

**THE PICTURE OF HEALTH:  
A HEURISTIC SELF-INQUIRY OF THERAPEUTIC PHOTOGRAPHY  
AS SELF-CARE FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS**

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A Project  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Lethbridge  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**MASTER OF COUNSELLING**

**CAMPUS ALBERTA APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY  
ALBERTA, CANADA**

April, 2008

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*Traveler, there is no path.  
Paths are made by walking.*

~ Antonio Machado ~

## DEDICATION

To my parents, who with every act of love and generosity, defy the notion that you can  
never go home again.

To Jeri Lynne, who has offered me a safe place to tell my story, and introduced me to the  
power of the therapeutic relationship.

To Kathy, who holds up a mirror to my soul, and reminds me that I am *enough*.



*Figure 1. Daisy, by J. Caines, 2008.*

Thank you.

## ABSTRACT

Helping professionals are at elevated risk of stress and burnout due to the nature of their work. This fact creates an ethical imperative for helpers to intentionally attend to their self-care needs. The purpose of this heuristic inquiry is to address the question: *What is the experience of engaging in therapeutic photography for the purposes of self-care?* The study is prefaced by a literature review on helping-professional stress and burnout, self-care, and therapeutic photography. The raw data of this study include images, poetry, and written personal reflection. These data are summarized through a creative synthesis in the form of a metaphoric narrative, accompanied by a discussion of the implications, findings, and possible future directions of the research.

## Acknowledgments

This project is the culmination of a graduate journey that has been influenced by many wonderful people. I must begin by extending my gratitude to Dr. Ronna Jevne for her willingness to supervise this process, as well as for sharing her obvious and contagious passion for therapeutic photography and writing.

I also would like to acknowledge Dr. Dawn McBride for offering her involvement with this project, as well as for her positive influence in my educational experience. It has been a privilege to learn from someone so committed to her work.

My learning has been made infinitely richer through my relationship with a much-appreciated mentor, Kathy Offet-Gartner, who has so freely shared her immense knowledge and experience as a therapist. Her love for this work is inspiring.

This journey would have been intensely isolating and a great deal more challenging had it not been for three very special classmates – Michelle, Nalini, and Kathleen – whose support and friendship (and editing) I value immensely.

And of course I must thank my family and friends who have been patient and understanding of the demands of my life as a graduate student. I am certainly blessed to have so many remarkable people in my life – thank you!

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction



Figure 2. Trail Head, by J. Caines, 2005.

*“To set out on a pilgrimage is to throw down a challenge to everyday life [italics added]”* (Cousineau, 1998, p. xi). To accept the challenge of a heuristic self-inquiry has been a “pilgrimage” through doubt to discovery, from guardedness to revelation, and from the conventional into the creative. It has been a journey that is academic yet, more profoundly, intensely personal.

#### *Rationale and Intent of the Inquiry*

Helping professionals, such as teachers, nurses, social workers, and counsellors, often experience unhealthy levels of stress due to the nature of their work (Rout, 2002). This fact supports the necessity for helpers to discover and practice personally meaningful processes of self-care. The overall intent of my inquiry is to answer the following question: *What is the experience of engaging in therapeutic photography for the purposes of self-care?* Parts of this project will offer a more traditional review of the

work of those who have grappled with these ideas before me, while other pieces will offer a window into my heart and mind through an image-based self-inquiry.

My research began with a literature review on helping-professional stress, self-care, and therapeutic photography. This review influenced the formation of an original qualitative self-inquiry utilizing heuristic methodology. The raw data of this study include images, poetry, and written personal reflection, which capture my experience of pursuing self-care through visual and written self-expression. These data are summarized through a creative synthesis in the form of a metaphoric narrative, accompanied by a discussion of the implications, findings, and possible future directions of the research.

#### *About the Author*

Tierney and Lincoln (1997) offered that “who we are changes what we write about and how we write .... If our views of reality are to be more inclusive, then we need to take a broader view of authorial voices” (as cited in Brearley, Abstract section, ¶ 1). My own “authorial voice” found its most authentic expression in that of visual and written images. It was important to me to choose a research method that is congruent with my sense of self, which I found in heuristic methodology. This decision invited an experience that crossed over into methodology of which I had previously been unaware. There has been a fear-provoking yet exhilarating emotional vulnerability inherent in the transparency demanded by this experience of self-inquiry. I do not often nor easily reveal my deepest thoughts and feelings, yet I keep reminding myself that I invited this experience into my life for a reason. I could either back away and allow it to become a purely academic endeavor, or I could embrace it - fear and all. I chose the latter.

As a professional, I am philosophically and personally drawn to theories and concepts that place relational processes at their core. In my emerging counselling practice, I hold to the belief that growth and change occur primarily through relational connection, and that these connections consist of empathy and empowerment (Worell & Remer, 2003). I have come to realize that this value has been largely absent in my self-beliefs and internal processes; therefore, undertaking the self-reflective inquiry represented in these pages has been an intentional effort to be in relationship with *myself*.

I have been a helping professional for the last decade – first as an elementary school teacher and now as a counsellor. As a teacher, I experienced first-hand the pain of inadequate self-care and, therefore, I care deeply that other helpers are made aware of the potential for such distress. My engagement in this inquiry is further rooted in personal experience in that I have certainly benefited from the therapeutic value of photography and photographic images. Reflecting on the importance of images in my life has instigated a deep curiosity regarding the qualities and meanings of its influence.

### *Definition of Key Terms*

#### *Self-Care*

Self-care is an intrinsic, intentional, and self-initiated activity that promotes good health and well-being (Christopher, Christopher, Dunnagan, & Schure, 2006). Health and well-being encompass the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of the person and, for the helping professional, include: “intrapersonal work, interpersonal support, and professional development” (Carroll, Gilroy, & Murra, 1999, p. 135).

### *Burnout*

Skovholt (2001) referred to burnout as “a hemorrhaging of the self” (p. 106), which is experienced as “fatigue, frustration, disengagement, stress, depletion, helplessness, hopelessness, emotional drain, emotional exhaustion, and cynicism” (p. 107). Similarly, Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined the concept in terms of a continuum between fully-engaged (energy, involvement, and efficacy) and burnout (exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness). Such serious symptoms are the result of unaddressed, chronic stress reactions to helping work.

### *Therapeutic Photography*

Therapeutic photography is activities that are “self-initiated rather than therapist-precipitated, done by individuals by and for themselves for the purpose of their own personal growth [and] self-discovery” (Weiser, 2001, PhotoTherapy and Therapeutic Photography section, ¶ 5). For the purposes of this project, the term *therapeutic photography* also refers to the personal use of photographic images as a means of emotional expression.

### *Helping Professional*

This term refers to those professionals, such as teachers, nurses, social workers, and counsellors, who are “dedicated to the improvement of the lives of others” (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001, p. 168). Helping professionals are also periodically referred to as *helpers* throughout this project.

### *Heuristic Self-Inquiry*

Heuristic research is “an organized and systematic form for investigating human experience” (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 9). “In such a process, not only is knowledge



extended, but the self of the researcher is illuminated .... [It] involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration” (Moustakas, p. 11). As one application of this methodology, heuristic *self-inquiry* involves the self of the researcher being the sole focus of inquiry, with transformation being the ultimate goal; it is:

A psychological process wherein the researcher surrenders to the feeling in an experience .... The purpose is to allow the formation of new awareness and connections or to see the self ... from a different perspective and, thus, reinterpret meanings or significance .... Once known, individuals can be transformed by this self-knowledge. (Sela-Smith, 2002, pp. 82-83)

#### *Organization*

I have organized this project into five chapters. The intent of Chapter I is to provide information regarding the nature and rationale of the research direction, provide a personal introduction, and define key terms. In the second chapter I explore the literature that addresses the potential risks of helping work, the common categories of self-care, and the therapeutic value of photography and photographic images. Subsequently, in the third chapter I discuss the heuristic methodology utilized, along with a description of my personal experience of each phase of the inquiry. The explication phase of my inquiry is presented in Chapter IV, which is a combination of images, poetry, and written reflections. Finally, Chapter V offers a creative synthesis that reflects on the meaning and impact of this research process, as well as a discussion of the implications and findings of my study.

## CHAPTER II

## Review of the Literature



Figure 3. The Path, by J. Caines, 2005.

*“Questions illuminate the world around us. Questions tune the soul. The purpose behind questions is to initiate the quest [italics added]”* (Cousineau, 1998, p. 24). This literature review was the first step in my personal “quest” to explore my curiosity around the therapeutic benefits of photography. The review was completed prior to choosing a specific research direction, which was a purposeful decision as I wanted to allow the connections between photography and self-care to emerge without a predetermined premise. The purpose of this literature review was to clarify the predominant themes in the areas of self-care and therapeutic photography. In selecting and analyzing the literature, I was guided by three questions:

1. Why is self-care important to helping professionals?
2. How are photography and photographic images therapeutic?
3. What are the connections between self-care and therapeutic photography?

Reading with these questions in mind, I sought to discover meaningful connections between the self-care needs of helping professionals and the positive benefits of engaging in photography. Furthermore, the ultimate goal of conducting this review was to develop a specific research question, which resulted in the heuristic inquiry presented in the subsequent chapters.

### *Methodology of the Review*

#### *Information Gathering*

I began the literature review by brainstorming keywords to utilize in database searches. These keywords were: self-care, burnout, stress, photography, art therapy, creativity, counsellors, and helping professionals. Various truncated forms and combinations of these keywords were applied in the PsycINFO and Web of Science databases to locate applicable journal articles. Articles not available in fulltext were searched using the SFX feature to reference other databases. Additionally, the University of Calgary library catalogue and Alberta Library Online catalogue were utilized to locate books and additional articles on the chosen topics. A more global internet search was used, through Google Scholar, to gather titles of books and articles not available locally, which were then ordered from all over North America through the University of Calgary's document delivery services. Electronic books applicable to the research problem were located using the Ebrary and Net Library websites, accessed through the University of Calgary. A further source of related resources was bibliographies located on the PhotoTherapy website, <http://www.phototherapy-centre.com/home.htm>. These lists were cross-referenced with the items already located and relevant books and articles not in possession were searched for using a variety of databases. Finally, to expand the

list of relevant literature, the citation and reference lists of electronic articles were scanned and searched. Eventually, these methods yielded a saturation point in which no new relevant and accessible literature was found.

### *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Once the literature was collected, I evaluated each source to decide upon its inclusion or exclusion in the review. The factors considered were the reliability of the source, applicability to the research focus, scope of the information, strengths and limitations of the information, and year of publication. The intent of these criteria was to ensure that the literature reviewed was as scholarly, focused, and recent as possible. However, due to the nature of the questions upon which this review was based, many of the sources found were subjective views of the topics rather than academic literature. This was especially true of the photography literature discussed, which was largely experience based. This type of literature added a rich experiential component to this review.

### *Categorization of Information*

The resources selected for inclusion in the review were sorted into five groups of literature: self-care, burnout, art therapy, therapeutic photography, and general photography. I scanned each group and took notes on the main themes that emerged. From these lists, commonalities and connections were identified and an outline of headings and sub-headings was created. Each section was colour coded and a second, more in-depth reading of the literature was conducted using coloured flags and highlighting to mark pertinent information for each heading and sub-heading.

### *Self-Care*

“We are in the midst of a paradigm shift from an exclusive focus on the care and well-being of clients to the care and well-being of ourselves as well” (Porter, as cited in Carroll, Gilroy, & Murra, 2003, p. 134). This shift is partly demonstrated by the inclusion of self-care activities in professional ethical guidelines, such as the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Canadian Psychological Association, 2001) and the *Feminist Therapy Code of Ethics* (Feminist Therapy Institute, 1999). The inclusion of such guidelines, in these and other codes of ethics, represents an effort to eliminate the traditional view of self-care as nothing more than a form of self-indulgence or personal luxury (Carroll, Gilroy, & Murra). The ethical and moral imperative of self-care for helping professionals forms an underlying assumption of this review.

#### *The Importance of the Topic*

A vast quantity of the self-care literature is focused on the negative effects of stress and burnout on the helping professional. In an effort to illuminate the importance of self-care as a consideration for helping professionals, I will examine in this section the common themes discovered in the literature regarding the causes and symptoms of stress and burnout in the helping professions.

The reality of being a helper can literally be hazardous to one’s health. The trauma and experiences of distressed clients can “rub-off” on helpers (Miller, 1998) in what is sometimes referred to as secondary stress (Wicks, 2006) or vicarious traumatization (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). A 1997 survey of 86 helping professionals conducted by Mahoney (1997) found that some of the professional and personal issues that can lead to stress and burnout are: size and severity of caseloads, problems in

intimate relationships, doubts about professional effectiveness, lack of sleep, loneliness and isolation, and feelings of disillusionment about their work. Schaufeli (1999) provided two explanations for the prevalence of burnout in helping professionals – emotional overload and lack of reciprocity. Emotional overload is caused by the intense interpersonal demands of helping work, whereas the lack of reciprocity refers to the one-way nature of the caregiver/recipient dynamic (Schaufeli).

The effects of burnout were studied extensively by Schaufeli and Enzmann who listed over 130 associated symptoms, which have been categorized as affective, cognitive, physical, behavioural, and motivational (as cited in Schaufeli, 1999). According to Rout (2002), there are several physical diseases which are caused or aggravated by chronic stress conditions, the most common being heart disease and stroke. Rout also offered an overview of several studies that show a relationship between occupational stress and poor mental health, most often characterized by depression or anxiety related disorders, as well as a link to decreased job satisfaction and increased risk of developing addictions.

There exists evidence within the literature reviewed to make a strong case for helping professionals to seriously consider ways in which they can attend to their well-being through self-care practices. In the following section, I will break down the concept of self-care by its root words, *self* and *care*, in an effort to more deeply explore the concept.

#### *Common Elements of the Self-Care Literature*

*The “self”*. Leary (2004) stated that “you are so accustomed to thinking about yourself that you may have never considered what an unusual ability this is or what life

would be like if you couldn't do it" (p. 5). This concept of *self-awareness* emerged as an essential component of self-care. Skovholt, Grier, and Hanson (2001) contended that a heightened sense of self-awareness is of high value for those in the helping professions as a means to prevent burnout. In a survey of well-functioning and effective therapists, Coster and Schwebel (1997) observed that "awareness is a prelude to regulating our way of life, modifying behaviour as needed" (as cited in Baker, 2003, p. 14). Similarly, Grosch and Olsen stated that "finding healthy ways of maintaining a strong sense of self is a prerequisite for effective functioning as a professional helper (as cited in Skovholt, 2001, p. 132). In fact, Jevne (1981), in a study that surveyed counselling students, educators, practitioners, and supervisors, found that the competency rated the most imperative for all of these groups was self-awareness. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) advocated for inner attunement, which was described as "an awareness of oneself, one's needs, limits, and resources, [and] is essential to living fully" (p. 382). Further, Wicks (2006) concluded:

Self-awareness is an ongoing, dynamic undertaking that requires daily attention. When we have such a process in place, we can become more attuned to the rhythm of our personality and have our "psychological fingers" on the pulse of where we are emotionally with respect to an issue, a person, a challenge, or the general thrust of where our life is moving. (p. 54)

Baker (2003) agrees with this premise in concluding that it is only when we are aware of our limitations and needs that we can begin to make decisions regarding how to attend to them. She stated that "if we are not adequately self-aware, we risk acting out repressed – and thereby unprocessed and unmanaged – emotions and needs in ways that are indirect,

irresponsible, and potentially harmful to our self, personally and professionally” (Baker, 2003, p. 14).

