AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Darcy M. Edwards for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented on December 16, 2002.

Title: The Role of Resiliency in the Educational Attainment of Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors.

Abstract approved

[Redacted for privacy] Joanne B. Engel

This is a qualitative research project that seeks to understand the meanings that Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors (CADC’s) have ascribed to their life experiences in relation to their choices about higher education. The participants are four Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors in Oregon who have less than bachelor degrees.

The research is based on a case study method of inquiry in which the participants discuss their life experiences and their thoughts about their educations during in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The findings are grouped into two themes that emerged from the data: The themes are: 1) resiliency and 2) personal transformation.

In keeping with the literature, this study indicates that people can and do develop resiliency characteristics well into adulthood. It also suggests that reflection can be a vehicle for catharsis and personal transformation.
The Role of Resiliency in the Educational Attainment of Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors

by
Darcy M. Edwards

A DISSERTATION

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Dean of Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Darcy M. Edwards, Author
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I was 17 years old when I quit school. I had no direction, and I had nobody to raise me because my mother was weak, so I ran the streets until I couldn’t run the streets any more, and I ran and did many gang crime kinds of stuff. You know—just drinking, curfew kinds of stuff and just never went back to school.

They thought that I was suicidal, and I probably was, and at age 16, my mom had enough, and she was in the bathroom, and she had my uncle come... Well, I was depressed, so she took me to these doctors because I was the child that it is okay if you are sick, but it is not okay if you are bad. “You’re not the bad child; you’re the smart child. You’re your father’s child,” so that was the belief system I grew up in. “You’re—the other kids, they’re bad kids. You’re the good child; you’re just sick.”

So I became the sick one, and they believed that if they took me to a psychiatrist, everything would be all right. I was an addict. That’s all that was wrong with me. I mean that was evident to me at the time. I was an addict, and I [pause] medicated, so for a year and a half, I was in this hospital, which was a state hospital. Actually, what happened is I went in for curfew—the detention home, 13 times in the month of October.

[Speaking rapidly] The police knew me by name. They were going to take me—a young woman hung herself in this detention center, and I was in the room right across from her, and I saw her hanging, and they came in to cut her down, and I’m still detoxing, and I came-to seeing this, and I flipped. I just lost my dad.

I had been out on a run. I had been drinking alcohol. I’m in detox. They got me down for 24 hours, and I’m detoxing, and everything I felt, my grief that I wasn’t allowed to feel, my nothing, everything [pause] is gone, and now I’m experiencing this suicide. I had never seen anything like that in my life, and they are taking this little gal out and her bag, so I tear up the bedroom. I am in a cell, and I tear it up. [Begins laughing, pretending she is hollering] “Let me out. I need someone to talk to me!”

They decide, “Oh, no. We’re not going to let this happen,” so they hauled me off in chains to the psychiatric unit. A year and a half later I get out on Christmas Eve. [Long pause.] I was gang raped.

Darcy: While you were in there, or when you got out?
Carlie: The day I got out. My mother wouldn’t let me come home because she didn’t think she could control me. Are you ready for this whole story? I, [laughs] so now they believe I am nuts, [pause] and I’m bad, [pause] and it’s better to be sick than it is to be bad, [pause] but I hung out with bad people all of the time, just proving how bad I was. It was okay for me to be sick, but not bad. The other siblings did go to farms and detentions, and now I had been defiled.

I had been in this hospital for a year and a half, clear through adolescence, and I would be playing cards with this gal, and she will get up to go to the bathroom, and, you know, she don’t come back, so I go down the hall, and I say, “Have you seen so and so?” All of a sudden, she came walking down the hall, and her arms are slashed from the top all the way down.

And then I see psychosis when these little girls, who are just brain damaged, just acting out, having these horrible, horrible fits, and they were still doing shock treatment, and people would kind of flip out and be psychotic, and they would take them out, and they would be coming back all mellow picking Cheerios out of their pockets and stuff. You know, just—so that was my adolescence, [pause] and they tried to get me to go to school in there. Can you believe that? This crazy lady used to come in and try to teach me things, so I had a little slant on my education. Okay, Darcy? Okay?
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband Denny for all of his love, understanding, and patience and for his willingness to put in all those long hours of proofreading draft after draft of this manuscript. It is dedicated to my daughters, Hollie, Tiffany, and Amy, for giving me the love, support, and encouragement that helped me to hang on. It is dedicated to my grandchildren, Devin and Nicholas, for all their hugs and kisses that came at just the right moments.

It is dedicated to my parents, Don and Ruth, for all their love and pride, and it is dedicated to my grandmothers, Hilda and Goldie; I am sure that they know about this accomplishment and that they are somewhere smiling, and, lastly, it is dedicated to my dear old friend Ethel who took the time to sit and listen to a little girl who had big dreams.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the meanings that Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors (CADC’s) have constructed about their life experiences in relation to their choices about higher education.

Significance of the Study

The addiction treatment field has humble origins. It began as a grass roots, self-help movement with people who were in remission from their addictions organizing to help other people who were active in their addictions to achieve recovery. As such, the counselors’ credibility tended to be based on life experiences, not on academic achievements. Thus, the education levels of addiction counselors have historically ranged from persons with less than high school diplomas or equivalents to those who hold doctorates.

At the same time, counselors without degrees have tended to avoid the formal academic process in their pursuit of continuing education. In this regard, they have been inclined to pursue their addictions training through employer sponsored workforce development programs or through the Oregon Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs (OADAP). However, as the field has evolved and become more professionalized, the educational requirements for treatment specialists have risen.

In fact, in 1995, the Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR’s) were revised to require that all outpatient treatment staff who work in state approved programs must be certified or licensed (Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs, 1995). Thus, certification in Oregon currently requires that an applicant must have
completed a minimum of 150 hours of alcohol and other drug education to qualify as a CADC I (Addiction Counselor Certification Board of Oregon, 2002). To qualify as a CADC II, applicants must have a minimum of an associate’s degree [or equivalent] and a minimum of 300 hours of specific alcohol and other drug education (Addiction Counselor Certification Board of Oregon, 2002). All of the education hours for either level must be accredited or approved by a recognized endorsing body.

While these changes have made some improvements in raising Oregon’s treatment standards, there are still problems with the overall certification process. In this regard, the American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association (AMBHA) (2000) has declared that addictive disorders have received insufficient attention in formal training programs and that specific expertise in addiction treatment has often been difficult to identify.

The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) (2000) concurs with this perspective. In this regard, ASAM holds that even when counselors are certified by professional organizations, they still often lack adequate training in the field of addiction treatment. Further, ASAM’s experience is that third-party payors are reluctant to reimburse programs for treatment services that are delivered by counselors who do not have advanced degrees.

To address these concerns, the Addiction Counselor Certification Board of Oregon (ACCBO) (2001) is proposing heightening its education requirements in 2003. In this regard, ACCBO is suggesting that the CADC I be considered an associate proficiency level certification and that the CADC II be considered a baccalaureate proficiency level certification.

As such, the associate proficiency level would require a combination of academic courses and specialized training that would include a minimum of 150 addiction-specific education hours. The baccalaureate proficiency level would require at least an associate degree with a minimum of 300 alcohol and other drug education hours. As with the current standards, all of the hours would need to be accredited or approved by a recognized accreditation body.
In anticipation of these heightened standards, many treatment programs are now requiring that applicants have advanced training in order to qualify for jobs. For example, on October 15, 2001, I reviewed the ACCBO Jobs Page on the World Wide Web (Addiction Counselor Certification Board of Oregon). Many of the job postings required at least the equivalency of an associate degree for entry-level positions. Further, several of the advanced positions required a minimum of a bachelor’s degree up to a master’s degree.

While many organizations are increasing the training, experience, education, and competency requirements that it takes to qualify for employment, over 40% of the chemical dependency professionals in Oregon have less than four-year college degrees. In this regard, 22% of the CADC’s lack any type of degree and only 19% of them possess two-year degrees (ACCBO, Paper presented 10/02/01). Thus, many treatment programs are already having difficulty finding qualified applicants to fill vacant positions (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1999), and the proposed changes to the standards are expected to exacerbate the problem.

Based on these concerns, the Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) was created to foster improvements in the preparation of addiction treatment professionals. In this regard, they help to evaluate existing curricula and establish priorities for curriculum development (Northwest Frontier Addiction Technology Transfer Center (NFATTC) 1998). As such, they have delineated the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to counselor proficiency. In this regard, they recommend that addiction professionals be knowledgeable in four basic foundations.

These foundations are: understanding of the current models and theories of addiction and addiction treatment; treatment knowledge, which includes knowledge about the continuum of care and the social context of addiction and recovery; application to practice, which includes the ability to identify a variety of helping strategies that are based on the needs of the individual client; and professional readiness, which is the ability to adapt to the challenges and constraints of addiction treatment (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1998).
In 1998, the ATTC completed a national study in which they surveyed over 1,200 counselors and supervisors regarding entry-level counselor proficiencies. One purpose of the inquiry was to gauge the actual proficiencies of entry-level counselors as compared to their perceived proficiencies. In this regard, the results suggest that there is a substantial gap between the actual and the needed levels of proficiency for entry-level counselors (Gallon, 1998).

Based on the above concerns, OADAP formed the Workforce Development Coalition. The charge of the Coalition is to plan for professional workforce development and to suggest how the agency’s training dollars should be spent.

As such, the Coalition has recommended that the agency’s training funds be divided in three ways: 50% should remain in the traditional OADAP training program in which counselors receive continuing education units from program sponsored workshops, which then qualify as certification hours; 25% should be allocated to colleges to enhance workforce efforts to obtain degrees; and 25% should be allocated to providing technical assistance for individual program projects and regional consortiums.

While the standards for substance abuse treatment professionals are becoming more demanding, the Coalition has discovered that there is a regional shortage of qualified addiction treatment workers. In general, the field is not attracting qualified people, it is not retaining enough of a workforce to meet the growing demand, and the current workforce is aging and nearing retirement age.

In this regard, ACCBO has found that the average CADC age is 51 years. This is in comparison to an ACCBO survey that was completed in 1995, in which the average age at that time was 39 years (Paper dated 10/02/01).

Regarding retention and recertification, ACCBO has found that the ratio of first time applicants is about 50% male and 50% female. However, they also discovered that men tend not to stay in the field. In this regard, ACCBO statistics show that, at renewal, only 35% of the men choose to renew their certifications as opposed to 65% of the women who renew their certifications (Paper dated 10/02/01).
The percentage of minority first-time applicants has remained constant at approximately 11%. However, ACCBO has noted that ethnic and sexual minority counselors continue to leave the field without being recertified. Thus, the number of ethnic and sexual minority counselors has not increased, but remained a small percentage of the alcohol and other drug-counseling workforce. This fact is especially problematic since ethnic and sexual minority clients continue to comprise a greater percentage of the client base as compared to that of the general population (Paper dated 10/02/01).

Research Question

My initial research question was: “How did the meanings that CADC’s ascribed to their previous academic experiences influence their motivation to pursue college degrees?” However, early on in my research it became apparent that the question needed to be much broader than just being limited to the individuals’ academic experiences.

I discovered that I needed to look at the individuals’ entire life experiences to learn the meanings that they had formed about themselves and to understand their levels of motivation to pursue college educations. Thus, my research question was broadened to encompass the individuals from a whole-person, whole-lived experience perspective, so the question became, “How did the meanings that CADC’s ascribed to their life experiences influence their levels of motivation to pursue college degrees?”
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

I conducted the following literature review in order to develop a conceptual framework in which to aid us in our understanding of four CADCs’ life experiences in relation to their educational choices. In this regard, I wanted to describe the participants’ life experiences, I wanted to understand the meanings that they had constructed about those experiences, and I wanted to understand how their constructs about their experiences has impacted their educational choices.

I am a professionally trained social worker. As such, I adhere to the tenets of the social work philosophy. Until recently, social workers have based their understanding of the human condition on a disease model. In the conventional model, the focus was on injury, pathology, victimization, and maladjustment. In the new paradigm, however, the focus is on resiliency, hope, healing, and self-repair (Norman, 2000). Thus, in keeping with this perspective, I did not want to know what was wrong with the participants; I wanted to know what was right with them. As such, I began my review of the literature by studying the self-righting characteristics of resilient people.

I initiated my examination of the literature by conducting a computer database search. Since I was focusing on a strengths perspective, I began by examining psychological records. In this regard, I used the term “resiliency” as the search descriptor. I read journals, books, dissertations, and professional papers. I also referenced on-line abstracts, journal articles, and papers.

All of my inquiries ultimately had links to education databases. Since my study was in relation to adults and their choices about education, I also reviewed the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) databases for the relevant literature on adult learning and human development. From there, I researched theories of adult learning and education. Through my examination of adult learning theory, I discovered many
references to Malcolm Knowles’ adult learning theory and Jack Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning. As such, I also added those theories to my review of the literature.

I continued to refine my examination of the literature throughout the study. Once I had analyzed my findings and assigned them to the themes that had emerged from the data, I went back over the materials that I had collected, and I focused my review on the concepts of resiliency theory, adult learning theory, and transformation theory.

Resiliency Theory

Risk factors.

Dole (2000) describes risk as any biological, psychological, cognitive, or environmental condition that impedes normal development and makes one vulnerable. Life is full of stressors, adversities, and risks and not many of us, if any, can expect to get through life without experiencing some form of negativity.

At the same time, it appears that one’s exposure to risk is not necessarily predictive of one’s future. In fact, many people who have survived against incredible odds appear not only to have endured and adapted to their problematic situations, but they appear to have been strengthened by them, and they seem to have become more determined through the process.

In recognition of this phenomenon, researchers have recently begun to study the human condition from a strengths perspective rather than from a deficit model. As such, they have begun to search for the innate human qualities that foster successful adaptation and transformation rather than continuing to focus their attention on risk and adversity. It is from this strengths perspective that the theory of resiliency is derived.
Resiliency.
Resiliency is defined as the ability to make a successful adaptation despite risk and adversity (Grotberg, 1996; Grotberg, 1997; Krovetz, 1999; Luthar, 1998; Masten, 1994; Rutter, 1984; Winfield, 1994). In building on this concept, Grotberg explains that resiliency means, not just adapting to adversity, but also being strengthened by it.

From her meta-analysis of longitudinal studies of resilience, Masten (1994, p. 5) has developed a working model of developmental adaptation. In this paradigm, she explains that “a stressor is an event or experience that can be expected to cause stress in many people, with the potential for interfering with normal functioning.” Further, she adds that “psychological stress is the experience of an imbalance between the demands impinging on a person and actual or perceived resources available to meet the challenges, an imbalance that at some level disrupts the quality of functioning in the person.”

In this regard, she explains that risk factors are characteristics in a person’s life that are associated with an elevated probability of negative outcomes due to the stressor and that there are protective factors within the individual or the environment that serve to ameliorate the risk by enhancing the outcomes. According to Masten, there are three major groups of resilience phenomena. The first cluster refers to people from high-risk groups who have better than expected outcomes. Studies on this group focus on identifying the predictors of good outcomes for the high-risk individuals.

The second class of resilience phenomena refers to one’s ability to make a good adaptation in spite of experiencing a major life stressor. Researchers who focus on this aspect of resilience examine the effects of stressors on behavior, and they seek to identify the factors that moderate the effects of the adversity.

The third class of resilience phenomena refers to the study of individual differences in recovery from trauma. Researchers who study this feature of resilience are interested in the patterns of recovery from trauma.

Masten contends that there are numerous correlates to individual resilience that address the concerns in all three classes of resilience phenomena. These
include: effective parenting, access to competent adults who function as mentors, social appeal, high intellect, valued talents or accomplishments, self-efficacy, faith in a Higher Power, socioeconomic advantages, and supports from the community.

Of these factors, Masten has identified that mentoring is one of the primary strategies for fostering individual resilience and for enhancing a person’s ability to make a successful adaptation. According to Masten (p. 14), mentors:

1. Make a person feel worthwhile.
2. Model competent behavior.
3. Provide information and access to knowledge.
4. Coach competent behavior, providing guidance and constructive feedback.
5. Steer children away from wasteful or dangerous pitfalls, both by providing advice and by proactive buffering.
6. Support the undertaking of new challenges that they feel reasonably confident a young person can handle or can stretch to meet.
7. Function as advocates, opening doors.
8. Provide opportunities for competence- and confidence-building experiences.

In summarizing her review of the literature, Masten asserts that resilience is a dynamic, diverse, and complex phenomenon. In this regard, she claims that what works for one person in one situation may not work for another person in a similar situation, or that what works for a person on one occasion may not work for that person at another time. Further, she believes that what works at one point in a person’s development may not work at another developmental juncture and that what did not work at one point in a person’s development might work at a later stage.

One of the foremost experts in the study of resiliey is Emmy Werner. In 1955, Werner (1994) was part of a research team of pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, public health workers, and social workers that conducted a longitudinal study of the biological and psychosocial risk factors that humans face
from infancy into adulthood. This classic work studied the development of all 698 babies that were born on the Hawaiian island of Kauai that year. The study followed the participants from birth up through their mid-30’s.

The group was comprised of a mixture of ethnic backgrounds. However, most of the participants were of Japanese, Philippine, or Hawaiian descent. Over half of the group was raised in poverty in families in which their fathers were either semi-skilled or unskilled laborers and their mothers had not graduated from high school. The researchers considered approximately a third of the children in the cohort to be at high risk for negative outcomes.

The research team had two primary goals for the investigation. The first goal was to examine all the pregnancies on the island, to follow the surviving offspring until they had reached adulthood, and to assess the long-term consequences of any perinatal complications that they may have experienced. The second goal was to document the participants’ development and their adaptation in relation to any life adversities that they experienced.

The researchers began their study by examining the participants’ exposure to serious risk factors such as perinatal stresses, poverty, parental dysfunctions, and family disruptions. However, as the study progressed, they also began examining the protective factors that enabled some of the participants to escape from adversity and to become healthy functioning adults.

Of the high-risk individuals who had demonstrated resilient characteristics in their childhoods, the majority of them had staged a recovery of sorts by the time that they had reached their 30’s. In this regard, their educational and vocational levels exceeded that of their high-risk peers, and their outcomes were equal to the low-risk children in the cohort who had been reared in more affluent, secure, and stable homes.

The researchers also found links between the protective factors in the high-risk youths’ lives and their successful adaptation as adults. In this regard, they discovered that the most accomplished individuals shared similar clusters of protective factors.
Cluster 1 focused on personal temperament and one's ability to elicit positive responses from caring others. Cluster 2 included personal skills and pro-social values that led the person to maximize his or her natural abilities. Cluster 3 involved the care giving styles of parental figures that fostered self-esteem in the children. Cluster 4 included adults or older siblings who acted as surrogate parents, mentors, and role models who accepted the youth unconditionally and who fostered a sense of trust in the youth. Cluster 5 consisted of the opening of opportunities at major life transitions. In this regard, the researchers found that involvement in education programs at community colleges was one of the most influential factors in ameliorating the effects of adversity in the later lives of the high-risk individuals.

A major implication of this study is that it appears that humans can adapt their lives and be successful despite the odds against them as long as they are insulated by protective factors. A second crucial finding of this study is that it appears that humans have the ability to develop resiliency well into adulthood.

In her 1995 follow up work to the Kauai Longitudinal Study, Werner found that resilient people have certain characteristics that serve to moderate their reactions to stressors so that their adaptation is more successful than if the protective factors are absent from their lives. She referred to these dynamic characteristics as protective factors, and she found that they transcend ethnic, class, and geographic boundaries.

Werner also discovered that these shielding characteristics could be divided into three categories. The categories are comprised of several ameliorating factors that can be found within the individual, within the family, and within the community.

Factors within the individuals are described as: coping patterns that involve a balance of autonomy with the willingness to ask for help when needed; a nurturing and sensitive personality; a belief in one's personal effectiveness; a positive self-concept; and religious beliefs. Protective factors within the family include having a close bond with at least one competent, caring, stable person. In this regard, the nurturing can be provided by substitute caregivers such as older siblings or from within the extended family, such as grandparents. Protective
factors from within the community include peers and elders who can act as mentors and who can offer emotional support, counsel, and comfort in one’s time of need.

Based on these findings, Werner has declared that her study has important implications for society’s ability to provide effective interventions for at-risk youth. As such, she contends that resiliency can be fostered by decreasing the youths’ exposure to potent risk factors; by increasing their personal competencies and self-esteem; and by providing them with alternative sources of support outside of the family.

She also found that multi-disciplinary social service programs that offer a broad spectrum of health, education, and family support services are the most effective interventions for mediating the influences of risk. Further, she learned that programs that view the person from a systems perspective have the most impact on a high-risk individual’s development. In this regard, she explains that social interventions provide individuals with sustained access to competent caring adults who can teach them problem-solving skills, enhance their communication skills, heighten their sense of self-esteem, and provide them with access to positive role models and mentors.

In keeping with the findings from Werner’s Kauai study, several other authors contend that human beings have the ability to develop resiliency characteristics across the life span (Benard, 1997; Dole, 2000; Fox, 2000; Gutheil & Congress, 2000; Kaplan, 2000; McQuaide, 2000; Norman, 2000). In her 1995 meta-analysis of several international, cross-cultural, longitudinal studies on how to foster resiliency in children, Benard (p. 1), found that “between half and two-thirds of children growing up in families with mentally ill, alcoholic, abusive, or criminally involved parents or in poverty-stricken or war-torn communities do overcome the odds and turn a life trajectory of risk into one that manifests “resilience."

Based on those findings, Benard believes that we all have an innate capacity to develop resilience. In this regard, she contends that we can all (p. 2) “develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.”
Benard describes the trait of social competence as one's capacity to empathize with others and the ability to elicit positive responses back from them. She explains that problem-solving skills are one's capacity to plan and to think critically, creatively, and reflectively. She clarifies that critical consciousness is the ability to be reflectively aware of the structures of oppression and to have the capacity to create strategies to address it.

According to Benard, autonomy is the capacity to have a sense of one's own identity, the ability to act independently, and the faculty to exert a measure of control over one's environment. Lastly, she describes a sense of purpose as having (p. 2) "a belief in a bright future, which includes goal direction, educational aspirations, achievement motivation, persistence, hopefulness, optimism, and spiritual connectedness."

Benard groups these characteristics into three major categories: caring and supportive relationships; positive and high expectations; and opportunities for meaningful participation. In regard to caring relationships, she said that the presence of at least one caring person who can act as a positive role model and who can convey a sense of compassion, understanding, respect, and interest for the person can have an ameliorating effect on that person's ability to cope with his or her life stressors.

In regard to high expectations, Benard believes that teachers can help to foster resiliency in students by recognizing their strengths, by providing positive role models for them, and by assisting them to recognize their own abilities. Further, she contends that schools can facilitate resiliency in students through their structure and their organization. In this regard, she holds that a curriculum that is experiential, challenging, comprehensive, and inclusive of multiple perspectives can help to foster resilience in at-risk students.

Further, Benard contends that an instructor's teaching style can cultivate resiliency by building on the students' strengths, interests, and experiences. As such, she maintains that classroom activities should be participatory and that they should provide the students with opportunities for self-reflection, critical inquiry, and real life problem solving.
Lastly, Benard believes that the ability to participate in society is a fundamental human need. In this regard, she contends that schools can ameliorate a student’s level of risk by providing an environment of caring and respect and by providing opportunities for meaningful involvement. Conversely, she argues that they can alienate and isolate the student even further by ignoring the student’s need for inclusion.

In their study of children from alcoholic families, Brooks and Rice (1997) discovered that racism and discrimination often put children from different ethnicities at heightened risk. This aspect of vulnerability is especially pronounced if the youth have been cut off from their cultural histories and have been discouraged from making positive connections with their cultural origins.

At the same time, the authors believe that a strong positive racial identity and a close attachment to one’s ethnic community can serve as buffers to risk by providing one with a strong sense of belonging and self-worth. Further, they claim that one’s self-esteem can be heightened when a person receives positive messages about his or her culture. As such, they hold that supportive cultural role models and mentors can help to foster resiliency in individuals by connecting them to others in the community who share their cultural heritage.

In addition to providing student’s with mentors and role models who share their cultural heritage, the authors have outlined several suggestions for fostering resilience in the academic arena. The following is a summary of the strategies that can be incorporated into the classroom:

1. Provide opportunities for the person to learn about and celebrate one’s culture.
2. Have “cultural celebration” days in which the student can share his or her cultural heritage with the group.
3. Encourage students to research their cultures and to discuss biases and misconceptions about their cultures.
4. Use literature that celebrates and honors cultural diversity.
5. Have students keep journals, make books, write letters, or tell stories about themselves and their cultural experiences.
Adult Learning Theory

In her article in which she summarizes her doctoral dissertation on ego development and adult education, Billington (1998) explains that she drew heavily from Knowles’ work on the adult learner when she conducted a four-year investigation into the environmental factors that best facilitate adult growth and development. In regard to the results of her study, she maintains that her findings reveal that significant learning and the maturation of the human thought processes are inseparable and that adults can and do experience significant personal growth at midlife.

At the same time, however, she contends that adult learners can only grow developmentally when they are situated in student-centered learning environments where certain key factors are present. In this regard, she outlines seven characteristics that she believes are indicative of highly effective adult learning programs. The following is a summary of those seven characteristics:

1. Students feel safe and supported; their individual needs and uniqueness are honored, and their abilities and life achievements are acknowledged and respected.
2. Intellectual freedom is fostered and experimentation and creativity are encouraged.
3. Students are viewed as peers; they are heard, their experiences are honored, and their opinions are valued.
4. Students are self-directed and take responsibility for their own learning.
5. Intellectual challenges are paced just beyond the learner’s present level of ability.
6. Students are actively involved in their learning.
7. Feedback mechanisms are in place for students to tell faculty what works best for them and to tell what they want and need to learn. Lastly, faculty are willing to hear the learners and to make changes based on their input.
Billington claims that faculty-centered programs are in direct contrast to student-growth environments. She describes faculty-centered environments as ones where the focus is on the needs of the faculty rather than on the needs of the students. Based on this distinction, she argues that students feel inadequate and vulnerable in faculty-centered programs.

Further, she maintains that learners do not grow or that they actually regress in their personal development in faculty-centered learning environments. In this regard, she believes that developmental regression is especially apparent in the students' levels of self-esteem and self-confidence.

She describes these faculty-centered environments as places that: make the students feel unsafe and threatened; view the students as inferiors; do not value or honor the students' life achievements; and require students to take prescribed courses whether or not the classes add value to the students' academic or professional goals.

In reflecting on his 20 years of college teaching, Brookfield (1990) discovered that educators need to understand the tensions and emotions that are involved with learning. In this regard, he maintains that (pp. 58-59) “learning is not a rational, bloodless, ascetic phenomenon,” but one in which students have strong emotional reactions that are based on their previous life and learning experiences.

In fact, he has found that some students have had such negative learning experiences and view themselves as such inept failures that they are psychologically and emotionally crippled in regard to future learning opportunities. Thus, he claims that with learning having such significant implications for adults and with their egos being so fragile, it would be unnatural for adult learners not to experience the phenomenon on an affective level.

Further, he reports that grief about the loss of certainties is one of the most profound emotions that students experience when they undergo significant learning and personal transformation. He claims that transformative learning involves the students reexamining what they previously held to be fixed, true, and permanent and coming to the realization that what they perceived as the truth about a phenomenon was (p. 46) “relative, shifting and culturally specific.”
In this regard, he reports that when people question their assumptions about their ideas and actions, they usually recognize that some of their conventional wisdoms are distorted, invalid representations of reality. As such, the learners usually end the process by discarding some of their old beliefs. By releasing some of their previous assumptions about reality, they are letting go of pieces of themselves, and they are being forced to reassess the way that they have previously known the world. In the process, the learners explore the unfamiliar while longing for the security of the familiar. Hence, they experience a sense of loss and grief through the transformation.

Based on this affective perspective, Brookfield recommends that instructors should remain mindful of the emotions that are inherent in any learning situation and that they should provide the learners with opportunities for balanced interactions between action and reflection. As such, he believes that lessons should be designed to demonstrate to students that they are heard, that their ideas and beliefs matter, and that their experiences are valued. Lastly, he contends that by addressing the affective aspects of learning, teachers can help to sustain the students’ learning by affirming their self-worth, by strengthening their self-confidence, and by enhancing their self-esteem.

Transformation Theory

According to Mezirow (1990), transformation theory is based on the assumption that truth and knowledge are constructed, that they are fluid and evolving, and that they are derived from negotiated meanings. Based on this perspective, he believes that education is always culturally situated and that we create our sense of truth out of our experiences and our thoughts about our experiences.

Further, Mezirow contends that transformative learning emphasizes contextual understanding, critical reflection, and validation of meaning through discourse. Of these three elements, he holds that critical reflection of one’s assumptions is at the heart of his theory. In this regard, he proposes that critical
reflection allows learners to explore their cultural and gender biases, and it provides them with an avenue in which to challenge their social assumptions and constructs.

In describing the practical aspects of his theory, Mezirow (p. 2) contends that adult learners tend to:

1. Seek the meaning of their experience
2. Engage in deliberate mindful efforts to learn
3. Rely upon beliefs and understandings that produce interpretations and opinions that are more true or justified than those based upon other beliefs
4. Accept others as agents with interpretations of their experiences that may prove true or justified
5. Validate contested beliefs and understandings through reflective discourse – assess their supporting reasons and assumptions in order to arrive at a tentative best judgment – as a sometime alternative to resorting to tradition, authority or force to make a judgement [sic].
6. Understand the meaning of what is communicated by becoming aware of the assumptions (intent, truthfulness, qualifications) of the person communicating and the truth, appropriateness and authenticity of what is being communicated
7. Make meaning of our experience through acquired frames of reference – sets of orienting assumptions and expectations with cognitive, affective and conative dimensions – that shape, delimit and sometimes distort our understanding
8. Transform our frames of reference by becoming critically reflective of their assumptions to make them more dependable when the beliefs and understandings they generate become problematic

Sokol and Cranton (1998) have also studied critical reflection in relation to adult learning. As such, they explain that transformative learning theory assumes that we all have perceptions that are derived from our experiences, thoughts, values and insights. In short, these researchers believe that we all create our constructs of reality based on our pasts and that critical reflection of our experiences is the core
concept of transformative learning. In this regard, they claim that transformative learning usually follows a trigger event that fosters critical discourse and reflection.

Based on these suppositions, they conducted a case study in which they investigated the ways in which educators used critical reflection in their teaching practice. They used a methodology of in-depth observations in which they studied 16 adult educators who were participating in a three-week (75-hour) course on methods and strategies in adult education.

As such, they concluded that nearly all of the participants experienced at least some degree of transformative learning. Further, they learned that the role of the facilitator, the psychosocial ambiance within the group, and the self-awareness that was gained through the use of a psychological-type assessment were the three key factors in the educators’ abilities to transform their perspectives on teaching.

In relation to the role of the educator, the facilitator designed the learning activities to foster transformative learning. In this regard, the facilitator created a classroom atmosphere that engendered a sense of safety, trust, and support. Further, the facilitator allowed the participants to take responsibility for their own learning.

Regarding the construct of psychosocial ambiance, the authors explain that the physical layout of the classroom fostered a transformative learning experience. In this regard, the class was conducted in a circle, and the activities were designed to foster comfort, movement, and small group interactions.

Lastly, the researchers report that the majority of the participants claimed that the personal insights and self-awareness that they gained through the use of a psychological-type assessment tool contributed to their transformative experience. In this regard, the participants’ heightened sense of selves as educators enabled them to gain insight into their educational practices, and it provided them with an opportunity to revise some of their fundamental assumptions about the role of the learners in relation to themselves as teachers.

In building on Mezirow’s theory of transformation, Nelson (1997) is convinced that the telling and retelling of our life stories is critical in human development and transformation. In this regard, he explains that the sharing of our stories through biographical accounts helps us to understand ourselves better and
helps us to explain ourselves to others. He describes autobiographical learning as being derived from reflection on one’s life experiences, critical thinking about one’s life experiences, and imagining different meanings for one’s life story.

Nelson explains that the serial reconstruction of one’s life story takes form within and through the process of the author’s ongoing self-interpretation and that each new telling of the story reveals the author’s emerging understanding of self. As such, he holds that the author’s heightened understanding of self is expanded beyond what the person ever could have understood about one’s self before the reconstruction of the story.

While Mezirow’s theory of adult learning appears to be a viable foundational explanation of how humans construct, revise, and transform the meaning of their experiences, other researchers and authors have found that the emphasis on critical reflection is not enough to explain the full range of human transformation (Barlas, 2001; Even, 1988; Galbo, 1998; Kearsley, 2002; Nelson, 1997; Smith, 1989; Taylor, 2001; Tennant, 1993; Yorks & Kasl, 2002). For these authors, feelings and the affective state of an individual also need to be considered in understanding significant change.

According to Gibbs in his 1960 classic work on adult learning theory, affect impacts one’s ability to learn. In examining the role of experience in learning, he contends that, in order for the learner to reflect on experience, the student must be emotionally and psychologically free and adjusted to the learning environment. In other words, if one’s experience of learning is too emotionally charged, or if the learning environment is too threatening, learning will be negatively impacted.

Smith (1989) contends that learning is either a positive experience or a negative one, and that it is never neutral. Based on this assumption, he proposes that learning is a developmental “mix” of factors that need to be considered in a learning environment. These elements are internal physiological and emotional states, prior learning and expectances about learning, and the external environment. Of these factors, he believes that one’s emotional state and one’s memories and experiences regarding previous learning are critical in determining one’s ability to
learn. As such, he maintains that if an individual has a negative learning experience, the event can then inhibit the person’s ability to learn.

Even (1988), too, believes that emotions and memories are part of learning and that they need to be acknowledged and addressed in order for the learning to transpire. In this regard, she explains that when adults enter the learning environment they bring the emotional “baggage” from their previous learning experiences with them. As such, she believes that if the baggage is negative it can then act as a barrier that inhibits future learning.

Based on this assumption, Even writes (p. 1), “The baggage of an adult’s life contains all that the adult is, has been, and hopes to be, as well as all that life means to them. It contains history, culture, values, attitudes, finances, philosophy, religion, hopes, dreams, sex, self-concept, physical attributes, abilities, skills, knowledge, education, beliefs, and life experiences. It contains all that life and living have produced for that person.”

In her descriptive case study of transformative learning and personal change, Barlas (2001) demonstrated that emotions play an important role in transformative learning. In this regard, she studied 20 self-selected participants from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. All of the participants were chosen from an adult transformative learning and change program that was held at a small graduate school.

The program was designed to challenge higher education’s valuing of the rational learning domain over the affective dimension. The program was based on the assumption that experiential learning is a holistic process that includes the affective and symbolic realm as well as the rational domain.

The researcher gathered her data by using in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews. She taped, transcribed, and coded the material and then looked for themes using the constant comparative method of cross-case content analysis.

One of the themes that emerged from her study was the need to acknowledge and work with the participants’ affect, compassion, and trust. In this regard, she reported that the (p.3) “intense emotional content of learning
experiences served powerfully to trigger reflective learning by directing focus on assumptions that underlie frames of reference.”

Lastly, she writes that the facilitator heightened the participants’ learning experiences and levels of transformation by setting a tone of trust and safety. She explains that by the instructor attending to the affective dimension of the participants’ learning, the participants were able to be more open and authentic with each other and that their learning reached deeper levels of meaning than what they would have experienced otherwise.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand the meanings that Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors (CADC's) have constructed about their life experiences in relation to their choices about higher education. In this regard, I want to know what the participants deem to be real about their experiences, I want them to use their own voices to describe their experiences, and I want them to take an active role in determining how the constructs of their experiences will be presented. Based on those objectives, I chose a qualitative design for my research.

The Researcher

Creswell (1998) maintains that one of the important verification procedures in qualitative inquiry is the clarification of the researcher’s biases and assumptions that may impact the inquiry. In this regard, he holds that the researcher should note her or his past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may have had an effect on one’s interpretation and approach to the study.

Along these same lines, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) have declared that the goodness of constructivist research is based on the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity. In this regard, they hold that, “the inquirer’s voice is that of the ‘passionate participant’ who is actively involved in facilitating the ‘multivoice’ reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants (p. 215).” As such, these authors hold that the researcher’s “voice” must be identified early on in the examination so that the reader can discern for herself or himself how the researcher’s biases influenced the inquiry. The following is my story, my biases, and my “voice.”

I am a middle-class, married, Caucasian female. I am in my mid-40’s. I have three grown daughters and two small grandchildren. My three daughters are all currently attending college, and I take great pride in that fact.

I have a passion for learning. In this regard, I have had many wonderful learning experiences, and I have had several exceptional teachers who knew how to
make the classroom feel safe, who knew how to teach their students from a learner-centered paradigm, and who knew how to impart the excitement and joy of learning.

At the same time, however, I have had some painful experiences along the path of my educational journey. In this regard, I can remember several teachers who seemed to take great delight in finding opportunities in which to shame me or my classmates, and when I reflect on those occasions, I still feel small, childlike, and vulnerable. At the same time, however, the grownup in me feels wronged and angry for having had to endure those experiences, and I feel compelled to voice my concerns about the injustice of it all.

In spite of the negative aspects of my educational experiences, or because of the wonderful experiences, I have loved the process of learning for as long as I can remember, and I have always wanted to attend college. In fact, I value education so much that there have been times in my life when I have enrolled in college classes even when I could hardly afford to pay my rent or to put food on my table.

I do not know how I came to value education so intensely because higher education was not one of my family-of-origin’s norms. In fact, not only was I the first person in my family-of-origin to earn a college degree, I was the first one to even finish high school.

I did not pursue a college education immediately after I completed high school. Instead, I got married, and I began having a family, and within four years, I had three children. I only resumed my education after the youngest of my three daughters had started kindergarten.

However, like so many other things in my life, I resumed my education inadvertently. In this regard, I had some free time once my children were all in school, so I began volunteering to co-facilitate a support group for sexually abused children who were involved with the Oregon Children’s Services Division (CSD). The work intrigued me, and I enjoyed it so much that I ultimately enrolled in the human resources program at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon.

However, shortly after I returned to school, my husband and I separated, and I became a single mother. As such, I needed to work fulltime, and I was forced to
drop out of the program. However, even though I worked fulltime, my finances remained strained, and I quickly realized, that with only a high school diploma and few marketable skills, I would be relegated to a life of the working poor unless I found some way to continue my education.

As such, I started taking lower-division transfer classes with the intention of transferring to George Fox College. With that, I began the long and arduous journey of pursuing a college degree while being employed full time and parenting three young children. In that regard, I worked days, and I took college classes during the evenings and on weekends. However, there were many times throughout those years that I could only manage to take one class at a time, so my educational goals were delayed.

In 1991, I was finally granted a Bachelor of Arts degree in Management of Human Resources (MHR) from George Fox College (GFC). I earned that degree approximately eight years after I had taken my first college course. The MHR program is an adult completion program that is designed specifically for the educational needs of the working adult learner. The classes are offered for four-hours one evening each week and six hours per day on occasional Saturdays.

While the campus is in Newberg, Oregon, the classes are held in satellite classrooms around the state. Based on this format, the school was able to take the classroom to the learner, and I attended classes in a church meeting room in Salem, Oregon.

I received my Master of Social Work (MSW) degree from Portland State University (PSU) in 1996. That program was based on the standard model of higher education at that time, which was that all the course work was done on campus. As such, I traveled to the Portland campus each week to receive my instruction.

Lastly, I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Adult Education Program at Oregon State University (OSU). As with the MSW program, my PhD. course work was completed on the campus.

Professionally, I am a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor II, but unlike many addictions treatment professionals, I am not in recovery from addiction. In
this regard, personal recovery is not a requirement in order to practice in the
addictions treatment field.

I entered the addiction treatment field indirectly through my work at CSD. Several of the children who were involved with that agency were also children of alcoholic parents. As such, many of them attended support groups for children of alcoholics at one of the substance abuse treatment programs in the community where I lived.

