shared experience? We had worked together for two years in the secondary at post secondary transition program, and yet I failed to usher in a true understanding of your experience. Did I not listen? Did I not ask? Perhaps I circumscribed your college experience and ignored the peripheries of your lived experience.

A year after you had completed the program, I reentered your life and affirmed your success: you had secured full time employment and were living independently. When I contacted you, you invited me to do the interviews at your apartment. At my request you emailed travel instructions. I found it relevant that you sent me precise directions originating not from the town where I lived and where you had gone to college 140 miles away but from your childhood home 90 miles away.

A luminary with an effervescent smile, you greeted me. Your apartment also glowed, well furnished, orderly and immaculate. When I inquired if you

always kept it that neat, I answered my own question, of course you did. Dear little gal, you knew how to create a nest. Propped beside your blue recliner nestled a cross stitch baby quilt project, both a talisman and a portent of forthcoming revelations of your mother's crucial influence on your life. You later explained that when you were a child your mother taught you how to cross-stitch.

We sat at your oval kitchen table covered with the blue and white checked tablecloth. Even with recorder and microphones in place you appeared relaxed, maintained sustained eye contact and curled your bare feet in and out under your chair. Just the few times I asked you questions which you could not quickly answer, you offered an impish grin and your blue eyes pleaded for release. You responded to my smile and quietness, eventually realizing I was content with waiting, and you responded in due time.

Remnants of Divorce: Half Brothers and Discord

You described your family. Your father had married your mother after her divorce. She had two sons from the previous marriage: Rob, eight years older than you and Dan, ten years older. You were the only child from your mother and father's marriage. You described yourself as quiet and well behaved:

I was a good person. I was always very quiet, that's how I was brought up, or I'm not sure why, but I've always been quiet and I don't think I ever got in trouble because I never said anything. I just, I behaved well.

Trouble appeared in the form of your brother, Rob. You started school when Rob was about thirteen or fourteen, and he made your life miserable. Before that time you had fond memories of him playing with you and taking you sledding. As Rob entered his teen years, did he begin to question his paternity

and find his step dad lacking? You never mentioned Rob's biological father, merely acknowledging that Rob did not get along with your dad. Rob terrorized you and your father released his rage upon Rob, his stepson. Such an environment must have been especially traumatic for you, a quiet, well-behaved little girl who craved connectedness. Rob betrayed you.

Well at that age was when Rob and I had problems. Rob will tell them a half-brother is a lot different than and Rob had a lot of problems and I think he blamed me for a lot of it. That him and my dad did not get along at all. My dad treated him badly and because I was my dad's real child, he treated me badly. And my parents even to this day don't understand why and they wish teachers would have told them how he treated me at that time. It seemed like, at five, he just all of a sudden, when I started school, he treated me very badly. Well, if I would see him at school, he would act like he didn't know who I was, or would tell me to get away from, and then when I was at home, he would threaten to push me down the stairs or just the way he talked to me was very mean. He called me names and just didn't want anything to do with me.

Ultimately, your dad made the decision that Rob must leave. You expressed uncertainties concerning what Rob had done that initiated your dad's anger. You assumed he "most of the time probably deserved it." Rob was sent to live with your mother's parents. You did not explain how your mother dealt with the chaos. She had brought two sons into a marriage and the arrangement did not work. Was it her solution to send Rob to her parent's home? She faced a sacrificial decision, to turn her back on her own son, send him away in order to salvage a remnant of peace in her home with your dad and to reengineer an environment free from fear for you.

Um, not sure what age I was, but at some point Rob did get kicked out of our house and had to live with my grandparents because it was so bad that my dad said that it wasn't right for us to be together like that and him either. They jus, I remember my dad yelling at Rob so much that he'd sit

there and be crying and stuff like that. He'd cry and things like that. Rob, 'cause of my dad yelling at him. But Rob was the type that most of the time he probably deserved it.

Rob's departure, a reprieve for you but a point of no return for Rob, and exile from his mother's home. My heart was torn. Facing the crucible's aftermath, what replaced the presence of her second born in your mother's life?

Peace was achieved but at what cost? You were bereft of a brother; she lost a son.

And once he got, he left, it was better on me, but Rob, just I think got worse as he got older. I think he hated us more and more....Well I think I felt bad. That I wanted him there and I wanted him to accept me as his sister, but I knew I really couldn't change him. And I think I just accepted it that he lives with my grandparents and but he would eventually get out of there, I thought.

Although you secured your parents' solitary attention, the loss of your half brother underscored the absence of familial attachments. You hungered for a sibling to call your own, someone to understand you and to provide the elixir for the wounds of betrayal.

It wasn't so bad because my parents I had their full attention and everything, but I always wished they had another child that I would be close to, a real brother or sister, or just someone close to my age that would understand me and I thought and I would be close to, I think, even was a boy or a girl.

You implicitly contrasted your thorny relationship with Rob to your felicitous relationship with your brother Dan, who was ten years older than you. Although you designated Dan significant because you did not quarrel, the foundation of your agreement was separation; Dan was at college and later out on his own while you remained with your mother and father.

Dan would have been still been very important because we never, ever fought and he would have been in college at that time or somewhere. He went to college for a year and then he lived in Fonda. And he was just away but when I did see him, he was always nice to me...

School Daze: Insecurity, Emotions, Worry and Friends

The insulation value of your home and parents withered when you entered junior high. Adolescent insecurity and residual worries invaded your quiet tender life. Your meek ways may have made you a target for other students just as insecure but exercising overt and cruel behaviors.

I think it started junior high. That's when you start growing up, kids start giving you a hard time about different, whatever, so then I worried about everything. I started to get insecure about myself. By the way kids got treated at school, and probably a normal thing for a teenager.

Your insecurities and worries mounted as you struggled with schoolwork, especially tests. Your gallant and heroic attempts to perform well on tests were barren and thus only increased your anxieties.

I started having trouble in school, my tests. I couldn't pass tests very well. It was very hard for me. I tried very hard, but just wasn't very good at that so it made it worse. I think I got help a little bit on a couple different subjects, but that did help a little bit but.

I questioned why you were not evaluated for special education services when you were experiencing so much difficulty in junior high; however, it was not until you were a freshman in high school that the required testing was done.

All I remember was some guy, I don't remember his name, had me putting puzzles together and doing different stuff like that.

Even though you were fifteen at the time I sensed you experienced no clear understanding of the testing process or rationale. Moreover, after you received special education services and programming as a freshman you

identified it as "learning skills." In my role as secondary at postsecondary transition program coordinator I had numerous conversations with your high school special education teachers. Never had I heard them refer to their special education programming as "learning skills." Did this designation hedge the stigma of special education? Did you originate the term or rather did it spew repeatedly from your mother as she coaxed you into receiving the antidote to academic failure and perpetual anxiety you needed?

I would be, ah, freshman in high school. Well, I wasn't planning on taking that class when I had enrolled. Um, I went to an English class. It was my first week and I didn't understand anything that was going on and I just felt that I was going to really struggle in those classes and my mom talked to the teachers and they thought I could get into learning skills, and they would help me with my homework and with tests because I know that I have always had trouble with tests. And it would just be a way to help me and so I started right away then.

Your transition to high school was problematic. Difficulties in an English class spilled over to other classes, and you were beset with anxieties. I found it significant that by your description it was your mother who reported your frustrations to your teachers. Night after night you carried home your ubiquitous concerns to your mother. A rueful mother, she ameliorated your school experience by advocating for services thus furnishing your relief.

I recalled that the prerequisite test results revealed you had a mental disability. You began receiving special education services, but why had the testing and the forthcoming help for the needs of a girl with a mental disability been thwarted? Perhaps your teachers talked about it for years. Did your mother delay the testing to avoid a label? Or perhaps did you manage, trying

hard, a sweet quiet girl who always completed her work. You mustered no clear understanding of the test results:

I don't remember what. I don't know if showed that English skills were lacking, or wasn't as good as the rest of it. But it showed that I could *do* (italics indicate voice emphasis) things but I needed a little help or, I'm not sure.

As you recounted how you utilized special education services again you avoided calling it by name, instead you offered, "I would go down there." These services which included help with testing situations, provided a balm for your recurrent testing nightmares.

I used it all through high school. I think I just went in there for one period a day. And then if I had a test I would go down there.... Yeah, I think having the tests read to me was the most helpful because not that I couldn't do it, just that sometimes tests are phrased in a way that they are kind of hard to understand what they are really asking. And they would rephrase it so that I could understand it.

Therefore, as a special education assistance recipient, you reaped substantial benefits. Conversely with the services and the label you became both a target and a victim of teasing. Your emotional retrieval most likely reiterated your mother's adages to you, "you are not dumb," "you just go there to get help with tests," "many others, including the popular kids, are using the help."

Not in college but in high school kids used to call it the "retard room." "Better go down to the retard room and take a test.".... That's what they always used to and they'd laugh. I'd like, "I'm not a retard. I just need help with the tests, so what?" Cause that was just what they referred to it all and it's like you don't have to be *dumb* to be in there. And they eventually jus', it was getting old, they quit. That was mainly a freshman thing. Um, after that I don't think I got much of it. Because there was so many of us that actually did go down. But even some of the people, who are like the

popular kids at school had to use it, so. It was like why tease so it wasn't too bad so.

You acknowledged the other changes, the amalgam that occurred.

Rob was away at college and no longer an adversary; however, you were more emotional. In spite of receiving special education services, you loathed high school but fostered friendships, predominately one that proved long-lasting.

I was getting older and that's probably when some things would bother me more than others. I'd get more emotional than I was before and Rob. Think at that time he might have been better that he went to college....We went to all his basketball games he played for Midwest State for four years, went to every home game that he had there. And he, I think he had a few girlfriends there. That seemed to have helped him in some way. He was actually nice to me, but we were never close or anything but he okay at that point...I guess just I guess high school meeting new friends in high school. And I hated high school. Just is was the classes were hard. I just didn't like it at all. But I mean I had friends there and that was okay, but for the school part, I hated it. Sharon was my best friend at that time. We got real close in high school. We did everything together so she was there for me through everything.

Propitiously a high school friend introduced you to Taekwondo. The friend who acquainted you with Taekwondo eventually quit but you persisted. Unlike attending school where you felt ugly, defeated, and ignorant, when you participated in Taekwondo you engendered a new persona – you were efficacious and excelled.

Um I started Taekwondo when I was fifteen, which was about the only thing, which I was enjoying at that time. And I loved Taekwondo. I did that about twice a week....I think I was very insecure about myself at that point. I thought I was fat and ugly and just everything at that point. I didn't like how I looked, I went on and just stuck with taekwondo. That was the only thing that really seemed to get my mind off of school. School was where I felt bad, I felt very bad about myself, and then I did terrible in school so I thought I was stupid.

You also held jobs where you did not have to measure yourself and come short as you did in school. At the work site you were needed, wanted and valued.

Um, during the summers I worked at the amusement park. Um, during the school year, I think, maybe I was seventeen. I can't remember if I was seventeen or eighteen, I got a job at a day-care that kids go after school while their parents are working. And I worked there for maybe two hours after school every day so.

I sensed you primarily carried your insecurity blanket at school. You were content without it when you went out with friends, participated in Taekwondo, worked at a job or entered your loving home.

Um, 'cause things were, besides my feeling insecure with myself, for the most part things were okay, how I lived my life.

Bones of Betrayal: Forging a Path through Depression

At age eighteen a vicissitude occurred that haunted and thwarted your efforts to compose a life and transition into adulthood throwing you into a chasm of despair. During May of your junior year you met and dated a young man who unbeknownst to you, was married. He maintained his charade throughout the summer and into the fall of your senior year before you heard and eventually conceded the truth.

Eighteen seemed to be when everything changed. So the summer I was eighteen before going into my senior year was when things really changed. I met a guy that was about two years older than when I dated and we got along real well. This May or so when the summer was starting so I dated him all through the summer and then into the school year and then I found out the truth.

Recalling the past you identified the omens: he was divorced, he never introduced you to his family, and he needed to return to his former home.

I was told that, he had told me that he was divorced, okay. And I didn't have any reason not to believe him and so I stuck with him. But when things just didn't seem that, he never introduced me to his parents or things like that. Then he said he had to move back to where he came from and to work at his job so we wouldn't be seeing much of each other and so I think it was September, September or October when I found out the truth and so.

An email from a former schoolmate revealed the impostor; however, initially you renounced the reality of the deception. Never in our dialogues did you honor your betrayer with a name.

Um, well, one of my friends. He was a senior when I was a freshman and he had always been e-mailing me. Well, he had some friends that worked with him he worked with him at McDonald's at the Amusement Park, and I guess my friend, John, is what his name is had friends that had know this guy and said he was married and that he was just using me. Well of course I didn't believe it.

Whether acting alone or buttressed by family and friends you yearned to know the truth and challenged him. Throughout your emotionally bound retrieval you tangled the drama's sequence. Embedded in your recital was your mother's burgeoning role in this debacle. Your pronouns slipped and slid between "I" and "we." I sensed that as this nightmare adjourned you were an emotional mess, and that your mother led the vanguard to unravel the mystery and to secure a solution. Your mother called his parents and uncovered the fact his family was unaware of your existence. You described the final scene of that sordid chapter in your life when "we" went to his house. The unknown became the visible as his wife was there. Moreover, as you mangled the specific order of those events and rotated pronouns, I was skeptical that it was not "we" who went to his door but rather your mother, your ally and your savior, alone. You were probably curled

up in the car or more likely at home while your mother faced your predecessor and your replacement.

But I confronted him and of course he denied. He said that he was married, that's when I found out that he was married. Well, then he said he was gonna, when he had to move back to work or whatever. Well one Thursday before I went to school, he came to see me, you know. He was going to see his son, this is in Ames I believe. And ah, then Thursday night he didn't call, nothing. Friday he didn't call, nothing. And then I called where he had been living and his roommate said he moved, he's gone, he's living here again. I said, "He just left?" Yeah so we knew his parents lived in Boone so my mom called his parents, and they knew nothing about me, and they told my mom that he was just moved back into a house with his wife. He was married. And then he called the next day and denied everything. Said that his dad was just saying that 'cause they didn't like him to move on. So we weren't sure but then he said we should take a break of seeing each other, but he's not going to go out with anyone else and something wasn't and we right so we went right to his house and she was there, when the truth came.

His lies continued; however, his cover was finally and fully obliterated and your relationship terminated.

But he still denied it when she was there. She was just picking up his son, just wearing his clothes I guess. I don't know, I mean, "I'm not an idiot." And I never spoke or saw him again so.

You explained that securing the truth provided amelioration and peace; however, I sensed your words, merely provided lip service to those notions or perhaps rather they were phrases you had heard your mother repeat. The truth offered a temporary remedy; however, your subsequent dialogue and frequent reconnection to this story indicated the remedy did not provide a permanent cure.

That was kind of a relief to know the truth. Like I wasn't upset after I found out. I was just like, ah, it's over. Thank God.

You struggled to salvage blessing from your personal tragedy. This

implied possibility derived from loss, the need to construct and value a core of trust in relationships and commitments.

I think, I mean, not that I would ever want it to happen again, but in a way it was good because now after him every other guy that I ever I was ever with I was very, I don't trust them right off the bat. You got to know, their background, everything about 'em before I ever really. And then Randy (speaking of present boyfriend) and I knew he was my friend from the start so I knew that there was nothing I couldn't not believe about him. He brought me to his parents and his family. I knew that there was nothing to be worried about with him so.

The residuals of your trial kept erupting. No you were not experiencing relief. You were recasting the play, revisiting the scenes, going over it again and again, working out what had happened and why. You had stepped into a chasm of despair.

And then he caused a lot of problems after I found out he was married so then after that, I went through, I don't know if you call it a depression where I didn't understand "why me" of all people that he could have done something like that. I mean he hid it so well, lived with another kid two years old than him, and no wedding ring. His wife apparently lived three hours away. He had a child and just nothing. I would never have guessed anything like that so then I just took that hard. Why I never understood why? That was probably when I went through the worst part of my life.

The story in continual rerun, tendered no reprieve. You searched for a word to describe your breaking point. I sensed based on your parent's response and words you used in a later discussion, "I didn't want to go on" that you contemplated ending your life, escape from your recurring and unresolved nightmare. This event initiated a weekly session with a counselor, first a man who made you feel uncomfortable, leading to change to a woman counselor. Whether through counseling support, your parents constant affirmations, your

mother's emotional ballast or an effective amalgam you eventually began to heal from your injurious experience.

One day I remember I don't know what you call it, a panic attack, I don't know. That's when they (parents) were interested to get me in to see a counselor of some sort. Both of my parents stayed home and took me that day. Then I started to go see a counselor weekly. It was a man counselor and I did not like him at all. And I did not like him at all. He just did not make me feel comfortable. It was just getting worse with him and then they did switch me to a female and then, I started getting better and then eventually, I didn't need them anymore so.

Your tragic experience incurred vast ramifications. Just when you should have enjoyed your final year of high school you unsuccessfully dealt with tumultuous emotions and sacrificed ten days of school. I puzzled and postulated that ever the arbitrator, your wise mother, arranged the continuance of your peer practicum experience at the elementary school even when you were not attending high school, hoping that by helping others you would see beyond yourself and your struggles. I sensed your mother generated further post tragedy accommodations. Your friends did not share your lunch hour; you could not bear the isolation and went home. You claimed responsibility for that unique arrangement; however, I was skeptical. Your "I" activities exhibited considerable alignment with your mother's previous behind the scenes arrangements. Not a deliberate subterfuge, rather as you faced struggles you developed a complex dependency on your mother; your constant discussions enmeshed in emotions clouded your perception of who did what and the "she" and "we" often blurred to come out as an "I."

Well, I guess there was probably maybe two weeks the whole year, but for me that was a lot 'cause I never missed more than two days a year

and um yeah, just, emotionally couldn't go to school for a couple of weeks so um. And I did go over to the elementary. One of my classes was peer practicum went over to the elementary and help the little kids. And um, but I think that was right after my lunch period. I didn't have lunch with Sharon that year. There was two periods of lunch and Sharon wasn't in it and either I don't think any of my friends were. I was like the only one. Who's going to want to be at lunch with no one to talk to, sit by yourself for whatever. I hated it. I won't eat so I arranged it where I could eat at home. They don't let, we don't have open campus like that but for me they let me do it because they knew I wasn't going to get into trouble.

Coupled with time and your mother's administration of effective potions you healed. You cut your losses and moved ahead.

So yeah I guess I did have a rough senior year but halfway through I got a lot better. Moved on I think and then I graduated so.

The betrayal had rent the fabric of your being; however, you finally discovered a new pattern of meaning and reinitiated your previous goals:

Probably graduating from high school. Um and that my senior year I did very well. I actually made honor roll the whole year and um, I had Sharon. Sharon and I were still best friends. We did everything together and when I graduated I, my GPA had gone up a significant amount from the last year and just being able to graduate from high school. It was just something very important to me that I always wanted to do.

You demonstrated emerging maturity as you took the discord and composed something beautiful. While remaining in implicit concert with your mother, you learned from your misfortunes:

I just learned how deal with things a lot better after that so I didn't have so much on my mind and I could actually study at school.

Your hard work at school did not go unnoticed and reinforced your healing process:

And I knew I wanted to do so good and I tried very hard. I didn't have such hard classes my senior year but the only class was government which I did have trouble with that, but the teacher understood that I tried

hard and so he helped me with my tests, kind of give me pointers on what to study so I did an average in that class, but my other classes were everything that I like, like child development and that kind of things so. It was everything, there wasn't any like any recommend, or it wasn't the classes you had to take, it was whatever you wanted. It was electives. So I enjoyed the year.

I was searching for what you remembered about your high school IEP meetings. You recalled your mother's defining presence and reflected that you merely listened and did not contribute, underscoring your disfranchisement in the process.

I remember going down to the room and I know my mom was there I know they were talking about being in the secondary at post secondary transition program when I started college. I just, I think I didn't really say much there so I just kind of listened. I don't remember a whole lot about 'em then.

Yes, you listened. You repeated, verbatim what would have been said about the program at the meeting. Moreover, you faced a conundrum, whether to participate in the secretarial or the child care program. Again I heard your mother's tacit influence as you explained why you chose the secretarial over the child care program; your own children would eventually satisfy that calling.

I think they just talked about what was going to take place in the secondary at post secondary transition room. That I would be there for a certain amount of scheduled hours and um, my tests could be read if I wished and, homework basically the same thing that I was doing then....I thought at one point I wanted to go for secretarial and then come back and go for day care as well but I just kind of went for the typing instead. I mean, I enjoyed children, but I just figured I would have to have my own for that.

During your senior year IEP, which I attended, you made the decision to enroll in the secondary at post secondary transition program. You usually worked at a day care that time of day but could not because of the IEP meeting.

Before the meeting, however, you refused to make the phone call to notify the day care supervisors you could not work that day. At the meeting your mother voiced that you did not make phone calls. During one of our conversations I inquired about your fear of phoning, you concurred and explained:

Just the fact of talking to someone. Well just talking to people on the phone. If people called me, it was okay, but I just didn't care to call people unless it was a close friend or.... And um, when I had gone through depressions I was also diagnosed with social anxiety. So I think that may have been part of it, why I didn't want to make phone calls or stuff like that. I don't know what it really was. I just....

I recalled after you left the IEP meeting your mother softly informed me of your diagnosed social phobia. During our discourse I inquired how you dealt with the diagnosis. You referred to self-help books that the counselor had recommended; however, you alluded to the root origin of your improvement, coaxed maturity.

I don't know I got a few books. I just talked about things you could do that would help like make yourself go out and talk to someone you've never met before and stuff like that and. Not really sure that I really did 'em, but I just think growing up it just kind of, there wasn't anything that you could do.

I was curious about your relationships with your high school resource teachers. Your tally card for relationships included close connections, nurturance and loyalty.

Um, yeah, well my freshman or sophomore year I had a lady called Mrs. Turner. She worked with me for those years and during that time I was really close with her because she was the one that worked with me. But then during my junior and senior year I was with Mrs. Bell so then I wasn't with Mrs. Turner anymore so I became closer with Mrs. Bell. And I think she really liked me for some reason. Um, I think it was. I believe I had already graduated from high school. It was that summer she called me at home and wanted me to do her a favor for her and pick up her daughter in

Radcliff because she had some meeting at the school. I was working at the day care that time, but I called in and they said it was fine if I came in like a half- hour late. So I went to Radcliff and picked up her daughter for her. Yeah, I was pretty close to her. So after high school that sure changed when she wouldn't come to any of my IEP's.

Mrs. Bell eventually betrayed you. She refused to attend either of your two IEP meetings held while you were participating in the secondary at postsecondary transition program. You perceived you had secured a special relationship with Mrs. Bell; however, once away from her jurisdiction she abandoned you.

I had to call her the second year and ask her and um, and then I did talk to her. I told her who I was and asked her if she could be there. She said, "Oh, I don't know. It looks like I have another meeting or something." And she said, "You are doing, okay, aren't you?" (said in a mimicking tone of voice) I told her I was so yes so she didn't think there was any need for her to come so. Right. After not seeing me for two years. I thought the least she could do was just to see me and not so much for the.

Ellie, I considered a disquieting memory of your senior year IEP meeting. Mrs. Bell headlined the front page of your IEP implementing bold script, "Mr. Reed (your accounting instructor) is very concerned about Ellie in the secretarial program because of her math deficiencies." Earlier when you talked about your strengths and weaknesses you pinpointed English as your problem area. (You later experienced difficulties with your college accounting class but earned a "B" due to your consistent hard work.) On the bottom of that same IEP page Mrs. Bell penciled another statement, "Ellie is extremely fearful of new situations." Neither of these concerns, however, were openly discussed during your meeting.

Therefore, you received an unenthusiastic and uncommitted send off from

your high school instructors. Their support for your potential college success was tenuous at best. Still riding on the tail of a tragedy your continued source of meaningful support, affirmation and coaxing came from your home front.

They always said that they would like me to go to college and when I was deciding on whether I was going to or not they said if I decided and chose not to you know, they would support me no matter what but they would prefer that I would because it would be easier to get a job and I would just know better about the real world and so they kind of coaxed me into doing that.

Call of Community College Life: Calisthenics for Independence

Unlike your transition to high school, wrought with anxieties and difficulties, your transition to the community college was harmonious and welcomed. Your best friend accompanied you; additionally other friendships blossomed from all corners. Your self-esteem burgeoned as you enjoyed participating in classes that were leading toward your chosen career.

Yeah. Ah hum I would have been nineteen when I came to college, and I loved college. Compared to high school, it was totally different. You weren't accepted by some but not by others, there weren't groups like there were at high school. Um, Sheila was one of my roommates and the other roommate was someone I didn't even know, but we were friends with them, and I met a lot of other people in my hallway and in my classes. I enjoyed my classes very much. Some of them were hard, but I think I did very well 'cause it was a field I wanted to go into. So I just, I really liked college.

Your community college classes were career specific:

Um, we had all different computer classes which made us familiar with all the different computer programs they use in business, like your Word, Excel, and Power Point. And so we had classes on all those and typing. And transcribing, just everything you would do in an office. Um, that really helped and then we also had business classes. Not working with the computer but learning different things in business or law. Just kind of gave you more information, which helped a lot I think.

Braced by a successful and pleasurable college experience, a year later you were primed for a new relationship. You met a wonderful young man in the farm management program and developed a strong friendship.

Um I think, at age twenty was when Randy came into my life so he was always there for me and he's never put me down or anything.

You reflected on the kind of person you were at that time. You recognized your consistent qualities, quietness and diligence; moreover, you acknowledged change. What your mother had oft repeated, you now experienced. You attended college, succeeded in your coursework, developed a cohort of friends, met a young man who cared for you; furthermore, you handled it all away from home. Phone calls and emails with your mother most likely continued and occurred daily; however, this communication was within the context of you creating a life for yourself physically apart from her.

I was still very quiet, but I think I believed in myself more than I ever did before. And then I knew I tried very hard and was good at what I did try to do....

During the second semester of your second year you experienced a significant set back. A sledding accident rattled your life. An unknown stranger remained by your side, inserting an aura of mystery to your tragic experience. You were hospitalized; however, once again you eventually healed.

I went, took my little niece tubing at Goose Bend and going down the hill and I stopped in the middle of the hill and a kid came from behind and pushed me...I almost broke my neck so I was rushed to the emergency room which they were worried something was wrong with my spinal chord, and luckily, I don't know who was at Goose Bend, I don't know if it was an angel, but some guy was at my side and knew not to move my neck. He was a critical care doctor. And he was there until the ambulance

came and made sure no one moved me and all of a sudden he was gone. I don't know who he was or where he came from or anything, but he was probably the one that saved my life.

Recursively affirming and reinforcing your burgeoning vocational skills and self-esteem, your instructor encouraged you to participate in state and national business professionals' competition:

Um, my um making it at least to nationals. I didn't qualify at nationals but just getting there was I mean only four of us went from our program and you had to be in the top five I don't remember. But I didn't think I qualified but somebody got sick or turned it down, so I was the next one up so I got to go. I was just like, wow! I get to go. I didn't know even imagine that so I that was a good something.

Throughout your community college experience the emphasis was placed on developing employment skills, learning how to secure and keep a job. Your secretarial program helped prepare you:

We had business professionals, which we did um, fake interviews in class and went over what a resume should include what and how to act in an interview and so when I did get an interview, I was ready for it.

You omitted details. I knew that Theresa, the secondary at post secondary transition program instructor, had also helped you prepare for interviews so I inquired:

Yes, um, she had. If she knew I had an interview coming up, she'd as soon as I'd walk in the door, I think she'd come over and tell me her name and shake my hand and make sure I'd do it right back to her. I started writing out resumes, I did my resumes myself, cover letters. She just checked them over; she said they were fine and I started to send those out and then she went over with me like a pretend interview and what I should do and what I shouldn't do and so she was basically there to give me pointers of how to get a job.

You worried about applying for a practicum job; however, your instructor

and the secondary at post-secondary transition program staff replicated and reinforced your mother's role as encourager and coxer. Ultimately you navigated through the dreaded interview process and secured a job. Each afternoon you sedulously left the college to work at a local attorney's office:

Yeah, I worked there about three hours every day. I'd go in, there was two lawyers there. They'd be constantly sending letters to clients and I'd type up all the letters and they would have to proof read 'em that I corrected if there was any errors and I'd put them in an envelope, I'd type up the addresses, make copies, answer the phone, go to the post office to mail the letters which was just a block away or so. Really anything they needed, I would take care of.

Since you did not volunteer, I wanted your role clarified and queried if someone assisted you in the office.

Yeah, a secretary. Yeah I worked side-by-side with her. She showed me most of the stuff.

The attorney, your job site supervisor, regularly communicated with your instructor, and you appreciated the fact that your work was recognized. You noted and were comfortable knowing that your instructor knew your employer on a personal basis, perhaps even savoring these connections.

We had to, every week, or every day we had to write on a sheet of paper what we did and how many hours we were there. And we'd turn these sheets in every week and then I don't know if it was once a month or how many times it was but then the person who hired me had to fill out how my work was going along. And he always said I was doing a great job so she knew I was doing good. Plus she did know him, I guess. Yeah, she had known him for a few years. I think their kids were about the same age maybe.

A vital component of your college success was the support of the secondary at post secondary transition program. The secondary at post secondary transition program room offered you a secure haven for aid,

commensurate with your requirements. You clearly separated yourself from students in the program who required more structured programming, and “responsibility” was your correctly identified marker. You understood that you rightfully earned the flexibility to use the room on an as needed basis because you were responsible. Students lacking your degree of responsibility were continually watched, monitored, and realigned.

I recalled walking into the classroom and witnessing you sitting next to Dave, a student with severe anti social behaviors, which most people could not tolerate. As you sat aside him smiling and teasing, it was obvious he loved it. Your authentic interaction with Dave originated from your core of care for others.

The spiral emergence of growth and independence came as you attempted challenges on your own within a secure environment and then would occasionally retreat for assistance or affirmation. Paradoxically, requesting aid became a critical component of your acquired independence and self-advocacy.

Um because if I needed help with anything, I could always get it, but I wasn't one of those students that had to be there for so many hours a day, because they knew that I was going to the computer lab or my job and that I was responsible enough to do those things on my own. But I always could have a test read if I wanted. Um, I think it really helped me with like homework. Like if there was a certain assignment I had to get done that I didn't understand, there was always someone there to help me, and it was mainly the second year that I had most of the help. My freshman year, it was all in the computer lab so I was always down in the computer lab. I don't think I spent much time in the secondary at post secondary transition program room because of that, and I knew how to do all my computer stuff, and I never needed help with that. My second year I was with math so Theresa spent a lot of time with me on my math and biology. Rick really helped me with my biology. I was... I think I did one

test by myself. And I did terrible on it, but I had studied. So after that he helped me study and take tests and I did very well.

Once again you negotiated parameters. Although you acknowledged difficulties, unlike many others in the program you identified and voiced when you needed specific assistance and asked for it.

I really think I got it how I needed. I didn't have, I mean I had trouble, I wasn't really one that needed constant help. I could do a lot on my own and so when I needed help I would come to you for it so I think I got all the support I really needed; I don't think there was really anything more that needed to be done.

You pondered how outcomes might have played out differently had you attended the community college without the support of the secondary at post secondary transition program.

I think I would have but I don't think I would have been as successful. Um, I knew that I wanted to go to college, and I always had it planned to go to a community college just for two years and close by... Um, I always knew I was going to go, but I think the transition program just helped me be better at it.

The secondary at post secondary transition program staff interfaced with your mother's supportive role as they routinely dispensed affirmation and reassurance:

Just that I could get all my work done and any help there was always someone there and there was. I think they gave me a lot of confidence and without that I don't think that I would have been as eager to go. They were always telling me I was always a responsible person, and I did good and tried my hardest and everything. I didn't give up so that made me feel better about myself so....

Correspondingly you considered how things might have taken a decidedly different turn had you directly secured a job after high school instead of proceeding to college. Therefore, your college experience afforded you far more

than an education; it rendered liberation. Instead of living independently in Cedar Falls you would have remained at home with your parents:

I don't think I would be where I am now. I mean, I would have high school education with *few* computer classes and most places don't want to hire you if you haven't had at least some college education er and I don't think I would even *try* to leave home without college or.... I'd probably still be living with my parents if I didn't go on.

Reflecting on your community college experience, you considered its recursive effects on your self esteem and autonomy. Your college experience, a genesis, created: a channel for separation from your parents, a harvest of friendships, and a cornucopia of successful experiences in and out of the classroom.

I think it helped a lot. I got to be on my own, away from my parents, an' meeting new people and so I think it just, it helped me I think. Not being there, being close enough to home but yet far enough so I am not with my parents all the time....Hm, well it was a really good experience. It's helped yah get ready for the real world and the friends you made. It was totally different from high school 'cause you didn't have like different groups, you know. You didn't have to fit in anywhere. It was basically you didn't know anybody. It was like starting all over and I think that just you know. You can be accepted by people. Um, and then go with my classes doing so well that just really changed me. An' I knew I could do things. Making it to nationals was something that I couldn't have dreamed of either so I think that kind of helped al lot.

During your senior high school IEP meeting your mother had informed me that initially you fervently refused to consider participating in the program because you had heard you would be required to conduct your own IEP meeting. Curious about what prompted you to change your mind I queried; a synthesis of logic from your mother and a friend of a friend had organized and diminished your anxieties:

Oh I remember that I wasn't going to do anything like that. I didn't want to talk in front of everybody. I figured that would be very embarrassing. I never be able to do that on my own. But then, um, I had a friend and he was dating someone, an Amy Carlson?...And she told me, "It's nothing to be worried about." I would get the help I needed to help conduct it and it shouldn't be the main thing on my mind so that she helped me decided to.

Moreover, while in the program you effectively conducted two annual IEP meetings. As you sat at the head of the table and conducted your meetings, I could not help but recognize the contrast from the one I attended while you were in high school. The dynamics reversed. Instead of silent you spoke; instead of disenfranchised you were primed and engaged.

Oh, I was kind of nervous but everyone there, I basically knew, and I knew what we had reviewed, what I was supposed to say before the meeting so I was prepared. It wasn't that bad. I seemed to do all right with it so.

The Art and Craft of Autonomy

Months before completing the program you anticipated and planned your departure. You and Sharon wanted to find work in Cedar Falls and share an apartment. Your instructor, your parents, the secondary at post secondary transition program staff, and your boyfriend unequivocally reinforced your goals.

Well, I think it was a couple of months before I graduated I started looking in the Cedar Falls paper for um jobs, and I printed up my resume and cover letter, and I started sending 'em to places, and I got a few interviews. There I mean, I mean, a few before I graduated, which never turned out to be. Probably a big business or um, not really someone they really wanted, who hadn't actually graduated yet. Um, so then Sharon and I found an apartment, and we knew it was a nice apartment. We wanted it so we figured we could afford to live there a month or two without a job. We figured within a few months we would have a job, so we took the apartment and a month after graduating we moved to Cedar Falls and we

had more interviews and um, um, I did my other job. I think it was a month after I moved to Cedar Falls I found a job at USA Reach so.

After moving to Cedar Falls, you quickly grew discouraged when you could not secure employment and your discouragement increased when a job found Sharon and you were still struggling to find a job.

Well mainly not so much that she got the job, but the way she got it. She was going through employment agencies just like I was and an employment agency called her one day and told her she got a job....She had no interview; she had no resume; She had no cover letter. She went in and then she got hired full time with nothing, and she hardly went to any interviews, so it was me doing all this work, and she just laid around the house. By her doing nothing, she got this full time job with benefits and here I'm like, what am I doing?

Finally you nabbed an interview and your self-characterization shifted.

Instead of your earlier role as victim you arose as a heralded victor:

It was the easiest thing I had ever had, um. They had walk in interviews so they put 'em in the paper and there was a big sign out front and went in, filled out an application, had a typing test and you had to have 45 words per minute minimum, and if you don't have 45, you can't have an interview, but you can always come back and try again. Well I got, I think 80 words per minute at that point so I immediately went into an interview, and she just asked me a few questions about where I went to school what I did and different jobs I've had and um I just told her I just really like typing and it was, I was just really interested in trying it, that I was reliable. And she said it sounded like I would definitely be hired and that I would get a call within the next few days, which I did get a call; I think it was even the next day, and they called and hired me.

Your work satisfied two of your passions, typing and helping others:

My jobs are interesting. Kind of hard to explain, but I'm called a communication assistant, and I provide relay service for the deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled where I sit at a computer and get phone calls in. A hearing person could call in like and wanted to call a deaf person or a deaf person could call in and wanting to hear a hearing person, and what I do is I just type the conversation for the person that cannot hear. Type it word for word on that part of the conversation; I'm just an operator. An' I do that all day long, forty hours a week and its kind of a different

experience. Ya some calls are *totally* not what you want to process but you have to do it, and the thing about it is, you can't just read what they type, you us emotion, so it would be like you were talking to someone. It makes for the deaf person to be able to communicate with anyone they want to.

Serendipitously I met your mother about a week before our first conversation. She related you were both excited and apprehensive about our planned session; you had tentatively admitted, "I have never been interviewed before." As we visited, your mother related her immense pride in your accomplishments: coping admirably, living alone, responsibly managing your money and pleased with the young man in your life. She had remained heavily invested in her relationship with you. Your intense relationship continued to follow the ritual pattern, as difficulties arose your mother was both your ballast and consultant. Distraught about your work schedule and hours, she had encouraged you to confront your manager. You were to have met with your manager before I met with you. Curious about the results of that meeting and how you would relate the experience, I inquired. Yes, you lived alone and you had a good job, yet your intense relationship with your mother continued, and your pronouns still wavered. Even though your mother had encouraged you to speak with the manager you omitted that detail and claimed sole responsibility for making the connection. Indeed you set up the appointment but only after your mother's repeated suggestion.

When I *first* (emphasis) started, you get a certain schedule. When I first got hired they offered me a 8:45 to 5:15 schedule, which meant I was hired to work one weekend day, so I picked Saturday so I did work Monday through Thursday and Saturday. And that schedule goes for

three months at a time and that ended. Now I got a different schedule, which was... I think it was a 8:15 to 4:45 schedule and the one following that was similar to that. I can't remember exactly the next one. Ah, well, the one before this one was good except for maybe the Fridays where I'd work from 8:45 to 2:45 and 3:45 to 6:45, so was kind of a long day, but for the most part it was okay. And then we just got our new schedules, which are... mine is terrible. I'm working a lot of nights, which I don't want. I'm working Saturdays, which I don't want and your schedule was based on seniority, which I'm in the two hundreds, so there is over a hundred after me, and I've seen *new* people come in that had day schedules, which weren't offered to me, so I took it upon myself, and I went into the manager, and I told him everything, and he asked me to write it down on paper of which I told him. So I did and they submitted it to the central manager, which then submitted to the scheduler and now I'll be getting a new schedule. I don't know what it will be but she's going to work with me *this* week on getting a new schedule.

Although passionate and committed to your work, if your scheduled hours daunted and threatened your self allocated time with family and friends back in Iowa, it was your work schedule that you questioned. Surely your employers understood that your family and friends held more sway than your job.