Another reoccurring theme found within the literature related to the concept of the self was *composition*. In other words, what makes up the self? Domar (2000) utilized a model that includes body, mind and spirit. Along the same lines, Swinton (2001) conceptualized the “self as spirit”, which is made up of the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual. Burnard (1991) offered a model of the inner and outer experience of self, in which the inner experience encompasses thinking, feeling, sensing, intuiting, and bodily sensation, whereas the outer experience is in movement, speech, eye-contact, touch, proximity to others, gestures, and facial expressions. Regardless of the specific model, there was a consistent message within the self-care literature that, in order to care for the self, the person must begin to understand their self.

*The “care”*. The idea that personal self-care is imperative to professional and personal resilience was explicitly stated throughout the literature reviewed. Simply put, helping professionals “need to be assertive about their wellness” (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001, p. 174). To do this, every helping professional needs to be aware of the strategies that can contribute to a personal self-care plan. In this section, I describe some of the strategies represented in the literature.

Although the strategies described in the ensuing sections do not all *directly* relate to the guiding questions of this review, the purpose of their inclusion is to identify the intent of each strategy in order to subsequently illuminate the connections between these effects and the therapeutic value of photography and photographic images.



The personal self-care strategies that were reoccurring in the literature have been analyzed and organized here into six categories based on similarities, and ordered from most common to least common. An extensive explanation regarding the application of each strategy was beyond the scope of this chapter, however, a brief description of each category is provided.

Nutrition and exercise are both significant factors in adequate self-care (Rout, 2002; Skovholt, 2001). Exercise improves cardiovascular functioning, reduces high blood pressure, increases physical strength, improves sleep patterns, improves mental functioning, improves body image and self-esteem, increases feelings of self-control, and reduces levels of stress (Rout). Physical exercise also combats the symptoms of anxiety and depression (Skovholt). Further, proper nutrition reduces a person's vulnerability to the effects of stress (Rout). Some recommendations for a healthy diet are to keep blood glucose stable, eat breakfast consistently, consume vegetables and fruit, drink plenty of water (Skovholt), reduce caffeine intake, and eat adequate carbohydrates, protein, and good fats (Rout). Ultimately, adequate nutrition and exercise are the basic building blocks of health and wellness, yet are often among the first to be compromised during those times when self-care is most needed.

Cognitive restructuring was a strategy frequently discussed in the self-care literature. "Cognitive restructuring is a technique by which stress-provoking thoughts or beliefs are changed for more constructive ones, which can promote individuals' well-being" (Mahoney, as cited in Rout, 2002, p. 125). Wicks (2006) contended that this strategy helps people to appreciate how their thoughts and beliefs affect the way they feel and behave. Domar (2000) listed four questions, based on Beck's theory of Cognitive

Therapy, which aid in the process of cognitive restructuring: “(1) Does this thought contribute to my stress?; (2) Where did I learn this thought?; (3) Is this a logical thought?; and (4) Is this thought true?” (p. 47). Another technique with a similar goal to cognitive restructuring is visualization, which is defined as “the conscious, volitional creation of mental sense impressions for the purpose of changing yourself” (Fanning, 1994, p.8). The primary distinction between the two techniques is that visualization focuses on imagery rather than words, however both are aimed at positively influencing personal well-being through cognitive and emotional change.

Additional self-care strategies focused on relaxation and breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and meditation. Focused breathing techniques can train the body to breathe properly (Burnard, 1991; Rout, 2002). According to Davis, Eshelman, and McKay, “improper breathing contributes to anxiety, panic attacks, depression, muscle tension, headache, and fatigue” (as cited in Skovholt, 2001, p. 159). The objective is to change tense and shallow chest breathing to deep and relaxed abdominal breathing (Domar, 2000). Progressive muscle relaxation was developed in 1929 by Jacobson and involves systematically tensing and relaxing specific muscle groups (Rout). Tensing muscles serves to intensify the sensation of relaxation (Domar). Finally, meditation was a common theme in the self-care literature (Burnard, 1991; Domar, 2000; Rout, 2002; Skovholt, 2001). “Meditation refers to a family of techniques which have in common a conscious attempt to focus attention in a non-analytical way, and an attempt not to dwell on discursive, ruminating thought” (Shapiro, as cited in Shapiro, Schwartz, & Santerre, 2005, p. 632). There has been considerable research around the practice of meditation in the past three decades, which has shown a positive correlation to improved

cardiovascular health, relief of chronic pain, and decreased symptoms of anxiety and depression (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Santerre). Unfortunately, few researchers have studied the original purpose of meditation, which is “a self-liberation strategy to enhance compassion, understanding, and wisdom” (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Santerre, p. 634). Even still, the empirical validation reviewed undoubtedly supports the use of meditation as a self-care strategy.

As the saying goes, “laughter is the best medicine”. Some researchers have empirically supported the healing influence of humour. Lefcourt (2005) conducted studies on the power of humour as a stress moderator and found a positive correlation between humour and emotional coping. Higher levels of humour were found in people with fewer emotional disturbances, less depression, and less irritability (Lefcourt). However, these results have been difficult for researchers to replicate due to the difficulty in measuring such an individual characteristic as humour (Lefcourt). Nevertheless, a study by Kramer-Kahn and Hansen in 1998 found that “humour was the number one career sustaining behaviour, endorsed by 82% of the sample in a study of psychotherapists’ coping strategies” (as cited in Skovholt, 2001, p. 151). The experience of these helping professionals provided clear qualitative support of humour as a self-care strategy.

Spirituality as a means of self-care was repeatedly discussed in the literature and takes many forms. But what is spirituality? The Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling [ASERVIC] (n.d.) theorized that:

Spirituality is ... defined as a capacity and tendency that is innate and unique to all persons. This spiritual tendency moves the individual toward knowledge, love,

meaning, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, compassion, wellness, and wholeness. Spirituality includes one's capacity for creativity, growth, and the development of a value system. (ASERVIC, Guidelines section, ¶ 4)

By this definition, spirituality could encompass all of the strategies discussed thus far. Some would argue that it is indeed the core principle of the person and, therefore, of self-care (Swinton, 2001). Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) encouraged connection, hope, meaning, and awareness as tools of spiritual development for counsellor self-care. This pursuit of meaningfulness was a key component of the literature reviewed around spirituality and self-care (Baumeister & Vohs, 2005; Burnard, 1995). One author described this quest as seeking to fulfill four main needs: purpose, values, self-efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister & Vohs).

The final category of strategies found within the literature reviewed was creative expression, which covers the use of a wide range of artistic media for the purposes of self-expression. This means of self-care was the least commonly encountered within the literature aimed at helping professionals, yet provides the closest link to the concept of pursuing self-care through photography. Therefore, the support for the therapeutic benefits of creative expression that exists within the general *art therapy* literature will be discussed at length in subsequent sections of this chapter. This more in depth exploration will be made in an effort to focus on the potential therapeutic value of photography and photographic images, as well as to provide support for an increased focus on creative self-care strategies in the literature intended for helping professionals.

The sobering consequences of neglecting to attend to personal well-being make a strong case for the logic of self-care for helping professionals. The myriad of strategies

represented in the literature communicate the potential for a proactive response to the hazards that helpers face. Many of the universal themes found in the self-care literature were clearly related, both directly and indirectly, to the research questions stated at the outset of this review. In a later section of this chapter, I will present my analysis of these connections. However, I will first explain my findings regarding the therapeutic value of photography and images.

### *Therapeutic Photography*

The therapeutic benefits of photography were represented within the reviewed literature in three ways: the data that support the benefits of general creative expression, writing that directly addresses the concept, and the personal experiences of those who regularly engage in photography. In this section, I will review the literature in these three areas with the aim of illuminating the relationship between therapeutic photography and self-care.

#### *Support from the General Art Therapy Literature*

Payne wrote that “the common ground for all art therapies includes the focus on non-verbal communication and creative processes ... within which people can acknowledge and express strong emotion” (as cited in Saunders & Saunders, 2000, p 100). The literature regarding art therapy, which ranged from medical science to experiential stories, provided a wealth of support for the therapeutic benefits of creative expression. This range represents the debate between the scientific and the spiritual views of creative expression. However, much of the literature reviewed was subjective, experiential data – a fact which Kaplan (2000) argued is due to a general lack of science-minded researchers in the arts. On the other hand, researchers such as McNiff theorized

that creative expression research, due to its very nature, demands a non-traditional approach (as cited in Kaplan). The subsequent sections will review some of these differing ideas as to *how* and *why* creative expression is therapeutic, including scientific, metaphorical, and spiritual explanations.

*Scientific explanations.* The primary area of scientific support for the benefits of creative expression was found in the physiology literature. For example, Kaplan (2000) pointed out that data are becoming progressively more available that support the concept of mind-body unity. He stated that:

Neuroscience can help us understand the reality-based impact of mental imagery. Recent research (see Pinker 1997b for a review) has shown that the visual cortex of the brain is activated in a similar way by imagery from either the external world or the imagination. It seems logical, then, that our bodies respond to mental images as though they were things actually seen. (p. 32)

The work of Samuels and Rockwood (1998) supported the premise that there are physiological benefits to imagery and creative expression. Their explanation of this process is as follows:

Images held in the right brain activate the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus activates the autonomic nervous system and results in arousal or relaxation ... that impacts the whole body .... The autonomic nervous system is a healing system that balances and maintains the blood flow, heartbeat, breathing rate, and hormone .... It is also the system that we need to heal. This system was thought to work by itself, but it is now known to be profoundly influenced by thoughts in the

mind .... Stimulation of the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system results in relaxation, in healing. (pp. 83-84)

The parasympathetic neural response, along with the hormones and neurotransmitters, work to trigger relaxation and healing through the physiological response to creative expression described above.

*Metaphorical explanations.* Feinstein (1985) asked the question, “What, other than the obvious, can a visual image represent?” (p. 157). This is the basic premise of the metaphorical explanations for the therapeutic benefits of creative expression. The meaning that is attached to a creative product can offer great insight into its creator. Metaphor is a necessary way of experiencing the world that tends to be highly individual, as one thing is associated with or understood in terms of another thing (Feinstein). A study by Millis (2001) illustrated the importance of metaphorical symbolism in the meaning attributed to images. Over 300 participants of the study were shown two sets of images three separate times over the course of several weeks, with the presence and type of title manipulated each time (Millis). The results found that metaphorical titles led to a more powerful and pleasurable experience than either no title or descriptive titles (Millis). This phenomenon is explained by Millis, based on the responses of participants, as resulting from the attachment of meaning beyond the obvious. Dosamantes-Beaudry (2003) noted that “the metaphors that we spontaneously generate from our illusory self-experience allows us to reframe the way we think about the world” (p. 30), which speaks to the transformative influence of metaphorical thinking. In her book, *The Soul’s Palette*, Malchiodi (2002) theorized that creative expression is an “inner source of knowing” (p. 78) that emerges through symbols and metaphors.

*Spiritual explanations.* A predominant theme encountered in the literature around creative expression is that it is a spiritual endeavor. Farrelly-Hansen (2001) stated just such a view in saying that “art making is inherently spiritual and ... spirituality is an important ingredient in ... becoming more whole” (p. 17). Rubin (1999) acknowledged that art therapists have a broad variety of approaches; however the theme that weaves through the theoretical differences is a focus on the human spirit. The transpersonal nature of art therapy is not a new idea. Malchiodi (2002) pointed out that the traditional purpose of art since the genesis of humanity has been to cultivate the sacred dimension. Natalie Rogers (1993), daughter of renowned psychologist Carl Rogers, published on the healing power of expressive arts. She described the connection to spirituality as “involving oneself intensely with the creative process [which] brings an alignment of mind and body, creating an opening to receive divine energy” (p. 184). As demonstrated, the variety of interpretation regarding the spiritual nature of creativity differs in its defining principles, yet is united by the basic premise that art-making is spiritual.

The art therapy literature reviewed provided a solid foundation for the therapeutic benefits of creative expression. In the subsequent section, support will be offered regarding the creative and expressive nature of photography, which speaks to the connections between photography and other forms of artistic expression. Consequently, this link validates the consideration of photography as a form of creative expression and therefore, as a potential means of self-care.

#### *Common Elements of the Photography Literature*

Much of the support for the therapeutic benefits of photography as a form of creative expression can be gleaned from the general art therapy literature explored in the



previous section. However, since the invention of the camera there has been debate surrounding the scientific versus artistic nature of photographs (Weiser, 1999; Winston, 1998). There is also an argument that photography is the least threatening form of creative expression as it is so familiar and accessible for the average person (Weiser, 1990). Regardless of this debate, the current art therapy and photographic literature demonstrate a consistent agreement among theorists that the therapeutic value of all visual expression lies in the symbolic representation of meaning. Nevertheless, there *are* significant differences between photography and most other aspects of expressive arts that cannot be argued. Patterson (2004) raised one such critical divergence:

The chief difference between a camera and virtual every other visual tool ... is that when you make a photograph you have an *already-existing object in front of your lens*. In painting, you start with an empty canvas, and you put on it whatever you want. In photography ... you can't escape the fact that you are always confronting some aspect of the physical world that has an existence and character independent of you and your interpretation of it. (pp. 85-86)

While opinions vary as to if this difference is an asset or detriment to creative expression, an obvious result of this fact is that the photograph represents a dichotomy between reality and meaning in a way unlike any other visual form. Zehr (2005) believed that a photographic image does not contain a static meaning, nor is it a simple depiction of reality. Zehr observed that “since a photo is something that stands for another reality, photography can be viewed as a metaphoric activity” (p. 52). This metaphoric nature of photographic images is unique amongst forms of visual expression, all of which can have therapeutic value. Due to this uniqueness, I will focus specifically on the therapeutic

value of photography and photographic images in the subsequent sections, from both academic and experiential perspectives.

*Photography as/in therapy.* Photography *as* and *in* therapy has been utilized for decades by psychologists (Cox & Lothstein, 1989; Furman, 1990; Laing, 1980; Landgarten, 1981; McNiff & Cook, 1975), and the narration of images by the image-taker has been linked to increased reflection and understanding of self (Killian, 2001). Cosden and Reynolds (1982) discussed the specific use of photography as therapy. Using case studies, the authors concluded that photography can be a therapeutic activity – both as a means of emotional expression and through the actual steps required, which encouraged focus, self-control, and interaction with a variety of people and environments. Further academic literature on the therapeutic use of photography emphasizes the way in which photographs and their interpretation are shaped by and reveal the individual's beliefs, values, experiences, and assumptions; that the images provide a window into the photographer's relationships, environment, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of self (Cavin, 1994; Orellana, 1999; Ziller & Smith, 1977).

My intent in this review is not to take an in-depth look at photography *in* therapy (known as PhotoTherapy); rather my focus is on photography *as* therapy, which involves self-directed uses of photography and photographic images for their therapeutic value (Weiser, 1999). By its very nature of being a personal rather than professional process, there is a scarcity of academic literature around the experience of therapeutic photography. However, the experiences of those individuals who are deeply-rooted in the practice of capturing and contemplating images can be effectively utilized to understand its effect. The subsequent section will explore such personal experiences of photography.