Thus, when an opening came up at the addiction treatment program, I was recruited to work for that agency based on the administration’s belief that I had the understanding, experience, and skills to address both of those issues simultaneously. Thus, like many addictions treatment professionals, I entered the field based on my experience, not on my educational attainment. In fact, at that time, I was not even certified in the addiction field.

I have worked in the addiction treatment arena for approximately 15 years. In that time, it has been my experience that there is a distinct culture within the profession and that the culture is based on an educational hierarchy. In this regard, a person with a bachelor’s degree and no practical experience in the field will often be granted more therapeutic credibility within the treatment team than someone who lacks a degree but who has his or her CADC and has worked in the field for many years. In Chapter 7, Jennifer Lopez, who is one of the research participants, speaks in great detail of her experience with this phenomenon.

During the last 12 years of my clinical practice in the field, I worked primarily with and advocated for addicted women from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Through that work, I became interested in socio-political issues regarding women and people from non-dominant and marginalized cultures.

In addition to being a clinician, I am also a trainer for OADAP. I have been an educator for that program for approximately 13 years. I have taught prevention classes to school age children, and I have trained addiction treatment professionals in courses on women’s gender specific treatment.

At the beginning of this doctoral process, I was employed as a manager at a publicly funded addiction treatment program in Yamhill County, Oregon. However,
a little over a year ago I changed jobs, and I am now employed by the Oregon Department of Corrections where I supervise an alcohol and other drug group treatment program. The program has sites throughout the state of Oregon.

I became interested in workforce development issues with addiction treatment professionals because of my work at Yamhill County. I supervised addiction counselors, and I was having a difficult time finding qualified applicants for the positions. I discovered that many of the applicants qualified on an experiential basis but that they were disqualified because they did not meet the educational requirements. On the other hand, I found that many of the applicants who qualified on an educational level were disqualified because they could not demonstrate practical competency.

As a result of my concerns about the shortage of a qualified addictions treatment workforce, I joined the Workforce Development Coalition in order to work with other professionals to address this dilemma. Through my work with that group, I became even more apprehensive about the future of the workforce as I learned that there was a growing trend for third-party payors to require higher levels of credentialing for service providers. As such, I became concerned that addictions treatment providers without higher-level degrees might be forced out of the field and that the workforce would be depleted even further.

Assumptions

According to Burns (1989), a qualitative researcher should identify her or his assumptions about the nature of knowing early on in the process. In this regard, I believe that there are many ways of knowing. As such, I hold that learning is exclusive to the individual and that it should only be viewed through the lens of her or his personal experience.

I believe that learners are their own best experts; I believe that they have unique ways of knowing, and I believe that the ways in which they view the world are based on their life experiences, and I believe that those life experiences are shaped by social, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender considerations. Lastly, I
believe that the learner's experiences are a source of and a justification for the construction of knowledge.

Research Paradigm

Qualitative research is defined as a subjective method of inquiry that is based on social interactions and personal relationships (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Janesick, 2000; Merriman, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In further elaboration of this point, Denzin and Lincoln explain that this method of research is grounded in personal relationships and interactional processes and that it provides credence for the reality of the subjective human experience. As such, they hold that it is the best method to employ when one seeks to answer questions that stress how social experiences are created and given meaning.

Merriman (1998) concurs with this assertion. She proposes that individuals construct reality as they interact with the world and that the meanings that they assign to their reality is embedded within their experiences. Additionally, she contends that the meanings that people give to their experiences are mediated through the investigator's perception of reality.

Qualitative research also provides the participants with an opportunity to construct their own meanings about the phenomenon of study, and it allows them to explain the phenomenon in their own words (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Janesick, 2000; Merriman, 1998). In this regard, Creswell asserts that knowledge is what people make of it. He believes that knowledge is gained as people talk about the meanings that they give to experiences and that the meanings are infused with their personal biases and values. He also holds that knowledge is inextricably tied to the content in which it is studied and that it should be written up in a subjective, up-close manner.

For the purposes of this study, I drew most heavily from the 1985 work of Lincoln and Guba. These authors are two of the foremost experts on the subject of qualitative research and naturalistic inquiry. In their work on naturalistic inquiry (pp. 36-44), they explain the concept of naturalistic inquiry, and they delineate the
axioms of this paradigm. The following are those axioms: 1) the basic assumptions about the nature of reality; 2) the relationship of the knower to the known; 3) the possibility of generalization; 4) the possibility of causal linkages; and 5) the role of values.

The Nature of Reality

Regarding axiom one, the nature of reality, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that the concept of truth is an elusive one and that there is no such thing as a single reality. Instead, they believe that there are multiple realities that participants construct about any phenomenon and that those realities cannot be understood in isolation from their context.

In this regard, Creswell (1998) contends that knowledge is what people make of it. He believes that knowledge is gained as people talk about the meanings that they give to their life experiences and that the meanings that they assign to their experiences are infused with their personal biases and values.

Relationship of the Knower to the Known

In respect to the relationship of the knower to the known, which is axiom two, Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that the researcher and the participants are inseparable and that they interact to influence one another throughout the study. Further, they contend that the researcher should use herself or himself as the primary instrument of data gathering. By so doing, the authors assume that the researcher will be able to encompass the full scope of the phenomenon and will be able to adjust to the varieties of realities that will be encountered as people reflect on their experiences.

Along these same lines, Lincoln and Guba (1985) hold that researchers should utilize tacit knowledge in their inquiry instead of using prepositional knowledge. They explain that tacit knowledge is an intuitive or felt way of knowing and that prepositional knowledge is a way of knowing that is expressed
in the form of language. These authors contend that intuitive knowledge is a more realistic depiction of the investigator’s values and that it allows for a sense of multiple realities.

**Generalization**

Pertaining to the possibility of generalization, which is the third axiom, Lincoln and Guba (1985) hold that realities are multiple and different and that they cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts. Thus, they believe that it is not realistic to think that findings from one setting to be duplicated elsewhere.

**Casual Linkages**

In axiom four, casual linkages, Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that every entity in a study is simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the other people in the study. As such, they hold that there is no way to truly determine cause and effect.

**Values**

In the fifth axiom, Lincoln and Guba (1985) declare that all inquiry is subjective and value bound. In this regard, they hold that the inquirer’s worldview and values are inextricably woven throughout the process from the choice of the problem through the analysis of the findings.

**Methods and Procedures**

**Case Study**

I chose a case study as my method of reporting this investigation. The design appealed to me because I wanted to provide my readers with an in-depth
understanding of the participants' life experiences, and I wanted the readers to understand the meanings that the participants have ascribed to those experiences.

Further, I wanted my report to be natural and free flowing. I wanted it to capture the true essence of the participants' experiences, and I wanted it to reflect how my own worldview and values played out in the process.

Yin (1994) explains that the case study is a method of empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, and that it allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life events. He also believes that the case study method allows the researcher to use multiple sources of evidence, which then allows for various sources of reality.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) concur with this thinking. They believe that the case study mode is the reporting method of choice for researchers who want to study a phenomenon in its natural state and who want to provide their readers with an understanding of the multiple realities that are inherent in any given situation. They maintain that the case study approach enables the researcher to reconstruct the participants' lived experiences in such a holistic, life-like fashion that the reader has a vicarious experience of the phenomenon.

Further, Lincoln and Guba also hold that one of the primary axioms of qualitative research is that the inquirer and the participants are interdependent. In this regard, they contend that a case study demonstrates the interconnectedness of the researcher and the participants and that it allows for the reader to judge the bias of the researcher in a way that would not be possible in quantitative research.

Lastly, they contend that the case study method of reporting provides the researcher with a mechanism in which to continuously report back to the participants about the study's findings and to negotiate the meanings with them. It also allows the participants to remain active in the process by providing the researcher with opportunities to solicit the participants' consensus throughout the inquiry, not just at the end of it.
Participants

I contacted a total of six volunteers. All of the participants initially agreed to participate in the study. However, two of the volunteers later decided against completing the study. The first volunteer to change her mind about participating in the research stated that she did so because of work and family responsibilities and because of her time constraints. She changed her mind early on in the process before she ever signed the Informed Consent form. As such, I did not interview her.

The second volunteer withdrew after he had signed the Informed Consent form, and I had already interviewed him. He withdrew without explanation. I made numerous efforts to contact him, but they were all to no avail. Thus, I destroyed all of his interview materials as I had outlined in the Informed Consent form.

Of the four participants who completed the study, two of the women and the man all described themselves as Caucasian Americans. The third woman described herself as Hispanic. Their ages ranged from 41 to 56.

Two of the four participants have not earned two-year college degrees. Both of these participants were Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor I's (CADC I’s) at the time that the study began. However, one of the participants was granted her level II certification during the course of the study.

The other two participants have two-year college degrees. One of these participants is a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor II (CADC II), and the other participant holds a provisional certificate for a CADC II.

All of the participants are employed with substance abuse treatment programs in the Willamette Valley area of Oregon. The Willamette Valley region is a narrow corridor of towns and communities in northern and central Oregon that surround the Interstate-5 freeway. For the purpose of this study, the region is designated as beginning in Portland, which is the state’s largest city and ends in Eugene, which is one of the largest communities in the state. It also includes the city Salem, which is the state capitol and the city of Corvallis, which is home to
OSU. All of the participants are employed at agencies that are at least partially funded by managed health care.

Recruitment

I designed my study so that I could gain a comprehensive understanding of a professional workplace issue. Thus, my sample was small and non-random, and I utilized a criterion type of purposeful sampling to identify my participants. In this regard, I determined that each of the participants needed to meet my inclusion criteria that I have outlined on the following page.

Once I had determined my criteria, I began my recruitment by contacting a person whom I knew met the criteria and who had shown interest in my study. After I determined my criteria and identified my first volunteer, I used a snowball selection approach in which I asked the first participant and subsequent ones to assist me in identifying other information-rich cases.

Inclusion Criteria

Criteria for inclusion in this study were that the participants all needed to be Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors, that they all needed to have less than four-year college degrees, that they all needed to be employed at treatment programs in the Willamette Valley, and that they all needed to agree to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

The only criterion for exclusion was that I could not have an administrative or supervisory relationship with any of the participants any time during the course of the study. If any of the volunteers had met the exclusion criteria, I would have excluded her or him from further consideration in the study. However, none of the volunteers met this criterion.
Pre-Study Screening

I contacted each of the volunteers by telephone, and I followed an initial contact script that I designed especially for that purpose (see Appendix B). In the script, I introduced myself, I explained my study, and I described the criteria for inclusion. Once I determined that the volunteers had met the criteria, I then asked each person if he or she wanted to participate in the study.

If the volunteer was willing to be included in the study, I then scheduled the first session with him or her. The volunteers chose the times and the places of all the interviews.

Informed Consent

At the beginning of each of the first interviews, I provided the participant with a consent form (see Appendix C). I asked the respondent to read along with me as I read and explained the form. I then asked the respondent to sign two copies of the consent form. I kept one copy of the form for my records, and I gave the other copy to the participant.

In the consent form, I explained that the study was part of my doctoral dissertation in the Adult Education program at OSU. In so doing, I pointed out that I was studying certified alcohol and drug counselors to see if their educational experiences had impacted their choices about higher education.

I then described the overall process involved in the study. As an element of the process, I suggested that they journal. Only one of the participants chose to turn in any journaling that she had done. I also explained to them that the study would be interactive and that they were welcomed and encouraged to review all of their data and that they would have edit rights over all of their data.

I explained to the participants that they might experience some uncomfortable thoughts and feelings as they remembered and discussed their life experiences. I also clarified the process to address this situation should it have occurred.
I outlined the benefits that I expected from the study. In this regard, I explained to them that the inquiry would contribute to the body of knowledge about counselor education and workforce development.

I assured the participants that I would maintain their confidentiality to the best of my ability. In this regard, I asked them to pick their own pseudonyms, which I explained would be their sole source of identification in the study. I also changed the names of any people, places, things, or other unique descriptors in their transcripts that might have inadvertently identified them.

I clarified that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study any time that they chose. I notified them that if they had any questions about their rights as research participants or comments, questions, or concerns in general they could contact my doctoral chair or me. I also explained that they were free to contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator at the OSU Research Office if they had questions specific to their rights as research participants.

**Interviews**

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with each of the participants. In this regard, I designed my questions so that I could gain insight into the participants' thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions regarding their educational goals and experiences (see Appendix D). I interviewed each participant at least two times, and the interviews ranged from half an hour to two hours. The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed verbatim.

**Post-Interview Process Time**

After each of the interviews, I allowed time for us to debrief the interaction. All of the volunteers participated in at least some discussion of the process. At the close of each interview, I reminded them all that they were free to telephone me or e-mail me if they were uncomfortable or disturbed in any way by the content of their responses during the interview. One participant telephoned
and e-mailed me several times so that she could process her answers. However, she was not unduly uncomfortable or disturbed by the process. None of the other participants contacted me to process their material between or after their interviews.

During the post-interview phase of the process, I reminded the participants that I would be sending the transcripts to them to review and to edit as they saw fit. I also explained that they could change or delete anything that they wanted. In this regard, I reminded them that my goal was to understand the meanings that they had constructed about their experiences, that the their stories were theirs to tell, and that I would not consider the transcripts correct unless they deemed them accurate.

All of the volunteers reviewed their transcripts. Two of them added clarifying information to their earlier narratives or expounded on their thoughts. One of the participants and I negotiated the meaning of one of her themes, but none of the participants changed their minds about the content of their narratives.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), all research should generate knowledge that is truthful, valid, and reliable. In the empiricist research tradition, the principals of scientific truth and knowledge about reality are fixed, objective, predictable, and instrumentally possible to validate. From this perspective, the criteria for judging the goodness or quality of an inquiry are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Qualitative research, however, is based on a different set of assumptions than that of empirical inquiry. In the qualitative paradigm, the nature of reality is subjective, socially constructed, and holistic. Thus, from the non-foundationalist standpoint, there are no permanent, unvarying criteria by which truth can be universally known or by which research should be judged.

From the naturalist perspective, the only legitimate criteria that should be used to define truth are those that can be agreed upon by the participants at
certain times and under certain conditions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In this regard, the authors have argued that “truth” is a fluid, social construct that is created by means of a community narrative (p.178). Further, they have declared that the community narrative itself is subject to the temporal and historical conditions that gave rise to the community.

If one holds to the naturalist tenets as I do, how then does one measure truth and assure the quality of an inquiry if one does not address the concerns of validity, reliability, and objectivity? To deal with these concerns, Merriam (1998) has asserted that the researcher should consider these concepts from a perspective that is congruent with the philosophical assumptions of her or his research paradigm.

Therefore, since the naturalist perspective is compatible with my worldview, I followed Lincoln and Guba’s 1985 recommendations on the subject. In this work, they determined that the primary principle for judging the goodness and quality of an inquiry is trustworthiness. In this regard, they hold that there are four criteria that help to establish the construct. The criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is most analogous to the conventionalist’s construct of internal validity. The credibility criterion refers to the probability that the study’s findings will have heightened truth-value. It is also a vehicle for the researcher to ensure that the participants’ truth and worldviews are projected.

Triangulation is one method of enhancing credibility. Triangulation reduces the likelihood of misinterpretation of the materials. Stake (pp. 443-444) has declared that triangulation is “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation.” Stake also noted that triangulation is a method of clarifying the phenomenon by identifying different ways that it can be experienced and expressed.
Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that researchers can use multiple methods of inquiry to enhance credibility, and they hold that the researcher should validate each piece of information against at least one other source. In this regard, they suggest that a second interview can be a source of validation against any findings from the first interview.

**Member Checks**

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314) believe that this technique is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. This method provides on-going opportunities for the participants to review the process and to provide feedback as to whether the researcher’s reconstructions adequately reflect the members’ perception of their reality. Among other things, member checks provide the researcher with a method to ensure that the participants intended to behave in certain ways or to disclose certain pieces of information.

Member checks give the participants opportunities to correct errors in the transcripts and to challenge misinterpretations of the interactions. This method also provides a vehicle for the participants to volunteer additional information and to begin to summarize the data from their own perspectives.

**Transferability**

Transferability is the naturalist’s response to the traditionalist’s concept of external validity. In this regard, Lincoln and Guba (p. 316) have declared that the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry. Instead, they hold that the naturalist can only provide working hypotheses and descriptions of the time and context in which the hypotheses were found.

Whether the hypotheses hold across contexts depends on the degree of similarity across the situations. Lincoln and Guba (p. 316) maintain that in order to demonstrate transferability, the researcher should provide a, “thick description
necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility."

With transferability, the researcher provides an in-depth description of the participants and the setting of the study. By doing so, the reader is then able to ascertain whether the findings can be transferred to other situations.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the concept of dependability parallels the construct of reliability that is found in the traditional positivist paradigm. In the conventional model, reliability refers to the ability to demonstrate that the measurement is stable, dependable, consistent, predictable, and that it can be replicated.

In naturalistic inquiry, however, dependability can be established through the use of an inquiry audit, which mirrors that of a fiscal audit in the business world. In an inquiry audit, the auditor examines the "process" of the inquiry and determines its level of acceptability. If the process is acceptable, the auditor can attest to the dependability of the inquiry and further lend trustworthiness to the study.

Confirmability is also established through an audit trail. However, rather than emphasizing the "process" as in the construct of dependability, confirmability examines the "product," and it investigates whether the product or findings are grounded in the data. Lincoln and Guba contend that the techniques of triangulation and the keeping of a reflexive journal also add to the concept of confirmability.

Creswell (1989, p. 203) has recommended that qualitative researchers should use at least two of the above techniques to demonstrate trustworthiness in any given study. In this regard, he suggests that triangulation, a thick, rich description, and member checks are especially helpful in assuring trustworthiness.

Lather (1991) concurs with the above suggestions. However, she also believes that the researcher shapes others and is shaped by the research process.
Thus, she advises the researcher to use reflexivity and deep self-exploration as the primary methods of establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study.

I used a variety of techniques to demonstrate the goodness and quality of my inquiry and to discover what was trustworthy and real. In this regard, I used myself as a research instrument, and I drew on my own self-reflections and personal transformation as other sources of information.

I compared my transcripts to my reflexive journal entries, and I validated the findings from my first interview by following up with at least a second interview with each participant. I also triangulated my findings with the literature. I conducted member checks in that I allowed the participants on-going opportunities to review the process and to provide feedback to me regarding my reconstructions of their reality. By using member checks, I made sure that the participants had the final choice as to what I published in their individual chapters.

To address the construct of transferability, I attempted to recount the study in a manner that would provide the reader with an in-depth description of the participants and of the settings. I wanted my study to live for the reader the way that it lived for me. In short, I wanted the reader to feel the energy and the emotions of the stories in the same manner that I experienced them.

Data Analysis

Janesick (2000) contends that data analysis is an on-going process that commences at the beginning of the first interview. I found this to be true in my own analysis of the data. Within the first few minutes of each interview, I found myself beginning to synthesize the information in order to make sense of what I was hearing. During subsequent interviews, I was aware that my mind was automatically sorting, filtering, and categorizing the information as quickly as I could process it.

After each interview, I then continued this on-going process by reading and re-reading the participants’ transcripts and by analyzing their narratives for
the presence of common experiences and reoccurring themes. In this regard, I examined the data by using the constant comparative method as was described by Merriam (1998). I chose this method because I wanted to arrive at a structural description of the participants’ experiences, and I wanted to discern the meanings that they had ascribed to those experiences. I was not seeking to build substantive theory.

According to Merriam, the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is to continuously evaluate the material within and across data sets. The researcher persistently compares the research materials with each other in an effort to compare one unit of information with the next unit of information and to find regularities in the data.

To accomplish this, the researcher starts with bits of information that are sorted into groupings that have some form of commonality. These bits of data are anything that the researcher deems as meaningful. Merriam refers to these bits of information as “units of data” (p. 178). The researcher identifies these units of data from the research materials such as interview notes and transcripts.

I only considered data that reflected the purpose of my research and that added understanding to my inquiry. Therefore, while each of the participants had many thematic experiences, if a particular experience or theme was unique to any one participant or did not have relevance to my study, I excluded it from further consideration.

I continued my data analysis by constructing themes through a step-by-step process. In this regard, I read down through each transcript, and when I came to data that I thought was important or might be relevant, I hi-lighted the word or section. At each hi-lighted area, I wrote notes or made comments in the margins. In some areas, a preliminary theme was suggested by the data. When that happened, I assigned a preliminary thematic name to the section and wrote the name of the theme in the margin.

When I reached the end of the transcript, I synthesized the data and separated it into themes that best captured the essence of the participant’s experiences. I then presented the themes to the participant for her or his review of
my assessment and for a validation of my interpretations. Once I had agreement from the participant about the emerging themes from her or his narratives, I summarized the transcripts into chapters for each participant.

I based the chapters in chronological order of the participants as I had interviewed them. In the chapters, I provided summaries of each of the four participants’ transcripts that were based on themes that had emerged from the data.

To begin the process, I provided a brief profile of each participant. This included either the participants’ autobiography or a biography that I wrote which was based on feedback from the participant and my own perceptions of him or her.

Based on chronological order, I then provided an overview of each of the participant’s interviews. In this regard, I described the setting where the interview took place, I included a summary statement of the points of interest and the preliminary themes that I found embedded in the transcript, and then I followed that up with evidentiary excerpts from the narratives. I then added a section of my reflections on that particular interview, and then I presented the participant’s chapter back to her or him for review and confirmation of my findings.

Lastly, once I had completed all the chapters in the same manner, I then re-read all the chapters and looked for common themes that had the most relevance for this study. I provide a summary of those themes in Chapter 8.
WHAT IS REAL?

“What is REAL?” asked the Rabbit one day...“Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become REAL.”

Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real, you don’t mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn’t happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real, you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.”

The Velveteen Rabbit
Margery Williams
CHAPTER 4: CARLIE NEWMAR

Carlie is a Caucasian female. She has worked in the addiction treatment field for 11 years. She is currently employed at a private, for-profit addictions treatment program.

I have known Carlie in a professional capacity for approximately four years. During that time, I have discovered that she has a ready wit and a wonderful sense of humor that she uses effectively in stressful situations.

The following is Carlie’s autobiography. Other than for a few minor changes that I made in the syntax, this statement is verbatim as she wrote it. I cried when she read it to me, and I am crying now as I think of all that she has survived and all that she has become.

My name is Carlie Newmar. I am a 50 year old woman working in the field of alcohol and drug addiction. I am supervising a staff of twelve certified counselors. I am in charge of the staff supervision, staff needs, education and training opportunities for them. I am in charge of developing an atmosphere that the group is able to create a team and grow from one another in a supportive environment. I strive to create a ground work for other professionals to keep seeking a higher development of them selves. I encourage, support, challenge them to become the best as individuals and also as the force only a well honed operation can be. I get excited to see the "seasoned" counselor become willing to learn new ways. I thrive on seeing the energy of the new therapist looking to see the why’s of the seasoned therapists style. It is a gratifying position. It is a people in creation that help the client actualize the world the staff is living. The staff is the breathing, walking, talking example of what the client aspires to become. They are the role models for the client. They may be the first person that client see’s [sic]. My job is to help that counselor be the best they can be and want to be. I am the fire fanner. If there is a glimpse of the flicker, I zero in to fan the flame.

Why am I so excited about my job? Well here it is. I am the new staff, the seasoned counselor, the client. I am the one who ended up becoming the woman at the end of the bar...[sic] the one I never wanted to become. I had a 9th grade education. I had a family that did not support academic [sic] achievements. I was a single [sic] mom through most of my life. I achieved my GED at age 40 years
old. I have been in recovery for 15 years. I am a scholar of the school of life. I have had great sadness in the life of an addict, and the spiritual joy of the woman I am today in recovery. Today the fears are, will I get my term paper done on time, can I get a financial aid loan for my bachelors [sic] degree? Will I make it to the speakers meeting that I am the guest speaker at today?

These were all unattainable goals for myself. I am the mother of three children I buried my oldest son at age 20 years old from drug abuse auto accident, my second son is actively using heroin somewhere in the world. I have a daughter who is married and has blessed me with two grandsons, they have never seen their grandmother drunk they have never hugged me and smelled stale gin. I have been given a second chance several times in my life I have been diagnosed with two life threatening diseases, one being the disease of addiction. I am no longer dying from these, I am living with them. I have an opportunity to achieve and make a dent of difference today in this life. I am seizing my opportunity. I believe in passion, for life, excitement [sic] in the everyday life....[sic] its [sic] such a gift. I am the woman I never thought I would be today. I am who I wanted to be...I wanted to grow up and be just like "her" the ones who helped me through. The wise ones, the mentors, the powerful women I had in my life...the ones that encouraged me, loved me, believed in me.....[sic] all along the way.

So this is to the women in my life that said I could...they knew it even when I didn’t. They saw it in me when I could barely lift my head from insecurity, drunkeness [sic], and low self esteem. And this is to the women that do not know who they are today. To you who aren’t [sic] sure you even have a story. Believe me it may not be the story you want to tell, but it is yours...and you can change the ending any time you want. I believe in Them [sic], that went before us, Me [sic] who’s living the dream, and you who are afraid to dream it!!!! [sic] I encourage you, [sic] I challenge you to dream it, think it, imagine it, draw it, write it, shout it, sing it...LIVE IT! [sic] It is your dream. It is you. Because....... [sic] it was me.

Carlie Newmar’s First Interview

Carlie was the first person that I interviewed. As with the other participants whom I interviewed, Carlie chose all of our interview sites. Our first meeting was at
a Chinese restaurant that was a few blocks from her place of employment. We were scheduled to meet at 5:00 p.m. on January 5, 2001, which was a Friday night.

I arrived at the restaurant about 15 minutes early so that I could find us the most private table that the restaurant could afford. The restaurant hostess placed me in a section of the building that was away from the main part of the business and was empty when I arrived.

Carlie was running late leaving work, so she was about 15 minutes late for the scheduled appointment. By the time that she arrived, the main portion of the restaurant had filled up, and two of the tables in our section were also occupied.

When Carlie entered the restaurant, we hugged each other, and then we sat down across the table from each other. After a few minutes of small talk, we ordered our meals, and when I turned on the recorder, we both instinctively leaned toward each other and spoke in hushed voices that were our best efforts to garner a sense of privacy.

Over the course of the nearly two-hour encounter, the entire restaurant completely filled up, as such, by the time that we concluded the interview, Carlie and I were packed into a small room with approximately 50 other people.

The space had terrible acoustics. The audiotape has recorded a background of non-descript 60’s love songs, the noisy cacophony of restaurant patrons’ conversations, the busy clinking of the cash register, the sporadic ringing of the telephone, and the polite voice of our waitress with her occasional interruptions bringing our food and asking us if we needed anything. At the end of the interview, Carlie and I both acknowledged that we would find a more private, quiet setting for the next meeting.

Carlie epitomizes the construct of resiliency. She dropped out of school when she was a sophomore in high school; she was 15 years old at the time. She later attended a trade school, and at age 40, she passed her General Education Development (G.E.D.) test.

Darcy: Did you complete the tenth grade, or did you complete the ninth?
Carlie: No. I completed my tenth grade, and then left school and did some classes here and there and did some stuff. We didn’t have alternative education, but I just went on and did a trade school. I became a cosmetologist and did hair because that’s what we did back then. It was like a college degree for us.

Darcy: Sure, so what are you putting down as your highest level?

Carlie: I am going to put a G.E.D. I went back at age 40, and I completed G.E.D. classes in Missouri while I was working two jobs, so I slept four hours, did G.E.D. for four hours, and I did two jobs and raised my daughter. [Sucks in breath.] [Long pause.]

Darcy: Why did you decide to . . . ? You make it a special point—you put a lot of emphasis on the fact that you were 40 . . .

Carlie [breaks in]: Yes. It is significant to me because to have the ability to return at that age is very unexpected for my family values.

Darcy: And, not to impose my value system on that, but it sounds like you have some real excitement and pride that at 40 you went back and got your G.E.D.

Carlie: Absolutely! You don’t go back and take a G.E.D. at 40 years old being a recovering addict. You move on. You learn trades, and you do skill work. You figure out how to succeed and use the skills that you used to have. You bet! You bet, and it wasn’t a big deal. Nobody expected me to complete it. Expected me? I didn’t expect me to complete it. I got up every morning and went to this dumb school in this little place in town, and it was hot, and I was tired, and I did that, and I got great scores.

Carlie was one of those typical addictions treatment counselors who entered the treatment field devoid of a degree. Her work in the field and her desire to be a certified addiction treatment counselor were the impetus for her to complete her G.E.D.

Darcy: Why did you decide to do the G.E.D. and not something else? Why did that have so much meaning?

Carlie: Because I wanted to be a certified drug and alcohol counselor, and I was working in the field, and I knew that I couldn’t get certified without my G.E.D., so it was a push in that
direction. I thought, "I am never going to get where I need to be without this," and, so I did it.

Carlie’s immediate goal is to earn a bachelor degree, so she is currently attending lower-division transfer classes at the local community college. Because of her hectic schedule and financial constraints, the maximum number of credits that she has been able to take per term has been six. While she intends to remain in the addiction treatment field, she is interested in earning a bachelor degree in criminology.

Darcy: So your goal is to get a what . . . ? What degree do you want?

Carlie: A bachelor’s degree, and I think in criminology. Portland State has that program for criminology, and the reason I want that is because my interest in the field is corrections, criminality, and addictions, and how that all plays out together.

And now that all the addictions programs are coming into the prisons, they are finally recognizing that is where it needs to take place. That’s where I want to be. That’s where I want to go, and what better enhancement would it be for retirement! I mean there is a place in my life in retirement where I may get tired of doing what I am doing. I mean a different place in corrections where I can utilize this, so . . .

Carlie has experienced many frustrations in attempting to further her education. In this regard, she explains that she has spoken to several college counselors in an effort to enroll in a human resource program and to earn an associate degree. She claims that until recently each person that she had spoken to had discouraged her from applying. She says that the advisors had questioned why she wanted to earn an associate’s degree when she was already working in her chosen field.

Darcy: You have talked to some of the universities, and what are they saying in terms of how many more credits you have to do? I mean where are you?
Carlie: I just met with another lady at Blue Ridge, and I said, "I am not getting . . . I kept banging on doors, and I am not getting the answers. I am not getting the answers I need to further my education." I needed direction, and I am hearing, "No. You are too over-qualified," and "What are you doing here?"

Carlie has recently found an advisor at the community college who is willing to honor her request for assistance in enrolling in a program. She now has a cursory understanding of the process. However, she is still somewhat confused and has many questions.

Carlie: What I have decided is, before the holidays, I met with Amberlyn Rose, and she helped me redefine what I want to do, and she brought me the book, and now I have direction. I have to take these classes to go to Portland State to get this degree, so now I know exactly what I have to do, so I am just doin' 'em and checking 'em off, so that's where I am at.

Darcy: Okay, do you have any sense of time frames--your doing them and checking them off types of things? How many credits does it take to transfer to Portland State?

Carlie [rapidly responds]: I don't know. I need more information. I don't know.

Carlie declared that she could only readily remember having one positive learning experience in her entire life, and she stated that the occurrence happened in one of her classes at a community college just last year. She noted that the experience stands out for her because it challenged her belief system that she and all women were stupid.

Carlie: I took that writing class, that writing composition class.

Darcy: Which was what, about a year and a half ago?

Carlie: Yeah, about a year ago I think. I grew up with the belief system that I am stupid. [Clears throat.] I can talk about my recovery can't I?

Darcy: Yeah!
Carlie: And some of the stuff?

Darcy: Yeah. This is yours. Whatever you want to do with it. You'll have edit rights [slows speech] over it, so what goes . . .

Carlie [interjects quickly]: There is a place in the Alcoholics Anonymous book that talks about people, alcoholics, come in with an inferiority complex. It’s like they really think they are nothing, but they overcompensate with like an inferiority complex and an inflated ego.

Inferiority complex and this grandiosity, and that’s how you play your whole life. Right, so your whole life gets played like that, and that’s what I did with my education, because somewhere in my family they believed that I was the smart one, but in my gut I knew I wasn’t.

I knew that! I knew that somewhere in there women were stupid, and women didn’t know anything, and so my best learning experience was the day that I took the English class, and I got my 90, and I got an “A,” and it’s the first class I completed. Not just the class I took, the first one I completed, and I never wrote anything in my life. That was the best experience I ever had.

Darcy: You didn’t have any great learning experiences in elementary school, or middle school, or whatever you call it?

Carlie [interjects, emphatically]: No!

Darcy: Junior high?

[Carlie shakes head in the negative.]

Darcy: Nothing? So this was it?

Carlie: One of them I guess. I suppose I had . . .

[Long pause.]

Darcy: Grade school?

Carlie: I don’t know. I had more disappointment in education than I had wonderful stuff.
When I asked Carlie to describe her worst learning experience, she immediately described a situation that occurred when she was in the fifth grade. When she was midway through that academic year, her parents transferred her from a public school to a parochial school, and the move set the stage for many negative experiences that were to follow.

Carlie had always valued education, and up until the move, she had viewed herself as a good learner. However, by the time that she had reached the eighth grade, she had gone from a student who had consistently received excellent grades to one who was failing academically.

She had learned to equate education with embarrassment and frustration. Further, she had internalized her parents’ stereotypical view of women as being stupid, powerless, inferior beings who did not deserve educations and who should sacrifice themselves to make sure that their men were educated. Early on, she had determined that women grew up to live unhappy, miserable existences in which they were disrespected.

At the same time, she had come to believe that men were smart, that they were powerful, that they were superior to women, and that they deserved to be educated. Further, her experience of men was that they had the money, the respect, and the fun.

During this period of her life, Carlie lacked anyone outside of herself who was supportive of her academic aspirations or who provided her with a strong female role model. In retrospect, she now believes that her educational experience might have been different if she had had even one person who would have believed in her or who would have provided her with direction.

However, in spite of lacking support from her family or community, she was able to draw upon her own internal protective factors and maintain her motivation to achieve. In this regard, she made the connection between achieving a higher level of education and gaining equality.

Carlie: My worst learning experience was with the nun that said I couldn’t come up with the answer. I was very shy. I got transferred to a new school. I was very shy, and the nun looked at me and
said--because I couldn’t come up with an answer, and I was, you know, holding back because this was a new group, and they called it something else, and I called it something else, whatever it was that she was talking about, and I didn’t know that I knew--and she made a remark, “What did they teach you in that place?” I mean, she used humor, and it embarrassed me.

Darcy: Oh. How old were you?

Carlie: Eighth grade.

Darcy: Eighth grade?

Carlie: Um hum. [Begins speaking rapidly.] Brand new school--came from a public school getting straight “A’s.” Excellent student. Fifth grade! Coming out of straight “A’s” and then just blocking in.

Darcy: So wait a minute, you were in . . . ? This happened in fifth grade or in eighth grade?

Carlie: Yes, in fifth grade. Excuse me. I moved from public school to parochial school in fifth grade, mid-year. It was a big transition for me. Big impact. Dad had great expectations that I was going to be this great student, and his expectations of being taught by nuns in parochial school, private schools, expensive schools, that that was his experience, so that was . . .

Darcy [interjects]: Okay, so your family had evidence that you were a good student, because you talked earlier that they had a belief about you that you hadn’t internalized . . .

Carlie [interjects]: My mother had the belief.

Darcy: Your mother had the belief.

Carlie: My father had a demeaning attitude, [pause] and he was never there.

Darcy: Demeaning about you?

Carlie [quickly inserts]: Women!

Darcy: And education?

Carlie: Right.
Darcy: Women in general?

Carlie: Right. Women were the wives. Women could—they could cook, and they could do hair, and they were cocktail waitresses in those days, and they were at-home parents, and Mom, [pause] Mom believed that you put your men through school. If men need to go, men go through school, and you support your man, and, so Mom's belief was women were stupid as well because that's the man she was with.

Darcy: Right.

Carlie: Who believed the same thing, so she, therefore, never finished school either.

Darcy: So did you ever...? I mean you had some evidence—you had some grades that were good...

Carlie: But if you are six years old, or eight years old, and you're the smartest one in the family, or led to believe that because you have “A’s” and because everything I did at home. I used to play school in my room. I would line up my stuffed animals, and I would teach them school.

Darcy: So you have always had a value on education?

Carlie: Um hum.

Darcy: Even back to your play?

Carlie: Um hum.

Darcy: So when was it that you became conscious that you didn’t see yourself as successful in school? I mean...

Carlie: Eighth, ninth grade.

Darcy: So then you went, “Okay. I am a...?” What did you say? What were some of the messages?

Carlie: “That I am really not getting it. I am really not cutting it. This is really too hard. Maybe, maybe I wasn’t a good student. Maybe that it was just a dumb little country school,” and “maybe I didn’t know anything,” and “maybe they weren’t teaching us the right stuff,” and “maybe this is too fast. This is the city,” and, so I
did whatever the city did, and "I got to get by. I got to survive," so I did what I knew how to do.

[Long pause.]

Darcy: In spite of all voices and the expectations and your family, did you have any desire for yourself at that time that . . . ?

Carlie: Yep.

Darcy: That, "I don't care what they say, I am going to do . . . " What? I mean . . .

Carlie: Um. I think that I probably didn't have—if the right person had come along and said, "You know, you can be somebody. You know, you could be a corporate lawyer." I know if someone would have come and told me that, I could have done it, but the belief system of the culture at the time and the environment was, "Oh that'd be great. You go get a nice trade."

My father said, "You always get a trade. Yes, you can go to college, but you get a trade." You know? And what he told me—that's where it came from! What he told me was, "Even in war time, women get—people have to have two things," and the two things were food and beauty products, so I became a hairdresser, and I worked as a waitress, and somewhere I got that. Somewhere in there I locked into, "Oh, nylons and hair."

Darcy: Okay—that I will always be able to eat if I can provide something in that avenue.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: What's interesting is the question about learning and messages. Part of what you threw out was, "Dad wasn't there."

Carlie: He wasn't.

Darcy: But somehow, because I have heard you talk about him before . . .

Carlie [inserts]: Right.

Darcy: I mean he had a profound impact . . .

Carlie: Yes, he did.
Darcy: His absence more than his presence.

Carlie: He was very smart.

Darcy: How did you know he was smart?

Carlie: Somebody told me.

Darcy: Somebody told you.

Carlie: And Mom put him through college.

Darcy: Your mom put your dad through college?

Carlie: Right, and I saw the picture. There’s a picture of him, and he is sitting up in a bank. I have no idea what he did, but this is my visual of what men are. He was sitting in a chair. You know those big leather chairs in a bank?

Darcy: Yeah.

Carlie: And he had a hand full of money fanned out because he was counting the money. He sat there with a handful of money, and I thought, “Well, men have power.”

Darcy: Um hmm. Men have power.

Carlie: Men have power, and so what I decided was women were stupid, women had no power, and women stayed home, and they weren’t any fun either. Men had money because I always saw him with big bankrolls. That first visual was the picture.

Darcy: Literally.

Carlie: Literally the picture, and then he would come home with a big bankroll.

Darcy: Wow.

Carlie: Because he was a car salesman, and he had . . .

Darcy [interjects]: Oh, interesting!

Carlie: This money hadn’t gone to the bank yet, so you know, and so my vision was men had money, and they had power, and they had fun, and they smelled good by the way--because he was a
businessman, and he wore suits, and he looked nice and dressed nice.

[Long pause.]

Carlie: So my vision of women was--and men did not respect women at all. Women were not respected. What I did define for myself was that whatever I got to do, I got to be their equal.

Darcy: Now where did you come up with that?

Carlie: I don’t know. I just knew that they were having the fun, the power, and the money, and they smelled good, and they dressed nice, and they weren’t miserable. That’s all I knew, and I had seen my mom [chuckles] who was slaving over this stuff. I mean she would take in ironing and all of this stuff, and she would be home all of the time, and she wasn’t happy. I didn’t want that, so [pause] men were more fun and women weren’t, so I wanted to be more like men, so obviously I am a girl, so what am I going to do? I am going to be their equal.

[Long pause.]

Darcy: And, so somehow in there you made a connection between education and pulling yourself up to be an equal.

Carlie: Yep! Yep!