I don't know if it will be a whole bunch better, I might have to drop to thirty-two hours which is still full time until the end of three months and then go back up, ...but if that's just for now, I'll probably just do that. Just as long as my hours, 'cause I have three straight days of ten hours and then I have to do in early on Saturday for four hours, and it just. I want five days of eight hours, and it just.... I want five days of eight hours, but I. That's what I wanted, Monday through Friday and no weekends. 'Cause I have my friends and family in Iowa and I *only* have my job here, and that's what I told them so hopefully they will help me out. We each were assigned a team leader and he does one survey for us and we go to him if we have any problems so. I went to him. Yeah and I didn't want to. I didn't want to be like someone that just aren't happy, complaining all the time but I knew I wasn't going to be doing the best I could if I was unhappy with the hours so I went to him 'an. So he knows how what I am thinking.

Remembering my previous conversation with your mother, I heard you echo the suggestion she offered you. Her words became your words:

It's kind of, I thought I could stick it out, but it just dragged on and on. I *had* to do something. An' I figured they can't fire me for telling 'em how I feel. And I did.

Your wages and earned incentives were a source of pride.

Right now it is \$8.50 but I should be getting a 25-cent raise but we do, that is not exactly what I get. If you have surveys and you get graded surveys on how well you process a call, and on attendance, productivity and all those points add up, and if you get this many its like for some of those points you get a 25 cent raise for that month and if you get or a 50-cent raise. Well I usually meet the top points so I usually get a 50-cent raise for that month so I am usually getting a nine dollar a month so. Yeah, and if you work past 6 o'clock or weekends you get another 50 cents added on to that so.

You received medical insurance and vacation benefits through your employer. Your parents continued to help you with your car payments; however, you proudly managed the majority of your expenses.

I still get help with the car payment. I paid my insurance but not the car payment because I can't afford it. And my parents will still pay until I'm at a point where I can afford that, but the rest of the bills I've always paid them myself. I've never needed any help telephone, Internet, electricity, heat water, and garbage so. And then I bought a computer so um. I bought it from Best Buy where they did a thing where I can pay it off in a year with no interest so I just pay monthly payments for it so. I do all that myself.

You have not collected friends here. You offered reasons or excuses:

It's no; I'm not very good at developing friendships. It's at work, yeah I talk to people that are my age but everyone there smokes, drinks, whatever. I think I'm the only person that doesn't smoke and so on that extent, there is hardly a way to make a friend and when I can't be around smokers its such a big city. I mean, there are probably places you could meet people, go to the bars and I don't do that either so, no not really.

Ellie, you were truly content with the cornucopia of your life, your family, and Rob; it was enough:

I like to spend my time with my family...and well Randy. Basically Randy and my family is what I do the most I mean. If I'm not working, I'll go home usually and I like to take my nieces and nephew or take them to movies or whatever and spend my time with Rob. That's about my only thing that I enjoy doing.

You secured and treasured safe relationships. You moved beyond your betrayal experiences. Moreover with Randy's family, you found the sister you never had and the felicity of a family working in harmony.

Yeah, I guess it depends if doing anything else. If I don't go home, I probably go to Randy's house. He lives with his parents. I probably stay with them an' work on the farm with him. I enjoy that and he has a sister that, she just turned eighteen so I'm pretty close to her. I don't have a sister so she's kind of another one.

Although you had not joined any service organizations or clubs, you fostered a family mission project. While attending a church service with your parents, you heard a missionary priest tell about children in need of sponsors. You convinced your dad that if he made the sponsor payments you would regularly send Tony, a little boy from Mexico, letters. Your efforts reiterated your yearnings to succor and to build safe relationships. Tony's picture was sitting on your microwave and you proudly told me:

And he has about five brothers and sisters so he needs help and paying different things. He really likes having someone that is going to help him.

You interlaced the clarity of your commitment to connectedness and consolation to your work arena. You also continued to crave affirmation. In the passion of your words, I sensed you sincerely wanted me to hear this story. You explained how you earned and received what you called, accommodations:

That's when you're um processing a call and where either the deaf or the hearing person thinks you did a good job on the phone call. Well I had

one deaf person say they wanted to give me accommodation and so you get a team leader, which are people that will help you if you have problems on the calls. You call someone over and they listen to the person told then how good of a job you did which they document and then I got a certificate with a date, what the person had said about me and then also 60 cents. And then I also got another one, I think it was in May, um of a hearing person who, he wanted to know where I was located and then he e-mailed the center and said how good of a job I did so. And got another one. ...Um, I like, I think, I make the Reach call and the deaf person always says, "Well thank you Reach. What would we do without you?" It's like you are doing something good for somebody not only is it for you, for your money, you are helping somebody and um I've had two commendations where people, one was a deaf person and she told the supervisor, "She just did a wonderful job." And another person was a hearing person whose father was deaf and he just enjoyed how well I did the call and so that makes you feel good when you do good with a call. And my supervisor, our team leader has told me that I'm doing great and he'd do anything he could to keep me when I wanted to quit for those hours so.

The consuming issue in your life revolved around your work hours, and you returned repeatedly to this subject. Your job both complimented and defined you. You typed for hours, working independently even among others, and savored the opportunity to assist and serve others as you performed your work. Only one obstacle could diminish your zeal for your job; the infringement on entitled hours with family and boyfriend back in Iowa.

I think will probably stay here in Cedar Falls unless for some reason the hours are so terrible that I can't stand it.

Reflections on Relationships

When I asked you what kind of person you wanted to become in the future, you revealed a rift in your relationship with Randy; you each had received decidedly different religious training. Another dissonance appeared; you justified

not attending church regularly since you disliked attending services alone, yet you missed and longed to reestablish that crucial component in your life.

Um, maybe religiously. I was brought up Catholic and I always went to church with my parents but I started dating Randy and his family has a thing about Catholics. They are furthest from Baptists of course and so we don't really agree on things. An that's not why I haven't gone to church. I guess I don't want to go to church by myself and I do go when I go home, most of the time. An' I know that eventually I will turn Baptist so that may have something to do with it. And so I'd like to get back more into religion than I guess than I have now.

Ellie, as we continued to reflect together, I asked you to consider what you would tell your future eighteen year old daughter about your experiences during this period of time I called transition. You advised this future daughter to understand that struggle and hardship would be part and parcel of the this time frame, especially during high school, and encouraged her to follow your example to persist in her educational goals and to attend college. You promised that the college environment would have a significant climate change from high school. You braced your recommendations with encouragement, promise and hope:

I would probably explain to her that in high school it was tough. I had people make fun of me. I hated it, I had trouble with it, but I didn't give up because that's not going to get you anywhere. And it will get better, it may not seem like it at the time, but it will get better, it does get better. And college is just a *totally* different thing than high school. No matter where you go, it's not going to be a high school atmosphere and that she can do it. If I can do it that she can do it. And its just you can't just say, "I can't do it." I guess that is probably what I would tell her.

Amidst your discourse I heard your mother's adages and admonitions, echoed, framed and repeated so often they became your own. Embedded and anchored in your intense mother daughter relationship you synthesized and assimilated your mother's convictions. She instructed in relationship. Moreover,

this implicit instruction provided a resin for your misfortunes. Hence you no longer distinguished her thoughts and contributions from your own and therefore deprived her credit.

Even when I offered you ample opportunity to acknowledge your mother and her positive impact on your life you demurred. I identified her logic and litanies embedded in your psyche and voiced in your discourse. When I asked you what you would tell your mother in a letter about this time in your life I sensed your response merely echoed her previous and continued words to you:

Um, I'd tell her. Yeah it was hard but I got through it. I didn't give up even though many times I said, "I'm quitting high school. I'm done. I don't want to go back. I think many times I even said, "I want to go to a different high school. I don't like this high school." But she kept saying, "It's not going to be any different from where you are at. It's going to be the same thing." But um, I stuck it out and I'm on my own today so and she knows that I had trouble times but I got through it so.

Increasing the ante, I asked specifically about the support your mother offered you during this time. Your mother, ever the wise woman, shared her personal experiences, gifted, braced and commissioned you with the venerable knowledge that just as she had faced and negotiated hardships so could you:

Um she kept telling me, she knows, she didn't *know* how I felt but she could understand how I felt and that kids could be really cruel sometimes and um just because I had trouble in school doesn't mean I was stupid or whatever. And that I just needed a little extra help to get through it. But she always said I can do it. I can do anything that I do have that in me and that she did it too. She said she liked high school a little bit, not she didn't love it but she liked it a lot better than and she got through it and she said there was different things with her. She got through a divorce, raising two boys and dealing with that and she could do that and I could certainly go through high school so....

I requested you recall the episode when you found out you were dating a

married man and specifically asked about your mother's support:

Yeah very supportive. She was very angry about the situation. I don't know. I think she called him up and there was times and saying, "Are you for real?" And yes, of course there were times he was totally for real. She was the one that actually went to his house and ah confronted the wife. And she hated to see how it was affecting me, but she was always there and she knew she would probably do the same thing if she were in my place. I mean, who would know he would have a wife like that?

You were driven to continue talking about this dramatic event, ignoring my admonition to talk about your mother's support while never acknowledging your perpetrator with a name:

Someone who was from a totally different town, he lived with a roommate and he had no wedding ring, no sign and then all his friends knew about it, but they never said a word so you wouldn't have known so yeah. I just kept thinking, me a quiet person that wasn't really into guys.... I mean I wasn't looking for a relationship. I was just out to, I was out with my friend when I met him, just and I don't know. Just so then I'm thinking, why. I mean, I always said I want him to tell me why but of course I'll never find out. And I don't care to, but it just doesn't make sense.

When I asked you to describe yourself, you were more obedient and Specific; you focused on your caring and serving attributes. You bequeathed yourself with attributes that you valued in others: loyalty, reliability, and independence.

I would tell them that I usually put everyone before myself. I think about others. I am pretty caring about other people and you can always count on me and reliable. I don't break promises or things like that and I can take care of myself, pretty independent. Things like that.

Recalling your college experiences you recognized and valued your accomplishments; perhaps more importantly you recognized your unlimited potential:

Most important, just realizing that I could accomplish anything that I set my mind to it. Um, another dream that I could graduate with honors. I made honor roll every single semester, which in high school I would have said this would never have happened. And it just made me realize, you know, I could do anything.

Basking in your collegiate triumphs you considered those important to you then and now. Fresh from our discussions of your college days, predictably you honored those of us who worked with you in the secondary at post secondary transition program. Then you were swept back to those who had accompanied you through the long haul; your parents, your best friend and perhaps more recently your boyfriend. Lastly you included those you had feeling for and loyalty to but perhaps not as significant as those you allocated to the median of your list, your parents. Once again you failed to specifically acknowledge your mother.

Um, the last few years, well definitely Theresa, Rick and you. All those people were there, I always had laughs with them and there were also someone I could look up to and then my parents and Sharon and then Rob came in my life too so all those people, my brothers, nephews and nieces.

Ellie, as you defined success you encapsulated your successful transition experience from high school to college to work and independence. You implied the apprehensions and doubts enmeshed in this process:

Oh, just being able to do what you set goals and try to achieve them, and even if you don't achieve 'em, you are at least trying. Like me, I graduated from high school, which I did, graduate from college, which I did with honors. That was something I didn't think I ever could do, but I did. And now I am living on my own, paying all my bills, working a full time job, I think that's just being successful.

Unsure where your use of "goals" originated I inquired:

Well my family was always saying, "Well you got to set goals for what you want out of life." And I've always learned through school, always it was just...you got to set goals.

I feared I had implicated the later part of your above response; I had asked if your ideas about goal setting emerged from special education programming where we continuously talk about goals. So I returned to the arena of your family and goal setting and asked if you remembered an example of their goal setting behavior. Your example reconnected with your current work dilemma, once again demonstrating the relationship nature of your learning.

I know that like recently I was having problems with my work schedule and not liking it an my mom, she used to be a nurse and when she worked at a hospital at one point and she would have like every other weekend rotating hours and she'd work through the night and the next weekend not and she.... So she knew how she hated her hours and she had to do something about that so she just saying you got to set up for what you want.

As we concluded our time together, I hesitated but tentatively asked you if I had neglected to uncover something important about your transition experience. You responded immediately:

Hm, well I know at first when I moved here it was just like really different and kind of wanted to be home just. But then you know, Sharon was there but if she would go home on a weekend or something I was stayin' here just, I don't want to be here. I have to be with someone you know. I thought even. She got the job before I did. No interview, no nothing. She didn't even try. She had maybe, I don't think she had any interviews. Through that summer, I had about twenty and I'm thinking, here I'm doing all the work and you get the job. An' I was so upset I told my mom. I'm leaving, I'm coming home. This is, I'm sick of this and she's like, no, no. You got to stick it out something is going to come up. Which it did. I can't believe I wanted to go home so soon. And I moved here by myself and I thought, well geez, I wonder how I would handle that, being alone all the

time so I can't imagine living with her again. I like being alone so much better.

Fortuitously the response offered your cache, revealing the formative nature of your continued transition experience and simultaneously exposed your mother's vital input in your direction and destination. You confessed your initial need to never be alone. Although you moved to Cedar Falls with your best friend and shared an apartment, you were separated by her absences and the fact that Sharon latched onto a job with apparently little effort. Conversely you had submitted yourself to about twenty unfruitful interviews. Back on the phone with mom, you told her that you were coming home. She listened and once again was flint, coaxing and insisting you stick it out, guaranteeing you would locate a job. She was right. You did find a job and later you moved into an apartment by yourself. As you recollected you recognized your leap: originally you feared and could not imagine living alone, now you could not fathom living with Sharon. You staked the claim to independence and found it rewarding.

Situated among microphones, long since irrelevant, our united reflections and discourse revealed tangible testimony of your transition experiences; moreover, you teemed with a personal revelation:

Um, just getting through all the hard things. Um, I know there was a point I jus' didn't want to be here. I didn't want to go on and I guess you look, I probably look back on it and I think it's nothing. Probably since then I probably have more than that. I guess just realizing what my accomplishments are. I guess I don't really think about 'em. And I get into all these questions, an' I think guess I did pretty good... Learning more about myself.

Ellie, I learned more about you, too. Throughout your experiences as you were understood, responded to, challenged, and affirmed, you continued to change and grow. Your responses and my letter imbrued in relationship affirmed relationships.

With appreciation,

Elizabeth

ERIC'S STORY

October 27, 2002

Dear Eric,

When I chose you as one of my four participants, I did so with curiosity and respect hoping to learn from what I knew and endeavoring to surface what I did not know about your grueling transition process. At one level, certainly, I met with you hoping to move toward a better understanding of your transition experience, but I learned far more as you recalled the formative nature of your experiences.

Anticipating our first conversation, I watched you park your prized 2001 red Cougar and enter through the community college doors. You greeted me with a confident smile and a soft handshake. Uniformed in hospital scrubs, both banner and emblem of your employment status, your pride was unmistakable. Completing the secondary at post secondary transition program about a year ago, you secured employment as a housekeeper at the local hospital. You worked the noon to eight thirty shift, so we met at 10:00 a.m. before you started your work day. You chose to meet me at the community college, and I reserved a quiet conference room for our three conversations.

After explaining that I was a deliberate thinker and quite comfortable with extended pauses after questions, I sensed you assimilated my proposal. Later I wondered if you would have responded differently had I not clarified the silence issue. Later, listening to the tapes I timed the wait time after my questions. So difficult for you was the task of plumbing the recesses of your memory, I would sometimes wait in silence for up to three minutes for a response. As I sustained gentle eye contact with you through extended hiatus, you appeared neither usurped nor rattled by my observations. Your eyes tucked behind thick lenses seemed to retreat into your consciousness. Offering neither sign of struggle nor bent to please or satisfy, rather yours was an intent search mission for something to bring up, more a response to the work asked of you. Before commencing our taped conversations, I warned you that ours was an arduous mission, one meant to peel back the surface of your transition experience and examine what went on beneath. Although I had known you before only as we began our work together, did I begin to understand the time and the effort it took for you to remember.

Memory Woes

Captivated by your prolonged attempts to answer my questions I found myself responding in kind. Working in tandem, I supported your slow responses with patience, and you rewarded me with candidness, which included confessions of a feeble memory. Embarking on our first conversation you assigned chapters to your life. Assessing it the most difficult to remember, you chose to talk about your early childhood first.

I don't know if I can remember as much stuff at the top as I can going towards the bottom.

Endeavoring to fathom your mode and sequence of recall, I mulled over how many people from your present or your past failed to grasp the effort it required for you to remember. How many genuinely took the time to maintain a dialogue with you? Did your grandpa, your mom, your dad, your teachers, or your classmates? How did your reaction rate affect you socially, academically and vocationally? These concerns repeatedly returned to the forefront as we considered your transition experience.

During our conversations you explained utilizing a complex record keeping system: two discrete file folders, "bad" and "good" and two locations, "behind" and "in front" for your memory collection. You explained that you stuffed bad memories in the rear occasionally bringing them forward in an attempt to learn from them; simultaneously you strove to focus on the "good memory" file. Had you agilely negotiated in this convoluted enterprise it might have worked; however, you were neither efficient nor nimble.

The basic premise of your efforts was healthy and perhaps with practice potentially effective. Your analysis, enlisting your hope for a promising future evolved from a history of repeated painful experiences.

Mainly what it is all the bad memories I had... I put them behind and all the good ones I just put them in front and kept on going they were things I did any bad things I seen and everything... I just put them behind... I just kept movin' forward put those at an advantage to move forward every time....Actually all the bad things I did and all the bad memories I put those to advantage and every time I do it again I think back to it and I won't do it I just think back to the good things I did and everything.

Concluding our dialogue of your early childhood you tenderly sought to reconnect with yourself as a small child. I asked you what kind of a person you were as a young child:

I was probably a good person at that time if I can remember right. It was kinda' hard thinkin' back that far away.

Home and Family

During our initial conversation where you outlined and described your life history you avoided specific mention of your mother and instead focused on your dad, your grandparents, your aunts and your brothers. Only during the following two conversations when I specifically asked about her or presented leading questions did you explain your mother's critical role in your life.

Without highlighting your mother's importance during our first conversation you defined your early years as self centered and demanding.

I think I might have been a little cranky in that kind of stage 'cause most people all kind of cranky in that kind of stage and everything. Like I wanted everything and all that kind of stuff an' didn't get it.... (Christmas '83) I got a whole bunch of stuff I kinda wanted and everything.

You identified the significant people in your life during early childhood as grandparents and aunts, qualifying them as those who dispensed good deeds and bestowed material goods.

Um, they always did stuff for me. They always got me anything I wanted that kind of thing. They always let me stay over night sometimes... always gave me money and everything whenever I wanted.

Speaking of your father I sensed you concurrently desired to uphold his

presence in your life and to explain his absence. Before your brothers were born, your father occasionally allowed you to join him in farming duties.

Um, I got to go out and help my dad once in awhile, mow grass and help him out in the field and ride in the tractor with him and that kind of things. I know I remember that.

Apparently frustrated with your slowness and memory difficulties, your father failed to recruit your assistance as you got older. Instead you remained home with your mother while your father occupied the field or the coffee shop. Your mother, in marked contrast to your father, faithfully organized her schedule to work while you attended school and to be available at home when you returned.

He wasn't really helpin' that much. Cause he wasn't hardly at home that much 'cause he was mostly out in the field at that time. He didn't really help that much. He would be in the town drinking coffee.... Where my mom she was always home and everything. 'Cept for when I was at school she will be at work but that will be it. Where my dad wasn't hardly at home. He would be out in the field or else he would be in town drinking coffee, one of those two.

Other than your initial farm activities the only other positive reference you accorded your father was a token semi trip you described during the summer before you attended college:

I think it was somewhere around there I got to go to Florida with my dad on the truck an' everything took a week away from the state here and all that. I remember that ' cause that was the first time I ever got to go down to Florida and all that. Furtherest I ever went was Texas.

Struggling to comprehend your family dynamics I postulated you functioned as family scapegoat. An impromptu meeting fueled my notion.

Several weeks after completing our third conversation I traveled to a St. Francis restaurant with my family, and you were there with your parents, your grandfather, your brothers and your aunt. Both of us in the buffet line at the same time, I inquired about your job and your family, anticipating that conversation would conclude our interchange. Instead not much later you appeared at our table and remained long after our initial introductions and small talk diminished, obviously not picking up on subtle social cues. Finally you retreated to your table, only to point at me from across the room. Ignoring my expression, gently indicating, "please do not point at me," you, your father and your mother in intrepid cavalcade approached and perched at our table. Again it was I that elicited the small talk, commenting on the thoughtfulness that you included your grandfather and what a nice young man you were. At this point your father arrogantly wailed, "How can you stand him. I've known him all my life, and I can't stand him." Both you and your mother remained silent. Developing in a parochial world where father berated you, your mother quietly tolerated it, you hungered for affirmation and closeness; my heart went out to you. Small wonder as you lived and grew within this domestic climate, you failed to understand or participate in appropriate social conventions.

Earlier, during our conversations I had queried how you would eventually function as a different kind of a father than yours was to you. You reconfirmed your vision of a father who would offer a supportive, engaged presence in the life of his children.

Well probably always be there for 'em cause my dad wasn't there for me that much which I'm probably not that close to my dad cause I don't get to see him too much anymore ah probably do things with 'em like take'em to a movie or somepin' like that..take 'em out to eat and jus' things they like to do, stuff like that...not jus' do stuff I like to do or somepin' things kids like to do.

Unlike your father, your mother remained a constant in your life. Her presence emerged only as I asked you pointed questions during our second and third conversations. Your mother, not your father attended all of your IEP meetings. I recalled your mother's solid, quiet but demanding presence during your high school senior IEP, your father's absence, and your virtual nonexistence until your participation was mandated after you enrolled in the secondary at post secondary transition program. You defined your mother, in marked contrast to your father, as a constant presence, both vessel and vehicle of care in your life:

Well actually it was kinda like my mom because my dad he hardly didn't do anything. She helped me get through school and everything- helped me with my home work an' all that – always bein' there for me when I was sad an' everything an' when I was upset – always there for me whenever I got in trouble an' everything.

A new chapter in your life emerged as your role was recast from only child to sibling of twins. Your memory and your math difficulties were apparent. Although you claimed you were twelve or thirteen when the twins were born, I knew you were twenty and the twins were thirteen when we spoke. Therefore, you were more likely seven when the twins appeared on the scene.

Probably when I had two brothers come in my life when I was about twelve I think, twelve or thirteen....You know, when they came home it was probably a month later that I got to hold one of 'em. Um, I always took

care of 'em an' everything. I always picked up after 'em an' that kind of thing.

Again your scapegoat status was reconfirmed; your brothers tormented you and their behavior was tolerated. Having your own apartment (perhaps similar in situation to when you lived with your grandfather discussed later) your mother who previously offered you stability and respite discouraged you from coming home. This fact was confirmed when I asked you how your mother felt when you no longer returned home frequently:

Oh she kinda likes it 'cause my brothers fight an' everything especially when I get around there an' then they really start fightin' an' then I kinda get upset an' everything. They jus' start messin' around with my car an' everything so an' then I get into it so I jus' don't go home too much any more.

Previously you honed the role as your brothers' care taker. Later the twins with little parental interference tormented you. Whether to alleviate the torment or as a practical solution to deal with family dynamics gone awry and a grandfather in need of care, you moved in with your grandfather in St. Francis where you held a part time job. Your framed and designated commitment to your grandfather reinvented and enhanced your role as caretaker. This concentric route of ascending responsibility led you towards increased maturity:

I had to take care of my grandpa an' everything, an' he couldn't do as many things as he used to do an' everything. He couldn't remember anything....I was probably, ah, a junior or a sophomore. I think I was a sophomore when I first got it. Actually I lived over there in St. Francis at that time then, lived with my grandpa....'Cause I was workin' over there an' everything and I didn't really want to drive back an' forth from there so my mom jus' asked me if I wanted to stay over at my grandpa's so that's what I did an' everything. Jus' stayed over there an'. It was kind of, he kinda needed someone to cook him breakfast an' for supper an' all that kind of thing 'cause he couldn't do anything like cook an' all that kind of

things or clean or, he jus' kinda needed help an' all that. Well, I was grownin' up, doin' more things by myself an' everything. Plus takin' care of someone.

The Special Education Odyssey

Needing to unearth your special education experience, I asked about the origins of your experience. You responded that although you resided in Brookings when you were in grade school, Brookings offered no special education programming. So when you were in third grade and identified as requiring special education services, you were "shipped" by bus from your home town to St. Francis about twenty miles away. Brookings was a very small town and St. Francis although not appreciably larger construed a significant cultural adjustment for you:

It's been awhile – 'cause I'd been in third or fourth grade when I started that in St. Francis goin' to St. Francis 'cause at that time we didn't have special education in Brookings until 8th grade. That's when I went back to Brookings....By bus. It was a big change cause St. Francis schools were a lot bigger an' everything – an' more students in there. It was just a big change. It took me awhile to get changed. In addition to the population differential you were an isolated immigrant: Communicating with other students that I didn't really know that much.

Fortuitously the change of venue offered you the assistance not afforded in the regular classroom of your home community.

It was just that all the teachers down there were help me out a lot ...when I first started out at Brookings they didn't help you that much...when I went down there (referring to St. Francis) it changed. They just started helpin' me an' everything...anything you need help with.

You struggled to remember attending any classes other than those offered in the special education setting:

I think I was in all special ed if I remember right. I don't think I started to go out to other classes until I went to high school ... Actually middle school ... what they called it over at St. Francis.

When you were in eighth grade, special education programming was available in Brookings so you could return to your home community. You discerned and reaped the benefits of special education in your home community; however, you returned to strangers.

Yep that's right -- that's when they started helpin' me a lot more....
Yep it was startin' back with my other students which I didn't know too well anymore it was change kept on change -- not as much as when I went to St. Francis but it changed a little bit -- cause I know I was back at Brookings already.

A particular resource teacher assisted you with this transition:

I can't remember what their names are now. Oh Mr. Kray I remember him ...which he doesn't even work there anymore...he's about the only one I really remember from middle school. Yea he helped me read a lot better an' started doin' more hands on things.

You clarified what you meant by hands on projects and how this approach contrasted with the previous one:

Oh by doin' a lot of things by myself...projects by myself....Oh before they jus' kept on helpin' me. They jus' ... every time I got an assignment they were there to help me. I was jus' *used* (emphasis) to it.

Perhaps you were initially empowered and encouraged as you reestablished in your home community. I recalled that you had newly certified male special education teacher and I speculated that he, as well as your other teachers, both supported and affirmed you:

I think when I moved back I jus' started believin' I could do it an' everything an' all the teachers that I had started believin' I could do it an' everything so I jus' started believin' it.

Just a short year after making the transition back to your home community you faced yet another transition as you entered high school; however, a special education teacher bolstered and ministered to you.

It was for a little bit yea. Instead of goin' to a lot of different classes that I didn't really know about, know anything about well still teachers give me a hand an' everything so I can get through it....Well I took some classes up there like reading, math. I always went up there ta' get the tests an' everything. She helped me get my homework done. If I had any questions, she was there 'ta help me with that.

Although clearly apparent much earlier, you identified high school as the initiation grounds of your stubbornness. Extensive reading was integrated into your coursework and you revolted.

That came into play a lot because I didn't want to readin' like that much. When you get into high school you gotta read a lot so you understand everything. So that's where my stubbornness sorta' began when I first went to high school....Well I would just get *upset*. I jus' slam my books down an' everything like that mainly what I'll do an' what I did an' everything.

You explained that the teachers were unmoved by your outbursts and only pressed you.

Well they knew I really didn't like reading that much so they jus' kept pushin' me an' everything. "You have to read this chapter. You just have to jus' keep reading it 'till you understand it an' everything.

Taking classes that afforded you an opportunity to work with your hands provided a reprieve from those dominated by the despised printed word. Furthermore the Woods class promoted team enterprise which engaged you in a different peer dynamic, conceivably promoted by a teacher who insisted on team work rather than solo endeavors.

Well I took Woods an' I took a computer class, took CAD which was mainly building houses an' everything. That's about it, what I took....Well with woods it jus' brought me closer to the other students. You had to work as a team an' everything. Well I think what we did. Was build a shed for the school an' everything. We had to work as a team an' everything to get all that done....Yea I worked as a team 'cause that's where mainly your grade comes from was team work.

Based on my previous knowledge I knew that Brookings's High School staff had developed a well constructed, highly recognized student volunteer program in which a significant percentage of the students participated. Remarkably, however, when I inquired about your involvement in the volunteer program you demurred, claiming you were unaware of it. Evidently since no one pressed for your participation, the program was void from your experience or even your realization:

No I don't think so. If they did I didn't know about it.

Again you struggled with recognition and memory as you attempted to recall your senior year IEP, which I attended:

Not right off hand. Well mainly I couldn't remember everything back then.

Curiously you did not recall how a significant portion of our dialogue revolved around the discussion that although you attended school in Brookings you resided in St. Francis with your grandfather. The AEA representative, markedly concerned, was not previously aware that you lived in St. Francis. Therefore, this situation held the potential to seriously implicate the funding of your current and future education. Your singular memory was a more homely concern, where you would live the following year.

Yea, I remember that now. I think it was living at the South dorms. Like not living at home and everything. I need to get my life going and not jus' goin' hope an' stayin' there the rest of my life.

Power of Pushing

A dissonant theme pervaded your life history; one where you often ignored or fought the direction of others while at the same time you identified the commands of others as a mark of care. Demonstrating an obvious lack of ownership or responsibility in your education process, the teachers exerted the effort and you remained placid but not malleable to their direction and assistance. Therefore, it was teacher industry that channeled you through your secondary education requirements.

Um, they kinda pushed me ta' get my stuff done all my stuff done at school, not just ta' take it home and get it all done an' all that. If I needed help, they were always there to give me a hand. They was always helpin' me study for tests an' all that....Probably my teachers they kind of pushed me an' everything made me the kind of person I am an' everything 'cause I didn't really want to do anything and they kept on pushing and pushing an' all that, until I got through everything.

Again you enlisted your teachers as those desiring your success rather than acknowledging any innate energy forthcoming from you.

Um, 'cause all my teachers wanted me to succeed an' everything, especially Mrs. Tools. She really wanted me to, she was the one who really kind of pushed me a lot. She wanted me to get everything done an' all that stuff.

By refusing to acknowledge your resource teacher's admonitions, you hedged any notion of self responsibility and instead tenaciously gripped your own agenda. Your teacher drawing you back to your task, only elicited your anger.

She was kinda pushin' me but I wasn't really listenin' to her....Probably at home, watching TV, not studying for the test....When about anything I do, um, I kinda' want to go on the computer an' all that. She told me to sit down an' read books an' ta read my chapters over and over again, which back then I didn't really like to read an' all that. It kinda made me mad.

Thinking back to your earlier dialogue where you explained that you filed bad memories back I wondered if your IEP meeting memories were lodged in that rear compartment for a similar reason. Your IEP meetings provided fertile terrain for the school staff and your mother to exert further pressure on you. Rather real or imagined, you admitted to making changes after the united IEP front demanded you improve your school performance.

Um, I can't really remember 'em IEPs things like that....Mostly how I'm doin' in school. A few times I wasn't doin' that good, it kind of pushed me to do a little better every time, every time I had an IEP. I think it kinda' pushed me to work on it....It made me push because my mom didn't really like that an' she kind of got upset with me an' everything and made me push an' everything, make me do better.

Signifying your resource teacher as the one who pointed you towards college and ultimately towards living on your own, you confessed you were grateful you had followed her exhortation.

Probably not jus' lettin' me go back home an' everything...still tryin' to find a job an' all that...jus' wanted to right back home after high school an' she jus' pushed me not to do that ...an' I'm kinda glad I did.

Honoring all the "pushers" in your life, predominately your mother and your teachers, you realized what might have happened had they not done your job and pressed you.

Well I probably wouldn't be here right now...havin' my job an' everything ...probably still at home doin' stuff tryin' to find a job.

Eric, with your high level of stubbornness and low level of self initiation, I sensed that without the united front that pressed you from goal to goal you could not have made it through high school, let alone go on to complete the vocational program that led to your employment. Where your teachers, specifically your resource teachers, directed you at school, your mother commandeered you at home.

Well she if I needed help she was there to help me with my homework an' all that an' studying for tests an' made sure I got all my stuff done before I went to do something else.

You provided an example, which I sensed, was a compilation of what probably transpired on a daily basis on the home front:

I think one time tellin' my mom goin' outside to shoot some hoops an' everything an' she asked me "Do you have everything done an' I said um all I have to do is read a chapter in my book an' she told me sit down an' read it an' then go outside an' shoot baskets. So that's what I did sat in my room an' jus' started readin' that chapter.

Witnessing your memory and your thinking process in action, sometimes waiting minutes for your response, I understood the difficulty you encountered accomplishing your daily work which frequently crept beyond school hours into your precious free time at home. Your slow thinking processes coupled with your stubbornness surely triggered and constituted miserable evenings for both you and for your mother.

Mainly jus' tryin' to get everything done 'cause mainly I had trouble getting' everything done in one day and everything an' all those classes I was takin' an' some of those classes were pretty tough. Tryin' to do it by yourself an' everything. Sometimes I would have to do it about all day at home. Tryin' to get everything done an' that didn't make me too happy so I couldn't go out an' do stuff an' everything....I jus' wanted to get everything done so I could go out an' do my own things. I didn't really like sittin' at

home and' doin' homework all day an' everything. I jus' mainly jus' like going out an' doin' stuff like goin' to a movie or somepin' like that or playin' some golf or stuff like that. I jus' like doin' that kind of stuff. Not jus sittin' at home jus' sittin' doin' school work all the time.

Somehow in her motherly dialogues she interspersed both her sympathy for your plight as well as her experienced wisdom.

Well it kinda made me upset but she knows how its like an' everything – so that's what I did....Like in the real world an' everything. She has how to be successful an' all that. So I jus' went with it.

Perhaps most crucial for you was her devotion and constancy as she refused to relent.

She jus' kept on doin' what she usually did. Jus' kept on pushin' me.

The Art and Craft of Teasing

A second theme emerged from your life story far crueler than the first. Concurrently singled out for special education services, you were designated as a victim for teasing. Unfortunately the battering and the teasing affront continued until you completed high school. Ill equipped to deal with derisive assaults you responded with an ineffectual combination of anger and avoidance.

The other students ... every time I was in class, I didn't go up to the resource room, they kinda picked on me an' all that 'cause I was always readin' in the classroom an' goin' up to the resource room ta like do tests an' that kinda' thing. Like say things like, "You're stupid." An' that kinda stuff. Yea it jus' about happened every day....It really didn't really make me too happy an' when I said, when they Kinda said that kinda stuff, kinda made me mad....Probably when everybody started pushin' me around an' stuff...I started pushin' back defendin' for myself an' everything like.. every time I did that I like get in trouble so I jus stopped doin' that an' everything I kinda got yelled at all that kind of stuff 'cause I kept getting' in trouble so I jus' stopped doin' that... so I jus' kept stop listen' to 'em an' after that.

Your principal dispensed appreciated consolation and sanctuary. I asked

you what role he played as you were teased:

Oh I only remember he was always there for me as soon as somebody was pickin' on me ... he took 'em in an' started talkin' to 'em an' everything ... he'd tell me any time I had a problem jus' come talk to 'em and everything, he was jus' kind there for me too.

By not altering the way you reacted, however, the repetitive assaults continued:

Well I really didn't like it or anything or anything like that it jus' made me upset.

Even beyond the high school walls you could not escape teasing.

Although you held a part time job at Foodway in St. Francis, outside your home community, you quickly assumed your recurring role as victim of teasing.

Probably when I first got my first job at um Foodway in St. Francis. I was workin' there the night shift an' all that when I started my on-the-job trainin' I worked every morning getting' the truck unloaded an' all that kind of stuff an' which they kinda teased me over there a little bit, kept on pagin' me overhead an' that kind of stuff.

You claimed the job situation changed once you ceased taking the defensive; however, I sensed the teasing persisted. Perhaps you perceived the teasing differently from the variety served at school.

Um, it took a while, took maybe a week an' then started getting' along with 'em an' everything. It kind of teased around a little bit, finally I jus' started goin' along with it.

You differentiated the brand of teasing you received at work from the callous remarks orchestrated by your classmates.

Well it didn't really bother at work or anything 'cause I knew they was jus' teasin'. But at school some the students they were jus' kind of mean an' everything. Sayin' those kind of things an'....

The spring before you entered the secondary at post secondary transition program you worked at Foodway on prom night. A coworker of mine witnessed you working in the produce section when several high school girls dressed in their formals arrived on the scene. The girls blatantly mocked you, making a spectacle of taking their pictures with you. When I later inquired about the incident, you made light of it. I could not decipher if you did not understand how they had humiliated you or if you had admirably played along. Regardless, it comprised a vicious assault; one I am sure which was unmercifully repeated in other scenarios over the years.

Although you no longer work at Foodway, you slipped back into that tease mode when you reentered the store as a customer. Perhaps your first job provided a more effective learning environment than school to learn to negotiate the terms of teasing.

They still kinda' do that whenever I walk in now, when we were jus' jokin' around an' all that kind of stuff.

You learned the art and craft of teasing in concentric settings. First within the walls of school where you were the object of merciless perpetual teasing. Then during your first job you joined a cadre of employees of different ages, and for the first time you had the opportunity to practice the give and take of teasing. Now at your hospital job you have mastered the skill and daily banter teasing with your coworkers.

If unchecked teasing could quickly trespass beyond the bounds of human kindness. In a spontaneous combustion of discourse you shared a recent work

experience where a coworker may or may not have crossed that line of decency. Unlike the remainder of our dialogues, where you remained stationary, throughout this testimony your hands constantly waved, and you inserted specific quotes obviously spurred by the excitement of your story.

Um, I was cleanin' the receptionist area an' the outpatient, there is two phones up there. There is one that rings out the house room an' there is one that rings inside, an' the one the phone that rings inside an' everything an' um, I answered it an' there was someone on the other line that said, "I am outside bleeding. I need help." So I said, "One second please." And she said, "I can't wait. I am on the cell-phone an' I cut myself an' I am out in the parkin' lot an' I need help." An' I went outside an' everything to see what was goin' on. When I knew if there was someone out there but there was someone out there playin' a joke on me. Janet Marks, she was one of the nurses down there an' she was at the nurses station.... I guess they got cameras up there an' everything an' everyone look up at the camera. Everyone watchin' the camera an' everything. Some of them just die laughing. It was kinda funny but....

This teasing prank was decidedly different from those that occurred in high school. As a member of the hospital staff, you were awarded insider status and the privilege of sources to reveal the culprit.

Oh, I've got a few friends up there an' one of 'em works at the receptionist an'.... Janet calls back an' everything an' I answer the phone again an' I jus' kinda told her about it an' she just about laughed over the phone an' when I gave the phone to the receptionist, when she tells her an' everything, an' she tells me that it was Janet playin' this joke on me. I should've knew. I should've knew right away but I wasn't thinkin' at that time.

I am confident that in high school teachers teased you and perhaps used good-natured teasing to press you to complete your work. After visiting the secondary at post secondary transition program, your resource room teacher utilized teasing to remind you of your former goals. Perhaps this interaction even helped you confirm your new agenda.

Well I kinda told her I kinda' liken everything. It was a good experience. Then she kind of teased me a little bit because I really didn't want to go an' everything. I jus' wanted to stay home an' jus' sit at home doin' nothin'.