*The experience of photography.* When considering how photography affects the self, the lived experience of those in the field provided insight. A selection of books and websites that highlighted the voices of various photographers were reviewed and are presented in the following section to characterize the experience of photography.

Gross and Shapiro (2001) co-authored a book entitled, *The Tao of Photography*. The authors approached the subject with a combined background in photography and psychology. Their book provided a detailed collection of thoughts from master photographers regarding the influence of photography in life. What follows is a selection of quotations from this book that best described the experiences which relate to the research question of photography as a means of self-care.

- “Our personal growth can fuel our photography and our photography can fuel our personal growth” (Jensen, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 4).
- “Taking photographs ... is a way of shouting, or freeing oneself, not of proving or asserting one’s own originality. It is a way of life” (Cartier-Bresson, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 52).
- “Taking pictures is savoring life intensely, every hundredth of a second” (Riboud, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 54).
- “The camera is my tool. Through it I give reason to everything around me” (Kertesz, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 64).
- “To me, photography is an art of observation. It’s about finding something interesting in an ordinary place .... I’ve found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them” (Erwitt, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 70).

- “We look at the world and see what we have learned to believe is there. We have been conditioned to expect .... But, as photographers, we must learn to relax our beliefs” (Siskind, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 86).
- “To photograph is to hold one’s breath .... It’s at that precise moment that mastering an image becomes a great physical and intellectual joy” (Cartier-Bresson, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 106).
- “I usually shoot early morning on week-ends. That’s how I relax. It’s a morning meditation” (Nitahara, as cited in Gross & Shapiro, 2001, p. 116).

The words of these individuals offer a view of how the act of photography can be a form of expression, growth, meaning, and joy. Porterfield (n.d.), a photographer and proponent of therapeutic photography, observed that “when we carry a camera on our journey through life, we are forced to look outside ourselves and view the world around us in a new way” (§ 1). Like Nitahara, Porterfield also saw photography as a form of meditation. Heiferman and Kismaric (1994) offered the idea that the role of a photograph is to communicate something, that it has a voice. Cartier-Bresson (1998) viewed the moment of taking a picture as “putting one’s head, one’s eyes, and one’s heart on the same axis” (p. 16) and as a means of understanding unlike any other.

However, it is not simply the act of photographing that holds therapeutic value. A person could benefit from therapeutic photography without ever having picked up a camera to create an image. This is due to the inherent provocation of expression and meaning an image, in and of itself, can cause. Kraemer (2008) explained that “there are two ways in which the camera can be used as a tool to further self-understanding: first, by

paying attention to yourself as you are photographing and second, by looking at your images in the light of self-exploration” (p. 25).

I have touched on images as self-exploration in various other sections of this project in regards to their metaphoric nature. Lesy (1980) described that photos are “like frozen dreams, whose manifest content (what is actually visible in the photograph) may be understood at a glance, but whose latent content (the meaning of the photograph) is enmeshed in unconscious associations” (p. xiv). Ultimately, photographic images are much more than illustrations, rather they provide insight into ourselves and the world around us (Banks, 1998). Bach (2001) emphasized that meaning does not exist within the photograph itself, rather within the narrative the individual viewing the image prescribes to it. Bach stated that:

Photographs do not themselves preserve meaning .... Only that which narrates can make us understand. Photographs in themselves do not narrate ....

Photographs can help us to acknowledge what has previously been resisted and repressed, so that we may let go, reflect and grow from our experiences. (p. 7)

Images, then, are therapeutic in how they evoke something unique and personal within each individual. “In recognizing that a photograph ... cannot have any objective meaning separable from that of its creator and/or later viewers, it can be seen that there can be no single right way to uncover any absolute truth about it” (Weiser, 2004, p. 24). For that reason, the “truth” of every photograph is found within the response it stimulates.

Barthes (1980) utilized the concept of a *punctum*, or trigger, as an explanation for emotional responses to images. These responses are highly individual as the source of the trigger is located in the viewer. Similar to this idea is the notion of images as a *projective*,

meaning a projection of emotional content (Gosciewski, 1975; Weiser, 1999; Wolf, 1976). This premise is built upon the assumption that much of what we perceive actually comes from within ourselves, rather than from what we are seeing (Weiser). The image may be a reminder of something else, may stimulate an actual memory, or may take on symbolic meaning – all of which are metaphoric processes. Patterson (2004) stated that:

If you look at a fern and merely say, ‘Yes, that’s a fern,’ you may not be seeing past the old, familiar labels of its name. But if you really *see* a fern ... you will have found dimensions and hidden beauty not included in the usual definition of a fern. (Patterson, 2004, pp. 10-11)

To see past the “fern” requires a projection that goes beyond the reality of the object to an underlying personal expression. Our tendency to apply such literal labels is the antithesis of relating metaphorically with an image. Zehr (2005) noticed a cultural aspect to this tendency. “English relies more heavily upon nouns to name and categorize. We quickly label things .... Nouns serve as labels and tend to be static, implying an unchanging state or condition” (p. 32). The therapeutic benefit of seeing in metaphor does not, therefore, happen naturally for every individual.

The metaphor is not simply a figure of speech. It is a habit of thought, one we must develop in order to see. The habit ... allows us to see the large from the small, the pattern in chaos, that which is not expected, that which is expected, in new ways. Metaphor allows us to see with eyes expanded beyond the simply literal, the cataloguing of perceptions. (Meyers as cited in Zehr, 2005, p. 55)

In essence, the experiences of these individuals who utilize photographic images as a means of self-exploration can be adeptly summarized by these words: “we can use

photographs as a mirror, to show hidden aspects of ourselves” (Zehr, 2005, p. 26). That we can potentially discover a reflection of ourselves in any image is the fundamental power of therapeutic photography.

Clearly, the data and experiences reviewed in the fields of art therapy, therapeutic photography, and general photography support the therapeutic value of photography and photographic images. The notion of creative expression as a vehicle for heightening self-awareness, improving feelings of well-being, and communicating meaning relates directly to the focus of this review of the literature.

### *Analysis and Implications*

An analysis of the themes that emerged from the literature on self-care and photography revealed several connections. Even though many of the categories of self-care explored were not directly related to photography or creative expression, the intended effects of many of the strategies had clear connections to the ways in which engaging in reflective photography can be a therapeutic endeavor. Figure 4 provides a list of key concepts that I found within the literature on both self-care and the therapeutic benefits of creative expression through photography and photographic images. This synthesis of concepts provides sound reasoning for helping professionals to approach personal self-care through the medium of photography. Although I began this review with a firm experiential belief in the therapeutic value of photography, I was nonetheless astounded by the plethora of ways in which photography and photographs can access so many of the categories of self-care discussed previously. The multidimensional potential of therapeutic photography has been illuminated for me through the process of this review. The connections discovered have strengthened my belief that photography and

images can be utilized as a proactive means of increasing personal well-being, as well as a healing process to diminish the effects of previously inadequate self-care.

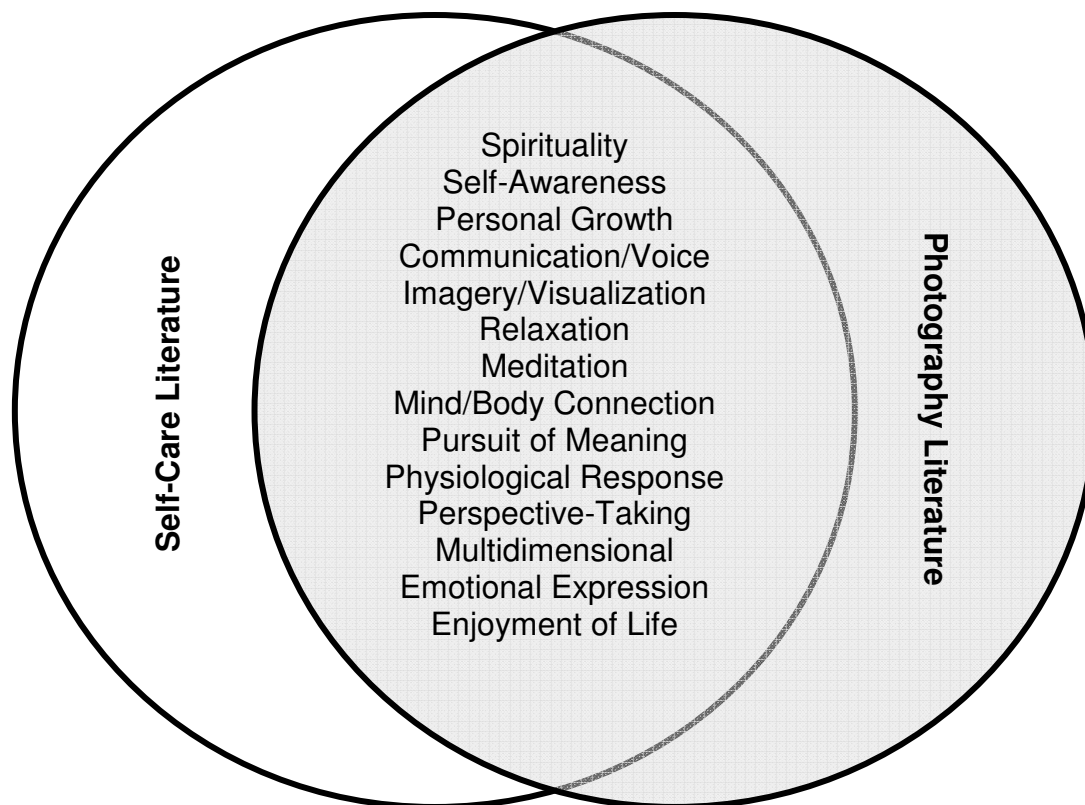


Figure 4. Venn diagram of key concepts found in both self-care and photography literature, by J. Caines, 2008.

### *Summary*

Through a systematic review of the literature, I have aimed to establish the necessity of self-care practices for helping professionals and examined some recommended strategies. Specifically, creative expression through photography was explored as a means for helping professionals to meet some of our self-care needs. The connections found between the two fields of literature were numerous and significant, thus validating the significance of further inquiry. The heuristic inquiry presented in the subsequent chapters utilized this review as a foundation from which to personalize and



build upon the evidence which supports the therapeutic benefits of photography as a means of self-care. The ensuing chapter will describe the stages of heuristic research, as well as my personal experience of the process

## CHAPTER III

## Methodology and Personal Process

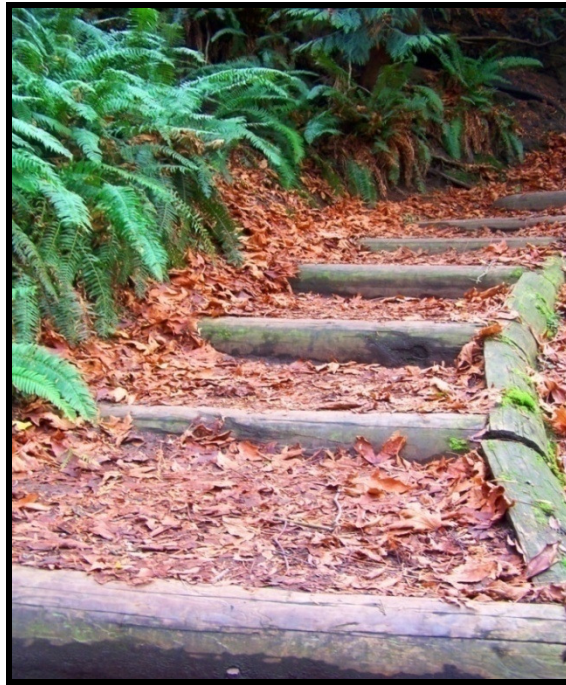


Figure 5. Steps of the Journey, by J. Caines, 2007.

*Once the call for pilgrimage is heard, it is time to plan and clarify our intentions.*

*Just as we had to be attentive to identify the sources of our longing, it is now important for the traveler to be clear about the how and when of the journey* [italics added]. (Cousineau, 1998, p. 69)

Choosing a methodology was, for me, a process. *Research* is a broad concept that encompasses an immense array of philosophies, intentions, and activities. All research, however, is focused on an investigation of a particular subject matter for the purposes of discovery. Beyond this basic premise, the methods and objects of discovery are vast. The choice of a research methodology is, in my view, crucial as it must fit the nature of the inquiry, as well as the worldview of the researcher.

Beloff offered a metaphor that fits well for choosing research methodology when he observed that “if we are barking up the wrong tree then we shall not find what we are looking for no matter what kind of ladders we use” (as cited in Braud & Anderson, p. 36, 1998). If the “tree” is the type of discovery being sought, and the “ladder” is the methodology, then it would be wise for a researcher to examine their intention before choosing an application. In examining *my* intention, it became clear that the focus of my inquiry necessitated a qualitative rather than quantitative paradigm. However, qualitative research also exists along a continuum of approaches, which vary in focus from conceptualizing to experiencing the chosen subject (Braud & Anderson). Focusing in on those experiential-based methods funneled my choices down further to include several phenomenological systems. An additional consideration of my research question, however, was the dimension of *self-inquiry* as not all styles are conducive to the researcher also being the sole participant. The choice of method must be fundamentally based on the focus of the inquiry and it was this fact that led me in the direction that ultimately resulted in my choice of *Heuristic Research*. The term *heuristic* is a derivative of the Greek word *heuriskein*, which translates “to discover” (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research is “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of an experience .... The self of the researcher is present throughout the process” (Moustakas, p. 9). The fit between the heuristic research process and the intention of my research question was immediately obvious to me – I had found the appropriate ladder with which to explore my tree.

The decision to utilize this methodology was made with some initial self-doubt, which stems from a foundation of minimal exposure to unconventional methodologies.

Yet, beyond this insecurity I embrace a firm core belief that the human experience – *my* human experience – holds deep value and broader significance. Braud and Anderson (1998) believed that "many of the most significant and exciting life events and extraordinary experiences - moments of clarity, illumination, and healing - have been systematically excluded from conventional research" (p. 3). It was encouraging to discover that there is, indeed, more to the world of methodology than I had previously experienced. I certainly am not discounting the contributions of the conventional, rather I am communicating that the research designs and applications I had encountered in my studies up to this point simply did not fit for me, nor for the questions about which I have developed a curiosity.

While reading the book on heuristic research by Clark Moustakas (1990), I experienced an innate recognition of the intuitive process I had already begun. The philosophy of research offered in this book put words and form to how I inherently desire to express myself as a researcher – in a manner that allows *all* of me to be present in the process. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the issue of validity, describe the stages of Moustakas' heuristic process, and explain how I personally experienced each stage throughout this journey.

### *Validity*

The heuristic research process is largely undefined, with the personally entrenched question of the researcher acting as the primary guide. “‘What works’ becomes the focus, and anything that makes sense can be tested. This trial-and-error process, this discovery of what works, is the heuristic. What succeeds becomes the ‘right thing’” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 58). This is vastly different than the ways in which the

validity of other research paradigms is judged. The validity of a heuristic process is found within the essence of the experience; within the meaning discovered (Moustakas, 1990).

Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching ... present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience? This judgment is made by the primary researcher, who is the only person in the investigation who has undergone the heuristic inquiry from the beginning. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32)

This approach to validity may be difficult for some to accept. However it is the reality of subjective experience that it cannot be measured. The intent of heuristic inquiry is not to prove. Like so much of the human experience, my results cannot be scientifically proven – it simply is the truth of my internal encounter with myself.