Carlie’s sophomore year in high school was another major transition point for her. It was the year that her father died, and it was the year that she dropped out of school. By the time that she had reached that point in her life, her self-esteem was low, and her feelings about herself were shame-based.

Further, she had lost all respect for her mother, and she was out of her mother’s control. In this regard, she states that her mother had tried to talk her out of quitting school, but that she had rejected her mother’s opinion about the matter because her mother had quit school in the ninth grade and was working in a factory making minimum wage.

It was during this segment of the interview that Carlie identifies the fact that her father had drunk alcoholicly and that she had grown up in a chaotic, dysfunctional family in which nothing had been as it had seemed. In this regard, she
now believes that her mother had been the primary provider for the family and that she had been powerless to do anything other than what she had done to manage the situation.

Darcy: Why did you--what happened that you dropped out of school when you did? Is that what you said you did? You dropped out somewhere in your sophomore year. Is that correct?

Carlie: Yes, I didn’t do very well in parochial school; I had a roadblock. I wasn’t a good girl, and I had a distorted vision of Catholicism and Christianity, and my belief was kind of twisted. [Prolonged pause.] I couldn’t measure up... I was shame based, and I didn’t have anything good enough. I wasn’t good enough, and I could never be good enough, and I don’t know what happened, but I wasn’t good enough.

Darcy: So how did you decide you were done? How did you decide that you would leave school?

Carlie: Well, a crisis happened, and what happened was that Dad died. He got real sick. He got sick, and he died from cardiac arrest, and it happened quick. Like right now, so I had no more--I had no more power in my life. No one was going to make me do anything because I role modeled after Dad who really had the power, and Mom really didn’t have control over me anymore than she had over Dad because it was obvious that that was my view of women even though I was one. It didn’t matter. I didn’t have any respect for her. She was certainly not going to control my life, so I did what I wanted to do at that point, and this wasn’t it.

Darcy: Um hum, so did she resist you dropping out of school?

Carlie: Yes. Absolutely.

Darcy: But you had no respect because women have women’s voices...

Carlie [speaking as though she was addressing her mother]: “What do you know? You didn’t even finish eighth grade. What do you know?”

Darcy: Your mom didn’t finish?

Carlie: Ninth grade maybe. “What do you know? You are working for two dollars and 45 cents in this factory.” I had no respect. No
respect for her at all. That’s horrible. I feel bad. Because you know who she is? She was the one who provided. She was the sole provider. I didn’t know that until years later.

Darcy: So everybody was living a charade.

Carlie: Every [pause] single [pause] one. [Speech becomes rapid.] Dad was an alcoholic; Mom was the queen enabler and had no tools to get out. [Speech slows.] Had no tools and really wanted out. Really wanted out, just didn’t know how to get out.

Carlie’s experience in the college class where she was awarded an “A” had a profound impact on how she views herself as a learner today. By working hard in that class and by truly believing that she earned the grade, she now views herself as smart and capable of learning. At the same time, her opinion about herself as a learner has its roots both negatively and positively in her mother’s role modeling.

Darcy [laughs]: Okay, so how do you feel about your self as a learner now?

Carlie: I am smart.

Darcy: And how do you know that?

Carlie [responds in a child-like voice and laughs]: Cause I got an “A.”

Darcy: So the one “A” says, “Oh, I am smart . . .?”

[Both laugh.]

Carlie: I am so capable of learning. I didn’t know. I didn’t, I didn’t know. People who made those choices that I made weren’t smart people, and, ultimately, there was a point in time where I thought I ended up just like my mom, and that’s what I didn’t want to be. I worked so hard not to be my mom.

Darcy: What was the evidence at that time that you were like your mom?

Carlie: Relationships.

Darcy: Oh, relationships.
Carlie: I didn’t want to be her?

Darcy: You said you noticed that you were just like my [corrects self], your mom.

Carlie: A relationship. I was in a relationship, a marriage that was so destructive. It was so horrible, and I was trapped, and it was like I didn’t have any skill to get out, and he kept drinking and using and relapsing and going back out, and I would be sitting there thinking, “Oh, all I can do is hair to supplement the family.”

I was raising a daughter, and I was trying to make it, and, [long pause] and I went, “Oh my God! The very thing I didn’t want to be, I am. I am the co-dependent, queen enabler, and then one day, I got out. I said, “I may be all that, but I ain’t staying to find out how it ends.”

So, I got my G.E.D, and then I went for my certification, and I worked two jobs, and I did it so I could support myself and my daughter, and I put out the money for the G.E.D., and I just got up every morning, and I went to those classes, and I made it, and I did it, and here I am.

Darcy: What kept you going? I mean, how did you keep going? I mean obviously, the fatigue and all those things that... I mean obviously...

Carlie [interjects]: I could not die like that. I could not die like that! I did not. I can’t leave this earth without what I need, [laughs] and what I need is not to... I had to break the family cycle. I could not be my family. I am not that woman. I am smart. I have intelligence. I am capable. I just got to get the opportunity. I just got to go take it when it is there.

Darcy: So you have never given up on yourself once you figured out what you needed and what you wanted? You have never given up on yourself?

Carlie: My mom gave me that, actually. It is kind of contradicting, but you know what? She had perseverance, and if I could just take that thing that she had, you know, that kept her down, and turn it around and make it a plus for me... The perseverance is working out great.
Darcy: Yeah, to take all the tools that are there and use them wherever they fit.

Carlie: Right.

[Extended pause.]

Darcy: So it was that one class, that one instructor . . . ?

Carlie: It wasn’t the “A.” It was finding out that he was a tough instructor and that he does not grade high, and then, he didn’t just give me a grade because he felt sorry for me because I was a woman, or because I was so old coming into school and coming into college, and he didn’t feel bad that I was the oldest person, and I didn’t con him, and he didn’t feel sorry for me. I made the grade because I made the grade, and he is a tough teacher, so my work was good. That was the coolest thing about it.

Carlie declared that the first time that she experienced support for her educational aspirations was when she was an adult and had gone into treatment for her drug addiction. She had a male counselor there who saw that she had dropped out of school, so he made educational completion a goal on her treatment plan.

She later experienced support, role modeling, and mentoring from women in the recovering community. By having strong, healthy women role models and supporters in her adulthood, Carlie has learned to respect and value women and to see herself as equal to men and worthy of an education.

Darcy: So, who did you talk to along the way, if anybody, or I mean, was it always just within you? Did anybody encourage you beside yourself, or did anybody else believe in you?

Carlie: Not until I got into recovery. In 1985, I met a counselor, and he used to come to town, and I would miss my appointments, and I was horrible. I was the worst client anybody would ever hope to have, and that guy said, “Okay. Here is your treatment plan,” and I didn’t even know it was a treatment plan.

I had to get legal. I had to get my driver’s license, find out what that was about. I had to go to meetings, and I had to get my G.E.D. Oh yeah, and I had to get divorced because I was married for a
long time and just kind of left. I didn’t get a divorce; I just was married for 12 years.

And on the treatment plan was, “Get your G.E.D.” It was the last thing I did, and the cool thing is that later I got to see him in the world, you know. As I was growing up in my recovery, he was still growing in his career and his education, and he came over to Missouri right after I got my G.E.D. because he was celebrating his—he got his masters, and I told him I got my G.E.D. and that I was going on, and he said, “Okay. I can go back and close your file. Now it is complete.”

[Both laugh.]

Carlie: I said, “Yeah!” And he was really—he told me I could do it. He told me things about being a woman that I never knew from anywhere that I was supposed to hear it. He told me that I could be anybody I wanted to be. I just had to figure out who I wanted to be, and I could never—I never had to give credit to men anymore if I didn’t want to. I could take the credit for myself.

Darcy: So that is kind of an interesting thing. That was a male counselor and a male instructor, wasn’t it?

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: So where have you gotten, if at all, any reinforcement from women as toward your goals?

Carlie: Do I need enforcement from women? Is that what you are saying?

Darcy: No. The question is, “Have you had it at all?”

Carlie: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah! Oh my gosh! I have got a mentorship of women in the fellowship because I come in, and my goal was to get clean, but my belief system around women was based on my mom, and what my father gave us, and what her actions were, and what the culture thought of women at the time, which wasn’t very much, and what I perceived it as, so when I met these women, and they told me, “No. You have to go work with women.” It was like, “Get out of here! Women are stupid! They don’t know!” And the truth of it is, they know me better than anybody because we are women, and so I learned how to develop a sisterhood, a motherhood.
I learned how to be a best friend. I learned how the women that were never in my family are in this fellowship. They became my family. They mothered me. They sistered me. They were my mirror. My sponsor went to school [laughs] and never finished high school. She went to school and became this big mucky muck in--I don’t know, art design or something, and she is like the head of this company now, and you know, we all went to college with her, and we saw her walk across the stage, and she had this cute little cap on, and I went, “Hmm.” You know? And then I saw another person do it, and they walked across the stage, and they had that cap and that gown on, and I went, “Oh!”

And women rocked me, and cried with me, and cradled me, and babyed me, and I didn’t have to be strong, and they told me that my strength was in my vulnerability, and my ability... I am going to bawl. [Tears well up in her eyes.] [Long pause.]

[Begins speaking through slight sobs] It’s everything I give the women today. Everything I try to give them today. [Long pause.] [Clears throat.] The coolest part about my life was the women in it, that I can be equal.

In the following passages, Carlie delves into some of the more painful experiences of her life that could have destroyed a less resilient person. It is though an understanding of the following events that I truly learned how to view risk and adversity from a strengths perspective.

Darcy: There was a long time there where you could have lost who you were and never come back, because people do that and never come back.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy [continues]: Or die, and never come back.

Carlie [inserts]: Right.

Darcy [continues]: But somehow that little candle, or that little spark was sustained, and I am wondering what that was. I mean you truly never gave up on yourself. I mean, no matter how dark it got . . .

Carlie [interjects]: And it got real dark.
Darcy: Because you came out on the other end of the tunnel. You know?

Carlie: But my belief system was that I couldn’t end up like my mom. I couldn’t be weak. I had to be strong, and I gotta win--gotta win. You can’t get me down. I gotta win. I am a survivor. I don’t know if that answered your . . .?

Darcy: Yeah. I think so. So, “You can’t get me down. I am a survivor,” so you already knew that concept and had applied it to yourself, that you had survived some things--bigger things than that.

[Long pause.]

Carlie: I can’t believe I just told you all that.

[Both laugh.]

Carlie [clears throat then immediately continues]: I was put in an insane asylum for a year and a half after that. My dad died. Not after that, before that. I was 15 years old--17 years old. I’m going to tell you this. I don’t believe that I am telling you this. Okay?

I was 17 years old when I quit school. I had no direction, and I had nobody to raise me because my mother was weak, so I ran the streets until I couldn’t run the streets any more, and I ran and did many gang crime kinds of stuff. You know, just drinking, curfew kinds of stuff and just never went back to school. [Long Pause.]

They thought that I was suicidal, [pause] and I probably was, and at age 16, my mom had enough . . . Well, I was depressed, so she took me to these doctors because I was the child that it is okay if you are sick, but it is not okay if you are bad. “You’re not the bad child; you’re the smart child. You’re your father’s child,” so that was the belief system I grew up in. “You’re, [pause] the other kids, they’re bad kids. You’re the good child. You’re just sick.”

So I became the sick one, and they believed that if they took me to a psychiatrist, everything would be all right. I was an addict. That’s all that was wrong with me. I mean that was evident to me at the time. I was an addict, and I medicated, so for a year and a half. I was in this hospital, which was a state hospital. Actually, what happened is I went in for curfew--the detention home, 13 times in the month of October.
[Speaking rapidly.] The police knew me by name. They were going to take me—a young woman hung herself in this detention center, and I was in the room right across from her, and I saw her hanging, and they came in to cut her down, and I’m still detoxing, and I came-to seeing this, and I flipped. I just lost my dad.

I had been out on a run. I had been drinking alcohol. I’m in detox. They got me down for 24 hours, and I’m detoxing, and everything I felt, my grief that I wasn’t allowed to feel, my nothing, everything [pause] is gone, and now I’m experiencing this suicide. I had never seen anything like that in my life.

Darcy: No kidding!

Carlie: And they are taking this little gal out and her bag, so I tear up the bedroom. I am in a cell, and I tear it up. [Begins laughing, pretending she is hollering.] “Let me out. I need someone to talk to me!”

[Both laugh.]

Carlie: They decide, “Oh, no. We’re not going to let this happen,” so they hauled me off in chains to the psychiatric unit. A year and a half later I get out on Christmas Eve. [Long pause.] I was gang raped.

Darcy: While you were in there, or when you got out?

Carlie: The day I got out.

Darcy: Oh, man.

Carlie: My mother wouldn’t let me come home because she didn’t think she could control me. Are you ready for this whole story? I, [laughs] so now they believe I’m nuts, [pause] and I’m bad, [pause] and it’s better to be sick than it is to be bad, but I hung out with bad people all of the time, just proving how bad I was. It was okay for me to be sick, but not bad. The other siblings did go to farms and detentions, and now I had been defiled.

I had been in this hospital for a year and a half, clear through adolescence, and I would be playing cards with this gal, and she will get up to go to the bathroom, and, you know, she don’t come back, so I go down the hall, and I say, “Have you seen so and so?” All of a sudden, she came walking down the hall, and her arms are slashed from the top all the way down.
And then I see psychosis when these little girls, who are just brain damaged, just acting out, having these horrible, horrible fits, and they were still doing shock treatment, and people would kind of flip out and be psychotic, and they would take them out, and they would be coming back all mellow picking Cheerios out of their pockets and stuff. You know, so that was my adolescence, [pause] and they tried to get me to go to school in there. Can you believe that? This crazy lady used to come in and try to teach me things!

[Both laugh.]

Carlie: So I had a little slant on my education. Okay, Darcy? Okay?

Darcy: Yeah. No kidding. No kidding! Okay. Well, yes. That would be a slant on education.

In the final portion of this interview, Carlie and I switch to a less emotionally charged topic. In this segment, Carlie explains her intentions about remaining in the addiction treatment field, and once again, the essence of her resilient spirit shines through as her closing statement reflects her continuing motivation to achieve.

Darcy: Okay. Do you plan to stay in the addiction treatment field? That’s the last question.

Carlie: I do, but I think my asset is, I think the asset in expanding on this field is into corrections because of the prison system and where people--my story that I just gave you. We end up in those places. People not knowing we’ve been addicts since we were kids.

Darcy: Right. Not understanding the true picture, what they’re seeing.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: It is not what it appears to be.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: There is something beneath the surface.
Carlie: “If you have done a crime for PCS, well, don’t you think I want to come in there and work with you?” You know, “I am sorry you got there and we didn’t catch it when you were seven.” You know, “But, now we have you here, and you got to do this prison time, and rather than put you back out into the world, in the environment to reoffend, why don’t we give you some treatment here?” So, I want to know as much about that, addiction, as I do the criminality. For successful releases . . .

Darcy: Okay, so it doesn’t matter who your employer is, essentially. You plan to treat addicted people.

Carlie: You bet.

Darcy: So you see the value of getting a degree?

Carlie: You bet.

Darcy: And fitting into that, options and opportunities. It sounds like it would open doors for you.

Carlie: Absolutely. I have personal experience in addiction. I know what works. I have--I am a woman. I know the stuff that--I know the things that will kill us as women. I know what women need. I believe in also treating the men who are sleeping with the women, having their babies. You know? Being the fathers of their children, and the women are having their babies. It doesn’t matter who I work with, women or men. You know? It’s families ultimately, and it’s the offspring, and it’s the me and the you, and our grand children, and our children.

Researcher’s Reflections on Carlie Newmar’s First Interview

While I was interviewing Carlie, I was aware that her story was having an impact on me. However, it wasn’t until I began writing her chapter and began re-reading my field notes and my reflexive journal that I discovered what a profound encounter I had experienced.

In this regard, I was amazed to discover it wasn’t what I had written that was the most telling; it was what I had not written. I can remember feeling deeply moved by her story while she was telling it and having a strong sense of connection
to her after it was over. In fact, I ruminated on her story for weeks, and I could not
distance myself from its content or my thoughts on the matter.

Yet, in reading my notes, I found that they had belied my experience. They
were brief, detached, and unemotional. In fact, it was only after the final interview
that I provided an in-depth review of my experience during the first meeting.

In trying to analyze why I hadn't provided a detailed description of my
experience immediately following the interview, I discovered that I had
unexpectedly related to Carlie in more ways than I could have imagined at the
inception of the study. As such, I had apparently needed extra time to process my
own thoughts and feelings before I could commit them to paper.

In fact, I was still processing my thoughts and emotions about the matter
when I wrote the draft that I presented at my Defense. In that draft, I wrote
extensively about several aspects of my childhood that had paralleled some of the
elements of Carlie’s childhood. In so doing, the effect was initially cathartic and
freeing for me, but as I continued to reflect on the process, it occurred to me that the
participants of the study have shared their stories anonymously and that I, as the
researcher, have not had the same protection.

As such, to tell my story in-depth would be to tell my family’s story
With that understanding, I have decided to limit my process comments about my
reflections on Carlie’s first interview to those in the above paragraphs.

Carlie Newmar’s Second Interview

Carlie chose her place of employment for our second interview. We met in
her office on February 22, 2001. The location offered a sense of quietude and
privacy that was missing from the first interview setting.

Her office was situated in the back of the building, and the room’s two long
narrow windows faced a quiet grassy courtyard that was punctuated by two massive
oak trees. A tone of relaxation rounded out the stage as the final rays of the day
crept in and cast a warm amber hue over the room and us.
Carlie had furnished her office with a large office desk and a swivel office chair for herself; several straight-backed chairs for visitors; a couple of file cabinets; a bookcase; and an assortment of professional, text, and self-help books. Her desk was covered with stacks of client’s files and business papers. The space was also decorated with pictures and ceramic figurines of elephants, which are her favorite animals.

The building was nearly empty at the time that we met, and it slowly finished vacating over the course of the nearly hour and a half interview. We could hear the occasional muffled voices of staff and clients in the hallway as they left the building.

Carlie sat at her desk, and I sat across from her in one of the visitor’s chair. Since the room was large, we sat farther across from each other during the second interview than we had during the one in the restaurant. However, the arrangement still retained an ambiance of connection and intimacy.

Carlie began the interview by outlining some insights that she has gained about herself by participating in the study. She discovered that she still has many unresolved issues regarding her mother and her daughter and that those issues are emotionally charged and that they have acted as barriers to her fully pursing her academic goals.

Carlie: So, I did this journal on our interview and my responses, thoughts, and feelings. Some things have been coming up for me. I have been able to get a stronger sense of who I am becoming, and it is very exciting to imagine and watch that unfold.

Darcy: You started to say something about emotions that came up for you.

Carlie: Right, right. It was incredible for me to read the interview paper—and how I think and what was exciting and what was still disturbing in my life, and, you know, I don’t even talk like that [referring to her speech pattern]. It’s real difficult to have a free-flow—I don’t have a free-flow solid thought or speech pattern when it comes to some of those really hard places in my life, and a lot of it was around my family and has a lot to do with education and how that continues to block me today. Right down to the thoughts about, you know, my mom, and I’m too uppity, and who
do I think I am, and--it’s incredible. I mean it’s incredible what
sticks with you. Like you were saying, it’s just incredible--at ten
years old, or today. I just want to get through the days. I just want
to finish school.

Darcy: Well, one of the things that you mentioned in the kitchen
there was that you didn’t take a class this term.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: You thought that maybe that was something to do
with--your, you know, your family type of stuff that’s going on,
and . . .

Carlie: Um hum. My mom had lived with me this summer for five
weeks. She moved in; I had been waiting five years for her to
come. She showed up, and that’s the day, you know, the time span
that--I just want her to be proud of me. You know? I have done all
of these things. I think I have got it. You know?

I mean, “Look Mom, I am not who I was. Look, look--you can
come to my home,” and, you know, “I am not an addict. I am not
the addict you knew. I am not the baby you have to take care of. I
am not the kid who turned out bad. I did all right.” [Long pause.] I
end up being uppity and too much for them and too above them,
too far ahead. It was just real disturbing to me, “and I just want to
be your kid. I just want you to be proud of me. Can’t I just be your
daughter?” So I think I had a hard time with going back to school
sort of behind that.

[Long sigh.] It’s not anybody’s fault. It’s my block. I got that
pretty clear. It’s, you know, even with my daughter, my issues with
my daughter--you know, you’re doing this in your life. You’re
letting go of Mom. Boy, you know, I waited a long time to be
here--a long time--to be able to do this stuff, to be able to go to
school, to be able to get an education, to feel [pause] freedom.
There is a sense of freedom of being a single woman without--with
having adult children, beginning to go to school now just for you,
and to do that.

[Long pause.]

Darcy: So this, this is still emotional for you.

Carlie: It is real emotional.
Darcy: It is amazing how it’s all tied together.

Carlie: Yeah. I mean my God--you know?

Over the course of the years, Carlie has never lost sight of her professional and academic goals, and even though she has never been enrolled in an academic program, she has continued to seek out learning opportunities. In this regard, her motivation to achieve her CADC was so high that she sought out educational mentors and developed her own independent learning practices to prepare for and to pass the CADC examination. She passed the test in approximately 15 months. This point is especially telling about her level of motivation in that it takes the average applicant two years of formal education to accomplish the same goal.

Darcy: You got your CADC, and that assumes that you have some level of education? Was that through--you didn’t go through college classes and take that. Where did you get that?

Carlie: I got that through a mentorship in the hospital that I worked in in Mississippi. I had great nurses, doctors, addictionologists, nurses who were willing to teach us. I would sit in on every class that they did. Every group they did, I would sit in and just soak it all in. I gleaned every bit of it and then some, and life experience and the counseling magazine in the kitchen--you know? I would get all those books and read them. I would read DSM IV’s. You know--DSM III’s!

Darcy: Right. Well, that is pretty amazing though because to get through that--they assume that, to get your CADC, that’s about a two year program in some places, and you were able to do that pretty much on your own. That speaks volumes just for your, your desire to learn . . .

Carlie [interjects]: Right.

Darcy: And to move forward even though you didn’t get into the formal educational system, so what’s happening?

Carlie: It’s just real good. It’s just a good feeling. They think I’m smart.

Darcy: Yeah. I believe you.
Carlie: They think I’m smart. I didn’t think you can do what I did. I don’t think just anybody can do what I did, and it’s like water off a duck. You know? I don’t think it’s easy for people to come in from the fellowship or Alcoholics Anonymous, getting clean, working in a place and just absorb what I absorbed. They think I’m smart. [Tears up.]

Darcy: Um hum, so what are the tears about? What’s that?

Carlie [Long pause, continues to be tearful]: Because I did know what theories meant, and I did know, because I read every book. The night--this is how I passed the test--the night before the test, there was an extra Counselor magazine in the kitchen, and I just grabbed it up because it had, it had the question on--I can’t think of the word--minorities, and how you treat minorities and all of that. I had no idea that was a part of the test. I knew all about pharmacology and theories and what I would do in a group--counseling skills and all that, and I just read the whole book right there and turned on a lighthearted, you know, movie. Cartoon kind of movie--watched it with my daughter, and went to sleep. Got up and passed the test. That’s what happened. That’s how--I mean, I know I did a lot more work, but that book was--things were provided for me, and I always wanted to read it, and I knew I hadn’t read anything about minorities, or women, and Latinos, and any of that, and that’s how I passed that test because that was on that test.

Darcy: Wow, so you have a lot of self-determination, and, you know, the self-drive. I am thinking of the phrase--it’s eluding me, but I mean some of that ability to get a goal and stay on it, and, you know, all you had was you to keep you reading books and sitting in and asking, and, you know, and them letting you in, but you were still looking for it. You had that drive within you to claim that for yourself. That’s pretty amazing--two years worth, essentially.

Carlie: I don’t know--and I did it in a year. [Clears throat.] I had never been in the field before. I had never been in the field before--15 months, something like that.

While Carlie has maintained a sense of educational purpose, and she has helped other members of her family in their educational endeavors, her family has either offered her no support at all, or they have actively discouraged her academic aspirations.
Darcy: Why did you decide to—you made it a special point—you put a lot of emphasis on the fact that you were 40. You said, “Yes. It is significant to me because to have the ability to return at that age is very unexpected for my family values.”

Carlie: Right. I actually had a young man that I helped raise from the time that he was 15 years old. I still contact him. He’s probably 30. No, he’s probably 40 now. I can’t remember. Anyway, he came into our lives, and I was like a step-mom, or a foster sister, or something. I was to help raising him, and he knew me pretty well, and I knew him.

And I helped in an alternative education program ‘cause he was really struggling, and he wasn’t going to school, so I said, “That’s okay. You’re going to be a success in another way. That’s all.” You know?

“Maybe you learn different. You know the numbers,” so when I called him and talked with him about going back to school, he said, “You’re going back to school? You’re in college?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Aren’t you a little old to be doing that?”

I thought, “Well, isn’t that interesting? I thought I taught you different.” [Laughs.] You know, I thought, “Him, too?” [Laughs again.] You know? Because I think that’s the consensus, “You’re going back to school? What are you doing that for?” Because I have a career already?

Carlie may have the certification and a job in the addiction treatment field, but she still desires a higher education. As such, she has been trying to enroll in one academic program or another for at least four years. However, until recently she has only experienced misunderstanding and discouragement from the academic community.

Darcy: You tried to apply for school, and they went, “You don’t need this. Why are you here?”

Carlie [interjects speaking for the school]: “You already did that. You already did the CADC. You’re already . . .” So I kind of got, “Well, now what do you want me to do? I want to be a student!”

Darcy [speaks for her]: Right. “I want to do more.”
Carlie: Yeah.

Darcy: "This isn’t the end of my trail."

Carlie: No!

Darcy [continues the thought]: And, "Why are you saying this?"

Carlie [continues]: “Don’t you want my money? What’s the matter with you?” [Laughs.]

Darcy: Yeah. That’s—that’s interesting that you, you know—you knocked on the doors where people usually are salivating over students . . .

Carlie [interjects]: I know! I know! Well, what I thought was that I wanted to go take--because I felt like I took the CADC, but I didn’t know what I knew.

Darcy: Right. You wanted validation with the degree or some sort of formal blessing.

Carlie: Right, and, so, I feel like I came in backwards, but that’s okay. I still--what’s wrong with me going to school? What’s wrong with me getting a degree?

Darcy: Right, at 40, or 45, or 60?

Carlie: Who cares? Who cares if I have a CADC? Well, maybe it would be a conflict for their group. I am thinking--later--because I already know some stuff. I am already in the field, so maybe that would be a conflict for teachers and students. I don’t know.

Darcy: Yeah, that’s the point. You felt shut down, and you had to go away wondering what made you so different that you couldn’t go in even though you were there, and you had your money, and you were ready.

Carlie: Right, and I was. I have been trying to do this for quite a few years since I have been back.

Darcy: Right. How many years do you think you have you been trying to do it? What would that be?

Carlie: I have been here two years, so I’d say four years. I’d say four years because I had more time on my hands when I was just
working in Blaine, so I was more open to go to school, and looking for grants and all that.

At the time of the second interview, Carlie had an appointment to meet with academic advisor who was willing to honor her desire for a degree and to help her with the admissions procedures at one of the community colleges. However, she is still confused about where she is in the process or even what words to use to get her needs met.

Darcy: You’ve heard a lot of that--a lot of the discouragement. I mean you had--you said that you had gone to Blue Ridge or wherever it was.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: Right. You know, or do you know that probably Blue Ridge has--you can get in and find out how many credit hours you have because we’re talking about where you are in this process.

Carlie: Right, and I don’t know, and I don’t even know what to ask about what I am asking for.

It is in this second interview that Carlie discloses that she exchanged a physically abusive first relationship for an alcoholic relationship in which she married the man and resumed a dysfunctional life style. Hidden in her narrative about the dysfunction is her explanation that she was attracted to her husband because he was smart and because he recognized her intellect, which was something that no one else had done in a long time.

Darcy [resumes quoting from the transcript]: He was fine. We had good times, and he saved me from a really abusive relationship because I told him to.”

Carlie: Uh hum.

Darcy: [Laughs.] That’s funny!

Carlie: Well, he saved me. He married me.

Darcy: Oh, now you didn’t say that. Did you, before?
Carlie: That he was my husband?

Darcy: You didn’t say that.

Carlie: He married me.

Darcy: Ah, you didn’t say that.

Carlie: I was in a very, very abusive relationship.

Darcy: Right. That part you said.

Carlie: And he was my friend. He was a cool guy. He came along and he was smart. He was so smart; I admired him because here is this really smart guy and really fun and really humorous, and I loved humor anyway, and oh, God, he was just so much fun, and he thought I was bright. He thought I was smart and pretty, and he rescued me, and he was my friend, so I said, “Yeah, you should marry me.”

Darcy: And he did?

Carlie: Yeah. Sounds like a good idea.

Darcy: Okay. What happened with him?

Carlie: He was an alcoholic in the making. However, I didn’t know that. You know, it’s like two sick people get together; the other one thinks the other one is the real healthy one. I think that’s how it was.

Darcy: And you think that maybe it will rub off on you, but it doesn’t work that way [laughs].

Carlie: Yeah, neither one of us was very healthy [chuckles].

As with other resilient people, Carlie is a reflective person. As such, she has found her participation in the research project to be inspiring, and her reflections on her life have added to her determination and sense of urgency about completing her education.

Darcy: Well, you know, having thought back over this now—you’ve had several weeks and little journaling on the thing--any
revelations for you that—any connections that you can come up with between your past and this? What do you make of it?

Carlie: It's not too late, but I can't afford to waste time. The other piece is—I have regrets. I have regrets that I didn't start sooner. That's the only regret that I ever had. I wish I would have started this sooner. I am very, very, very fortunate woman to be sitting here in this office, in this job with my feet kicked up and interviewing with you. I am very, very fortunate and very grateful because I have a hell of a story, and the chances of me getting right here, right now, were pretty slim, and I still have barriers and obstacles in my life, but I have got to get over them. I just gotta get over there and walk through...

This has been inspiring for me to be able to go back and review what's happened, where I came from, you know, what my plans are, what I would like to do, and how I am going to get there. It is making me think, "How am I going to get there? How am I really going to get there? What does she mean when she keeps asking me, 'Do you have any idea in terms of where you are right now?' I'm like, "No. What does that even mean that she asked me that question?" You know?

Darcy: Do you know what it means?

Carlie: I just want it—I don't even know that I can't do it, so I don't want to know. I just want to go and say, "Look, I need this degree, and I need it by this—five o'clock next Friday. Can I do that, and where do I sign up for the test? And what do I need to study, so I'll go do it?"

Carlie is a self-directed learner, as such, she has adapted her work environment into one in which she finds opportunities for learning in the most routine of situations. Further, when she discovers deficits in her knowledge, she uses her adaptive problem solving skills to find peers who are willing to share their knowledge with her.

Carlie: I love to write.

Darcy: Yeah. You do, and I mean it's obvious that you're a self-motivated learner. You know, that you can do that in spite of everything. You've done that. You've kind of gone away in the dark and taught yourself, which is absolutely phenomenal.
Carlie: And how much more would I know—that's the, that's the piece. What I learned and where it was reaffirmed for me. How much more would I have know right now had I just done it with self and been able to go to college...

Darcy [interjects]: In a formal institution.

Carlie: [Sighs] How much more is out there? I mean—I just get so excited. I went to a dumb little lunch lecture for the wellness committee yesterday, you know. Who would think that I would show up at this thing, right? There was a word. There was a new word that I learned, and you know me and my new word things. I'm like, "What's that!" I mean I didn't hear anything from the guy's lecture but that I think. I mean, you know. Of course, I had to write it down. It was something like "efficacious."

Darcy: Oh. Yeah. That is a good word.

Carlie: Effaciate? Efficacious? It means, works if you take it. E-F-F. I'm going to have to look it up in the dictionary.

Darcy: So you see, that's the thing I am referring to about with you. You're like a natural born learner. You find learning opportunities wherever you go. Just like that; you learned a new word when you least expected it.

Carlie: In a wellness committee.

Darcy: [Laughs.] Yeah. You were there for something totally different.

Carlie: It was about physical education and the opposite versus physical activity. I didn't know there was a difference. I know now.

Darcy: Yeah, but see, you came away with going, "I had a learning experience!" And I am wondering how many other people did yesterday. How many people came away going, "Hey, I just learned something that nobody intended for me to learn, but I've learned something!"

Carlie: I think that they know it.

Darcy: They being...?
Carlie: I think I am the only one in the room who doesn’t know it. [Laughs.] It’s like everybody in the room knows that.

Darcy: Everybody knows that?

Carlie: Everybody, except me! [Laughs.] Yeah. Yeah, and the counselors will walk by, and they will engage in my office, or Willy will be in here, and someone will walk by, and they will engage, and I’ll listen to what they say, and they go off into this other stuff, and they have--oh, you know, they’ll talk about something that they learned in school, and they go, “Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!” And I will go, [lowers voice to a whisper] “Willy, what does that mean?” And he gives this long, great explanation for me. The other day he taught me something, and I took it right to group because I correlated it with treatment, and you guys go, “Huh?” I just learned this, guys.

Carlie has been a support person, a mentor, and a positive role model for other learners. However, while she has experienced some of the same experiences through her self-help community and a close friend, she is once again at a point in her life where she needs someone to help her navigate the academic waters.

Last week, I encouraged my friend to apply for a position at another job, and she was my practicum student, and she--it was her last day at work, and I know how hard it was that last two weeks for her. She wouldn’t call and whine about it. She wouldn’t call and tell me about it, but I know because it was hard for me to walk out--and leaving her clients, and the potential, and everything you wanted it to be. It didn’t turn out that way and accepting the fact that it is time for her to move on.

This is an opportunity, not an obstacle. It’s not a failure. It’s a success, and it’s time for you to be a student again. You’ve mastered this now. Now it’s time to go be a student, and, so I called her up and asked her to meet me for dinner, and she did a twist. We met, couples, we met, and she grabbed the check, and I said, “No. No. No. You’re not going to do that!” And she goes, “You don’t understand. You are my teacher, and it’s an honor for me to be able to give to you, not just to be able to buy you dinner.” I have never been a teacher like that. I have never been a mentor like that, so that was a great moment [inaudible]. I don’t know who I am. I just know who I want to be.
Darcy: Wow! Wow! Because for me, I think you are that person. You just haven’t found the path.

[Tape cuts off and then resumes with Darcy speaking]: Wasn’t their goal and their dream, but it’s your dream, so that’s what makes it real and valid. That’s your value that you have for you. I don’t think that you will ever feel complete until you get that. I mean, obviously, you are not going to be satisfied with having a job at a place where you put your feet up and close the door of your nice cushy office because you want more than that.

Carlie: Um hum. Yeah, I want a room with no windows and brick walls.

Darcy [laughing]: That’s what I want!

Carlie [laughing]: This is great, but unfortunately . . .

Darcy: This isn’t the end of it for you. You want more.

Carlie: I do. Some people will do anything to get right here.

Darcy: Yeah, and people do, and they stop, but I am personally not going to let you do that because I know that you value that, so I am going to be your cheerleader.

Carlie: Thanks. I need a cheerleader.

Darcy: Yeah, I know you do.

[Carlie tears up.]

Darcy: What?

Carlie: [Sighs.] So there I was praying, you know, this God thing that I do? And I said, “Listen here, if you could just let me walk into that college one more time, and if you could just let them step up and say, “We know what you want. We know--you just come with me, and . . .” I just need a guide. I just need a guide that’s all it is.
Researcher’s Reflections on Carlie Newmar’s Second Interview

My notes from Carlie’s second interview reflect my thoughts about the resiliency of the human spirit. I think that they speak for themselves. As such, I do not think they need any further elaboration:

Learning appears to be so tied into emotions, self-esteem, and self-concept. What is success? How do you measure resiliency? Is it relative? What would have happened to me if:

- No one had respected women, and everyone thought that women were stupid, and I had internalized that belief?

- My father had died when I was in my teens?

- I had become addicted?

- I had lacked any positive role models?

- Society had held no expectations for me?

- I had been locked in a psychiatric unit for a year and a half?

- I had seen a young woman hang herself while I was detoxing from drugs?

- I had seen another young women mutilate herself?

- I had dropped out of school at age 15?

- I had been gang raped on the eve of my release from a psychiatric unit?

Could I have gotten my G.E.D. after all that? Could I have even survived all that? How could one even begin to study in a psychiatric ward like the one that Carlie described? How did she stay sane? It appears that surviving with your sanity would be the goal and the measure of success—not book learning.
Carlie Newmar’s Third Interview

I conducted my last interview with Carlie on March 20, 2001. We met early one evening after work. We met at her house that abuts a busy, noisy city street. The audiotape of the interview includes the constant drone of rush hour traffic as it passed her house on its way out of town. At one point, the recording even includes the wailing of sirens on emergency vehicles as they raced to some sort of a crisis. Inside the house, however, it was quiet except for the flow of questions and answers that were exchanged as Carlie and I proceeded with the interview.

Carlie’s living room had a comfortable feel, and it was filled with watercolor pictures of African women, various sized statues of elephants, and pottery from exotic places. Carlie and I sat across the room from each other. I sat on a love seat, and she sat on a couch. A glass top coffee table separated us. Carlie made a pot of coffee, and she and I sipped drinks throughout the meeting.

In this interview, Carlie provides an in-depth explanation of her father’s absence from home, his alcoholism, his propensity towards domestic violence, and her family’s denial of the problems. In this regard, she describes one particularly traumatic incidence and her response to it, and then she explains her family’s reaction to the episode, which was one of isolating silence.

Darcy: Okay. How did you know, because you said in our other interview, that your father was alcoholic? How did you know he was alcoholic?

[Long pause.]

Carlie: I didn’t know until later.

Darcy: How did you put it together?

[Long pause.]

[Carlie clears throat. Phone rings.]

Carlie [resumes]: Okay, ask me the question again--about my dad.
Darcy: How did you know that he was addicted? When you think back over it, what were the classic things? How did you know? What was going on? You know, like--obviously you were being raised in an alcoholic home.

Carlie: Right. I didn’t know then. In fact, there was a time where I didn’t. Looking back, I think--well, that just looked normal--that he was never home.

Darcy: Okay, he was never home.

Carlie: He was never home. He always worked, but when he did come home, he was Mr. Happy because he had stopped and had a few drinks. He was either very happy and fun to be around, and so we looked forward to it, or it was like--horror! You know. He would come home--it would be like, “Oh, my God! Shut the TV off. Oh, my God! He’s here! Who the heck is that --the guy from under the bridge, or what [chuckles], the troll? What is that?”

But there are two flashes that I have in my life that I--I know. Looking back solidified it for me--above his dresser was the Serenity Prayer. I never put that together. My uncle was an alcoholic, and we all knew that. Someone said that he’s an alcoholic, so he’s an alcoholic because he want to A.A., and he’d been--he took the cure is what I remember hearing, and I heard that he was--he was dry . . . That’s what I remember the most, but I also remember that my uncle was drinking in our home at Christmas, so he must have been in relapse, so I know that it was, you know, a problem in the family. My dad didn’t escape it.

Darcy: You were talking about, you know, “the guy from under the bridge.” Was he like abusive in any way, or . . . ?

Carlie: Not to me, huh uh.

Darcy: To somebody else?

Carlie: To my mom.

Darcy: To your mom?

Carlie: Um hum.

Darcy: So you saw abuse?

Carlie: Big time.
Darcy: Physical? Emotional?

Carlie: He broke her ribs. He broke her hand, broke her arm. I never saw anything--I mean, that was the most that I saw, and I had no--it was really weird. I woke up--I was about five years old. [Pause.] Do you want to know this?

Darcy: Yeah.

Carlie: I woke up, and I was about maybe six, or, maybe six or seven, and I heard this yelling, and--I heard the voices that I had never heard before. I never heard voices like that, and I came out, and he had her down on the couch, and I just remember him hitting her--like he was beating up a man. I mean it was [pause] pretty violent, and I just started screaming, "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!"