After our third conversation I asked you if could give me a tour of the hospital area where you worked. As you confidently escorted me around the hospital, what touched me most was how you interacted with the staff. As we met a nurse you issued a teasing comment; she responded and you promptly fired back a retort. Meeting a fellow housekeeper again you engaged in good and appropriate give and take. What you have learned and put to use since high school has entitled you to switch roles from victim to equal participant in the art and craft of teasing.

High School Working Man

What was the genesis of your first job? The specifics remained unclear; however, the origin was lucid. Your mother as driving force wanted you out and working.

Yes she did. She wanted me to get out an' start makin' money.

Not immediately aspiring to the notion of leaving the comforts of home for a job, you stubbornly resisted the suggestion.

Yea 'cause I was just used to stayin' at home an watchin' tv an' everything.

The typical ritual ensued as you fussed, but your mother prevailed.

Financial benefits emerged, offering you a foretaste of independence.

Yea, it was but there was probably the first time I was payin' for myself, and when I go an' get stuff an' all that, pay for my own gas, an' goin' out an' getting' stuff for myself. Not jus' goin' out an' havin' my family pay for them an' everything.

The grocery store job experience failed to proceed smoothly. The thinking process and the memory requirements involved in bagging groceries mounted huge obstacles for you; moreover, the customers expressed displeasure with your performance.

They like baggin' up groceries mainly. 'Cause a few customers like complained an' all that an' kinda like mad the bags too heavy or things like that, puttin' things in the wrong bags.

Your job reviews, paralleling IEP meetings, addressed and reverberated with required improvements:

Um like I know you are tryin' the best you can an' everything you are tryin' your hardest out there but kinda you need to do things a little better everything sackin' the groceries better an' faster think that's jus' mainly what we talked about was mostly jus' sackin' groceries. I don't think I was doin' a good enough job.

Since your job lacked a school connection, your IEP team was not privy to your poor performance. Simply knowing you held a Foodway job, during your senior year IEP meeting the suggestion was made that when you attended the community college in Fairview, you could transfer your position to the Foodway store there. This suggestion appeared especially appropriate since at your mother's insistence you were initially enrolled in the Retail Sales Associate program. When the time came to set up your on the job training, Foodway was your most viable option. When we called to arrange the transfer, we hit a formidable snag. Your former manager refused to give you a recommendation, and therefore the transfer was impossible. He informed us that although he had

repeatedly taken you to the back room to train you in the art of bagging groceries, the next time you reported to work you had forgotten the instructions. During our conversation you shared how you felt when we told you a Foodway recommendation would not be forthcoming:

Not very make me too happy cause that's where I got my groceries an' everything. I was always in there jus' talkin' to 'em. I woulda' thought they give me good recommendation an' everything. I thought I was doin' a good enough job.

Now you held a better job and you counted yourself fortunate. You acknowledged that your current job spurred more than financial advancement but also inherent personal growth, skill and confidence development.

I'm kind of glad I didn't go there to work an' everything 'cause I wouldn't have gotten paid as good as I do now....'Cause I'm more responsible than I was before. I'd do a better job this time. Sack groceries a lot better.

Community College Life: Linchpin for Change

The experience of high school haunted your existence. Investing considerable passion you anticipated an escape:

I jus' wanted to get out of high school so I could move on. 'Cause I didn't really like high school too much an' I really didn't like school too much back then....I was waitin' for that day that I would get out of high school an' all that.

Puzzled by the viability of functioning on your own, you were committed to remaining at home. Fortunately for you, your plan was flawed, and failed:

Uh, I jus' wanted to get out an' do my own kind of things an' all that kind of stuff. At that time I didn't know if I wanted to go to college or what I wanted to do. There was one story back then an' I told my, one of my teachers I was never goin' to live by myself; I was always goin' to be at home, which that never happened.

You awarded your resource teacher and your mother credit for heading

you towards the community college:

Ah probably my mom and the resource teacher talked about it first then they kinda' brought it up with me afterwards.

You and your mother made a college visit. You voiced your fears;

anticipating change left you feeling vulnerable and anxious.

Well I think it was jus' me an' my mom that came. I was kind of scared an' everything because I didn't know what it was goin' to be like when I came to college bein' away from family an' all that comin' to a bigger town. I jus' wasn't used to it. I was jus' used to livin' in a small town.

Perhaps you made a switch from security to commitment to change after observing other students who had made a similar skeptical investment:

I can remember goin' to the resource room an' everything. I can remember goin' back to the COC an' sittin' down an' everybody introducin' themselves. I remember that....Probably made me feel a little better after that. I didn't really know that many people up there. After that I think I wanted to come. See jus' if I can find a better job....An' I saw the dorm room.

Your abiding reticence and stubbornness stymied your adjustment to community college life:

It took me a little bit 'cause didn't really wanna go to college an' everything.

In addition to the effects of your reticence, you could not handle a new curriculum that was beyond your reach. You had not developed the scholastic stamina to function in an educational environment requiring more autonomy.

While you identified your mother as the change agent for the program adjustment, the guidance came from the secondary at post secondary transition program staff :

Oh, it was kind of tough to start with when I was retail sales, but when I switched classes an' everything it kind of got a little easier. I kind of started doin' things I wanted to do an' all that....Um, I wasn't doin' that good in retail sales. My grades weren't very good. I wasn't doin' very good on the tests an' all that so me an' my mom jus' kind of jus' thought that we should change courses here an' all that an' I went into housekeeping. I'm kinda' glad I did do that 'cause retail sales isn't as easy as you think.

On a September afternoon I sat in the college cafeteria visiting with a colleague and looked up to witness you talking to your mother on the phone and crying. This incident occurred at the time you struggled in the Retail Sales Associate program and we urged you to consider the Housekeeping Facilities Specialist Program. (During our later conversations I inquired you if you remembered that poignant scene.) Once again you utilized your filing system forte, having filed that memory in an obscure folder.

No I don't. I don't remember that conversation. I must have put that one behind or somethin' or I don't remember or just moved on.

You claimed, however, that you recalled the meeting we held to discuss making the switch from Retail Sales Associate to Housekeeping Facilities Specialist program.

Well I remember my mom wasn't too happy that I wanted to switch an' everything.

You explained your mother's agenda:

'Cause she probably thought I wanted to do retail sales and that since I used to work at the grocery store an' everything ... she thought that that would probably be a good program for me to go into.

Describing the change as something your mother objected to and you desired, in reality you were merely unhappy and ambivalent. The change came only as you experienced a degree of success within the more structured and

supported programming.

Yep, kind of like what I wanted to do an' everything....Made me feel a little better after that 'cause when I started going to that class an' everything I knew some things about housekeeping an' everything. Plus I liked cookin' an' that kind of stuff. I always liked doin' stuff hands on. Plus when my grades started lookin' a little better than when I was in retail sales.

The staff recognized and addressed your ambiguity and lack of inertia by propelling you into action. Their directive of directive was braced with praise for your work, yielding a productive alchemy.

I believe all right 'cause it got me out doin' stuff with other people got me goin' an' everything ... kind of taught me a lot ... not jus' sittin' in my room doin' homework all the time. It jus' taught me how to do other stuff. Plus if I didn't have that I wouldn't be here right now jus' havin' that kind of job....I know the janitors kind of liked me workin' there an' I know a lot of 'em kinda' miss me right now, with me not bein' here. They jus' kept tellin' me I was a hard worker an' everything. I jus' cleaned everything real good.

Inquiring about your experience in the Housekeeping Facilities Specialist

Program once again you repeated the benefits of your filing system. Your good memories occupied the forefront and any bad memories were buried deep.

I don't remember any bad experiences. I jus' remember good you know 'cause I really liked it.

As I prodded you admitted to one unproductive and disputed employment practice and confessed:

Oh mainly about when I was standin' around talkin' to my friends an' not doin' my job an' everything.

Since then you have developed as a worker so now at your current hospital job if you engage in conversation, it plays out differently:

No, if I do talk to someone I jus' keep workin'.

Implicit in your vocational training you were taught to organize a work strategy and plan. In fact, your Housekeeping instructor helped you develop a checklist because you so easily omitted important cleaning details.

Little things that needed to be done first ... go an' do those first an' go do your usual routine. 'Cause some things need to be done then other things.

Your education was not confined to the work place. Louise, your house mother and your foods instructor, instructed you in culinary skills and life skills. Her frequent recitals echoed in your words:

She taught me how to cook an' everything ... so I can cook my own food an' everything so I don't have to go out an' eat every night an' stuff like that ... mainly not worrying about other people an' everything.

You valued the diversity and range of education afforded by the secondary at post-secondary transition program which equipped you with a view beyond your stagnant vision of home:

Um, mainly jus' helpin' goin' out in the real world. Jus' how to kinda' cook an' all that, doin' a job an' everything. Mainly jus' helpin' me go out and do that kind of stuff. Living by myself, that's jus' mainly what it did for me. Not like before I jus' wanted to go back home an' everything which no I jus' livin' by myself an' everything, doin' my own cookin', helped me a lot.

You considered the privilege to develop and practice interviewing skills and to amass the documents necessary for a job application. You further appreciated the opportunity to practice the rudimentary skills of conversing and shaking hands.

Well they jus' taught me how to get through an interview 'cause I wasn't that good at interviewing helped me 'cause I wasn't that good at

interviewing before the I got back at college an' that kind of things....Well, we had to do this for class an' everything. We had an interview with some, practicing interviewing an' everything an' had to write a resume an' cover letter an' everything, which that took a while for me to get all that together an' everything 'cause I wasn't really that good with talkin' to other people at that time. I worked on my handshakes an' all that.

Your training was neither singular nor insular rather it was repetitive and engaged:

We kind of did it throughout the year; about half the semester they kind of practiced an' worked on doin' it an' everything.

Authentic instruction arched and connected to your current work milieu and expectations. All of your mundane concerns were addressed in your post secondary setting:

It helped me a lot too, since I got this job at the hospital here. It helped me get through the interviewing an' everything, plus giving good handshakes an' everything like that....An' how to deal with stress, an' how to deal with other people. They jus' got me ready jus' to go out into the real world here an' they jus' got me all ready an' made me learn how to cook by myself an' all that, cook different things an' not jus' goin' out to eat every time an' that's probably about it that I can think of.

Although you neglected to initiate the subject, I was curious about your recollection of your participation in Skills USA and inquired. I sensed your reticence resulted from your placement in that competition. Although you placed first at the local level, I recalled that when you and your two peers competed at the state level, you fell below your peers and placed third.

Yes I remember Skills USA. It was different. I was nervous an' everything.

Clearly it was not that difficult, Eric. You did things that April in front of the judges that you practiced in the classroom and performed daily during your on-the-job job training. Notably two factors undermined the experience for you: the

apprehension that you demonstrate your skills in front of judges and the realization you placed third out of three participants.

Um, mainly jus' cleanin' in front of other people. Um, all the judges an' all that, had ta' clean in from of 'em. Um, it was jus' tough 'cause had to talk at the same time. It was jus' really tough, really tough.

Your housekeeping instructor pressed you to participate in the competition. Comparing her motivational techniques to your mother's you discerned profound similarities:

Probably the teachers, the housekeeping teacher she was jus' the one who loved to do a good job, kind of pushed me to clean real good an' that kind of thing....She kind of pushed me like my mom did. She jus' wanted me to be successful an' everything. She wanted to be get everything done.

Not yet assuming self responsibility for your educational progress Theresa, the secondary at post secondary transition program Housekeeping instructor provided crucial reinforcement as well as high expectations for your progress:

Um probably jus' she was always jus' there when I needed her an' everything when I had questions an' when I really didn't want to read or anything she jus' kept pushin' me to read the chapters an' everything when I jus' wanted to go back to the computer an' everything when I had everything done an' she jus' said, "Go read your book some more – your chapter some more."

On the work site she administered your required affirmation:

She us' mainly jus' kept saying', "You're doin' a good job."

Changes were forthcoming as you were expected to do more and more on your own. When you held your college year IEP meeting, the dynamics and the responsibility switched:

'Cause, um I had to do most of the talkin' an' everything; I was like the main person that was there speaking.... I suppose, I really didn't do too much talkin' in high school. I was mainly jus' there, teachers doing the, doing the IEPs an' all that....I had to do it myself, get everything ready an' everything. After that I had to, um, do thank you letters an' wrote to people that came.

With thought and with practice you assimilated your leadership role and enhanced your performance in your IEP process and meeting.

Oh, I was kind of, I was nervous tryin' to talk an' everything, figuring out what to say....I jus' kept on practicing an' everything. It took awhile, but I think I did pretty good on it.

Understanding their rationale, the staff continually mounted their expectations and rallied your autonomy.

My teachers an' all that. In college, they jus' kinda got me ready to just an' livin' by myself an' all that, an' tryin' to find a job to keep an' everything.

From a Façade of Friendships to a Framework for Friendships

A third theme emerged as you related what kind of a person you were when you attended the community college compared to your former high school self. Learning to develop friendships and having friends enhanced your quality of life.

Um, I think I was more outgoing, not to start with but after a few days of starting to hang out with other people. Um, nicer than when I was during high school because I kind of grew up a lot during that time period....Ah, I was nice to a lot of the students. I didn't get upset like I would before.

While you attributed increased maturity for the fact you were kinder to your community college classmates than you were to your high school classmates, you failed to recognize the seedbed for change. Rather than tossed into a traditional dorm setting you lived in the structured South Dorm with a

housemother and more supervision than the conventional dorm setting. Part of your structured programming included eating breakfast and lunch family style and participating in twice daily group sessions with the other South Dorm students. Furthermore you traveled from dorm to meals and classes in communion with this group.

Although you explained you had a friend or two in high school, your high school teachers had informed me you had no friends. Small wonder high school was a grim experience.

Mainly jus' like one or two, actually jus' one of 'em. I think that's about the only one I had in high school....Kind of upset that no one liked me an' all that. I didn't really have many people to hang out with. I was mostly, when school got done with, I went straight home. I really didn't do too much.

Negotiating the change from living a solitary existence to being thrust into a mob, you escaped to bed early:

It was tough to start out. Really tough 'cause I didn't really know 'em too well an' I always went to bed early before. By the time I was in college an' everything an' my roommates liked to stay up an' party an' everything. An' I really didn't like an' stuff 'cause they always came in late. It was tough. It was.

Who would have blamed you had you moved back home with momma.

You considered that, yet you resisted:

No, I thought about it but I didn't do it.

You strove to uphold and maintain your customary solitary existence within a community college community; however, the staff steered you toward others. Even as you struggled to maintain your outsider role, I sensed you hungered for friendship.

You guys jus' kind of jus' kinda' pushed me an' I jus' kept on while I was livin' at the dorms I jus' kind of liked bein' by myself, doin' my own kind of things an' all that ...cookin' for myself....It was tough for awhile 'cause I didn't really have that many friends to start with, I was mostly jus' in dorm jus' doin' my homework or watchin' TV an' all that, goin' up to the Wellness Center....

Living with strangers and lacking the rudimentary skills to overlap your life with theirs, you confessed your reticence to making personal connections:

Always comes slow getting to know people an' all that. All those stuck in the room not goin' out an' doin' things an' I was always goin' out doin' things by myself an' all that and not really with other people, so they kinda got me ta loosen up some an' that kind of stuff.

Conversely, with pride you told about peers who drew you away from your self centered confinement:

There was a few of 'em that encouraged me to get out an' do things but I didn't do it right away. It took me awhile. Um, like Kirk, he kinda got me to get out some an' hang out with some friends. He kinda got me to go out some too. After that day I jus' kinda really changed so I was always kinda' hangin' out with other people an' all that, doin' things with more people an' not jus' by myself.

What you attributed as the desire of the other students to get you involved was in reality more your deep yearning to be counted a member of their fellowship.

I think the other students wanted me get out an' do things with 'em an' everything. An' they knew I was jus' sittin' in my room watchin' tv or that kind of thing an' sittin' down doin' my homework or seein' go up to the Wellness Center by myself. They jus' wanted me to get out an' do things with other kids.

Through participation you grew to understand the necessity and the joy of interdependence:

Well it took me a little bit but I went with it an' jus' started likin' it.

I really didn't like jus' sittin' in my room jus' doin' my own thing. I kinda liked goin' out with all them people an' everything an' doin' other things.

You understood the necessary counterpoint between stubborn painful isolation and the glorious dependence and fellowship of friendship. Your change, involuntary yet desired, came with age and with circumstance and was the bridge from lonely isolation to involved companionship:

Oh after getting' a few more friends an' everything it helped me out a little bit 'cause I was always havin' things to do now an' hangin' out with friends before I wasn't probably doin' anything jus' sittin' in the dorm jus' doin' my own thing. I jus' changed, made me change.

Caring for a Woman

College life, full of surprises, you met a young woman in college who tempted you into love:

When me an' Stacey first went out an' um, what day was that? I can't remember now, 'cause after that day we kinda gotten closer together an' all that 'cause she was probably about the only one I have gotten about as close as most people would because when I was in high school I didn't have that many people get as close as she did. She's about the only one I have loved as much, liked as much. (remembers first date) Oh Valentine's Day when we first went out to that dance you know at the college.

Drawn by the passion for relationship void in your high school experience you proudly recounted your college social venue and described your relationship with Stacey:

When I was in high school um I didn't like the girls that were in high school but when I got to college an' everything I kind of jus' changed a lot the time. Girls hangin' out with jus' about every night.

Reflecting on a deep vicissitude, your fidelity to Stacey captured you:

Well we was, we hung out jus' about every night. We jus' gotten closer together, watched movies together, go out an' other stuff, goin' for walks

together, goin' up to the Wellness together, doin' stuff together, kind of got us closer together an' everything.

Although your family has met Stacey, they have neither demonstrated nor voiced their approval of your relationship. Clouded by your emotions you imagined their unstated favor:

Yeah. My whole family has met her right now, except for jus' a few. Oh they like it.... I think. They didn't really show it that much, but I think they like it.

Unlike your family you were demonstrative concerning the object of your affection. Your appreciation for a relationship was enhanced because you both understood and had experienced its absence:

I like it a lot. 'Cause I really didn't have one in high school an' everything. I jus' brought me closer to some people.

A change occurred once you both left the college campus: you to your hospital job and Stacey to her job 45 miles away. She set limits on your phone calls and your visits:

She don't want me to call every night. She usually jus' wants to do it once a week. Mostly jus' once a week we do something, jus' stuff on a weekend. 'Cause me an' her schedules don't get a long an' everything....

Had you secured more experience with women you might have picked up two warning signals. She did not want you calling every night, countering that it was for your own financial benefit and you base her affection for you on what you have done for her:

She jus' doesn't want to get my phone bill up high an' everything. Which I been tryin' to do that. Hasn't been easy but.... 'Cause I know she likes me an' everything an' always I'm nice to her 'cause I am usually buy her lunch an' somethin' to drink an' that kind of thing. We usually go try to find a movie which I buy that, which we haven't been at a movie for a while.

Given an opportunity to write Stacey a letter you would have declared your love for her. Understanding the labor and the duration of your thinking processes, your suggestion that the letter would include at least two pages confirmed a substantial investment of affection and time:

Um it would probably be at least two pages long on that one – cause I don't get to see her too much anymore. I would jus' keep sayin' how much I miss her an' everything how much I *loved* (emphasis) her an' everything. That's mainly what I 'd put in those letters.

Less than a week after our last conversation, propped in a chair in my office you related that it was Stacey who wrote a letter to you. Instead of affirming her love, however, she enclosed her key for your apartment and informed you that your relationship was terminated. The letter's message was reinforced a few days later with a visit a from the local police informing you that beloved Stacey had obtained a restraining order against you. You were not to go to her work place or to her home. I knew Stacey had left you for a man lacking the rudiments of common sense and bent on becoming a professional wrestler.

You left my office to tell others at the college your story of love gone wrong. Still in shock, with pride you legitimately took on the role of the wronged. While you no longer had a woman in your life you owned a virile righteous story you could both proclaim and uphold.

Hospital Job: Change and Commitment

During your final days at the community college the transition program staff pressed you to locate employment. Through a college connection a job offer in a large city was proposed and you declined. You feared the distance

from home and the size of the city. You applied for a job at the community college but among the cadre of applicants you lost out. The transition program staff heard of a job opening at the local hospital; you applied, acquired and accepted the position.

'Cause they kinda' wanted me ta' find a job an' everything so I didn't have to stay home an' do nothin' an' everything. An' I was thinkin' of movin' up to Minneapolis but I found out I had another job here in town that was much closer an' everything an' which I'm not used to livin' in big towns, I jus' used to small towns an' everything. I'm jus' glad I found one right here in town.

Once you acquired the job, however, the work to maintain it began in earnest. You had advanced maturity and experience in your favor:

I'm all grown up now, than I was before, an' a lot grown up lets jus' say. I know how to kinda how to keep a job an' all of that.

Previously your mom and your teachers exerted the force necessary to keep you focused and working. Who pressed you now?

Me. I am.

What dynamic or deed instigated this role reversal? You had acquired your treasure trove, a job of your liking, one you gripped with all of your being:

Well I got my job an' everything. I knew I had to push an' get everything done, in the time I had. It jus' mainly changed to get everything done.

You considered the vicissitude, instead of needing someone to prod you now you assumed responsibility for your duties. The basic motivation for your prodding had not abated; however, you now assimilated the prerequisite rationale and quota necessary for commitment and accomplishment.

I like it. It jus' helps me a lot, jus' pushin' myself 'cause I know how much I need to be pushed an' everything an'.... I jus' think that that, um, that I need to be pushed, to pushin' myself to get everything done in time, in the time that I have, I jus' kind of need to push 'cause workin' at the hospital it gets kind of busy "cause I jus' needed to push myself.

The lights were flashing, the banners waving, you desired to keep this job.

Herein lay the key to your most significant learning, seismic change and newfound commitment.

Jus' mainly, I wanted to keep this job so I jus' needed to push myself so I won't lose it, so I won't have to look for another one.

Even with anchored commitment you faltered. As you would frequently stop back at the college, we inquired how your job was going, and you always claimed all was going well. About a month after you started your job, your supervisor phoned to inform the transition program staff that she was hearing complaints from the nurses and the surgery personnel that you were not cleaning the rooms completely. Your supervisor wanted to retain you because you were dependable in reporting to work, agreeable in accepting assigned tasks and a pleasant young man. Your housekeeping instructor met with you and your supervisor. As an outcome of that meeting a checklist was developed, similar to the one you utilized on your college on the job training and the number of individuals issuing you orders was reduced to one. You accepted the constructive criticism and utilized a more structured routine including the checklist.

You honored the admonitions and put them in practice for as we visited you explicated the required rituals to maintain your job:

Make sure I have everything cleaned an' everything out of the room that needs to be out so that when other patients go into the room, they won't have to find other things in their drawers an' all that.... You just gotta keep on workin' as hard as you can, probably do the best you can. That's all about the most you have to do, you just gotta keep on tryin', even if you have to push yourself.

A very personal vicissitude occurred as you assimilated amidst the hospital community. Your words evoked the rite and rigor of care as you spoke of: your coworkers, your work in the life and death hospital habitat, the patients, and your vocational calling. You had metamorphosed from an object of derision and inadequacy to a vehicle of care and compassion.

I started like carin' a lot about other people when I started workin' down, you have to start doin' your thing an' everything, an' jus' doin' what you normally do an' jus', just got to deal with everything an' tease around with everybody that's got to deal with it an' everything. Plus you got to be a lot nicer than to those patients up there too 'cause they are not feelin' too good, you jus' have to nice, every time you walk into a room, out in the halls an' that kind of thing. You just have to be nice. You have to be nice an' friendly.

You discerned your change by comparing yourself in your former role as an ineffective grocery sacker to your present role at the hospital where you demonstrate formative self responsibility and service.

'Cause I'm more responsible than I was before. I'd do a better job this time. Sack groceries a lot better.... I kinda' like my job where I am now better than I did before, it jus' keeps me hoppin'.

In your effort to compare work settings you confused terms and identified hospital visitors as customers but the meaning prevailed. Your commitment to helping others has evolved over time. At Foodway you were asked for directions and failed; now at the hospital through familiarization and repetition you succeeded:

Like at work like if a customer will come in or something that needs directions or like show 'em if I am going in the same direction I will like show 'em an' everything but if I'm not I'll like kind of direct them the right way. Probably when I had my first job I didn't really direct 'em in the right direction. I wouldn't ignore 'em but kind of point them in the wrong direction or somethin'.... Oh for where you're workin' in a hospital ya got to know where ya goin' an' everything an' where everything's at so you can help the other people that come in. I know a lot more now than I did at the grocery store. Helping others became addictive.

Your basic commitment to assist others wove into your sense of self and lingered like a haunting melody.

It helps me because I know I am helping people jus' showin' em right directions an' everything jus' I like to help people around if they need help or if they have any questions or things like that I jus' like helpin'.

Recently I entered the hospital to visit a hospitalized student. It was you who met me in the reception area and asked if I needed assistance. You ably and personably headed me in the right direction. You have experienced and ritualized connection between your aspirations to aid and assist and your vocation.

Your good Samaritan role was formative and evolved as you learned, rehearsed and repeated your job responsibilities:

I didn't really help too many people out when I started 'cause I didn't know the place too good to begin with when I jus' started walkin' around I jus' started learnin' where things were at so I jus' started helpin' people out. Um probably getting' paged over head that kinda' helped me ta do different things so I kinda' know where the areas at an' everything an' tryin' to remember all the numbers an' everything you have to call. Um like "Housekeeping call 1410" "Housekeeping call 1410" that will be the outpatient area. Actually I get paged I don't know how many times during that time to go clean out things that need to be done an' so.

Working with others offered you community; offering courtesies to

the patients enriched your life. Companionship and care spiraled through your days and provided a comfortable framework for your life.

Well, its getting' me closer to 'em. I really like the people that I work with. They are real, real nice. An' with the patients you jus' have to be real nice to 'em 'cause they are sick an' everything. They can't really do anything. You jus' have to be nice to 'em an' everything, jus' kind of tell 'em what you are doin' in there. I like my job with the coworkers I got there.... Yea I like most of 'em a lot of 'em up there – joke around an' everything makes your day go a lot faster.

Your stories of transitions through time offered another way of listening, for as you defined success, interwoven in your words emerged haunting memories. Your success resided in the fact you had maintained your present job for a year in marked contrast to your prior job, which had painfully shriveled and faded as you lacked the skills to continue. Now you remained vigilant, pledging and yearning to preserve your position and to avoid further transitions.

Probably jus' keepin' my job for a year, the whole year an' everything. 'Cause I didn't do that good when I was younger, when I was workin' at Foodway an' everything. Now I think I probably can keep this job an' jus' and jus' keep on goin' now. Hopefully jus' stayin' at the job where I am right now.

Autonomy

The stages of your life which extended you steadily outward in growth coincided with your journey inward as you gradually became less self-centered and more centered as you increasingly cared for others.

I was a lot nicer than when I was in college; I grew up a lot more when I first started workin' an' everything. When I first got my own apartment when I really started growin' up an' all that.

This stage of your life with a job and an apartment offered you choice before, undreamed of the liberty to chose independence or interdependence

at will.

Yea it does – I started doin' more kinda' things I wanted to do. Probably when I first moved into my apartment, my apartment here in town. Probably tryin' to find one an' all that. Where now I'm kinda likin' it an' that kind of thing. Before I was jus' livin' at home drivin' back an' forth.

When you were in high school and had experienced a bad day, you would return to your mother's bosom. Now if you experienced a disturbing day, you practiced centering on the opportune events occurring at the hospital, played a game or made a phone call.

Well I mainly jus' put it behind. There is always good things that happen up at the hospital so every bad thing I've seen an' everything I jus' put it behind. Or when I get home I jus' sit down an' play my play station or somethin' like that jus' get that out of my mind an' everything or jus' call an' talk to someone.

Your memory filing system continued to receive a work out and hopefully became more efficient as you learned from both negative and positive experiences.

Actually all the bad things I did an' all the bad memories I put those to advantage an' every time I do it again I think back to it an' I won't do it I jus' think back to the good things I did an' everything.

September 11th marked another step in your development as you considered and pursued other means to assist others.

Like on September 11th all the bad things that were happenin' an' everything to me that kind of helped me to help other people in the community to help people like give blood an' that kind of stuff. Jus' helped me out to see how bad people need that kind of stuff an' everything.

A paradox was evident; although you sought to assist others, it was only in your work setting that you actually connected with others in this enterprise.

After work your examples of helping others were solitary endeavors.

I go out in the country some times an' I pick up trash because it is jus' somethin' I do an' everything. I jus' go out an' park my car somewhere – go out an' pick up trash an' everything – cause I don't have anything else to do.

Unlike college where you were constantly surrounded by others you identified as friends, you acknowledged that now (more like high school days, when you simply returned home) you did not join with anyone other than Stacey after the workday.

Not really – not yet anyway – I might later on but not right now – I was I actually jus' go on a walks after work an' everything. Sit down an' watch tv a little bit 'cause I don't get to do that too much anymore.

So what occupied the void left after Stacey vacated your life? Did you return more frequently to your parent's home? Did you seek to reestablish college friendships or did you simply retreat to your empty apartment?

Regrets and Revelations

Regrets nibbled at and invaded your consciousness. Surely you could have formed friendships in high school. Certainly you could have done your school work without balking.

Jus' tryin' to make more friends. 'Cause like I didn't have that many in high school. Jus' tryin' to make friends back then. Jus' talkin' to 'em doin' things I like to do like takin' 'em to a movie or go out a cruise a little bit – things like that. Mainly jus' go an' hang out. Probably change my stubbornness – not slammin' my books down an' all that kind of stuff – Probably sit down an' read some more – 'cause I probably didn't do too much reading in high school an' stuff.

You lamented that you could have made chivalrous contributions instead of continually going home to momma:

Probably go out an' pick up trash or give blood 'cause I didn't do that while I was in high school. I mainly jus' went back home.

Rotating from the topic of regrets you set goals for the future: a heart tuned to be more world-aware, socializing with your coworkers and trying to attend church more regularly.

Probably be more active what goin' on around the world now an' everything 'cause I don't watch news too much on tv since September 11th I've been payin' more attention but not as much as some other people.... Yea an' like go out an' do some stuff with my coworkers an' stuff like that um try to go to church more often.

Answering a question previously posed, you defined success. Your response rang of personal experience:

Well you jus', you jus' try an' see if you can go out in the real world an' be successful, see if you can keep a job for a long period of time, see if you will be really successful in the real world here, that's what I think it is.

Eric, during two different dialogues I inquired why were you successful when so many other of your peers do not have jobs or just part time ones and still live with their parents. One instance you handed the credit directly over to your mother and qualified her prescription, a hefty dose of force.

Well I think that my mom jus' *pushed* me an' everything an' jus' pushed me into bein' successful – boosted my energy up – an' get everything done an' everything an' jus' movin' on.

During the other conversation you retained credit for exerting the force to head you toward success. The dissonance was not difficult to decipher. Your mother clearly initiated and pursued the press; however, it was not until you held a job and leased an apartment that you feared losing that you took control.

Well, I jus', I pushed myself a lot. Jus' I needed to push myself jus' to get through high school an' everything an' go out there an' find a job. You jus' got to keep on pushin' yourself. 'Cause if you don't push yourself an' everything you aren't goin' to be successful.

Perhaps even more compelling than your specific postsecondary vocational training were the social skills you learned and practiced in a community college setting. You harvested social skills, crucial in the work setting and enriching your life.

Jus' hangin' out with friends an' everything, gotta be nice to 'em an' everything, made me be nice to everybody at the hospital, with all the patients an' all that, you have to be nice an'.... Well, I'm more outgoing now. I like ta go out an' do stuff which back in high school, normally it was jus' sittin' an' watchin' tv or that kind of stuff like that. Now it goin' out an' doin' things, like goin' out to a movie, hangin' out with friends.... Yeah. It's surprising me a lot. Oh, 'cause when I was in high school, I really didn't like doin' other things with other people, because it was mainly doin' things by myself or with my family, which now I like goin' out an' hangin' out with people. I jus' like goin' out to a movie or somethin', takin' someone out to eat or....

Even as I asked you how you had benefited from our conversations, you appeared to ignore my question, refusing to abandon your companionship theme. I had to decipher your explicit meaning from your implicit references. What you had reaped from our conversations was the revelation and the illumination of your change from a social misfit and brunt of teasing to a social college man and now an appreciated employee and coworker. The community college experience, enmeshed in structured programming pivoted the change.

Yea it was 'cause back then (referring to high school years) I really didn't do too many things with other people an' everything but every year I jus' started growin' an' growin'. I jus' started doin' more things with other kids – especially when I got into college here. That's when I *really* started changin' when I got to college here until now when I jus' care about other people I jus' I can't believe I have changed this much.... Probably from college an' everything 'cause when I first got into college I was jus' kind of by myself an' all that an' when I first started goin' out, I jus' kinda I jus' had to start changin' an' at that time right there an' jus' kept on changin'.... Um probably jus' havin' this meeting an' everything an' seein' how much I

been changin'. 'Cause before I really didn't know how much I been changin' but *now* I know I have changed a lot since high school an' jus' kinda' helpin' me out here jus' knowin' more about me than I did before I jus' didn't think I'd changed this much.

Yes, Eric what you accomplished during our shared times together traversed far beyond your struggles with memory. Remembering was not knowing. Your experiences were illuminated by the more subtle process of recollection (Crites, 1971), and hence your revelation of change. Reflecting on your words, I realized how meager the support in your life for examining your experience.

With appreciation,

Elizabeth

MEG'S STORY

November 22, 2002

Dear Meg,

We held a relationship and a mission mired in kinship; we were both educators bent to affirm our vocation. Our efforts ran parallel; you sought to proclaim your experiences while I endeavored to understand them. When I first contacted you about participating in interviews, I suggested you think about it; however, you responded immediately, "I don't have to think about it. I will do it." Contacting you before our first conversation I tentatively suggested we carve an appointment into our busy schedules; once again it was you who reassured me, "Don't worry. I can make this work. I am a working woman."

Even after completing a long workday, you bounced into my office for our first conversation wearing a big smile, white shorts and an oversized polo shirt. Statuesque, with smooth skin, lively eyes and a ponytail you exuded an effervescent attitude. I was jumpy; I should have collected my gear earlier. I had piles of library books, a tape recorder, a box, a big purse, and a backpack - too much baggage. You on the other hand arrived with a big smile and a small purse. As we headed for a quiet room in the college, I discerned I could learn much from you.

After completing two years in the secondary at post secondary transition program and receiving the Child Care Diploma, you chose to complete a third year on your own. You subsequently achieved an AS degree in Early Childhood Education. Then just a month prior to our first conversation you experienced your life long dream: you were hired as head teacher for a class of five year olds, which included a seven year old boy with Down's syndrome at a Methodist preschool. At the time of our July interviews you were not only working full time but also preparing for your October wedding.

During our conversations my questions often dissolved as you released floodgates of response leaving me no other recourse than to paddle in your direction. This dynamic functioned similar to what occurred during your first visit to the community college as a high school senior. You, your mother and your high school resource teacher met with me, staff, and a group of current students; however, unlike a typical "interviewee," you administered your prepared list of questions to staff and students alike. Your former injunctions as well as your current responses reflected a young woman who aimed to wrestle with rather than to avoid or abandon life's demands and decisions.

Defined by a Disability

The drive to understand your disability and to have others understand it as well positioned a sturdy stake in your life. While yet in kindergarten you submitted to the painful rigors of testing; subsequently branded with a disability label not only affected your school life, but also spilled over to affect how your parents perceived and protected you.

I remember going to school an' I remember taking tests in Kindergarten. An' there were a lot of people around the table quizzing me an' throwin' things at me an' that's when my mom an' dad found out I had a disability at that time. Like puzzles an' rushin' me through, like do this in so many seconds an' I got frustrated. An' I remember walkin' in the hallway that day an' mom was crying, an' that's all remember.

You delivered the final phrase in a hushed reverent tone. Hereon you carried the memory, the genesis of your mother's tears, her first born was flawed. That moment forever etched in your consciousness, directed yours as a life bent not to disappoint but to please. Amid this turmoil your parents' response to your label and their dilemma was to protect you and perhaps themselves by constricting your opportunities.

And it was difficult to my parents, their first child got disability, new to them an' you know they didn't know how to react to it so they jus'... So they kept me in a little shell, in my nest so I couldn't spread my wings.

Although you were identified as having a disability in kindergarten, you did not begin to receive services until first grade. You designated your teacher as determining the onset of services. Again your voice grew soft and reverent as you described ascending the stairs to receive those services.

Ah, I think that kinda' waited after first grade. An then Mrs. Aga kinda' realized that it was time to go up so.

A lurid cheating incident compelled your teacher to connect you with special education services. Perhaps in your unfailing desire not to disappoint, cheating provided the only tenuous avenue to success.

First grade, um, I remember cheating on the test, an' it was math. An' a I remember the first grade teacher ripped up my piece of paper in front of everybody. An' um, that's when Mrs. Aga, my first grade teacher figured out that I needed to go upstairs an' um.

Henry Parks, a resource room veteran, not only helped you negotiate the resource room but also kindled a kinship based on your shared experience.

While you immediately made a connection with your resource teacher at the top of the stairs, you felt divested of the explanation you craved and which no one offered, why you and Henry left the regular classroom to “go upstairs.”

Plaintively and beneficently you excused the teachers’ negligence, inexperience and ignorance.

I met a boy up there, Henry Parks an’ he showed me everything an’ um my resource teacher, Miss Cass was awesome an’ so started goin’ up stairs at first grade. Henry Parks. He was a little boy who went up-stairs for special ed. He, we went upstairs an’ he showed me how we signed in an’ he told me what we did every day an’ um, he helped me out a lot. An’ he had a speech problem an’ handwriting problem an’ he jus’ He was a good friend. He was the only one who knew how I felt an’ the rest of the students down the road did not understand why I went in there because no one didn’t explain it to them an’ it was new to the teachers an’ it was new to that school because they’ve never had a resource room at that time so.

Recording your educational experiences you offered a vivid verbal timeline coupled with teachers’ names. Even as you struggled academically you remained heavily invested in your educational process. You were comforted knowing you as a student with a disability had earned the respect of your classmates.

An’ second grade I remember Mrs. Strand, no Mrs. Meir, I mean, lovely lady. Um, she caught me cheating on my spelling test an’ that’s when she figured out that spelling was not my thing. Um, third grade was writing an’ um, it was awesome going upstairs. You know everybody wanted to go up-stairs at that age an’ you know I was part of the class. The class respect who I was an’ my disability.

Classroom demands were masked by confusion. Only when your

teacher both sat and worked directly aside you did you experience any relief from the recurring classroom nightmare.

I was lost, confused. Everybody got everything done before I did an' it was like, in third grade, um, I remember all the homework. I had a stack, a pile of papers on the end of my desk an' I would go outside for recess an' not do it. Um Mrs. Richardson, my third grade teacher, you know, it never dawned on her. She'd always ask for my papers an' you know, I said, "I'll get them done." First I didn't know what I was doing an' I rather went outside than sit there an' do my homework. I never took it home an' um it was hard. It was very hard until Mrs. Richardson an' I sat down an' we did my homework together an' at first I felt *very* (emphasis) uncomfortable but I kind of got used to it a little bit an' she helped me out a lot, getting' those papers done. I had a *thick* pile of papers on my desk so.