#### *Heuristic Process*

My application of heuristic methodology took the form of a self-inquiry in which I, as the researcher, was also the only participant. The goal of this heuristic self-study was to explore the question: *What is the experience of engaging in therapeutic photography for the purposes of self-care?* Moustakas stated that “the heuristic process requires a return to self, a recognition of self-awareness, and a valuing of one's own experience” (p. 13). Sela-Smith (2002) observed of her own heuristic process that:

The goal ... is to come to a deeper understanding of whatever is calling out from the inside of the self to be understood .... In the process, the researcher is coming to understand something within that is also a human problem or experience. The researcher uses the data within to lift into awareness the experiences that are felt and trigger the *being* of the researcher. In this lifting, an awakening, a greater self-

understanding, and personal growth occur and combine to produce self-transformation. (p. 64)

It has not been a simple task to value my own experience to the level described by Moustakas, and others who have utilized his process. Although the philosophy of the research design and application fit for me, I admit that there remained some skepticism regarding the transformational power of such a method. Nevertheless, I chose to embrace the unknown and, in the process, encountered myself in a profound and authentic way.

Although there is more than one way to conduct heuristic research, Keen (1975) suggested that “the goal of every technique is to help the phenomenon to *reveal itself more completely* than it does in ordinary experience” (as cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 44). To break away from my “ordinary experience” of photography, the process that I initially planned to employ for this inquiry was to:

1. Engage in photography for one afternoon per week.
2. After each group of pictures taken, record brief field notes of my thoughts and feelings regarding the image or images.
3. Within four days of each weekly photo shoot, review the photographs, taking time to experience them in a reflective way through journaling about their meaning and impact.

What I discovered, as I embarked on this self-reflective process, was that my original plan was too rigid. I quickly recognized the need to be able to respond to the natural rhythms of my life and emotions. Too rigid of a structure took my focus away from the inner experience, and placed it on the external obligation of completing the tasks. Instead, what emerged was a balance between intention and need – the intention of challenging of

myself to step outside of my usual experience, and the need to respond in the moment to my authentic desire for emotional release. This type of a shift is not uncommon to the heuristic process.

Learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated, and open to spontaneous shift. It defies the shackles of convention and tradition .... It pushes beyond the known, the expected or the merely possible. Without the restraining leash of formal hypotheses, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or channel it, the one who searches heuristically may draw upon the perceptual powers afforded by ... direct experience. (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 44)

Ultimately, the self-responsive process that emerged led to a deeper and more organic experience. What developed was an average of one field experience per month for five months, in which I captured approximately 25-75 images each. I did not plan in advance when these field experiences would occur, nor how many photographs I would take. I simply took my camera out when I felt compelled and photographed until I felt like stopping. I did, however, find it became necessary to be more intentional with my reflection and writing times as the process was sometimes emotionally challenging, and therefore easy to avoid. I challenged myself to complete a minimum of one period of intense reflection per week. All of these changes to my original plan allowed for an appropriate balance between structure and responsiveness. A further shift from my original plan that took place was the use of poetry as a part of reflecting on the meaning of each image. The ensuing section will briefly explore this addition to the inquiry process.

*The Inclusion of Poetic Expression*

When I initially began this process my intention was to exclusively use photography and written self-reflection as means of expression. As you will discover in the chapters that follow, my emotions also found a voice in poetic writing. I continue to believe that photography, in and of itself, is a meaningful form of self-expression. However, as I challenged myself to go deeper than ever before in how I considered the meaning and impact of my photography, I experienced the need to draw out the metaphor I encountered in each image and, in so doing, turned to poetry.

Throughout the self-inquiry process, I developed a curiosity regarding why the act of writing each poem was such a release for me. A review of the literature around therapeutic writing is beyond the scope of this project; however, I discovered in the words of a few authors some concepts that resonated with my personal experience. Although lengthy, I have intentionally chosen not to paraphrase these quotes as I believe the language and essence of what each author shared to be as important as the content, and I wish to honour the influence their voices have had on my experience.

Poetry contains and unleashes the power of metaphor. It ... opens up new possibilities and understandings. A *metaphor* is itself and something else at the same time. It enlarges, it connects, it shatters old frameworks .... Metaphor unlocks the meanings inherent in particular objects and ordinary events. (Cox & Theilgaard, 1986, as cited in Gorelick, 2005, pp 122-123)

We sense that poetry is related in some essential way to spirituality. It is because of our inborn sensitivity to this that we are attracted to the creative use of language. Our soul responds with energy to our desire to grow – and creates



poetry. Poetry says things in ways that no other kind of communication can.

When we write poetry, it is possible not only to ‘heal the wounds of the heart,’ but liberate our imagination. Reading and writing poetry is a secret bridge to a part of ourselves that is sacred. (Fox, 1995, p. 25)

Giving voice to those aspects of ourselves which usually remain hidden – the sensitive, beautiful, vulnerable, and courageous as well as the dark, the shadow, the rage, the anguish – this is what our attraction to poetry is all about. Our connection to poetry is deep and very personal. We are not likely to reveal this depth readily to others, if at all .... The hidden part of ourselves is essential to our being. It takes great courage to reveal this side to others – or even to ourselves. (Fox, 1995, p. 25)

Poetry is simply speaking the truth .... Without knowing the truth, without speaking it aloud, we cannot know who we are and that we are already whole .... A lot of healing lies in the recovery of a personal sense of meaning, that capacity which enables us to ... find and draw on unsuspected strength. In times of crisis, meaning *is* strength. But the deepest meaning is carried in the unconscious mind, whose language is the language of dreams, of symbols and archetypes. Poetry speaks this language, and helps us hear meaning .... Finding such meaning feels like a revelation. Like grace. (Remen, 1995, as cited in Fox, 1995, pp. xiii-xiv)

Poetry helps us to *feel* our lives rather than be numb. The page, once touched with our poem, becomes a place for painful feelings to be held, explored and transformed. Writing and reading poems is a way of seeing and naming where we have been, where we are and where we are going with our lives .... You make

a poem with words – but you also build an *interior space* when you write, a place where your *intuitive voice* may awaken and thrive. (Fox, 1997, pp. 3-4)

As with the support for the therapeutic value of photography, the voices of those immersed in the experience offer significant insight into the value of poetry as a means of emotional expression. When I was not yet able to put my own words to why the process was so profoundly healing, the words of others seemed to jump off the pages in how familiar they felt to me, thus allowing me to put form to my experience. The themes from these quotes regarding what poetry means to each author are captured in Figure 7.

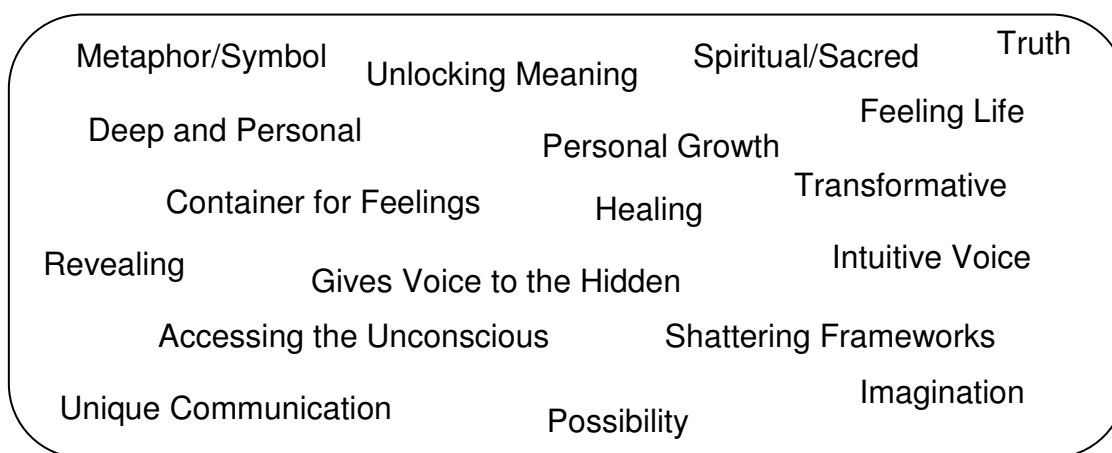


Figure 6. Themes from Other Poets' Experience of Writing Poetry, by J. Caines, 2008.

These themes resonated with me and bore an astounding resemblance to my personal experience of photography. This realization of the connections between these two forms of self-expression is conceptualized in Figure 8.

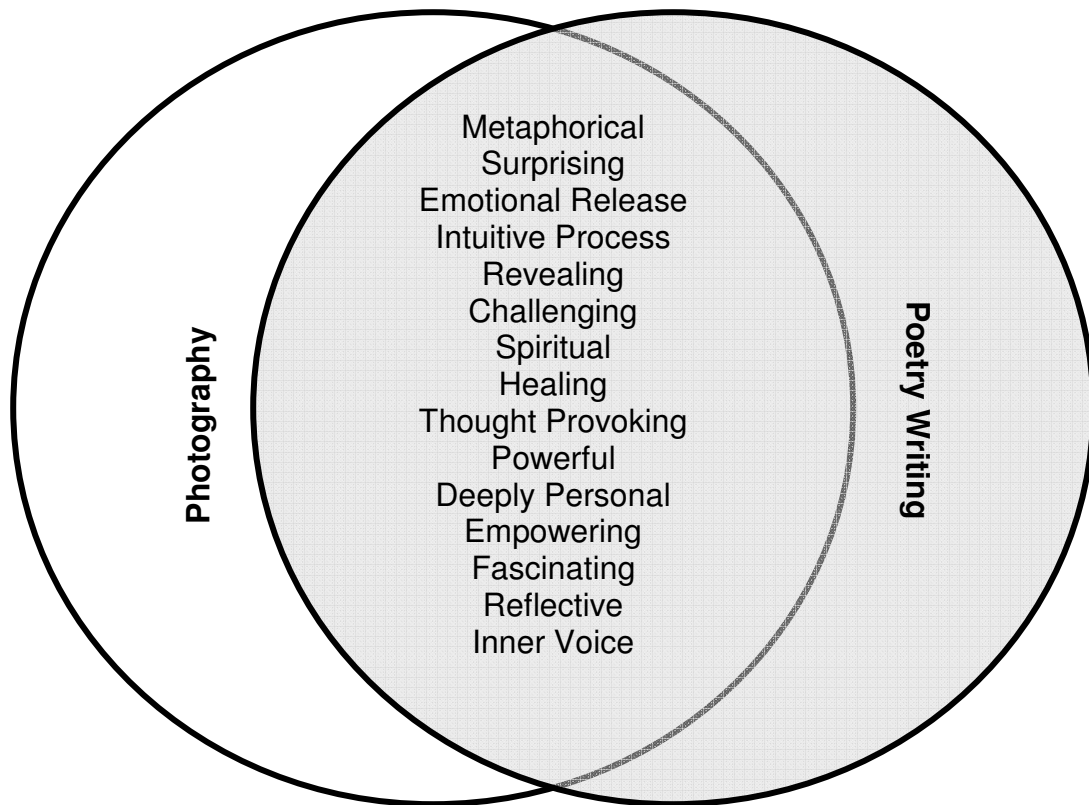


Figure 7. Venn diagram of themes discovered in both photography and poetry writing, by J. Caines, 2008.

After I recognized my need to draw out the metaphor of each image more deeply, followed by the decision to explore the use of poetry, I very quickly felt overwhelmed and intimidated. Thus, it became helpful for me to strike a balance between structure and creativity. What emerged was writing that was rooted in the *abecedarian* poetic form. “The abecedarian is an ancient poetic form guided by alphabetical order. Generally each line or stanza begins with the first letter of the alphabet and is followed by the successive letter, until the final letter is reached” (Academy of American Poets [AAP], n.d., Abecedarian section, ¶ 1). The form dates back to ancient times, well known examples of which are found in biblical psalms and Chaucer’s medieval poetry (AAP). A derivative of the abecedarian is the *acrostic*, “which spells out names or words through the first letter of each line. The intent of the acrostic is to reveal while attempting to conceal” (AAP,

Abecedarian section, ¶ 4). The structure and intent of the acrostic proved to be an appropriate fit for the metaphorical nature of my engagement with each image. What naturally emerged was the use of a literal description of the visual image as an acrostic with which to explore the underlying metaphorical meaning. Minty (1997) observed of her own writing: “Everything I do in this odd business of writing poetry is based on intuition. I have no rules, only patterns that I fall into. Most of my reasons for doing what I do, craftwise, can be answered, ‘because it felt right at the time’” (As cited in Fox, 1997, p. 59). This statement is analogous to how I came to utilize this structure in order to make the experience less anxiety provoking in its early stages.

#### *Personal Experience of Moustakas’ Stages*

The progression of this inquiry involved the application of the six phases offered by Moustakas (1990), which include “initial engagement, immersion ... incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (p. 27). True heuristic research allows the phases “to unfold naturally by surrendering to the feeling state of the subjective ‘I’” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 63). In the remainder of this chapter, I will share my experience of the natural “unfolding” of the first four phases of my personal process. The final two phases, explication and creative synthesis, will be presented in the subsequent chapters.

#### *Initial Engagement*

Within each researcher exists a topic, theme, problem, or question that represents a critical interest and area of search. The task of the initial engagement is to discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher,

one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications.  
(Moustakas, 1990, p. 27)

My initial engagement with this topic began years ago with the genesis of my interest in photography and photographic images. The images I take and collect have an almost sacred importance to me in how they capture meanings and moments that may otherwise be forgotten or go unnoticed. Although this connection to images goes back as far as I can remember, my more intentional involvement in photography began about 12 years ago when I took my first formal course. The course assignments were unusual and abstract, and were focused on exploring both the external and internal worlds. I was hooked. Ever since, I have been fascinated by how I feel when I capture and revisit photographic images. Shortly after beginning graduate school, I was introduced to the field of PhotoTherapy and was immediately captivated by the multidimensional applications and benefits of image-related work. The more I engaged with this learning, the more the topic of therapeutic photography emerged as an obvious choice for my final project direction.

Along side my engagement with the notion of therapeutic photography, existed a passionate concern for my own self-care, as well as the unique self-care needs of other helping professionals. As alluded to in the introduction to this project, I have had a personal experience of burn-out, part of which was certainly related to a depletion of self through my work as a teacher. My lack of awareness regarding the potential consequences of expending my energy in helping work without also intentionally replenishing myself was perhaps myopic and naïve, however it was my reality at the time. I loved my work, and felt that the intrinsic rewards of helping others was “enough”

to fulfill me. I adhered to the number one myth identified by Jevne and colleagues (1994) - “it can’t happen to me”. That naivety resulted in significant physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual consequences, from which my healing process has been long and challenging. Thus began, out of necessity, my initial interest in the area of self-care. My learning as a graduate student in psychology has served to add knowledge to my interest, and has fostered an even deeper concern for the ethical imperative of self-care for those who serve the needs of others in their work.

The merging of two areas of passion into a unified direction of inquiry created an intense personal connection to this academic process. Two roads, one of self-discovery and the other of self-destruction, coalesced to form a meaningful curiosity with which to engage.

### *Immersion*

Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states .... The immersion process enables the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question – to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28)

The catalyst for my immersion in this research question was connecting with a potential supervisor, who shared a similar passion for the power of photography. We engaged in a dialogue that crystallized this research focus and caused me to spend copious hours, over several weeks, engaged in reflection, research, conversation, and intense thought on the connections between self-care and photography.