I think he was in a blind rage. We never spoke about it again. I don’t know how I went back to bed. I don’t know anything. I know that my mom’s ribs were taped up, and--like that [makes a wrapping motion around her ribs] the next day. I remember, [pause] I remember that big white masking tape that was so--you know?

Darcy: Oh, yeah.

Carlie: You know--she had to have something around her ribs because her ribs were broke. Bizarre . . .

Darcy: You didn’t talk about it, so that means--you didn’t . . .?

Carlie [interjects abruptly]: Nobody talked about it!

Darcy: Nobody talked about it? You were the child. There was nobody that you could talk to? You couldn’t talk to your parents about it--there wasn’t anybody that . . .

Carlie [interjects]: Nope!

As an adolescent, Carlie lacked protective factors from within her family. She had no close bonds with any caring family members, and she lacked any substitute caregivers who could have provided nurturing for her. Her friends were
gang members and drug addicts, and there was no one from the community who offered her support or who provided positive role modeling for her.

It is in this section that she speaks of her experience of feeling abandoned and betrayed by her mother, the legal system, and the psychiatric community. To survive, she hid from herself and her pain. She hid the way that her father had; she hid behind alcohol and other drugs. She hid for 23 years, and she only began to make sense of her life and heal from her wounds after she had been in recovery from substance dependence for three years.

It was through the self-help and therapeutic communities that she first experienced the caring, nurturing, and support that she had lacked as a child. It was in those supportive environments that she first felt safe enough to reflect on the experiences of her life and to integrate her head with her heart.

Darcy: Okay--well let me move to the other--another question. You talked about the gang rape.

Carlie: Um hum.

Darcy: How did you get through that? You didn't talk anymore about what happened. You just said that you got out--on the day you got out, you were raped.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: And then we kind of jumped to something else.

Carlie: How did I survive it?

Darcy: Yeah! What did you do with that? I mean . . . ?

Carlie: So I told you about the hospital.

[Long pause.]

Darcy: That doesn't ring a bell.


Darcy: Yes!
Carlie: Well, it took me a long time in my recovery--I mean, years. I used for 22 years. Then I got into recovery, and it took me three years, three years to remember how I got from the detention home to the psychiatric unit where--that's where I understand that I was abandoned. I didn't get it. Did I tell you about this?

[Darcy shakes her head in the negative.]

Carlie: Okay. I was in the detention home because I wouldn't come home, and I was involved with the gangs and all that.

Darcy: You told me about that.

Carlie: Okay, so I went there, um--a gal had committed suicide.

Darcy: You told me about that.

Carlie: Okay, and I had lost my mind a little bit [chuckles], and I was in detox and all that, but I didn't know that then, and they hauled me off to the psychiatric unit in the county hospital in a [inaudible]. [Long pause.] [Sighs.] So I stayed there a year--barely saw my mom, and this is the part...

Darcy [interjects]: Oh, okay. That's a piece you didn't tell me about.

Carlie: Well, and this is how I ended up finding it out. I mean things take a long time for me to--I don't know why, but they do. I guess disassociation and all.

I was pretty much abandoned there for a year, a year and a half almost, and she would come--it was like being in prison. She would come and put money on my books, bring cigarettes, or whatever I wanted. You know, just kind of filled my little cubbyhole and dropped things off.

And all along, I would ask her to take me home, and all along she would say, "They won't let me," and I got a release, a pass, but I didn't get to go home because she didn't want me home, but I kept confronting her with that, and she kept saying, "No, they won't let me take you home," and so--I don't know what really--I mean what I believe is that she abandoned me. It took me three years of therapy to find that out though. [Long pause.] It's a hard place to be--so I got like a pass on Christmas Eve, and I was gang raped. I went home.
I have not been out of this place other than the times that I would just take off and go party with my friends [chuckles]. I would come back. I would run away from there--I wouldn’t run away--I would take off and go party. I would come back to the hospital instead of run away, so I was becoming institutionalized is what my belief was.

The people wondered where I was, and they wanted to know where I was, and they cared that I was missing, and--I don’t know. I felt okay being in there. You know? It was like--it was like an institution. You know, so I would take off for a weekend and run back there. I was gang raped, and I went back to--I went to the house on Christmas Eve.

Darcy: Wait! What house? Your mom’s house?

Carlie: Right. I was released for a pass Christmas Eve because he was getting ready to discharge me because there was no reason--he couldn’t keep me there any longer. I didn’t know this right away.

I got a pass Christmas Eve. I came home--took off. I was going to go with my friends for a few hours and was pulled in off the street and gang raped. I didn’t get to go back to the house because I was detained all night long. It was pretty violent, and I finally got home the next day.

I got to a telephone is what happened. I got a hold of someone who knew me, and, actually, it was one of the kids from the hospital. I called their house, and he was home for a pass, and I called his house, and, [long pause] and they came and got me, and I went to their home, and that’s where I called my mom, but I called them first.

And I said, “I am going to take a cab. I am going to call a cab. Just pay for it,” and she said she would, so I got home from that. I took a hot bath for a couple of hours, and I--well, I walked in, and she asked me where I had been because, of course, she called the police.

[Long pause as Carlie takes a drink.]

Carlie [continues]: And I said, “Well, I have been raped, and I have been beaten up, and I have been raped, and all I really want now is to just take a really hot bath [pause] and smoke a cigarette and drink a . . .” I said, “Here’s what I need, I need cigarettes, and I need a bottle of booze, and I need a hot tub, and I need to be left
alone. Can I have that?” She gave me that, so I kind of locked myself in the bathroom, and I didn’t cry for about ten years. That’s what I can tell you.

Darcy: Did she ever talk to you about that?

Carlie: She called the police because she thought that I was a run away. She thought I was out partying. I wasn’t, but she had nothing else to believe. Here’s another way to solidify that I shouldn’t be in her home. Right? [Long pause.]

So this woman police officer came, and it was pretty clear at that stage of life, in that day and time. I remember that officer saying, “Look, you don’t want to take this to court because you know they are just going to rake you over the coals.” They just—rape victims at that time, they weren’t getting any satisfaction out of the cases. They would re-victimize the person, anyway, so it was kind of like “pooh-poohed.” You know, and so, I went back to the hospital for a day or so, and I went and saw my therapist, and that’s what I remember, crystal clear.

Interesting. I was raped by probably 13 black men. My friend that I called was black, and it was during the era of prejudice and the big riots, interracial riots and everything, and [long pause]. I don’t know why that has impacted me, but it has, but anyway—my mom was really prejudiced. [Clears throat.] I guess that is why it impacted me, so I went back to the hospital, and I was shut down. I was just disconnected from myself.

It was this huge old hospital, right, and this one room was like a huge library. It had these huge wooden desks or tables, like a conference table. It was a huge table, or it seemed huge, and I remember him being at one end of the room, and I’m on the other, and I just . . .

Darcy [interjects]: Him being the counselor, therapist?


[Darcy begins to laugh.]

Carlie: What?

Darcy [laughing]: I am just imagining this.

Carlie: It was bizarre.
Darcy [laughing]: Therapeutic environment!

Carlie: I am shut down and don’t even think about it!

Darcy: Wow!

Carlie: Don’t even--he didn’t know what to do with me. He did not know what to do with me, and I knew that. I know that now, but I had power right at that moment. There was nobody getting in, and nothing is getting out. “I will tell you what you need to know, but that is it because I am not spending one more year in this hospital. There’s nothing wrong with me that warrants me being here,” and that’s all our therapy sessions were about when I would go in there, and, of course, he wouldn’t tell he--he couldn’t, I guess. I never had a session with my mom. I never had any family therapy.

[Extended pause then Carlie quietly continues as if to herself.]
That’s pretty sad. That’s pretty sad, [pause] so I pretty much told him what we were doing. I said, “I am going to be 18 in four months. You can’t hold me here. You can hold me here until I am 18, but then you are going to need a court order.”

I have no idea where I got this information, but I knew that I had some rights, and there ain’t nothing nobody was going to do--period, and I said, “You need to know that I don’t belong here, and you need to know that I have not been on any medications since I have been here, except when I first got in here,” and I said, “and I don’t need medication, and I am not like these other people, and I am not suicidal. I am not homicidal. I am not out to get anybody,” and I said, “you need to let me go home.” And he turned around, and he said, “Carlie, you could have went home like 30 days, six weeks after you got here.” I said, “What?” He said, “You really don’t have any reason to be here and didn’t.”

[Heavy sigh.] So, here I am, two days after a rape--here’s my therapist telling me I’ve just done time in the most bizarre situation. It was like One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. People, you’re playing cards with them one minute, and the next minute they’re coming down the hall with their arms slashed. There are seizures and psychiatric--I mean checkouts. People are still getting--what do you call that? What is that called? Shock treatments.
Young women are getting violent. They take them off—they come back a day later [chuckles] in zombie form. People—it was bizarre, and that’s my exposure as a kid, as a teenage girl. I don’t have any trust. I don’t belong here, so my education was—I don’t know. [Long pause.] Anyway, I got out of there. He said, “You’re right.” The thing that bothered me the most was he said, “Your mom didn’t want you home. You could have went home anytime.” He said, “Really.” And I asked, “Why is that?” And he said, “She didn’t think she could handle you.” I said, “I believe that.” I said, “But what I am hearing, what she is telling me, is that you won’t let me go home.”

Now who do I believe? I just kind of like lost it. Man, I went, “Here’s the deal. First of all, I can’t believe that you would tell me this, and then you are going to release me? You’re going to release me? You’re going to release me back to my—this woman’s house—that you just told me doesn’t want me? And you have kept me inside here for a year and a half, and I have just been raped. Do you think that this is crazy or what?”

And I just remembered verbalizing that and telling him that, and I just knew I had to be good. I had to be good so they would let me out, so I was. They released me—and I just did my time at home until I was 18 and left, and that’s that.

Darcy: When did you actually do work on that? You know, obviously, you have done a lot of work on that, so, after recovery, you went through all those years of addiction, and then you worked on it later, so you bottled that up for all those years.

Carlie: Two years in recovery I was in therapy behind my sexual abuse, my mom, my dad. I was 36 years old—37-years old. Eleven years ago [sighs].

Darcy: You heard what years ago?

Carlie: I said 11 years ago was my last therapy thing, and then I went back into therapy when I was in Texas. Just because the marriage was so bad, and it was like, “Oh, I remember this.” You know, and it was abuse with a different face. You know, and it was a subtler form of abuse, so I didn’t get it.

Carlie’s experience of her childhood was that there was no caring adult available to support her emotional needs. Her father was lost in his addiction, and her mother was broken in spirit and emotionally detached from her children. Thus,
like so many children from alcoholic homes, Carlie became a parentified child who served to meet her mother’s emotional needs.

Darcy: I didn’t really get a sense, in your childhood, that there was anybody really there for you or that you felt you could go to in a time of stress and need that . . .

Carlie: Not my parents. My mom was emotionally--detached--so I think, somewhere in there that I was the parent. Not that she was the alcoholic, but I was her partner--like the emotional support. You know? She would make decisions that I would be gung-ho like, “Okay we can do this!” You know, like the “rah-rah” person or something.

She would have the idea as the adult, but, you know, I would be behind her setting the fire. You know, fanning the flame or something because I just think that, being the enabler and being the co-dependent, she did it sober, and it was hard for her and she just--she was weak. I really believe that.

I mean, in essence, there is some kind of weakness in there or some kind of--I don’t mean weak like it’s a bad thing--I mean she was just broken. She was just broken--living with the alcoholic and not knowing. She didn’t have any tools. She couldn’t be the mom. She didn’t parent any of us until--15 years old--she pretty much stopped parenting us--amazing! She didn’t know what to do with us after that.

In the next segment, Carlie and I discuss the themes that had emerged from the first two interviews. In this regard, we summarize the numerous psychosocial risk factors that she had been exposed to in her youth, and we discuss her inherent resiliency factors that helped her to make a successful adaptation in her adulthood.

Regarding the risk factors, Carlie lacked a strong female role model in her childhood; she had a shaming experience in school that changed her view of herself as a learner; she was traumatized by her father’s untimely death; she was a parentified child who nurtured her mother at a time when she herself needed to feel safe and secure; she was addicted to drugs at a young age; she was a delinquent youth whose peer group was involved in drugs and criminality; she was traumatized
by being institutionalized in a psychiatric ward; and she survived the ultimate trauma of a gang rape.

In spite of all the stressors in her life, Carlie was determined to survive, and like many of the high-risk youths in Werner's (1994) Kauai longitudinal study who had serious coping problems in their adolescence, she staged a dramatic rebound when she reached her 30's. It was at that time that she got into recovery for her drug addiction and began to construct an environment in which she found the caring, nurturing, and support that she had never received in her family of origin or from her community. It was also in the safety of that environment that she began to reflect on her life and to integrate the past with the present in a healthy way.

Darcy: What is the theme of your story as you see it? How would you summarize what you told me so far? If you were dictating an assessment like we do--summarizing, I guess is more what I mean. I know one of the things was that you had a traumatic--you had the rape, which was a traumatic event.

Carlie: Um huh.

Darcy: There weren't any strong role models for you. You had a dominant father who essentially didn't value what women had to bring. You were other-oriented toward the adult male dominant figure.

Carlie: Correct.

Darcy: Those were, you know--if I were to take snippets of what you said and look to generalize that--well, the reason I say generalize that is because a couple of the other people that I've interviewed have similar types of things in their backgrounds--no support systems.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: You know, until you get to be an adult--recovery being a major point in your life where then you get support people.

Carlie: You know, the other day we were talking about gangs. You know, and how we think. Well, everybody is all up in arms about the gangs and the world right now. You know, young people
getting into gangs so early, and I thought, “You know what, I get it.”

Because growing up where I grew up and then having my group of friends, it was not hard for me to go to my friends. That was the only support, and it wasn’t healthy support. I mean we were kids running, doing, you know, criminal things, but when there is nothing at home, of course you’re gonna, so it wasn’t hard for me to [sighs] assume the position in A.A. and N.A. It was not hard to sit in front of a group full of people and tell your story--and you know. It was not hard. I think [long pause] I was the support at home. I was the funeral director. I was the adult child as a child.

Darcy: Did you say funeral director?

Carlie: I was the funeral director. If you had to be buried, it was me. I was the youngest. If there was a spiritual question, because I went to Catholic school, they asked me. They asked me things that were bizarre for adults to ask a kid. They put me in a position that I was supposed to know something, so I started to think that my dad was right. Maybe that is what women are.

Well, I wasn’t going to be one of them, so I think that all of these--I don’t know. I think that the hospital was traumatic. I think that the rapes were traumatic. I think the death of my father was traumatic because I picked out the suit, because I took the calls, because I had to nurture my mother, who--I think all of that made me a survivor.

You just keep going. You don’t know that you can’t. No one told you that you can’t. No one told me I couldn’t be a drug counselor. Nobody told me I would fail it. Nobody said I couldn’t. I had to go to school though. You just go do it. I think survival was--that’s how I--I didn’t live; I survived. [Long pause.]

And then--not so much anymore--I mean I remember passing over somewhere in recovery, probably ten or 11 years, thinking, “I don’t feel like a survivor. I feel like I am starting to live my life. I don’t really feel like a survivor anymore.” I don’t know what is after that. I think you just live your life, so I think that would be my theme, I suppose. That is a pretty sad state of affairs isn’t it [laughs] when survivor is your theme? That’s what it is.

[Long pause.]
Darcy: What do you think made the change for you going from survivor, just hanging in there, to some sort of a switch within yourself that--I don’t even know how you would even describe it. I guess by not really describing it. Just going from what to what?

Carlie: I caught a glimpse of it at three years in therapy. I had just a glimpse of it, and what happened was, I was telling my story--again. You know in this therapy, and it clicked. Everything clicked. I realized I was telling my story--because I had been detached from it--and a current thing happened; my son died. I walked through that in recovery two years sober.

My brother was in the hospital. I had to go there and be the bedside person, and I’m telling the counselor my story, and when I got back to what ever part of it--I don’t even know--but all of a sudden, I looked up at her, and she’s emotional. She’s crying, which shocked me. I think she cried because I wasn’t, and then I looked at her, and I said, “Oh, wow!” She goes, “Nope, not you. I am just--this is very sad. This is a very sad story.”

And I am like, “It is?” And it clicked. I am telling my story. I am talking about me here. This really happened to me, and my head hit my heart, and it progressively got--I don’t know, [pause] like instead of separate, I started coming together--started being whole. It wasn’t a story out there any more. It was--it was me.

Everything that ever happened--you know, brought me right to this spot. All those things accumulated right to this spot, and here I am, and I met myself right there through recovery, working the steps, telling my story, writing, journaling. Journaling, journaling, journaling. I never did so much writing in my life. Free-flow writing and thoughts and feelings. I don’t know. I think self-help really helped. Every tool they ever told me to use, I used. If they had told me to go stand in the corner and scream for an hour, I would have. Whatever they told me to do, I would do it. I wouldn’t question it.

Darcy: Okay, but that’s like years and years later after the fact that all of that came together for you. You were in a supportive environment, as an adult, with other adults.

Carlie: Thirty-seven, um, 36 to 37. Almost three years.

Darcy: Okay, I know one of the other things that I can remember right off the top of my head is that you did a lot of self-teaching, all your reading and stuff--you glommed on to that. You talked about
shaming--a shaming experience in school. That has been a theme that, at this point, looks like it has gone across the people--all the people that I have interviewed so far have that as a common theme--that they have had a shaming experience in school.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: At one point, another common theme--you had it, and they had it--was that you internalized the shaming piece and your experiences in school, and you had negative comments and frames of reference for yourself around learning--your abilities.

Carlie: Right.

Darcy: That would be a theme that came out of that. You had generalized that into a lot of areas for yourself, and you went away and did the self teaching that you controlled, and you didn’t have to worry about being shamed by anybody or letting anybody down because it was yours to own and to do however much or how little you chose.

Carlie: Right! Right! Good point! Yeah, if I didn’t finish the book, nobody was going to give me an “F.”

Darcy: Right, they weren’t going to drag you out in front of a class and do anything to you. I’m trying to think of . . .

Carlie [interjects]: Add this, in the 12-Step belief system, Step Two is, “Came to believe in a power greater than ourselves that would restore us to sanity,” and the insanity being doing the same thing over again expecting a different result. You know--being stone cold sober and making a decision or a choice to drink again. That’s crazy. Right?

And when I went to this Step Study, and we broke down “restore,” and it said, “To put back to original condition.” I thought, “Well, that might be just fine for some, but that’s not what I want because original condition was not very good, so it had better be better than that.” Then there were those who said, “Well, no, there’s a few of us who don’t have that kind of original condition that’s desirable, so create your own.” It felt kind of bizarre. I felt kind of like a liar, or like this actress or something. You know? It’s like, “Well, this isn’t reality.”

Well, sure it is. Create your own reality and all that, so I really got into all that, and it was like, “Well, who do you want to be when
you grow up, and what do you want?” And the next thing I knew, there I was. I was doing counseling! I was in front of a group! I was teaching something! I knew something! Who would have thought? Not me, so being restored, I think to maybe to what I was meant to be, rather than what I was, and actualizing that for myself making that happen. You know—for me. Maybe what I was meant to be—not the damaged goods. You know?

Researcher’s Reflections on Carlie Newmar’s Third Interview

While Carlie’s story has stayed with me throughout this research process, my reflections immediately following the third interview were direct and to the point. I reported just the facts about questions that she had answered based on questions that had come up for me from the other interviews.

I noted her father’s educational level and her age when he died. I reported that Carlie had believed that she was genetically predisposed to become addicted and that she felt that her addiction had been activated when she was 14 years old. I ended my bullet style notes with the comment that she had determined that her father had been alcoholic based on the fact that he had never been home. I later provided her with a list of the themes that I perceived to be emerging from her data. In particular, I noted that she had unresolved issues with her dad and that she had no respect for her mother.

Several days later, I resumed contemplating Carlie’s interviews. From the excerpt of my notes, it is clear that I was still struggling with her story and my own emotions:

I e-mailed the transcript to Carlie for feedback. She took exception to my preliminary themes of unresolved issues with Dad and no respect for Mom. The Dad piece was my assessment, but the respecting Mom piece was based on a couple of her verbatim statements. I need to go back and see where I got the Dad piece. Was it because of her silence or her tears? She is going to review the whole interview again and see what she comes up with. I am not going to review her first transcript tonight, but am I projecting my own unresolved stuff on her?
Apparently, I decided to go ahead and read the transcripts again as my writing skips one line and then resumes:

Well, I went ahead and looked at that first interview again. I am not sure where I got the unresolved grief about Dad. Maybe it was based on some of interview number two in addition to statements in number one like, “Dad wasn’t there. I was depressed. I had just lost my dad.”

A day later I began the entry by declaring that I had gone over the first interview again and that I was not sure why I thought that she had unresolved issues with her dad. In this regard, I noted that I thought that the theme had come from a combination of the first and second interviews. I ended the entry by stating, “I will pay special attention to this issue, as I don’t want to project any of my own stuff on her.”

Several days later, I resumed my internal dialogue and expounded on my evolving understanding of myself in relation to Carlie’s story. In this regard, I stated, “I did more of the transcription [Carlie] tonight. I feel a real connection with her story. I feel very emotional as I am transcribing.”

In closing the chapter on Carlie, I find myself reflecting on my own life, and in so doing, the trials and tribulations of my childhood seem small and insignificant. I find myself in awe of this wonderful woman who has survived many painful experiences and who epitomizes the resiliency of the human spirit.

Post script.

The following is Carlie’s response to my final draft of her chapter. She e-mailed her reaction back to me, and other than a couple of minor changes to punctuation for clarity, I left her correspondence the same as she had mailed it to me.

The 4th Step that she refers to in the third sentence of her quote below is from the Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) program (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 1981). In the 4th Step (p. 42), people who are working recovery programs from their addictions are encouraged to make a “searching and fearless
moral inventories of themselves.” Indeed, in her reflections, I agree that she has done just that, and I can think of no better fitting way to end her chapter than with her own words.

Hi Darcy. Let me begin by saying I am so proud to be a subject in your education, and then by saying I can’t tell you how emotional it has been for me to do this with you. It has been a thorough 4th step all over again, but it has been working me and helping me to see the abilities I had and didn’t even know I had.

I cannot tell you how Carlie impacted me. I want to know her (if I didn’t). I want to help her. I want to tell her she can do it. I want to tell her how proud I am of her, and then I remember—she’s me. Oh, thank you for this opportunity to see me as an objective person. It has become more of me, and then—I became More of Me. The part I didn’t bank on was the part of you, and then I remember, “You are like me, Carlie.” How can I thank you for being one of the greatest parts of my career? You’ll never know the impact.
CHAPTER 5: VERY BLUE

Very Blue is a 41-year-old Caucasian female. She is the third born of seven children. She has been married one time. She and her husband have been married for 25 years. She has two grown sons. One of her sons is married, and the other one is engaged to be married.

Very Blue earned her associate degree from a community college in 1998. She is not currently enrolled in school, but she is interested in continuing her education at some later date.

She has been in recovery from substance dependence since 1993, and she has worked in the addictions treatment field since 1996. She has a CADC I and is studying for her CADC II.

She is employed at a private, for-profit substance abuse treatment program. She is currently receiving workforce development training through her employer. Her goal is to become a clinical supervisor for that program. She expects to complete that training and be a supervisor by March 2002.

Very Blue is the only one of the four participants that I did not know before I began this study. I was introduced to her through the snowball sampling method of participant selection.

Very Blue chose not to write her autobiography. Instead, she preferred that I write a biography of her based on information that I summarized from her narratives and from a brief description that she provided for me when we were discussing the subject on the telephone.

When I asked her to describe her personality, she stated that her pseudonym, Very Blue, is a description of her persona. In this regard, she explained that she had attended a workforce development training on personalities types and that the training had been based on the premise that personality types can be coded on a color scale. She went on to explain that she had scored especially “blue.”

Very Blue stated that people with “blue” personalities are dominated by their hearts, that they love people, and that they have especially strong connections to their families. She explains that “blue” people are exceptionally vulnerable in
their actions with others because their emotions affect a lot of how they view the world. She felt that the description was an apt depiction of her own personality, and since she had scored especially high on the “blue” chart, she chose the pseudonym Very Blue for the purposes of this study.

In further description of her personality, Very Blue explains that she views herself as quiet, soft, and caring. She also perceives herself as being a deep thinker who likes to consider things for a long time before she makes comments or decisions.

She explains that she has spent much time in personal reflection and that she has gotten to know herself better through the process. In this regard, she states that while she has experienced many life adversities, she feels that rather than having been destroyed by the hardships, she has grown beyond the person that she might have been without the experiences.

**Very Blue’s First Interview**

My first interview with Very Blue was on the cloudy early afternoon of Sunday, February 18, 2001. The meeting lasted approximately an hour and 15 minutes. Very Blue chose to be interviewed at one of the local chain restaurants that is a few miles from her home. After my restaurant experience with Carlie, I was hesitant to meet with her in such a public place. However, even after I had described that experience to her and voiced my concerns, she still wanted to meet at the restaurant, so out of my respect for her decision, that is where we met.

I arrived at the restaurant first and asked to be placed in the most private area that was available. The hostess seated me in a section that was separated from the rest of the customers by a couple of empty tables. However, by the time that Very Blue arrived, all the seats around us were filled with Sunday diners. The recording of that interview is a muffled symphony of our lowered voices, the clanging of dishes, unrecognizable songs playing in the background, and a haphazard chorus of the voices of the other diners and wait-staff.
Since Very Blue and I had not known each other prior to that date, we started out by introducing ourselves, talking about our employment histories, and eating a light meal. It took us approximately 20 minutes to eat. We did not turn the tape recorder on until after we had finished the meal. After several attempts to make sure that the recorder was working properly, I began recording the interview.

Very Blue’s highest level of academic completion is an associate degree that she was awarded from a community college. She is not currently enrolled in an educational program, but she is studying for her CADC II examination.

Further, while she does not have any immediate plans to further her education, she is feeling some pressure from the treatment field to pursue a higher degree. In that regard, she explained that she has learned that her current employer is now requiring bachelor degrees for new employees. Based on this information, she assumes that if her employer is requiring higher educational degrees, then other employers in the field will also demand higher credentials.

Her friends are also having a strong impact on her thoughts about returning to school. In this regard, she stated that she has several friends who are returning to school to pursue their bachelor degrees, and their examples have kindled a strong desire for her to return to school, also.

Darcy: What is your highest level of school completion?

Very Blue: Associate degree, at South Winds College in 1998.

Darcy: What is your educational status?

Very Blue: At this time, the only education stuff that I am getting is from job experience and certification--CADC I, and I am going to get my CADC II in August of this year.

Darcy: Do you have any educational goals?

Very Blue: None at this time. It might be in the future because they are asking for a bachelor’s degree, and I have friends going for that, and I kind of envy them and want to be there right with them, but right now I am just focusing on the job.
Darcy: So you have heard some talk that people are requiring more education?

Very Blue: Yeah, I noticed at Recovery Bound when they put an advertisement out for a job they are requiring somebody to have a bachelor degree.

Very Blue’s best learning experiences occurred while she was enrolled in her associate’s program. She was one of the older students in her class. Yet, she enjoyed learning in that environment because she was able to take a critical look at her life, to reflect on her life lessons, and to apply that understanding to her academics.

She explains that the instructors in her associate program were patient with the students, that they had a vested interest in the students, and that they took the time to explain concepts to the students. In such a setting, she felt safe to not-know. The safety of that environment was in direct contrast to that of her experience in elementary and junior high school in which she had felt stupid for not knowing.

Darcy: Can you think of a time when you had your best learning experience--from grade school throughout college?

Very Blue: When I was taking my associate classes. When they started doing group therapy and stuff like that, we were able to look at ourselves. I enjoyed the teachers during this experience, because it seemed like they were more invested than in grade school or even in high school.

Darcy: When you say, “invested,” what do you mean by that?

Very Blue: It seemed like they took their time to describe things. Like in the math class--I have a hard time with math, but the teacher was able to describe it on the board, and if you didn’t get it, you didn’t look stupid for saying, “I didn’t get it,” which was even harder because I was older than most of the students there. I took the risk, and I never felt like I was stupid.

In describing her academic experience, Very Blue declared that she could not remember having a positive learning experience before she entered college. In
fact, prior to her college experience, she said that she had viewed school as a traumatic place in which she had felt ostracized, alone, and vulnerable.

She started perceiving the learning environment as an unsafe place in which she felt vulnerable when she was in elementary school. It was at that juncture that one of her teachers shamed her in front of the class, and her ability to learn was compromised thereafter by the association that she made between school and shaming.

Darcy: What was your actual worst learning experience in terms of education?

Very Blue: You know, as for learning, I don’t know if there is a worst learning experience, but it’s just the stuff that happens in grade school or high school. Like in grade school there was one time my gym teacher asked me to bend over in front of my class, and he took a paddle to my butt. I don’t remember if I was chewing gum or forgot my shorts or what I did.

Darcy: It sounds like that would be a real shaming experience?

Very Blue: Yeah, it was. Maybe that is why I like the college experience so much more.

Darcy: What do you mean by that?

Very Blue: You know, the experiences that I have had in college. You know, being able to sit down and focus on what is going on instead of the stuff that happens.

Darcy: You really haven’t described having problems with academics, except that you did mention that you had a hard time with math. You are primarily mentioning emotional types of things that would get in a person’s way of even being able to be sit there ready to take anything in. You are so emotionally caught up with what is going to happen to you in a half an hour when you have to go from one point to another. Is someone going to jerk you up at any moment and shame you in front of the class?

Very Blue: A “blue” person is very vulnerable because their emotions affect a lot of their stuff.
While her elementary school experience was negative, her junior high school experience was even worse. She stated that one of the most painful periods of her life occurred during that time, and it was at that point that she began to equate school as a frightening place as well as a shaming place.

She stated that it all began when her family moved to Oregon during her seventh grade year. When she arrived at the new school, there was a group of students that traumatized her and physically assaulted her on a regular basis. Life was miserable for her, and the experience had such a negative impact on her that it ultimately set the stage for her to drop out of school.

Very Blue: I really had a hard time, and a lot of it was the move from Denver to Portland the beginning of my seventh grade year. I didn’t know anybody, and here I was in a junior high setting with no one to be with. It was really hard, and I became an outsider. I was picked on and stuff like that, so I really didn’t care to be in school.

Darcy: What would be an example of you being picked on?

Very Blue: Well, over at Washington there is this tunnel you have to go through to go to the pool, and swimming was part of the classes. Well, everybody that was smoking cigarettes or marijuana was there in the tunnel, and I got cornered a couple of times because some of the girls didn’t like me because their boyfriends would look at me or I would talk to a boy, and they cornered me, and I was up against the wall, and everyone was yelling, “Hit her! Hit her!” Hit me, and the vice principal started coming, and I took off running and passed out at my locker. Everyday after school I would always run into them. It was a really traumatic thing, and I just didn’t like going to school because of that.

Very Blue dropped out of school and got married in the middle of the 11th grade. She ceased attending regular high school at that time because she was five months pregnant. She then enrolled in an alternative school for pregnant students, but she ultimately dropped out of that program because of the difficulties that she experienced with being a pregnant student.

She was in her mid-30’s when she finally earned her G.E.D. As an adult, she was afraid to return to school, but with her husband’s encouragement and support,
she was able to overcome her fears and to take the risk. Another factor that helped
to forge her educational sense of purpose was her belief that she could find a better
job if she had a G.E.D.

Darcy: You had mentioned before we turned the tape on that you
got married in the 11th grade?

Very Blue: Yeah. I was married in the 11th grade. I was five
months pregnant. That is when I stopped going to school. I did try
to go to the YWCA, and I think that if I wasn't so late in my
pregnancy, I probably would have graduated then, but I was just
too exhausted to get up in the morning. The YWCA had a program
that offered young mothers a chance to complete high school. I
liked it.

Darcy: So did you get a G.E.D. then?


Darcy: How old were you in 1995?

Very Blue: Well, I am 41 years old, so that would be in my
mid-thirties.

Darcy: Well how did you decide to go back at that age and get
your G.E.D?

Very Blue: That was part of my recovery because I was scared to
go back. I was making changes in my life and part of that was to
go back to school and get my G.E.D. I didn't have any thought
about where I was going to go from there.

Darcy: How did you get that goal?

Very Blue: My husband encouraged me to do that. There were a
lot of things that I was working on, and I was moving forward. Not
having a G.E.D was keeping from getting a better job.

Darcy: So it was getting in your way?

Very Blue: Yeah.
The period that Very Blue spent active in the throes of her addiction was particularly difficult for her and her family. However, as with her schooling, her husband played a pivotal role in her getting into recovery and for turning her life around.

She did not start out with the goal of earning an associate’s degree. In fact, her aspirations for a higher education began simply with her taking a free college course that she had earned for completing her G.E.D. The course was a positive experience for her, and its effect was heightened by the support and companionship that she received from one of her sons who took the class with her. They attended that class not only as mother and son, but also as competitive peers, and the experience whetted her appetite for further education.

Darcy: So when you say part of your recovery, are you in recovery from addictions?

Very Blue: Yes, I am recovering from alcohol and methamphetamine use.

Darcy: How did you get into recovery?

Very Blue: My husband kicked me out of my house. I was an I.V. user. It didn’t start out that way, but it grew to that, and he used drugs, and he could take it or leave it. He didn’t like the needle, and when he found out that I was using the needle, he threatened to tell my kids, threatened to tell my family, and kicked me out. I left and came back and said to him, “We have been through an awful lot, and I helped you through a lot of things, so help me.” He got me into detox the next morning. That is where it all started. I found out that there was an answer, and that was almost eight years ago.

Darcy: It sounds like he was a real anchor and support person with helping you to get clean and sober and also with moving on with school.

Very Blue: Yeah. He was very encouraging. He is kind of like my fan club.

Darcy: It sounds like it had a profound impact on you for someone to believe in you.
Very Blue: Yeah. It helped with building my self-esteem—believing that I could do it—believing that I am intelligent and getting past being a victim. In school I think I learned how to be a victim. Getting picked on and stuff like that instead of standing up for myself and making boundaries. In fact, I am still working on that today.

Darcy: Well, you have come a long ways. Recovery is hard enough, and then to get your G.E.D. and then an associate’s degree.

Very Blue: When I got my G.E.D., they gave me some free credit hours, so I said, “Well, what do I want to do when I grow up?” And that is when I decided to take the alcohol and drug class. I took that with my son. He graduated on the night before I graduated with my G.E.D. We were in the same building and everything, so we did this together. It was a mother-son thing. I did my homework, and he didn’t. I got an “A,” and he got a “B.” He was mad because he was usually the “A” student.

The support and encouragement that Very Blue received from her husband and sons is in direct contrast to that of what she felt from her family of origin. In fact, life at home was difficult for her and, as with her experience at school, she felt alone, different, and like an outsider.

Darcy: What did your parents think of you dropping out of school?

Very Blue: As for what they felt, I don’t know what they felt. I was kind of let go of their household, and I was not their problem anymore.

Darcy: Because you were married?

Very Blue: No, because I was pregnant. I was like the “black sheep” of the family—third to the oldest. I had a boyfriend, I got pregnant, and I was becoming a problem for them. I think I was the “lost child.” They talk about the “lost child” not really finding a place to be, and that is the role that I took on. It was really hard.

My dad was old fashioned. His father came from Greece, and his mother came from Belgium—very strict stuff. You don’t wear makeup. You don’t have a boyfriend, and you don’t go out dating. [Pause.] I got pregnant, and I said that I wanted to keep the baby.
They helped put the marriage together, and I am very lucky to have the guy that I did. We are still married today. We have been through an awful lot.

Very Blue’s concept of herself as a learner is rooted in her resiliency traits. Of these, she has the social competence traits of empathy, responsiveness, and caring. All of these traits are core competencies for addictions counselors. She also has good problem solving skills in that she is able to think critically and reflectively about her own life and the lives of her clients. She also has a strong sense of purpose in that she is self-directed in her personal and professional development.

Darcy: How do you feel about yourself as a learner now?

Very Blue: I think it is a challenge, but I like it. I like to learn. I like to go to seminars and through all the educational workshops that companies have you go through, like Caring Factors. I really liked that because it was like learning about your personality and helping others learn about theirs. I get full of emotions when I’m in it, and I really get into it.

Darcy: How did you happen to get into the addiction field?

Very Blue: It was my own recovery. When I took a look at my journals in early recovery, I was thinking back then that I would like to help other people help themselves. I got a lot of counseling when I went through Blue Bijou after detox. I just loved it. I started looking at my boundaries, stuff that I didn’t know before.

Darcy: Do you plan to remain in the addiction treatment field?

Very Blue: Yes, I do. I want to be a supervisor. I could see myself helping others come up with ideas on helping clients. I just like to work with people. At the other place, I was doing all the paperwork, screening, assessments, and doing an awful lot. It was like I had it down pat, but I had to move forward. There was no supervision there. We have a supervisor, but she was not there all the time, and there is no lead counselor position because of conflicts that have happened in the past--people with egos. With this move that I am making with this other company, I am interested in getting my feet in and hopefully growing with them.
Although Very Blue is not currently enrolled in school, she would like to eventually continue with her education. In this regard, she would like to focus on the administrative aspects of addiction treatment.

Darcy: Do you think that it might require more education for you to be a supervisor?

Very Blue: Oh, yes. I would like to learn more about the administrative stuff--knowing the laws and rules.

Darcy: So not only do you plan on remaining in the field, you plan to become more firmly ensconced in it, knowing the administrative part, and the ins and outs of the addiction field.

Very Blue: Yeah.

Very Blue has spent a lot of time in contemplation of her own life. In her reflections, she has come to understand that her emotions are a critical aspect of her ability to learn.

Darcy: Is there anything that I haven’t asked you that you think might be important for this study.

Very Blue: No. I just think that I don’t know if it is just me or other people, but emotional stuff hinders me at times. It keeps me from moving forward and being able to learn.

Darcy: In regard to that, that goes back to when you were a child?

Very Blue: Yeah. I find that this is something that I am learning in the field with my co-workers. Learning doesn’t just stop at school. You get it on the job, on the site, etc., and I have learned an awful lot at Recovery Bound itself. I am learning how to work with other people, but also learning how to keep my boundaries at the same time.
Researcher's Reflections on Very Blue's First Interview

My notes reflect that Very Blue did not keep a journal and that I thought that she was just too busy at her new job to follow through with that exercise. On some level, I think that is almost certainly true; she probably was too busy. At the same time, I wonder if some of the questions that I asked might have dredged up some long buried, uncomfortable feelings for her.

I know her story brought up old memories for me that I had long forgotten. By reflecting on her story, I remembered times in my own life that other students had made my life miserable, and I remembered how badly I hated school during those times and how badly I wanted to run away and never go back. Given Very Blue's traumatic experience in junior high school, I am impressed that she made it all the way into the 11th grade before she left high school. I think her perseverance is a testimony of her resiliency.

After I had transcribed Very Blue's interview, I read over it again while I listened to the tape in an attempt to identify any emergent themes. In this regard, I noted that she had shared several themes with Carlie. Those themes were:

1. Drug addiction and recovery
2. Recovery as an educational motivator
3. High school drop out
4. G.E.D
5. Shaming experience during grade school
6. Supportive Others - husband, friends, and recovering community
7. Transfer in junior high school that preceded a traumatic experience
8. Not much parental support for her to complete school
9. Positive view of self as an adult learner
10. Continuing education through non-traditional avenues
11. Positive experience with college classes
12. Father had played a dominant role in her family of origin

After I transcribed the interview and included my thoughts about the emerging themes, I routed the material to Very Blue for her critique. She was
satisfied with the transcription of the interview, and she agreed that my proposed themes had captured the essence of her experience.

Very Blue’s Second Interview

My second interview with Very Blue was at 5:00 p.m. on April 8, 2002. She chose to meet at the same restaurant in which we convened the first interview. She went to the restaurant directly from her home and was waiting for me when I arrived from work.