Your obsession with your disability, which attained near human status, consumed your narration and channeled your life focus. You commissioned yourself a pilgrim endeavoring to understand your disability and its wake.

Um, getting to know my disability, trying to understand it. I didn't know why I was up there, probably just getting used to my disability at that time.

Simultaneously acknowledging your aversion to talking about your specific disability and floundering with the spectrum of its impact you conceded:

Um, first off, it's really hard to talk about it. Um, I know that I have one, reading, math, language, um. I don't know.

Perhaps the most effective balm for your distress would have been for someone to have tenderly but forthrightly delineated your mental disability and its potential limiting factors while at the same time illuminating and promoting the potential impact of the strengths of your character. You qualify much the same as you suggested an alternative route, one that illuminated your disability, ultimately tempering your circumscribed demands.

Jus' sat me down an' tell me. Tell me this problem an' you need to come in here an' work on it. Upstairs I went, do all that I had to do, went back downstairs, went back to the room. I did more of my time in that room than in a classroom. *That was tough.* You know, I spent most of my time in the resource room an' it was so hard, very hard.

Adhering to your disclosure theme you conveyed how you and the parents of your student with a severe disability explained to your other students why he was treated differently. You confessed yearning that your parents would have replicated that scene and explained to *your* peers why *you* disappeared to the resource room, leaving me to wonder at the potential outcomes of that imagined endeavor. Jealously and reverently you discerned that the bequests of explanation and courtesy you afforded your student would have like wise benefited you as a student with a disability.

Some of the, you know, new ones that come in. "Why is he being fed or – Why doesn't he get to eat at the table." Um the new ones I have to tell. Um, the dad, the parents came in, mostly the dad came in an' explained to the children *why* they do this an' no one didn't neither of my parents didn't come in an' explain *why* I go upstairs. Um, the par, the children, um see that they're older than him because he is down-syndrome an' he smiles an' that's all an' I'll say no he is seven and this is the day he was born on and they will all dropped their mouths. They do not treat *him* *different*. They treat him as equally an' they be careful with him once in awhile. Um, they are my watch eyes, they watch him when he gets too close to the table for food, "Jake, you can't have that. Meg!" So yeah, its, they are my watch-eyes. An' they treat him how they want to be treated. I wished I had that, but I didn't.

Offering you an opportunity to explain your transition experience in the form of a letter you chose to direct that communication to special education teachers. Pleading they summon their resources to understand the child's perspective, you begged them to understand the consequences of confinement in a segregated classroom and the injury and the teasing that occurs as a result

of that distinction.

I would like the teachers, um the people that works with special needs to understand what it's like because they do not know what is going on in those children's heads. When they shove them in a classroom for so many hours an' they don't get to get out an' see what there is. I've been there, done that. Um, how it feels to be teased an' stuff like that. An' they don't see it, they don't hear it, I mean jus' everybody who works with special needs children, to understand what's going behind the scenes, of a child with special needs so I guess I would do that. I want to tell them about that.

You railed that the special education teachers should administer more freedom and less dictating or pandering, thereby affording students the ability to ascertain a more holistic view of the world.

Let 'em be free, don't drain 'em. Don't say, "This what's going on." Don't give them one side an' they go an' see the other side. That's not fair on them....Um, like *don't* tell them what they want to hear an' then I would hear something totally different, that's not fair. That's not fair on them, um.

You ascertained that your sheltered, jaded education thwarted your preparation for the world beyond the school walls.

Um, like, how can I explain this? Um they think that it's a perfect world out there. Saying everybody perfect an' no one is going to hurt you an' that there is no such thing as drugs an' stuff like that. I'm kind of getting carried away, an' then they turn around an' see what's really out there. Like, I went through. They told me what it was but I wanted to hear. Then I got out there. People drive like maniacs; people stop people an' hurt people. People make other people cry and um.

Forgive me, Meg but I questioned if your previous description was your perception or your reality. You affirmed your response that by reissuing your notions of the world, your teachers deprived you of a more realistic foundation. Further, by segregating you in a classroom with other students with disabilities, they denied you friends in the mainstream without the amplified and deserved

explanation.

They really did. They told me what I wanted to hear and I listened and until I got out there and was like, this isn't what I was told. You know jus' let 'em be free, let 'em be a child. Um, don't keep 'em in the classroom for so many hours. Let 'em be in the classroom with their students because you're keeping away, their friends an' um, maybe as you like a special needs teacher, go in the classroom an' explain why they go in there. An' maybe if the child wants to, they can talk to them while you're in there. You know why they are going in there.

Your reading and writing difficulties shaded your pastoral relationship with your small charges and implicated the more mundane aspects of your job. You plaintively and bravely enlisted tenuous solutions to your onerous dilemmas, promising improvement. Each stated crisis held the potential for opportunity and failure. You chose to prefigure these dilemmas as you had countless times in the past and gripped and pursued the solutions.

I don't read in front of the children. Um, I feel very bad that the children won't learn new words they'll learn the same words that I give 'em. Um, I feel really bad for the children I teach for because I skip over words or they ask me how to spell words an' it's like, "I don't know." But I will always keep working at it.... Reading, reading to the children because I am so slow. An' they don't have time for that. You can tell. Um, I go find an easy book and I read it. If there is a hard book, I'll have my aide read it. Um, I think that the reading part is really difficult right now. It will always be.... Ah, um the most is doing paperwork, writing, typing, an' reading, um, I *don't* read to the children. Um I have my assistant do that an' ... That is really, really sad to say that I am afraid to read in front of 'em because um I don't know, because I am so slow an' they will not sit there until I am done with the book, so reading an' paperwork is really hard for me. But I told my director you know that I am having difficulties with my writing an' she said that she would proofread. I have a teacher right next to me and she proofreads with me so do have somebody that proofreads and Scott does too so and he got me that laptop and so I got a laptop that I take to work an' I type and then I send it on to my next friend and who reads it for me and then sends it back.

You repeatedly salvaged a capacity to groom your dire reading and writing skills. Others witnessed and honored your crawl towards improvement.

Um, for example by freshman year of college, when Scott (husband-to-be) and I were separated um I wrote letters back an' forth an' I always made sure they were proofread before I sent them because I didn't know how Scott felt about 'em an' um over the years Scott has seen so much improvement over my writing. And my grandma one day got a letter from me an' she couldn't believe it was from me because there was no errors in it. I didn't have anybody proof 'em anymore because I *worked* on it. I kept working on it until I knew I could do it. Um, I see myself keep going and don't give up. Um, I will always improve so.

Deprived Youth: Responsible Big Sister and Premature Mother

I was curious if you felt you had a disability at home; you responded fiercely, "No!" Your life on the home front offered a stark contrast from the one you experienced at school. Much different expectations were held for you at home; there you could have been labeled a precociously responsible child. You described yourself as a preschooler:

A responsible one. Um, I did everything. Mom and dad told me that I washed dishes at the age of two and um, so, I don't know. I was getting the hang of being a big sister, and then on top of it, learning to be a mom so I. Yeah, a big sister an' a mom to the little ones.

Who gave you the label of "mom"? Did your mother grow so dependent on you that she shared her title with you? While yet a grade and middle school student you were designated or designated yourself responsible for your siblings.

A mom. A mom at that time. Taking care of you know at time I think Kim, Ann, Kris, and Ana were in that time frame. Um, trying to help mom out as much as possible an jus' being there for mom.

Although only two years younger, your sister Linn enjoyed a far different family status. Linn was the smart, talented, and demanding one. Now pregnant and a college drop out, she wounded your mother. Furthermore, Linn awarded you the blame for the chaos at home. Although she was the gifted one, now after successfully completing a college program and securing a job, you were labeled the successful one and certainly she used both arguments against you, causing you to stay away from the turmoil at home.

Linn got everything that was handed to her, I didn't. Um, I went and I found a job. I earned my own money. Um, my way to go to school was the bus. My sister, car. Ah, I didn't care what vehicle I was seen in. My sister did. My parents went to every ball game that she was in, not mine. Um, my sister was a spoiled, rotten brat and still is and um, I don't know. And there is my sister and I do not get along. Um, she hurt my mom so much and it was *my* fault that I did everything. My fault that things aren't going right. Um, so I stayed away from home for awhile.

Linn's pregnancy accomplished far more than mar your mother. Linn stole your inheritance, the right to have the first grandchild and the first great grandchild. Furthermore, as you planned the wedding of your dreams, Linn, in ritual form realigned the spotlight on herself, this time as the unmarried pregnant daughter, one who would soon have a baby to join her in the limelight.

Therefore a heart-wrenching dissonance emerged. Originally claiming center stage as the smart and gifted one, Linn continued to claim that position as she progressed from wild child to unwed mother while you, behind the stage, worked dutifully at school, became engaged, found a job and planned a church wedding.

After unloading your burden you chose to dispel your painful recollections. With your conscious decision to refrain from continuing your

narration about Linn I discerned a multiplicity of meanings and a pattern. Since our dialogue was framed in the affirmation and celebration of your success, this poignant digression should be suppressed. Back on your home turf, however, with your mother and sister I am certain in ritual rhythm your and their emotions would rekindle and searing sentiments reissue from three fiery corners. Finally, I recognized that as you curtailed your dialogue and suppressed your emotions you had reached a level of maturity and strength foreign to you in the not too distant past. Where previously you functioned in constant emotional upheaval you had developed the capacity to contain and store those emotions.

Um, my sister is um, pregnant. She's due any day now. Um, I'm furious with her. She knew that I wanted to be the first one to have the first great grandchild, first grandchild. Um, she's not even married; there is no wedding to come and she want attention and the weddings in two more months or three more months and this baby is going to be a flaunting baby so um, I don't want to talk anymore.

I contemplated this dissonance and the results; your parents offered one daughter unrestrained freedom and the other both protection and vast responsibilities. Moreover you were haunted by a previously mentioned misstep you took while attending high school as well the memory of your mother's tears as she learned you had a disability. Living under the fear of further disappointing your parents, you pledged not to repeat that script with your own children.

I never got to see anything. Um, my sister got to go to parties an' stuff like that but I stayed home, um, um, I was very, very, very sheltered and I was on a pedestal you know and I will not put my children on a pedestal. To do this day, it's hard to get off that pedestal. I made one mistake already in my life. Er I didn't, but I disappointed my parents, but I won't put *them* on a pedestal. That's jus' wrong so my parents expect more out of me than anything so.

You identified Linn, two other sisters and your brother as the ones that “got the brains,” where you and later two of your other sisters received special education services.

You bragged about your brother, Paul, the low maintenance sibling.

Paul, um, he’s a workaholic, mom doesn’t worry about him at all. He’s a workaholic. He is seventeen and he works at a sandwich shop. He’s a workaholic so mom don’t. He’s the only brother and he just works, works, works.

You invited me to your October wedding. Weeping with emotion at the rear of the church, the congregation waited until you composed yourself enough to allow your father to escort you down the aisle. With two of your sisters as bridesmaids, the one closest to you was Linn. The remainder of your sisters and brother had roles in the wedding. Even though I had not previously met them, I could easily identify your siblings as they either resembled your mother, mirror images of you or were reproductions of your father. At the reception, Linn attempted to give a bridal toast; however, the only thing she managed was sobs and tears. In what was most likely a typical emotional family ritual, Paul sitting to Linn’s right cracked a joke and cut the tension. So without a toast from Linn the groom’s brother offered his tribute.

Continuing your big sister role, you have now added role model for family members and underclassmen to your list of responsibilities. During your third year of college, while no longer a part of the secondary at post secondary transition program, your big sister role expanded as you were hired to assist with a bumper crop of first year students. You were present each day as the students

made lunch and dinner and weekends you supervised meal preparation and laundry chores. Your self-labeled position as role model converged with your reoccurring mothering role.

I have brother and sisters an um, cousins that are looking up at me, you know, saying you know, "Look what she did." And um, so, I'm a role model to most of 'em. I was a role model for the freshman. Um, I was there for my third year an um I went over an' had breakfast an' had dinner with 'em and made breakfast. Um, the building where I was at, I was kind of like the dog watch, watching everybody so I got that kinda responsibility to do that an I worked at the COC building an' got paid for that. Helping the kids to laundry and get them something to eat. So I was basically a role model for them.

Obviously with a keen eye for sincerity and seriousness you astutely distinguished which students elected to follow in your path and those who chose an alternative, misdirected route. You were particularly drawn to the first year students who sought you out for valued advice. In a treasured epiphany you realized that by helping those struggling first year students you not only enhanced their situation but in the doing, also your own. For your feelings of self-esteem and pride increased in direct proportion to your protégés' progress. The synergy escalated as you understood your responsibility to complete your degree as an example to your charges.

And I was, and I really think half of them did look up and some of them just turned back and looked away. I, the first day that we were in the lunch room I looked around and I knew who make it and who wouldn't and I was exactly right of who wouldn't have made it. I knew that the people who were looking up to me would come up to me and say, "What do I do? How do I do this or handle this?" Um, one persons would been Betsy, "What do I do and how do I, you know what I do with Jane and Mavis (instructors)?" I would tell her and she would go do it. Um, jus' you know, I knew that they were looking up at me and that made *me* feel good inside. It made me have more self-esteem. Hey, you know, I'm a role model for these kids so it made me really, really proud. An' that made me keep

going my third year of college. If I can show them that I crossed that stage with an AS degree then they can do it too.

Meg, you observed, identified and understood "attitude" as the key marker for student success as well as for student failure. You offered your impression of those students who chose not to follow your path of responsibility. Certainly you must have entertained some of those same defenses, especially in your early college days. Yet you triumphed as a bastion of wisdom, realizing the inherent value of rules and respect.

Attitude. I can go home an' mom can do everything for me. No they can't always turn to mom anymore so. Life wasn't fair; their rules weren't fair. They thought ah I come to college, I can be free. No, you still have rules and they didn't want to go with 'em so they broke 'em an' tried gettin' kicked out an' you know, and the rest of 'em look down on 'em because the way they act, the way they treated their adults so.

Your experiences gave you a rich reserve of examples as you witnessed at college, just as you had at home, how some young people consistently defy the rules and thereby bypass the opportunity to serve as a positive model for others.

I guess some children jus' think that they don't need to do this. Um they just or they don't like people to look up to 'em or somethin' like that.

During your third year you also succored two first year student roommates. Utilizing your memories and motherly, caring commitment you nurtured and nourished your "little girls." Your ministries overlay your ardent self satisfaction and enhanced your education.

My roommates were um, Rita and Mindy. Um, spittin' image of me my first year of college I remember. They were shy. Very scared just like I was. Um they asked me, "Okay what do we do for our orientation?" and I would sit them down an' I would tell them what they would go through. Um, Rita

wanted to quit. I would say about the second semester she wanted to be done an' I told her, "No, you can do this, just take your time." An' she pulled A's. I think she did. I think she pulled A's. I was so proud of her. She would come home, "I got an A." You would just be so proud of her. Um, Mindy she had her heart broken and I had ta' help her through that. Um it was like being a big sister all over. It made me feel so good!

Caring for others was both your emblem and your gift to yourself.

I love to help people out as much as possible. But I was jus' glad I was a mentor my third year of college.

Just as strength can also function as a weakness, you acknowledged that you experienced difficulty setting bounds on your caring.

I think that I go way too far to help people out an I think its, I think I push it too far, but I don't know.

Your college friends took advantage of your caring ways. In response you chose to proceed without the potential betrayal or benefit of friends.

Oh, Elizabeth. Um you know I can tell you that right now I have *no* friends. Um, because they would use me in anyway possible, shape, or form. The only friend that I have is Scott and right now I kind of want it to be that way. Um, so, yeah. So there is -- there is no friends. I've been stepped, and stabbed, and poked, and prod and I just can't. I don't want to do that anymore. So they want me here and I can't be there and they'll be mad so, yeah.

The central example of your unbridled care revolved around your first roommate, Linda. Jealous that you had a boyfriend and she did not and Linda nightly went out in man-pursuit, dumping her unfinished class projects on your table as she headed out the door. No matter how many times she repeated this scenario you faithfully came to her aid. You staggered under the weight, attempting to help Linda and struggling to complete your own work. Although

Linda had far more academic abilities than you, she eventually failed much of her coursework and was exited from the program.

I would tell them to do it themselves because like my roommate, um she said, "Help me, help me, help me." So I would help her and she would leave and I got stuck and thinking you know I didn't want to see her fail and it just ended up like she failed anyways so you know, I did way too much. I had too much trust on me, I had way too much on my plate and just adding a few more didn't help it at all.

These memories echoed similar high school experiences.

Um, in high school I can remember in group projects, I'd get stuck with somebody and they would use me because I would get more time on my work, an' this girl would use me and I couldn't take it anymore.

Tensions: Aid and Autonomy

From the moment you initiated receiving special education services you encountered the profound tension between the idea of special education as "holding your hand," carrying with it the security of instantaneous and constant assistance and the idea of special education as "binding you to the nest," obscuring your view of the world and separating you from your peers. Throughout your dialogues you praised and excoriated special education services by turns, for it was both a boon and a curse, muting the sentiments for realism and independence. Within the shelter of the resource room you experienced a tempered environment unlike the regular classroom where the concepts and the pace extended beyond your grasp:

Um, I got to work at my own level. I didn't have to *rush*. Um, they just showed me. They took me back. You know if we were in third grade an we were doing division, you know they took me back to plus an' take aways an' stuff like that. They took me back an' retrained me all over again. So it kinda' helped me a lot, taking me back and starting *all over again, fresh* so.

While reaping the benefits of special education services, you recognized a thread of betrayal. In addition to struggling with the atrocities of teasing you were hindered and weakened by teachers who not only sat by your side helping you complete your schoolwork but also miraculously took care of your personal problems. Although you ardently sought and recruited their assistance, you recognized this method of functioning handicapped your learning and disarmed your potential to handle your own problems. Therefore, you felt deprived of a vital learning component, learning and practicing the hierarchy of problem solving.

Hm, getting teased a lot. Um there always, the teachers that were in there helping me you know they didn't let me do it by myself. Or they did it or they took care of everything that need to be done. They didn't show me step by step how to do things. You know, at first you talk to this person and then you go talk to this person. No I jus' went straight ...the main top dog an' they took care of it and I wish they didn't do that. I wished they took it step-by-step. Um, I wish that they would like showed me, more an' more an' more that was out there. Not jus' what I wanted to see or what I wanted to hear, just a little bit more, broaden my horizons out a little bit.

While wise enough to recognize this manner of doing business was debilitating, you were ill-equipped and weakened by not understanding the essence of your disability. Congruently you felt compelled to explain your segregated status to your peers without the slightest notion of its origin and dogma.

A person who couldn't handle her problems. Um, I was a person that cried home to mom. I wouldn't put myself that strong then. I put myself as weak, um, still tryin' to learn my disability an' tryin' to deal with other students, telling 'em why I go up there and why I don't come to their classrooms so.

In carry over ritual from your earlier school days, during you primitive days attending the transition program, you occasionally rushed to my office, a courier depositing an envelope on my desk, and sashay out without a word. These notes from your mother would allude to her concerns and demand that I call her. In one early phone conversation she railed her list of concerns and centered on her dissatisfaction with how Teresa, the instructional assistant, interacted with you. As a result of that conversation but without suggesting my source, I inquired about your relationship with Theresa. After initial bumbling dialogue from both of us you voiced your frustrations. I instructed and positioned you to schedule an appointment to visit with Theresa about your feelings and then return and report what you accomplished. The results were both positive and formative. Forthcoming you steadily developed a more candid, reciprocal relationship with Teresa. Additionally as we helped you develop strategies, reinforced with practice you eventually got to the point where you independently set up your own appointments with instructors and staff as you faced obstacles and frustrations.

Compared to your previous special education experience your high school experience was novel. Although you had a full time aide since middle school, you described your high school aide and resource teacher as significantly different; they offered you more of a power share in your educational process:

They showed me a lot. They did not do anything for me. I did it. Um, they let me have my life. If there was a problem, I could take it to them and they would give my advice of what to do and I would go handle it. Um,

they weren't my baby-sitter, they weren't my mom, they were there to show me the right way to go and how I'm supposed to do it. Um, they were really, really helpful. Um, at that time felt like I knew what I was doing and knowing how strong I was getting and they helped me transfer from high school to college. So they were there 100% until I graduated.

Reflecting on your high school experience you compared and critiqued it with your experience during middle school:

Yes because I really think that through K through 8 they didn't know anything about special ed. I mean, yeah, they did go to school for it but they didn't know what they were doing. They did everything for me. They did my work. They handled everything. When I got to high school, Mrs. Yokum just knew what she was supposed to do and how to handle things so yeah.

Somehow in the tangle of comparisons and descriptions your initial premise of increasing independence in high school crumbled. Perhaps special education staff trained you to handle more of your personal problems but personalized academic life support in the form of a one-on-one full time aide persisted. You described her:

She never left my sight. Um, high school was awesome. Jane Simpson was the most wonderful aide I've ever had. Um she read my tests; she made me feel good every single day. If I needed anything, she helped. Um, the one that was really scaring me in class was reading out loud. I hated reading out loud because I had to you know stop and stumble over words an' at first I thought they would laugh at me. They never did in high school. Um, or middle school at all. Um she was right next to me an' if she knew that I wouldn't pronounce that would get it so it didn't look like I was really stumbling over words because she jumped ahead and told me the word before I even *hit* the word and that helped a lot. Um, she took notes for me.

I challenged you to consider the potential benefits had you weaned yourself from the services of full time aide while yet in high school, thus softening its absence in college. Although you initially agreed with my premise,

you quickly rescinded your acquiescence finding solid comfort in the memory of the abundant assistance you savored while in high school.

I wish they would of started, out of high school, but you know, she came into my classes, and she took *all* my notes and she helped me with all my reading and *that* helped me a lot....Technically, Elizabeth, I was so glad that she was with me because she as the teacher's writing notes, she would put the notes in *my* words and that helped me so much better through college, I mean high school.

Your college experience was a radical departure from the one you experienced in high school. Instead of an aide beside you scribing notes in your vernacular you struggled to merely get the words on paper only to discover you held no clue as to their meaning. Only when you overlaid your instructor's examples with her verbal words and your written words could you make sense of the gibberish. While committed to appreciation for one on one assistance you received in high school, you understood the seismic change that occurred in college as you garnered the wisdom to know that authentic learning occurred only as you experienced it independently.

When I got to college, it was like, "Okay, here are your notes, write 'em." So I would write them word-by-word and I'd get these notes and I don't know the heck what I'm writing and then I would teach myself to write down, okay, Jane (instructor) sayin' example on this, and I would write down Jane's example an' then I would read them, "Oh yeah, I remember that." That helped a lot. I was glad that I had an aide through my whole year and it was very difficult my first year, my freshman year of college. It was very difficult, but I *had* to *learn* that I can't have somebody holding my hand.

Although I had journeyed with you those years, I was hearing about some of your struggles for the first time. Thus humbled, I questioned why you had neglected to inform us about the magnitude of your strife and explained that had

we known we could have readily arranged to make a copy of a classmate's notes. You valiantly and proudly responded that you had ultimately done just that, knowing that you could not depend on your roommate who although well equipped to take notes refrained from even going through the motions. You had entered college with the misguided notion that your roommate would automatically become your best friend and assistant. It took you over two years to realize that Linda did not share your commitment.

My second my third year I did find another best friend. And Kate and we would sit down and we would write notes together because Linda Miller (roommate) didn't write 'em she would do bad on her paper, and I think that I can't do this, I got to do this.

Then by your third year of college you agilely and confidently collected the notes of your peers. Other serious classmates recognized your passion and commitment and joined forces with you in your efforts to scribe and read. Attending the community college, you first learned to commandeer both interdependence and independence, rallying the forces without and within; it became more intelligible and accessible as you built up of coherent self determined mental models.

And then my third year of college, I would, I was not afraid to ask. Hey can I borrow your notes? Can you take these notes and I copy them? And they did, the girls did and it was sooo much better. It was awesome 'cause I had. An' the third year of college the girls knew that I had that disability an' they knew what I was going through and they would help me read. They would catch the words ahead of time and they would take my notes an' I would write them down.

After completing your first year of college, you experienced a compelling

dissonance, the refreshing thought of going home and the realization that by returning home you forfeited the liberty you practiced in college. For as you reentered your mother's kingdom, you again became culpable to her rites and decrees.

Ah, I was so relieved. I got to go home. Um, I know that I was coming back, it was hard to leave my friends that I already made there. Um, I was so excited to come home. My stress level was down an' um, jus' relieved to go home, relax and enjoy my summer....I wanted, I kind of wanted to stay (at college) because I, you know, had my freedom. I didn't want to go home, an' follow all those rules I wanted to be on my own.

Instead of thinking that your education was the transmission of specifics, you learned that the meeting of specific goals was illusionary. You initially mistakenly worried about managing and completing large projects to the point of melt down instead of isolating, chronicling, and discretely undertaking your tasks. You learned before and after and alongside to pace and to abate.

To relax, not worry about the *big* stuff, just worry about the little stuff. Like, you have a paper that's due next month, me I would get all my research done, get it do the paper, have someone proofread, get it in my folder, and be ready to hand in. The little stuff jus' worry about you know, just the worksheets. Don't worry about all this big stuff. It was *very* hard for me to understand that because I don't know. I would just get it all done. I would just myself get worked up and sick that I can't do anymore, that's what I did. I mean I made myself sick the whole year of college. Getting so jus' getting' to the point where I break down. And I did have breakdowns. I mean everybody gets them but I got to the point where I just broke down and cried an' never slept.

Feeling ill prepared for a world beyond high school you were repeatedly drawn to your parable of "showing me what was out there." You conjured that your parents and teachers had created an illusionary vision of a world free from vice. Subordinate to this overt sin and closer to home, the injury you harbored

closest to your mind and heart was their betrayal. Somehow your parents and teachers failed to prepare you for the searing blow inflicted when you were questioned and condemned for your loving ways. You came to college an alien from a large family and a small school, a warm bundle of emotion, love and fervency, applying the golden rule. Evenings you would round up the troops in the dorm, perhaps much as you had your siblings, and march them to the pool or for a friendly sport. You applied your warm hands, loving ways and words on boys and girls alike. Troubled boys, whom no one had ever liked, mistook your caring ways. On a community college campus those who worked with you feared for you and those you touched.

In my eyes, I was, they showed me the good things. You know, all people are good and ya ya ya. They're not. I wish that I got to see more of it. I wish that I got to see more of it. I wish they would take me out and let me see all those people, you know. An' no, they never did. They never showed me there was drugs out there, there was alcohol out there an' there was people out there are so mean and there are killers out there. People step on you and people stab on you. Um, people talk behind your back. They never showed me that showed that to me. I had to learn that on my own and it was *very* difficult because I couldn't handle it. I wanted, in my eyes, *everyone* was a good person and until I came to college, an' you know, I'm treating everyone how I was supposed to be treated. Um, I would say "hi" to all the boys and introduce myself and um. I would tell them the good things, you know, I just have a lovely conversation with 'em. My first year of college I did that on 'em but. No one, I didn't know the heck what I was doing so I go in trouble my first year of college because I was hitting on boys and I don't know. It was a mess an' I had to learn from that and I was not happy so. Um, I was nice to everybody and say "hi" and would always say "good morning" an' you know and that stuff to *them*, it was hitting on 'em and I wasn't and it was hard to tell Louise (house-mother) Andrea (director of special needs) an' Teresa (secondary at post secondary transition program instructor) I have a boyfriend. I'm not hitting on 'em, but they didn't believe me.

I was present in the room but absent from the dialogue when the staff inoculated you for your fraternal ways. Although discontented with their approach, you appreciated their message. Your homey ways while coherent at home and at high school were potentially misconstrued in a broader setting. At another level your revised vision now coherent and adept to foreign ways shivered but responded both to atrocities and epiphanies.

It was nice to know that, but they took it, they didn't listen to the *whole* story. Um, they took it the wrong way and they approached it wrong an um, I wish that they didn't approach it like that, the way they did. Ah, I'm glad that they told me that you know the things I did was wrong, by they shouldn't have approached it the way they did. Um, so now I see I see what's really out there now and it's scary. And I'm still scared to see what's out there, you know, I'm from a town in Iowa and six or more months I'll be in Kansas or wherever and I will actually get to see what's really out there and I'm *really* scared so I'm really. So I mean when we went on our field trips I got to see homeless person. First time in my life to see a homeless person. Um I saw a lot of things that I never got to see so.

Independence experienced, claimed and honed as a rite of both entry and initiation you could no longer suffer bondage and reissued commandments. Releasing the anchor from home you refused to look back.

Um, I know that when school was out, my mom told me that if I didn't get a job here I would have to move back home and I didn't want that. I wanted to stay in my apartment with my husband-to-be and live my life the way I wanted to. I didn't want to go back to trucking kids back and forth, an' new rules. I wouldn't do it, but right now it's like awesome so.

Reveling in your emergent strength, you construed that you would face and surmount obstacles and realized that even with occasional setbacks your spirit would resurrect.

That I can keep going and that no one can't hold me down anymore and no ones going to hold my had so I have to keep showing myself that I can

keep doing it / (emphasis) can build my self-esteem right back up again so.

You found yourself contrasting two ideas. On the one hand you conscripted a scene imagining an earlier era learning to handle your own conundrums. On the other hand you admitted the notion that your former self harbored no recognition of that unearthed power source. Instead, with a mere word and little muscle or maneuvering on your part you quickly recruited your army and they defeated your foes.

It would make me a strong person now. Um, because right now I say, "Yes, I will take so much." And it didn't even dawn on me then but I wish back then they would sit down, OK, you have to take of this on your own. You know we are not going to do it anymore. But they never did. They took care of it so.

Victim of a Good Mother

Your esteemed mother marched through your dialogue rotating roles as heroine and as villain. Whichever the role, she maintained a looming, leading presence in your life.

My mom. My mom was... she was always there. She always told em that I can do it. Mom helped me through a lot; my mom was the main one.

As you acknowledged your mother you recognized yourself. Just as her work ethic elicited no bounds, neither did yours. She was organized, yet your organizational skills met and surpassed hers

She does everything. Ah, she used to work at a nursing home. Um, she baby sits for all year long and she cleans homes....I'm so much like my mother. Um, my mom was organized and she worked a lot and I am so organized that it makes my mom sick because I can tell her where. She would call me and say, "Do you know where so-and-so things are? I hadn't even been in the house for a week and I would say, "Yeah, it's in the...."

Where you and your mother shared the virtues of industry and organization, she did not initiate you into the rites and the responsibilities of dealing with your school problems. Solving your problems remained solely your mother's domain. You could deposit your problems at her feet like a pile of dirty laundry; she would ably take care of them allowing you to proceed without entanglements or involvement.

My mom always, mom, this person you know, whatever situation I would have, she would take care of it for me or they would I had nothing to worry about 'cause, okay, my problems are solved and I can move on.

I had the opportunity to observe this effective process up close. I asked you if you knew that while in the transition program your mother would frequently call me. Evidently, there were times you were so insulated you were not even aware that your mother was attacking your problems.

I never knew that my mom called. I never knew that. So what would she say?

Your mother usually told me, "I'm not happy." "I'm upset." Then she would issue her storm of complaints. I would listen. I would explain. She would listen to me and then it would be amicable for the moment.

Oh wow.

While acknowledging that your mother needed to offer your release, you understood both her reticence as well as the ramifications of your entrapment. Your vision of escape and independence came only by attending the community college. As you experienced liberation, fear was added fear to your mother's matrix. Although you attributed it to your mother, I saw that same fear reflected in

your eyes.

Yeah, She needs me to go and I want her to let me go but she will never let me go, never....Like my mom keeping her so close in her nest. Um, wouldn't let me leave the house. Um, and when I got to college, I was afraid to spread my wings 'cause didn't know how far I can spread them and now at 22 I feel like I have spreaded them out so far that. It's kind of, it scares my mom a lot but yeah.

Construing the Business of Teasing

Heralding teasing as a significant memory from your school days, you conceded that your attendance in the elusive resource room defined you as an object of derision and disdain. What stood between your peers and your acceptance was the guarded but simple explanation from your teachers, construing your purpose for attending the resource room and hence a fuller respectful understanding of you.

Getting teased. Um, just getting really teased. You know, "You go upstairs to the dumb room" or um, "You're slow." I never got picked on a team because they knew at that age that I go to a different room to get help. An' none of the teachers stopped an' told the class why we went in there.

In middle school the special education teachers not only assisted you in the resource room they also tagged along to your classes. The boys were attracted to your warm gregarious ways; however, they were held at bay by your placement and label leaving you to fret and conjure you would never earn a beau.

Um, my resource teacher was very, very helpful. They came to class with me in middle school. Um, I at that age I started having little friends, boyfriends and they, he dumped me that day because everybody in middle school said that, "She's goes to the resource room and she's slow and stupid." And he dumped me that day an' that was very hard. Um, I

thought I'd never get to date again... The kids teased me a lot through that chapter but I got over it.

You knew a simple effective way to deal with the teasing, cry to your mother or inform your resource teacher and watch the magic.

Um went home and cried to mom. Went to my resource teacher an' you know we talked about it an' she basically jus' took care of it. I took my problems to them and they took care of it. So I was like, okay, if I have a problem I go to them and they'll handle it for me, just like my mom. You know, have problems with my homework, she would sit down and help me with it or she do it and she would just handle in all my problems and I had nothing to worry about.

The scenario changed in high school. You attributed the notion that you were not teased in high school to the fact that you were close friends with your aide's daughter. Assuming she asked her mother questions about you and your disability led her and ultimately your peers to understand you. Instead of comprehending your disability, more likely your peers were concurrently maturing and growing to accept and love your warm-hearted means and ways.

Um, I really think that was my classmates that went with me K through eighth grade understood a little bit more, um that my aide Mrs. Brown had a daughter in my class and we became close and so she kinda' understood and I think she probably went home and asked her mom a bunch of questions. Um, never got teased. Never, never, never, never. An' it was very nice and very relaxed. Um, I enjoyed that year. I really enjoyed my high school year. I would go back and do it again even though I wouldn't do some of my grades, you know. Freshman year, I didn't do good and sophomore I wouldn't do again. Junior and senior year I would do all over again but it was nice not being teased at all. I didn't get teased at all. The only thing that we got teased was were the puny freshman and that was it and none of them everyone was very nice and helpful.

Revealing your wisdom and experience you offered tangible testimony that teasing was an innate component of life. Tabulating an effective response you responded in teacher voice, first listen and then give ownership to the child

to handle the teasing crisis. If that approach proved ineffective you recommended summoning the transgressor for meaningful dialogue. Poignantly you administered that educators must vigilantly oversee the war and wounds of teasing, lest negligence cause irreparable harm to the tormented.

There is no way you can stop it. Everybody gets teased, um. I mean all you have to do if a child comes to and says they are teasing, just sit them down and don't you go take them, don't you go solve the problem yourself. Let the child go do it and if it keeps happening bring that child in, the one that is teasing and sit down and talk about it. An' see what happens from there but take care of it before it gets worse because a lot of children now are killing themselves because they are getting teased so many times so.

Unfortunately your caretakers failed to practice your wisdom; when you were teased, their response although more direct and simple proved counterproductive to your growth and self-advocacy.

Oh yeah. It was very difficult an' I would run an' they would take care of it.

Your problems translated as your mother's problems, and she reacted much like a mother animal protecting her young. She enhanced her strength by keeping you weak, mutable and dependent. Undefined by either muscle or grit you slipped through unaffected and unscathed.

My mom always, mom, this person you know, what ever situation I would have, she would take care of it for me or they would I had nothing to worry about 'cause, okay, my problems are solved and I can move on.

Fearful Transitions

Transitions were always painfully difficult for you. You faced your first significant transition as you progressed to middle school. Both fears and help hovered round.

And when fifth grade started coming around to transfer to go to the middle school, I thought I would never make it. Um, the classes I couldn't take. It was government, math and spelling, and language. It was very hard and ah, but I got a lot of help with what I can do and what I couldn't do.

Your school district, a victim of declining enrollment, burgeoning expenses, and old buildings was forced to send you and your classmates to other school districts. Some of your classmates chose one direction others chose an alternate destination. For a close-knit bunch of eighth graders this rift was traumatic; for a young lady in emotional and social overdrive the move was catastrophic.

In eighth grade um the people that went from Fairmont and some of my classmates went to Dows, um, that was the year that they decided to split this class up. It was very difficult for us. Eighth graders to separate because we just became a close bond. Um, then we went to Dows, and new people, new staff, new rules, new building, brand new building. They built a new building for us to come because the old one was wrecked. Um, it was very, very scary for us to go, um but my class, the freshman.

Recalling your experiences as you were transported to a new school you acknowledged that although you shared fears with your fellow emigrants, you harbored a unique fear, defining your special education role in a new setting. You positioned yourself for a response; however, to your amazement no one questioned you.

Um, I can remember that we were all scared on the bus on the way to Dows and Fairmont jus' wondered are they gonna like u an' all that kind of stuff an' that in the back of my mind its like right, now I got to explain to all *these* kids what I'm doing in special ed., but through that whole high school year no one didn't answer or asked me any questions about why I left the room, why my tests got read to me and note-taking and why do I have June Swift who is my aide with me um, it was freshman year it was scary.

Your transition fears eased as your freshman class, others from your former school as well as those from the new school, began to function like egalitarian family members. As an active participant in this melding process, you earned a beloved prize: acceptance. You were no longer cast as a special education student.

The class of freshman decided.... we became very close to...we became a family, brothers and sisters, everyone expect, you know everyone treated everybody the same, no one didn't get treated different and that is why I liked my class a lot because they accept me for who I was and um, it was nice. I liked my class a lot because they accept me for who I was in special ed or why I went to the resource room.

In your fledgling effort to fit in and establish friendships you connected with the wrong crowd. For perhaps the first time you got in trouble in school which undoubtedly created repercussions at home and profound heartache for you. While unjustly accused and punished for this transgression, which you chose not to explain, you learned the humble lesson of avoiding guilt by association.

Um, I was dating the wrong guys. Um, I just got into that group. Um, I got in my freshman year my first in-school suspension. Um, it wasn't my fault. The principal was very sexist. Didn't listen to my side of the story. Listened to everybody else's but mine and I served my time and I deep down I didn't deserve it. Um. Ah, I don't want to talk about it. Um, I did my time and from then I learned my lesson on who I should hang out with and who I didn't so that's it.

The time came for your school kin to separate. As you honored the wealth of relationships you recognized that departure was inevitable and necessary.

We just kept going until our last year and last year was very hard for us. Um graduation we all bawled. Um, the boys did too. That's how close we were. Um, we didn't want to cross that stage. We were all ready to head

out the door, say forget it, we don't have to go through this, we won't go through this, we don't want to graduate but we did, we had to move on. An' still to this day and when we see each other and we e-mail each other, we still are as close as can be so that was our family right there so. It was neat.

Your transition to the community college was enmeshed in emotional turmoil. When I inquired what your emotional level was when you came, you aptly responded, "Oh, I was a wreck." It took two vehicles to transport you and your belongings the brief 45-mile trip. Somehow you could not untangle yourself from your good byes. Although you had invested a great deal of effort and finances in amassing things to outfit a dorm room once there, you were more than ready to gather it all and retreat.