The researcher is able to become intimately involved in the question during the immersion process to live the question and grow in knowledge and understanding.

Something amazing happens when a researcher has surrendered to the call in Phase 1. When the question has been properly formed, it appears to have a power that draws the image of the question everywhere in the researcher's life experience. Immersion happens naturally, not through control or planning. (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 65)

I find this time of immersion quite difficult to fully explain as it was, for me, so abstract and effortless. Upon encountering the right catalyst, I experienced an explosion of energy, insight, connection, clarity, and wonder that my previous experiences (initial engagement) had prepared me for. It is only in retrospect that I am able to see the significance of that brief yet intense time of complete focus on the question that was calling to me. I had not yet even heard of Clark Moustakas and heuristic research, yet my intuitive process plunged me into an immersion experience that has fuelled the remainder of the process.

### *Incubation*

Incubation is the process in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question. Although the researcher is moving on a totally different path, detached from involvement with the question ... on another level, expansion of the knowledge is taking place. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28)

Once my research focus and supervision had been confirmed, my externalized effort and intense energy softened and my thoughts turned to other tasks, primarily school related assignments and practicum arrangements. This period lasted a couple of months and allowed the ideas to settle into a clearer picture of my intention and desires.

Incubation is the period when additional input is stopped because living with the question has provided all the information that the unconscious processing part of self needs to sort through, consider, review, and reorganize new ways of thinking, being, seeing, and understanding, to create meaning and form an answer to the question. This stage begins without planning. (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 67)

As with the previous phases, incubation *just happened*. It was created from my need to step back from the all-consuming fervour of the weeks I later recognized as immersion. This need was practical in that there were other areas of life that required my attention, yet also emotional as it was not possible to maintain the previous level of intensity.

### *Illumination*

The process of illumination is one that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition. The illumination as such is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29)

As the question reemerged to the forefront of my focus, I found myself more firmly grounded in my understanding of the ways in which photography and images have had therapeutic value in my own life. I reconnected with my curiosity and needed to know more about the experiences of others and, thus, became absorbed in the literature on the topics of self-care, creative expression, and photography. As I explored these areas more deeply, and my understanding grew broader, I reached a point in which the collective connections between these two areas of passionate interest became apparent. I utilized the academic requirement of a literature review to record the knowledge and connections I discovered through this period of illumination.



It was at the end of this phase that I discovered the work of Clark Moustakas. I was fascinated when I studied these six phases as they revealed that my experiences up to this point bore a striking resemblance to the descriptions of the first four phases of heuristic research. In retrospect, I wonder if my initial lack of knowledge of the heuristic process was more of an advantage than a detriment as the process unfolded quite naturally, without me trying to control it or make it fit any particular model of research. I suspect that my lack of direct awareness was a gift that allowed for a more tacit experience of self-exploration.

### *Summary*

My choice to embrace a methodology outside of the boundaries of the conventional objective paradigm resulted in a unique experience of creative self-discovery, to which the subsequent chapters are devoted. This choice has not been without its challenges. There were many moments of feeling lost and insecure. However, it was the very ambiguity of the process that allowed for the emergence of an authentic journey of self-discovery, which was the ultimate intention of my inquiry. Moustakas' (1990) phases of heuristic research offered a light with which to guide my journey, yet it was a subtle light – requiring me to illuminate much of the journey from within. In choosing and authentically applying this type of approach, I was forced to find my own way and create paths within myself where none had previously existed. The remaining chapters of this project will provide a glimpse into where the application of the heuristic process led me in my inner travels.

## CHAPTER IV

## Explication



Figure 8. The Road Ahead, by J. Caines, 2004.

*The soul of your pilgrimage, the heart of your destination, disappears, will be invisible ... if you are too afraid or too proud to appear as you really are at the moment – someone far, far from home, without all the answers, without the soul map to the city [italics added]. (Cousineau, 1998, p. 120)*

The “soul of my pilgrimage” lives within the pages of this chapter. I certainly have worked hard at setting aside my fear and pride in order to be willing to reveal this journey. I do so as a personal challenge to the walls of silence by which I no longer wish to be confined. I also share my journey with the hope that it will speak in some way to others - as a message regarding the risks of containing self-expression, as well as an example of the power of painting an emotional canvas with words and images. This chapter offers the raw data of my experience, in the form of images, poetry, and reflections. However, before sharing this process of explication, I believe it is important

to provide some foundation for my decision to place this creative expression within the body of this project.

### *Organization of the Explication*

#### *Placement*

Often the type of visual and reflective work presented in this section would be relegated to an appendix due to the ways in which it does not easily conform to publication guidelines. However, the nature of heuristic research, which is an inherently creative process, allows for the inclusion of such material within the research report. These data are not a supplement to the study; rather they are the heart and essence of it. I strongly believe that publication guidelines need to allow space within the main body of a research work for the personal and creative authorial voice that is required by research methods such as heuristic inquiry. Richardson (1992) summarized this notion with these words:

“[We] inherit an academic culture that holds a traditional authority .... That culture suppresses and devalues its members’ subjective experiences. For example, we are expected to write papers in prose, reference others, place our work in a lineage, objectify the topic, and focus on the expressed topic rather than on the self-as-producer .... Although there are textually marginal places, such as appendices and prefaces, for social scientists to ponder their lived experience, making that experience the centerpiece of an article seems improper, bordering on gauche and burdensome” (pp. 125-126).

By choosing to be the sole participant of this study, I made the decision to place my personal experiences and my creative and emotional expression at the centre of this work

to an even greater extent than is usual. This choice represents a less common use of Moustakas' phases. While heuristic research lends itself well to the inclusion of the researcher's personal experience, it is most often applied using co-participants as well. However, Sela-Smith (2002), in a detailed review of 28 research efforts that claimed to utilize Moustakas' method, found that only three truly represented a personal, subjective experience of the phenomenon being studied. Sela-Smith believed that this was, in large part, due to the external distraction of co-participants; she maintained that self-inquiry is the purest form of heuristic discovery as it is entirely focused on the internal exploration of the researcher. Further, I agree with Moustakas' (1990) assertion, discussed earlier, that the personal experience is highly relevant in that it contains broader social and universal significance. Gergen and Gergen (2002) supported the importance of the use of self in research in their observation that:

In using oneself ... the researcher is freed from the traditional conventions of writing. One's unique voicing - complete with colloquialisms ... and emotional expressiveness is honoured. In this way the reader gains a sense of the writer as a full human being. (as cited in Etherington, 2004, p. 137)

It was my goal to be as fully present in this writing as possible. I also made every effort to respect academic guidelines, while still seeking to minimize the ways in which these conventional criteria could diminish my personal involvement, or be incongruous with the nature of this inquiry. My intent was to be respectful yet authentic.

### *Features*

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to sharing my personal expression of pursuing self-care through therapeutic photography. It is both process and product, which

together form the explication of my lived experience. My written reflections are presented in their entirety, with only minor editing changes to enhance readability. It is also presented chronologically, as experienced over the course of several months, to allow for a more accurate portrayal of my process. To minimize any potential confusion, I will briefly explain the various features of my explication process.

*Field experience.* Each field experience, of which there are seven, represents a different location and experience of photography. These field notes were created on location in point form, and then expanded into paragraph form the same day. The content of these pieces of writing is what I noticed about myself as a person and photographer during the act of making the images captured in that day and location. Each field experience reflection refers to all of the subsequent images that precede the next field note.

*Image.* I have shared all 15 images for which I wrote corresponding poems. Throughout this process, I captured and reflected upon approximately 300 photographs, yet chose to write about only those images to which I felt inherently drawn. For aesthetic and readability purposes, I have placed each image and its poem together on a separate page, even though these page breaks often result in gaps in between sections. The literal name of each photograph can be found in the figure caption underneath, as well as through the bolded first letters of each line. The metaphorical title of each image and its poem is embedded in the header. For example, *Image 1: "Remembrance"*.

*Reflections on image.* On the page immediately following each poem is my reflection on the experience of contemplating and writing about the related image. These reflections are numbered to correspond with the previous image header. The content of

these reflections is focused more specifically on that particular image, as well as what I noticed about my process, my thoughts and feelings, and the meaning that emerged.

*Self-dialogue.* Moustakas' (1990) concept of self-dialogue has been challenging for me to fully grasp. At times I felt unsure as to how it differs from other forms of self-reflection. Yet, when I revisited my self-dialogues, they did seem to yield a differing perspective and add another dimension of self-awareness. Moustakas believed that:

Self-dialogue is ... that recognition that if one is going to be able to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one must begin with oneself .... In self-dialogue, one faces oneself and must be honest with oneself and one's experience relevant to the question or problem. (pp. 16-17)

The self-dialogue sections of my explication stage, of which there are seven, are simply me talking to myself. A deeper explanation is that I view these dialogues as the "me" who sees the bigger picture and greater significance of the experience speaking to the "me" who feels a bit lost and wants to hide. It is a place in which I question, challenge, and encourage myself; in which I am able to step ever so slightly *outside* of the experience to see myself more fully *within* the experience.

#### *My Process of Explication*

The fifth phase of Moustakas' (1990) heuristic process of inquiry is that of *explication*. This is a period of deep clarification and revelation. "The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers and meaning" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). Sela-Smith (2002) described the explication process in the following manner:

The heuristic researcher continues the focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure ... to recognize meanings that are unique and distinctive to an experience .... The entire process of explication requires that researchers attend to their own awarenesses, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments. (p. 68)

These words aptly describe how my explication of self occurred, although I would use the word *revelation* rather than *disclosure*. In my experience, the act of revealing goes beyond disclosure. To *disclose* is to make a predetermined choice to share particular information from an existing perspective. In contrast, to *reveal* takes the person to the level of epiphany, from which new insight is gained. When I disclose, others will gain information about me, whereas, when I truly reveal, others become witnesses to transformation. The remaining pages of this chapter contain my experience of explication and self-revelation.

*Field Experience 1*

I've been hesitating to begin the process; feeling vulnerable in the rawness of my emotion. I did not expect to find myself in this place of loss and confusion while beginning this process, but perhaps it is a gift of "realness" that will enrich the impact and meaning of the experience. Today a present inspired me to initiate this journey. So I captured an image of that gift - a simple gesture of care and remembrance that is an outward expression of what words cannot seem to adequately express. It seems fitting to depict this meaning as the first step in my pursuit of self-care through creative expression.



*Image 1: "Remembrance"*



*Figure 9. Pendant, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**P**ain, unwilling to conform to mere words, confined within.

**E**ntombed in the hush of unuttered sorrow;

**N**eeding a voice with which to speak its loss.

**D**esiring to be honoured.

**A**ching for release, yet seeking remembrance...

**N**othing more than a simple eulogy of existence.

**T**ouched, at last, by an unassuming gesture of acknowledgement.

*Reflections on Image 1*

These words were difficult to write as they are so intensely personal, and because I feel at a loss for adequate words of late. Today, this process helped me get past some of those feelings of being stuck in my chosen silence. Confining my writing to a literal acronym is both challenging and inspires depth and creativity. Although I was aware of the general meaning of this image before writing about it, locating words that fit my feeling as well as the abecedarian form caused me to reflect in greater detail about the particular essence of my emotions.

*Self-Dialogue 1*

Today you took the leap to begin this process of inquiry that has had you both exhilarated and terrified. I am proud of you for inviting the vulnerability, the fear, the ambiguity, and the experience (whatever it may be). I wonder what it was that created the sense of readiness to begin. Why today? Perhaps it is the deep pain of your recent loss that needed a release. Or maybe even a simple lack of any further self-protective excuses. Certainly I see in you a deeply entrenched desire to connect more fully with a side of yourself that has been relegated to second place in the presence of that amazing analytical brain of yours. I sense that you feel as if you have lost a significant piece of your self along the way - well, not lost exactly because I know it is still lives within you. Would it be accurate to say that it is the means of *expression* that you are searching for? Yes, that seems to be what it is - a disconnection with the means by which to release what is created in your heart and soul. And I know that you feel as if no one truly sees *you*. I know I want to see more outward expression of the beauty, depth, and strength that exist within! I am so pleased that you picked up your camera today and captured the moment

of inspiration. I know how challenging it was for you to make the meaning explicit through words, but I hope that you see how powerful it is to take the time to gaze upon your experience and capture the image more fully. When I look at this image and read the words, I feel as if I have been offered a glimpse of the honest, raw, and uncensored you! That must be both frightening and comforting. Thank you for taking the first step. I am so looking forward to observing how this journey unfolds for you; remember that you have much to offer yourself and the world!

### *Self-Dialogue 2*

Why are you hesitating? There you sit, wanting to head out with your camera, yet you have not. What is this resistance about? Perhaps you feel as if the images must be something extraordinary to be worthy of representing your innermost thoughts and feelings. Perhaps there is some fear - fear of what you may discover if you prod too deeply. What you will find is YOU! Remember that quote you read the other day that resonated with you? “The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable .... For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers” (Peck, 2000, p. 23). Allow this discomfort to *propel* you because your fear is based in the knowledge that something unknown and powerful could happen. As scary as the ambiguity is, I know that you desire to invite the experience in. Start here, in this moment...

### *Field Experience 2*

It was difficult, once again, to get out here. I chose to take a small step by going no further than my backyard. I was immediately drawn to the contrast of the weeping

Buddha amongst the beautiful foliage. As I captured the image, it stirred something in me and inspired me to set aside my hesitation and contemplate its meaning. I took other photos out here, but none created that inner sense, a curiosity to explore like this one has. I am surprised by my reluctance, yet encouraged by the experience once I took the risk.

*Image 2: "Guarded"*



*Figure 10. Weeping Buddha, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**Wounded and weeping,**

**Exhausted,**

**Exposed yet invisible.**

**Praying for stillness and reprieve.**

**Isolated through disguising the deluge of tears.**

**Not able, in this moment, to see that which encircles,**

**Guarded by a shroud of self-protection.**

**Bold, illuminating light,**

**Unyielding, resilient foundation,**

**Determined, flourishing growth.**

**Despite a blinded awareness, life continues to offer beauty and strength,**

**Humbly awaiting recognition and acceptance;**

**Assuringly patient.**

*Reflections on Image 2*

This reflection took me hours to write. I kept backing away from it and then coming back again - needing to finish it but exhausted by the effort. My emotions are so acute, that I desired to find the exact right words. The direction has become driven by finding *the* word that speaks to my soul, in this case “guarded” was that word. The first section was especially difficult to write as it touches on some very raw emotions. I felt a physiological response - clenched jaw, rapid heart rate, muscle tension, and headache. I wondered, at that point, if this could possibly be self-care as I felt “better” before. However, the second section found me exploring the surrounding beauty of the image, which brought hope and some release of tension. The process made me think about how when I clean my house, it often looks worse before it gets better. There is certainly a sense of release, combined with a growing realization of the emotions I have been neglecting by thinking rather than feeling my way through challenges, both recent and distant.

*Self-Dialogue 3*

How did it feel to push through your resistance and capture some images yesterday? I sense that it was astonishing how much inspiration came to you despite your initial hesitation. The meaning you exposed was profound and intensely personal - I know that it was an experience of both release and pain. Did you anticipate the pain? Or did you think that emotional release would always be cathartic? I sense you were taken aback by how difficult it was to look some of those deeply veiled emotions in the face; perhaps even startled by the nature of some of those feelings. It felt more uncomfortable and took more effort than you anticipated, didn't it? I suppose that if emotional

expression and self-care were easy, fewer people would suffer the effects of repression and burnout! I'm curious to know what you are going to *do* with these challenging emotions as they find a voice through your images and words. Is expressing them enough on its own? Something to think about as you continue this journey...