It was a chilly spring day, so we wore our jackets throughout the entire interview. She had family commitments that evening and needed to make the meeting short, so rather than eating, we both just ordered drinks, and we sipped our drinks throughout the interview.

The primary focus of my second interview with her was to solicit her view of the credibility of my findings and interpretations from the first interview. In this regard, she concurred with my assessment of the data.

Darcy: You have a history of drug addiction.

Very Blue: Yes, I do.

Darcy: Recovery was a major motivator for you to return to school.

Very Blue: Yes, it was.

Darcy: You were a high school dropout.

Very Blue: Yes.

Darcy: You later got your G.E.D.

Very Blue: Right.

Darcy: You had a shaming experience during your middle school years.

Very Blue: Yes.
Darcy: You had supportive others in your life around your recovery and returning to school. Your husband was one of those as were your friends in the recovering community.

Very Blue: Yes.

Darcy: Okay. I did a little more break down about how the transfer to the new school during the middle school brought about the negative learning experience for you.

Very Blue: Right.

Darcy: It set the stage for a lot of negative things that happened in school.

Very Blue: Yes.

Darcy: What were your parents' attitudes about you and education? Did they encourage you to get more of an education, or . . . ?

Very Blue: I don’t think that that was encouraged. There were so many kids in the family. It just seemed like they were distracted with all that, yeah.

Darcy: Okay. About your view of yourself as a learner, I don’t remember what my note was about that, but it seemed that you saw yourself as a learner and capable of learning, and your experience of college was very positive and set the stage for you to feel better about yourself as a learner.

Very Blue: Yes. I would still like to learn more. In fact, I was just looking on the Internet the other day and realized that I need to get to some trainings, you know. I'm starving for the learning.

Darcy: Oh, great! Okay, you had continued your education through non-traditional avenues such as workforce development and in-service types of stuff.

Very Blue: Yes.

Darcy: Okay, you already said that you had good learning experiences in college classes. Your father played a dominant role in your life.

Very Blue: Yes, he did.
I focused the last half of the interview on having Very Blue expound on a couple of areas. In this regard, I started by asking her to clarify her parents’ educational levels. It appears that both of her parents at least were high school graduates. This information is an indication that they had adopted the conventional norms about a high school education.

Darcy: Okay, the question that I asked you before was, “What were your parents’ educational levels?” Do you know that?

Very Blue: I think Dad started college, but he hurt his knee in football, so then he stopped, and then my mother, she’s a graduate, high-school graduate.

As with the other participants, Very Blue had a parent who abused chemicals. In her case, the parent in question was her father. Her perception of him was that he was a binge drinker. In this regard, she stated that his alcohol abuse was sporadic and interspersed with periods of sobriety in which he did not drink alcohol at all.

Darcy: So looking back over my notes, I also had the question about whether you thought either one of your parents or both abused alcohol or other drugs.

Very Blue: My father was raised where his father owned a tavern, so there was a lot of drinking going around. Then he started working in the tavern. But as soon as they had the first child, my dad stopped working in the tavern, and he had his brother-in-law work in it, but I see my father as a--once he starts drinking, he doesn’t stop drinking, but he does it on occasion. He held down a job. He raised a bunch of kids, but I could see him going to black outs.

Darcy: Okay, so it sounds like he at least did some binge drinking and abusing . . .

Very Blue: Oh, yeah. Yeah.
As an adolescent, Very Blue felt disconnected from her family of origin. In this regard, she noted that her family’s lack of communication and her own defiant behavior triggered a downward spiral in which there was no return.

Darcy: Okay, you had said that you were the “black sheep” of the family.

Very Blue: Yes.

Darcy: And, I don’t remember how you drew that conclusion.

Very Blue: Okay, during my teenage years, it was really hard to communicate with my mom and dad, and I felt kind of like the “lost child.” I was the “lost child,” so every time I did something, I was told “no” I couldn’t do it, and I was the one that always got into trouble because of the boyfriend, the drugs, staying out late, and there was a couple of times that I ran away, and it just seemed like it wasn’t working.

The disconnection at home was painful and confusing for Very Blue, and it ultimately ended with her father physically assaulting her. The assault traumatized her, and she responded by detaching from her parents and leaving their home for good before she was 18 years old.

Darcy: The other thing, just looking at my notes, I put a word down here and a question mark about physical abuse because I didn’t really hear it when I sat with you the first time, but when I was doing some of the transcription, you had talked about being bruised on your legs. When your--something about your dad or . . .

Very Blue: I don’t think it was bruised on my legs. I don’t remember . . .

Darcy: Okay, that’s not ringing a bell?

Very Blue: No, but he did hit me one time.

Darcy: Okay.

Very Blue: And that was the only time.

Darcy: Okay.
Very Blue: And that was when I was pregnant with my first child, and I told him I wouldn’t have an abortion, and then he told me I had a certain amount of time to get out of the house, so I was about three months pregnant, and I was carrying all of my stuff down in boxes in front of him. He sat there and watched me take out the boxes to my boyfriend—actually, my husband now, and he was putting them in the car. I had left. They called me where I was and told me I needed to get home right away the next day and was mad at me for not coming home that night, but my father saw me carry things out, so it was really confusing.

My dad had said that he had talked to my husband, who was my boyfriend at the time, and they got into an argument because my dad was being mean to me, and my dad took it different. He thought that I had told people that he was physically abusing me, and then when I got home, for everybody to see, he slapped me, and that was really traumatic.

After I transcribed the tape, I routed it on to Very Blue for her assessment. She was satisfied that I had captured the fundamental nature of her intent.

**Researcher’s Reflections on Very Blue’s Second Interview**

When I think of Very Blue, I feel a sadness that I cannot explain. I have gone over and over her transcripts and have tried to remember the essence of all my communications with her, but none of it explains my feelings.

I am beginning to think that I am picking up on some sadness that is left over from her adolescence because I do not sense it in her conversations about her husband and her sons. I sense it in the parts of the conversations that focus on her family of origin and her adolescence. At the same time, I am wondering if I am projecting something on to her that is not there, so I question myself about what that might all be about.

I cannot imagine what it must have been like to be pregnant, emotional, and needing support only to have my father reject me and slap my face. I think it would have been an unbearable affront to my emotional well-being, and I think it would
have changed me somehow. Did it change her? Did it harden her resolve? Did it make her more determined?

Benard (1995) says that resilient people have autonomous characteristics in that they adapt to negative situations by distancing themselves from the stressor. Is that what enabled her to leave her parents’ home that day and never try to go back? Is that what makes her seem so independent? Is that why her husband and sons are so important to her?

In closing my chapter on Very Blue, I think the most important thing I learned from her story is the importance of having at least one person who believes in you until you can believe in yourself. Very Blue obviously felt lost in a tribe of children when she was growing up, and when she needed her parents the most, they were unable to be there for her.

I think that is why she formed such a close bond to her husband [who was her boyfriend at the time], and I think that is why she ultimately followed him into recovery. He had time for her, he made her feel special, and he believed in her. Maybe that is why her face softens and her eyes sparkle when she speaks of him and his emotional support. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all children, indeed, all people, had someone who had time for them, had someone who made them feel special, and had someone who could believe in them until they could believe in themselves?
Chapter 6: South Paw

South Paw is a 56-year-old Caucasian male. He is the second child of four children. He has been married twice. He was married to his first wife for 19 years. They later divorced, and, subsequently, he was a single parent for many years. During the course of this study, however, he married for the second time.

South Paw has been in recovery from substance dependence for 20 years, and he has worked in the addiction treatment field since 1983. He has his CADC II, and he is currently employed at a non-profit addiction treatment program.

Out of the four participants who completed the study, South Paw is the only one who actually received a high school diploma. He later enrolled in college but then dropped out after the first year. As such, his highest level of academic completion is the 13th grade. He is not enrolled in an educational program at this time, but he is interested in continuing his education.

I have known South Paw in a professional capacity for approximately ten years. In that time, I have discovered that he has a quick wit and that he is a joker who loves to make people laugh.

At the same time, I have found that he is determined in all of his endeavors and that he has an intense personality that rivals my own. In fact, he and I have been on the opposite sides of many philosophical debates, and I have found him to be a worthy opponent on every occasion, and I have admired his passion for his beliefs.

The following is South Paw's autobiography. It is an excerpt from a paper that he wrote in 1987 to a certification board. While the document was written 15 years ago, he is choosing to use it as his introduction now because he feels that it will provide the reader with a historical perspective of his life and a better understanding of who he is as a person today.

I have made some changes to the demographic identifiers, such as names and places, to ensure his anonymity. Other than that, the document is as he wrote it.

South Paw begins the piece by detailing the physical and emotional abuse that he experienced in his family of origin. He then shares some examples of his drug addiction, his criminal history, and his recovery from addiction. He ends the
document by providing an overview of his personal growth and professional development.

I come from a dysfunctional family. My father was an alcoholic who was relieved of military duty after World War II for "combat fatigue" and sent to a military hospital. He was released after several months and granted a lifetime pension for on-going mental problems.

My father was psychotic and unpredictable. I was severely physically and emotionally abused from the time he was sent home. He hit me with boards and hammers, drove staples into me, burned my hands on our wood stove, and continually called me names, downgraded my accomplishments, and, in general, destroyed my self-worth. I learned at a very young age that it wasn’t safe to trust anyone, that the world was a violent and terrifying place where I was absolutely alone, and that survival meant whatever was necessary from moment to moment to survive.

My father was what was called a “fruit tramp” at that time, moving from place to place, following the crops as they became ready to harvest. We lived in extreme isolation in rural areas, moving from town to town frequently. We lived in poverty in one-room places with no electricity or running water and, at one point, lived in the back of a pickup for almost a year.

My father taught me not to steal from friends but that anyone who had more money or power was fair game and deserved to be taken. Through all the moving around and continual rejection by my classmates to whom I was a stranger, I became fearful, alienated, and angry. I felt as if I were different and not as good as others who had homes and families who cared about them.

I was also born with a defective jawbone, which made my teeth stick out grotesquely in front, which in my mind, was another reason why people rejected me. (An operation repaired this in 1964.) After a while, I became a loner and avoided contact as much as possible with everyone so I would be rejected as little as possible.

My family ended up in Memphis, Tennessee [sic] when I was in seventh grade. Our truck had broken down on the way to Lane County for the pear harvest. I then stayed in Memphis through high
school and one year of junior college although my isolation, fear, and anger remained unchanged. I felt I was different and inferior. My situation with my family and father became worse as his alcoholism progressed and bouts of violence continued. I began to drink myself at that time and had several self-destructive episodes with alcohol and marijuana. I received a great number of traffic citations and, in my drunken and hostile irresponsibility, ignored them all until I was arrested. I volunteered for the draft to get away from my father and to appease the court, and on September 7, 1966, I joined the U.S. Army.

I had a very difficult time in the service due to my resentment of authority and was in minor trouble several times. While in the Army, I got married to the second woman I dated, after knowing her for only one month. I was discharged in 1968 as a private first class, without any vocational skills, and moved to San Francisco with my wife to find a job.

What I found instead of a job was drugs and a group of people who appeared to be more like me than anyone I had ever met. They were alienated, hostile, resentful of authority, and so was I. I began taking LSD in large amounts on a regular basis, and also was given speed. At first, the LSD was a pleasant experience, but speed had a very sinister affect on me. I was very hyper anyway, and speed not only made me feel confident but also lowered my inhibitions and made me psychotic.

I began acting out, doing anti-social things deliberately. I also fell in with a group of people in San Francisco who were drug users and criminals. I began stealing cars then abandoning them. I also started selling drugs to support my own drug habit. My first real criminal arrest was for an old ’58 Chevy that was stolen and then given to me. I bought a wrecked ’58 Chevy and switched the license plates and registration.

During the same time, I committed the only burglary I ever did. I broke into my best friend’s parents’ house and took a lot of their possessions. I was never charged with this crime. I was thoroughly crazed on LSD and (mostly) speed at that point. I drove to Mexico in a stolen car full of stolen property to buy drugs to bring back to sell.

I was nearly killed in Tijuana because I was extremely naïve but escaped with my life and went back to Memphis. There I was arrested with the car. I had given away and sold some of the property I had taken. After I was off drugs long enough to clear my
head, I took the police with me to retrieve the stolen property. The next time I was arrested was for trespassing; the time after that was for receiving stolen property, which, I think, was a motorcycle.

The sad fact is that I don’t even remember what item I had stolen led to my arrest, but I was certainly guilty of far more than I was ever charged for. I wasn’t stealing cars for the money or profit but would sometimes just abandon them. I once traded a motorcycle for a car, which I later abandoned. I had gotten more into drugs by then and spent my first 90 days in jail in Phoenix and Albuquerque (for receiving stolen property).

I returned to abusing and selling drugs after that and moved away from Phoenix—a strategy for pretending that I would be a better person somewhere else. I lived with my wife and several other people in an alley by the waterfront in San Francisco until February 17, 1974.

On that day, I injected a large amount of speed (I usually put it in coffee or snorted it) and went berserk. I kicked in the door of my own house, tore the house apart looking for a coffee cup, and had to be restrained by the other people living there. They gave me Quaaludes to calm me down. After about eight Quaaludes, I demanded to be driven to Sacramento to visit friends and, along the way, forced my wife to let me drive.

I spotted a motorcycle dismantled in a carport, made my wife get out of the car, and, in plain view of the house, ripped the back seat out of my Saab and dragged the dismantled motorcycle as far into the car as I could. I left my car seat there and drove off with my wife screaming and crying and this worthless motorcycle dangling halfway out of the car door.

The Sacramento police stopped me, naturally, and I told them I found the motorcycle and was going to fix it. I told them I was going to a friend’s house a block away, so they just followed me there and arrested me. I was arrested for possessing drugs, stolen property, and malicious mischief. The malicious mischief charge was for kicking the police car after I was in it. I don’t remember doing that or much of that whole episode, but people filled me in later—to my dismay.

I was frightened by my bizarre behavior and, for the first time, began to suspect that there was something really wrong with me. I did things I knew were wrong; it seemed like I wanted to hurt myself and offend others I didn’t even know. I began to think I was
mentally ill, so I went to the V.A. Hospital in Martinez Arizona and turned myself in.

I went there every day for months participating in their day hospital program. There they did extensive tests and took us on field trips where we smoked pot with the therapists. It never occurred to them or me that I had a serious drug problem. They pronounced me a manic-depressant because nothing else fit, gave me Lithium and Elavil, and said, “Take these and you should be okay.”

I took the medications for quite a while but resumed selling and using drugs again and began experiencing the same kinds of hostile and self-destructive patterns. During this time, in 1967, my son Jonathan was born. I also got involved with cocaine about that time and had to sell more and more drugs to support my cocaine habit. I began selling quite indiscriminately and getting further and further into debt.

Cocaine made me feel the way I imagined everyone else felt--confident, secure, socially adept, and gregarious. It was as if someone had designed a drug to interlock perfectly with my deficiencies and character defects. I literally could not get enough and overdosed regularly, doing up to seven grams a day. I was very heavily in debt by that point and was selling anything and everything to just stay loaded.

I was arrested on August 20, 1978--charged with a multitude of drug charges. I was convicted two years later for transportation and sale of cocaine. During all that time, I never stopped using drugs. I remember thinking I was just unlucky to have been caught. My world was drugs and the drug culture. I didn’t know anyone who didn’t use or sell drugs. Everywhere I looked I saw signs that the world was doing it with me from High Times Magazine, to references on the Johnny Carson Show, to music on the radio--even in the Herb Caen column.

Drugs had become my reason for living--my only worth as a distributor of them--my only security as a user of them. I went to jail for a year and never stopped using. In fact, I actually ended up selling cocaine to the guy who ran the outside trustee program.

I was released from jail and moved to Stockton--again figuring that moving somewhere else would make life better and that cocaine would be harder to find in Stockton. I got a job as a janitor in a drug store, worked the graveyard shift alone, and went to school
during the day in Modesto. I did hold my drug use down for a while but resumed again after a few months and got back into cocaine.

This time was worse; it didn’t take any time at all to get to the point where my entire paycheck went to the purchase of cocaine. I began stealing cameras from the store to trade for a half or whole gram of cocaine. I tried to hide my usage from everyone, so I would go in cycles of doing massive amounts of cocaine to enable myself to continue my job, then taking handfuls of Valiums or consuming large amounts of alcohol to sleep during the day.

Due to my schedule, I didn’t have much contact with anyone and continued to get worse and worse. My store manager warned me that they were aware of what was happening, but I was so far gone by that time I just literally didn’t care if I lived or died, let alone whether I got caught or not, so I just continued stealing, and they eventually caught me just as they said they would.

After I came down and came back to reality in jail, I began to realize what had been happening. My wife had left me, my family wouldn’t even talk to me, my son thought I was crazy, I had lost my job, had no self-respect whatsoever, and had completely hit bottom. I realized that the last 20 years of my life had been completely wasted. I didn’t have anything but a sickening past, a ruined present, and no future.

After what had just happened, I could no longer delude myself that drugs were something I could control since I had been unable to quit under any circumstances. I sent a request to talk to somebody about drugs, and a lady from a drug treatment program came to see me in jail. I had seen a sign stating, “If you have a drug problem, call Recovery Now.” I was accepted into their program and ended up going to Recovery Now.

At Recovery Now, I had to change everything from the inside out. My warped values had to be brought to light and changed. I had to learn the value of honesty, rigorous honesty, with not only property but with others and myself. I had to learn how incredibly selfish and self-centered I was thinking the world revolved around me.

I had to admit that I was terrified of other people; that I was convinced that I was inferior socially, physically, and ethically to other people and that I had to have something—drugs, money, something to make me equal. I had to examine and discard all the
unethical, underhanded, and manipulative ways I had used to survive and exploit others.

I needed to be able to admit and identify the ways that I twisted things around in my head to make wrong things seem right, by rationalizing, minimizing, discounting, and so on. I had to admit that I was a basket case emotionally, that I was incapable of dealing with or expressing my feelings honestly or productively. It became apparent to me that I was incredibly immature and irresponsible and tended to blame others for things I was responsible for.

To admit these things to myself and a community of other people was the hardest thing I have ever done or probably will do. I learned that there were choices, whereas before I had known only one way to feel, one way to think, one way to respond to conflict, or fear, or anger, or controllable situations. I learned that I was completely responsible for my own feelings, attitudes, and responses. I learned how to use choices to help myself and others.

I learned that I would have to discard my former acquaintances and did so. I became involved with Narcotics Anonymous, learned further moral and ethical guidelines to live by, became a part of that fellowship, and got involved in service work after Recovery Now.

I had always wanted to work with people. While using my G.I. bill money in ill-fated attempts to go to various schools, I had always taken both psychology and anthropology courses and consistently did well in them regardless of my personal condition. I had always been a keen observer of others, initially out of fear as with my father, and later out of a genuine and continuing fascination with human behavior.

I did so well at Recovery Now, and my natural and learned aptitudes were so evident that the director offered me a position as a staff orientation candidate. I took that position, went right from that to staff trainee, and later became a full-fledged counselor. I had a lot to learn, but my interests and abilities kept me going when things got difficult.

Treatment became more complex as more and more was learned about families, addictions, and psychology, and as the requirements and demands of documentation skyrocketed. More and more of the original recovering staff were unable to cope with the influx of new information, treatments, demands, and the
competition with counselors with masters [sic] degrees and family counseling licensing. I stayed and flourished, learning more and more and loving it all.

I became interested in working with families as an even more complex, challenging, and effective way of dealing with alcoholism and addiction came about. I learned radical and innovative techniques for counseling in working with trainers from the Emotional and Mental Research Institute in Phoenix. I had been recognized during the training as being able to quickly grasp difficult problems and come up with original solutions to those problems. I applied structural and strategic interventions to people and situations in residential treatment and was invited to write papers documenting my work.

My personal life was changing. I had gone to a marriage counselor with my wife after Recovery Now and had gone back with my family with the hope of continuing the relationship. After about 1-1/2 years, my wife began using drugs again, began behaving erratically, and refused to seek help or acknowledge that she had a problem.

In one of the most difficult decisions of my life, I had to face the fact that the chances of my remaining drug-free were seriously being jeopardized by her use, and after 19 years of marriage and, by now, two children, I moved out with my children. She has since become restabilized, but we are divorced and share custody of our children from separate towns.

South Paw’s First Interview

My first interview with South Paw was on the cold and rainy evening of Tuesday, March 13, 2001. We met for an hour and a half that night. He chose to convene the interview at his place of employment, and we met after he had completed a treatment group. His group was the last one meeting that night, so other than a couple of clients who straggled out of the building after the close of their counseling session and the janitorial crew that was cleaning offices at the far end of the hall, the structure was virtually vacated.

We conducted the interview in South Paw’s small private office. I sat facing him a few feet away in one of his two office chairs. He sat in his chair at his desk. His desk was covered with a few client files and random stacks of paperwork. The
chair had a rocking mechanism to it, so throughout the course of the evening, he periodically rocked slowly back and forth. His window looked out over the dark, empty, parking lot, and his mini-blinds were pulled up tight against the top of his window so that our distorted images were reflected back to us from the darkness.

The wall behind South Paw was adorned with pictures of his family. One picture in particular was of his father and a flight crew that his father had flown with during World War II. South Paw had me guess which one I thought was his father. I guessed correctly on the first try, and we spent some time discussing the strong resemblance that he had to his father in that picture.

South Paw’s method of continuing his addiction certification training has been based solely on non-traditional means. In this regard, he has relied on OADAP’s counselor-training offerings to meet his recertification requirements. However, that program’s contributions have been greatly scaled back in the last couple of years, and he, like some other addictions counselors, is now being forced to seek alternative avenues of gaining the continuing education that is needed to renew his certificate.

OADAP’s reduction in its training contributions has put South Paw in a difficult position because he works full-time and has little excess time for after-hour activities. His plight is further complicated by the fact that he just recently returned to work after being out on medical disability for a couple of years. During the time that he was out recovering from his medical problems, he was too ill to attend trainings, and he is now feeling pressured to complete 60 hours of training within a year. Under such pressure, he is now considering enrolling in traditional college classes in order to maintain his certification.

Darcy: Okay. What is your educational status at this time? Are you enrolled anywhere?

South Paw: No, I'm going to have to be though, because [rocks back in chair] in order to maintain my status as a CADC, you have to have a certain amount of ongoing education. [Clears throat.] Now being on disability and out sick for a long time like I was--I was on sabbatical, so all that was suspended, and now I've just
come back from sabbatical and found out that I have to have, 60 hours of education and training in the next year, so there's that.

Darcy: Okay, so 60 hours. Well, that's what, two classes, or ...? How are you looking to do that in terms of ...? Are you going to do the eight ...?

South Paw: They don't have those anymore. They stopped them this year, and myself and one other person here was looking at those as kind of a lifeline, and now because of funding and changes in the way things work, there are no more of those, so now it looks like I'm going to have to maybe take some classes at Valley Community or something.

Darcy: Okay, so like regular--I don't know what they call them, traditional institutional type.

South Paw: Yeah, and there may be some on-line types of things that I can do or something like that.

South Paw describes his best learning experience as one that happened shortly after he began working in the addiction treatment field. In this regard, he explains that the learning occurred in the context of a workforce development program that his employer had provided for the staff.

On a practical level, he describes the experience as being especially beneficial to him in that he was able to gain knowledge in the context of performing tasks that were of immediate relevance to his job. On a personal level, however, he explains that the experience transformed him. In this regard, he clarifies that he went from being someone who had a negative concept of himself as a learner to a person who perceived himself as a respected professional and a valued peer educator.

He credits the instructors for his transformation. He declares that they were innovative, that they had engaging teaching styles, and that they balanced the learners' intellectual needs with their emotional needs. Further, he explains that they fostered the students' intelligence by providing them with opportunities to be creative and by allowing them to assume responsibility for their own learning.
South Paw felt that the instructors were supportive, encouraging, and validating. In that regard, he maintains that they listened to his ideas, they recognized his life achievements, and they honored his wisdom. As a result, he felt valued and fulfilled, but most of all, he felt safe, and in that environment of safety, he became excited about the prospect of learning. Indeed, he was riveted by the notion of learning. The more he learned, the better he felt, and the better he felt, the more he wanted to learn. He wanted to learn as much as he could, as fast as he could.

With such newfound feelings of success, his self-esteem and self-confidence soared. His co-workers recognized this transformation, and his excitement became infectious. He ultimately became a leader to his peers and contributed to their learning as well as his own.

Darcy: Well, let me switch gears a little bit from the nuts and bolts to the historical stuff. What was your best learning experience? And of course, this is assumed that you had one--this question. The best one from kindergarten on up--if you had one.

South Paw: I do, actually. I think for me it wasn't in a traditional school setting. It was when I was a new counselor, and I was working in a place in Nevada where, because of the way the program was run, they were a really innovative place, and I just was a rookie. I don't know what they call it, sort of like a kind of an intern counselor at the time, and that's what I really wanted to do more than anything.

And because it was an innovative place, they brought in these people from MRI, the Mental Research Institute that knew about brief therapy, about structural and family therapy, and about solutions therapy, and those guys were there like three days a week for four hours teaching all the people that worked there. It was like an inpatient and an outpatient and transitional housing and everybody that worked there was there.

I just couldn't learn that stuff fast enough. It was-- it was wonderful. It seemed like I could pick it up really quick, and, it made sense to me, and the people there were . . . I mean I wasn't hesitant about participating, and it was a real positive experience, and I was able to apply the stuff that I learned right there in the setting, and then they thought that that was pretty cool.
They encouraged me and so set up this feedback thing where I just wanted more and more and more, but I started doing some extra reading and asking those guys for more information, and they brought me more stuff, so it just turns into this incredible process where I couldn't get enough of what was being offered to me.

That never really had ever happened before in life to me before, so that was, that was an incredible experience, and later on, the same people ended up working in the same outpatient where I worked, and I figured out ways to use some of that stuff in the residential where people hadn't done that before, and they asked me to write about it, to publish it, and I thought, "Wow, this is really cool! Neat!" You know?

Darcy: Right.

South Paw: Me, Mr. Bonehead. You know, so that was probably the--that was really, really easily the best learning experience in education I've ever had. It was exciting and fulfilling. I felt, I felt encouraged and validated and all these things I'd never felt before, and I didn't know if it was because I was not in my dysfunctional family, and I was clean then, so I was kind of really ready and ripe, or whether it was the style they used, or what exactly it was. Whatever it was, man it sure worked!

Darcy: So in terms of the style, and maybe you already answered it as you were talking, what was their style that was different as far as you look over it and think about it now? What did they do that was different than say, grade school or high school? You talked about barely, barely getting done with high school.

South Paw: Well, they were really engaging. I mean they really wanted to engage people, so they were always drawing people in, and they were really encouraging, too. It wasn't... Even if they thought peoples' ideas and suggestions weren't the best, they found a way to validate them for at least having an idea, so there wasn't that fear of getting shot down for having an idea that wasn't the best one in the world. So, it created an atmosphere where people could feel like taking a chance a little bit, and I think mostly it was their encouraging style, their way of doing it. I mean, if you even have the slightest bit of interest, they just picked right up on that and then watered that to make it flourish...
Darcy: It sounds like there were opportunities for the experiential hands-on doing it. You mentioned that.

South Paw: They let you try out things, and then they really encouraged that. [Prolonged pause.] There were two of them, so they kept it going. They really kept it going, so it kept my interest, and I have a tendency to sometimes wonder off course. [Pause.] Pretty frequently, actually. [Rocks back in chair.]

[Both chuckle.]  

South Paw [resumes]: So, the two of them together, they had each a little bit different style. One of them was more kind of funny and sarcastic, and the other guy was more laid back and encouraging, and they sort of played off each other, too, and kept people involved, so, I was pretty much riveted, you know. I didn't find myself thinking, “Well, let’s see, it’s almost time to...”

Darcy: Yeah. That sounds like a wonderful experience.

South Paw: It really was.

Darcy: Well, the other thing that cued me that it was good for you is that it triggered you to go on and find stuff for yourself, the reading and the extra stuff, and it took on a life of its own for you.

South Paw: Oh, it sure did!

Darcy: So it really surprised you, this “this is me” type of thing?

South Paw: Yeah, yeah.

Darcy: You know, all the learning opportunities?

South Paw: Yeah, and being successful at it and really getting the stuff, too.

Darcy: Yeah, right and having it fit.

South Paw: Yeah, and the people that were there started like turning to me for stuff, “Oh, you really get this stuff! Well, then what do you do if this happens? What do you do if that happens, and what do you do about that?”

Darcy: That really would have been validating for you as a learner and a teacher, too. I mean, you went from being the sponge to
people turning to you and asking you, which fits with what you were talking about earlier in terms of your hopes for maybe the future to get some training yourself—to be a trainer.

South Paw: Yeah! Yeah! That was the first time that that happened, so I couldn't believe how encouraging that was.

Darcy: How old do you think you were? I mean, obviously you were an adult, but what are we saying here?

South Paw: That was in 1982. No, sorry, 1983 [chuckles].

Darcy: So, 1983?

South Paw: Yeah, back in '83 [makes his voice sound like an old man].

Darcy: Okay. You were definitely an adult then.

South Paw: Oh, yeah.

In recalling his worst learning experience, South Paw reflects on his elementary school years. He remembers those years as a painful time in which there was no sanctuary for him at school or at home.

He remembers those years as a time of poverty and transience. He remembers moving from school to school, never being able to put down roots. He remembers feeling different than the other kids, feeling like an outsider, never fitting in, always having to prove himself, always having to fight.

He remembers being academically advanced, and then he remembers feeling overwhelmed and falling behind. He remembers feeling hopeless about his ability to learn.

He remembers experiencing corporal punishment at school at the hands of a teacher. He remembers the punishment as being painful but no match for the torture and beatings that he sustained at home at the hands of his father.

He remembers a teacher who taught him to equate school and learning with shame and humiliation. He remembers feeling helpless, and then he remembers his helplessness turning to anger. He remembers shutting down. He remembers learning to fight. He remembers learning to hate.
Darcy: What was your worst learning experience, or earliest, or one you want to share, or maybe you have more than one you want to share?

South Paw: Oh, probably Mrs. McDuffy.

Darcy: [Laughs.]

South Paw: I think.

Darcy: Everybody always remembers the names, don't they?

South Paw: Well, school was really, really tough. My family was in really, really bad shape. We moved around all the time. I mean, like, I'm talking all the time. We'd flee one town and go to the next one and the next one. We were like transients, and fruit tramps, and all that kind of stuff—one town to another, [pause] so we were never in one place.

There was always that feeling of not really belonging and having to catch up. I got skipped a grade, too, when I was like in third grade. 'Cause I was always kind of—I was a tremendous reader. I learned how to read when I was really young. I was reading like Kipling in second grade, so they skipped me a grade, and then that was really a bad idea though because I think I was emotionally [pause] and psychologically [pause] not real mature. I had all these issues and problems, and I was in with all these older kids now, so that kind of shut me down, and then I went downhill from there.

But Mrs. McDuffy, the thing with her was . . . I was in a school in Texas where they believed in corporal punishment. You know, where they would hit ya if you didn't do what they wanted you to do, and getting hit didn't phase me that much, but [rocks back in chair, pauses] Mrs. McDuffy, [pauses] I was left-handed, and she didn't like my handwriting, so one of the worst experiences I think I had was I turned in some homework, and to make an example and shame me into doing the right thing, she took me and my homework around from class to class showing all the other kids—you know, “Look at all this horrible work that you see before you.”

And it worked. I was pretty ashamed and pretty humiliated [rocks back in chair] and really, really mad, but I couldn't do anything [pause] about that, so the one thing that I could do though was to stop doing homework, which I did, and from that day until I graduated high school, I did no homework—none, ever.
Darcy: What a negative experience. Do you know what grade you were in or how old you were?

South Paw: I think it was like in the fifth grade.

Darcy: Okay. Uhh, that's ugly.

South Paw: Yeah, it wasn't too much fun. Mrs. McDuffy, bless her heart. I wonder what happened to her.

Darcy: [Laughs.] How many other poor students did she shut down . . .?

South Paw: [Chuckles.] Yeah, except for my handwriting, I wasn't a problem in class.

Darcy: Yeah. How many schools would you say you were in from first grade to when you graduated? What would you guess? You said you moved a lot.

South Paw: Uhh, well, several times a year sometimes, at least. I don't know--maybe 30 or 40--something like that.

Darcy: Wow! In 12 years?

South Paw: Yeah.

Darcy: Holy cow!

South Paw: Yeah.

Darcy: Tremendous.

South Paw: Yeah, that's a lot.

Darcy: So, tell me again, what would be the worst part of the moving piece? Like always being an outsider . . .? Always . . .?

South Paw: Always being a stranger. Never knowing where you fit in. Always coming in the middle of things, so that kind of stuff. That kind of stuff and mostly the outsider thing, you know. Like not feeling like you ever belong, and everybody looking at you kind of funny because you're the new person. You have to fight a lot and stuff like that. I hated that.
In elaboration of the distress in his family of origin, South Paw talks about his father's alcoholism and about him being the target of his father's rage and physical abuse. He also tells about how his mother had tried to encourage him to pursue his education and how he had dismissed her urgings.

He explains that he rejected her encouragement because he had experienced so much academic failure by that time that he had internalized all the negativity and had begun to perceive himself as stupid and defective. In fact, his experience of school was so distressful that he began having phobic responses to it, and he ultimately needed to disconnect from it in order to alleviate the discomfort.

Darcy: You were talking about the dysfunction, and you were talking before that there was an addiction in your family.

South Paw: Yeah, alcoholism for my dad, and then he had PTSD from in the Air Force, so there was violence and physical abuse and emotional abuse and things like that, so, there was all that stuff.

Darcy: Who was the target or the targets of your dad's rage?

South Paw: Well, I was the primary target because that was my job. It was just like in the books. I had three brothers, and Tom was the hero, and I was the acting out guy, and Dick was kind of the wild child, and Harry was the mascot. It was just like the books.

Darcy: Mm-hmm. Okay, so when you were talking earlier about throwing grenades and bullets, so was the educational piece a trigger type of thing in focus with one of the things your dad could act out his rage on with you or . . . ?

South Paw: He didn't care about that.

Darcy: He didn't care?

South Paw: No. He just cared about chores and stuff like that. Yeah, so I don't think education had anything to do with it. He didn't believe in church or education or anything like that. You knew what you were supposed to be doing, and you had to do it on your own.

Darcy: Oh, okay, so that was part of the message that you got was, "Do it, or don't do it, and I expect you to do it yourself." Did your
mom ever try to encourage you to go on with school since she started off with trying to get you to read?

South Paw: Yeah, she did. She wanted me to go on to college and do all that stuff, but it didn't seem like a possibility--or a realistic possibility anyway. I thought I was just a--a stupid person.

Darcy: How did you come to believe that you were a stupid person?

South Paw: Just academic failure--things with math and things like that. I had a learning disability with numbers. I think because I got skipped in school I missed a piece of my math, and nothing made sense to me after that, so then I got phobic about it and backed away from it, and I began to think that maybe my thinker wasn't as good as others.

Darcy: Do you remember calling yourself dumb in school as your own message to yourself?

South Paw: Oh, sure, yeah. Saying that this really wasn't for me.

Darcy: [Laughs.] I always laugh because it sounds so familiar--to know what that feels like to feel dumb, or stupid, or whatever it is, so, early on--what grade did you say you got skipped again? Was it third grade?

South Paw: I think it was third grade, yeah. Third or fourth. I don't know which.

When South Paw was in junior high school, he had a teacher who saw behind his anger and recognized his academic potential. The teacher tried to reinforce his talents and even encouraged him to explore a college education. However, by that time, his self-loathing, sense of shame, and low self-esteem had turned into depression, and he was unable to internalize the support.

His depression was also exacerbated by his family's dysfunction, their transient lifestyle, and his frequent school changes. He recalls this as a period in his life in which he constantly had to fight to prove himself. He also recalls it as a time in which he felt stupid, ugly, isolated, and anxious. He remembers feeling scared and living in dread, and he remembers those feelings overriding his ability to learn.
He also remembers feeling bored because the learning was too prescribed. He recalls the boredom as being particularly disturbing in that he could have used an academic challenge to have diverted his mind off the troubles that he was experiencing at home.

Darcy: Was there anybody saying, "Gee, you really ought to do this?" Or had there been anybody beyond your mom, in the early days at least, encouraging you to go on back to school? I mean really hanging in there and checking in with you, or . . . ?

South Paw: Well, I had one teacher in junior high school that I really related to, and he saw something that I wrote. He was asking me to write these things all the time, so I wrote something that was pretty hateful and sarcastic, and he looked at it and saw through the hate and sarcasm that there was something going on there, so he encouraged me to write more stuff, and because of him, I ended up taking the entrance exam for a university in Arizona when I was in like junior high school and passed it, and he said all of these really encouraging things. He said, "You can write anything you want. You’re a smart person and talented." You know what I mean? Like that, and that was really cool. That was one person in the midst of all these other [pause] people, but that was pretty cool, and I sure— I sure remember it.

Darcy: You remember that. Were you able to own it and wear it as much as—did you start calling yourself smart?

South Paw: No, nah. Nah.

Darcy: It wasn’t enough by that point. Too little in the middle of the stream of all the other stuff that had gone by?

South Paw: Yeah, yeah. I just thought, “Well, geez, maybe I can do just this one little thing here,” but everything else . . .

Darcy: So you compartmentalized that piece.

South Paw: Yep. Um hum. Um hum. Yeah, because it didn’t fit with [pause] all the other stuff. You know? [Long pause.] I like to think of it like the Rain Man type of thing. You know? He can count the matchsticks, but . . .

Darcy: Yeah. Yeah.
Darcy: Okay, so by that late date, it was just too little too late in terms of—to generalize to the rest of your life.

South Paw: I don’t know. Maybe too, too far gone in terms of self-esteem and especially with the way that everything else was going on; I was just stuck.

Darcy: Yeah. Do you think that you were depressed then in middle school, junior high?

South Paw: Oh, yeah!

Darcy: Like what was the most depressing part going on then?

South Paw: Uhh, I think just being isolated. I didn’t—I was so sure that I was [pause] unworthy and not only stupid, but also ugly, and [pause] and that nobody wanted to associate with me, [pause] so I made that a reality by, by not reaching out to people, and by [long pause] purposefully isolating myself, I made that my reality, and then I was really by myself, which is [pause] pretty sucky, and I wasn’t a fun place to be either, at the time, so [pause] it was not good.

Darcy: So, did I--am I just thinking--is this just in my head? Did you say that you did a lot of fighting in school?

South Paw: Yeah.

Darcy: You did say that?

South Paw: Yeah. That was mostly before we came to Montana. In Pennsylvania and those places, I used to have to fight all the time. All of these people would—if you came to a new school, the guys there would . . . The guys at school would come and want to beat me up, so, [pause] so, I had to do a lot of that. It was much better when we moved to Montana, and then I was like in sixth or seventh grade [coughs], so all that—I didn’t have to do that much of it then. I just kind of kept to myself. I hated that. That scared me really bad.

Darcy: The moves, or having to fight?

South Paw: Everything! All of it! I was always scared it seemed like.
Darcy: Well, yeah. I mean, just the anticipation of knowing that you were going to be moving any time soon and knowing that the other shoe was going to drop as soon as you do. I mean . . .

South Paw: Yeah, pretty much living in dread.

[Both laugh.]

Darcy: Yeah. No kidding. I can’t imagine what that would be like, but I can imagine that it would be pretty ugly.

South Paw: Um, hum.

Darcy: And I would imagine that it would make learning even that much tougher. I mean, how do you have time to worry about learning if you’re worried who the biggest big guy is in school?

[Both laugh.]

South Paw: Yeah.

Darcy: Bring out Bubba or whatever--on a leash. [Laughs.]

South Paw: Bubba and friends!

[Both laugh.]

Darcy: Yeah, Bubba! Okay, anything else you want to say about worst learning experiences?