Um, that day was when we packed up the two vehicles, it was like all packed an' everything, trunk, back, under seats, everything was packed. Um, just that night, the night before it was time to go it was very, very difficult and then that next day it was even twice as hard saying good-bye and stuff like that. And then we got there, you now things were just, you know, moving things in, and after it was time for them to go, um, I don't want 'em to go. I said, "Let's pack up my stuff an' go."

Despite the strong pull to return to your safe haven with your mother's backing you forced yourself to stay. Internally you knew that you could only accomplish your goal by making this work.

And then got to meet everybody else there and got to our first meeting of the next day an' I knew right away, I'm going home, no more of this. I gave it my shot, don't want to do it anymore because it was too scary and I wanted to be in my nest again. I wanted to be comfortable in that safe spot but then deep down I knew that this was what I wanted, got to keep going an' I did. I kept going and um, first day of class it was like, no way, I can't do this and then I jus' had to take a breather an' jus' go with it, try it out. My mom wanted me to do one year of college and then I give it my first year of college and then, hmm, I kind of like this I go my second year and I kinda' like this, my third year. But that first day, I wanted to go straight home, pack my stuff and go home, but I didn't, I stayed.

Your ongoing fear, defining your disability, reemerged and roared. Similar to your experience in high school, the other students did not filter you through a disability lens like you did. Despite your struggles if given an opportunity to play things out differently you would have chosen the same route.

Um, it was very scary, very scary to come to a new place. Um, the only thing that I have troubles with is that everybody in high school knew who I was and my disability and then I had to go back and you know, probably explain to people but I didn't. Um college was just, who you are; they expect that person and not anybody else. So it was very hard to come over to college, but I'm happy that I did come over here. I won't change it. If I had to start all over again, this would be the number one place I would go so.

Through the transition program, you completed two years at the community college and earned your Child Care diploma. You turned 21 and were no longer eligible for the program, but you proudly chose to go a third year on your own without special education support and earned the Early Childhood Education A.S. degree. Lacking the previous level of funding you piled two jobs on a heavy load of classes. Nourished with fortitude, hard work and resolve you claimed your lofty goal.

Once I went to college, my last year, I got to make the decision to stand up for myself. It was very, very scary. Um, I was, I had a job, going to school, I had two jobs. Working at the church and the day-care an' cleaning an office an' that was very difficult, working two jobs an' going to school. Um, ah, I was very nervous my last semester of Spring 2002 of getting my grades. I was worried about my Math, an' I was worried about Government, and I passed them, both. Um, I passed them. I was shocked, very, very, shocked. I did not, I had to take an incomplete in Science and pick it up in the summer time and finish that off with Martha Fank.

Your next transition occurred as you sought employment. Your first job was chaotic and short lived, yet you persisted and secured another job at the

Methodist Preschool.

Very, very difficult to find a job. Um, I found a job in Farley. Mavis helped me I went for that interview and it was very, very lousy... Um, they were rude to me... I just, I couldn't work there they never called me so I went on. I looked for a job an' found one in Mills. Um I only worked there four days an' I quit because the director did not show me how to run things, did not tell me what was supposed to go on, um it was a mess. I don't understand why parents kept bringing their children there. It was, nothing was clean, ants everywhere, never sprayed down nothing. Um, never washed their beds, cots, so I quit an' I went to the Methodist Preschool.

Fears continued to run rampant in your life. Fears prevented you from participating in such mundane activities as voting.

'Cause I don't know how to vote. I'm afraid to vote. I know my mom was not happy with me but I don't know how to vote. I have a voting card, but I don't know how to vote. I'm scared to go into the booth.

The fears of further transitions swirled around and around, but you had experience going for you. Releasing the tendency to harbor worry you have learned to visualize your self-determination.

Um, jus' sit down and just think for a minute. Think you know, how you are going to handle it an' stuff like that. Um, just like with this whole thing of moving to Tennessee. You know I had to sit and think, what am I going to do and how I'm gonna handle it. Just sit and talk it over, that's all I can say instead of just bundling it inside and not let go, just sit and talk about it.

While certainly enmeshed in fear, what was so striking about each of your transitions was the existence of repeated moments of choice and subsequent personal investment. Each transition reaped multiple and creative beginnings and a new opportunity to compose and direct your life.

Grandmother: Kindred Spirit

Given the choice you opted to emulate your grandmother. Her role arched far beyond a traditional grandmother. As a college educated woman and a former teacher, she provided both the inspiration and the motivation that you could attain the same.

I wanted to be like grandma. Um, she was the one that went through college. It's grandma. It's grandma. I've always wanted to be a teacher and she's the one that told me, she never looked down on me. She said, "You go on and do it. You will not fail." So it's grandma.

Your relationship and your identification assumed a degree of mystery and spirituality demanding growth and change and learning. As you vowed to emulate your grandmother, you entered a covenant of vision and revision.

Um, I think I have a part of my grandma's heart inside of me in her spirit. Um, I don't know. Um I don't know. I just know I am like my grandma and always will be 'cause everyone says I am so (spoken reverently).

Perhaps the most highly prized and valued inheritance you acquired from your grandmother was the spitfire to beat the odds. For when I inquired why you continued to persevere in your goal to be a teacher when everyone railed that you could not you responded:

I don't know. I don't. I think I got a little bit from my grandma. 'Cause my grandma likes to prove 'em wrong and I told 'em, "I can do this." An' I did it.

Self-Determined Decisions: Career and Community College

While in high school you sampled various careers. Your resource teacher handled the arrangements. Your mother, however, directed your first job

placement. Perhaps she thought working at a gas station would be a viable career option for you; unfortunately you did not succeed at cash register 101.

We would find a job, she would find a job and I would pick of which one I wanted to do. And the gas station one my mother wanted me to work there, to see, to work the cash register. I will I hated it. I mean, my mom wanted me to work at the gas station. Okay, okay you know, I'll do it.... I mean if I kept, if someone like stood there an' showed me how to do it and watched me do it for a couple days with the gas station, with running the cash register, I think I'd get the hang of it, I don't know it's that money thing. They didn't work with me on the money very well.

You chose the next site. Your grandmother and her love of flowers influenced your decision.

And then I wanted to work at a flower shop because my grandma loves working with flowers so I wanted to try it and I loved it. I loved seeing the fresh flowers an' I loved when the guys come in and get a rose for their girl er somethin'. It was very fun.

Working at the day care center hemmed your career direction and goal.

And then I worked at the day care center and I absolutely loved it. And then I think really right there I really wanted to be a teacher.

Your aspirations operated in opposite alignment to your mother's and the school staff's perception of your potential. They unanimously dismissed your dream. They qualified their opinion with the injunction that the required coursework exceeded your capabilities and offered an alternative career focus. You felt deserted and bereft of their belief in you as you valiantly fought to attain your precious dream.

That was with some teachers, and the principal, an my mom and I and then my resource teacher...at that one, it was more what college I was going into and what education, an' what all I was going to do with the rest of my life. I told 'em I wanted to become a teacher and they all frowned on that and they told me that it would be way too much work and that um, there was no way you would handle all that load. They were pushing me

be something else and I do not....Um, they told me that I would *not* be able to be a teacher. Um, I cried and they didn't have any faith in me at that time an' I knew that my mom didn't either. It was gonna' to be too hard an' there was no way I was gonna' be able to handle it.

They offered a far humbler option. Instead of teaching you should clean homes.

Kind of like to clean homes an' stuff like that an' I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to do any of that housework cleaning stuff.

Your savior, your high school principal, resonated with your lofty mission. The principal based her stance on the fact that her daughter with a disability had resisted advice concerning her limitations and instead pursued and attained her goal. She sensed a similar characteristic in you; the dogged persistence and grit to attain the impossible.

Um, until the principal told me that her daughter was in special needs and that um, her daughter showed her what she could and couldn't do. "I've got a daughter with a disability and she proved us wrong...an' I know you can do it too." And I stucked to my guns that I wanted to be a teacher and I went for it.

The decision to support you made, the group vowed to assist you locate a school with adequate supports. Your first community college choice did offer a special needs program or provide dorms. Your resource teacher, however, had heard about the secondary at postsecondary transition program and set up the visit. The group declared the program a match.

The principal just said, "She can do it. Let's go for it." And I did it and they helped me find where I wanted to go. I got to pick the college where I wanted to go and first college didn't have a special needs program and they didn't have dorm rooms and so then I think my resource teacher found this college and then we went and looked at it and we liked it and signed the papers to get here.

I attended the spring IEP meeting at your high school where everything was set in place for the following fall. Alternative versions of that meeting emerged in our dialogue. My most striking memory was when your resource teacher in a final argument affirming your goal's exceptional difficulty or impossibility reported your recently tested academic levels: reading, fourth grade, writing, fourth grade, factual knowledge, fourth grade level and math, fifth grade. Tears streamed down your face as she submitted the naked results. When I inquired about your reaction to my vivid memory, you had no recall. Your predominant memory focused on a more homely detail, where you would live.

While discussing housing options, I had explained the dorm setting that included a house mother and more regimented rules than a typical dorm setting such as the house mother retaining the students' car keys during the week, curfew hours, and set time for meals. Such an arrangement defeated your personal agenda of burgeoning freedom. A friendly compromise was reached. You would live in the dorm with the housemother but only subject to the basic rules of dormitory living.

I remember the conversation about what building I would be in that they'd take my keys away and stuff like that and I was so furious when I walked out of there. My mom was kind of too because my mom wanted me to spread my wings an' all I'm doing is getting sheltered in again an my mom didn't like it, my grandma didn't like it and Scott didn't like it. An' then you guys coming with the quiet dorm. Then it was more lenient of what I can do. And I was so much happier that you guys found something else for me to do instead of being sheltered in.

During your first days and weeks at the community college the timbre of your transitions were diverse. The pathos of stepping into unknown and

unprepared for terrain including roommates beneath your expectation and coursework bereft of a full time aide. These feelings were coupled with the ethos of resolutely trekking toward your dream and encountering a new kind of support.

Um, I came here, and it was very, very scary. I didn't know what I was getting myself into. Um, I knew I wanted to do this. Met my roommates, very difficult. Um, the classes were very difficult. Um Teresa Hill (secondary at post secondary transition program instructional assistant) really helped me a lot.

Without the directorship of a full time aide you tested doing things on your own for the first time. Your schooling was abusive, the pressure was translated into your gallant but ineffective efforts. As your grades fell, Teresa advised you to have your tests read and that service coupled with your continued hard work and dedication turned the tide of failure.

Um, freshman in college, um, I was getting behind an' not getting my test read an um, I remember Theresa jus' telling us, "You gotta get your test read." An' I started doing that and I pulled "As" and "Bs" my first year of college. Second year of college was more homework, more loads. Um, livin' with the same roommate as my freshman year and it, I shocked everybody. I pulled "As" and "Bs" again. Mid-term was like "Fs" and "Ds" and then I can just remember my teachers saying, "You've got to get these pulled up." An' I did I got 'em up to "As" and "Bs" and I know I had a few "Cs" in there.

Feeling bereft of family support you persisted in the only fashion you knew:

More studying, more work. Um, I know that my mom an' dad an' everybody jus' knew I wouldn't be able to do it.

You experienced an interesting example of incongruity of services and communication. While in high school you savored the assistance of a full time

aide. This service, however, was neither documented on your IEP nor discussed at your final high school IEP meeting. Therefore, those of us who worked with you in the transition program were unaware you were addicted to that support, and since you and they failed to inform us, you suffered. Again, however, you mustered your amazing indomitable strength to persevere.

When I came to college I felt that they. I felt that the secondary at post secondary transition program was, I need an aide and that aide to come up with me everywhere I went. Um, no, it never happened. I was really quite upset because I was so used to it, having an aide through my whole year. Um, I don't know, um, it was very difficult. I was very, very upset. Right then I wanted to quit 'cause I knew I just wouldn't be able to handle it but I didn't.

You entered a world where answers steadily changed; recalling the dichotomy of your expectation and your experienced reality you understood that you needed to revise your opinions of possibilities. Instead of a full time aide you heralded tenuous yet triumphant independence.

I don't even think I was even told if that I was going to have an aide or not. Um, I thought it was going to be just like college, I mean just like high school. You know, only a few people was going to be in there, and that was it. But no there was a *lot* of people in that one room and it made it, I don't know, it was just very hard to get used to that and having an aide. You know I thought Theresa was going to be right there, side-by-side, holding my hand through everything, but, no. Theresa weaned me off of that. It was very hard and very *difficult*. I was very stressed out, but I got used to it.

Your vocational program provided a valiant precursor to the world of work, encapsulated in one word:

Practicum. Practicum. Um, jus' seein' all the different, um, day cares and um, when it was time to go on trips they took me places I had never been. An' it was scary, but I got to see what was really out there and it was pretty cool and so. So practicum and field trips to everywhere that we got to go, it was really cool.

The bridge between dependence and independence positioned from one source, the secondary at post secondary transition program. As you learned to do and think things on your own you were delighted not only by your newfound skills but also by the process of discovery of the power you held within, leading to a new kind of experience. The joy of self-determination surpassed the hardships of learning and opened up the vistas of self realization, understanding, and self appreciation.

Ah, the secondary at postsecondary transition program taught me, well it taught me a lot. Do things on my own, um stand *up* for myself, um that jus' to take my time with my work and not *rush* through it and get out and um, sit down and study. It got me ready for the world because no one didn't teach me how to um or teach me how to see what was really out there. The secondary at post secondary transition program kind of did a little bit of that. Um the program did not hold my hand and I figured, you know. I could have someone hold my hand throughout until I leave this place but *no*. Everything I had to teach by myself and show myself I could really do it.

You pondered a horizon bereft of the secondary at post secondary transition program experience, a vista denuded of today's victory:

Ah, honest to truth Elizabeth – work in a factory. Or probably stay home with mom and help her with day-care. But without the secondary at post secondary transition program I wouldn't have been here today.

You experienced the intrinsic joys of impervious resolution, clouded by the painful unbelief of others and yet warranted by your ultimate triumphant victory.

You know, you have proved everybody. I know that when I first crossed that stage, I knew that I was very happy with my diploma. I proved everyone out there *wrong* that knew I couldn't do it. Um, I shocked my mom when I jus' proved her wrong that I could do this.

Success once earned and achieved craved closure; however, success was addictive. Your mother observed in awe the impossible, and yet demanded more. You in turn buoyed by your success took on the challenge of pursuing yet one more hurdle and reward:

Um, my last IEP meeting, I can remember my mom wanting me to go on to get my AS degree, Associate of Science. An' I didn't want to do it because I was done. I wanted to be done with college. I wanted to work. Then, I sat back an' I thought maybe mom was right, one more degree will not hurt me.

At the age of twenty-one you had aged out of receiving the fruits of special education services and feared the ramifications of continuing your education bereft of its benefits. Yet experience was on your side. You expanded beyond the unregenerated appeal of assistance and dependence into the emancipated deliverance of holistic self-determination.

And when it was time to go out of the program I thought, oh, now, this isn't gonna work for me and I did it. I did everything myself. So I'm glad that I did the weaning myself because now it's jus', it makes my life a little easier and my wings are almost spread out, not that far, but almost spread out.

Prefacing this transition, you entered as a veteran and a mentor for your new roommates. For during your third and final year at the community college the extrinsic rewards obscured the intrinsic rewards- although difficult and repeating your ritual pattern of threatened failure and ultimate success you purported your valiant outcomes. Simultaneously you reassured your instructors and more significantly yourself of your preordained triumphs.

I went back an um, I lived with two new roommates. Um, *very nice* two little girls. Um they needed a little help and I helped 'em as much as I could. My last year of college was very stressful. More workload, um, I

had to drop science and picked it up later. Um, once again Mavis was very hounding on me that I was not, needed to drop the class and I didn't. I didn't drop her class. I basically told her that "I am going to prove you wrong, you just watch." And I did. I was in the low "F" in my night class in my night class and I brought it up to I think a "B", I'm not for sure. Um Jane was worried about some of my classes that I was behind on. And I told her not to worry about it, that I was doing just fine, and I was.

Each transition melded into the next. You garnered the needed support.

Scott, your boyfriend and now fiancé, literally sat by your side as you completed your coursework. Your mother cheered from a distance. Martha Fank, the director of a federally funded support program at the college, several times a week would detour from her leadership position and personally tutor you in your most challenging academic coursework. Of course this arrangement would not have occurred had you not demonstrated and vocalized both your frustrations and your unwavering desire to succeed.

In spite of holding down two jobs you could no longer afford the costs of dorm living so the decision was made to move into Scott's apartment for your last semester of college. The apartment atmosphere with Scott certainly provided a quieter environment than the dorm for you to complete your homework; however, now planning a wedding added more complications and stress to your life.

I had a lot of support from Scott and my mom and Martha Fank. She helped me *a lot*. I moved in with Scott my last year in December of 2001. Um cause I couldn't afford to live in the dorm room and on top of it going to school. I was planning a wedding. Um very difficult.

Your two Early Childhood Education instructors supported you from opposite corners. While Jane was your soft mother figure who would kindly listen

and reassure, Mavis threatened and refused to offer affirmation. Perhaps you required both camps to get you through.

Jane was always there. Jane was like a *mother* and I would always lean to her more. Um Mavis was the one that would *push* and say, "You have to get this done." She, I don't think she believed in me. I think I had to prove her wrong and I did. I proved her wrong. I proved her in my third year of college, that I passed all of her classes and crossed that stage with a AS degree and it shocked her. I know she wasn't happy of the things I did or how I act but that was the way of life an' she had. But Jane was more like a mother and I could go to her anytime I wanted and Jane knew that I could do it and I did.

Sometimes the support was reciprocal as in the case of the dorm mother.

While Louise grew to depend on your sensibility in the dorm, you trusted her advice on roommate issues. Equally strong willed and verbal you and Louise would occasionally tangle; however, your bartered relationship strengthened you.

Louise and I had our ups and downs. Um, she always she always came to me when something was going on in the dorm, "What's going on?" An' every time, Louise and I had a close relationship. I'd go to her anytime I wanted to. Um, yeah, there was some days I wanted to strangle her, but Louise and I had a really good relationship. I coulda' gone to her and she would listen, "Now Meg, you don't need to do that." "Meg, what are you doing?" But if I had a problem with my roommate I went straight to Louise, an' Louise would give me advice, and you know.

You were repeatedly drawn to revisit your graduation scene. The significance of your graduation experience held sway even over your employment position. After years of hearing people reiterate that you could not accomplish your goal, a marvelous audience witnessed you receiving your sought after prize. Your reward was held so much sweeter since Scott received a diploma the same night you were awarded your degree. Even as he collected

his reward his eyes focused on you.

Crossing that stage at the same time as my husband-to-be was exciting. My dad actually got to come and my grandma actually got to come and watch me cross that stage and they are very, very proud of me because I got my Associate of Science. And Scott was very proud too.

Now you brought the ease of experienced independence and problem solving to the life you created. You realized that your past and present act of emancipation took a daily act of will. You ventured beyond the borders of personal comfort to sever the cord of provided support to strengthen your own resolve and capabilities. You acknowledged the pathos of yet unrequited redemption and release. Your mother yearned to continue to hold you in her sanctuary, her clarion call continued to tempt you.

Knowing that I am on my own and I don't need anybody to hold my hand anymore, I'm twenty-two years old and I'm a big girl now and it's time for me so to handle my own problems and I did. I knew that anything that anything that was thrown at me I could handle. And still this day I can handle anything that's thrown at me I, so....So I'm glad that I did the weaning myself because not it's jus', it makes my life a little easier and my wings are almost spread out, not that far, but almost spread out. Um, I haven't flown the coop yet enough but I know that mom is trying to protect me and keep me huddled up a little bit, but yeah.

Partner

Your committed relationship with Scott ran diagonal to your relationship with your mother and parallel to your relationship to your resource teachers and full time aides. Your life was organized around these discrete yet intertwined relationships that defined your personal history.

You met Scott during your last year of high school. Since Scott's brother had a disability, Scott was afforded authentic training for his role and his

commitment. Scott offered you gifts of highest worth: understanding, acceptance, and fidelity, disability and all.

Um, in my senior year I met my husband-to-be. Um, it was love at first sight and he didn't take my disability at all 'cause he had a brother like that who was in special ed.

A year behind you in school he joined you at the community college during your second year and his first. He slipped roles from suitor to tutor to champion of your cause.

My husband-to-be, Scott, wonderful. He read my chapters for me, every night. We studied together. He proofread everything I wrote. Um, Scott was behind me 100% through this whole thing. Um, he never left my side. Um he jus', he did a lot for me, more than anybody could do. Um, when I felt so stressed out, he was the one that told me I could handle it; I can do this and don't let go.

Assuming a role commensurate to your full time aides while in high school Scott met all of your needs apart from attending your classes with you. Different from your parents, he refused to provide you a permanent safe harbor or permit your disability to define your life. The equilibrium of your relationship slightly awry, nonetheless his belief in you provided a fertile ground for your progress.

Um, Scott never left my side. Scott came in and helped me as much as possible. Um, he was the one that basically showed me what was really out there. Um, helped me spread my wings as little as possible because my mom and dad sheltered me a *lot* because, you know I have a disability and they didn't want anybody, you know, to stomp all over me an' control my life.

While other supports were in place and active, it was Scott who provided the anchor and the constant supportive push.

It was Scott that helped me the most. Through it, he never left my side. He never left me down. Um he always gave me that extra, um, self-esteem. "You can do this. Keep going." Scott kept me goin'.

During your third year of college, although you had weaned yourself from most official support services, you firmly attached yourself to Scott and his powers. While less official than the full time aides you required in high school, his attention was just as intent, and you were just as dependent. To remedy your stress level he would simply join you in your course busy work.

This scenario provided a direct contrast from what you experienced with your first roommate who would delegate her work to you as she left for a night of partying. Incapable of saying no, you were left to complete both your work and hers. Your roommate further betrayed you by reporting to her mother that you rallied people in the dorm room when it was she who commissioned the wild crowds and you simply secured Scott. Scott supported you as you finally came to the point where you lanced your unappreciated and undeserved benevolence. During your third year at the community college you experienced the luxury of complete release from your bondage to Linda.

It got so much better, maybe because, I think because my third year of college Scott was right there, an' that he helped and when he knew I was going to get so much. He knew when I was going to get stressed out, he would sit down and he would help me, make my activities. And he would sit down and color, and cut, and paste and I have a roommate who would throw things at me an' say, "Do it for me." You know instead of having *my* work to do I had *her stuff* to get done too. It was hard for me to say no and then she would come home late and party an' have everybody goodness gracious in the dorm room and then she would go home and tell her mom all these rumors that I would have people in the dorm room. It made my life stressful my first year of college and second year of college but I looked an' knew what was going on. I knew the truth and Scott knew the truth and I got to the point where I told her "no" and she wasn't happy with me. I had to worry about my own stuff so my third year of college I didn't have any breakdowns because I was away from her and I didn't have anybody else's work to do. I had *my own*.

Scott proudly witnessed your successful outcome. His relationship was embedded in your successes; he had journeyed and labored with you and for you while loving and cherishing you. Scott's fidelity and your joint commitment emanated as you ascribed your success.

Oh, he is so proud. I mean I mean there is nothing, there is no words to describe how proud he is of me and he saw me struggle through college. I mean, he won't let me give up and so, he is so proud.

Teacher: Dream Realized

As you transitioned into your job at the Methodist Preschool, you honored your commitments and displayed your potential with a certain and profound unitary grace. In the midst of our conversations, I visited you there one day. Before you realized I was there, I peered in the door of your classroom; all of your cherubs were sleeping and you, a Madonna, on the floor holding and comforting a blonde little boy with Down's syndrome. Peace reigned; your firm vigilance had secured it.

You acquired a quick ascension to head teacher. Congruent with the promotion and the excitement came more responsibility. In finding your personal path among the difficulties and the challenges you faced, you performed a creative synthesis, which you celebrated.

I went to Wesley Methodist Preschool and I was assistant for three weeks and one of the girls got fired and I became head teacher with the fives. Very, very excited. Um more paperwork to do. Um I work with, there is a little boy who is Down Syndrome and that even gets it twice as hard because I have to stop my session and go and feed him and give him his meds and checking his Os for oxygen, making sure I have the right things for him to do an' on top of that I have to have stuff for my children to do. Um, I love being a head teacher.

The complicated sphere of your daily activity commenced early. Your organizational skills resounded as you shared the course of your day. You embraced the concept “my” as you defined “my” students and “my” room. Offering inclusive attention, mindfulness and response to your little boy with special needs as well as to the girl displaying behavior difficulties. Your responses portrayed continual, burgeoning and all encompassing self-responsibility.

At five o'clock I get up and am out the door at 5:30. I get to work at 6 and I open. Um, I get everything ready. I turn on the computers, I get the paperwork done. Um, get their breakfast ready, turn on the lights. Let's see, feed the kids when they come in. Um, check them in and answer the phone 'cause there is no secretary at this job. We are the secretary. Um, at eight o'clock I round up *my* kids and I take 'em to *my room* – I love sayin' that – *my room*- and they play an' at 8:40 its time for circle time and then we go outside because it's summer time, it's always hot by the time at 10 o'clock so we are out the door. Wash hands, come in eat, activity, art and stuff like that. Um, wash up again, lunch, snack, um, between eight, ten, noon, I give one of my students, he's a Down syndrome boy his um food. I have to do it by. I have to feed it through a tube. Um, I have to checks his o's and at two o'clock before I leave I have to sit down and give him his meds and um, at ta ta ta and then I don't leave the building because I have to do all sorts of paperwork and then I am out the door and I go home. So it's a long, long, long day. An' on top of it I have a child who does not like to listen, an' who thinks that she should have her way or the highway an' it doesn't help when the parents give her everything that she wants so I have to put up with that every day and the biting an' the hitting.

Mustering the sum of your resources you ministered to the little boy with Down's syndrome, responded to the attention seeker, while sustaining the remainder of your charges. Honoring a personal covenant, you aimed to fully include your charge with special needs. Having lived and regarded the experience you created an environment where he could not be left behind.

This mission, above all, harmonized your fulfillment.

Um, it's very hard to give my full attention to the down-syndrome boy an' then I have to give one to the rowdy one and then I have to give attention to *my* children so I have every child and then on top of it activities, I have to make sure I have the *right* materials for him. If I do not, then he does not get to do the activity so when I go shopping, I make sure I have the right things for him. The right scissors and stuff like that and I make sure that he is as involved with everything as possible so I try not to leave him behind because I know how that feels so.

You maintained your commitment to his inclusion in your class despite the fact that in fragile health he slept the majority of the time. Amidst the chaos and confusion of managing a preschool classroom you perpetually kept an eye in his direction. Contemplating the circumference of your duties and responsibilities you justified your fatigue.

The sad thing is that he sleeps all day so. So, you know, he can go anytime so. Yeah, so, we have to keep an eye watch on him.... And he's seven an' he's with the ages of kindergarten some of them into first grade and some of them are going into kindergarten and he is seven. So at 4, 5, an' 7 so (whispering) that's why is so exhausting.

Incongruent with your education and your job description you earned a mere six dollars an hour.

I make six bucks an hour. I'm supposed to get a raise but I haven't seen it yet.

Your satisfaction, your creative fulfillment came from other than financial sources. Always a social person, as you worked you met a steady stream of new people. You have created an environment for growth and learning for your students. Living the vision, you construed and garnered your vision and now your reality included serving a child with special needs. In sum you taught and

cared as you wish you had been taught and cared for. Ascribing this fecund environment both your and your students' self-esteem flourished.

Ah, um, I get to see all new people. Um, its really. One of the things I wanted to do was have a special person in my room. I don't call them special need children. I *hate* that word. An' I jus' call 'em special children in my class. I always wanted one in there, always wanted to know how it felt and let me tell ya it's fun because they make you happy an' you know they help out so much. And it's neat teaching the children all new stuff. Right now my kids um do not, some of 'em do not know how to spell their name, some of 'em do not know the alphabet. Um, some do not know how to write their name so right now we are in the process. I am *showing* them, and them how to do it and some of 'em are happy and others of the, "I can't do this!" And we got ta build up their self-esteem, so.

Your pride bridged the generations. As you relayed your accomplishments to your parents and grandmother, they responded with praise and admiration.

Oh man, my mom and dad and my grandma and my grandma are so proud of me right now. Every time I come home. I got to tell 'em that I am the head teacher and mom and grandma just bloomed because my grandma was a teacher too and ah, so um, they were so happy. They are so proud of me an' so.

Reflections

The path toward your goal was filled with ruts. As you stumbled, you adapted and grew. Your path toward your goal was learning along the way, continually lit by the strength of your vision. Even the disfavor of others only pushed you forward. A synergy emerged that not only enabled you to accomplish your teaching goal but also to set new ones.

That was one of my goals was to be head teacher and I've made it. I've always wanted to be a teacher from day one. Um, the only thing that I can remember is that no one knew that I could do it, Be a head teacher and get through college at the same time. I've done all my goals and now I'm just ready to make some new ones.

You repeated this refrain as you qualified why you were successful when so many other students who received special education services are unemployed and living at home. You developed a habit of mind and heart that grew from unwavering focus on an intoxicating goal. Hurdles forecast and in place did not detour you. Although you assigned Scott, your mother, and your grandmother as your advocates, it was you who directed and maintained your course. They may have helped and encouraged, but it was you behind the reins.

I have my grandma's heart and um, I've always wanted to be a teacher and I set a goal for me and that's what I was going to do. I even though I, you know, if I failed my first year of college, I would go back and re-do it all over again. I'm not going to give up. I'm not a person that gives up. Um, the only person, the person that kept putting it in my head was Scott, an' my mom was there when I needed her.

Spontaneously taking on your school teacher role you addressed students receiving special education services advising them to follow your words and example and aim for a specific goal that would stretch their limits and potential leading beyond the pull and comfort of home. You glorified how you successfully ascertained, projected and pursued this course. Aware that you had obliterated everyone's dire admonitions and forecasts, you celebrated your feat.

An' I really think that I wish that I could tell everybody in special ed not to give up and to *keep* going, to set that goal and go for it. Staying home with mom ain't going to do you any good because that's what I wanted to do, but I didn't. I felt this an' I came to school an' look where I am today. No one in their right mind thought that I would be this far.

Words of encouragement were absent; you were only spurred on by others' foreboding discouragement. Now you reveled in their surprise and amazement. Your high school principal, your sole supporter at your earlier

violent IEP meeting, joined this jubilant chorus. Your instruction and message to others in your situation was to interlock decision and commitment, to maintain hope and possibility.

The only thing that kept me going was last IEP meeting I had and those people in there said I wouldn't be able to do it an' I told them, "I'm going to show you." And I did. Let me tell you, those people are like, "Oh my God." So they are very, very happy with me and the principal that was there, an' she just, she's happy, very happy so. I would say that those people out there need to keep going and not give up. When they give up, an' they jus' give up on God and give up on their life. They shouldn't be here they are going to give up. That's it I think.

You constructed a life based on respect, responsibility, charity, perseverance, exploration and sensitivity. Living and learning was practiced as a form of spirituality that you wished to pass on to your future children.

Um, *my* children are going to learn to respect everybody, respect everybody who are different than them. Um, help people out. I don't know, I want 'em to be like me. Not to quit, to keep going, an' there is more out there than *just* home. I want my children to see everything, things I've never got to see. I want them to see and feel and touch and smell everything that they can get their hands to get their eyes to see an' touch... so.

You constructed a life, willing to brave the wind of change and uncertainty. You proceeded, however, in the grip of fear. In July you defined yourself as strong but in a recent conversation just four months hence, you shared that with Scott in the service and you alone and your mother pulling you in you had hit an emotional bottom. Now in November you struggled to hang on to your self-esteem as a teacher and as a person. Scott, your life support, planned a homecoming for a couple of weeks at Christmas to lift you up before

returning to basic training. You have learned to sustain and function in abundance and in famine.

I am grown up. I have grown up so much, um. I know what's really out there now. It's very scary but I know what's out there. Um, I know that my mom is very scared to let me go. And then I feel like I could do anything now. Um, I have grown up so much through my whole year and there is so much to go an' I think I have reached all of my goals so far an' I 'm jus' going to keep making new ones. So I would put myself, at very, very, very strong person right now.

Your vision for the future was filled with the joy of possibility. Underneath this joy, however, bubbled the fear of disappointing others.

Oh, Elizabeth. Um, well, let's see, living farther from home. Um, I want to do what I am doing now. I want to be a teacher in a day-care. Um, I want to have children. I want to have babies. Um I want to be successful. I don't want to let people down. I hate that but yeah.

Chronicling your aspirations, you revealed the tangled bond between you and your mother, often working at cross-purposes to your development. Mirroring your mother you pledged to provide a refuge for you future children and as an antithesis of her, you hoped your children, would know that as they shared their struggles with you, they would not be ravaged by your response. During your wedding homily the deacon described your mother and said that he had not heard her sing since high school. That statement was a keen analogy of her life. Your mother, unhappy, often made your life miserable. Although available, her responses to you and others were often emotive and irrational. Your dad appeared a mere side bar in your mother's agenda; she ran the show.

My hopes and dreams. Um, I want to see everything, as much as I can. Um, I know I won't, but I really, really, would like to see everything. Um, I want to be happy. I want to have a good job and um. I want to have nice, nice, four beautiful children and um, I want to make their lives happy and

not make their lives miserable. And I've always, I want to be there for them. I want to be one of those parents where they can come and tell me anything I'm not going to spaz out on 'em. Um, I jus', I want to make Scott happy and I jus' want to have nice marriage and a nice life.

Ever the teacher, ever the learner, your pride in your educational accomplishments spiraled over and over again in your dialogues. Your learning similarly complex and laced with difficulty spiraled and evolved. The apex of your accomplishments was crossing the community college stage to grasp your diploma and the next year your degree.

Accomplishing is that is, that I have accomplished K through my college years. That is one of the major accomplished. And telling my children that I crossed the stage and telling them how difficult school was for me. Crossing the stage, not once, but twice! Um, I'm a head teacher and I have *my* classroom and my students um so yeah. Crossing the stage is the most biggest thing I as so excited, absolutely! I could have done a dance up there I was so happy.

You held a precious resource for registering your growth, you have recorded and kept a journal since you were in fourth grade. Congruently painful and affirming, you read your past and acknowledged your growth and change.

I go back an' I read them. Some of them kind of haunt me and some of 'em don't an' I can tell *my writing*. I'm different, my spelling an' everything so.

You considered your learning spiral and recognized why you changed from the girl who simply reported her problems to her teachers and mother and left them to handle them to the self determined Meg that was sitting across from me. The move from home to the community college was the spark that initiated the blaze of growth.

More independent in many ways, however, you now depended on Scott much as you had your mother for consolation and understanding. Perhaps what marked this arrangement as different was that you and Scott were partners and unlike your mother Scott led you towards self-sufficiency. The deacon who issued your wedding homily registered that you and Scott had already achieved a level of communication that he and his wife required twenty-five years to accomplish. Certainly you talked.

Because I lived at home an' mom was right there an' mom took care of everything. Now this Meg is um grown up. She can handle her own problems now. Once in a while I do go home an' say, "Mom, what am I doing?" or "How am I supposed to this?" But I don't. I go an' find Scott and he will explain it to me and he will let me do it on my own. Um, the old Meg just got sheltered a lot and this Meg is grown up and taking care of her own problems.

Buoyed by success and happy in love you were bent to improvise. Willing to participate in forays into the unfamiliar you were ready to be released from the imprisoning framework of the comfortable. You had built a sturdy framework of tradition and willingness for personal growth.

Um, we took a big risk and we bought a 2000 car. Um, you know, right now I a lot into taking a risk. I want to see what I can handle and what I can't. Um, yeah. Um, so there is so much going on right now. Working an' um, Scott is going into the Navy an' so that means I will move far away from home an' that's even going to be twice as worse because not it's not going to be 45 minute drive is going to be a day drive or something like that but. Um, I'm just in the mood. I just want to take some more risk, just to see how far I go an' I'm happy, really happy an'

Through this process of recalling your experiences you had the surprising opportunity to experience it again and discovered another way of observing and perceiving. You learned to experience comfort in your own skin which for you

included your disability. Recovering a wealth of memories reconstructed with the help of your adult knowledge, you grew to love and treasure not only the adult you were, but the child you used to be.

I'm shocked that I could remember everything. Um, I'm glad that I'm very comfortable talking about my special needs not. I mean I can stand up in front of a bunch of students and talk about it. It won't bother me because I am who I am and God created me and I just have to live with it and keep learning new things every day an' you know that's a good thing about being a special needs child. You learn so many new things. Um, I'm not saying a regular child learns new things but a special needs gets to see everything and learn what's really out there an' get to explore and you know so and I'm glad of who I am and I'm not scared anymore.

Liberated from "special learning" you were free to strengthen your wings. Your authentic strength, however, emerged from your relentless spirit, a spirit fueled by the fear of disappointing your family.

Um, I've done a lot of new things. I don't need a special hand anymore. I went to bank here in town. An' I asked the questions about opening up student account. I didn't have Scott come with me. I wanted to do it. He was so proud of me when I did it so I get to do things and knowing that I can do things if I just put my mind to it and that's been my quote every, through college an' right through right now so.

You celebrated both your resolution and your accomplishments. A gleam of enthusiasm glistened in your eyes. I called it hope.

Yeah. You know, I look back an' think ah I finished elementary. I finished middle school. I finished high school an' I've finished college with a diploma *plus* an AS degree. It's, you know I get to tell my children that the things I've accomplished in life and it makes me proud inside because it makes me keep going 'cause I can say keep going so yeah.

Your recollections permitted a journey, delving into foreign domains once your own. To understand, you summoned ghosts and spirits and abstract reasons for both action and stalemate from your past. Together we tried to

carefully capture the layering of your experience (Josselson, 1993) so necessary to understand and honor your transition experiences.

With appreciation,

Elizabeth

REFLECTIONS

This inquiry was rooted in and arose from my own practice as a special education educator in relation to the students with whom I worked. I made the decision early on to organize my writing around the stories of former students who were employed and living on their own, although I have also learned much from former students whose outcomes were not so positive. I wanted to understand the contexts of their transition experience from within. I sought their interpretations, their constructions of reality, and their stories (Rose, 1997).

Concluding this research, I returned to the origins of my inquiry, pondering anew the contextual complexity in which my participants traversed their transitional experiences. I reflected on the ways in which this study addressed the transition experience of adolescents who have completed a secondary transition program at a community college. Concurrently emblazoning and bemoaning my initial fervor I considered both the discoveries this narrative study revealed as well as the portents I had previously ignored. I sensed how the narratives captured the layering of experience (Josselson, 1993) necessary for understanding. Herein I contemplated the potential and the grist for understanding that might lead to better programming and planning for young adults with disabilities.

As I set each participant's experience next to the others and my own, I was greeted with “*insight*,” the depth of understanding that comes from setting

experiences...side by side, learning by letting them speak to one another.” (Bateson, 1994, p.14). Actively I wrestled to negotiate a way to present and depict my learning. How could I reconfigure my newfound understandings to the printed page? Perusing and pondering my experiences I was acutely aware of not necessarily themes, but rather the layers of meaning.