### *Field Experience 3*

I was excited to capture some images today - no hesitation! Today I find myself drawn to contrasts - life versus death, light versus dark, etceteras. I also feel drawn to look more closely at that which I would normally not notice, or would pass by. I have found beauty in "ugliness" and am intrigued by my desire to capture starkness more than what is typically aesthetically pleasing. I did not choose today's images with my mind, rather with my heart. I endeavored to be open to what would draw my eye, and then I captured it in whatever manner spoke to me without considering any metaphorical meaning ahead of time. I noticed that many of the images I took today have a wide aperture and the use of fill flash, resulting in a blurred background and an illuminated foreground. I am seeing so many ways in which my life is reflected in my photography - literally and metaphorically!

*Image 3: "Disregarded"*



*Figure 11. Dead Tree, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**Disregarded.**

**Estranged from a reflection of the ordinary.**

**Abandoned.**

**Defiantly present yet fundamentally unseen;**

**Tenacious in a declaration of existence.**

**Resolved.**

**Echoing the knowledge of cruel experience.**

**Expectant.**



*Reflections on Image 3*

The meaning of this image seemed to emerge from the nature of the first word that felt right. This is very much an intuitive process, a bit of a mystery as I do not know what meaning will present itself until I find it. I have developed the process of scanning lists of feeling words until the word that fits becomes obvious. The occurrence surprises me each time as the “aha” moment arrives and I discover “what it is”. It is especially surprising given the limits of abecedarian poetry. I am fascinated by the contrast of darkness and hope in the emotions I have expressed through this process thus far. I understand that these meanings come from within me, such as the feeling of being disregarded that I expressed through this image and poem. However, I do not always overtly recognize all of the nuances of the expressed emotion – a phenomenon that is allowing me to discover more about myself in the process.

*Image 4: "Resilient"*



*Figure 12. Wild Flower, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**Wild flower,**

Insistently growing in harsh surroundings;

Longing for the intimacy of commonality.

**Delicate flower,**

Faithfully reaching for the light;

Looking for the redemption of illumination.

**Optimistic flower,**

Wistfully believing in the existence of meaning;

Embracing the possibilities.

**Resilient flower.**

*Reflections on Image 4*

The meaning that emerged from this image was much more positive and optimistic than I anticipated. What drew me to this photograph initially was the contrast between the life and colour of the flower with the fallen tree in the background. I also was drawn to the fragility of the flower and the vulnerability of its location on a walking path. However, as I wrote, the words that felt like a fit were more of hope than despair. This was an uplifting reflective process today as I experienced a positive shift in my affect; it was more an occurrence of strengthening than of release.

*Image 5: “Deconstructed”*



*Figure 13. Decayed Stump, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**Deconstructed.**

**Eroded.**

**Changed by the forces of true human contact.**

**A diminished version of**

**Yesterday’s impenetrable exterior.**

**Exposed to the scrutiny of what resides within;**

**Details of growth and scars lay bare.**

**Sacrificing safety for transparency**

**To discover a reflection of truth.**

**Unexpectedly confronted with a fragmented self.**

**Mourning and celebrating lost ignorance;**

**Possessed of the yearning for wholeness.**

*Reflections on Image 5*

The word “deconstructed” so aptly describes where I am at. This process of intense self-reflection feels, at times, more like self-punishment than self-care! This piece so accurately describes *me* - it is a gut level truth of how I feel in this moment. This place is wonderful and terrifying all at the same time; it is exactly what I need as well as exactly what I fear - to be exposed, to be seen by self and others. Having found the image and words to express this feeling has left me raw, disarmed, uncertain, and vulnerable. It has also marked the beginning of something that I sense will be transformative, if I am willing and able to embrace the chaos and ambiguity.

*Self-Dialogue 4*

This experience seems to be an emotional roller coaster for you. That piece you wrote today about feeling deconstructed was powerful and full of angst. I suspect that this place is a pivotal point in the process. What will you do from here? Step back and try to put the pieces where they were, or step forward from this precipice into the canyon of your deepest emotions? It's not as easy to decide as you would have thought, is it? The whole point of choosing this self-inquiry was to challenge yourself to a deeper level of feeling and expression, but now it is getting uncomfortable in its closeness. Are you willing to deconstruct even further? I suppose you could turn this process into an academic exercise but is that what you want? You seem to desire what you most fear, and fear what you most desire. I know you have questions about if this deepening self-exploration and expression will actually lead to healing; you are worried that it may be a deconstructing process without the capacity to rebuild. How else will you know but to try? Trust the journey, trust your emotions, trust yourself!

*Image 6: "Shadows"*



*Figure 14. Silhouette, by J. Caines, 2007.*

Shadows of self,  
Illuminated from the  
Light of external perception;  
Hiding the intricacies of authentic inner spirit.  
Outwardly exquisite and enlightened, while  
Underneath a diffused awareness obscures truth.  
Elusive truth.  
Truth that hurts but also liberates.  
Truth that has become  
Endangered of being lost in the shadows.

*Reflections on Image 6*

This image is quite stunning in colour and contrast. As I was driving through Fish Creek Park, I saw a group of leafless trees that were stark compared to the surrounding growth. I was immediately drawn to these trees and pulled over. The scene was made even more interesting by the sun setting behind it. Of course, traditional picture-taking rules would say not to shoot an image into the sun, but I was curious as to what would happen if I broke the rules. It required some faith to capture this image as I could not see much of anything. I focused on the borders, tried to frame the photo the best I could, and took several shots. When I loaded this image on my computer, it seemed to be a wasted effort at first glance. Yet I decided to dial down the brightness, and this is what emerged - a beautiful silhouette. This image would not exist without curiosity, faith, and a shift in perspective. The silhouette caused me to think about the image from the “other side” - the side illuminated by the sun - and how different that view is. I connected with this idea as I often feel that other people see me differently than I see myself, and that they only see what I allow. The rest hides in the shadows.

*Field Experience 4*

I continue to be drawn to close-up photos; I used my zoom lens for every photo I took at the zoo today, which is not usual practice for me. I noticed that I often felt frustrated with how “pretty” everything was; it was difficult to find edgier or less common images. This pull to the uncommon has emerged as a theme. The images I captured are quite beautiful, which makes me question how meaningful they will be given the rawness and darkness of the emotional expression I have experienced so far. I

am curious to see what happens as I process this collection of 125 photos down to a few to write about, as well as what meanings will emerge.

### *Self-Dialogue 5*

A day at the zoo provided you many opportunities to photograph and reflect on the process. It was several hours of existing completely “in the moment” and focused, through the lens, on the here-and-now. You were certainly tired at the end of the day - it must have consumed a great deal of energy to be so present and focused. Isn't it interesting how much time you spent *waiting* - waiting for the right angle, the right light, for other people to get out of the way, for the wildlife to cooperate. Often, that patience paid off and you got the image you wanted, but did you also notice that sometimes it was in vain? Sometimes, the image you had in your mind simply would not come to fruition. Sometimes you even waited too long and gave up a really good image in the hopes that the “perfect” one would happen. Sounds a lot like life, eh? It was also interesting that there were moments when you gave up; when you put the camera down and accepted that some things simply cannot be captured through the lens, but must be taken in and enjoyed in the moment, with all of the senses. I am reminded of what Freeman Patterson (2004) cautioned: “making pictures can be a substitute for seeing and participating” (p. 12). Sometimes the moment is just for you to be present in, and it cannot be captured nor shared.



Image 7: "Anger"



*Figure 15. Caged Cougar, by J. Caines, 2007.*

Captured and confined anger.  
 Anger that lives behind a barricade which  
 Guards from real experience.  
 Exiled to a contrived  
 Den of existence.  
 Censored to a powerless expression  
 Of genuine emotion.  
 Unseen, or dismissed with condescending smiles.  
 Grotesquely misunderstood;  
 Aching for release from the  
 Repression of concealing walls.

*Reflections on Image 7*

I took 125 photos at the zoo today, however only 16 made the initial cut, in which I keep or delete photos based on my intuitive reaction. This image was an unquestionable first choice to write about as it is so different from the others. Visually, it is chaotic, unfocused, and laden with aggression. Anger is an emotion that I very rarely express as the roles and scripts that I play out in my life are of peace-maker, good-girl, and ultimately forgiving. This “barricade” is, I’m sure, collaboratively constructed, however I often feel trapped by the expectations of others. It was cathartic to write about an emotion that is felt, but so unspoken in my life. I really connected with this image in how the simple bars make the expression of anger so dismissed.

*Image 8: “Contrasts”*



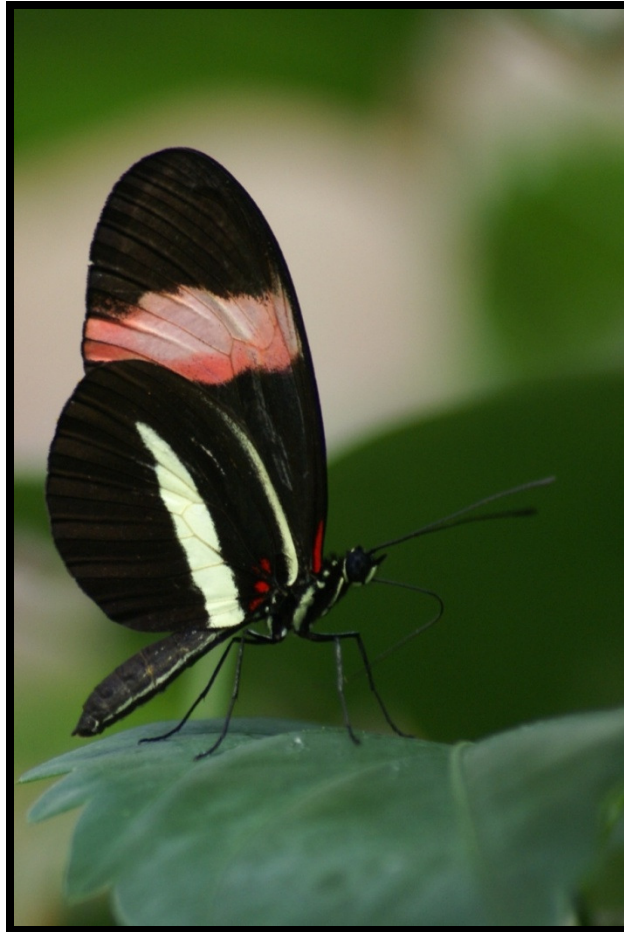
*Figure 16. Striped Zebra, by J. Caines, 2007.*

Shaped by contrasts of self  
 That pull between  
 Reason and passion; mind and heart.  
 Intrinsically governed by  
 Powerful feelings yet  
 Exposing only those well-crafted scripts that  
 Deflect and defend.  
 Zealously guarding  
 Emotions, yet desiring to be understood.  
 Black and white versions of self  
 Rebellious against the evolution of an  
 Authentic whole.

*Reflections on Image 8*

This reflection stems from a recent realization that people close to me see me quite differently than I see myself. As is likely reflected in previous writing, there is a discrepancy between how I feel and how I express myself to the world. As soon as I looked at this picture, the word *contrast* came to mind - not a big leap of course. Yet as I considered the contrasts in my life, this pull between the *thinking* and the *feeling* parts of myself was what I felt compelled to write about. It is a significant issue for me right now - one I view as a lack of authenticity. This is an issue that I was largely unaware of until I really let someone into my life over the last few months - someone who was willing to challenge me on my scripts and on what I present to the world. Reflecting on this issue helps me to feel empowered to change it - simple awareness and mindfulness is a big step!

*Image 9: "Beauty"*



*Figure 17. Butterfly, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**Beauty as camouflage; brightly hidden**

**Under a veil of excellence.**

**Toughly vibrant;**

**Timidly concealed;**

**Eager to both please and withhold.**

**Reluctant to be closely observed for**

**Fear of the unknown.**

**Luminous beauty**

**Yielding to uncertainty.**

*Reflections on Image 9*

It was difficult for me to begin writing my reflections on this image as it is so beautiful - something that feels at odds with the emotions I most desire to express. I continue to be both surprised and relieved by the darkness that has emerged in these reflections. It was also difficult to look past the common metaphors of the butterfly and make this image my own - notions of metamorphosis seemed the easy idea to default to. But it was important to me to find my own voice. Then, as I considered the image and experience of this moment more closely, the idea of camouflage resonated with me. The butterflies were incredibly difficult to find as they sat still and blended into the tropical surroundings. Their very brightness and vibrancy was what made them difficult to see. It took an incredible amount of effort and patience to get close to the butterfly - perhaps how people in my life feel about me.

*Image 10: "Defiance"*



*Figure 18. Ugly Flower, by J. Caines, 2007.*

Utterly defiant of expectation; a  
Glorious reinterpretation of the ordinary.  
Letting go of the need for approval and  
Yearning solely for nourishment and growth.  
Faithful to an authentic uniqueness;  
Longing not for conformity of spirit;  
Obliged only to an expression of inner truth.  
Witness to a process of self-declaration in an  
Environment of acquiescence.  
Radiantly defiant.

*Reflections on Image 10*

I was drawn to this image due to its unusualness; how it defies conventional view of beauty. It packages the concept of “flower” in a way that does not make sense, yet is utterly intriguing. As I reflected on this notion, the word *defiance* presented itself and sparked the direction of my writing. This idea resonates with me in how I often feel very different from those around me; almost a sense of not belonging. This can be lonely, but is also empowering in that I value my uniqueness. I do not want to be ordinary, nor make decisions based on expectations. It is sometimes challenging to see the gift in uniqueness when I desire to be understood and seen for who I really am. Reflecting on this image was a process of affirmation for me.



*Image 11: "Stillness"*



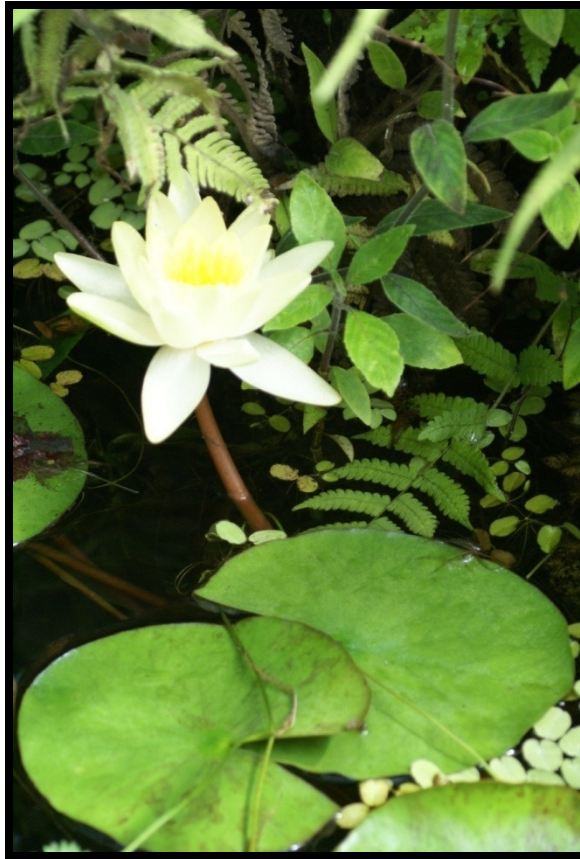
*Figure 19. Flamingo, by J. Caines, 2007.*

Finding stillness; an experience of  
Luxurious tranquility,  
Assuring peace, and  
Mindful awareness of the present.  
Inwardly focused;  
Not compelled to understand or analyze.  
Granting the self a reprieve; a moment  
Of pure BEING!