South Paw: Ummmm. Just that it all--it just seemed really, really boring. It really, really was, and most of the teachers didn’t seem like they cared about what was going on. Everything was--it was sort of like the Army. In the Army, everything was the lowest common denominator kind of thing. You know? They tell you, “Pick up the pencil between the thumb and the forefinger of your right hand, or if you are left handed, your left hand. Put the pencil on the paper and begin writing your first name.” Like that, and, oh God, that was horrible. It was horrible, because [long pause] I didn’t need that.

Darcy: Yeah, your mind was a thousand miles from there.

South Paw: Yeah.
Darcy: You can't relate.

South Paw: Um, no.

As with many addiction treatment counselors, South Paw entered the addiction treatment field devoid of much formal higher education. Instead, he entered the field as a result of his own addiction and recovery. In this segment, he speaks about the life changing transformation that he experienced while he was in treatment, and he describes how he came to trust the addiction treatment staff and to feel safe from shame while he recovered and learned.

Darcy: How did you end up getting into this field? I mean, which assumes some level of learning--yeah, learning. How did you get into this field?

South Paw: Well, I went into, I went to a residential program because I needed to.

Darcy: Okay, treatment for yourself.

South Paw: Mm-hmm, treatment for myself, and in the process, I was in this residential program that was like 13 months long--a really, really long time.

Darcy: That's a long time for treatment.

South Paw: It is a long time for treatment, and it changed everything about me from the inside out--the way I thought about myself, the way I looked at myself, the way that I thought my capabilities were, how I thought my relationships with other people should be.

All of those things . . . I mean, people say it's literally like being reborn, and in that process somehow I don't know . . . I started feeling like it was such an important thing that was happening to me that I wanted to encourage and help other people because I had that, [pause] I had a feeling like I'd never had before, and it was profound, from the inside out, so I had all these things that I thought, and felt, and had known about all along, and it felt silly because I'm not used to all that stuff.
And so I couldn't focus and couldn't see what happened to me and all that stuff, and I was like a willing person at that point. Willing to do what was suggested because I was feeling pretty thrashed at that point. I was on my way to prison—I went there. I had already been in jail for a year at one point and lots of other times before that.

And so I was a pretty willing person at that time, at that place, they brought people that were in recovery there, and occasionally they would bring people in to work there, and they thought it would be useful for someone that could do it or would have an opportunity, so that became my goal, was to get...

Boy, I never really had a chance to do anything before, but the main thing I wanted to do is to do this thing that changed me from the inside out, so they--after I went through the whole treatment thing there, they called me and asked, “Would you like to have an opportunity maybe to be on . . .?” Staff orientation, that's what it was called. “You need to be willing to sleep at the place, and we will give you 200 bucks a month, and we will put you up, and maybe we will try you in the next phase.” I think that was the greatest thing that ever happened in my whole life. I couldn’t wait to do it.

Darcy: That’s wonderful.

South Paw: So I did that and then that thing led into like a six month thing, which led into another thing, and that’s how I ended up sort actually working there.

Darcy: So again, the non-traditional ways of learning and the experiential types of things, some hands-on types of things, right there on the job . . .

South Paw: Yeah, and I trusted those people there because they had seen my worst spot, and they hadn’t given up on me. They encouraged me and all of that stuff, so I felt safe to learn there. I didn’t feel like anybody was going to drag me around the room.

Darcy: Yeah, isn’t that amazing, too, that that stuck with you because one of the things that you said was trust, which--what immediately went on in my head was that they weren’t going to shame you in front of people or hold you out as the poster boy of stupidity.

South Paw: Yeah!
[Both laugh.]

Darcy: How old were you when that all happened--when you got into the recovery?

South Paw: [Clears throat.] Well, it was actually about a year and a half or two before I had that really good learning experience, so pretty close to the same time. Almost--I was only 20 or something like that--close to a year then.

Darcy: Okay, so how old were you when you got addicted? When you know, “Okay, the addiction started at x age?” When you think back about it?

South Paw: I was probably in [pause, chuckles]. I think I was probably already that way, but when I was probably 19. I was still in the Army, and I started with drinking. That was all that there was. There wasn’t anything else to do. Nobody had heard of anything else at that point, and as soon as I got out of the Army, I was already drinking pretty much like a fish, and I moved back to San Francisco right in the middle of the Haight Ashbury thing, and then the real fun began.

Darcy: And there were lots of drugs.

South Paw: Um hum, and whatever there was, that is what I wanted, and I couldn’t get enough of it, whatever it was, because [pause] I always felt so bad that anywhere but “there” was cool, so I was happy to be anywhere but where I usually was, so whatever it was--up, down, sideways--what ever! I took a lot of acid, you know, and that was cool, too [laughs].

South Paw’s view of himself as a learner has greatly improved subsequent to his life in recovery. As such, he now views himself as a competent learner who is capable of absorbing almost anything that he chooses to study. At the same time, he doesn’t know how to begin the process of resuming his education, and he lacks a mentor or someone else to champion his cause and to support him in his educational endeavors.

The practicalities of being a working father also present barriers for him when he considers continuing his education. In this regard, he already feels guilty for having to work when his children need him, so the thought of being away from
them any additional time is disconcerting to him. Further, financial constraints weigh heavily on his mind, so he wonders if he could even afford to return to school.

Darcy: Okay. How do you feel about yourself as a learner now when you think about yourself--given all that, and given where you are today in life and your reality? I mean, how do you feel about your self as a learner?

South Paw: Oh, actually, these days I'm [pauses, re-adjusts self in chair] I feel like I am a pretty good learner. I can learn [pause] whatever I choose to, [long pause] so [long pause] sometimes I have to struggle to focus [pause] and stay on track, but [long pause] I think maybe--except for math, which I am still not too comfortable with, [long pause] I think I am a competent learner anyway.

Darcy: A competent learner?

South Paw: Yeah. [Rocks back in chair.]

Darcy: Who do you have in your life, or do you not have anybody in your life right now, who kind of champions that, or has, has anybody said, "Hey, I know of a program?" Or is there anybody doing that, or has there been anybody for the last ten years, or what ever? You have been around here for how long?

South Paw: [Laughs.] Since '91.

Darcy: Since '91. Yeah, so about ten years, so has there been anybody outside of yourself saying, "Wow, you seem like you are really bright, and you really ought to go do something else?" Or has that been within you, checking it out and just kind of having a mentor for yourself?

South Paw: Well, some of that has been going on within me and wondering what I could do and what I couldn’t do. When it comes right down to the practicalities of it, it was a lot about, you know, struggling about being away from home a lot anyway--with Jonathan, Pamela, and George, and then could I afford it and all that kind of stuff.

Darcy: So being a single parent, and...
South Paw: Yeah. Yeah, and I already feel guilty about having to be here all the time anyway and having them way over there at home. It’s about half way where I live now, but still . . .

Darcy: Yeah, so a lot going on for you. I mean, that’s a lot with kids, worrying about them, and . . .

South Paw: Yeah, and the guilt stuff, too, about, you know, being away a good part of the time anyway, and this is a horrible job to do that with any way because it so doesn’t work with kids’ schedules.

Darcy: Right. I was just going to say the exact same thing.

South Paw: Um hum. That’s when they need you, um hum. That’s when you have to be there.

Darcy: And that’s when you need to be on the job--when they need you then. Yeah, it is just the opposite, isn’t it?

South Paw: Yeah.

Darcy: Okay, I still didn’t hear you say that you had somebody, a buddy, or somebody who has said, “You really oughta go to school.” Is there that person in your life?

South Paw [shakes head and answers in the negative]: Hmm um.

South Paw intends to remain in the addiction treatment field for two reasons. First of all, he views it as the only field in which he has training. Secondly, he still believes in the work and derives satisfaction from practicing in the field. However, rather than continuing to work with the general population, he would like to focus his work on families, and he is interested in starting a private practice rather than continuing to work for others.

Darcy: Okay. Do you plan to remain in the addiction treatment field?

South Paw: Well, yeah.

Darcy: So for the long haul, indefinitely. You’re not just saying, “Well, you know, I will be here a couple of more years, but my
really grand design is to move off into something else because I am fed up with this.”

South Paw: Yeah. Well, there are a couple of reasons that I will. First of all, [clears throat] I don’t know anything else to do . . . . There’s that. That’s the practical matter, but there’s different ways that you can do this sort of thing, too. You know, and I would like to work some more with families, and maybe have my own little place to work with people, too.

Darcy: What do you mean, like private practice?

South Paw: Yeah, something like that, so I mean it still makes sense to me. It still makes sense to me as the thing to do. It still makes sense to me as a thing that is important and that matters, and something that I feel like I can do, so there is all that, but I may want to do it in a different place, in a different way [long pause]. I guess that would be a long way of saying, “Yeah, I guess so.”

Like many other clinicians in the field who lack formal academic training, South Paw is concerned that he may be forced out of the field if he does not further his formal instruction. While he is open to advancing his education and enhancing his credentials, the traditional academic process seems alien to him.

Where others in the same predicament might have mentors who could help them to navigate the educational waters, South Paw lacks such a support person. Therefore, he does not know how or where to begin the academic process, and the experience is anxiety provoking for him.

Darcy: Okay. Well, I am not sure if I got this on tape. I know that when you and I talked that first night on the phone, and the reason I want it on tape is so that I don’t lose track of it as being a theme, because I think it is a theme, is that I am hearing from people in our field that managed health care is driving who gets paid and how they do it, and that it is really driving people to need to get some kind of an academic type of track record going on. Is that part of your experience? Have you heard that? Is it . . . ?

South Paw: I have heard that, yeah. Now there’s things like-- ACCBO is even doing equivalency [long pause] sort of academic [long pause] equivalent of different levels of CADC, so even that is heading that way. You know? And I have some fears about being dinoaured out into thee, [pause] into the dust, and then there
I will be over 55 with, you know, a job and nothing but a whole lot of experience that won't do me or anybody else any good, so that's my nightmare.

Darcy: Yeah, which fits back to the last thing you said, "This is all I know how to do," which really makes it a nightmare because it is not as if you can go back--as if you can say, "Okay, I will go back to my life as the accountant." [Chuckles.] You know, that just . . .

South Paw: I will go back to my life as a grocery clerk, or, you know.

Darcy laughs: Yeah, I mean what else is there? So it is pretty scary for people, I think.

South Paw: Um hum.

Darcy: People who came in, you know, the grassroots way--in their own recovery and because it felt good--because it made sense in treatment, and you wanted to take that on, and I think that there are a lot of people just like you going, "Now what do I do?" You know? Putting the pinch on here. It is a little late in the game to be putting the pinch on, but they are doing it.

South Paw: Yeah.

Darcy: And if a person wants to be around in the field probably for the next decade, I think that there is probably a good chance that a person could get pinched if they don't do something.

South Paw: Yeah.

Darcy: In terms of thinking about school--well, I guess you said that you're--with the disability and changing, you're behind or could be quickly behind in terms of your ACCBO certification, so you're looking at the traditional types of school.

South Paw: Yeah. It seems like I am kind of like starting behind. It feels like somebody telling you when you appointment is, and it's already too late.

Darcy: Yeah. [Laughs.] Well that's all of the standard interview that I have right now--all the questionnaire questions. Is there anything that you've thought about or that you think is important that--given what little you know about this study--that would be useful? Because the bottom line is that there are lots of people just
in the same type of predicament that you’re in, and, you know, this might be useful for people—other people in terms of what’s important for learning and after-the-fact type of learning and catching up.

South Paw: Yeah. I wish I knew more about learning and more about schools and more about how to work them and what that whole process is. To me, it seems like a separate life, kind of, and it’s a way of doing and being, and it has its own rules, and its ways of thinking and acting [leans back in chair] and procedures and all that stuff, and I just feel so alienated from that that I just really wish I knew more about how to, how to do that and how to navigate through all those kinds of things. I have even looked and [clears throat] looked into those places where you can, you know, “Send away for . . .!”

Darcy: Oh, yeah.

South Paw: You know, “Only 12 easy monthly payments.”

Darcy [laughs]: Yeah.

South Paw [continues]: “We will give you lots of life experience crap.” That kind of thing, so that’s [pause] the level of desperation.

Darcy: Well, I think that’s a really good point. I have summarized it as being like a different language or a dance that only they know the steps.

South Paw: Um hum.

Darcy: You know, you can watch it, but you are guessing what the steps are, or you can get a word or two in the language, but you’re always on the outside looking in watching them know it, and they seem to know it instinctively, and you’re out there still pressed up against the window looking in trying to make sense of it.

South Paw: [Inaudible.]

Darcy: Yeah, already being outside, and the shaming stuff that goes along with . . .

South Paw [completes the thought]: From not knowing.

Darcy: Yeah, from not knowing.
South Paw: And all that kind of stuff, so there is a lot to overcome there and a lot to figure out how to do that.

Researcher’s Reflections on South Paw’s First Interview

After interviewing South Paw and sitting with his material for many hours, I have a better understanding of why he is such a zealous defender of his ideals. He is a survivor who endured a childhood of physical abuse and emotional torment. He is a proud person who came into this field with nothing but his own recovery experience, and along the way, he learned about addiction treatment through non-traditional means.

In many other disciplines, South Paw would be considered a respected master of his trade by now. In his case, however, the field that embraced him when it was in its infancy and when no one else wanted to do the work is now questioning his credibility because of his lack of academic credentials. As such, he is feeling pressured to return to school, and he is willing to go back; he is just at a loss as where to begin.

I understand what it is like to feel lost and alienated when it comes to higher education. I have stood in his shoes and have watched through the academic window at others who appeared to have been given the rulebook while I was left to figure the game out on my own.

I am concerned for him and the many others in the addiction treatment field who are feeling just as lost and just as alienated as what he is experiencing. In fact, his story only goes to reaffirm my belief that adult learners need mentors who can help them to feel safe and who can help them to navigate the world of academia interpret the world of higher education for them.

The ability to feel safe appears to be a critical element in South Paw’s ability to learn. I think that someone like him with a shame-based past is apt to feel vulnerable at just the thought of returning to school, let alone of actually beginning the process.
South Paw's Second Interview

We conducted South Paw's second interview on the hot, humid evening of July 9, 2002. We began the interview at 7:30 p.m. and concluded it at 8:30 p.m. As with our first interview, South Paw chose to meet me at his office. We met after he had concluded his last treatment group of the day.

Therefore, as with the other interview, the building was essentially vacant and silent. The only other sounds that occasionally seeped through the walls were the faint, muffled noises of the janitorial crew as it labored somewhere at the far end of the building.

South Paw had changed offices since our last meeting. His new space was just down the hall from his old one, but it was much larger and more comfortable than his other one.

He had clearly taken the time to make his office feel comfortable and inviting. He had drawn the mini blinds, so the sharp, hot rays of the day were subdued and cooled. For illumination, the space was softly lit by the warm glow of a floor lamp that he had placed in one of the far corners of the room. He had hung a large colorful tapestry on one wall, and he had strategically placed several lush green plants and numerous brightly colored fish figurines around the rest of the room.

He had placed a computer in one corner of the room, and he had personalized the screen saver so that it featured various types of slow moving, brilliantly colored oceanic fish. The floating scene provided an effect that was both tranquil and mesmerizing.

On the wall above his desk, he had hung pictures of him and his wife that were taken on their wedding day. Many other pictures on the wall featured the smiling faces of his grandchildren. One of the pictures was of him and a lovely young woman. He noted that she was the daughter of a woman he had lived with for several years, and he explained with obvious pride that he and the young woman had remained close even though he and her mother had separated long ago.
I did not remember most of the pictures as having been displayed when we had the first interview, but there was one in particular that I remembered from before. It was a World War II picture of South Paw’s father and his crewmates standing in front of their fighter plane.

The picture is one that resonates with the spirit of a young man who looks remarkably like South Paw. It is the picture of a young man whose face is filled with pride and courage. It is a picture that has eternally captured the memory and the spirit of a father before the war changed him forever. It is a picture of what the father was like before the hurting began. It is a picture of how the son wants to remember the father.

We begin the interview by South Paw describing his autobiography. He discusses how he thinks that the document will be helpful in summarizing his life transformation.

South Paw: This is a document that was born of necessity. I actually did one version of an autobiography when I first went into drug and alcohol treatment, but it didn’t have any sort of post-recovery things on it, and this particular one is a--was a specific thing that was requested of me by the Department of Social Services in the state of California.

I originally started out working with adults in treatment, but when I began to shift into working with kids, or before I could even do that, before I was able to work with juveniles or kids at all, because I had an extensive criminal background with felonies and years of all these different sorts of crimes and things, they required me to do some specifically targeted descriptions of my past.

So what they asked me to do was to write out a brief family history detailing some of the things that contributed, possibly, to my criminal history and addiction and then a brief history of each of my crimes, basically, with a brief description and explanation--if there was one, [sucks in breath] and then what had gotten me into recovery and what that experience was like, and they were specific in their requirements, and so this document that I brought here today is a specific response to that.

So it starts off by saying that I am applying for certification to work with kids, [sucks in breath] so it’s not [pause] in some ways it’s not a typical autobiography because it was sort of to respond to
some specific things, so keep that in mind, but it's--in some ways pretty specific, and I think it covers a fair amount of ground, so hopefully that will be useful to you in some way.

In the next section, South Paw describes the personal characteristics that helped him to adapt, overcome, and survive the obstacles in his life. He speaks of learning to be a fighter, of learning to never give up, of learning never to surrender. He also speaks of how he generalized those characteristics into surviving a life threatening illness in which he was initially told that the condition was terminal and that he should go home and prepare to die.

Darcy: Obviously you had some really, really difficult times in your life, and I see you as very successful now in terms of where you have been and how far you have come, and I would like some kind of statement from you--what is it about you . . . ? You didn't die of your disease, and lots of people do. They die in all the ways that they die, but you didn't. You turned your life around, and you're actually helping people in the field, and I'm wondering how you would describe your own personal characteristics.

Are you a survivor, or is there some other word that you would use to describe yourself? What is the strength that made you hold on? Clearly, I got that out of your last one. One of the things that I really got out of it was the isolation and turning inward and somehow, somewhere in that isolation, you found something, you know? You got into recovery and all those things, but still, you had to be receptive to the things that were offered to you, and I am wondering what it is about you, that strength, that positive thing, that strengths piece . . . ?

South Paw: Hmm. I don’t know what that, that is [chuckles]. [Begins speaking rapidly.] I don’t know what it is or where it is or where it comes from or how to talk about it or anything, but I think some of that comes from, [long pause] just a whole lifetime of, [pause] being sort of presented with [pause] things to adapt to and to overcome and survive. I guess if you want to call it that, so there’s a part of me in there somewhere that is that fight.

Darcy: Okay, that’s it.

South Paw: Um hmm, and even when things were really bad, and you will read about it in my autobiography--about some of the
things that went on and where, [pause] where some pretty horrible stuff was happening, and in the middle of all that stuff, there was still a tiny little piece of me that wouldn’t surrender, [pause] that was, [pause] that was determined not to be overwhelmed or overcome or [pause] to completely surrender.

I mean there were times I felt like I, [pause] I acted like I had surrendered just to buy myself [pause] a minute [pause] or just to buy myself some relief or some space or a couple of minutes to catch my breath, but [pause] that part was always [pause] there, and sometimes I saw that as a negative, and other people saw that as a negative, too, about being rebellious, and [pause] about kinda goin’ against things.

Sometimes against--goin’ against the grain, or goin’ against [pause] the flow, and [fumbles for words] it got to be so engrained sometimes that I would do it even sometimes almost automatically against things that might have been kind of good for me had I of let them happen, and I had to learn how to differentiate between those two things, which was difficult, but [sucks in breath] I think there is that spark of rebellion and the unwillingness to be overcome . . . It still works, and it works against all those things. It works against, not just against the disease of addiction, but against that disease of hepatitis and all those other things that have gone on recently, you know.

There’s that, [pause] that little [pause] tiny speck that says, “No, no, no, no! I’m not going to give up! I can’t give up!” Because if I give up, then I’m, [pause] then I’m really nothing. There’s a part of me in there that has to [pause] stay alive, [pause] so [pause] I don’t know what that is or where it comes from . . . I don’t know if it comes from things that have happened or if it was already there to begin with. I just don’t, [pause] I don’t know, [pause] but it gets stronger as time goes by though, so sometimes when, [pause] when all these things, these horrible things were happening at work, and it looked like my life was going to be over again, [sucks in breath] when the doctor was telling me--in this physical illness, [pause] that there was no point in even doing treatment because, [pause] you know, it was just basically a waste of time.

There was that part of me still that was going, “No, no, no, no! Huh uh! There’s, [pause] there’s going to be something else,” and that’s why I volunteered for that research and all that stuff. It was all--it seemed like it was a part of that same little piece that said [pause] that said, “Fuck you! I’m not goin’ down [pause] without a fight!”
Darcy: Right. Right. One of the things that I remember is that I had put in there somewhere that you had learned to fight.

South Paw: Um hmm.

Darcy: And it was essentially a survival thing. It wasn’t that you were a fighter by nature but that everything converged upon you to the point where you had to fight to survive. You had to...

South Paw [interjects]: Fight, or, or...

Darcy: Or die. I mean, clearly, somebody was going to take you out, and you became a fighter.

South Paw: Yeah. Yeah.

Like the other participants in this study, South Paw found that the experience of reflecting on his life events and reassessing his view of himself as a learner has had a transformative effect on him. In this regard, he explains how he has felt strengthened by the process, and how he has felt empowered to take some educational risks that he would not have taken otherwise.

Darcy: You had talked to me somewhere in the process about, being involved in this project...

South Paw: Um hmm.

Darcy: It was bringing up old things for you and making you think about things and that you had gone to a reflective place that maybe you were surprised about, and I am wondering if you want to share anything about that. What it sparked in you. What you started thinking about. It sounded like you had done some real... I don’t know. You had put a lot of thought into what came up for you.

South Paw: Actually, there’s been a lot, and it’s hard to remember exactly what I was thinking about at the time, but one thing that happened was that I ended up going back and involving myself in some school and formal education stuff. I took a really hard class, and I no more would have done that before than I would have put on a dress and dashed down Main Street. It was—it was just completely out of the picture. Some of that, some of the decision to do that came from thinking and rethinking about myself and my education and where my sort of aversion to that came from and...
some of my own guilt and prejudices and things like that, so some of those early-on educational kind of shame-based experiences and some doubts maybe that I had about my own abilities and things, so that was a real strengthening thing to do, actually.

Because I took this college course and did really well, which was much to my great surprise, and it was not that, not actually as hard as I had thought it was, and that opened up some other things to think about—about my life in general and about my career and where I am going to be going.

Whether I am going to be able to get there without doing more, kind of, formal education kinds of things, and then from there, about where I am in life. Am I too old to be doing that? And, it makes sense in me definitely doin’ that, so it sparked all kinds of things about the way that I looked at myself, about the way that I looked at [sighs] my strengths and resources and all life in general and what I was going to do with it. So, [joking] yeah, it kicked up a couple of things. [Laughs.] Just little things! You know.

Darcy [laughing]: Well, you know, that was kind of a surprise to me. What you’re describing is also a theme that happened to the three other people. To varying degrees, they had some kind of a transformation from just being part of this research. It is really weird. It’s really weird, you know, even though most people did not do any journaling on it, clearly they were processing above and beyond and just not, essentially, putting things on paper but lots of action going on inside.

South Paw: Well, you know—gosh, there’s that kind of way of doing treatment where you sort of look at your life as a story, and then when you look at the story, the way you see the story changes as you mature. And as you look at your self, and as life changes you in all the ways that it changes you, and as you mellow and mature and things like that, and I think that’s what happened with this project for me. It forced me to look at things in a different way and at myself and at my life, so I think that is almost a transformative thing, or it can be.

Darcy: Right. Well, and the thing for me is—in this type of research, where you have relationships with people, and it’s not the sterile type of numbers, you know. You have connections with people. That’s kind of inherent with this kind of work, but also having to sit with people’s materials, transcribing over and over and over and going, “What did I hear?” and having to make sense of it, you know. It’s been a piece for me, too. As I have gotten to
know people and understand people, I feel different. As to who I am and understanding myself. It’s just weird.

South Paw: It’s a transformative thing. Isn’t it?

Darcy: Yeah, it’s just odd, you know. Like I come away going, “Whew, that’s bizarre!”

South Paw: Um hmm.

Darcy: I wasn’t expecting to go there myself.

South Paw: Um hmm.

Darcy: You know what I mean?

South Paw [jokes]: Yet, you’re supposed to be in the laboratory.

Darcy: Don’t you know--where it’s all sterile [laughs].

South Paw: Um hmm.

Darcy: Actually, that was one of the reasons that I chose this type of research method. It’s taken me a lot longer because you don’t just get in and get out the way you would with quantitative methods. You need to take the time and work with the people and meet with them and make sense.

South Paw: Yeah, I would be doing this kind, too. This kind has a, [pause] a heart and a soul attached to it.

We close the interview by discussing South Paw’s sense of humor as being one of his survival traits. In this regard, he discusses how his sense of humor and creativity became a lifeline to the outside world and helped him to survive the darkest days of his illness. By making others laugh, he nurtured himself, and he began to heal.

Darcy: So the thing I had started to say was, I think one of the, survival mechanisms for you--and I’m ascribing that term--is your sense of humor.

South Paw: Oh, yeah! Um hmm.
Darcy: In resiliency theory, they talk about a sense of humor being one of the things that’s kind of like an anchor for people to survive. It’s the ability to laugh, and, clearly, you’ve got a dry sense of humor . . .

South Paw [interjects in agreement]: Um hmm.

Darcy: And over the years, you know, you have been a laugh, so . . .

South Paw: Yeah, that’s true, but, you know, funny you should mention that because I was thinking about some times when I was really, really sick with the medication, and the side effects, and all that crap, and it was right then when I signed up to be—the only thing, the sort of contact type of thing that I kept up with the outside world was through my little computer and the Internet thing because I could always do that [sighs]. I could sit there in front of the computer and, and, and punch keys.

Even when washing dishes would make me so tired that I had to quit part way through—so it was then that I signed up—I did this test to see if I could be a writer for that Internet comedy site . . . And, and I got accepted, and I became one of the writers for that. I mean it was just a completely awesome thing.

Darcy: Oh, good for you!

South Paw: And it was so [pause] nurturing and healing for me to do that because I felt like I was being productive, and I felt like I was being creative, and it gave me something to do, 'cause they give you like deadlines.

Darcy: Right, something that took you outside of yourself.

South Paw: Yeah, four or five things a week, you know, and you have to be creative, and you have to think of things and responses to deal with these things, so, yeah, that definitely was, was part of it.

Researcher’s Reflections on South Paw’s Second Interview

I wonder who South Paw would have been if he had not experienced the things in life that he survived as a child. I get the sense that he would have been a
gentle, lighthearted person who would have loved nothing more than to make people laugh.

On the other hand, I wonder if he would be alive today if he had not learned how to fight and to be a survivor. Somehow, I think that he would not have survived the latest of his diseases if he had not learned to fight “the big guy” a long time ago. I think that when the doctors sent him home to die of his hepatitis that is exactly what would have happened.

I am honored that South Paw took a risk and shared his autobiography with me. I understand the meaning of the gesture, and I have not taken it lightly. His autobiography took me to a deeper level of understanding of him, and, as such, it all comes together for me now—the intensity, the laughter, the interviews, the autobiography, and the picture on the wall, and, so I say in closing, “Keep on laughing, South Paw. Keep on laughing.”

Post script.
The following is South Paw’s response to my final draft of his chapter. He e-mailed his reaction back to me. I include it as he wrote it:

Oh gosh. I just read the chapter [sic] and I was very moved by it. I was almost in tears a couple of times not just because of reliving some of the things, but in the process of seeing through the eyes of another. Thank you for your compassion, for your passion, and for your gentle and loving heart. I feel like I know you better now, and I appreciate what you see and what you say. What a great job of putting all that together.
CHAPTER 7: JENNIFER LOPEZ

Jennifer Lopez is a 49-year-old Hispanic female. She is a second-generation American. She is the sixth child born of nine children. However, since two of her sisters died before she was born, she considers herself to be the fourth out of seven children. She has two older sisters and one older brother, and she has two younger sisters and one younger brother.

Jennifer has been married and divorced two times. She has three married daughters whom she adores, and she is the proud grandmother of three school-aged children. She shares her home with a female roommate, her two small dogs, and her large tabby cat.

Jennifer has been in recovery for 20 years, and she has worked in the addiction treatment field since 1985. She holds a CADC II, and she is currently employed at a private, non-profit addiction treatment program.

Like the two other women in the study, Jennifer dropped out of high school. However, she later returned to school, and she is one of the two participants who completed an academic program. She is not currently enrolled in an educational program, but she is interested in continuing her education.

I first met Jennifer in approximately 1985. I made her acquaintance at a community college where we were both enrolled in the same human resources associate degree program. We were both adult learners who had returned to school after many years of being away from academics. She was the single parent of three children, and I was the soon-to-be-single mother of three children.

I left the college program after I completed the first year, and in so doing, I lost contact with her over the years. Then approximately five years ago, we were reintroduced in a professional capacity. Over the course of all the years that Jennifer and I have known each other, we have shared some classes, shared some laughs, and shared some of our own personal stories, but until this project, our relationship had remained that of a surface collegial one in which we had never really gotten to know each other. This project has changed all of that.
Jennifer is honest and direct; there are no pretenses about her. She copes with the world through laughter. She has a wonderful dry sense of humor, and like many resilient individuals, she can joke herself and anyone else out of any stressful situation. In fact, during many intense junctures of this interview, she laughed us both back to a place of relief.

**Jennifer Lopez’s First Interview**

My first interview with Jennifer was held in her home on the pleasant spring evening of Monday, April 1, 2002. The interview lasted from 6:45 p.m. until 9:20 p.m. Her roommate was gone on the night of the interview, so besides her cat and dogs, we were alone in the house.

We decided to meet after work that day, so we each had put in a full day before we had even begun the interview. We conducted the interview in the living room of Jennifer’s duplex. The space felt comfortable, homey, and safe.

She had drawn the curtains before I arrived, so three soft table lamps were all that lit the room. The space was decorated with a variety of green plants that were placed around the room and two large floral prints that hung on the walls. One wall was also adorned with numerous pictures of her daughter, her grandchildren, and various members of her extended family.

Throughout the evening, we sat close to each other. She sat on a long floral couch, and I sat on its matching loveseat. She had beverages for both of us, but once we began the interview, neither of us drank much, and the cups were still half-full when we finished the interview.

For most of the evening, the only sounds in the background were the intermittent humming of the refrigerator and the chomping of one of her dogs as he gnawed on bone. At one point, however, the quiet of the room was ruptured by the screams of a fire truck as it raced by on the highway that was a few blocks away.

Jennifer starts the interview by explaining her birth order and the tragic deaths of her two eldest sisters. They both died in a house fire before she was born. She then explains how a third sister escaped from the inferno.
During the course of this section, she shares that her birth was illegitimate. The designation of being illegitimate and different from the rest of her siblings has outstanding implications for Jennifer. She discusses that sense of differentness in more detail later in the interview.

Darcy: Okay, so we were just kind of going over kind of the state of where we are, both of us, in our personal lives—emotionally, and you said that you had been in recovery 20 years.

Jennifer: Yes.

Darcy: And I guess that is what sparked all of that for us—talking about the journey for you and a little bit about me, and I had asked you what number you were out of your family, and you had started to expound on that, and I wanted to capture that because it sounded like it was going to be if nothing else, very interesting to me.

Jennifer [interjects with laughter]: Well, I guess I ended up the middle child out of seven, but I didn’t start out that way. I had, I had my older sisters nine years older than me, and there were six born from the first father, which was not my father. Margarita and Rosa Linda were older than my sister who is nine years older than me, and they both burned to death in a fire.

Uh, one was four [pause]. Well, one was four, and I think one was six or seven, and, uh, [pause] then came my sister Carmen, and she survived. They said she—they were all napping in, [pause] in the house and, uh, you know—being the dirt floors—and we were very dirt poor. They said that it started—you know, the burner was left on . . . . I don’t know where it was! Maybe it was, [pause] it might have been Arizona.

[Long pause.] Uh, the door slammed closed or something, and it, um, somehow something caught onto the burner and started the house on fire. Uh, the girls were napping, and my mom had gone next door [pause] to visit a neighbor real quick, and, uh, my sister Carmen, who was three, got up and followed her—and it was meant to be that she was to survive, and they were not, [long pause] so the six oldest were from Juan Carlos, [clears throat then continues] the first father. I was the first illegitimate child. I came two years after my sister, Romie, who was two years older than me, and she was the last born of the first father, and so I ended up with three older sisters. No, two older sisters, two younger sisters, one older brother, and one younger brother.
In the next section, Jennifer talks about how the standards for addiction certification have recently become more stringent than when she entered the field. In this regard, she states that certification for level II counselors now requires a bachelor degree before someone can even apply for the certificate.

Jennifer: They're saying now for a CADC II you have to have a bachelor's degree.

Darcy: Are they really?

Jennifer: Yes. They keep upping the ante, so now you have to have a bachelor's degree to apply for a CADC II.

Darcy: Oh, okay. See, I haven't even looked at that in awhile, and here it is part of my research, so I need to look at it.

Jennifer: Yeah, they've upped the ante. You've got to have a bachelor's--you can't even apply--so everybody else is a CADC I if you don't have a bachelors degree. You can't even apply.

Jennifer is interested in continuing her education. In this regard, she knows that she would at least like to pursue a bachelor degree, and she is considering a degree in sociology. At the same time, she is not sure if she wants to continue to work in the addiction treatment field or if she should leave the field entirely and do social work in a hospital setting. If she decides to stay in the field, she is not sure if she wants to work with adults or to work solely with children. Regardless of the academic degree or the employment area, the one thing that she knows for sure is that she wants to focus her work on the Latino population.

Darcy: Okay. What is your educational status at this time? Are you enrolled in any classes or . . . ?

Jennifer: No, I really wanted to this time, but I just haven't gotten around to it, and I plan to. That's something that's definite.

Darcy: Okay, so you do have educational goals that you want to pursue.

Jennifer: Oh yeah!
Darcy: But I don’t remember what you said you were interested in doing. You had mentioned what it was.

Jennifer: Well, at least a bachelor’s, but I know I was floundering around a little bit with chemical dependency, and do I really want to stay there?

Darcy: Right, stay in the field.

Jennifer: Yeah, and I am just thinking a lot about my roots. You know, working with Latinos, or—I don’t—I speak . . . I speak it, and I can read it, and I can almost write it, but I really need to get—I think that’s another area I really need to do some college work on and get some more education and work on it because I would like to be able to do it all.

Not that I am the greatest at, you know, speaking and writing English [laughs], but that would really be something helpful for me, and I don’t know, I almost feel like I want to get a sociology degree now. I don’t know. I certainly feel the need to help, you know, my brethren. Does that . . .?

Darcy: Yeah. Yeah, so focus more on the cultural aspects?

Jennifer: Right, right. Yeah, see what there is as far as [sighs]—not so much education because probably I am pretty cemented in what that is, but more like the areas of where I would go with that education. Where would I go with that? Where would it really benefit the most? I mean would it be setting up in a hospital? You know, or where people come in the E.R. all the time, you know, and can’t speak English? Would it be at the schools because I do facilitate a Latino group for the kids at Willow Lake School, and, so, [clears throat] would it be with the kids? Would it be in the schools? Would it be in the hospital?

You know, what would I do with it? And then again, I think, well, you know, maybe just being able to have a 40-hour, 40-hour work week with specifically Latinos because right now my time is half and half. It’s 20 hours, and the other 20 hours is, you know, the rest of the population.

When it comes to best learning experiences, Jennifer fondly remembers two teachers who made her learning enjoyable. She starts out by detailing a profound experience that she had with a college professor. In this regard, she describes how
she had felt panicked the first day of her college English class because she hadn’t understood the concepts that the teacher was discussing. She then explains how the teacher had recognized her fear and how the teacher had calmed her fear and had convinced her that she could teach her.

She then remembers back to grade school and a second-grade teacher who knew how to laugh and who found joy in the laughter of children. The teacher delighted in the foibles of young children and reveled in the wonders of their innocence. As such, Jennifer had felt safe in the security of that environment, and, as she will explain later in the interview, she had needed a refuge because her home life was one of confusion, pain, and fear.

It is also in this section that Jennifer describes the culture of poverty in which she was reared. In recounting her family’s poverty and the sociological implications of that poverty, she provides us with a hint of some internalized oppression as she refers to her childhood self as “Mexican trash.”

Darcy: Okay, what was your best learning experience? You had this great little story, and I don’t remember anything beyond that other than you had something that readily came to mind.

Jennifer: My English teacher came to mind. I had gone in her classroom, and [long pause] she had started talking about all these different things. You know, names, words, or sentences, and sentence structure and putting a sentence together, and I was so overwhelmed that I was ready to run.

[Begins speaking rapidly] She is a wonderful lady! She remembers me to this day. When I see her, she remembers me and asks me how I am doing, and she is still a very sweet lady. I mean, you know, she is a wonderful teacher, but she saw the panicked look on my face and that I was ready to run out of the room.

Darcy: What grade were you in, or where was that?

Jennifer: I was in Happy Valley Community College.

Darcy: Oh, okay. As a--wow! Okay.

Jennifer: And I was ready to run out of the room, and she saw this panicked look on my face, and she said, “Just come back, okay?
Just promise me that you will come back the next two classes, and if you really don’t want to stay here.” She said, “You can drop it, but I really--I really think I can teach you.” You know. “I’m going to teach you. You don’t have to know all this stuff.”

So I went from, I think a “D”-- I got a “D” on my mid-term, to an “A,” and I got a “B” out of the class. She wrote on my test paper that out of all the students, that I had gone like from zero like to a 100%. From absolutely nothing to--and I realize that’s what they do there. That’s what they are supposed to do. They are supposed to teach you.

Darcy: Yeah, they are supposed to teach you.

Jennifer: I sat there thinking I had to know--you know, I had to know all these things, and, in fact, we’re like a blank chalkboard. You know. We need to go in there like a blank chalkboard, and I was a blank chalkboard! Let me tell you--when I walked in that class [laughs].

And you know, when I got done, there was this whole other level of understanding about language and writing and all that kind of stuff--how brilliant some people are about their writing. I mean, I just--everybody has a style. Anyway, I appreciate her. I think the lesson wasn’t even so much the English that I was learning. It was just that whole life lesson that I got out of her class from wanting to run out of there to, you know, just improving so much--with just trying to push myself to expand my mind--that I could do it--that it wasn’t impossible. Yeah, and that was a good learning lesson.

The other--the only thing I can think about is Mrs. Blake in the second grade. She taught me to read. I think I knew how to read a little bit in first grade, but, you know--I don’t know. It didn’t stay with me. I don’t know, but we were in her reading class, and I was in the slow reading group. You know, a little circle, and there were so many things that happened in that circle. So many things that happened in that classroom that I remember so vivid, vividly, that I don’t with the others--except the bad things, but, yeah, Mrs. Blake. We--every Friday, or once a month we got to play bingo, and everybody got a Tootsie Roll Pop for bingo, and we would yell, “Bingo!”

[Darcy chuckles.]

Jennifer: And I loved her. I loved her so much, and she lived on the riverside. It was called Blue Bell Hill. Those were the richest
people who lived there—up on Blue Bell Hill. She had this big swimming pool. She had a big swim party for her second graders at the end of the school year, and she was just the neatest lady, and there are a couple of experiences that I remember so much about her.

Like, I had gone to school, and I guess that my mom had kissed me on the forehead with her red lipstick [giggles] and she saw me and just chuckled and said, “Whoa, it looks like somebody got a kiss from their momma this morning when they left for school,” [chuckles] and I must have turned ten shades of red because she [inaudible] all day. [Clears throat.] And then me and Louie Garcia were in the back playing around. We shouldn’t have been goofing off back there, but we were playing chicken with the stapler.

Darcy: Ooh!

Jennifer: Yeah, so I tried to stick my hand—you know how little kids’ fingers are?

Darcy: Yeah.

Jennifer: First, I would try with this big old stapler we had—back and forth. Well, he was trying to staple me, and then I would try to staple him. I stapled Louie [both laugh]. I stapled Louie! [Both continue laughing.] I stapled Louie’s fingers!