The four narratives yielded a framework for the musings about the transition experience of young adults with disabilities. I hungered for my informants’ insider perspective and aimed to evoke and preserve their voices while mindful of how my own stories were rooted and channeled in my inquiry. As the coordinator of the secondary at post secondary transition program, which the individuals attended, my stories were embedded in theirs. Therefore the research was, in part, an inquiry into my own practice. I am a researcher telling a story that is grounded in the transition experience of my four participants and in my practice as an educator, and I endeavor to share what I have learned and experienced (Rose, 1997).

I summon the reader to examine and evaluate the constructed narratives and to consider my interpretations of those narratives. Josselson (1993) and colleagues evaluated good narratives based on the breadth of the material, the coherence of the material and the aesthetic appeal of the presentation how it “made sense” in intuitive, holistic ways. Barone (1992) forecast good narratives as accessible, compelling and morally persuasive.

Perhaps my participants’ stories and my researcher story might resonate and connect with the reader's own stories and tentatively initiate further

investigations and reflection. Ultimately, I hope special education educators and administrators may find consequence in this work. For this purpose I aim this discussion chapter to my reflections. While situating and reflecting upon my learning and insights, I pose both questions and possibilities that emerge from this research.

Learning occurred in spiral fashion and evolved from a multiplicity of sources: threaded through layers of experience, mine and the participants; layer upon layer of processes, our connections, their and my memories, our dialogues, and my analysis. From this mother lode of material I focused on those portions that interested me most, I realized that those portions echoed from one life to another. I found the process of teasing these discoveries out of the wealth of material personally illuminating and emancipating (Bateson, 1990, 1994). In the following sections I share these insights.

The Story: Mundane and Sacred

I came to this project and my participants armed with curiosity and respect. There was “a spiritual basis to my attention, a humility in waiting upon the emergence of pattern from experience” (Bateson, 1994, p. 10). I offered reverent hesitation as I listened to and ultimately wrote their narratives. What transpired and the narratives that emerged were mundane, directly heard, and sacred, the creation of an internal coherent sense of their selves and their worlds (Crities, 1971).

Through each dialogue I sensed in each of the four individuals a tender and transforming reference as they plumbed their consciousness and awakened

their stories within. They mingled the mundane and the sacred in the narrative quality of their experience. The mundane emerged as they told their experiences at times inchoate; the sacred surfaced, as story birthed story.

Meg oft spoke in reverent tones as she submerged into her personal history. Eric valiantly and solemnly dug for artifacts lodged in his memory. Ellie piously embraced the mission, chronicling her experiences. Mark solemnly savored the pulpit, dramatizing his shortfalls and championing his successes. They each, with my blessing, recovered and claimed a living past (Crities, 1971).
The Journey: Self-Determination and Responsibility

The premise and the background for my study revolved around the skills and attributes of self-determination and responsibility that allow students with disabilities to successfully transition to employment and independent living. While conducting this study I had the luxury of distancing myself from special education framing and vernacular, although I confess to far too frequently using terms such as “transition” and “self-determination.” I endeavored to promote the participants’ dialogue, descriptions and definitions in order to open myself to peripheral vision. So while keeping special education praxis in the background, I was treated with a rich reserve of elicited multiplicity of experience. Amidst our banter, discoveries and illuminations surfaced.

I chose to explore the transition experience of four of my former students. All faced struggles, on the home and school front, yet each achieved a level of success that many of their peers forfeited. Each narrative was singular and unique. The narratives were by no means meant as a representative or capsule

version of the transition experience of individuals with disabilities. Instead as an outcome of the process of conversation and reflection, I strove to make their experience accessible to others in a form unlike a survey where they would have lost their individuality (Bateson, 1990).

Recognizing the fragility of the occurring twofold dialogue-narrator and interviewer, telling and living (Rosenwald, 1994) I felt fortunate that our dialogues were lubricated and advanced by familiarity. I did not return to these individuals a stranger off the street. Instead we experienced kinship; I represented for them a connection with the transition program, which ultimately changed and enhanced their life course. While they attended the secondary at post secondary program, in my role as coordinator of the program I functioned much like a caring principal, spooning support or discipline as the situation required. Therefore, our dialogues emerged from a separate and yet shared experience.

Hesitant not to oversimplify, I proposed to consider the IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings of the participants in the secondary and the post secondary environments as a metaphor for self-determination and the identification of change. As I attended the student's high school senior year meeting, each played the equivalent of a quiet pawn. Others were orchestrating plans for their lives and they submissively followed along. While they may have had pointed dialogues with family members before or after the meeting, for the most part they remained quiet and uninvolved during their meeting. Once part of the secondary at post secondary transition program the dynamic shifted and

reversed. Each was guided through the process of preparing for and conducting the IEP meeting. Seated at the head of the table sharing their goals, requesting input from their team members and sharing their progress they had evolved from pawn to programmer of their own plan and their own lives.

While the IEP provided a metaphor for self-determination, each participant's journey to self-determined responsible behavior evolved in unique spiral fashion. Mark's roots of self-determined behavior developed predominately outside the classroom. Mark described his early boyhood behavior in and out of classroom as full of mischief; he never considered the potential consequences of his actions. Only as he witnessed and experienced crises in his family, saw first hand the fruits of irresponsibility, and not much later became a premature father did he rechannel his course to one of self-determined responsibility.

Ellie's rocky road toward and away from self-determination was similarly more home and out-of-school based. While always a self-described "good girl" Ellie's path to self-determination was thwarted by a fragile psyche, accompanying worries and fears, and nearly obliterated by a tragic relationship. Her parents' understanding and perpetual prod kept her from permanently regressing. Ellie's self-determination skills further developed and were reinforced as she participated in a very successful community college experience. Ellie continued to learn and practice self-determined behavior as she lived alone but remained firmly connected with her mother for assurance and advice.

The same kind of spiral underlay the shaping of Eric's self-determination skills. Lacking the muscle for self initiated activity through his high school years, the genesis of Eric's self determination skills occurred as he was pressed into participating in a variety of work and social settings and more significantly as he experienced the freedoms and rewards that came with living away from home and having a job. Each step of the way he was coerced by his mother and school staff. Now, holding a job that he abhors losing, self-determined responsible behavior surfaces and swells.

Meg traveled a dual road to self-determined responsible behavior. Programmed to please and not to disappoint she demonstrated goal directed behavior; concurrently, parents and exhaustive special education programming inhibited her. Meg had to leave home, disengage from the grip of her mother and special education services to truly initiate self-determined behavior. Now having built a history of improvisation and a habit of reflection (Bateson, 1994) she confronted change with tenuous but committed self-determination.

Pain was part and parcel of these individuals' journey toward self determined responsible behavior. Their central survival skill was developing the capacity to pay attention and respond to changing circumstances, to learn and adapt, to fit into new environments (Bateson, 1990) and expectations beyond the safety of their previous comfort network and alliances.

The Struggle: Thorny Transitions

As is the case in our society, transitions were painful for these individuals. When their paths disappeared in the underbrush or were blocked, they faced the

problem of finding a new path that seemed like a continuation of the old (Bateson, 1990). Growth and learning emerged from and festooned each transition experience.

The constructed vision of the participants was not the classic pioneer vision of struggle and self-reliance (Bateson, 1990) rather the footage revealed more mundane but potentially self-sacrificial patterns of frustration and discomfort. Each experienced the move beyond discouragement with a core of growing confidence and embedded hope.

The narrators experienced struggle in and out of the classroom. In cadence and chorus I heard them say, "I am lost and confused." Each experienced an environment at home that alternately ministered and disenfranchised. Schoolwork was masked with confusion and marked by unrelenting speed.

Additionally, as recipients of special education services, each experienced being the target and the victim of teasing. This experience was mainly a middle school, junior high phenomenon, which felicitously diminished during high school other than for Eric who remained a teasing target throughout his high school years both in and out of the classroom.

I took a moment to honor the violence and struggle each participant incurred as each journeyed toward adulthood unfolding commitments and decisions. Hearing their struggles and experiences led me beyond my bailiwick and kindled an attentive sacred awareness and appreciation for the formidable path that they trod.

The Linchpin: The Secondary at Postsecondary Transition Program

For the participants, the secondary at post secondary transition program offered a fecund arena to compose a new way of envisioning themselves and their potential. Furthermore, participating in the program afforded them a genesis of success, self-sufficiency and self esteem that primordial notions had neither calibrated nor comprehended. Hesitant to remove this discrete experience from the context of their lives or to romanticize it, I proceed.

Eric tracked and earmarked his progress in the program as change that knew no bounds. Forthcoming from living apart from family and directed towards involvement and participation, he developed relationships. Through his formative involvement with his peers, claiming friends for the first time, he learned to extend beyond himself to develop an empathy and respect for others. Benefits accrued, reached and reverberated far beyond his vocational training to a realized departure of continued sustainable employment, apartment living and a cadre of companions at work.

For Meg the program provided the bridge from dependence to independence. Previously circumscribed in a mesh of special education services and parental restrictions, she was left bereft of power other than to summon it from others. As a novice pilgrim Meg faltered; however, she ultimately learned to do things independently and discovered the power source within. The victory and joy of self-determination surmounted the hardships of learning and opened vistas of self-realization, understanding and appreciation. Connecting goals with

both the power reservoir of self-determined learning and effective solicitation of assistance she attained her life long aspiration of becoming a teacher.

Through participating in the program, Mark built his skills and his self-esteem in tandem. Leaving a newborn and a girl friend at home he frantically and effectively aspired to become the best welder in the program. While heavily investing in this commitment he prospered and grew. A defining moment occurred as he participated in Skills USA. His training and his experience led him to an employment position that quickly led to shop foreman.

Leaving the past behind, the program offered Ellie a new beginning. As she succeeded in her coursework and developed a solid network of friends, her previously injured self esteem and fragile psyche burgeoned. In addition while distanced from her mother, Ellie practiced doing more on her own than would have been conceivable had she remained at home. Therefore, when the opportunity came to find employment in a more urban area a state away, Ellie was equipped to attempt the transition and the next step towards independence.

With the exception of Ellie who was predirected towards college by parents, the other three affirmed they would not have attempted post secondary training without the program. Although saying she would have attended college, Ellie admitted she would not have been as successful nor would her self-confidence launched and elevated had she not participated in the program.

Eric, Ellie and Meg all surmised that without the program they would have remained at home living with their parents. Eric realistically forecasted that he would probably still be searching for a job.

Replicating the experience of young adults without disabilities, the college experience furnished these four a portal and a platform to reinvent themselves and to chart a new course, one unattainable had they not participated in the secondary at post secondary transition program at a community college.

Relationships, Commitments and Allegiances: Formative and Deformative

Each individual afforded a better account of life by identifying constraining and liberating, relationships and loyalties. Positioning each as successful, by acknowledging and affirming individual accomplishments, I hastened this awareness.

Each of the narratives revealed the individual's transitions and resulting change emerged from and enmeshed in more than an "internal dynamic." It occurred or sometimes failed to occur in social situations (Rosenwald, 1994). Each of the four individuals experienced complex regnant relationships, some complementary and some at odds. Some of these relationships performed a formative function, others exerted a deformative power and stunted the individual's growth. In this section I suggest some of the relationships and allegiances that influenced formative or deformative effects.

Each grew up under the tutelage of a highly involved mother. Mark's mother promoted his education and further training. When he experienced difficulties in school, Mark would follow a consistent pattern of talking with his mother and then together they would inform school staff. When Mark was teased at school, it was his mother who offered him the thinking strategies to deal with it. Mark identified his mother as the one who would attend his school meetings,

and it was she who accompanied him on his college visit. Their relationship and its outcomes were intrepid and reciprocal; with a father who was physically disabled his mother continued to depend on Mark for the maintenance of her home and with the continuing responsibilities of her dysfunctional family.

Ellie's relationship with her mother was similarly involved. The fruits of their relationship, however, played out differently. Ellie, ever dependent on her mother for a constant stream of advice and encouragement, grew to a point that she could not differentiate her own thoughts from her mother's. Fortunately for Ellie this mental model pattern led to her growth and fledgling independence. Her mother early on and Ellie later recognized that this growth could only continue via incremental steps toward separation, first at college and now living alone in an apartment. Their relationship while still intense, continued to lead Ellie toward formative development and self-sufficiency.

As Eric's mother herded him towards responsibility and independence, she received precious little cooperation from him. Unabashedly Eric admitted that it was his mother's directive and persistence not his own that enabled him to complete his homework, find a part time job, and attend a community college. Although she may have allowed his father to publicly berate him she was unwavering in her mission that he develop the skills to live and work independently.

Meg's mother assumed contradictory roles, which significantly impacted her relationship with Meg, and ultimately Meg's development. Her resolute, abrasive will insisted that Meg was cared for in school and was a care-giver at

home. She threatened and pressured Meg to alternately live out of and in the family home. Meg appreciated her mother's strong constant presence in her life especially through her high school years. Meg could count on this fortress in her life for solace; with a mere mention of a minor or major difficulty her mother would confront it with storm and tyranny. Only after Meg had experienced tenuous independence at college and a powerful love in her life could she recognize a life apart from this orchestration. Even as a married woman, her mother's pull continued. With Scott away in the service, Meg's self esteem shriveled. The history of her achievements, however, sustained her.

All four mentioned the import of grandparents in their lives. While Ellie gave only fleeting mention to both sets of her grandparents, Mark identified his fraternal grandfather as a savior who encouraged him to occasionally leave the domain of a disciplinarian dad and escape to his farm. While at home Mark was in steady conflict with his father; on the farm his youthful energies could be spent riding bikes and mopeds. Therefore, Mark's grandfather's role was in marked contrast to his father's. Where his father was the disciplinarian, his grandfather supported and collaborated in Marks' youthful enterprises.

Similarly Meg's relationship with her maternal grandmother harvested vast rewards. Seeking to emulate both her grandmother's vocation and her spirit offered Meg vision and hope as she trudged the perilous trail towards her goal.

Early on Eric identified his grandparents as kind and generous benefactors. While in high school this dynamic reversed as Eric left his home and his community to live with an ailing grandfather who could no longer function

alone. This relationship of dependence, perhaps for the first time, afforded Eric the opportunity to be a caregiver rather than a taker. Living with his grandfather, a seedbed for change, Eric practiced fledgling attempts to see beyond himself and respond to the needs of others.

Conjuring up and rivaling visions of Cain and Abel and Esau and Jacob each of the four participants experienced critical moments with siblings. As a young boy Mark witnessed a beloved brother and a sister marched off to prison for making poor choices and not much later became an uncle to children his irresponsible sister treated as chattel. These vicissitudes occurring at home, Mark dealt with his losses by claiming a new set of roles for himself, roles radically different from those chosen by his older siblings. Mark vowed to provide a better example for his younger brother than his older brother had afforded him. After pledging a future paternity role for his nephew, Mark further implicated his role with his younger brother and designated himself his caretaker. Further pursuing his protector role, Mark recently carried this caring quality to the work place as he defended a harassed employee.

With the birth of twin brothers, the equilibrium in Eric's life fell apart. The family spotlight shifted from him to the babies. After the twins became mobile, their mission was to terrorize and tease him, so much so that he avoided going home. Eric even admitted that his mother appreciated it when he kept at a distance, thus promoting peace at home. Small wonder he treasured apartment living.

Ellie grew up with two stepbrothers and longed for a sister. The equilibrium of her relationship with her stepbrother Rob changed when Ellie went to kindergarten and he turned a teenager. Instead of a playmate Ellie became the victim of Rob's terrorism. Rob's overt behaviors which extended beyond his treatment of Ellie rocked the home front. Ellie's dad dealt with his step son's negative behaviors with unchecked anger. In spiral-fashion as Rob was berated he blamed Ellie; certainly Ellie must have cried for mercy which in turn doubled her dad's deployment on Rob. Ellie's mother ultimately made a sacrificial decision, sending her son to live with her parents in order to salvage a remnant of peace in her home with Ellie's dad, thereby seeking to reengineer an environment free from fear for Ellie. Perpetually yearning for closeness and understanding and wishing that it had come in the form of a sibling Ellie eagerly claimed Rob's sister, as the one she never had.

Meg gloried in her big sister role and strove to continue that role at the community college with peers, roommates and later as she shepherded preschoolers. As the eldest of seven, she learned and experienced the role early and frequently. Not all was pastoral; Linn, her next in line sister, contended to maintain the spotlight, working at odds with Meg's mission to please and appease. Linn dealt Meg a searing blow when she as Jacob to Meg's Esau deprived Meg of her birthright. Claiming some primordial privilege, Meg felt entitled as the eldest to bear the first grandchild; however, it was unmarried Linn who bore the first child, whom Meg feared would only join Linn in the limelight.

Although at odds, Meg chose Linn as maid of honor for her wedding, validating the strength of family commitment and allegiance.

Friendships were a much sought after and prized commodity for each of the four. Loss was felt when absent and gratitude when present. Throughout his K through twelve years Eric was impoverished of any semblance of friendship. He neither fit in nor acquired the skills or the attitude to practice even the most rudimentary attempts at friendship. His relationships with his special education teachers and his principal were perhaps the closest he came to friendship in the school environment. Once at the community college this situation changed but neither quickly nor smoothly. When his classes were over, a stubborn Eric retreated alone to his dorm room where he stayed until he fell asleep. At the community college, however, his stubbornness met a formidable opponent in the form of Louise, the housemother and Theresa, his Housekeeping instructor who demanded he join the other students. Unlike home, at the community college he was constantly in close proximity to peers eager to include him. Rubbing shoulders with peers, he warmed to the notion and the mechanisms of friendship. While attending the community college for a year, he could claim many as friends. By participating in the program's activities and classes he was afforded ample opportunity to cultivate friendships. Once on his own and living in an apartment, however, the friends disappeared to their own destinations. Although now equipped with more skills to develop friendships, he had little opportunity to practice them other than at work with his fellow employees. His coworkers must fill the void.

Ellie enjoyed a small company of friends in high school and a larger assembly at the community college. She was privileged to maintain a best friend, Sharon, from high school through the present. Although their friendship has experienced ups and downs, it has survived, providing balm for sufferings and joyful companionship. Other than her singular friendship with Sharon, Ellie was much like Eric in the fact that now that she is working she has not developed other friendships. She parades the excuse that since she does not drink or smoke when the other employees do, she avoids rather than recruits their companionship.

Similarly, Mark expressed missing the network of friends he enjoyed during his school years. He does have an edge over the others in that he joined a fraternal organization and although the other members were older, he enjoyed the regular camaraderie. He also frequently mentioned a brother in law with whom he enjoyed working. Mark had a rich history of friendships. Dating back to his mischievous years he traveled with a troupe. Each of his transitions was eased with a company of accustomed or newfound friends. Perhaps at no time was his friends' impact as significant as at the time he discovered he was going to be a father. Then his friends supported him with resolve and unfailing commitment, buffering the tumultuousness of that circumstance and its outcomes. Equipped to easily make friends once he was at the community college, Mark's new friends helped him weather the separation from his baby daughter and wife to be.

Meg attracted friends with her warm outgoing speech and mannerisms. As with Mark, friendships punctuated and eased her transitions. Shifting from school to school she traveled with and accumulated a repertoire of friends. She afforded the memory of those friendships to almost epic proportion and significance. I did not hear her speak of a best friend other than to hear her say her college roommate did not become one. At the community college her roommate, her hoped for best friend, betrayed her. Although similarly warm and enthusiastic, Linda (her roommate), operated with a hidden agenda. Unlike Meg her ultimate focus was not earning a diploma but rather getting a man and having fun. She made a ritual of leaving her school projects for Meg to complete and occupied her evenings by locating the best party. Meg, amidst her giving and naïve ways, did not recognize the subterfuge and gallantly did both of their work to the point of melt down while remaining loyal to Linda. Finally Scott affirmed severing this unequal allegiance. Defeated and hurt to the core, Meg was left immobilized and ill equipped to forage new friendships.

All four individuals were drawn to romantic relationships. Some of these relationships emerged from friendship others came by surprise. Some relationships affirmed, others inhibited the individual's transitions and growth.

During his early teens Mark met Amy when his family relocated. Amy immediately became his friend and provided the conduit for meeting and making other friends as well, thus easing this transition. Over the years Mark's friendship with Amy evolved and rechanneled to lover. Mark discovered he was going to be a father when he was a senior and Amy was a recent high school

graduate. Although Mark did not marry Amy until Katie was about two, they lived together after he completed the community college program. Mark's relationships with Amy and their child were part and parcel of his present happiness. Furthermore his paternal responsibilities clarified his focus as he developed and commandeered the skills necessary to sustain a family.

While in high school Ellie met an older married man. She entered a relationship with him unaware of his previous commitments. Through the process of discovering his subterfuge and feeling disenfranchised, Ellie lost all hope in life and buried herself in depression, isolation and despair. None of us who worked with her in the secondary at post secondary transition program were aware of Ellie's experience until she shared it with me in July. Once it came out, however, it was apparent this travesty continued to haunt her, as she repeatedly returned to the story.

It took until her second year at the community college for Ellie to warm to new beginnings. Braced by a successful and pleasurable college experience and a passel of friends, Ellie was primed to enter a new relationship. Her relationship with Randy, a farm management student, grew from friendship. Unlike the earlier relationship she was included in Randy's family's activities and work. Still unsure of the marriage commitment Randy continued to farm but saw Ellie at least weekly, and she spent more weekends on his family farm than she did returning to her parents' home. They sustained a strong steady relationship based on companionship and trust.

Before attending the community college, Eric had only observed girls from a distance. I sensed high school girls either ignored or tormented him. Dorm living and community college life were different. Girls were always in close proximity. The group Eric traveled with included both young men and women. Living among peers of both sexes afforded Eric the opportunity to practice a new set of interaction skills previously void from his experience.

In February of his year at the community college Stacey, another student, surprised Eric by attaching herself to him. Stacey had a vivid history of attracting and then dumping misfits. Tangling Eric in the web of her feminine wiles Stacey resolutely won Eric's heart and mind. Stacey's spell clouded Eric's awareness from the fact she was gradually distancing herself from him. About a year and a half after entrapping Eric, she tampered with another man's emotions. Later I learned that during the time of our three conversations, while Eric envisioned marriage and a family, Stacey was plotting her escape. Consequently less than a week after our final conversation Stacey sent Eric a letter enclosing her key to his apartment with an abrupt note severing their relationship. Without disclosing the fact to Eric, Stacey had latched onto another unfortunate victim. While their relationship did not continue, it afforded Eric the arena to experience the love and the close companionship a woman. Hence, while suffering the void left by Stacey's absence he could alternately and perhaps proudly replay memories both, the passionate joy and the insidious conclusion of that relationship saga.

The saga of Meg's amicable relationship with Scott was a story of love, understanding and passionate collaboration. She repeatedly spoke of her

regnant mission, attaining the understanding and acceptance of others within her self made frame of disability. Scott ultimately bounteously fulfilled this vision. Meg met Scott when she was a senior and he was a junior in high school. What began as a teenage romance intensified as Scott attuned his mission to helping Meg attain her goal. While his primary involvement was his unilateral love and support, he expanded that function, assisting her in more mundane ways. After Scott joined Meg as a fellow student at the community college, he appointed himself her tutor as he read aloud her textbook assignments, proofed her written work, and helped her prepare for exams. This unparalleled commitment supported Meg's unequivocal determination to attain her vocational goal. Concurrently aiding and abetting her, Scott summoned Meg to build her strengths and resources, to commandeer more on her own, inside and outside the classroom and apart from her mother. Although Meg was now married to Scott, her lifeline, she was separated from him due to Scott's military service obligations and was threatened by her mother, endeavoring to reestablish her control. However as Scott supported from afar, Meg built on prior successes and continued to experience and maintain tenuous growth independence.

The Service and the Insulation: Special Education

A different set of relationships for the four individuals was germinated, organized and sustained as they received special education services. As with the previously discussed relationships some bore fruits and others thwarted their growth.

Eric confessed that without special education teachers continually cajoling or threatening he would not have completed his homework, finished high school or gone on to the community college. He defined himself as a stubborn critter, content to allow others to direct his life while he merely offered obstinateness and resistance. Eric further credited special educators for dispensing a belief in him that he honed much later.

Before special education services were available in his hometown, Eric was transported to a different community to reap special education benefits and then returned as special education programming was established. The rotation of environments and accompanying provision of services did little to promote Eric's self-advocacy. Instead he functioned as the weak, traveling recipient of services rather than meaningfully contracting his own successful outcomes.

Meg concurrently heralded the all-encompassing assistance and protection special educators provided her and condemned the insular environment they maintained thus depriving her of a more holistic view of the world. While their support aided her both in and out of the classroom, this support weakened her for future struggles and heart aches once she left their kingdom. Hence the world these educators provided left Meg ill prepared for the world bereft of their services once she left high school.

In true educator fashion, Meg offered specific instructions for special educators. She begged educators to assess their young charges' experience, constricted to segregated classrooms for long hours only to be teased when they emerge. Moreover, she valiantly proclaimed her paramount malady; she suffered

severely from not understanding the origin, the essence or the effects of her disability.

Meg was haunted by the recollection of her mother's tears as she learned her daughter had a disability. This label lead to her segregation from her peers without the benefit of them understanding why. Meg lacked and craved an authentic understanding of her deficiencies. She was inhibited as educators failed to specifically delineate how her mental disability could hinder but not thwart her academic progress and future possibilities. Concurrently she needed educators to illuminate and promote the potential impact of the strengths of her character. Therefore, Meg charged special educators as guilty of not equipping her with the information necessary for the self-understanding she craved and the forthcoming explanation she wished they had shared with her peers.

Mark did not harbor such complex expectations and simply affirmed the role special educators took as they unclouded the haze of his confused classroom experience by reteaching and offering an alternative setting for test taking. Mrs. Bell, his resource teacher opened a window of opportunity by taking him aside to explain the secondary at post secondary transition program. I sensed, however, that unlike Meg, Mark did not identify himself as an individual with a disability and deliberately set himself apart from the disabled community.

Unlike the others who began receiving special education services while in elementary school, Ellie did not access services until she was tested as a high school freshman. Just as for Mark the opportunity to take tests in an alternative setting and with some minor adaptations afforded Ellie with the opportunity to

successfully complete her high school curriculum. Ellie evaluated her two high school resource teachers on close connections, nurturance and loyalty. While she awarded both high marks on the first two, she discredited Mrs. Bell for not attending her two IEP meetings that were held at the community college. As with the other three it was her resource teacher who promoted the secondary at post-secondary transition program opportunity. Yet this same teacher joined the ranks of those from her high school who eyed Ellie's shortcomings and questioned her success at the community college.

The Emergent Vision: Success

Where were the genesis and the sustenance for the success for each of these four individuals? Perhaps Meg best encapsulated the answer in one word, "attitude." Each, however, acquired the needed attitude via unique and individualized timetables and environments.

All four spoke of goals and goal setting which aligned with special education planning and programming; however, each of the four held the benefits of speaking of goals from the perspective of one who had attained them. Ellie defined success, "just being able ta do what you set goals and try ta achieve them, and even if you don't achieve 'em, you are a trying at least." For Ellie this success was graduating from high school, graduating from a community college with honors, maintaining a full time job and living on her own.

Continuing and pursuing this theme Mark defined success as "accomplishing all your goals, settin' a goal, getting' it and goin' for another one.

There is always something you gotta do better at." For Mark, success was not a stationary entity.

Likewise Meg identified the synergy for her success as emerging from goal directed thinking. As with Mark, Meg experienced goal setting as addictive:

That was one of my goals to be head teacher and I've made it. I've always wanted to be a teacher from day one. Um, the only thing that I can remember is that no one knew that I could do it, be a head teacher and get through college at the same time. I've done all by goals and I'm just ready to make some new ones.

Eric's definition of success resonated and reverberated from personal experience, "see if you can go out in the real world an' be successful, see if you can keep a job for a long period of time, see if you will be really successful in the real world." Eric at different times alternately offered his mother or himself credit for the impetus required to achieve this successful outcome. This dissonance was easily decipherable. His mother initiated and pursued the press. Only when Eric held a job and leased an apartment that he feared losing did he exert the energy and the motivation to sustain them both.

The Parallels: The Formative Nature of Transition and the Formative Narrative Experience

The previous sections produced rumblings, demonstrating the formative nature of transition experiences. While concluding this research and musing on my auxiliary readings an epiphany occurred. Not only were the transition experiences of the narrators formative but so were the telling of these experiences (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Reflecting on our experience, each

identified the self-growth and understanding that had occurred during our dialogues, our recalling and our reflecting work together.

Amidst their story telling I never assumed that these individuals represented their lives accurately or even thought it possible. I was content knowing they believed they were straightforward. Yet each, like Eric struggled to remember and to tell the story correctly. Therefore, their narratives were both about their experiences and part of their experience. This double relevance summoned formative potential (Rosenwald, 1992).

While my impetus was to understand their transition experiences, my access was through their stories (Rosenwald, 1992). I was alert to the phenomenon that the stories people tell about themselves draws forth more than the events and characters they describe but also the construction of the stories themselves. As I listened to the ways the individuals recounted their histories, what they emphasized and omitted, and their stance as protagonists or victims and how they negotiated with their audience, they conscripted how they laid out their lives. Their personal stories reached beyond describing their lives; they composed their identities (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

I heard them doggedly pursuing the creation of their lives (Rosenwald, 1992). I heard Ellie portray herself, real and imagined as a victim, and award herself credit for her mother's ideas. Eric composed his identity as one who for an extended time lacked any self-initiative. Mark ascribed the momentum that developed as he learned to purposefully use his hands while loyally not

acknowledging his parents drinking behaviors. Meg relentlessly pursued her dream without the benefit of the belief of others.

These were lives in flux, still indeterminate and subject to further transitions. This fact prevented the temptation to interpret them as pilgrimages to a fixed goal, for there was no way to know which fragments of their pasts would prove relevant in the future. Composing a life involved a continual reimagining of the future and a reinterpretation of the past to offer meaning to the present, remembering best those events with meaning and forgetting those insignificant within the narrative (Bateson, 1990).

At the conclusion of our conversations each participant in turn interpreted how this process of sharing experiences was of benefit. Each individually presented a unified thesis, validating the experience as illuminating and formative, using personalized supporting details. This unique experience of punctuating narration gave each pause before moving on in life (Rosenwald, 1992).

For Eric, the experience of telling his story and the narrative that ensued bore testimony to his radical change that occurred as a result of participating in a community college program that was supported by special education services. Eric contrasted his high school experience of total uninvolvedness with peers to his community college experience where he connected with peers, further activating and generating an attitude of care for others that had previously remained dormant. Not only did his story bear testimony to his self identified change but more importantly by the mere process of telling of the story Eric

came into a keen realization of this change that without which would have remained unacknowledged. As he, like the others, told his story, his experiences were illuminated by the by the subtle process of recollection (Crites, 1971), and hence his revelation of change.

Mark similarly attributed the story telling experience, as the vehicle for truly recognizing his "accomplishments," which would not have occurred spontaneously. Further, once activated the process of telling ignited reflections leading to further learning and self-understanding. Therefore, Mark felt rewarded because the dialogue took a previously unplumbed opportunity for understanding (Rosenwald, 1992) and materialized it.

The theme continued with Ellie. She considered the story telling experience as the opportunity to truly realize her "accomplishments" which would have remained unrecognized without the process of recalling and telling. Furthermore, as she told her story she recognized that perceptions of previous sufferings, which had destroyed her to a point of ultimate despair, diminished with new wisdom garnered from later experiences. These later experiences generated alternative versions of the past event. This was not a sign of "interlocutory opportunism" but rather an example of reflection coordinated with new experiences yielding new values (Rosenwald, 1992). She was greeted with increased self-understanding.

As if orchestrated from above, Meg in tandem with the others credited her story telling experience for illuminating her "accomplishments." With a lilt in her voice, Meg confessed her amazement that she could actually remember what

she was summoned to contribute. She confessed a very personal revelation that she had arrived at the point that she was comfortable talking about the intensely personal experience of having a disability. She professed that through the process of telling her story she recognized that she was comfortable in her own skin, disability and all and in fact felt enriched and blessed by the experience of having a disability. So doing, Meg laid claim to the narrative coherence in her life. Moreover, for Meg the story telling evolved into a spontaneous combustion kind of experience inspiring further growth which Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) labeled "progress."

I tried not to verify these narratives beyond attending to issues on internal consistency, checking them against my knowledge of the individuals and requesting a fellow coworker/researcher read them to monitor my assessments. The accounts as I heard them reverberated with the formative nature of narratives. They were autobiographical, not biographical, shaped by each individual's choice and selective memory and by the circumstances of our work together. No doubt they were shaped again by my selective process and resonated with my own experience (Bateson, 1990).

Each of these individuals will continue in the microcosms of their lives, shaping their own lyric commentary on the world around them. The day-to-day events of their lives will continue to unfold (Bateson, 1990). They will continue to undergo further transitions through periods of change and subsequent growth. Each transition soaked in hope and possibility and sustained with history.

This was an inquiry into stories of the transition experience of individuals with disabilities who attended a secondary at post secondary transition program at a community college. This inquiry stirs and challenges my role as the coordinator of the program. The harvest of results greets me with a sense of hope, the potential for new learning and insights arising out of the ways in which Eric, Ellie, Mark, and Meg gallantly channeled through the murky, precarious waters of the transitions in their lives.

What grabs me now as I complete this process is what can we do as educators to tap into the formative power of recalling, reflecting and narrating that could augment the transition growth of our students as well as our own. How can we best learn from our experiences?

EPILOGUE

Letter to Research Community

February 6, 2003

Dear Transition Special Education Research Community,

As I conclude my research project, I wish to reconnect with the research community that braced my beginnings. As I reread my initial literature review and consider those tenuous beginnings, I recognize both my organic naiveté as well as a humble appreciation for the comprehensiveness of my original literature investigation. Now as my work connects with and hopefully expands what was produced before, I look at the literature with different eyes.

My research exploration, similar to my role as the coordinator of a secondary at post-secondary transition program, was drawn to and evolved from the twin pillars of transition and self-determination. Amidst the deluge of transition and self-determination literature, I connected with the research community's clarion call for the student voice (Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Neiri, 1995; West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen & Martin, 1993; Reiff, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1997; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). I chose narrative inquiry to accomplish my mission. I wanted to understand the transition experience of students who had participated in a community college secondary at post secondary transition program. Therefore my subsequent treatise resonates with the firm and the resounding melody of the student's experience.

The literature identifies and describes the issues of both transition and self-determination as both “process” and “complex.” My findings support these markings. During the course of the research, however, the concept of “process” evolved to the nomenclature of “formative.” The transition journey toward self-determination and responsibility for the four narrators was indeed formative and complex.

Issues of Control.

My initial epochal stance, the conceptual framework for my proposal, heralded the notion of “locus of control” as the singular diviner of success. The premise, however, did not match the narrators’ stories; their stories softened my resolve and changed my title. Locus of control was too discrete a concept to determine the individual’s progress. Although still a factor, I can no longer simply earmark a person as having or not having “locus of control” when relationships and interdependence abound and interweave. Certainly these four students developed to the point where they demonstrated “internal locus of control” behavior yet, so much more was happening. Bandura (1997) spoke of internal locus of control as occurring within the context of social conditions, the supports the individual chooses as well as the supports others elicit. The narrators’ stories support this revised thesis.

Wehmeyer (2001) spoke of individuals increasing their internal perceptions of control by making more choices in a less structured environment. As the four narrators left the protective environment of home, high school, and insular special education to “practice” making choices in a less restrictive

environment (Halpern, 1993; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1997), they strengthened their personal control through the guided mastery experiences naturally occurring in a community college environment as well as those that were mandated through the transition program. The probability of risk, part and parcel of this new environment, compelled the individuals toward perseverant effort. Experiencing success in handling problems reinforced their capabilities even as they faced difficulties (Bandura, 1997).

Transition

As stated in the literature section, although transition planning is a major priority for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, follow-up studies track dismal outcomes for students with disabilities as compared to the general population in regard to post-secondary education attendance, employment and residential independence (Blackoby & Wagner, 1996; Levine & Nourse, 1998; Phelps & Hanley- Maxwell, 1997; Wehman & contributors, 2001). The four individuals I interviewed beat the odds, received post-secondary training, secured employment and live independently.

In each case, the individual participating in the secondary at post secondary transition program used research based on best transition practices: functional curriculum, bridging academic, vocational and independent living concerns (Dowdy & Evers, 1996; Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Hensel & Westling, 1985; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Nieri, 1995; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996), paid or unpaid work experiences (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Doren & Benz, 1998;

Kohler, 1993; Lichtenstein, 1993), vocational education, (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Levine & Nourse, 1998; Phelps, Hernandez, Jones, Sanchez & Nieri, 1995), and special education services incorporated in integrated settings (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands & Gliner, 1999). Their stories supported the crucial role teachers, special education teachers and service coordinators play in preparing students for career development (Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Hensel & Westling, 1985; Minskoff, 1996; Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Nieri, 1995) and work success (Colley & Jamison, 1998). Eric's and Ellie's stories specifically documented the wanted and needed "hammering and positive pushing" that is required to encourage students (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000).

The secondary at post-secondary transition program the students were involved in exemplified and promoted interagency cooperation, collaboration and service delivery. Program participation provided a seamless connection from secondary to post-secondary training (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanhoff, 2000; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Izzo, Cartledge, Miller, Growick & Rutkowski, 2000; Kohler, 1993; Levine & Nourse, 1998; Lichtenstein, 1993). While enrolled in the program at the community college, the students continued to have IEP meetings, thereby maintaining the involvement of their high schools, their parents, area education agencies, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and other agencies.

Transition best practices also support the implementation of social skills training (Bassett & Smith, Benz & Halpern, 1993; Cummings, Maddux & Casey,

2000; Hull, Sitlington & Alper, 2001; Fourquerean, 1994; Kohler, 1993; Minskoff, 1996). Eric's grim high school experiences vividly exemplified this need.

Additionally, each could have benefited from learning the social skills to deal with cruelty of teasing. While each received support, consolation and strategies from home concerning how to deal with the teasing that inevitably occurred, each could have profited from learning the social skills in the special education as well as the general education setting for effectively dealing with the ramifications of teasing. The issue of teasing is clearly apparent in the student's experience but absent in the transition literature.

Each narration supported the research-based premise that parent involvement is crucial to the student's successful transition experience (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Gartin, Rumrill & Serebreni, 1996; Kohler, 1993, Lehmann & Bassett, 1999; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands, Spencer & Gliner, 1999; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1995; Thompson, Fulk & Piersey, 2000; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). Another factor absent from the literature, however, apparent in each story was the dramatic negative and positive effects siblings can have on the formative development of students with disabilities.

Furthermore, while unacknowledged in the literature grandparents often have leading roles in the individual's development. Additionally, transition research and practice have neglected to tap a potentially powerful connection. The four students all mentioned their parents and or grandparents as role models of goal directed behavior.

Finally, research suggests extending transition services beyond high school graduation (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanhoff, 2000; Gartin, Rumrill & Serebrine, 1996; Izzo, Cartledge, Miller, Growick & Rutkowski, 2000) because many students with disabilities lack the maturity and the skills to enter the labor force. Students leave the protective secondary and special education environment for post secondary settings, experiencing what Halper (1992) labeled, the “fragile period,” and I call the “fragile period” (Bricout & Bently, 2000, Levine & Nourse, 1998). Throughout this “fragile period,” students with disabilities require considerable more assistance and support than their peers without disabilities. Therefore postponing graduation by extending to a year thirteen and possibly year fourteen programming may make the difference between positive or negative outcomes. Certainly the four narratives supported the rationale and the rewards of this proposal.