*Reflections on Image 11*

A recent focus for me has been calming my mind; finding ways to still my thoughts and be present in my feelings and in the moment. When I considered this image, I recalled how long I watched and photographed this particular bird. Amongst the chaos, the presence of others, the external noise, and my stares, this bird was completely still. She was balanced and restful - leaning on herself for support and not reacting to what was happening around her. The words flowed easily as I reflected on how I desire this kind of rest and stillness in my life.

*Image 12: "Beneath"*



*Figure 20. Pond Flower, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**Poised flower...what lays beneath,**  
**Obscured by murky waters of**  
**Nurtured fear?**  
**Deep pools of detachment,**  
**Formed of the desire for certainty.**  
**Lovely flower...why do you hide,**  
**Oblivious to the immersed strength of**  
**Wisdom?**  
**Empowered roots of intuition,**  
**Released through a trust in self.**

*Reflections on Image 12*

I almost chose not to write about this image as several times I approached it and found no inspiration. On my final attempt, I decided to question what I was seeing, and recognized that I was solely focused on the flower; I then became curious as to what was beyond the surface of the water. It was what I could *not* see in this image that was the catalyst for my reflective contemplation. This metaphor, once again, connects with my capacity to hide what is under the surface.

*Self-Dialogue 6*

Ok, so you have been genuinely ill and have not been out with your camera in awhile. But let's be honest, you have been well enough for a few weeks now to reflect on some of the images you have already taken. Are we back at square one? Are you afraid to go deeper and this illness has offered a convenient excuse? If you believe what you say, then what better time to express yourself emotionally than when you are down and feeling overwhelmed? You have had some significant epiphanies the last few months, its understandable to be afraid, to withdraw, to slow down - but what do you *really* want? Do you want to bring the truth out of the shadows you wrote about in "*Silhouette*", or do you want to continue hiding? Perhaps authenticity is not all its cracked up to be. Maybe you *do* want to keep some things protected, but the bottom line is that you have a *choice* to make about what you do with this new found self-awareness because you can't go backwards, only forwards. Doing nothing is accomplishing nothing. So, start unpacking, or find some new containers to store all this emotional content in because the old ones have been destroyed in the process!

*Field Experience 5*

I took this photo in an effort to notice images closer to home. Sometimes I cannot get outside to do photography, yet there are still opportunities for photographs that inspire reflection. I have realized that it is important to me to take aesthetically pleasing pictures that are a departure from the ordinary. I am generally not inspired by conventional images. This is why most of my photos are taken away from my usual setting. However, this image does inspire me and was simply taken in my living room. The light, lines, shadows, and soft focus all make for a visually interesting image of an ordinary object.

*Image 13: "Release"*



*Figure 21. Red Wine, by J. Caines, 2007.*

**Refined;**

**Entirely transformed from what once was.**

**Deliberately unraveled and renewed, yet demanding patience and faith.**

**What will I become, now compelled to believe**

**In a deviating account of self?**

**Nothing is certain in this pressing and aging...nothing, that is,**

**Except the release of that which was within.**

*Reflections on Image13*

While perhaps an overly obvious metaphor, the wine brought to mind the almost violent refining process required to produce something beautiful. This is not unlike my own process of self-discovery, which has been filled with many painful, uncomfortable moments. From grape to wine really is a metamorphosis - one that requires a change of state; an eradication of what originally existed. Does who I am today at all resemble the me of the past? Perhaps there are familiar flavours and colours, yet I feel almost unrecognizable to myself in many ways. This is an experience that is both liberating and frightening; one which incites those age-old existential questions of identity and self-knowledge. However, I have invited this journey of self-discovery and transformation into my life, and it doesn't seem wise to abandon the process at this stage!

*Field Experience 6*

A trip to the coast has offered many rich opportunities for photography. Today I found myself on a rocky beach, with not another human in sight as far as I could see. The air was crisp and cool, yet the sun was shining. As I sat and took in my surroundings, I was drawn to so many features – the pounding waves, the variety of rocks, the fall leaves scattered everywhere. Yet, today it took quite awhile to get my camera out of its case as it seemed to be an impossible task to adequately capture this multi-sensory experience of isolation and connection. It almost felt like a diminishing of the experience to narrow my focus to specific elements through only the sense of sight. However, I was still curious as to what my eye would see through the lens, and what would emerge from those images.

*Image 14: "Cleansed"*



*Figure 22. Ocean Surf, by J. Caines, 2007.*

Oh, how the  
Cleansing waters of revelation  
Ease my deepest fears.  
A comforting balm to the rising fissures of my  
Need, yet  
Subtly eroding what once seemed impenetrable.  
Ultimately, these waters both soothe and destroy...to  
Reveal is to be transformed  
Forever.



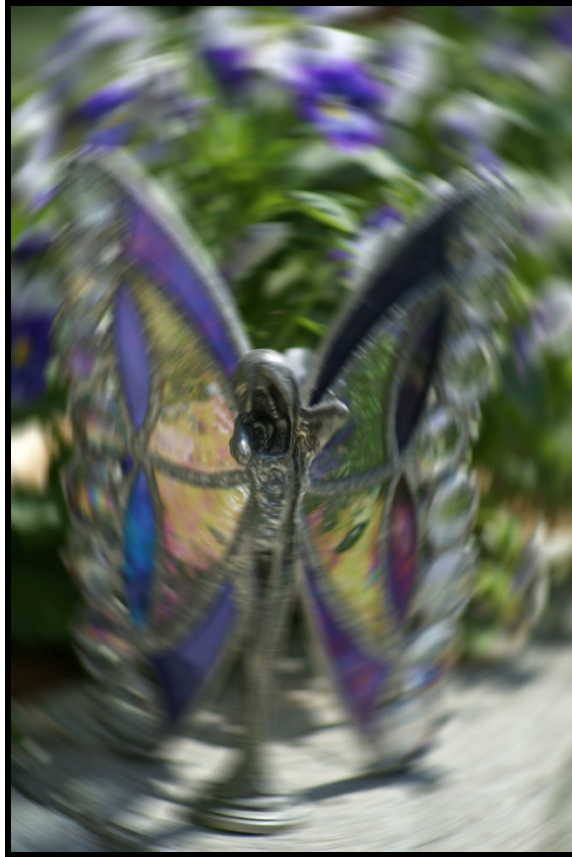
*Reflections on Image 14*

This is the only image that I chose to write about from my week on the coast. It surprises me that I did not find more inspiration, yet I suspect that it is more because my research process is beginning to draw to a natural close. The content of this image and poem demonstrates that shift to me. Early poems such as “*Guarded*” express a much different sentiment. Even “*Deconstructed*”, although recognizing my decreasing willingness to hide, is also filled with trepidation and ambiguity. This image, however, evoked an attitude of acceptance for the power, necessity, and benefit of revealing to self and others. This is not to say that the journey is complete as self-discovery is, I hope, a life-long process. Yet I do see within this poem a significant realization. To use the metaphor of this image, the waters have washed over me and it no longer is so painful to reveal of myself – in fact, it is even beginning to feel healing.

*Field Experience 7*

I actually captured this photograph on the same day as the second image, “*Guarded*”. In the same way as “*Remembrance*”, I created this image with a particular purpose and meaning in mind. I do not have any specific field notes for this image as several months have passed now. It has taken me this long to put words to the inherent meaning this image holds for me – partly because words were not entirely necessary, and partly because I was not ready to write them. In essence, my camera allowed me to hold on to this moment for as long as I needed until I was ready to fully experience it.

*Image 15: "My Angel"*



*Figure 23. Small Angel, by J. Caines, 2007.*

Sweet little angel - intimately  
Melded to my heart in a way that is  
Agonizing yet miraculous.  
Little precious angel - immeasurably  
Loved although I  
Ache in emptiness;  
Needing to find serenity within my  
Grieving spirit.  
Ethereal little angel - gently  
Lifted into eternal peace.

*Reflections on Image 15*

This will be the final image of this project as it is a fitting full-circle recognition of the emotional journey I set out on through writing the poem “*Remembrance*” several months ago. I am going to choose to keep the majority of my reflections on this image and poem to myself – not out of fear or resistance, rather because I do not feel that any further words are necessary for my personal sense of meaning, nor for the overall intention of this process.

*Self-Dialogue 7*

I asked you in our last dialogue what it is you *really* want. It would seem that you have made a choice by pushing through that resistance to face some of your most buried experiences and emotions, both through this process and through relational connections with others. And just look at the message in your last few images and poems – powerful metaphors of transformation and relief! Could it be that you have truly begun to let go of your tendency to hide? Certainly this is just the beginning of a life-long process for you, yet being willing (and less afraid) to reveal more of yourself to others seems like an appropriate place to wrap up this piece of the journey and begin the next. I wonder what the next steps will be. If you have been able to discover this much about your self in just a few short months just imagine what you can do, if you so choose, with the rest of your life! This is both an ending as well as a beginning. You can’t undo what you have learned of yourself, so it is the end of your self-ignorance. You also can’t “take it back”, once you have released these pages to others; therefore it is the beginning of a new chapter of your life. I know that sharing this inner work with others is a huge step that you have yet to take. Letting this go will be the final act of surrender to this process and to your desire to

live life differently. I wonder if you would go through with it if this was not also an academic exercise. I hope that you would, but there is a gift in the requirement to publish this experience. Interestingly, the word “publish” brings to mind that excerpt from the book “Writing and Being” I know resonates with you:

*We have all been, and all shall be, wounded by life. There is no choice in the matter. It is an inescapable condition of living. Despite the fairy tales, no one lives happily ever after. The question is not whether we will be wounded by life. We will be. The question is: How do we respond to the wounding? And, furthermore: What do we do with our wounds? Beyond our wounding lies our power .... Beyond our wounding, we have choices that are crucial to our health and well-being. We choose to hide our wounds and go on bleeding throughout our lives - or we can tell the stories of our wounds. The problem, however, is that we have been taught to do otherwise. We have been trained from birth to hide our wounds .... So we do as we have been taught: We hide our wounds in the darkness within us, often hiding them even from ourselves. But the problem does not end there, for hiding our wounds brings us up against another truth: Ultimately, everything gets published. That is, if I do not say my hurts, do not cry my tears, do not shout my anger, do not tell my stories ... they will eventually translate themselves into other languages and publish themselves into my very being, into the acts of my life [italics added]. (Nelson, 2004, p. 111)*

So, you have chosen to “publish” your story, both metaphorically and literally. I hope you truly know what an act of courage that is, as well as an act of declaration regarding who you are, who you hope to be, and how you desire to walk within the world!

## CHAPTER V

## Creative Synthesis and Discussion



Figure 24. Reflections, by J. Caines, 2004.

*“For some travelers the meaning of a pilgrimage is in the moment of arrival. For others, the meaning is in the journey itself, where every step reveals a piece of the answer being sought [italics added]”* (Cousineau, 1998, p. 173). I certainly fit within the latter category, in which the meaning is found in the journey itself. Yet, what *answer* was I seeking? If, as Cousineau offered, “every step reveals a piece of the answer” (p. 173), then ultimately I was seeking *me* – a deeper awareness and expression of self as a means of nurturing my well-being. This chapter is devoted to a creative synthesis in the form of a metaphorical narrative, which will summarize the heuristic inquiry I experienced. This synthesis will be followed by a discussion of the implications, findings, and future directions of this study.

### *Creative Synthesis*

Moustakas (1990) described the creative synthesis of the heuristic experience in the following way:

Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis. This usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples, but it may be expressed [in other] creative form. (p. 31-32)

Aspects of my experience cannot be fully shared as it is impossible for anyone else to actually live my experience. However, each person who witnesses this piece of my story will have their own unique experience of it, which is the inherent beauty and mystery of the power of human connection.

The intent of a creative synthesis is to construct an “aesthetic rendition of the themes and essential meanings of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52). This is achieved in the following way:

The researcher taps into imaginative and contemplative sources of knowledge and insight in synthesizing the experience, in presenting the discovery of essences – peaks and valleys, highlights and horizons .... There is free reign of thought and feeling that supports the researcher’s knowledge, passion, and literary value that can be expressed through a narrative, story, poem, work of art, metaphor, analogy, or tale. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52)

I did not begin this study with a clear idea of what my creative synthesis would be. The metaphor of a *journey* naturally emerged in my writing, which in turn caused me to

reexamine one of my favourite books, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, by Phil Cousineau (1998). Initially my intent was to simply open each chapter of this project with a quote from this book as a means to connect the various aspects of the project with a common theme. However, the metaphor emerged as the creative piece with which to synthesize the raw experience, or data, of my self-inquiry.

The metaphorical image of a *pilgrimage* resonates with my experience of this self-reflective process. Cousineau described a pilgrimage as “a transformative journey to a sacred center ... a journey of risk and renewal” (p. xxiii). I certainly took a personal risk when I left my *home* – the familiar patterns of thinking and feeling – behind to journey towards my *destination* – a deeper and more authentic means of emotional expression. I will make use of this metaphor to share a synthesis of my journey, utilizing some of the stages of pilgrimage offered by Cousineau: the longing, the call, departure, the labyrinth, arrival, and bringing back the boon.

### *The Longing*

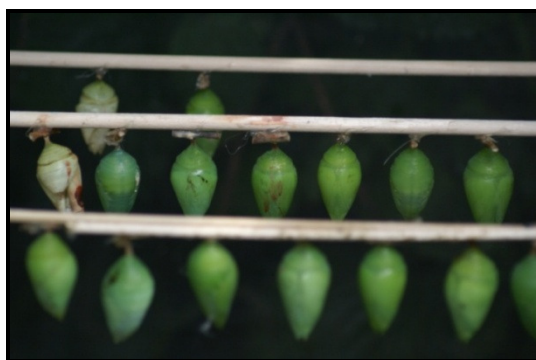


Figure 25. Seeking Transformation, by J. Caines, 2007.

Cousineau (1998) believed that the pilgrim’s journey begins with a deep disturbance; a sense of something missing. He declared, “uncover what you long for and you will discover who you are” (p. 13). Someone recently asked me what my deepest fear is, and I revealed that I fear I will die never having truly been known. My *longing*, then,

is to allow myself to be seen, to be heard – to truly be known. This inherent longing is reflected in much of my writing, such as the contrast of fear and desire expressed in the first half of the poem “*Guarded*”:

*Wounded and weeping,*

*Exhausted,*

*Exposed yet invisible.*

*Praying for stillness and reprieve.*

*Isolated through disguising the deluge of tears.*

*Not able, in this moment, to see that which encircles,*

*Guarded by a shroud of self-protection.*

This longing was certainly the catalyst that caused me to strap on my emotional traveling shoes and embark on this pilgrimage. My proverbial “road to Rome” was directed towards the destination of self-discovery, self-expression, and healing. But *how* would I find my way there? “Centuries of travel lore suggest that when we no longer know where to turn, our real journey has just begun” (Cousineau, 1998, p. 8). That deep disturbance and the sense of being lost were, ultimately, what initiated the quest.