[They both laugh as Jennifer continues.] And she came back there because she heard the yell, and when she came back—me and Louie—I was so afraid I was going to get in so much trouble. I mean our eyes must have been like saucers! ‘Cause she came back, looked at him, looked at me, and just burst out laughing.

Absolutely! These two little kids must have looked petrified. Louie’s right there with his finger. It didn’t go all the way through his finger. It just caught the skin of it enough to let him know he had been stapled. [Laughing] And then Louie looked at her and started laughing, and then they were both laughing, and I am standing there going, “What is so funny?” I felt horrible. I was just like petrified, but that’s the kind of lady she was, and I’ll never forget her for that. [Finishes the next sentences in a whisper.] I mean stuff like that.

We were in the reading circle one time, and we had this kid named Ricky Ricardo. He was absolutely probably—you know, I was white, Mex--Mexican trash. Well, he was white trash. Poor Ricky
Ricardo. We lived on the same street. We were both poor, poor, poor, and, we were reading the book, and, of course, “but” came out, “butt,” blah, blah, blah.” [Both are laughing.]

Ricky Ricardo started going, “Hee! Hee!” [She cups her hands over her mouth and acts out his behavior.] “Well,” she says, “now, who knows how to spell the other kind of “butt” that Ricky is laughing about?” So one of the kids lifted his hand up. She said, “How do you spell that butt?” “B-u-t-t.” She said, “That’s right, but it isn’t the same kind of “but” now is it?”[Both laugh.] It was classic! Rick Ricardo . . .

Darcy: I remember that story because what’s coming to mind is that the way that I heard that was that she made learning safe--the environment. You could make mistakes. You know?

Jennifer: Ummm hmm.

Darcy: That you didn’t have to be afraid.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Darcy: That she laughed and made it safe to laugh. You know--the relief.

Jennifer: Yeah, it took the intensity out of it.

By asking Jennifer to recall her worst learning experiences, I am thrust along with her on a journey that takes us from the reality of her life at school to the truth of her life at home, and I find that her memories of both places are inextricably woven from the same threads of confusion, embarrassment, humiliation, and shame. My interview questions trigger her to go to a painful, emotional place, and in the following passage, she often speaks in a voice that is barely above a whisper. She pauses frequently, and her hesitations are long. She stammers, and she struggles as she attempts to find the words that will capture her true meaning.

Jennifer: I think my worst learning experience [whispers something inaudible--as if she was speaking to herself.] [Long pause.] Maybe I didn’t mention it. I’ll bet I didn’t--talk about shaming--but sometimes kids repeat words that they don’t know what they mean, and I know I certainly did. You know--repeat words that I didn’t know what they meant, but I
heard someone say them, so I would say it. You know--repeating. You know, because--you know [pause] because you always want to show off to your friends. You know, at least I did because I never felt quite the same. [Long pause.] You know?

I didn’t feel like I belonged, so I always felt I had to make an extra effort to impress them or do something [pause] that would make them notice me, or make them see me as cool, or something. Of course, it never worked, but I know one of those times [pause] me and Cindy were writing notes back and forth, and she told me that she had seen one of the kids in class--who of course everybody in the class had a crush on--it was a boy, a boy having sex with somebody. We were in fifth grade now--fifth grade or sixth grade.

So, that’s really unusual, so--she wrote me a note about it, and she used the word “fuck.” You know, and so I wrote her back, and I said, you know, “You really saw him fuck her?” And wrote it back, and I went--well, kids being kids and me being, how would I say it? Naïve? Very naïve. I had the note in my notebook. In my book, and, for some reason--I don’t know why I hung on to it. Maybe just that day I hadn’t thrown it away or had--you know. I didn’t think about anybody seeing it. I mean, [pause] you’re just writing a note--especially the teacher. You know. Think about it.

Darcy: Right.

Jennifer: Well, I dropped my book and the note came out, and [pause] one of the kids turned it into . . . It was my fifth grade teacher, Mr. Barrett, [pause] and [pause] I truly [pause] didn’t know what was going on. I really didn’t. He was talking about trust, and he was talking about all this stuff that I didn’t know anything about, and then, all of a sudden, he points to me, and he says, “You! You take this note to the principal’s office right now!”

Darcy: Right in front of the class?

Jennifer: In front of the class! I had no idea! I, I, I still had no idea--except that my face burned red! [In the background, emergency sirens start going off over on the highway.] And, and I couldn’t figure out what it was. I couldn’t figure out what had happened, so I get to the principal’s office, and I said, “Mr. Barrett said to come up here, and he said I have to give this to you.” I think I began to realize that it was [inaudible]. My life had ended, [laughs] and I was ten years old. [Long pause.] Well, she comes up and she says, “I don’t know what to do about these kids now. I don’t know what kind of kids these are that we are raising,” and
just all this stuff, and she was going on and on, and I am sitting there [pause] half realizing what I had done, but the other part of me was still very naïve not knowing what . . . And then the principal said, “Who wrote you this note?”

And I said, [whispers] “Patty,” and she said, “You wrote her back, and you used this language?” And I said, “Yes,” and she said, “Well, this is going to go in your record!” Uhh! And I said [long pause]. I don’t know what I said, actually. I had a pretty big mouth as a kid, but when it came to adults, I was pretty intimidated by adults. [Claps hands together.] Clamshell! Because I didn’t know how--you know? Pretty much, adults were God [pause] to me, and I was afraid of them, so [pause] I felt real ashamed and [pause] really awful, [pause] and that fucker that gave it to him! [Both burst out laughing.] Using the “f’ word! Bobby Binkle [laughs]. I was so mad at him. They were the best of friends.

Darcy [bursts out laughing]: Was that his real name?

Jennifer: Bobby Binkle. His best friend! He picked up this note. Here’s this little guy, and his best friend picked up that note, read it, and took it--took it--sent it--gave it to Mr. Barrett. He was--he was Randy Jackson’s best friend. He was his best friend, and I didn’t know that, and [laughs] Bobby Binkle. [Continues laughing.] My God! I remember him being so pissed about it.

Darcy: Well, the name sounds like some kind of a spoof.

Jennifer: Bobby Binkle. Yeah, [chuckles] so I was pretty--I had a lot of shame. Part of me was very, very, confused. I think something that’s worse than having shame is being totally confused about--everybody knows, but you don’t know, and you know you have done something, but you’re not--you’re kind of sure it has to do with something, but you’re not really sure because they are not talking directly to you, and they are not asking you about it, [pause] so [pause] that was probably my worst, [pause] experience as far as schooling.

There are a few embarrassing and humiliating more moments, but that was it. I remember cringing and wanting to just disappear, absolutely disappear, which it pretty much what happened. What do you call it? Uh, I had a “you should know it” kind of life at home anyway.

Darcy: What do you mean by that?
Jennifer: Oh, they don’t tell you what you should--how to do it right, but they tell you what you did wrong. They don’t explain to you how to do it the right way. They tell you what you did wrong, so you know what you did wrong, but you don’t know how to do it any other way.

And they’re not telling you. It’s a secret, [pause] and you’re supposed to know, [pause] and you don’t know, so you just keep doing the same thing over again, and you keep getting in trouble, but they don’t tell you what you are supposed to do. That was kind of how I lived at home.

Darcy: I know you talked about--the piece that I am remembering is that you talked about--somehow some of that not knowing, and somehow that was linked with some physical abuse.

Jennifer: Oh, being slapped on the head and being called stupid [pause] a lot.

Darcy: Who did that?

[Long pause.]

Jennifer: My grandpa sometimes [pause]. I love my sister dearly, my older sister, but she did that sometimes, and I know, in turn, I turned around and did it to the little ones, too. You know. “Stupid!” Pow! [Makes a smacking sound with her hands.] And, [long pause] Grandpa mostly was . . . Uhhh, he used to hit us with a hose.

Darcy: That’s what it was. I was thinking a belt, but you’re right. It was a hose.

Jennifer: It was a hose, and, um, [clears throat] if we didn’t do something the way that he thought we should it, we would get beat with a hose, and that was part of it. We didn’t know what--we didn’t know what we had done wrong. We were kids, and we didn’t know how to do things any other way, so we would get hit with a hose, [pause] but nobody told you how to do it right, so the beatings were, with a hose, was like a daily thing.

I mean--that’s what I--I was old enough--I was so very afraid of my grandfather that I remember taking his hoses when he was at work and hiding them under my bed--under mine and my sister’s bed--a double bed. Uh, because I--you never slept alone in a big family, so he cut off another piece of hose, and come at us again,
you know. Every time, so I would turn around and would grab that hose while he was at work, and do it again, and he was getting really frustrated one time and took his belt off.

Well, this one time, I don't know what the hell we did. We were kids. Me and Romie were cowering in the corner on top of the bed trying to get away from the beating, and [clears her throat] he pulled the bed out because he couldn't get to us. It was a double bed. He couldn't get to us, [pause] and he saw all of those hoses. Well, one look at my face told him who did it. He let my sister go. I watched that look. He let her . . .

And I swear to you, I thought he would not stop beating me. I just braced myself because I knew he was going to let me have it with everything he had, and he did [sighs]. I don't even remember when it stopped. I think I just kind of blanked it out of my mind. [Pause.] Uhhh! That was bad, bad, bad, but it was some more of that stuff. You know. I don't even know what we did wrong. We were two little girls. What . . .? Did you get into the sugar? Did you . . .? You know. What did you do that was so awful that you deserved any kind of abuse like that? You know? What could a child . . .?

Darcy: This was your maternal grandfather?

Jennifer: He was on my--yeah, it was my mom's dad. He used to beat her the same way. He beat the skin off her arms. [Pause.] When she was a child, she said that . . . They must have [long prolonged pause]--but she waited on her stepmother when she had her stepmother because she was already the oldest, and [pause] I forget what she had done. I don't even remember what she did except that she didn't perform fast enough, [pause] but between [pause] him--her and my grandpa stood there beating her and beating her, and they left such welts on her arms that there was no skin hardly on her arms.

And she loved to go to school so much that she didn't care. She, she put a sweater on and went to school. Well, it was a hot day, and the teacher told her she should take her sweater off, and she said that she wouldn't--wouldn't do it. She just wouldn't do it. Well, the teacher took her to a nurse, I think, and the nurse pulled the sweater off, and on it came all her skin. Along with it, she had ripped off all her--whatever skin was left on her arms.

[At this point, I am aware that I have been holding my breath and that I have a profound feeling of sadness.]
Darcy [struggles out]: Oh, man.

Jennifer: The only time that anybody said anything about my mom as far as her abuse back then. They didn’t meddle in people’s personal business, and I am pretty sure at that point she didn’t go to school any more after [pause] all that.

Darcy: Do you know how old she was, or what grade she would have been in?

Jennifer: No, because when her stepmother died, she was nine years old.

Darcy: Ooh! So she would have quit school really early then. Okay.

Jennifer: Probably seven, seven or eight years old. I don’t know. She had to stop. She had to quit school when her stepmother died, and she had three younger siblings to raise.

Darcy: Yeah. Did your grandfather live with you then?

Jennifer: My mom always took care of my granpa. My granpa always lived with my mother, and they had this strangest relationship. It was as if--he wouldn’t go live with any of the other brothers and sisters even though they wanted him to--my aunts and uncles. He helped my mom financially, and he was there at night when my mom would be, you know, working until ten o’clock at night cooking, and then after that, of course, closing the bar, but when we were younger, he would be the one who was home. He would be the one that would fix us dinner if we were going to eat that night.

Darcy: I remember you talking about something, or I thought that you had talked about feeling like you were a parentified child. Is that ringing a bell?

Jennifer: Yeah. [Clears throat.] Carmen, my older sister Carmen, got married when I was seven, [clears throat] and she was our--pretty much our parent. She took care of us. [Pause.] My mom was there, [sighs] and I know she had a lot of work to do, but Mom went to work, and Carmen is the one who--who turned into a parent, and when she had kids, then Mom and her were both having kids. We were supposed to take care of the little ones.
We had to change their diapers and make sure they didn’t get dirty, and if not, we would get beat. You know. It wasn’t my mother who—it was actually my mom—I can remember the whippings she gave me. I can count them on my hand. I think maybe three times in my life her really spanking me. Once she slapped me and that’s it. My mom didn’t [pause] hit us, you know, [clears throat] but I am sure she could have—the way she was brought up.

Darcy: Yeah. Amazing.

Jennifer: So she isn’t the one who hit us. It was usually my older sister, Carmen, or my oldest brother, or my grandfather.

Darcy: You had said one of your sisters protected you.

Jennifer: Maria and Romie. They both did, the younger one and the older one. I happened to look kind of weak, believe it or not. I was like a nervous kid, very nervous, very frail looking child, and Maria, who is four years younger than me even put it upon herself to protect me because I looked like I needed protecting I suppose. Plus, I had this big mouth [inaudible]. It’s a wonder somebody didn’t kill me because I didn’t behave [chuckles]. I still have the big mouth.

Romie used to protect me a lot because, as a teenager, she was everything. She bought my clothes. She was the one who dropped out of school and went to work. She bought my clothes. She bought my make-up. She was my companion. She would take me wherever I wanted to go. If I wanted something, I would bug her until she got it for me. You know. It was really an odd relationship because she was only two years older than me, but I always seemed so much younger all my life—in a mature way, and I’m the one who didn’t want to watch the kids.

[Jennifer’s dryer signal had been going off periodically for the last 10 or 15 minutes. At this point, she stops the process and turns the alarm off.]

Jennifer [resumes talking]: I was the one who didn’t want to—I was the one who didn’t want to watch kids. I wanted to play in the trees. I wanted to go hang with the girls. I wanted to go visit. I wanted to go play. I didn’t wanna wash their diapers and take care of kids, and Maria and Romie were much better at it than I was. I don’t know.

Darcy: You just wanted to be a little girl.
Jennifer [sighs and laughingly states]: Exactly!

Darcy [continues]: And do little girl things.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Jennifer was reared in a culture of intergenerational poverty. The experience was socially stigmatizing and emotionally devastating for her and her family, and there was no place that the pain of poverty played out more than it did at school.

In recalling her school experience, Jennifer remembers feeling hated and feeling miserable. Her family was different than the rest. They were extremely poor. They didn’t have much to eat, and they wore clothing that was tattered and torn and little more than rags. As such, the other students ostracized them, and they were often the targets of jokes, ridicule, and torment.

The pain of that time still cuts deep for Jennifer. In reflecting on the experience, she reconnects with the emotions of the past, and the memory of those times brings tears to her eyes.

Darcy: How did you know--you talked about being really poor. I mean did you have a sense that you were poor? Did you feel different? I mean, how did you know you were poor? You know. Like a lot of kids grow up, and they don’t--didn’t know that they were poor until they find out years later. I mean, how did you know? Did you feel different than the other kids? I mean . . . ?

Jennifer: Yeah. People would make fun of me.

Darcy: Like what? What would they say?

Jennifer: Like our shoes and our clothes. They were tattered, [pause] or they were second hand shoes [pause] that were hideous. [Laughs.] One time, my sister Romie was so embarrassed because of her shoes. The kids had made fun of her for two days--these shoes that a lady had given to my mother--because that is where most of our clothes had come from. People had given them to my mom--or second-hand shoes, which I don’t remember going into second-hand stores that often.
And two days they had made fun of her, and I remember one day walking home from school with her, and she said, “Go on. Go to school. I’m not goin today,” and I said, “You have to go. I am going to tell,” and she said, “Well, go tell. I don’t care. I am not goin to school,” and I said, “Why? Why?”

And she said, “Because of these shoes. They’re making fun of me. I am not wearing these shoes to school if they are going to make fun of me any more,” so she threw rocks at me to make me go on, [pause] and this happened for two days. It’s miserable in school when everyone hates you. It was really awful. [Tears up. Long pause.] They sent--back then, they had some kind of school person that would go to your house and tell you that your kid’s not going to school.

Darcy: Right. I remember that.

Jennifer: And she got in a bunch of trouble. She got in trouble. You know. She got suspended, and, of course, my mother was furious with her, and, of course, “The shoes . . . ? What are you talking about the shoes? What’s the big deal with the shoes?” Because my mom was so dirt poor. You know. It was [pause], it was . . . I mean it was common for a whole kind of--country poor, my mom and them were. I mean absolutely starving to death kind of poor.

Darcy: Now was she first-generation American, or . . .?

Jennifer: Yes. My grandpa would go to the coal mines and leave them, [pause] leave her to take care of the kids for two or three months at a time.

Darcy: Holy cow!

Jennifer: Somehow they all survived. None of them died, [pause] so Romie’s ugly shoes weren’t that big deal. [Long pause.] You know, when you don’t have a scale. When you have such a low-end scale like that, like my mother did, hardly anything is a big deal. If you know what I mean.

Darcy: Yeah.

Darcy: Yeah, you’re right.

Jennifer: It would be like, “You’re not dead from starvation. You’re doin’ okay.” You know? “You have a meal a day. You’re doin’ all right.” So, you know, when you come from a place like that--I mean, us being poor and all that in comparison to what she went through, would be nothing, but in comparison to a lot of people it was like, “Oh my gosh!” It was awful! I mean--and it is awful, but [pause] it was just the card, the card that was dealt.

Jennifer dropped out of school when she was in the tenth grade. Her dysfunctional family life and the responsibilities of taking care of her younger siblings had left her no time or place to study. In all the chaos, she hadn’t been able to concentrate or focus on her studies, so by the tenth grade, she had academically fallen way behind her classmates and had been struggling to stay in school for many years. A rezoning of her school district severed the few remaining emotional ties that she had with her school, and the change finally pushed her over the edge of dropping out.

Years earlier, she had tried to advocate for herself. She had attempted to enlist the help of a teacher, but the teacher had not understood what she was trying to communicate, so her overtures had gone unrecognized. Further, the Hispanic community was not a resource for her either. In fact, the community viewed her mother’s lifestyle as an abomination, and her family was rejected because of it.

She had felt alone and hopeless, and in that hopelessness, she had turned to drugs. She had needed someone who understood her situation; she had needed an advocate, a mentor, someone to help her, but no one had realized her plight, so no one had helped. She had held on alone as long as she could, but the rezoning was the last straw. She had not been able to hold on any longer, so she finally dropped out.

Darcy: Well, why--I didn’t ask this last time. You dropped out of school. Didn’t you? Did you drop out?

Jennifer: Um hum.

Darcy: What grade were you when you dropped out?
Jennifer: I was in the tenth grade.

Darcy: Okay. Why did you drop out? What was going on? I know somewhere in there you got addicted because you're recovering.

Jennifer: I started drinking when I was 12. [Clears throat.] I was getting--I started to realize the picture, and there was really nobody I could go to in school that got the picture. There was nobody. There was no--I didn't have a mentor. Nobody who--like one time I went to my seventh grade teacher, and I said, "I can't just lock myself--I can't study." You know, because my grades were, [pause] you know. I was struggling with my grades, and she said, "Well, just go to some part of the house and just sit down with your books," and I said, "You don't understand." I said, "I can't do that. I have to watch kids." "Well, well, why don't you ask your mom or your sisters to watch them for a while so that you can study?" [Sighs and says in a whisper while clapping her hands together] Oh, my God!

So, I went home. I remember looking around make sure that nobody was around and finding a quiet little place to sit down and start doin my homework, and Carmen says, "There you are." You know. "Here's these kids." You know. "You need to watch them while I'm over here making dinner," or doing whatever, and I tried to go back and explain to her, but she didn't understand, and there was really nobody that I could talk to, and other kids were--I mean [pause] like--it was at that point that I was really involved in sports. I was in like choir. Those were the two things that kept me going in school. Not anything academically, but emotionally. That's what was holding me. That's what kept me going back.

Darcy: Which was what again?

Jennifer: Sports and, and choir.

Darcy: Okay, a more extracurricular focus.

Jennifer: Um hum, because I couldn't focus. I couldn't concentrate on the math and the things that were--that took--that kind of time and effort. I mean it didn't happen at home. It wasn't there, so I am ready for ninth grade [clears throat]--got my first "F" in ninth grade. I think it was in social studies [laughs], and then what happened was they changed the zoning, so I ended up going to Valley View High that was over in the east side, and I didn't know anybody.
And the kids that helped pull me through school, I know who they are. Actually, to this day, I know their names, and I know what happened to them. They went on to high school, that group of kids that I hung out with. Most of these kids were already drinking. I mean somebody brought pot into the neighborhood when I was 13, you know. So the neighborhood knew about pot, and it was a short time after that that heroin came into the neighborhood, so the kids who were holding me together were actually English speaking kids, American kids. They were not Hispanic kids because those guys in the neighborhood that I grew up with treated us bad.

Darcy: Other Hispanic kids? Why?

Jennifer: Because their parents treated us bad, and their parents said bad things about my mom because she was alone and she kept having kids.

Darcy: Oh, culturally, it was a real taboo thing.

Jennifer: Oh, yeah. They, they stomped all over us all the time [inaudible]. You know, and so, the kids who were helping me hold on went on to Sydney High, and I didn’t go with them. The zoning had gotten changed, and at that time, I was holding on by a thread, just a thread, so I just, [pause] I give up. I just started going into drugs and alcohol full time. Unfortunately, the kids I hung out with were really smart, so they could ditch school and still pull straight “A’s” [laughs].

Which me, it’s not like that--not like that at all. I’ve always had to work very hard at getting good grades. I just--I don’t know. Some people got better looks than brains. I don’t know, so I dropped out. I went though almost all of tenth grade at Valley View before they finally kicked me out. Then I went to Madison High School, and they kicked me out because I stopped goin’, and I tried it again, and it didn’t work. I just, [pause] I just couldn’t get it together, and so I started doing drugs and alcohol full time.

Both of Jennifer biological parents were addicted to alcohol. As such, her home life was filled with confusion, inconsistencies, lies, and dysfunction. In such an environment, the children wondered what was real, and in the chaos and uncertainty, they turned against each other.

Darcy: Was your mom alcoholic? I can’t remember what you said.
Jennifer: Yes. She would drink every night after work. Every night she would close the bar. Romie says no, and my other sisters think she did or didn't, but I remember her and I sitting on the couch, and we were pretty young--watching TV, waiting for my mom to come home, and she would yell at us cause she would say, "I don't want you waiting up for me! I don't want you waiting up for me!" I eventually stopped. Romie was the one who stayed up waiting for her.

[Jennifer takes a break to get some water.]

Darcy: So back to you and your sister. It sounds like you were pretty typical. In dysfunctional families, one child has one impression of what happened, and another child has a totally different version of what happened.

Jennifer: Right.

Darcy: Some times you wonder if you were raised in the same household.

Jennifer [laughs]: Definitely. [laughs again.] With us, I think Mom--there was a time there that Mom bargained. She said, "What can I get you...? What can I do to get you to stay in school?" You know, [sighs] I think my sisters--some of my sisters--a couple of my sisters think that she played favorites, and I really don't know if that is true or not, but I do remember her trying to bargain with me. You know, telling me that if I went to school every week--if I went to school everyday for a week that she would buy me a dress--every week, and that's what I told her I wanted was a dress every week.

Well, of course, I started to ditch, and, of course--you know, she reneged, too. There was no consistency in my life--ever! So--I don't know. My mom always seemed to need to... I don't know if she thought that I was going to do something. I think she thought that I was going to do something with my life. I really do. I think somewhere in her mind, for some reason, she picked me, and I have no idea why. [Sighs.] I don't know. I don't know. It was interesting because the other sisters told me there was times that she would get me stuff, and she would say, "Jennifer is special. She, she needs to..."

Darcy: Really?
Jennifer: Yeah. “She needs to . . .” You know. “You guys are going to have to do without. Jennifer needs it.” You know. “She’s special, and there is something wrong with Jennifer, and she needs to--so you guys have to make sacrifices.” She actually told them that.

Darcy: That there was something wrong with you?

Jennifer: Yes, she told my three youngest--Maria, Maria had so much resentment for me for years. I had no idea that she had had this conversation with my siblings. She told me, and then she said, “Yep. Didn’t you know that?” And I said, “Of course I didn’t know! How would I know? How would I know that? Nobody would even come to me and say that she told you guys that.” But that’s why they were so angry with me all the time.

And they would give in to me, “Because there’s something about Jennifer.” You know. “There’s something [long pause] about Jennifer.” The words kind of escape me exactly, but, kind of the meaning is, I am either special because I am special, or I am special because there is something wrong with me that, [pause] you know. “Put your needs aside [pause] for her,” which was kind of the picture I got from her. [Sighs.] It put me at odds with my three younger brothers and sisters.

I never knew why she did it. I don’t know why she said it. I don’t know why she did it. I have no idea. Maybe it was because I, I absolutely, on an emotional level, was so demanding. I, I didn’t let her escape me. I used to ask her stuff all the time. Like--I don’t know--kids. I don’t know. I don’t know if other kids do this, but I used to ask her if she loved me best. “Do you love me more than my brothers and sisters?”

She said, “No, I love you the same way, but I love you all differently because you are all different,” and I said, “No, you love me best. Don’t you? You love me best. Don’t you?” And I would ask her about our dads. You know, I would say, “Did you love Maria’s--did you love Maria’s father?” “Well, I loved Maria’s father in a different way than I loved Jose.”

I would ask her questions like that. I don’t know why. I mean I don’t know if that was part of the reason why she felt bonded to me or something. I have no idea, but I remember her telling me about my dad. I remember her telling that she absolutely fell head over heels in love with my dad.
He came after the oldest brothers and sisters. Well, he was a womanizer. My dad was a complete womanizer. He took her dancing. He took her out. I’ll bet he made her feel like she was numero uno. You know? And she said, “Your dad never raised his voice to me. He never called me dirty names.” You know, but he’s a womanizer. He went out on her a lot. He drank a lot, and he partied. You know. When I met up with my dad, he was still partying, you know, and wanting to dance. You know, “There’s my papa,” and I didn’t meet him until I was 12 years old. My mother told me he was dead, [pause] but she told me that she really loved him.

While Jennifer has been in recovery from her addiction for many years, the memories of that time are still difficult for her, and she has still not fully resolved all of her issues with it. Her addiction was severe, and it affected all aspects of her life.

She abused drugs up until she was in the second trimester of her pregnancy with her daughter. Later, her addiction interfered with her ability to parent her child, and, she left her daughter with one of her sisters for long periods of time.

By this point in her life, her self-esteem was shattered, and she felt defective. She was so depressed and miserable that she attempted suicide two times and was then involuntarily institutionalized as a result of those attempts.

Darcy: How old were you when you got pregnant?

Jennifer [answers softly]: Nineteen.

Darcy: So you were well out of school at that point. You had dropped out by that time.

Jennifer: Um hum. Actually, I think I was 18. I had Angelina at 19. No, I turned 20 that year. I was 19.

Darcy: Were you using then?

Jennifer: You know, the hardest part about my life is that piece. [Pause.] I used up until I was probably five or six months pregnant, and that has been the hardest thing for me to deal with. I have told my story to some, some... You know?
One time I was called in—not called in. Somebody invited me to go tell my story to a group of women. That's still a very tough one for me, but I tell them, "I tell you this to set you free to know..." You know, [pause] and I know that I asked God all the time to take care of my baby, to take care of me because I could not.

I knew, [pause] I knew there was something wrong. I knew that I was strung out, and at some level, some deep untouchable level because I just kept doin' what I was doin' out of fear, [clears throat] but there was somewhere deep inside that I knew [pause] what I was doin' to myself [pause] and, [pause] and Angelina, but it was madness.

And I told--I talked to God all the time--told him, "I can't help myself, God. You're gonna have to take care of me and my baby. You have to take care of us because I can't," and [prolonged pause] there's nothing wrong with my daughter [chuckles]. You know! And I know that it's sheer by the grace--I overdosed twice.

Darcy: Wow.

Jennifer: On Seconol. This is not--Seconol isn't the kind of--it's not pot. Seconol is a deadly [pause] very, very deadly drug.

Darcy: Wow.

Jennifer: You know?

Darcy: Yeah.

Jennifer: Especially to a developing fetus. It's totally [inaudible], so I'm, I'm [pause] grateful. I'm so, so grateful, and that's one of the hardest things I have had to get over [pause] was when I had her, [pause] but the other part was that she saved my life. I think [sighs, pauses]. She was about four or five months--I had postpartum depression really bad. I mean to the point that, [sighs, pauses] I never--I spiraled. I absolutely did not come out of it.

Not only did I do drugs and have a child, but I had no idea how to live life. I had no idea what to do with this tiny baby, and I remember looking at my sister, Romie, who had had Antonio about a year or so older than Angelina is. You know, there we were—we're both close, and we had babies real close to each other. Her daughters did the same thing [laughs].

Darcy: Interesting.
Jennifer [clears throat and continues]: But I saw her with Antonio. She loved him, and she--I was just a kid. It was like I had no idea what to feel about the whole thing. I was [pause] stunned. [Pause.] I was stunned. I knew I couldn’t do it. I knew I was no good. I knew I was no good. There’s something wrong with me. I looked at my sister with her baby, and I looked at my baby, and I didn’t know what to do, and I knew that there was something wrong with me.

[Continues in a whispered voice that is barely audible] There was something wrong with me. I’m a bad person, or something’s wrong with me, so when she was about four or five months old, I took off [pause] and went and got good and loaded [slows speech] and came home, and [long pause] I slashed my wrists. I have the scars [shows her wrists].

Romie woke up. Why she woke up--she would never have woken up. Why she came in. I don’t know, but what happened then was--the course that kind of changed things around for me--I think, which would be important to note, was she signed me away, but she didn’t know she did. They, they lied to her and told her that they were going to keep me for a few days for observation, and there was no room at the general hospital in Seaside, so they took me to Freemont State Hospital, and they wouldn’t let me out [long pause]. She came to get me three days later, and they said, “She’s not going anywhere, [pause] and we’re keeping her.”

And [pause] I don’t really remember [pause] how long I was there. I know I was there a long time. Not a long, long, long time, but I know I came out, and my daughter was older. [Chuckles.] You know, because they kept me pretty medicated up, [pause] and, [pause] geez, I don’t know how long they can hold you against your will [pause] back then, [pause] and I remember two of my friends coming to visit me, and my first visit with me, and my mom... [Sighs.] Uhhh! I went back to the wards wanting to die. [Pause.] I didn’t know what to do, [pause] but I knew I had to do something, and the time came when they couldn’t hold me any longer against my will, [clears throat], and I needed to sign up voluntarily, and I told them, “Hell, no.” [Chuckles.] “I’m going home.”

When I was pregnant with Angelina, I got arrested [laughs] and thrown in jail and held for a couple of weeks, [long pause] and I had been put on probation, and when I got out of Freemont State Hospital, [pause] the probation officer looked at it, and said, “You
violated your probation by getting loaded," which was wonderful to hear, so [pause] I had to see this lady who was going to be a P.O., but it wasn’t my P.O. My P.O. I only saw once a month, but this other [clears throat] student, I guess, was to come out every week to where I lived and would see me, and I had to stay on this medication that would absolutely zombie me out.

I could hardly take care of Angelina. Romie would get angry with me. She would say, “She’s crying all day, and you’re not waking up. She’s crying all night, and you’re not waking up,” and I said, “I can’t help it.” I was living with Romie. I was on probation, and I couldn’t help it, [pause] but I remember after all that time when I came back [clears throat] home, I said to myself, “I don’t know what I am doing. I know how to keep her clean. I know how to feed her, and I know how to keep her safe. Those are three things that I know what to do with this baby.”

And I just kind of made up my mind that I did know how to do those things, and that was the best I could give her. ‘Cause in here, [points to head] I was so empty because I had been taking drugs for already seven years, or however long, since the age of 12. I had no idea what was going on in here what so ever, [pause] and deep down inside, of course, I knew that I would have, [pause] I would have died for her, you know.

Jennifer earned her G.E.D. when she was approximately 21-years-old. However, she didn’t pursue a college education until she was around 35-years-old. She was in recovery at the time, and, with the support and urging of friends, she enrolled in a human services program.

She had gotten into recovery through her involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous. The recovering community in general had a profound impact on her sense of self. In the meetings, she found people who cared for her, who listened to her, and who supported her. As a result, her self-esteem rebounded, and she felt empowered to make major changes in her life.

Up until that time, she had not known that life could be different. She had never had a positive role model nor a close bond with any competent, emotionally stable person. There had never been any one to tell her that life did not have to be that way.
Jennifer: During that time they had what was called an adult education—an adult high school, and I went to school. We would go every day to school, and we had childcare. They paid for childcare, and you would go to your classes everyday, and I went on and got my G.E.D.

Darcy: How old were you when you got your G.E.D?

Jennifer: Probably about 21. I remember I was 21 'cause that’s when I met my friend Jody, and she took me to my first bar. I mean bar like a bar! [Chuckles.] Big people bar [laughs]. Not like a dance club, or Holiday Inn, or some cocktail lounge. We’re talking a bar, so I was 21, and I didn’t go back to school until I was 34 or 35.

Darcy: Okay, and then how did you happen to go—given all that, how did you happen to go back to school when you were 34, 35?

Jennifer: I had sobered up. Well, what happened was [pause] I met Rob, and we were married, and he dragged us to Oregon because things were going to be better in Oregon. You know because they didn’t like him down there, and he couldn’t find a decent job. He never ended up finding a decent job, but I left him and stayed drunk for a couple of more years, and [pause] Angelina again helped me come out of it. [Clears throat.] I had like a three-day blackout. [Pause.] I, I [pause] couldn’t live with myself if anything would have happened to that child, and she was already like seven or eight.

[Prolonged pause.] And I took her to New Mexico to my sister Romie, who I didn’t know was nursing her own disease at the time. I said, “You take care of her. I can’t take care of her.” I said, “If I don’t get it together in a year, you keep her because I think something bad is going to happen to her. I know I need to get my shit together,” and I didn’t really know what I needed to do, but I knew that I needed to do something, and I called it “getting my shit together,” and I went in and out of denial as far as alcohol and drugs and stuff—that perhaps there was a problem, and I went in and out of denial. Sometimes I knew it was it, and other times I just said, “No, it can’t be.”

You know, and when you’re at the bottom like that, you don’t know. When you have been so poor like that and you hardly have anything, and you don’t have anybody to tell you, or didn’t have anybody to tell you then that things could be better, that you could have a better life, you kind of think that that is life at the low end
there. You do! I mean I did. I just thought, “That is life.” You know?

Darcy: Yeah.

Jennifer: I thought that was life, and [clears throat] you know, struggling every day not being—barely being able to get food, barely being able to live. That was life. That wasn’t a big deal, so I got sober. I went to my A.A. meetings. Actually, a friend—I was going to A.A. meetings because my friend had this problem, and my friend ended up continuing to drink, and I stayed with the A.A. meetings. I stayed in A.A., and I got clean and sober for a couple of reasons. At first, it was just because people would listen to me and talk to me, [pause] and they acted like they cared.

Darcy: In recovery—the recovering people?

Jennifer: The recovering people, and they offered me coffee, and they gave me a cigarette and [prolonged pause] became empowered, and [continues tearfully] I needed that really bad, [pause] so I didn’t think I had this problem. I thought I was really fooling these people in the meetings. How would they know if I was alcoholic? And it was really obvious that I wasn’t [laughs]. I mean I was fooling these people, and somewhere in there, I started to do it for real, and I don’t even remember—maybe the third time around when I got my third 90 days cause I remember there was a 90 days I got in there.

I walked into that room, and I had drank, [pause] and I was afraid to go back in that room, and they asked me if I had today, and I said that I did. I hadn’t drank that day. I had been drinking the day before and the day before that. It was my 90-day cake, and “If you have today,” they said, “this is your cake.” That was it.

And during my drinking, I had lost a job as a housekeeper, so I was running around to all the nursing homes trying to get this housekeeper job. He said, “I don’t have a housekeeper job, but at this one nursing home, we need CNAs, and we will train you.” So I couldn’t get a job, and I couldn’t get a job, and I went back to them, and I said, “Okay, I will be a CNA,” and I did that when I was still drinkin’.

So three years into recovery—yeah, three years into recovery I’m like emotionally cannot hack being in a—in a nursing home or working—watching these people die and all. I mean, my feelings were so right there on the surface. You know, by then, so I talked
to a couple of my friends, and I said, “What should I do?” And they said, “Go to school,” so they sat there with me, and they must have spent three hours with me, and we went through all the--you know--and they talked me into it. “Well, what do you want to do? Can you do accounting?” “No, I don’t want to do accounting.”

Finally we went though all this stuff, and they said, “You have worked with people. Why don’t you see if you can’t find something where you work with people?” Like, you know, “Get into something like in the human services or something?” So I went down and I picked up the papers, and I filled them out [prolonged pause]. The last piece was taking them in there, and I did, and I got in there. That was kind of where it was at because I just couldn’t handle the suffering that I was watching any more, and I knew I wanted to work with people, but I didn’t know what to do.

Jennifer is the epitome of a survivor. She is tenacious, and she is a fighter. Paradoxically, she believes that her drug addiction saved her from the psychic pain that could have destroyed her.

Darcy: You talked early on--we were talking about how you are doing and you made some statement there about you’re not about to give up or something like that. You know, what is it about you? How did you--you didn’t die. You didn’t suicide out. You didn’t die of your addiction.

[Long pause.]

Jennifer: I don’t know... I think... [Sighs.] I don’t know. There’s just something in me that just [whispers] fights. Sometimes I’m fighting the wrong people, but [pause] I just think that--when I was young I thought for sure God had made a mistake by putting me here. I mean I was very young when I thought that. I thought, “Why did you put me in this family? I don’t belong here. I don’t know why I am here. What am I doing here?”

And I remember my mom telling me at four years old I stopped eating. I would not try to hide that I wasn’t eating. I mean literally I would put my whole plate and everything in the garbage, and she took me to the doctor, and she said that she told them that I had stopped eating, and he said, “What is she doing?”
And she said, “Well, all she will do is drink milk,” and he said, “Well, she will be okay,” so I thought that God had made a mistake. I was that young when I had seen that God had made a mistake by putting me here because I didn’t want to be here. I felt so uncomfortable in my skin. My sisters told me that Mom told them that I didn’t stop crying for the first five years of my life, and I said, “Well, I must have had a lot to cry about if I cried all the time.”

And I think that is just kinda how it was. I couldn’t handle being in my own skin, and I thought God had made a mistake, so I used to be punished at times for not being good, so they put me on, they made me kneel on bricks and beans.

Darcy: What is that?

Jennifer: To kneel on bricks and beans? Kneeling is part of being Catholic [laughs].

Darcy: Yeah. Right.

Jennifer: Well, I had to kneel on bricks and beans--sometimes bricks. They would make me kneel on bricks and other times on beans.

Darcy: Ohhh!

Jennifer: Hard beans because I needed to suffer--because I was bad, and I needed to be good, and pain and suffering would take it away.

Darcy: Who put you on--who did that?

Jennifer [sighs]: My sister, Carmen, and my uncle. I don’t think my Grandpa did. My grandpa just beat us, but a couple of times she did, so I was a bad--I figured that God had figured out I was bad [pause] and didn’t want me, [long pause] so I got angry at the world, pretty much. I got angry at everybody. You know. You feel like a piece of shit, so you act like you’re a piece of shit, so I pretty much just fought everybody and everything, you know, and when I said I gave up at 12, I did. I gave up on life in general and just decided that I would drink and use myself to death. I didn’t think I would make it to 18. I really didn’t, [pause] and then I didn’t think I would make it to 21. I figured that I would die before I reached 21, you know, from my drinking and my using, but [pause] I didn’t realize that I had given up like that, given in
like that. I think that all that drinking and using helped me survive. I
didn’t have any tools to help me survive, and [sighs] it sounds strange,
but I think that drinking and using, even though I was killing myself in
one way, in another way, I was absolutely saving my own life.

I think I probably would have suicided-out had I not had drugs and
alcohol. I don’t know. I had no coping skills, [pause] and [pause] I
don’t know. I just, [pause] I just get angry when I think about giving up. I get angry when I think this is it. This is all that life--
there has to be more. It’s kinda--did you ever hear that, about those
little boys? One was a pessimist and was an optimist?