Self-determination and Self-Responsibility

As introduced in the literature review, providing special education services may provide a barrier rather than a catalyst for developing self-determination and self-responsibility for students with disabilities (Abbey & Sands, 1996). Leaving school lacking these skills is a precursor for poor post school outcomes for students with disabilities (DeStephano, Heck, Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Mithaug, 1994; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1995; Wehmeyer, 1993). Special education programming operating in the traditional caretaker, protective model may weaken students for postsecondary settings. Both Meg and Eric received vast and comprehensive special education services

in high school and were unprepared for the “paradigm shift” of the post-secondary education environment (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Lukose, 2000; Reiff, Gerber & Geinsberg, 1996).

In addition to the insulating effects of home (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; Halpern, 1994; Lehmann & Bassett, 1999) and school, the student’s own emotionality may hinder the development of self-determination. The task becomes onerous – to support the student emotionally while pressing each to increasingly engage in self-determined activities (Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1996). Meg, Ellie and Eric as well as Mark to a lesser extent, struggled with emotions. With repeated practice and accompanying support, however, they learned to restrain their emotions to demonstrate self-determined behavior.

The four narratives support the notion of the formative evolution of self-determination. Through on-going, multiple and incorporated opportunities for practice across multiple environments and developing within multiple domains the individuals manifested self-determination (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; DeStefano, Heck, Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1996; Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands, Spencer & Gliner, 1999; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1995; Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996).

Special education educators hold in their hands perhaps the best tool to teach self-determination, the IEP. Actively involving students’ participation and ownership in the IEP process provides students with meaningful opportunities to develop and practice self-determination skills (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Feldmann & Messerli, 1995; Lehmann & Bassett, 1995). The four narrators

likewise benefited by gradually assuming a leadership role in the IEP process. This experience carried over to other situations where they experienced the power of positive personal control much like the directorship of the supports around the IEP meeting table.

The home should provide another arena for the development of perseverance and self-determination, as parents transfer the advocate role to the young adult (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; DeStephano, Heck, Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Feldmann & Messerli, 1995; Serna, 1996). Each of the four represented homes addressed this issue differently, and the individual responded in kind. Meg's mother confused her by alternately pushing her out and holding Meg in her control. Ellie's mother consistently nudged Ellie towards increasing levels of independence and self-determination. Eric's mother continually shoved him towards self-determined responsibility; however, the benefits accrued much later. Mark's mother functioned as a continued source of acceptance and encouragement. His dad set him towards self-determination both by his strict discipline as well as with his goal setting behavior.

Furthermore, their stories, abounding with relationships, support how interdependence relates to self-determination. Quality of life is directly related to a high level of interdependency as one contributes to and receives support from others. Personal control /self-determination might not be achieved without the support of others (Abery & Stancliff, 1996).

In conclusion, the four narratives afforded young adults with disabilities a voice as we consider their successful outcomes. Their stories interlock with and

perhaps construct faces for previous research, hopefully enhancing our research base. Meanwhile, those of us in the special education field, led by our mission for better outcomes for students, will continue to search for understandings, often learning best from those we wish to teach.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Madson Ankeny

Letter to Colleagues

February 2, 2003

Dear Special Education Colleagues,

Over the past months I have had the privilege to participate in an arduous and sacred journey; arduous, it swallowed my time and energy; sacred, it furnished a reverent, holistic view into the souls and stories of four of my former students who are now employed and living independently. I did not take a sabbatical to conduct my research project; instead I completed it in communion with my work as the coordinator of a community college secondary at post secondary transition program. I conducted the interviews during summer vacation days and did the analysis and writing by extending my working days into the evening and work week into the weekends. The labor, however, was fruitful. In the process of interviewing these students, eliciting then analyzing their stories I harvested a rich multiplicity of understandings. As I spoke with each, adult to adult, my questions summoned a dynamic of reflection and profound recognition of change. Reflecting with and listening to these young adults recall their experiences, we entered a mutually constructed venture to better understand their transition experiences. They offered me their stories; I produced the narrative. The narratives emerged from our joint conversations and reflections. The narratives were a way of making their lives available to others in a form that differs from the lost individuality of the survey (Bateson, 1990).

We have all read the grim statistics; students with disabilities do not fare well after the crucible of transition from school to life. Many leave high school only to be unemployed or underemployed, often remaining at home. The four students, with whom I spoke, though not exemplary, beat the bleak odds. I

wanted to better understand the experiences that fostered those positive outcomes. From my experience of developing the four narratives I distilled several insights, which may benefit us as professionals. Teasing these personal insights out of a wealth of material and recognizing aspects of my own experience in different forms was the process I found freeing and illuminating (Bateson, 1990). I share these insights, incomplete, ambivalent, a journey of care and learning.

Attentiveness to Peripheral Vision

As I sat and listened to each individual story, I endeavored to distance myself from my special educator's narrow perspective and instead opened myself to the multiplicity of each life. With new eyes, I observed the concentric fields where each learned: home, school, work. Each was living out far different dramas from those I had previously ascribed.

Too often as an educator I have alternately judged or diminished the impact of parents and family. Gaining access to the stories shattered those limiting notions. As I listened, siblings, grandparents, mothers and fathers all paraded through our intercourse, their significance woven into the fabric of each life. Now, after leaving the community college, the family continues as a strong influence in their lives where educators and even friends diminish in import. Loyalty to family differed in intensity for each, yet the connections remained strong. While friendships and school connections dissipated, the power of family connectedness continued, leaving me to consider that my time might best be spent not judging or even analyzing home front circumstances but rather building

and strengthening family allegiances, thus further supporting transition experiences.

When I previously worked with these students, I construed far different levels of awareness of their auxiliary relationships, boyfriends and girlfriends and friendships that both nurtured and threatened their transition experiences. Our interlocutions hastened my understanding of the significance of the relationships that affected their development both in and out of the classroom as well as their overall happiness. While as educators we cannot order our teaching experience around delving into our students' lives, nonetheless, we can benefit from developing an innate sensitivity, an attentive peripheral vision, to what is occurring in our students' lives outside of the classroom.

As alluded to earlier, the social skills of each individual varied in dimension and effectiveness. Social skills, similar to the network of relationships, developed in the arenas of home, school, and work. Each spoke of experiencing difficulties at work, relating to fellow employees or supervisors. Each case utilized and built on previous learning. How can we work to build on this jointly acquired learning so our charges are better equipped to deal with the work place social structure?

Similarly, these individuals' social lives were also impacted by prior experiences and learning. While attending school, they each eventually developed friendships; once they left school, however, those friendships dissipated; the individuals left ill-equipped with neither the skills nor the attitude to replace them. Just as social skills can help defuse and reconstruct workplace

confrontations and complications, social skills need to be developed to attract friendships, for companionship, shelter, and felicity. How can our peripheral attentiveness and our encounters with our students promote the moments and the modalities for building and sustaining friendships?

Pursuing peripheral visions extended beyond my specific research agenda. Before I conducted the interviews, I submerged myself in special education transition literature. While conducting the research, especially during the months of analysis, I sought to broaden and enhance my thinking with readings from anthropology (Bateson, 1984, 1990, 1994, 2000), psychology (Josselson, 1996; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992), religion, (Crities, 1971, 1986; Lewis, 1960), nonfiction (Coles, 1989) and literature (L'Engle, 1972; Sarton, 1968). These readings summoned and enriched a framework for thinking and subsequent understandings.

Understanding a Disability

Arguably none of the individuals I studied understood or could specify their particular disability. While each lamely identified tentative areas of weakness, they were disenfranchised from the ownership and the understanding of the specifics that earned them the right to receive special education services and programming. Thus, only partially conscious and ambivalent, they had continued their odyssey through the "educational" system. While construing that each may or may not have at some point been offered an explanation for their "special" programming, I suggest these explanations should occur repeatedly, commensurate with a student's development, enhancing a complicated lacework of emergent understanding.

The four were unified in the description of their classroom experience removed from special education assistance, confused and left behind. Subsequently each benefited from both the illuminations and the provisions special education programming supplied for them.

Therefore, I observed an incongruity. While appreciatively receiving the needed services and accommodations, the individuals were crippled by an incomplete understanding of the germinative basis for those services. Each explicitly or implicitly called for both an explanation of and implications of their specific disability. Additionally, Meg bravely and ardently commissioned us as educators to explain to her peers the rationale for some remaining in the classroom while others must depart. Can we consider the obligation as well as the inherent potential benefits of Meg's thesis and challenge?

The "rewards" of special education for them included the victimization experience of being teased. As they left the classroom for the mysterious veiled resource room, they were positioned for derision and alienation. While they universally experienced the torment and the pain of teasing, they subsequently dealt with and emerged differently from the experience, corresponding to their development and to the development of their peers. Meg, again the sage warrior, encouraged educators not to ignore the situation and first teach the victim how to deal with the ramifications of teasing; however, if those attempts prove futile, to address the victimizer in order to eradicate the formidable impasse. Neglecting to do so, she admonishes, could mar the child.

The Journey Towards Self-Determination

I was both puzzled and amazed as I heard these young adults each speak of the importance of setting goals, accomplishing them and then replicating that process, especially as a stated component of their success. We

in the special education field continually speak of setting goals with and for our students; after all, our IEP's revolve around goals. So as I heard them join in this vernacular, I felt confirmed. As I inquired further about the origins of their goal setting thoughts and behavior, however, they turned the tables on me and identified their parents and sometimes grandparents, not we educators, as those who had taught them goal setting behavior by demonstrating it in their actions and in their history. These goal-setting roots definitely provided an emergent strength for their aspirations as well as for their accomplishments. Are we as educators missing a potential link? How can we better connect with and build on the example many of our students are observing at home?

Each individual's path toward self-determination was both helped and hindered by the special education experience. Each spoke of the balm the resource room provided; there each escaped the confusion and the speed of presentation found in the general education classroom. Opportunities for relearning, an alternative setting for testing and for developing caring relationships with the resource teachers all eased the school experience frustrations, which were complicated by the effects of disability.

Paradoxically, at times they were handicapped by the very services sent to redeem them. Meg proceeded through the entire high school curriculum accompanied and assisted by a full time aide. Attenuation for each and every obstacle impoverished her from the real life experience and capacity of singularly dealing with discomfort and difficulty, even from having to ask for assistance. Moreover, if the resource room experience automatically and efficiently provides assistance and accommodations, how does a student learn to recognize the need for assistance and subsequently how to request it?

Vocational Experience

Beginning in high school and more specifically at the community college two closely aligned experiences channeled the formative vocational growth for these individuals. Taking what they identified as “hands on” classes such as welding, typing, or construction initiated a synergy of success that did not occur as they struggled with the more academic history and math courses.

Additionally, when they took part in work experiences, they not only reaped financial rewards, but they also attained crucial learning that did not occur in the classroom. As my students oft hear me say, “You learn how to work by working.” Especially when connected with school supervised experiences, even the failures or the trouble spots can provide abundant opportunities for irreplaceable learning. While connected with caring staff, students can be provided with guidance and if needed, redirection. Further these experiences often affirm or challenge the individual’s career goals.

At the community college each student participated in numerous lab and on the job training experiences, trips to potential places of employment, and opportunities to compete in competitions that enhanced, demonstrated and publicized their skills. Mark and Eric participated in Skills USA, competing against peers at the community college as well as others from around the state. For Mark, the welder, this experience was life defining. He chronicled the hours of preparation, the nervous anticipation, and finally the event itself. Attaining his goal of first in his class, Mark subsequently earned third in the state competition, giving him a memory he joyously replays daily. An instructor planted the seed

and regular nourishment; Mark in turn grew with the challenge and visualized his victory. While he did not attain the first place goal for which he aimed, he was not short-changed. Through the participation process he recognized the level of his accomplishments, a realization that carried over a synergy into his visualization of himself as a future welder and shortly thereafter, a shop foreman.

Ellie enlisted her typing skills and earned a slot at a state business competition. The effects of these laurels surpassed all previous notions. Each built renewed levels of self-esteem accruing from increased skills and determination.

Meg marveled at her Child Care class trips. Traveling for the first time to urban areas, not only did she observe potential work environments, she also witnessed homelessness and decay not apparent in her rural community. Instructors pointed out the benefits of urban life in terms of employment possibilities; she also had the opportunity to view and to assimilate a different way of life, leaving her better equipped to live, to teach, and to assess her future.

Eric's on the job training experience aligned with the others. Specifically it provided an arena for learning to surmount work place difficulties, which for Eric were mundane: using a job list to make sure every task was completed, refraining from talking to friends while working, and initiating professional etiquette and skills, such as interviewing and hand shaking.

Even after leaving the community college, these young adults remain connected with instructors and staff. They include the community college personnel as resources and confidantes as they face further transitions.

More Time

As I complete my research project, I consider how our students with disabilities, much like their peers without disabilities, need the advantage of further training and education beyond high school. Beyond specific vocational training they need the time to mature, to experience success as well as failures in an area of strength, and they need the experience of living with others. Further, they require this arena to develop or in some cases to initiate their self-determination skills. If our students leave high school with a diploma but without the skills necessary to live and work independently, we short-change them. If, however, they are afforded a year thirteen and perhaps a year fourteen, their outcomes are potentially brighter. A high expectation of vocational success was set for each of the four individuals. This challenge was braced by encouragement and monitoring. Post secondary training, accompanied with the benefits of special education assistance and support can provide a real life environment for students to develop and practice the skills and the self-advocacy required to truly succeed in the world beyond school. What can we as educators do to ascertain that such programming is available for our students and to support our students' use of these programs?

Reflective Practice

Throughout the narrative experience as the four recalled and reflected on their transition experiences, I witnessed in each a reverence not previously encountered with students, even as I have attempted to make the IEP planning process thoughtful and meaningful for them. The reverence they exhibited was a reverence for their past as well as for the previously untapped recognition of change summoned through the process of recollection and reflection. This formative learning experience I would mark as spiritual. In turn there was a spiritual basis to my attentiveness to them, "a humility in waiting upon the emergence of pattern from experience" (Bateson, 1994, p.10). The observing, listening, and learning proceeded as a pilgrimage (Bateson, 1994).

The narratives evolved to stand for nascent truths: Eric, who was teased unrelentingly throughout his school years, left his family home as a high school junior to care for a grandfather unable to live alone. Eric has carried that core of care, sensitive to the sick and dying, as he cleans hospital rooms. While bereft of the friends he accumulated while attending the community college, Eric enjoys the give and take teasing camaraderie of nurses and hospital staff. After Mark watched two of his siblings marched off to prison for making poor choices, he chose to set a different course for his own life. He now is a responsible caretaker for a child, a wife, a godson, as well as the employees that are under his supervision as shop foreman. Ellie who was betrayed, first by a stepbrother, then by a boyfriend and even by her high school teachers was led by her mother's constant loving encouragement and advice to attain a community college diploma, a satisfying job and an apartment in a large city. Her mother's warm strong influence continues to support Ellie's autonomy. Meg, who has carried the memory of her mother's tears when she learned that Meg as a kindergartner had a disability, helped her mother raise her six younger siblings. Maintaining a burning desire to become a teacher, like her grandmother, Meg

found no auxiliary support for her mission. Staking her own claim to her dream, she found a young man who joined forces with her. Scott loved and cherished her, helped her with the most mundane aspects of her schoolwork and made her his wife. Utilizing both interdependence and fortitude Meg reached her goal, earning an Early Childhood Education A.S. degree and securing a teaching position. Now as a preschool teacher she both ministers to and identifies with one of her students, a little boy with Down's syndrome. Although Meg's self-esteem and emotions continue to oscillate, she treks on, facing her tenuous future with fortitude, resolve and faith.

I have tried to weave my own ambivalence into this work, making it clear that the narratives are not comprehensive nor complete but own that there is much to use and much to value. I end this writing surrounded by echoes in the patterns of four individual's lives. For me, the sense of attentiveness and recognition is now layered (Bateson, 1984). I see the faces and hear the voices of my four "beloved strangers" who will soon occupy a lesser share of my contemplative time; however, they will continue to provide a rich reference as I work with students. In this way I will go on meeting them as I continue to think about issues that concerned them (Bateson, 1984).

As we work with young adults with disabilities, the challenge continues to unfold; how can we remobilize the formative processes, restoring their (as well as our own) reflective capacity (Rosenwald, 1992). I bid myself, as well as you my colleagues, to ponder the ways we can practice an attentive, reflective, spiritual dimension to our work with students.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth Madson Ankeny

Letter to Parents

February 9, 2003

Dear Parents,

Although I am an educator and a researcher, I am first and foremost a mother. I conclude my series of letters by writing to you. Since I want to speak to you parent to parent, this will be my most intimate letter. We are working arm and arm as we seek to raise our children to become responsible, caring, independent adults. When I set expectations for our children's development, I look at my own children through the lens of a teacher and a mother. I use that same lens for your children.

During the research process of interviewing the participants and writing the four narratives I had the privilege of spending several hours with Meg, Ellie, Eric, and Mark, as well as countless hours analyzing their words and experiences. Their words and their experiences bore testimony to the crucial role that their parents played in their transition experiences. I seek to honor you with my response.

Post Secondary Investigations

In each case it was the mother who accompanied her child for the initial community college visit. She both promoted the additional training beyond high school that would lead to better employment opportunities for her child and asserted the wisdom that her child would require and benefit from the special

education assistance and support of the transition program. I firmly believe those trips with parents and child to visit post secondary opportunities can provide a fertile environment for learning that can not occur in the high school setting. Both the parents and the child can learn and profit from each investigation.

Having warned you that this letter was going to be personal, I would like to share several of my husband and my experiences with our daughters as we worked together to help each of them find her best post secondary environment. These experiences transmitted the emerging notion that there was a life beyond high school and eased our daughters' eventual transitions.

What evolved was an unintended ritual as my husband and I took each of our three eldest daughters (our fourth is a high school freshman) for her first college visit to the state university that is my husband's Alma Mater. We were very much novices with our eldest daughter, Monica, but we had the foresight to help her prepare a list of questions to ask the program instructor with whom we were scheduled to visit. Monica, as a junior in high school, was interested in social work; however, after she asked the university professor how much money she could potentially make as a new graduate, she did the mental math. She realized the suggested salary would barely cover the monthly repayments for her loans let alone supply enough for apartment living. Following the college visit, as we traveled to our hotel, Monica spotted a woman driving a black Lexus. Good spiritedly she mocked hollering out the window, "What do you do for a living?" Monica had learned a valuable lesson. As she thought about future education and employment, she knew she needed to find an area both of interest as well

as one that would provide economic sufficiency. The following year Monica found her vocation. While taking a high school Health Careers class, she had the opportunity to job shadow an occupational therapist. She found a match utilizing her own fine motor skills, her empathy for others and a vocation. Then just to find a college that had a reputable program! Monica is now a successful occupational therapist at a large hospital.

Likewise Meg's mother accompanied Meg, her first born, and Meg's resource teacher to the community college. Once there Meg, with her mother proudly observing, administered a page of her prepared questions, encompassing a wide range of topics from dorm life to academic coursework, to the staff and current students alike. Uncharacteristically, Meg's mother remained in the background during this initial visit, but she plaintively and proudly confided as we walked together from one college building to another how Meg as the eldest of her seven children had early on capably assumed care for her siblings. Meg's mother had journeyed to the community college with Meg in support of Meg's unrelenting mission to prepare for a career beyond caring for her younger siblings.

As we visited around a table in the community college cafeteria, Mark's mother with Mark seated beside her asked me directed questions about which dorm setting would provide the best study environment. While knowing that Mark was soon to become a father, she aspired and promoted the notion that he gain the training necessary to attain his and her former goals. With an unemployed husband with a disability and she working at a factory job, she envisioned more

of a future for Mark. Without that gentle but firm directive, however, Mark would not have continued his education beyond high school. As student and parent invested in this process with questions and dialogue, they set the stage for growth, learning and understanding.

Several years later we returned to Jay's Alma Matter with Emma. Emma at that time was following a long-term dream to become a physician. We met with the woman at the college who monitored pre medical school programming. She, without any concrete understanding of Emma or her abilities, told her how difficult the math and science classes would be and suggested Emma look into the field of hospital wellness programmer. As Emma's mother I was angry at this woman's response but did not allow it to show. My bitterness would not help Emma. What we did instead was to take Emma on other visits to other colleges where faculty were more astute at acknowledging her gifts. The following summer we made arrangements so that Emma could spend a week with Jay's cousin and his wife who were both physicians. This experience, unlike any other, led Emma to enter the health care field through nursing. She has recently completed her BSN and is currently applying for a master's in nursing program.

As parents we struggle to maintain a balance, promoting our specific hopes and dreams for our children, sensing their strengths and potential, and allowing them the freedom to find their own authentic vocational calling. Eric's mother forecast a career for him that aligned with his high school work experiences and her aspirations for him. Therefore, when he was not successful

in her chosen path, she demonstrated resistance but ultimately supported him as he was guided towards another vocation.

Ellie's mother heard her suggest that she wanted to pursue a career in the child care field but understood the field's meager salaries and gently persuaded Ellie to follow a career path with a more promising salary and a full time employment outlook. Therefore Ellie's mother gifted her, reminding her that she had other strengths and interests that could be successfully channeled into a career; her interest in small children could be commissioned with her relationships with her nephews and nieces and later with her own children.

Meg retained and upheld her dream to become a teacher without the initial support of teachers or even her parents. During an earlier high school IEP meeting her mother did not object when Meg's IEP team suggested she utilize her strengths and bypass her academic deficiencies by finding employment cleaning houses. Once Meg cemented her vocational commitment, however, her mother assumed her traditional role of bastion of support as Meg fought for her goal. After Meg had completed the diploma course work, it was her mother who urged her to achieve her A.S. degree. Meg would not have pursued her work to that next level without her mother's optimistic support.

Mark, with his mother's support, visited with at least two program instructors, carpentry and welding, before he selected a vocational program. His father had encouraged Mark to follow in his footsteps and become an electrician, but Mark could not reconcile his difficulty with algebra and pursuing electrician training. Mark and his father had throughout the years enjoyed working together

on an assortment of carpentry and mechanical projects and repeatedly dialogued about the possibility of reestablishing his father's former business. The steps towards selecting a vocational goal and achieving the necessary training are never smooth. Yet each step can provide a learning opportunity but best braced by the support of parents.

Laura, our third daughter, traveled with Jay but without me to his Alma Mater during her junior year. There she was introduced to a college program that provided student mentors for young women interested in careers in science and industry. This program, a support program within the college similar to the transition program, excited them both.

Support and community must be sought out; however, it can provide the crucial difference between success and failure in a new environment. The four individuals I interviewed acknowledged that the secondary at post secondary transition program connected them to the community college and supported their success. Prior to entrance, however, it was apparent that each student's mother had the wisdom to advocate utilizing the secondary at postsecondary transition program as the most advantageous channel for her child to attain the desired vocational goal.

Laura went on to other college visits. She initially wanted to follow in my footsteps to become a special education teacher. When we met with the professor in charge of education programs at the college where she began her college career, she asked him as we were leaving what she should do to best prepare to enter the field of special education. He told her that she should find

ways to nourish herself because this field would draw from her, and she would need to find ways to refresh her spent reservoir. His list was generic, meant to find personal ascription. While directed to those in the special education field, I sense his prescription was more universal. Regardless of our specific vocation, each needs to consider ways to renew our inner resources.

Mark, in his job as shop foreman; Meg, in her role as preschool teacher; Eric, working in the life and death hospital setting; Ellie, transcribing for the deaf have developed skills and gathered resources to renew their spirits. Most methods revolve around set rituals and supportive relationships. To replenish his spent reserve, Mark gets on his bike with Katie behind him; takes her out to her little swimming pool; enjoys a leisurely visit with his young wife, Amy; or visits with his parents. Meg takes a walk, bakes or gets on the phone with her military husband. Eric enjoys computer games, watching television, picking up trash in country ditches and using his cell phone to check in with his parents. Ellie picks up her cross-stitch projects, writes a letter to a mission child, visits her girlfriend or calls her parents and boyfriend.

Each sought a religious connection as well. Prior to turning on the tape recorder for our second interview session, Mark disclosed his profound disappointment that neither his parish priest nor an uncle who was a priest would marry him and Amy as they had chosen to have an outdoor wedding. Therefore they utilized a justice of the peace. Both Eric and Ellie confessed that they wished they were more connected with a church community. Ellie explained that she attended services when she visited her parents; however, she disliked

attending services in Cedar Falls alone and missed that component in her life. Meg heralded a strong faith and professed that this source of strength aided her through difficulties. Even with Scott gone I witness her maintain her commitment to attend weekly mass, often accompanied by a couple of little sisters,

Although the four now live independently, they continue to have strong relationships with their parents; relationships laced with dialogue and shared activities. We do our children a favor when we share our own experienced rituals and support them as they establish their own. Similarly my daughters witnessed me as I trekked the country miles, observed my prayer life, watched as I repetitively conquered vast yeasty masses of bread dough. Now as the three oldest live on their own and miles away, we continue our conversations with phone calls, letters and emails.

Eventually we taught our daughters, (and I encourage potential transition students to replicate), how to schedule their own college visits; and to prepare a list of questions to ask instructors. In doing so we not only prepared them for a visit; we were preparing them for life. As we jointly ventured out to view prospective post secondary settings, we mutually learned and discussed what is expected in new environments and subsequently encountered a rich new set of learnings and understandings. Laura, reconnecting with her own organic roots, recently transferred from her first college to a university in order to follow her authentic calling to become a geriatric nurse practitioner.

Jobs

Meg, Ellie, Mark, and Eric all held at least one job while in high school. Their mothers either provided the impetus to secure those jobs or supported their implementation or both. These jobs in addition to providing monetary benefits secured a frame of reference for career exploration, basic employment expectations, as well as the residual self-esteem that accrued by performing a needed and valued function.

Monica, Emma, and Laura, while in high school, each took certified nursing assistant training and worked part time at local nursing homes. As employees, similar to Meg, Ellie, Eric, and Mark, they learned to budget their time, their energy, and their money. As students they learned to visualize themselves in various roles in future settings. As human beings, at a very young age, they learned the beauty of life, relationships and compassion, as well as the reality of death and the role they could play as both caregiver and family supporter.

Laura, working as a certified nursing assistant, developed a special relationship and a new set of understandings as she befriended an old man. Shortly after he arrived at the care center, Laura read him his wife's funeral card. Unable to attend his wife's funeral he praised Laura for the clear rendition of the card's contents and the time she spent to share it. Thereafter Laura would take time at the end of her workday to stop in for a short visit. Although in pain he would smile and call her an "angel." A few short months later Laura was called

in to wash his body before it was taken to the funeral home. By ministering to him in life and death she validated her own values and notions for future vocational satisfactions.

Correspondingly Meg, Eric, Ellie and Mark each responded to a mother's gentle admonitions, investigating and experiencing new work settings while in high school in order to help set a course for the future. Mark worked for an extended time at a hardware store; a social fellow, he enjoyed visiting with coworkers and customers. Then he did a stint at a welding shop where he enjoyed the camaraderie of the fellows in the shop. Later as Mark observed his employer's unchecked temper outbursts, he validated and affirmed his personal convictions of respect and effective communication among coworkers. These convictions were carried over, as Mark became the shop foreman and set the tone for his subordinates as well as for his employer.

Eric's mother directed him out of the house to locate a job. Although Eric was not really successful in his grocery store position, he experienced the satisfaction of earning money; he could purchase things on his own. Further he learned and utilized another kind of dialogue with coworkers and customers than he had been accustomed to in school. As a working man he earned a level of prestige and self esteem that he did not find when he attended school.

Honor the Struggle and Seek Renewal

School, like jobs, can offer a formidable environment whether a student has a disability or does not have a disability. We must honor the struggle our children face daily. If we can encourage our children to develop an alternative

arena for success or at least renewal, we do them a profound favor. Ellie excelled in Taekwondo and enjoyed an after school child care job. Mark wrestled and savored working on cars and stereos and at a hardware store. Meg built a supportive arena of friendships and felt empowered at home helping her younger siblings. Eric shot baskets, worked at a grocery store, and helped an elderly grandfather.

Similarly we encouraged our daughters as they participated in music, speech, drama, 4-H, church youth activities, as well as their mandatory tasks at home. They knew they could bring a passel of friends or a boyfriend to the farm for a meal or a movie or a game. Now the three eldest as young adults find nourishment from the stresses of their days by returning to those earlier diversions.

Home as a Refuge

Meg, Eric, Ellie and Mark all found their homes a refuge whether it was from the experience of teasing or from the on going frustrations of schoolwork. As they faced struggles, in ritual sequence, they would venture home to have fecund dialogues with their mothers.

We do our children a favor when we support the notion of home as a haven. Just as we working adults eagerly anticipate the moment we can return home after a long workday, our children crave that same sentiment. Ascribing this theory, however, there is ample opportunity for disconnect. While our homes must provide refuge, our role is not to harbor our children. Rather, our role must be to equip our children to protect and affirm themselves. Learning from each

other, through conversation, reflection, and observed example our children can accrue the necessary strength to face and negotiate the trials and the transitions in their lives.

With sincere respect and appreciation,

Elizabeth

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APPENDIX A: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As I consider the dire outcome statistics for students previously receiving special education services, questions come to mind. Findings suggest a large percentage drop out of high school, remain financially dependent, live at home, settle for low status jobs, experience problems with self-perception and motivation and describe high rates of dissatisfaction with their lives. There are individuals with disabilities, however, who live independently, employed in other than low status jobs, involved in leisure activities and satisfied with their lives. Why are success and satisfaction possible for some, yet elude others? What is the successful transition experience for students with disabilities? How are these questions addressed in the literature?

A literature web was subsequently woven with the collection of threads of literature considering follow up studies, transition, postsecondary opportunities, locus of control, barriers to personal control, and self-determination. Like the web, the literature identifies and describes the issues of transition and self-determination as both “process” and “complex.” Furthermore, the literature findings are not discrete; the topic threads continually overlap and intersect. Ultimately the student stories provided the *attachment zone* of the web.

Follow-up Studies

Follow-up studies and survey instruments traced dismal outcomes for students with disabilities as compared to the general population in regard to postsecondary education attendance, employment, and residential

independence (Blackoby & Wagner, 1996; Levine & Nourse, 1998; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). The unemployment of young adults with disabilities continues to be a pervasive national problem. In spite of 20 years of significant progress in special education and vocational rehabilitation, young people with disabilities continue to be unemployed and underemployed (Wehman & contributors, 2001). Wehman (2001), citing current statistics from Lou Harris and Associates, reports two thirds of Americans with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64 are not working. Twenty percent are working full time and eleven percent are working part time.

Despite the proliferation of follow-up studies, the transition experience as well as the immediate and long-term lives of youth with disabilities are not understood. Little is known about their quality of life, how they fit in communities, how satisfied they are with their lives. The follow-up research offers weak power to explain aforementioned complex processes and causes of poor outcomes. Moreover, data that focus on isolated factors such, as employment at a single time do not provide an adequate story of the graduate's situation (Levine & Nourse, 1998). Furthermore, there are no established criteria to identify what constitutes a successful adult life (Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990).

Transition Planning and Services

In response to these disappointing findings, the professional literature promotes transition planning and instruction. The review of transition literature offers a smorgasbord of best practices and recommendations for transition

planning. The juxtaposition of findings provides links to positive employment and postschool outcomes for students with disabilities.

Transition planning for individuals with disabilities has become a major priority of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA; P.S. 101-476) currently requires that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) include a statement of necessary transition services beginning no later than age 16.

Transition services are defined as “a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation” (Section 602 (a)(19)). The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children published a position statement on transition (Halpern, 1994). The definition includes:

Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships...

Current programming reflects and promotes the ideals of these definitions.

Functional curriculum, which bridges academic, vocational, and independent living concerns increases student competencies frequently associated with positive employment and postschool outcomes if taught in context of their

application and use beyond school. Using various approaches to link work concepts into school-based learning, opportunities are included as indicators of quality school-to-work programs (Dowdy & Evers, 1996; Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Hensel & Westling, 1985; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Nieri, 1995; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). Furthermore, paid or unpaid work experiences, when in high school lead to a consistently higher level of employment (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Doren & Benz, 1998; Kohler, 1993; Lichenstein, 1993).

Participating in occupational and vocational education while in high school is associated with postschool success. Those who participated in occupational education in high school are more often in paid competitive jobs and working full-time. Vocational and academic learning integrated with an occupational focus help students prepare for the postschool world (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Levine & Nourse, 1998; Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Nieri, 1995).

Some advocate that those who receive special education services in integrated settings, as opposed to separate settings, more often obtain paid competitive employment and feel better prepared to keep their job (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands & Gliner, 1999). Others enter the debate of how students should be educated with this priority in mind and suggest spending at least part of the day in special education classrooms developing functional life skills and participating in on-the-job training (Brown, Farrington, Suomi, Ziegler & Knight, 1999; Page & Chadsey-Rusch, 1995).

Teachers and service coordinators play an important role in assisting and preparing students for career development (Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Hensel & Westling, 1985; Minskoff, 1996; Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Nieri, 1995). Colley and Jamison's (1998) research documents that most youth report their special education teacher as critical to their work success.

Adolescents with disabilities want and need a personal relationship with a trusted adult who will encourage their efforts, validate their fears, and celebrate their accomplishments. Students also want and need "hammering and positive pushing" that is necessary to encourage students (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000).

Interagency cooperation and collaboration and service delivery have a positive impact on student outcomes (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000; Izzo, Cartledge, Miller, Growick & Rutkowski, 2000; Kohler, 1993; Lichtenstein, 1993). The collaboration should also include outreach links with postsecondary education or training (Colley & Jamison, 1998; Levine & Nourse, 1998).

To ensure more positive outcomes, social skills should be included in the retinue of transition programming and planning. Social skills training, though research based, is often absent in education programs as well as in transition planning (Bassett & Smith, 1996; Benz & Halpern, 1993; Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; Hull, Sitlington & Alper, 2001; Fourquerean, 1994; Kohler, 1993; Minskoff, 1996).

Studies confirm parent or family involvement as critical to the success of student's transition (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Gartin, Rumrill & Serebreni, 1996;

Kohler, 1993; Lehmann & Bassett, 1999; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands, Spencer & Gliner, 1999; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1995; Thompson, Fulk & Piersey, 2000; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). There exists a gap, however, as schools and service providers give lip service to the importance of parent and student involvement and the actual level of their involvement in transition related activities (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998). Conversely, parent engagement may inhibit the independence of their children (Lehmann & Bassett, 1999).

Extended transition services beyond graduation improve the employment outcomes of students with disabilities (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanhoff, 2000; Gartin, Rumrill & Serebreni, 1996; Izzo, Cartledge, Miller, Growick & Rutkowski, 2000). Izzo et al. (2000) research supports adding thirteenth and fourteenth year programs as a postsecondary option. In contrast to their age-mates, many students with disabilities are not sufficiently mature or skilled to successfully enter the labor force after high school. A preferred option might be to postpone graduation for two years for an extended program.

According to Lichtenstein (1993) employers should be identified as instructional and training partners. The concept of employers as instructional and training partners is an underused aspect of the transition planning process.

To ensure more positive outcomes transition planning and preparation should begin early. The skills necessary to be successful in postsecondary and employment settings take years to develop (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; Minskoff, 1996). Strategies must include the student with disabilities in collaboration with others in planning, providing support, and accomplishing

goals. All of the participants in the transition process, including teachers, administrators, parents, adult service providers, and most critically, students should carry involvement in the planning and implementation of the IEP and the transition plan (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; Minskoff, 1996; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996).

Considering this impressive and extensive list gives pause. Thompson, Fulk, and Piersey (2000) rail that we delude ourselves if we assume that transition services delivered in public schools have a marked effect on postschool lives of students. Instead they offer that schools for the most part are providing only minimal compliance with the technical requirement of IDEA by housing an annually reviewed transition plan on file. Moreover the intent of the law, quality programming and planning, is far from realized (Thompson, Fulk & Piersey, 2000). Questions persist regarding the reality of what schools are actually doing to address the transition needs of secondary-aged students. Are schools implementing what the literature identifies as best-practice? More specifically is what schools report they do and what actually occurs consistent? Much of what has been reported in the literature on transition practices focuses on reported best practices, not on what is conclusively being implemented in programs (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998).

Implementing effective transition services should become the ultimate challenge and attaining successful transitions for all students the ultimate goal of the educational system. What value are school outcomes as compared to outcomes necessary for successful adult living (Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-

Maxwell, 1996). Modeling general education, current special education reform issues emphasize academics rather than the eventual transition to adulthood and citizenship. Unfortunately, there is little support for a holistic approach to transition needs which includes: occupational training, social skill development, community opportunities, and leisure time activities (Bassett & Smith, 1996; DeStefano, Heck, Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Sittlington, 1996; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). Further students benefit from enriched and extended transition services (Farley & Johnson, 1999; Izzo, Cartledge, Miller, Growich & Rutkowski, 2000; Mithaug, 1994; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

Certainly we must consider the complexity of transition outcomes where young adults all too often remain at home, despite the desire to move out, face social isolation, and inactivity, continue to rely on family for social and community interaction, thus demonstrating that quality of life extends beyond work. Failure to address one or more domains of adult life can result in problems manifested in other realms (Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996). As aforementioned, the numerous follow-up studies about post school life for young people with disabilities provide weak power to explain the complex processes and causes of transition outcomes. These studies present only part of the "story" without considering the mass of data not measured (Levine & Nourse, 1998).

The misconception remains that students with "mild" disabilities will succeed on their own when research indicates otherwise (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000). Students may hold a high school diploma, but this

accomplishment bears little merit if it leads no further. Likewise, a beautifully crafted transition plan remains dormant unless the student and his or her family invest in its formation and implementation.

Postsecondary Opportunities

For students with disabilities, community colleges are the colleges of choice. Seventy one percent of all students with disabilities in higher education attend two-year colleges (Barnett, 1996). In fact, community colleges serve more students with disabilities than any other branch of post secondary education.

Various legislative acts (i.e., Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) state that educational programs and facilities, including vocational education and training programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels, may not discriminate against persons with disabilities solely on the basis of their disability. These Acts indicate that institutions may not discriminate in recruitment or admissions and must provide reasonable support services, accommodations, and modifications to course requirements and facilities (Dowdy & Evers, 1996).

As students with disabilities graduate from high school, they move away from a protective environment in which school personnel are legally responsible for identifying and providing appropriate services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Many students with disabilities entering a postsecondary environment need extraordinary and intensive services just to make minimal progress toward their personal, academic, and employment goals. The postsecondary environment is different for these students in that they need to

request specific accommodations and provide documentation of their disability before services will be provided (Fair-weather & Shaver, 1990). Concerns arise that many students with disabilities have not learned how to advocate for themselves by the time they enter postsecondary settings and, therefore, are not provided the services needed to help them succeed.