### *The Call*



Figure 26. A New Light, by J. Caines, 2007.



The longing I described above has been a part of me for many years, yet I resisted taking any significant or lasting steps towards it. Cousineau (1998) observed that “there is ... [a] call, the one that arrives the day when what once worked for us no longer does” (p. 36). He also discerned that “always, the call summons us to the hidden life” (p. 41). It was my longing that caused me to want this experience, yet it was *the call* that caused me to truly invite it into my life. My silence no longer worked for me and I was ready to begin the process of transformation.

### *Departure*



Figure 27. Choosing a Direction, by J. Caines, 2007.

Once prepared ... you are ready to cross the threshold. The threshold is more than an architectural detail; it is a mythological image that evokes the spirit of resistance we must pass through on our risky journey from all we've known to all that's unknown. It is the first step towards renewal. (Cousineau, 1998, p. 83)

I longed for this journey; I prepared myself and invited it in. Yet, I still had to take that first step. These words, which I wrote to myself in “*Self-Dialogue 2*”, perfectly illustrate that precipice – the threshold between desire and action:

*What is this resistance about? .... Perhaps there is some fear ... of what you may discover if you prod too deeply. What you will find is you! Remember that quote you read the other day that resonated with you? “The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable .... For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers” (Peck, 2000, p. 23). Allow this discomfort to propel you because your fear is based in the knowledge that something unknown and powerful could happen .... Start here, in this moment.*

So I did – I started in that moment, challenging my resistance and fear with every step of the pilgrimage.

### *The Labyrinth*



Figure 28. Twists and Turns, by J. Caines, 2004.

We know all too well that few journeys are linear and predictable. Instead they swerve and turn, twist and double back .... The image of the labyrinth is an ancient symbol for the meandering path of the soul .... With our backs against the

wall of the labyrinth and the shouts of the beast sending shivers through our souls, we look around for a clue, any clue, to help us escape. (Cousineau, 1998, p. 128)

This was certainly a meandering journey; one in which I encountered moments of immense challenge. What were the *beasts* that caused me to want to escape? As I look back over my own words, I recognize those beasts as fear, insecurity, and self-doubt. This angst, and its contrast to my desire, is alluded to throughout my written reflections. I can clearly recall the days in which I felt the most lost in the labyrinth of my journey, during which I wrote these words:

*Deconstructed.*

*Eroded.*

*Changed by the forces of true human contact.*

*A diminished version of*

*Yesterday's impenetrable exterior.*

*Exposed to the scrutiny of what resides within;*

*Details of growth and scars lay bare.*

*Sacrificing safety for transparency*

*To discover a reflection of truth.*

*Unexpectedly confronted with a fragmented self.*

*Mourning and celebrating lost ignorance;*

*Possessed of the yearning for wholeness.*

The *clue* that helped me to escape was faith – faith in myself and faith in the process. Inklings of faith are present in this poem. I had to believe that I was in the labyrinth and facing the confusion, darkness, and beasts for a worthwhile purpose. I had

to have faith in my own intuition and the desire to invite this experience into my life. I had come to a point in which my fear was outweighed by my longing. My internal struggle to move through the labyrinth is witnessed in “*Self-Dialogue 4*”, in which I challenge the beasts of fear and self-doubt:

*I suspect that this place is a pivotal point in the process. What will you do from here? Step back and try to put the pieces where they were, or step forward from this precipice into the canyon of your deepest emotions? .... The whole point of choosing this self-inquiry was to challenge yourself to a deeper level of feeling and expression, but now it is getting uncomfortable in its closeness. Are you willing to deconstruct even further? .... You seem to desire what you most fear, and fear what you most desire. I know you have questions about if this deepening self-exploration and expression will actually lead to healing .... How else will you know but to try? Trust the journey, trust your emotions, trust yourself!*

The significance of the labyrinth, of course, is that so much of the therapeutic value of the journey was in encountering these beasts yet nevertheless choosing to walk the path. I did not anticipate that the pilgrimage would have so many challenges, yet I am grateful that it did as I cannot imagine having revealed so much of myself without them.

*Arrival*

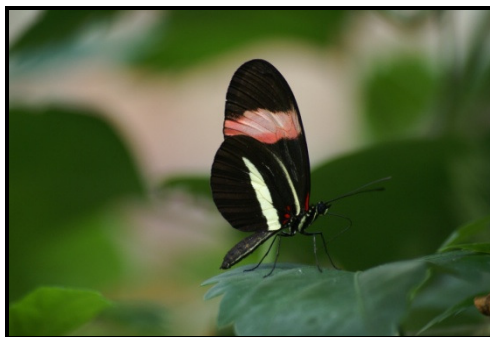


Figure 29. Metamorphosis, by J. Caines, 2007.

“This is a great moment, when you see, however distant, the goal of your wandering. The thing which has been living in your imagination suddenly becomes a part of the tangible world” (Stark, as cited in Cousineau, 1998, p. 159). Although I do not believe I have, nor ever will, completely *arrive* at the destination of self-awareness and self-expression, I can certainly see them in the distance. They are close enough that I am no longer wandering, rather I am fixed on that destination and they have become a very tangible part of my world. This, ultimately, was the goal of my pilgrimage. Not arrival, but finding - or perhaps creating - the path. The day I became aware of this change in me was when I took what felt like a huge risk of self-disclosure, and discovered that it was not as difficult as I had anticipated. I expressed this experience with these words:

*Oh, how the  
 Cleansing waters of revelation  
 Ease my deepest fears.  
 A comforting balm to the rising fissures of my  
 Need, yet  
 Subtly eroding what once seemed impenetrable.  
 Ultimately, these waters both soothe and destroy...to  
 Reveal is to be transformed  
 Forever.*

I believe that arriving at this destination of self-discovery will be a life-long pilgrimage for me that will deepen my connection and commitment to self-care through emotional expression with every experience.

### *Bringing Back the Boon*



Figure 30. Release, by J. Caines, 2005.

“This is the key to the poetry of pilgrimage: The story we bring back from our journeys is the boon [wisdom]. It is the gift of grace that was passed on to us in the heart of our journey” (Cousineau, 1998, p. 217). I cannot fully describe the sense of encouragement that this quote brings to me – it contains a message that is at the very core of heuristic process. The journey *is* the wisdom! As I came to the end of this leg of my pilgrimage, I was struck once again with powerful angst and fear. The idea of releasing this part of my innermost self to others felt, and continues to feel, intensely vulnerable. I have questioned repeatedly what the broader value of my experience might be. I have come to accept that some individuals who encounter my story of pilgrimage to self-care through emotional expression may recognize that the gift I discovered at the heart of my journey is one that they also need and are ready to receive. However, others may not - such is the nature of a gift given freely, without the confines of necessity or expectation.

### *Discussion*

#### *Summary of the Process*

I began this process to shed light on the need and ethical imperative for helping professionals to be aware of and practice personally meaningful self-care activities. I was

interested in investigating the experience of therapeutic photography as my own personally meaningful self-care practice, with the hope that it would encourage others to embrace creative expression as a legitimate means to emotional well-being. In order to accomplish this, I began by reviewing the literature pertaining to the risks of helping work, the categories of self-care activities, the support from art therapy, as well as the uses and experience of photography as a therapeutic tool. Various and multidimensional connections between the concept of self-care and the benefits of therapeutic photography were discovered that had not been made explicit in the existing literature for helping professionals. This review served as the foundational support for the development of a self-inquiry to address the question: *What is the experience of engaging in therapeutic photography for the purposes of self-care?* This self-inquiry took the form of a heuristic research process, in which the intent was “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of an experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). This process allowed me the privilege and challenge of exploring, becoming aware of, and exposing my authentic self as I sought personal self-care through pictorial and written forms of emotional expression.

### *Significance of the Inquiry*

Moustakas (1990) pointed out that the process is about “the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives. [It] is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social - and perhaps universal - significance” (p. 15). The nature of my own heuristic research has certainly been personal and autobiographical, yet there is inherently greater significance within the inquiry. The *social* significance of this self-study is in its advocacy of self-care for helping

professionals such as myself. Further, my personal experience of combining photography and poetry offers a contribution to the exploration of an unconventional self-care process – one that has the potential to be as deeply healing for others as it has been for me. More broadly, the experiential investigation of emotional expression as a means of increasing personal wellness is an ethically relevant issue for helping professionals and is much less commonly addressed within the literature than other forms of self-care.

Through this journey of discovery, I made some key connections that are personally and professionally significant. Moustakas (1990) spoke of discovery in the following way:

Heuristic research processes include moments of meaning, understanding, and discovery that the researcher will hold and savour. Feelings, thoughts, ideas, and images that have been awakened will return again and again. A connection has been made that will remain forever unbroken and that will serve as a reminder of a lifelong process of knowing and being. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 56)

Some of what I have come to know through this experience are concepts that I have not encountered in the self-care literature aimed at helping professionals. What I found during my experience of pursuing self-care through therapeutic photography is that 1) I was unaware of how much I needed to express myself emotionally in order to have an inner sense of well-being, and 2) the connection between emotional expression and self-care was not a direct path.

The first discovery, my lack of awareness, is connected to the bias I encountered in the literature regarding what is most commonly considered to constitute self-care. As demonstrated in Chapter II, the majority of the literature intended for helpers promoted



physically-focused activities such as nutrition, relaxation, and exercise, or cognitively-based activities such as restructuring, meditation, and visualization. There was certainly some support for spiritual and emotional considerations in self-care, however these were significantly less common. There was an obvious lack of emphasis on the significance of emotional expression and how it relates to the well-being of helping professionals. I realized that I had internalized these common and limited messages regarding what self-care entails, and had underestimated my need for emotional and creative expression. Upon engaging in the experience of this type of expression, I can no longer minimize the central role it plays in my self-care and, therefore, my overall health and well-being. I believe that this learning is of significance to others, who may have a similarly narrow definition of self-care processes.

The second discovery I made, which once again the information in the literature had not prepared me for, was the highly indirect nature of the connection between emotional expression and self-care. There were many uncomfortable and even painful moments in this process that caused fear and resistance. It did not immediately “feel good” to delve deeply into my feelings and self-beliefs. I often questioned whether I was caring for or punishing myself. Perhaps I never expected it to be immediate; however I certainly did not anticipate that it would be such a rigorous and lengthy journey for emotional self-exploration to begin to feel like my preconceived definition of self-care. It is only in retrospect that I am able to see the meandering path to empowerment, release, strength, and emotional nourishment. I suspect that my experience would not be unique as the prevalence of burnout and stress related symptoms in the helping professions, which I highlighted in the literature review, indicates that we too often take a *reactive*

approach to self-care, rather than *proactively* working to prevent such distress. This reality creates a situation in which emotional expression is often a complex, backward-looking process. It makes sense, then, that delving into years of unexpressed emotional content would not immediately, nor even relatively quickly, feel cathartic. This is a message that I hope other helping professionals will take seriously, as the eventual benefit of emotional self-expression was, for me, worth every bit of the challenging process.

In addition to the unique discoveries I experienced through this study that were not encountered in the literature, the process also validated the underlying premise of the therapeutic value of photography. The application of photography was a key component of my curiosity regarding self-care. I found that the increased intentionality with which I utilized images during the course of this study established the significance to my well-being of emotional expression through images. The inherent metaphorical nature of photographs provided meaningful opportunities to project and explore repressed emotional content. Further, the act of photography itself had a positive impact in my life as I became more mindful of and connected to my surroundings. How I approached my photography also demonstrated parallels to how I approach my life, and thus deepened my sense of self-awareness. These experiences served as a personal confirmation of the subjective evidence supporting the therapeutic value of photography that I found within the literature.

#### *Strengths and Challenges of the Methodology*

As stated previously, heuristic research is “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of an experience ....The self of the

researcher is present throughout the process” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9). This inner focus and involvement of the self is the inherent uniqueness and strength of the heuristic methodology. In a field that has been historically saturated with scientific inquiry, unconventional research designs, such as that developed by Moustakas, create balance between objectivity and subjectivity; observation and experience.

As a student and researcher in the applied field of counselling psychology, I believe that it is my moral and ethical duty to pursue a personal connection to my work. Rogers contended that “counsellors have an ethical choice of values: counselor as scientist, who treats the individual completely objectively, or counselor as therapist, who facilitates the therapeutic encounter by approaching it as a relating, experiencing, living personal growth” (as cited in Steen, Engels, & Thweatt, 2006, p. 110). I view this notion as analogous to my “ethical choice of values” as a researcher. Heuristic methodology allowed me to pursue an inquiry that was an authentic reflection of my personal and professional value of experiential and relational processes. For me, this was the ultimate strength of the research design.

The methodology was not, however, without its difficulties. The very aspects that were areas of strength were also, at times, intensely challenging. The foremost challenge was the ambiguity of the process, which stemmed from the exploratory, open-ended nature of this type of inquiry. The reality of research that is connected to academic requirements is that there is a time limit involved; heuristic methodology is not intended to be confined by time. In addition, the very personal nature of my involvement, as both researcher and participant, made it difficult to identify and analyze themes and experiential learning for an academic discussion. This was due to the highly emotional

quality of the experience, which felt contrary to the cognitive process of analysis. An added obstacle was experienced because of the extremely personal focus of the methodology - when it came time to share my work with the academic community, I was hesitant, even resistant, to do so. The vulnerability that I felt about revealing this type of inner exploration to others was powerfully anxiety-provoking. Further, it felt incongruous to be academically evaluated based on an experience that was so subjective and personal.

Despite the challenges of choosing a methodology of heuristic self-inquiry, I can truthfully say that I would not do any of it differently. The personal growth and broader significance of my experience was worth the struggles encountered along the way. In fact, the challenges ultimately enriched the process and deepened the learning. I concur with Sela-Smith (2002) when she stated that “heuristic inquiry that results in self-transformation and the creation of a story that generates potential for transformation in others and in society is the strength of the self-inquiry method” (p. 82).

#### *Future Possibilities*

This process, instigated by a deep curiosity regarding emotional expression through photography, has also revealed other curiosities that could be investigated through future research. Some of the questions I have noted throughout this experience that invite further exploration are:

1. How would other helping professionals experience a similar process?
2. In what ways could photography be taught as a form of self-care?
3. How can images make particular emotions more visible and/or accessible?
4. What are the connections between creative expression and spirituality?
5. How would cultural factors influence the value of image-based expression?

6. Are certain personality types more likely to benefit from creative expression?
7. How could this learning be applied to counselling work with clients?
8. How could creative processes of self-care be fostered through helping-professional education programs or professional organizations?

This list represents a few of the ways in which an understanding of the variables explored in this inquiry could be deepened or broadened by myself or others. It is my hope that this pilgrimage of self-care and self-reflection may serve as a catalyst for others to create their own journey of exploration. This, ultimately, is the purpose of research – to answer the call of one curiosity and cultivate another.

#### *Concluding Comments*

Although this has been a very personal journey, it has also been a research process as defined by the tenets of heuristic inquiry. It has addressed many of the aspects of self-care explicated from the literature and has clearly demonstrated the relevance of the creative therapies, specifically the combination of photography and poetry. The synergy between these two creative processes and my own self-care has been deep and significant. I am confident that what this process has offered me, it can offer to others.



Figure 31. The Bridge, by J. Caines, 2007.

*Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery [italics added]. (Polanyi, 1962, p. 143)*

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