Community College Services

Factors drawing students with disabilities to community colleges include: open admissions, geographic accessibility, emphasis on faculty teaching over research, strong counseling components, special services for special populations (Alexander, 1982) and affordability. In response to students' needs, many community colleges have developed programs and support services necessary to assist students with disabilities as they accomplish their educational and/or vocational goals. Colley and Jamison (1998) studied 720 former special education students in New York. Forty percent had attained a high school diploma, but less than half of those students enrolled in postsecondary programs following high school. In addition, less than half of those who did go on to college utilized academic support services the colleges offered.

Research by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) to document services for community college students with disabilities found that nearly 80 percent of the colleges had a formal disability support office. Eight percent of all community college students report a disability but only four-percent request service. The ten most common services and accommodations

involve registration assistance, counseling, alternative exam formats, note-taking services, learning center labs, disability support offices, adapted equipment, taped texts, and tutoring. The least prevalent services/accommodations include on and off campus housing, independent living, and transportation. The most common outreach activities include government and nongovernmental vocational rehabilitation agencies, high school counselor outreach, collaboration with community organizations, advisory boards, and accommodation consultation to business, and parent organizations. Few colleges successfully or systematically track students. As a result, there is a lack of concrete data on graduation or certificate attainment or information on what happens to students with disabilities once they leave community colleges (Barnett, 1996).

Disability Support Programs

In 1992 Barnett (for the AACC) sought to identify key factors contributing to the success of disability support programs. The six most mentioned factors were: administrative commitment, community linkages, staff expertise, faculty support, student-oriented approach, and stable funding.

In a related study, Scott-Skillman, Guichard, Halliday, Tarrer, and Wilson (1992) examined the effectiveness of a specific California community college program that serves students with disabilities. The program provides support services, specialized instruction and educational accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they can participate as fully and benefit as equitably as their non-disabled peers in the college experience. In this program an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) connects the student's goals and curriculum

program to required academic accommodations. Highlights of the findings included: the program positively impacted the college access for students with special needs; students with special needs could be mainstreamed into general college courses; they could successfully complete and reach their identified educational and career goals; it cost more to educate students with special needs; and the costs often exceeded the available allocation of funds.

Transition to Postsecondary

In an effort to facilitate the transition from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, Gartin, Rumrill & Serebreni (1996) propose what they call "The Higher Education Transition Model." The model consists of a three-part framework. To be effective, all three parts must coexist and interact: Academic Development, which includes learning and using effective study and time management skills and utilizing college services; Psychosocial Adjustment, which includes moving from independence and establishing and maintaining adult relationships; and College and Community Orientation, which includes early linkages with the college, making connections with other students and participating in orientation sessions and campus activities. Programs for students with disabilities, mandated and otherwise, have centered on the first of these three parts, leaving one to speculate how much more success the student with disabilities would enjoy if the last two were given more attention.

As discussed previously, as a direct consequence of open-door admission policies, 71 % of students with disabilities attend community colleges

(Barnett, 1996). Therefore, students with disabilities enter community colleges, but educational opportunity means far more than access.

Locus of Control

Mary's story (in the Prelude) brings to the surface a conversation about perceptions of control. While she was in high school, did she experience an internal locus of control in the school environment or at home? If previously undeveloped how can a student like Mary develop a sense of control in her life? What environments and experiences ameliorate a person's internal locus of control?

People have perpetually sought to control the events that affect their lives. Seeking for control over life circumstances encompasses almost everything people do throughout their lives because it provides substantial personal and social benefits. The inability to exert influence over matters that negatively affect one's life fosters, apprehension, apathy, or despair. The ability to achieve desired outcomes and to avoid undesired outcomes therefore provides a dynamic incentive for the development and exercise of personal control. The more people exert personal control on events in their lives, the more they can fashion them to their satisfaction. Human behavior is imbued with social conditions. Therefore, the environmental supports for a chosen life direction congeal both individually as well those elicited from others (Bandura, 1997).

Wehmeyer et al. (1999) define locus of control as the degree to which a person perceives contingency between personal actions and outcomes. The locus of control construct conceptualizes the degree to which individuals believe

that they have control over and can influence their outcomes, or whether others instead control their outcomes, fate, or circumstances. Mercer and Snell(1977) describe this construct:

When a person is characterized as having an internal locus of control, he views reinforcement as primarily the consequences of one's own actions; whereas, if a person is characterized as having an external locus of control, reinforcement is viewed as the result of outside forces, e.g., luck, fate, chance and/or powerful others (p. 183).

To promote internal perceptions of control the individual should be allowed to make more choices in a less structured environment (Wehmeyer, 2001). More pertinent perhaps, adolescents expand and strengthen personal control by learning how to deal successfully with potentially troublesome situations in which they have had no experience as well as with emergent life opportunities. This strengthening of personal control is best achieved through guided mastery experiences that evoke the knowledge and skills necessary to exercise adequate control over situations that place one at some risk. Development of resilient personal control demands experience in mastering difficulties through perseverant effort. Success in handling problem situations impregnates a conviction in one's capabilities that provides an impetus for persisting even when confronted with difficulties (Bandura, 1997).

Successful Transitions

People have always sought to control the events that affect their lives. To achieve and realize control of life is a powerful conduit to success (Speckman, Goldberg & Herman, 1992). Perceptions of control lead to positive adult outcomes such as employment, higher quality of life, including greater

opportunities to make choices in the lives and to achieve increased independence (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1997). Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg (1997) studied and interviewed successful adults with learning disabilities and identified the most consistent definition of success related to the ability to gain or regain control of their lives.

In their monumental study Gerber, Ginsberg, and Reiff (1992) identified patterns in employment success for highly successful adults with learning disabilities identified control as the key to success for those individuals. "Control meant making conscious decisions to take charge of one's life, and adapting and shaping oneself in order to move aheadControl was the fuel that fired their success (p.479)."

Research suggests people with disabilities hold perceptions of control, which are less adaptive than those of their peers. Environments where they learn, work, live and play historically have been segregated and insulated creating dependency coinciding with few opportunities to make choices that affect their quality of life (Halpern, 1993; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1997). For those educated in an inclusive setting there has been a tendency to overlook their transition needs (Bassett & Smith, 1996). Furthermore, students served in inclusive settings often see their high school as less rewarding than outside world alternatives such as jobs (Lichtenstein, 1993). Students who struggle in a traditional high school program to meet academic requirements often feel bored or question a high school curriculum that does not prepare them to meet post school goals (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanhoff, 2000).

Barriers to Personal Control

Special education environments and lack of opportunities can produce deleterious consequences. The typical special education classroom may be more a barrier than a catalyst for developing personal control (Abery & Stancliffe, 1996). The traditional caretaker, protective role of special education may impede students' realistic views of job expectations and career goals and instead promote ambivalence about their futures. Further, most non-disabled students make the transition to postsecondary settings with minimal assistance. The transition leap for students with disabilities, however, which may include postsecondary education, requires "paradigm shifts" for which they are unprepared (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Lukose, 2000; & Reiff, Gerber & Geinsberg, 1996).

Parents and service providers attach the notion that a disability label assumes the person unable to take personal life responsibility. Further aggravating the situation, secondary programs focus on academics, which have little impact on post-school adjustment (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; Halpern, 1994; Lehmann & Bassett, 1999). The achievement of academic skills alone is insufficient for improving postschool outcomes (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000). The traditional deficit driven, remediation model of special education is not adequate in preparing students for the world they will eventually face (Speckman, Goldberg & Herman, 1992).

Running counter to "services" and notions and programs adolescents must navigate their way to adulthood. Turbulent waters for most, for adolescents

with disabilities this “floundering period,” (Halpern, 1993) vibrates with significant and sometimes insurmountable barriers (Bricout & Bentley, 2000; Levine & Nourse, 1998). Acknowledging these tensions leads to the assumption that students with disabilities require more assistance and support than their non-disabled peers through the often traumatic years of adolescence and early adulthood (Gartin, Rumrill & Serebreni, 1996).

The “floundering period” for youth without disabilities is often spent at a college or university. By graduation these youth are better prepared for work, accompanied by skills and credentials. They are also four or five years more mature having had the experience of living away from home, the possibility of work experience, as well as opportunities to socialize in positive settings with peers. Youth with disabilities are not acquiring these experiences (Levine & Nourse, 1998). They are “late bloomers” with prolonged dependence on family (Speckman, Goldberg & Herman, 1992).

Unfortunately, educators and families often work at cross-purposes to support students. During transition planning, educators focus on the school’s role and improving class performance and sometimes express reticence about parent involvement. Teachers often view transition plans as “paperwork” rather than truly reflecting the transition planning team’s postschool plan and vision for the student (Thompson, Fulk & Piersey, 2000). Parents, however, take the role of allies, communicating trust, avoiding criticism and permitting the adolescent to experience life options. The adolescents describe themselves as passive participants in transition planning because they do not feel welcomed,

accommodated, or respected (Powers, Turner, Matuszewski, Wilson & Loesch, 1999; Thompson, Fulk & Piersey, 2000). Consequently students proceed to the next step of their lives, whether postsecondary training or work ill prepared, often embodying what Seligman (1975) labeled "learned helplessness" (Colley & Jamison, 1998; deFur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Hull, Stilington & Alper, 2001; Lukose, 2000; Minskoff, 1996; Page & Chadsey-Rusch, 1995).

Further complicating this process, students are moving from the protective public school environment in which school personnel are legally responsible for identifying and providing appropriate services under PL 101-476 to the next environment in which students are expected to request accommodations and provide documentation of their disabilities under 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (Gartin, Rumrill & Serebreni, 1996). Moreover, general education efforts currently focus on academic standards and teacher excellence where special education initiatives have progressed from access to student outcomes and self-advocacy (Lehmann, Cobb & Tochtermann, 2001). With such radical and profound differences from the public school environment to the postsecondary environment as well as the contrast of educational agenda directed to a non-disabled student versus a classmate with disabilities small wonder Lehmann et al. (2001) reflect "are we traveling in the same orbit?"

Self-determination

Returning to the issue of perception of control we recall success is defined as taking control. We now consider self-determination, which includes corollary attributes of self awareness, choice making, enacting choice, and

control over one's life provides the key to adult success and quality of life (de Fur, Wetzel & Trossi, 1996; Mithaug, 1994; Wehmeyer, 1993,1996). It follows and findings support that leaving school lacking self-determination skills becomes a precursor to poor post school outcomes for students with disabilities (DeStephano, Heck, Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Mithaug, 1994; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull 1995; Wehmeyer, 1993).

Why do the issues of self-determination predominate special education literature and conversely receive scant attention in educational discussions of students without disabilities? Students in general education acquire self-determination skills through daily interactions in their lives; however, students receiving special education services acquire far fewer self-determination skills in their daily lives (Martin & Marshall, 1996). As considered earlier, the protective environment of special education and family insulates students with disabilities providing them fewer opportunities for decision making and learning from positive and negative consequences than their peers with no disabilities. Students without disabilities also flounder but have the resources to recover. Without such resources or skills students with disabilities are clearly disadvantaged often becoming "causal unrealists" (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1997), bereft of self-responsibility and perseverance, instead overly-reliant upon adults and service providers to make decisions for them (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Wehmeyer, 1993; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1997). They must learn to negotiate the complex systems of regulations and services that inadvertently reinforce dependency and instead emphasize the assistance and direction

provided by others. Often times the educational and rehabilitation systems foster dependency and hinder personal control (Powers, Wilson, Matusqewski, Phillips, Rein, Schumacher & Gensert, 1996; Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996).

Self-determination should become the ultimate goal of education (Halloran, 1993). Wehmeyer,(1996) defined self-determination as "acting as the primary causal agent in one's life and making choices and decisions regarding one's quality of life free from undue external influence or interference"(p.24). Too many students with disabilities, however, remain dependent on caregivers, service providers, and overloaded social systems to do for them what they should be enabled to do for themselves. As stated earlier, self-determination and resulting control are strongly associated with quality of life issues. Causal agency is a critical element contributing to enhanced quality of life (Wehmeyer, 1996).

Much like the concept of transition, self-determination is described as a process (Kennedy, 1996; Abery & Stancliff, 1996). Abery and Stancliff (1996) define the process of self-determination as "driven by the intrinsic motivation of each of us to be the primary determiner of our thoughts, feelings, and behavior" (p. 112).

The literature provides a feast of "best practices" for developing this critical skill. Self-determination literature is interwoven with transition literature. Students become self-determined via a developmental process which must begin early with on-going, multiple and incorporated opportunities for practice across multiple environments and developing within multiple domains rather than

something that takes place solely at the end of schooling (Cummings, Maddux & Casey, 2000; DeStefano, Heck, Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer Palmer, 1996; Hasazi, Furney, & DeStephano, 1999; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands, Spencer & Gliner, 1999; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1995; Sands & Wehmeyer, 1996).

The primary barriers to self-determined behaviors of adolescents with disabilities involve their emotionality. It is crucial therefore to provide emotional support to assist students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses without obscuring the reality of their life decisions. If self-determination does not emerge, it is due to limited opportunities to engage in self-determination during adolescence (Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer & Palmer, 1996).

The work of Abery and Stancliff (1996) focuses primarily on the role of the environment "by focusing primarily on the individual, many models have not adequately acknowledged the important role of environmental factors in the self-determination process" (p.113). Abery and Stancliff (1996) relate that the current value in American society is independence and autonomy.

Interdependency is seen as a character flaw and a weakness. Interdependence, however, is related to self-determination for the highest quality of life is directly related to a high level of interdependency as one contributes to and receives from others. For without the support of others one may never develop the capacities necessary to gain personal control over his or her life.

Mithaug (1996) suggests an "optimal prospects principle" as a theoretical basis for teaching self-determination. By learning to set their expectations slightly higher than they are capable of achieving and choosing behaviors and

strategies to produce results to match expectations, learners become self-regulated problem solvers. By becoming self-determined, individuals gain the capacity and opportunity to change environments and get what they want out of life.

Martin and Marshall (1996) validate that past educational practices have not empowered youth to gain control of their own lives. They go further and admit that perhaps the biggest "culprit" of this disempowerment is the IEP as currently implemented. The IEP, paradoxically, also has the potential to provide the best tool to teach self-determination. Active student participation and ownership in the IEP process affords students with meaningful opportunities to develop and practice self-determination skills fertile ground for skill development (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Feldmann & Messerli, 1995; Lehmann & Bassett, 1995).

Parents and family should adopt an attitude of promoting skills of self-determination and perseverance at home and at school. Parents and family must transfer the advocate role to the young adult (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; DeStephano, Heck, Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Feldmann & Messerli, 1995; Serna, 1996).

Educators give nod to the importance of self-determination; however, they do not back this agreement with the IEP planning and curriculum for students to reflect this goal (Agran, Snow & Swaner, 1999; DeStephano, Heck, Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1995). The descriptor of "complex," as with the transition experience, explicates the processes necessary

to promote and practice self-determined actions pose obstacles to implementation as well as to evaluation (Abery & Stancliff, 1996; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands, Spencer & Gliner, 1999). Furthermore there are no established criteria to identify what constitutes a successful adult life (Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990).

Summary

The topic of student outcomes predominate special education literature (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanhoff, 2000; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Colley & Jamison, 1998; Doren & Benz, 1998; Morgan, Ellerd, Jensen & Taylor, 2000; Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990). Both positive transition outcomes and self-determination are paraded as “ultimate goals” for students with disabilities. A body of literature suggests research based transition and self-determination promotion and activities can improve postschool outcomes for students with disabilities (Benz & Halpern, 1993; Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanhoff, 2000; Colley & Jamison, 1998, de Fur, Farley & Johnson, 1999; Getzell & Trossi, 1996).

Although research supports the implementation of transition best practices and self-determination training and practice, research does not document that those practices are being implemented and therefore students are not reaping their benefits (Agran, Snow & Swaner, 1999; Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Minskoff, 1996). Business continues as usual. Services for students with disabilities have improved and expanded since the passage of Public Law 94-142; however, the provision of appropriate educational services remains problematic for many secondary-age students with disabilities (Brown,

Farrington, Suomi, Ziegler & Knight, 1999; DeStephano, Heck, Hasazi & Furney, 1999; Feldmann & Messerli, 1995; Hull, Sitlington & Alper, 2001; Izzo, Cartledge, Miller, Growick & Rutkowski, 2000; Lichtenstein, 1993).

Special education programming provides services for students but potentially handicaps students by depriving them of personal investment and responsibility in their planning, programming and evaluation (de Fur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Lukose, 2000; Reiff, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1997). As a result, we have students graduating from high school who have earned a diploma but lack the skills and the perception of control necessary to achieve success as measured by employment and quality of life (Colley & Jamison, 1998; deFur, Getzell & Trossi, 1996; Hull, Stilington & Alper, 2001; Lukose, 2000; Minskoff, 1996; Page & Chadsey-Rusch, 1995).

Clearly absent is the student voice in studying successful outcomes of students with disabilities. Only by listening to these individuals share their experience can we avoid myopia and enable understanding to take root (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Neiri, 1995; West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen & Martin, 1993; Reiff, Gerber & Ginsberg, 1997; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996).

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

This chapter evolved as I utilized literature and personal philosophy to explain my rationale for narrative as my method vehicle and submitted the chronology and the overview of my research process. As I reviewed the methodology section that I had presented for my dissertation proposal, I considered the multiplicity of basic tenets, which I laid out as the foundation for my work. Although some specific details of my methodology proposal were subsequently altered or omitted, my overall proposed philosophy and approach found harmony and grist for integration in my resulting work and results.

My quest was a narrative inquiry of four students who successfully, although not necessarily smoothly, transitioned from high school to community college and ultimately to self-sufficient living. My inquiry focused on the transition experiences of adolescents who have completed a secondary transition program at a community college. Their stories were shared within the rich, complex context of a narrative inquiry (Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Connelly & Clandinin 1988, 1990).

The research had a dual purpose. First, I wanted to understand the students' successful transition experiences and to tell the stories of their lived experiences. To do so, I relied on methods of inquiry, which allowed me to respectfully enter their life experiences. The methods initiated and engendered

acceptance, trust and openness, and secured an understanding of their stories, from their perspective, from the interior (Rose, 1997). Second, I sought to tell my experience as researcher. I promised that my voice would never overpower the stories of the participants, perpetuating the work where “subjects” thoughts and ideas have been directed and dictated by “well meaning” researchers (Rose, 1997). My goal then was to have their stories and mine heard with equal volume, clarity and authenticity. Rather than wearing a mantle of professional distance I strove to develop authentic relationships with my research participants. I invited the participants to work collaboratively with me as they shared their experiences.

Welty (1979) promoted one of the “I’s” in narrative inquiry as that of narrative critic. Concurrently acknowledging my role in and my commitment to the whole narrative plot, I strove to honor the intricacies of the meanings and the significance that extend beyond my purposes and me. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) alerted me to the dangers of developing a “Hollywood plot” where everything works out well in the end. Spence (1986) identified this counterproductive and inauthentic process as “narrative smoothing.” Instead I sought to grasp life as lived and experienced.

Why Narrative Inquiry

My path for selecting narrative was organic. As I ventured into my doctoral studies I came with my research topic and focus in tow, but throughout the course of my studies I struggled and fretted about securing the most appropriate vehicle to navigate my research. Although the field of special education research was rooted in a tradition of empiricism, I sided with those

who suggested that other ways of knowing deserved equal footing (Reid & Robinson, 1995). After wavering between qualitative and quantitative paradigms, I followed intuition over logic and chose qualitative but then another conundrum, which qualitative approach should one use? Phenomenology was akin to my purposes; however, I was ill content with the notion of segmenting experiences. As I considered both my purposes and my participants, I rallied with Riessman (1993) who observed "individuals knitted together several themes in long accounts that had coherence and sequence, defying easy categorization. I found myself not wanting to fragment long accounts" (p. vi.).

Late in my course work I stood, with shaking hands and knees, before a group, made up of two professors as well as other aspiring researchers to share my first attempt of Chapter One, which fortuitously included a segment of the story of Mary, one of my former students. Both professors simultaneously recommended I consider a form of qualitative research previously unknown to me, narrative. Just as Riessman (1993) reported a "click moment" of discovering narrative research my "click moment" produced the comfortable fit I had ardently sought. I realized that we are best understood in the context of our experiences, our life experiences are storied. I recalled my experiences, made sense of them and explained my actions and practices through story. My stories were not only told but also served to guide me (Rose, 1997). Unabashedly narrative inquiry provided a platform for the voices of my participants and myself, joined together in a spirit of collaboration (Mickelson, 1995) and connection. Furthermore

narrative was a way to organize these experiences (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

Reid and Robinson (1995) mused that narrative enables us to address intentionality, mental states, consciousness and meaning making, potentially enriching our understanding of students with disabilities. They cited Flavell who predicated adding personal profiles to our knowledge-base to discover what it was like to be persons with disabilities as well as what the world seemed like to them, given what they have and have not achieved. Including their voices in our literature could bring a new dimension to our understanding of our interventions and programming thereby providing information that could not be gleaned from empirical data (Reid & Robinson, 1995). Therefore, disciplined by the qualitative research process (Pugach, 2001) my efforts harmonized with pioneer and current advocates who used “the power of individual stories of persons with disabilities-and the struggles they have endured” to undergird “ the advocacy that continues to serve the field of special education” (Pugach, 2001, p. 439).

Qualitative Research and Narrative Inquiry

Qualitative researchers utilized natural settings and a gamut of methods to “describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). For approximately 20 years (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982) a group of committed special educators have promoted qualitative research to enable the voices of individuals with disabilities to be heard for the purpose of transforming their education and ameliorate their life options (Pugach, 2001). Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2000) described qualitative research

as fundamentally "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter... (to) interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (1994, p.2). Qualitative researchers have listened to and shared the student's context and voice as they examined the student's involvement or lack of involvement in the transition process (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000; Conyers, Koch & Szymanski, 1992; Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Hensel & Westling, 1985; Feldmann & Messerli, 1995; Lehmann & Bassett, 1999; Lehmann, Bassett, Sands, Spencer & Gliner, 1999; Lichtenstein, 1993; Morningstar, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1995; Phelps, Hernandez-Gantes, Jones, Sanchez & Nieri, 1995; Page & Chadsey-Rusch, 1995; Powers, Turner, Matuszewski, Wilson & Loesch, 1999).

Narrative research, however, did not emerge as a distinct qualitative design until more recently. Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) seminal article, pictured in words the lives of people, gathered and told stories about their lives, and wrote narratives. "...People are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect on life and explain themselves to others....A person is, at once, engaged in living, retelling, and reliving stories." (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4).

Furthermore, narrative researchers delved into an educational research problem by seeking to understand the experiences of individuals. The review of literature played a subservient role to the significance of learning from the stories. The researcher wanted to know the individual through personal experiences (Creswell, 2002). This research design construed fecundity from the

philosophy of John Dewey (1938); understanding an individual came through knowing the individual's experiences. Dewey viewed experience as continuous (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative research was intent on understanding individuals' past experiences and how they impact and contribute to present and future experiences (Creswell, 2002). The chronology aspect of narrative research, emphasizing sequence, defined narrative research as separate from other qualitative research designs (Cortazzi, 1993).

Therefore, as I sought to understand the transition experiences of my research participants by collecting and recording their stories and by writing narratives of their experiences, I also explored their life stories and shards of experience that defined their life stories. These activities coalesced as I considered their life histories; their past experiences, present circumstances as well as projected futures evolving from their stories of past and present (Rose, 1997). I employed the strategy Pinar (1994) described as the *currere* method, which produced knowledge of the character of the individual's lived experience.

Utilizing this particular, receptive framework I wished to capture a clearer, more intimate view and understanding of the students' transition process by listening to and telling their stories. Telling their stories was crucial to me. Threads of their lives enmeshed with my life. Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 1991, 2000) described narrative as complex, and multileveled, entangled, temporally continuous and socially interactive. My inquiry was correspondingly situated in the complex, multileveled, entangled, temporally continuous and socially interactive context of the participants' experiences and mine.

Political Issues and Implications

Because narrative research used personal materials such as life story, conversation, and personal writing, of necessity it invited reflection and reflexivity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). "Reflection brings the narrative researcher up against the edges of the work, and requires him or her to examine the context within which the research is carried out and its broader implications" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 75). Both the researcher and the participants commenced to view things previously ignored, including their own values and posits. Predictably "the conduct of narrative research in itself highlights the political because it is research 'against the grain' within the academic world, challenging the dominance of more established modes of inquiry" (p.75).

Narrative inquiry included a reconceptualization of the definition of "political." Central to this redefinition was the recognition that the personal was political and furthermore, the power was exercised in all relationships (Casey, 1995/1996). It relinquished the power traditionally captured by educational researchers to give advice and influence decision making on the basis of warranted knowledge only they possess (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) cited and considered Bruner's (1986) and Denzin's, (1989) radical notions, which challenged traditional views of progress and accomplishment, instead considering every life and attempting to pull together a convincing and meaningful story within given limitations. The lives of ordinary people were

viewed just as illuminating as lives realized from some form of externally defined importance.

Researcher Identity

Harry (1996) heralded the crucial impact of researcher identities on the research act. In qualitative research the researcher was considered a research "instrument." She recounted the emerging role of researcher as an instrument for empowerment; the "distinction between the knower and the known is spurious, because these phenomena are so mutually interactive that reality and knowledge are actually created in the process of the research act." (Harry, 1996, p. 293.) The edges of the researcher's role continued to push and expand. Harry cited Delago-Gaitan's (1993) work toward empowering Latino families where researcher was described and advocated as change agent. Harry, described the study of human perspectives as "an essentially dynamic process of which the researcher is an integral part" (p. 299) and therefore necessitated self-awareness and explicit examination of the researcher role. The issue of self-awareness became more urgent when there was evident power differential (Harry, 1996), which included the present study.

I have two particular predilections that affect my research roles: my preference for qualitative, narrative, and caring modes of inquiry, placing the participants in a centerpiece and collaborative position and my preference for fostering and maturing the self-determination skills of students necessary to exhibit and maintain personal agency. The later persona derives from my own experience as a parent as well as an educator with life outcomes clearly in view.

Caring and Collaboration

Conducting this research, synonymous to living my life, I aimed to live and work as “one-caring” for others (Noddings, 1984). Whitherell and Noddings (1991) described the notion of caring as something beyond a virtue, characterized as a special kind of relation that required contributions from both parties in that relation. The relation provided a foundation of trust. Inclusion evolved in an unequal relation, the participant as former student and young adult and me as researcher and educator. A stance of equality between participants was crucial in narrative inquiry and all participants must have a voice within the relationship (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I constantly strove to see events from the standpoint of the participant, by actively striving for the participant’s objective, an objective we have constructed together. Whitherell and Noddings (1991) maintained a caring relation also required dialogue. The voices of students have, by tradition, been subservient to the voices of researchers. The participant, long silenced in the research relationship first must tell the story. The process of narrative inquiry does not silence the researcher, rather the participant who has long been silenced in the research relationship is afforded the time and space to tell the story so that it captures the authority and validity the research story previously maintained (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Coles (1989) issued a corollary directive, “on that fast-darkening winter afternoon, I was urged to let each patient (or in the case of the current research - participant) be a teacher: ‘Hearing themselves teach you through their narration...’” (p. 22).

In Reid and Robinson (1995) Cherryholmes suggested that what were "objects" of research are now subjects who interpret their own situation. Therefore, in my research my quest was for genuine dialogue, full of moments of connection with my participants. It was for this reason that my "ethic of care" extended first and foremost to listening to the participants. This was a radical departure from mainstream research in which data were collected by an observer who maintained an attitude of objectivity and neutrality and where interpretation and analysis occurred in writing and theorizing detached from practice. In a collaborative context the researcher disturbed the situation. It rallied a different relationship; one in which involvement was acknowledged and from which the observations, ideas, connections and erudition, belonged jointly to the participant and researcher. The participant and researcher unearthed strong caveats to the potent collaborative relationship (Rose, 1997). Much like a friendship in which two lives intertwined in an atmosphere of trust and care collaboration was established over time, with attention and with care (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, 1990). "Narrative inquiry is...a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying...constructing a relationship in which both voices are heard." (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.4).

The negotiation of entry was an attempt to initiate such a relationship. It involved voice and matters of ethics, as well as negotiations of details by researcher and participants (Rose, 1997). My elixir for entry was facilitated by the selection of participants who were former students with whom I had known and worked.

Selection of Participants

Stories of my students whirled in my mind and provided a conduit for my selection of research participants. For the interval I have coordinated the secondary at post secondary transition program I have worked with committed staff implementing research based transition practices as well as reinforcing basic work and life skills for students in the community college environment. The results were significant. Even though some students were impervious to our efforts, many students completing the secondary at post secondary transition program “beat the odds” and secured positive employment and life outcomes.

Each year we took small groups of students to local high schools to speak to high school students with disabilities. The secondary at post secondary transition program students shared their experiences and the high school students questioned and identified. When potential students and parents or interested professionals came to visit the program, we involved students and had them tour guests around the college and share their impressions. As we are asked to present the secondary at post secondary program at conferences, our students are always included in the presentation. Students’ voices provide validation for what we do and for what they have accomplished.

Until this point, however, the students’ voices have been directed and choreographed. To achieve the erudition necessary to truly understand the student’s experiences I needed to listen to their self-directed and uninterrupted discourse. To do this I selected four students who successfully completed the program and were living self-sufficient lives.

As discussed previously the power ratio between the researcher and the participant was rarely equal. A fundamental example of researcher's power was the choice of who was included and excluded as subjects (Casey, 1993). Following dialogue with others and circumspection vis-à-vis the benefits of including students with unsuccessful outcomes, I believed we could best learn from the students who have successfully navigated the potentially pernicious waters of transition and entered adulthood with the skills necessary to work and live. Therefore, I selected four young adults not based on their exemplary performance or meritorious outcomes but rather on typical outcomes of those who successfully completed the program and secured employment, which considering the statistics, was significant.

Participants

The participants consisted of four individuals who completed the secondary at post secondary transition program. Each individual was identified as entitled to special education services while in the public school system. All participants were in their early twenties. The sample included two male and two female participants; participation was completely voluntary.

Negotiation of Entry

Although I knew the participants of this study prior to my research, I sought to gain entry with respect and care. I desired not only to meet the requirements of the university human subjects committee, but I also wanted to legitimate my reentrance into the participants' lives as well as assure their participation in the study would benefit them and result in no inadvertent harm.

A community college counselor contacted the participants and asked them if they would consider learning about participating in my study and if so to call me. The counselor contacted the four participants and in turn each willingly called me. At that time we set up the appointment for our first interview session.

During our first meeting, in addition to reading the human subjects' agreement form, I spent time explaining the ramifications of participating to ascertain whether or not their choice to participate was an informed one. Furthermore, the negotiation of entry constituted more than garnering permission. Sustaining my objective that my inquiry was a shared story, the negotiation of entry was a means of negotiating the ways in which we created and advanced collaborative work and relationships (Rose, 1997). This understanding of the negotiation of entry hallmarked the way narrative inquiry occurred within the relationship between researcher and participants and constructed a caring community. Therefore when the researcher and the participants told stories of the research relationship, they became stories of empowerment (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

I arranged individually with each participant how we set up the interview appointments. At the outset I informed participants that I wanted to meet with each of them on three occasions. During the initial meeting I furnished an overview of my purpose and encouraged dialogue.

While ardently grasping the mission of this inquiry, I faced a dilemma; how to transpose my ambition to the meaningful, fruitful dialogues necessary to elucidated my participants' experience. I knew I could not ascertain any

resonance with my participants talking in terms of “transition” and “self-determination.” Even though I earlier considered the transition experience as conscripted within the time frame of when students begin to talk about after high school options to when they secure a job, I learned that transition was not a discrete time frame. Precursors as well as a zigzag of other transitions occurred much earlier.

With a combination of serendipity and grace I stumbled onto an interview method to match my goals. In my readings (Wengraff, 2001) cited a narrative interview technique utilized by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber in life-story research. Therefore, during the first interaction with my participants I implemented a mechanism where my language would not thwart emergent formative dialogue. I gave the following directions: “Think about the your life as a book. Think about the chapters of the book. I am going to write your age on the bottom of this paper and then I’m going to write each of your proceeding years up the page. Divide your life into chapters by years. From each chapter I will ask you four questions. Tell me a significant memory from this chapter. What kind of a person were you during this chapter? Who were the significant people for you during this chapter and why? What is your reason for choosing to end this chapter when you did?” These questions provided the gentle underpinnings for the comfortable, productive dialogue I sought. During the following two conversations I asked questions aiming for clarification and expansion of the topics the individual initiated during our first parlay as well as inquiring about the specifics of their transition journeys.

Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

Data were harvested by several methods. Throughout the study I maintained a reflective journal. Field notes were made of the interview settings as well as in other contexts in which I connected with the participants. I made debriefing notes after each conversation. The interview sessions were recorded on a tape recorder and were transcribed for study and analysis. Before the transcription process I listened to the tapes and recorded my immediate thoughts. I reread the transcripts and listened again to the tapes. Whether I was directly working on the project or doing something else the spirits and the experiences of my participants invaded my psyche. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to this phenomenon as “falling in love” with the participants. I was not comfortable with that metaphor; however, I felt the four were my constant traveling companions over the course of this year, as I worked with students at the community college, as I prepared for a daughter's summer wedding and even came along on a Lake Superior family vacation. My family insisted that even in a rustic vacation cabin, I turned every room into a “dissertation room” and that we were always accompanied by my “beloved strangers.”

Before beginning the cumbersome yet meaningful recording and transcription process, I investigated alternatives: computers with microphones or hiring a skilled typist to do the transcription. Concerned, however, that even sophisticated software or talented typists could not comprehend Eric's quiet monotone or long pauses, I took on this arduous project with college daughter,

Laura's assistance. She listened to the tapes and typed the original draft. Then I would go back and painstakingly insert the missing elements. I now realized how much I would have missed in terms of understanding had I relinquished my role as transcriber. The final work of transcribing could not be delegated (Riessman, 1993).

Data collection and interpretation did not unfold as discrete and linear processes. Analysis and transcription blurred functions, close repeated listenings, coupled with methodical transcribing, often led to insights that in turn shaped how I chose to represent the narrative in my text (Riessman, 1993, p. 60). I cut and arranged the participant's printed dialogue, juxtaposing common threads and layers of meaning until I saw a harmonious fabric of experience. Furthermore, I endeavored to ascertain the meaning of data as the inquiry and the writing transpired. The writing was more than an act; it was as Richardson (1994) defended a method of discovery and analysis, "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it" (p. 517). The writing process was intoxicating, addictive, and insightful. The overall shape of the exploration became visible only gradually as coherence emerged and discord was eliminated (Bateson & Bateson, 1987). Instead of causality the narrative was "driven by a sense of whole" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 7). Therefore, I strove to mediate between the whole and the detail as I searched for harmony in this mission.

I shared my provisional written interpretations with another researcher always asking for a critical response, results of which led to further reflection and

revision. Then adapting a form previously utilized by other narrative researchers (Mickelson, 1995; Rose, 1997) I advanced the four-shared narratives in letter format. Furthermore, I communicated and discussed the work with committee members. This spiral process continued until we arrived at joint satisfaction with the product.

While positioned and supported in the periphery of a research community, the majority of my work and commitment was a solo enterprise. Throughout the months of this inquiry process I sacrificed precious after work and weekend hours and crawled to the computer in "the dissertation room," a converted former bedroom. There I joined with the spirits of my four participants for concentrated work and analysis of the data seeking to complete the work which I began. Moreover, my work extended beyond the confines of my "dissertation room." As I worked with my students at the community college, the dialogues with my four participants overlay my daily duties and reciprocally my daily duties with current students overlay my research project.

Eventually my inquiry and my writing spilled beyond the traditional five-chapter dissertation format. At several points I thought perhaps I had reached the conclusion of my project but my committee members summoned, one more chapter, and yet one more chapter. I am grateful for their experienced leading, realizing that without those two additional chapters my work would have concluded inchoate for readers and for me.

Throughout the work in progress I felt incredibly blest and nourished by the narrative vehicle. Narrative revered the internal complexity of my research as well as its coherent whole.

APPENDIX C: COMMUNITY COLLEGE APPROVAL LETTER

Dr. Jean Lehmann
Professor
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523

Dear Jean:

The purpose of this letter is to assure you that the Iowa Lakes Community College SAVE program is familiar with the scope of Elizabeth Ankeny's dissertation entitled *The Transition Experience of Students with Disabilities Who Participated in a Secondary Transition Program at a Community College*. We understand that Ms Ankeny will interview former SAVE students and we are satisfied that all individuals involved are adequately protected as human research subjects. The interview results may be useful in helping us to improve programming. Our responsibility in this project is to nominate graduates from our program as potential participants in the study. Our involvement in this project is limited and voluntary. We look forward to your good work.

Sincerely,

Ann Petersen
Director of Special Needs

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

The Transition Experience of Students with Disabilities Who Participated in a Secondary Transition Program at a Community College: A Narrative Inquiry

Principal Investigator: Jean Lehmann, Ph. D.

Co-Investigator: Elizabeth Madson Ankeny (doctoral student)

Hello. My name is Ann Petersen. My role is to contact former students in the Iowa Lakes SAVE Program, who currently are employed to see if you are interested in participating in a research study. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the transition process. The title of the study is the Transition Experience of Students with Disabilities Who Participated in a Secondary Transition Program at a Community College: A Narrative Inquiry. You will be asked to describe your experiences in the community college secondary transition program. If you are interested in participating you will be interviewed three times. Your time commitment for this project is approximately 6-12 hours over the course of the next month. If you want more information, please contact Elizabeth Ankeny at: 712-852-5274 (work) or 712-852-3547 (home). Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT CONSENT FORM

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project

TITLE: The Transition Experience of Students with Disabilities Who Participated in Secondary Transition Program at a Community College: A Narrative Inquiry

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Jean Lehmann, Ph. D.

CO-INVESTIGATOR: Elizabeth Madson Ankeny (doctoral student)

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS:
Elizabeth Madson Ankeny (712) 852-3547

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: To understand the transition experience of students with disabilities who participated in a secondary transition program at a community college.

PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED: You have been asked to participate in a research study. Data for this research will be gathered through face-to-face through 3 but possibly 2-6 interviews approximately one to two hours in length. As a participant you will be asked open-ended questions related to your transition experience which will include your years in high school, your year(s) at a community college and your beginning work and independent living experiences. You may also be asked about your life before high school. Your interview will be conducted in a setting comfortable to both yourself and the researcher and will be taped on audiocassette for the purpose of transcription.

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES: There are no known risks at this time. You may however, be asked to talk about portions of your life that were not pleasant for you. You will have the prerogative to decline to speak of experiences you are not comfortable talking about. The researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential risks.

BENEFITS: You may experience no direct benefits from this study. Information gained from this research may be used by secondary schools, area education

agencies, and community colleges throughout the country considering methods to promote the successful transition experience of students with disabilities.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All gathered materials will be identified by pseudonym so that no actual names will be associated with participant's responses. Additionally, the names of the schools and communities will be disguised in the study. Interview material and audiocassettes and student records will be stored in a locked area and will not be available to any persons other than researchers. The audiotapes will be destroyed following successful completion of the dissertation final defense. A summary of the research findings will be made available to each participant.

LIABILITY: The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury occurs because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of injury.

Questions about the subject's rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker at Colorado State University (970) 491-1563.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature indicates that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

Participant Name (printed)

Participant signature

Date

Investigator or Co-Investigator Signature

Date

Page 2 of 2 Subject's Initials _____ Date _____