Darcy [asks for clarification]: One was a pessimistic, and one was
a what?

Jennifer: An optimist. And they put the pessimist in with, in a
room with all these wonderful toys. It looked like toy land. You
know. Put him in there, closed the door, and came back an hour
later, and the kid is still sitting in the corner, and they said, “Why
aren’t you in there playing with all the toys? Why aren’t you
playing with the toys?” “Well,” he said, “a set up like this with all
these toys,” he says, “there’s got to be something to it. I’m not
going to play with any of these toys because there has got to be
something to this. You guys are up to something.”

So then they put the optimist in the room, same little room, just a
little spot for him filled with horse shit, so they closed the door. An
hour later they came back, and this kid is swimming through there.
Just swimming through there, and they said, “What are you
doing?” And he said, “Well, with all this horse shit, there has to be
a pony in here somewhere.”

Darcy [busts out with laughter]: Oh, I love it! How funny.

Jennifer: I don’t think I quite have that happy attitude about it. It’s
more like I’m angry, and there’s got to be a God damn horse in
here some place. You know what I mean?

Darcy: Yes. Okay.

Jennifer: And that’s kind of how I view life, but I’m not like this
happy kid that’s goin’ through there like tearing it up. It’s more
like I’m angry and pissed that I have to do this because, [laughs]
obviously, [laughs] nobody is going to bring me the pony. You
know, so [pause] I guess that’s it, tenacity. I don’t know. I’m
tenacious. I get angry, and I think—I don’t know. I’m not—there’s got to be more to this picture. I mean, there just has to be, so when I think about giving up, I think that I’m giving up on my—I didn’t get clean and sober to give up, and I’m not.

I think that’s what carries me through, but I don’t know what happened before that. I really couldn’t tell you what—I think I gave up a lot of times, but I think I didn’t stop breathing. I think that’s probably—you know, led me to the next day, and the next day, and the next day.

In addition to the physical abuse that she suffered at the hands of her grandfather, she also endured the physical assaults that her eldest brother metered out on her and her siblings. Further, she experienced the emotional pain of knowing that her brother was sexually abusing her sisters and that he was verbally abusing their mother and that her mother was too afraid and too powerless to help any of them.

Jennifer believes that, while her anger has been a destructive factor in some stages of her life, it has also benefited her in that it has motivated her to make the necessary changes when her life became too unbearable. In fact, her anger at her estranged husband is currently motivating her to return to school to pursue her bachelor’s degree.

Further, her motivation to achieve is fueled by her belief in a Higher Power and her desire to give back to the recovering community. In recovery, she has learned to believe in herself, and, as such, her self-esteem has blossomed.

Darcy: You had talked, or I thought that you had talked, about your brother. Was there some kind of abuse with your brother?

Jennifer: Yeah.

Darcy: What was that?

Jennifer: Um, my oldest brother used to beat us up, [pause] and he molested, three of my sisters, [long pause] and I always fought him. I don’t know why. I don’t know where I got—I just couldn’t stand [pause] to let him [pause] do that to anybody. I don’t know. Like for instance I only weighed a 100 pounds; I was pretty small, and my little brother and sister were watching—[I remember this so
well. It was the *Flintstones*, and he comes in drunk. He is two years older than me, and he came in drunk. I'm in my teens—I think, or pre-teens. He turns the channel, and he says, “I’m gonna watch boxing,” and he use to practice boxing on my little brother. He would box him. He would have black eyes. He would have busted lips. He would have a banged up head.

Darcy: Oh, my.

Jennifer: My mother knew what was going on, but she didn’t do any thing. Well, this particular night I just thought, “We’re sitting here very calmly. The kids are watching the *Flintstones*. I’m sitting here, and this fuckin ass-hole comes in here.” I don’t know. Something just ignited, and it always did. It always does when it comes to something like that, and I told him, “You’re not going to watch boxing. We were watching the *Flintstones*,” and so I moved it back. Well he—he’s a big guy. I mean stocky, but big and very strong, [pause] and so he moved it back. So I moved the TV back again, and I put my hand on it, and he pushed my hand away, so I socked him in the stomach. Of course, [laughs] it didn’t faze him.

Darcy: Yeah, to say the least.

Jennifer: Well, he either pushed me or punched me, and, of course, I went rolling, you know how they do in the movies because I only weighed like a 100 pounds, so I said, “God damn it!” And I knew I couldn’t beat him. He had me physically, so I picked up a bottle, an empty beer bottle that was setting there, and I threw it at him, and I hit him in the face.

[During this portion of the interview, I could feel myself starting to hold my breath, and I felt myself become transfixed as I listened to what I knew was going to be a story of extreme physical abuse.]

Jennifer: Do you know that damn bottle bounced off his head. It bounced off his cheekbone. It didn’t shatter. It didn’t break, and I was going to die [laughs].

Darcy [laughs nervously]: Yeah.

Jennifer [continues laughing]: He came after me, and he was choking the living life out of me, and I don’t know which side—I must have yelled for one of the kids to go get Mom [laughter stops], but I don’t know; I just didn’t back down, and it was the same with the kids. I mean [pause] when something weird was going on—I mean, I asked my little sister, I even took her in the
other room, “Are you afraid of him? Is that it?” She absolutely always . . . What do you call it when you separate yourself?

Darcy: Disassociation?

Jennifer: She had disassociated already too long for her to talk. [Clears her throat.] Apparently, she had told my mother, and my mother had done nothing, so when I came up to her and asked her, by the time I asked her, I had been questioning her and questioning her about my brother, and, you know, I used to have screaming fights with my mother and screaming fights with him, um, over my little brother getting abused, and then when I come home and find her sitting like a zombie.

I mean I would have fits, and she wouldn’t tell me anything. She was afraid of him, and I remember shaking her and telling her, “Talk to me! Talk to me!” And I couldn’t get her to talk, so I don’t know. I just would get pissed off. I would just get angry. I would get angry about the entire situation, and I knew that might not change the situation for good, but at least I could alter it in the moment because I couldn’t live in my skin knowing that it was going on with her.

Like when my brother came in and did that, I just stood there, and I know when [pause] he would cuss out my mom and call her dirty names, I couldn’t just sit there. I would start yelling at him, and I would say, “Why don’t you get out of here?” I would say, “Why are you talking to her that way? She’s your mother.” You know. I would say, “Why are you talking to her that way? She’s your mother.” You know.

I always ran to defend her, and I have no idea where--and, so that’s kind of it. I think I got angry. I think I just got angry. I finally got pissed off, and I got tired of crying. I got tired of crying about everything. I got tired of trying to do the right thing. Trying to go about it in a calm, orderly, appropriate . . . I don’t--I don’t know. I just got tired. I got tired of people not doing anything about it. I just got tired, and [clears throat] when I get that way, that’s the part of me that comes out the maddest. It’s sheer, raw survival. I’ll get pissed, and that’s what made me stop the meth. I said, “Fuck this!” [Laughs.] “This is not helping me. I feel bad any way.”

I think I get angry at people who don’t get pissed, and that’s kinda how I do it. I know some people do destructive things with their anger, and that’s how I used to do it. I used to, and every now and then I catch myself doing that, you know, but not to the degree that I used to when I was doing drugs, but I, I--that’s what motivates
me. Like right now I have a plan in my mind of how I’m going to go back to school. You know.

Darcy: Yeah, that’s probably a good point right now. How do you feel about yourself as a learner?

Jennifer: I don’t want to have--when I lay my head down there, I want to know--when I go down for the last time, when I die, I want to know that I did everything that I could in life and tried to do the best I could with me--that God gave me an opportunity by getting me clean and sober. I need to make something of myself. I need to keep pushing myself. I’m not here to sit on my laurels.

[Phone rings.]

Jennifer [resumes]: I don’t know. I think I’ve been, you know--God saved my life. The people in the program saved my life, the A.A. people, and I just think that I [sighs] need to honor that. You know, by being the best I can be, being the best I can be, and sitting around feeling sorry for myself because some fucking guy is being a jerk is not it. I have a lot to offer people. I have my experience. I want to help people. I still want to do that, and I can’t do that if I’m feeling sorry for myself. I can’t offer them hope, and I can’t offer them strength if I don’t have that myself, so [sighs] I kind of regrouped.

Now I have a plan. I’m going to finish paying off my car. I’m going to pay off--if I’m going to be a starving student, I have to deal with just the bare necessities, so I’m going to pay off all my credit cards and my store cards and stuff, and see what I can pull together as far as getting back--getting to school--saving enough money so that I can get into school, and that’s what I’m going to do because I know--my plan is to, to be near my family.

The other thing that has happened is when I first started in Oregon City, it was a new start away from Sam and everything, and then I got with him, and you know that saying, “Don’t shit where you eat.” I feel like I--you know, did that when I brought him here, and here we had this marriage and everything, and now all of a sudden Oregon City is like a painful place for me.

So, you know, in a couple of months, [laughs] everything could be changed [laughs], but the money thing, I’m definitely paying off my car, and I’m paying off my credit cards. That is a definite that I’m gonna do, and goin’ back to school is a definite I’m gonna do. Whether I’m gonna do it here or there, I don’t know.
Darcy: You’re just determined to do it.

Jennifer [continues]: But I’m gonna do it because, you know, what somebody told me is, “People can give you beautiful flowers, but you have to plant your own garden,” so although I know that these gifts that are given to me, I know that I have to kind of make my own garden, make my own life. I’m responsible for how I live my life and what happens, and, to a certain degree, and if I’m gonna sit around feeling sorry for myself, and I’m lookin at the weeds going, “Oh my God!”

You know, then nothing’s going to happen, but I know that if I get in there and start pulling up the weeds and planting flowers and, and that’s about me. You know, because I haven’t given me anything in these last few years. It’s all been given to him, and I need to be kinder to me. I need to be better to myself. Not so much with things, but just be kinder to myself. Like I pulled myself out of the marriage, but even though one part of me feels really bad, another part of me feels really good because I can feel that strength, that anger come through and that strength come through and that tenacity. Where the mad is kinda--I don’t know. I guess if you don’t feel—if it doesn’t make you feel really bad, you can’t feel. You’re kind of like in this middle space.

It’s kind of opposite, but it--nothing gets really bad, but nothing gets really great [clears throat], so I feel that strength back. It’s coming back. I lose faith, but I get it back. Then I lose it again and get it back. I think I’m back on the back. I lost faith there for quite a few months there, and I asked God why he was sending lightening bolts my way, and, of course, he said, “Because I don’t like you!”

[Both laugh.]

Jennifer [resumes]: But then again, you know, it’s that one where the guy’s on top of this house, and there’s a flood, and a friend goes by in a boat, and he says, “Come on, get in. Get in.” And he says, “Oh no. God’s going to save my life. God’s going to save my life.” “Jump in the boat! Jump in the boat!” “No, no, God’s going to save my life. I’ll wait for God.” Then a helicopter comes and says, “Come on. Come on. We’ll get you,” and the water’s rising. The water is rising. “No, God’s gonna save my life. God’s gonna save my life.”

Well, the man drowns, and it’s because he didn’t grab those life preservers, and that’s A.A. People who share not so much--they
are people that are--people who are real. Let's put it that way. People that are real are my hope--inspire me to have hope, [long pause] and that's where I think I get my strength to get pissed off. It's like, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! They like me. They love me. I know there's somebody here who's worth it," so I think I'm getting my life back together or whatever, but sometimes it's real confusing, and I don't understand, but, I don't know, I think I'm getting my faith back.

Researcher’s Reflections on Jennifer Lopez’s First Interview

Jennifer’s story and that of her family was painful for me to ponder. However, as with Carlie’s story, I didn’t realize how much it had impacted me until much later when I was transcribing the tapes. I had never expected that a study of educational experiences would dredge up so many painful memories for people.

As such, I was expecting to stay safely detached and firmly in my head; I didn’t know that I would become a witness to so much pain. I didn’t know that my heart would become so involved or that my emotions would run so high.

I have enclosed my journal entry from April 11, 2002. I wrote the entry as I was in the middle of transcribing her tapes. It is a glimpse of my own experience as I struggled to absorb the reality of her story:

I have been transcribing this for the last couple of hours, and when I got to this part [the part where she describes her grandfather beating her with the hose], I had an overwhelming need to speak to Jennifer. I called her house. Her roommate said that she was asleep. As I was leaving the message, I had an overwhelming feeling that I needed to cry. I didn’t because I decided I didn’t want to go wherever that would have taken me. As such, I continued transcribing with a tight feeling in my chest and throat.

[Later during the transcription] Well, I am crying now. I called Jennifer’s office number and left her a message letting her know that I am thinking of her. This is very painful. Between her story and Carlie’s, I am really being forced to sit with my feelings.
I conducted the second interview on the warm summer evening of Monday, June 18, 2002. We met for two hours that evening. Jennifer’s roommate was home that night, and since her home does not offer much privacy, we decided to meet in the home of one of her friends. The friend’s home is large and easily accommodated our need for quiet and privacy.

I sat on one end of a large couch, and she sat next to me in a stuffed chair. It was early evening and the room was lit by natural light when we first started the interview, but as the evening progressed and darkness settled in on us, we turned on a table lamp that was situated between us. We sipped iced water throughout the evening, and other than our own hushed voices, the room was quiet and lent an air of privacy and detachment from the rest of the world.

In this interview, we revisit some of the themes that had come up for her during our first meeting. In this regard, Jennifer begins by recounting how she had subconsciously abused drugs to help her escape the reality of her home life when she had no other way of coping.

She remembers being a child who refused to eat. She remembers being a social and cultural outcast. She remembers the poverty, the incest, and the abuse. She remembers being told that her father was dead, and then she remembers finding him and having him reject her gestures of love. She remembers the lies. She remembers the confusion. She remembers the pain.

Darcy: One of the things that you had said, and I didn’t write it here—you had kind of thrown it out as a question—that maybe your addiction, at one point, is what kept you alive.

Jennifer: Exactly.

Darcy: Do you know what you meant by that?

Jennifer: Well, [sighs] I meant that I think if I was to have faced all the—in the present moment of what was going on in my life [clears throat] with the abuse, with the poverty, [pause] with the neighborhood I lived in, with the Catholicism, and all that [pause],
I think if, if I was [pause] taking all that in, I don’t think I could have survived. I really don’t think I could have survived, and I think the drugs helped me survive by blocking out or allowing me to not be in the present moment all the time because there was something happening all the time, and most of it was negative and bad.

And I think that it would have probably destroyed my spirit had I been able to assimilate everything that was going on and internalize everything that was going on and think about and really take a good look at what was happening. I don’t think I would have survived. I had a--my mom told me once that when I was four years old I stopped eating, and [sighs] I remember [pause] her saying that she would take me to the doctor and that [pause] he told her not to worry about me because I was drinking a lot of milk. I was drinking a lot milk. I just wouldn’t eat.

She said that she’d find the plate with food sitting in the trash. I just--I wasn’t trying to hide it. I just didn’t want it, [pause] and I was always extremely thin when I was growing up. I used to get teased about it in my family because all the women in my family had, you know, were built. I mean by the time they were nine and ten, they were wearing 36 size bras, and they looked like young women, and I was a flat as a board and skinny, [pause] and I used to get teased about that a lot, and I think perhaps as a small child that I might have already started with an eating disorder.

I didn’t think about that until I was in recovery for a while, so I think had I gone through what I was going through, at the time of what was happening with my family, with, um, the incest, um, [pause] the poverty, the--we were--I think we were old enough as teenagers to realize that there was something wrong and to not know what to do about it, and to not be able to do anything about it, and in our neighborhood everybody had mamas and papas.

Moms that stayed at home, and pops that worked, and we were the outcasts, and [pause] I don’t think I really realized ... I didn’t start to look around until I was a teenager, and I think at that point is when I needed to escape. I think all of a sudden reality hit me so hard between the eyes that I couldn’t cope, and [pause] I was 12 or 13 when I started drinking, which would be easy to do in my neighborhood because we had the town wino, Uncle Martin.

We knew that Uncle Martin used to--you give him enough money for a bottle of wine, and he would go down to the Stringy Cheese liquor store and buy the alcohol that you wanted, so we saw the
older kids doing that, you know, so some kids in the neighborhood who were older doing that, so when we got old enough to do that, that's what we did. We put our money together, and we'd send him off to the store to get a bottle of his wine, and, you know, and buy us booze.

Well, I think he used to get in trouble, and sometimes if he was drunk enough, he wouldn't go do it [chuckles] for us, but sometimes, you know, he, he would desperately need a bottle, so he would do it anyway even though one of his siblings would want to do it.

[Phone rings.]

Jennifer [resumes]: Anyway, that's kinda where it started, and I know that it was also the time that I had asked my mother about my father. I was about 12, and she had told me all this time that he was dead, and I think that at that age I was really curious about who was this other part of me. Who was this other part of Jennifer? I knew who my mom was and what she looked like and stuff like that, but I was really curious about my dad cause I didn't know him.

Of course, I asked my mom, "Did you love him?" And "What did he look like?" And "Do I look like him?" And that kind of thing, and then one day she pops up and says, "Do you want to meet your dad?" And I said, "I thought you told me my dad was dead," and she said, "Do you want to meet him or not?" It was like so, "Okay, yeah." I just shut up after that, and that's the first time that I met my dad, [pause] and I went up to him--he came up to the house, and I went up to him, and I was so emotional.

I mean I was so excited, and I was so--my feelings were just right there. I am 12 years old; my hormones were just starting, and I ran up to this man and put my--tried to put my arms around him and tell him, "Daddy I love you," because I was practicing what I would say to him. You know, "Daddy, I love you." You know, and I went to try to put my arms around him, and he pushed his hands out, and he kept me at arms length and said, "You're a big girl. Why are you crying?"

Darcy: Ohhh.

Jennifer [continues]: And I remember just shaking my head and--you know, kids kind of go into little fantasy stage when they have never met someone, and here was, you know, this opportunity
for me to, you know, to create this perfect dad in my mind, and he absolutely rejected me. Not so much rejected—well, he rejected me a long time ago, but he rejected what I was feeling. He absolutely discounted the emotions that were going—that were happening, and I went with him for the day, and him and his sister-in-law who drove.

My dad never drove. My dad never learned how to drive. He never drove, and his sister-in-law, I think was doing the driving, and he took me to go get a burger, and he took me to get a few clothes and stuff. Well, here this man is and it’s during the Beatles time, you know, and I’m 12, and, you know, I loved the Beatles. I loved the Supremes. I loved all those guys, and Motown was out, so we’re at like this burger joint, and there’s a jukebox there, and he puts on some Beatles music and starts dancing around. I was humiliated! I could not believe. I just—he wanted me to dance with him, and I was like going, “No!” You know, and I mean—I was so confused.

[Both laugh.]

Jennifer [laughs as she continues]: I was just like . . . My whole idea of what papas do and how they behave—I mean . . . What did I know, you know? I watched, you know, the Ozzie and Harriet show—you know—and Donna Reed. What did I know what papas are supposed to. . . I remember this so well because he had one of those Indian fringed the, the, the suede fringes with the fringes hanging down. The leather, you know. It was a really nice coat. Back then they cost beaucoup bucks, and here he was dancing around to the Beatles’ song and stuff, and I’m just like absolutely just sitting there going, “Oh, my gosh.” I went and danced with him a little bit, but it was like—oh, [sighs] it was a nightmare!

You know, and it took me years and years to figure out that, besides my dad being a chronic alcoholic, that he was totally and completely immature . . . I don’t think without the drugs I could have handled stuff like that, and, you know, we watched my brother—me and my sister, Romie, were so afraid of my brother, Robert, who used to beat us up on a regular basis, and there was no male, [pause] you know, no parent there to protect us.

Grandpa didn’t know what was going on, and I don’t know if he would have . . . He was a strange guy himself, kind of, about things like that, but [pause] we would watch my brother take my sister, Alicia, and lock the door [pause] and go behind the locked door, and we would sit and plot how we were going to kill him,
and we would talk, and we would cry, and then he would let Alicia out.

It was just a really hard time, and that was going on, and, you know, boys, clothes, popularity. I couldn’t deal with it. I just, [pause] I just think that if I hadn’t had alcohol to run to and I think to--I had no coping skills. I didn’t know what to do with all of that [pause] stuff that was going on. I had no idea. I mean, [sighs] I’m a child for Christ sakes!

You know, [pause] nobody was talking. Nobody talked to you. Nobody talked in my family [pause] about things. They yelled at you about doing stuff wrong. They yelled at you, [struggles for the words] and you kind of saw by their faces, but you were never talked to like a human being. You were talked at and told what to do, but not as far as any important information. [Laughs.]

You know, the important stuff like your feelings, and, gee, you know, your hormones, and explaining about my papa, and those kinds of things. I mean, my mother told me he was dead for a long time, you know, so it was a very confusing time for me. I was just [pause] totally confused. I was totally, totally blown away by life in general at that point, at that point in time, and my mom was going out on a regular basis. Not regular basis actually going out.

She would stay at work until two in the morning, three in the morning, and come home very drunk, and my brother Robert, at that point, was very abusive calling her a whore and asking her if she got, you know, “Did you get the dick tonight, Margarita?” And just disgusting, horrible, degrading, things to her, and we would listen to him do that to her for [pause] hours!

For hours, he would talk to her that way, and here I was not getting any sleep. Here I was, all this stuff was going on, and I don’t know about my other siblings. I know that Romie, who was closest to me, dealt with things so totally different than I did. She always had. She will get angry before she will cry. This woman will not cry. She doesn’t cry, [clears throat] so the few times I have seen her cry, in my entire life, it’s been very [pause] emotional for me.

Darcy: Oh, I’ll bet.

Jennifer: I mean, it’s been an absolute--gosh, it’s like the rock breaking, you know.

Darcy: Yeah, that would be scary.
Jennifer: So she dealt with things totally different than I did. She would get angry and tell me not to talk about it or, you know, look at me like, “What did you expect?” or just say stuff to me that I just didn’t understand, and that’s—I don’t think she understood any more than I did.

Darcy: Right, I don’t know how she could have—really.

Jennifer: No, and that was her way of dealing with it was to shut down, or went away, or got angry at me if I even mentioned it or, or would even talk about it because then that would make it real, I think.

And she couldn’t handle it anymore than I could. That’s how I survived for a long time [clears throat], but I think [clears throat], whether I survived or not, [pause] developing the dependence early on. Gosh. [Pause.] I absolutely know, I absolutely know there was a point where I made that connection, and it was when I was pregnant with Angelina [pause] because I used on up ‘til I was probably seven months pregnant with her, and I remember having this talk with God about, “I know I am doing something wrong. I know I am something bad, but I can’t help it.”

You know, and praying for God to take care of her and take care of me because I was doing the best I could, and I knew it wasn’t good enough, and I said, “Please God, don’t hurt this baby. I know I’m doin’ wrong,” and I just, [pause] I knew I was so engulfed at that point, so entrenched in my disease then, and I knew I wasn’t sane, and I knew I was doing wrong things, but I couldn’t stop myself. I couldn’t help myself.

In this section, Jennifer delves more into her history of drug addiction, and she speaks of the ugliness of her affliction. This is a painful journey backwards for Jennifer, and it causes her much pain and tears as she reflects on the ugliness of those times. She speaks of her guilt regarding her daughter. She speaks of her drug abuse while she was pregnant. She speaks of neglecting her daughter and putting her at risk, and she speaks of how her daughter was emotionally affected by her drug abuse. She speaks of not being able to control her drug abuse and pleading to God to help her. She speaks of her early days in recovery and how prayer and the recovering community were all that kept her going.
Jennifer: [Clears throat.] I did stop using when she was about--when I was about seven months pregnant, and at that point, I didn't even look like I was three months pregnant, but in that very short time, I gained a bunch of weight, and I think I, I, what I wasn't eating and just putting drugs into my body, I made up for in those last few months, and I had a real iron deficiency. They were giving me iron shots in my hips every day because I had no blood [pause] for her and I.

[Clears throat and continues]: And I think if I hadn't done that we, we probably would have both died, I think. Had I tried to give birth without, [pause] you know, and I hadn't gotten really any prenatal care until around that point. I was strung out on drugs, so it was like, miss an appointment, make an appointment.

You know, it was all that stuff. My teeth rotted right out of my head. I mean, I had to have a lot of dental work after I had her. She--bless her little heart to this day--I am probably more amazed [pause] that she has just been--maybe not so much because my daughter, I think, has a lot of the [pause] personality of someone--I think if she let herself go, that girl would be hell on wheels, but, you know, [laughs] she's not been like that because she likes to be in control of her emotions.

So she won't let herself go like that, and I don't know if there was any damage. I really don't. She was--her birth weight was fine. Cognitively she developed. Physically, she developed as she should. She was, you know, she was [pause] probably as big as what we were. No, actually, she weighed more. She weighed almost eight pounds, but [pause] everything that they measured and on all the scales, she seemed okay, and she developed as a child would.

She has always been so bright, so bright, so smart, and I know that had to do with my Higher Power. I know that had to do with my God--to absolutely take care of that child, and she is a miracle. She is an absolute miracle in my life, and [begins to tear up] it still makes me . . . I don't feel good about it, and [pause] I share it because I know other women have done that and felt really bad, you know--felt like they were bad people, and really I just say it to free them [pause] because even with that [pause] you can get better, heal, make amends, and [pause] make up for--nobody can ever change back the clock, but certainly, in recovery, a day a time, you can become that person that you wanted to be, and the kind of mom you want to be, and the kind of grandma you want to be, and
you know, my grandkids will never see me drunk. Knock on wood, you know—a day at a time.

That was a big deal—a lot of guilt and stuff [pause] that hung on for a long, long time into recovery even. ‘Cause, you know, even at that point when I was under the influence and running like a crazed maniac trying to find drugs, I knew I was doing wrong. You know. I knew it was the wrong thing to do, and, I feel real blessed that she is okay and that she’s a wonderful mom.

She does have PTSD from my drinking days, and [sighs] she’s been on antidepressants for a while now. It’s in the family. I don’t know what to tell you. It is so genetic. I don’t even know, [laughs] you know, but, um, that helped me survive that [pause] kind of life, and she was the reason I actually stopped drinking and using. She was the reason [sighs] I--I had postpartum depression really bad, and I had also given up drugs, which the two didn’t come together in my mind for many years, the reason that was—that I had spiraled so badly to where I slit my wrists. My sister found me in the bathroom, and [pause] I actually did it when nobody was supposed to be awake. It really wasn’t . . .

Darcy [interjects]: Right, I remember you talking about that.

Jennifer: Yeah, and [long pause] went through a mental hospital. Survived it [pause] because they’re pretty nuts there [chuckles]. The psychiatrists are absolutely [pause] crazier, or as crazy as the patients that they are treating. I have got to say that. Man, and unfortunately, I remember everything. I stayed pretty aware, and I don’t have the common sense that God gave me, but [pause] as far as I’m pretty naïve about stuff, but I remember feeling, and I remember the thoughts that go through my head, and I remember just thinking, we’re the ones who are in here locked up, but I decided that I had this child.

She was mine now. She was here. There was nothing I could do about it. I was going to live, obviously. It was not meant for me to die, [pause] and I just kind of tried to figure out what I could do, so I knew I could keep her clean, and keep her safe, and feed her, and hug her, and I didn’t really feel connected yet because I was still so sick, [sighs, long pause] but my disease calmed down a little with her, and then I hooked up with my first husband. Of course, everything we did the kids were with us, so we were good parents even though, you know, they were going to the refrigerator and getting our beers, or even though they were getting in my purse to get our pill bottle or, you know, our pills or crank or whatever.
My daughter remembers it not a bad time until I left her dad, and that’s when I really hit bottom. I mean real, real bottom, and when you’re on the bottom, and you go further down, if you’re on the bottom, you don’t know that you’re on the bottom, you know, and it wasn’t until I got clean and sober that I realized that my whole life was kind of on the bottom [laughs]. You know?

Darcy: Right.

Jennifer: There’s no comparison. You don’t know. I had one pair of shoes, so during the worst times, you know, when I had hit that bottom in those couple, two and half years where I was drinking every day. Every day I was drinking. I would wake up in the middle of the night--drink myself back to sleep. I would get up in the morning. I wouldn’t drink. I would brush my teeth, and I would get to work, and I prayed that I could find somebody that would have some cross tops or some speed before noon so the hangover wouldn’t hit me.

Then I would make it to three or four when it was time to go home, and sometimes I would go home and change out of my uniform because I was a nurse’s aide, and sometimes I wouldn’t. Sometimes I would be sitting at the bar, you know, at five o’clock with my nurse’s aide uniform on, and that’s how it went.

That’s how it went constantly. Go home and check on Angelina, or I would take her to a bar, a café. I could have her there with me, and this went on for two and a half, three years solidly like that, and in between, of course, I would find other people that would have different drugs. They always had different drugs.

I even hung out with this mentally ill lady one time, and she had Valium [laughs], so, you know, instead of having to drink myself back to sleep, I would just take Valium when I would go to bed at night after I had, you know, been drinking since five o’clock until about ten or 11, and the Valium pretty much got me through the night, and I wouldn’t have to take a drink in the middle of the night to get back to sleep.

And that was the time that I neglected my daughter. I would be in the bar, and sometimes she would come home and not know where I was, and she would get on her little ten-speed bike driving all over Santa Cruz looking for me. Looking at all my--stopping off at the bars. Going in asking if I was there. You know, [sighs] and sometimes my friends would, you know, would put her down for
the night on their couch, you know, because it was late at night. She would be out by herself, 11, 12 o’clock at night. You know, [begins crying] and she was just like seven or eight, [long pause while Jennifer wipes her eyes] and [pause] bless her little heart.

Now there’s a heart of a lion there [pauses as she continues to cry and wipe her eyes]. It is still very hard [speaks through her tears] to talk about. You know, you know, and I don’t think that I will ever get over it. I will never be okay with it, and that’s something that’s fine because I think it is something that I should never be okay with, and I don’t think it’s too much to ask for me to feel bad for the rest of my life [laughs] because I will. I just will. I accept that I will. You know, and [sighs] became that when I had a three-day blackout. I don’t know if I mentioned this. I had been drinkin’ pretty bad. It was just at its worst, and I must have had a blackout because I found a note that was dated three days before, and I don’t remember seeing my daughter, [long pause] so I freaked out.

Bless this woman’s heart. This woman was obese. She must have weighed 500 pounds. Drove around in this beat up station wagon with her little boy named Tommy. Her husband, we would find him down in the garage sometimes passed out [chuckles]. He was this big old transient alcoholic.

This woman was mentally ill, and she’d come bring me--she would bring me stew that she had made in these filthy pots. She was mentally ill. She, you know, her house was filthy, and she was filthy, and, you know, but she befriended me. What can I tell you? I absolutely loved that woman. She had the biggest heart, and I ran down there, and I said, “Oh my God! I don’t know where my daughter is,” so she put me in her station wagon, and me and her went all over town [laughs] looking for my daughter.

And I caught up to her friends, and they said, “Oh, she’s walking up there,” and my daughter turns to me because I see her with her friends, and she says, “Mom, don’t you remember this morning? I told you that there was a slumber party over at my friends house,” so my daughter had seen me in all those three days, but I was in such a blackout I had not remembered--had not remembered, and I came to that, you know--I don’t know why I woke up. Maybe some people are meant to, but I realized that I could not ever live with myself had anything happened to that child.

And I absolutely said, “This is it. I don’t know what I need to do.” I had not words for what I needed. I just knew I needed to do something, and so I moved in with my sister Alicia for a couple of
months in Portland. I saved up my money and bought us, me, a round-trip ticket, [pause] bus ticket to, you know, California and back for me and one-way for her, and I took her to my sister, Romie, which I didn’t know was nursing her own disease at the time.

And told her, “If I don’t--give me a year, and if I don’t get my shit together . . .” Because that’s all, [pause] you know. I would go in and out of realizing that it was alcohol, no it wasn’t alcohol, you know, and I said, “If in a year, I don’t get it together and have a home for this child, then you keep her [begins crying] because . . .” [Long pause.] I said, “I can’t take care of her. I can’t take care of me. I can’t take care of her, and something bad is gonna happen to her, and I don’t want anything bad to happen to her.”

And I remember getting on the bus was the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life [sobs]--to leave that child [continues sobbing], and she was all I had, but I knew I had to because I really, really loved her, and [pauses while she continues crying]. I had to leave her [long pause as she gains her composure and wipes her eyes], and it took me a couple of times to get sober. I even got drunk once when I brought her back. I brought her back for Christmas. I had been sober 90 days, and, you know, it was a lifetime. You know, I thought I was sober a long time.

Darcy: Oh, yeah. Ninety days. You bet.

Jennifer [laughs]: My first 90 days, and I remember me going to a meeting up in Portland with a friend and someone walking up and saying, “I heard there was a newcomer here,” and I’m like, “Newcomer? I don’t know who you are talking about. I have 90 days.”

[Both laugh.]

Jennifer: Yeah, you know.

Darcy: Yeah. Who is that?

[Both continue laughing.]

Jennifer: You know, so I got drunk one more time after she came, after I brought her back. It was the last time. I was so sick. By then, my liver, I’m sure, was pretty tore up. I was crawling to the bathroom. For three days, all I could do was crawl to the bathroom to go to the bathroom, throw a little water in my mouth, and go
back and lay down on the bed cause my liver was just shot. I was so, so sick. I had never been that sick in my entire life, and that next 90 days, that next 90 days was the hardest 90 days, I mean, I had gotten sober those other--you know, because I had two 90 days before that, but that time I tell you I prayed almost constantly to just get me through the day.

It was on my mind. The craving was so bad, I kept that little Serenity Prayer deal. I kept it in my pocket, and there was a little saying that went on it, and I remember I just kept it in my apron pocket of my nurse’s aide uniform, you know, and I would just grab it when I thought I couldn’t handle it anymore.

I would just feel it in my pocket, and it would give me some peace in the moment, and I would get home, tear my uniform off and head over to the recovery club in Portland and make it there until 10 o’clock, and then I would come home, and I would try to read that damn A.A. Big Book and it didn’t make any sense cause nothing was coming together in my head, and I couldn’t really formulate much. I could read, but it didn’t--and nothing made sense.

Serious detoxing damage there, and I would be grateful because I made it to two o’clock in the morning when all the--I knew all the bars were closed. I couldn’t get any alcohol [sighs], and three o’clock in the morning you might find me down at the corner calling up my sponsor because I was just absolutely--my brain would not shut off, and I did this [pause] the first 90 days. I mean [sighs] it was the hardest thing I ever had to do, and I remember thinking that I could never--I could not go back to drinking. I knew that I could not get sober again. It was so hard I knew I would not get sober again if I ever drank again.

I knew it. I just knew it ‘cause it took [pause] every [pause] thing [pause] I had. Every thing I had in me to survive, to push me through [pause] to get that 90 days, [long pause] and it wasn’t like after the 90 days that everything was wonderful, but all my praying paid off. The obsession was gone, and I don’t know how it happened. I don’t know when. I just knew the obsession in my mind and the compulsion was gone.

It absolutely left me, absolutely left me, and I see people that say everyday they think about it. I am like going, “Man, I would be drunk!” You know, but, but I was one of those people, and I have no idea why [pause] the obsession and the compulsion went away.
It was absolutely a miracle. It must have been because I prayed my damned ass off.

I went to meetings, talked to people. I would do anything they told me to do. You know, “You go piss in the corner. Stand on your head,” or whatever. I would do it. I would do it because I knew that, that I wanted to stay sober that bad, and finally at six months, I could read The Big Book. I kind of understood what it was telling you. It was like the light bulb would go off in my head, and I would go, “Oh, okay. I understand now.”

In this section, Jennifer discusses the cultural implications of her family’s lifestyle. She also notes that she feels fully acculturated into the white culture and how she feels, with the exception of a couple of Hispanic women at work, disjointed from the Hispanic culture.

Darcy: One of the things that I kept flashing on during different points of this interview and last interview was about your culture, your Hispanic culture, and it seemed like you said last time that when you were a teenager living in all that poverty and your dysfunctional family that you were different from the rest of the culture, and that the culture wasn’t supportive of you. In fact, you were more accepted by the white kids, or something. I don’t remember what you said there.

Jennifer: Yes. Yeah, they were kinder to me.

Darcy: You were different than your culture.

Jennifer: Yeah, we were supposed to, as Mexicans, we were expected to hang out with each other even though they treated you like crap.

Darcy: Ohhh. Wow.

Jennifer: So it was just really weird. It is still like that. I still see it. I still see it. It’s interesting. [Sighs.] Sometimes, [laughs] it just doesn’t make any sense. I mean, why not stick together? You know, but I have realized in the last few years that I’m probably, as far as the culture goes, I don’t have a lot of that. I think I have--I’m very, very what do you call it--acculturized--extremely, and I actually didn’t--I think I knew at different levels that I was, but I think that living in Portland has really done it for me.
[Both laugh.]

Jennifer: It is like I can really see how sometimes my behavior and my way of thinking is, is not--you know--and maybe because my experiences have helped shape and mold that. I just--you know. I just don’t have that expectation that people are going to be loyal no matter what, and it doesn’t matter what color you are. I have gotten tight with the few Latina women that work with me, and we watch each other’s back, but I don’t see it as--I just see it more as a workplace thing [laughs].

In the workplace, rather than feeling discriminated because of her ethnicity, she feels discriminated because of her lack of a higher degree. In this regard, she describes a workplace educational hierarchy in which she feels disrespected and discounted because of her limited credentials.

In this section, she also describes her personality. In so doing, she explains how the way that she interacts at the workplace is rooted in her culture, and she describes how her self-expression disturbs some of her white co-workers. Their reactions to her communication style make her feel the need to monitor her behavior. As such, she does not feel that she can be her true self at work.

Jennifer [laughs as she continues]: I don’t see it so much as a Mexican, white thing as a workplace thing.

Darcy: When you say a workplace thing--people have been what? Oh, I don’t know. What does that mean?

Jennifer: People who are degreed. People who are educated. This place is really interested in, um--there’s a hierarchy here.


Jennifer: And I am probably one of the least credentialed people there, and I know my other two friends didn’t go to school either. They worked their way to where they are.

Darcy: But you do definitely feel it though. I know what you mean because I remember before--you know, I came into the field without any degree.
Jennifer: Yeah.

Darcy: And I know what that feels like.

Jennifer: It's not said, but it's certainly implied, and all you have to do is watch peoples' level of respect for you, and you know it's there because I have seen people come in with master's degrees—not that I'm saying anything bad about people with master's degrees—but to come into the workplace and absolutely have their say so while I have had to struggle to get my--anything to get my word in, to get--for them to see any kind of--for me to have any kind of power. You know, I have really had to battle to be heard, to be taken seriously.

Darcy: Right; I know how it feels to be at a workplace and to be degreed or not degreed, and in this case, to be not degreed, and there seems to be a general pecking order, or people are made to feel different somehow, so I guess that's what I am picking up here, so I'm kind of like you are. I don't know how I knew. Nobody ever said anything to me directly, but I knew that I was not okay because I didn't have a degree, and then when I finally got a B.A., then I was still not good enough because there were people with, you know, their master's degrees, and even though I have a CADC, right now, I am real aware that I'm not licensed. I have always had this feeling that I'm just one step behind the people that have the stuff. You know. It is really strange.

Jennifer: It is really strange, and I don't think I--you know, the interesting thing is that it is not on the surface, and I think you have to be around awhile to notice it. I certainly didn't pick it up right away when I got here, and I think it took me a while to figure it out, and I don't think I really figured it out by myself.

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One of my Latina friends that works there was actually mentioning it to me, and I couldn't see it, and I couldn't see it because she had already been there for a while, and they are very covert. It's very covert, and it's almost as if--it's terrible. It's absolutely terrible because you cannot put your finger on it, but you know it's there, and nobody says it out loud, so you can't really pin anybody down. All you know is that there is this thing that is in motion, and you know when you're caught on the wrong side of it.

I have watched this with a few people, to be real honest, and I don't know. It's, it's like I said, it's something that you have to be there a while to see it, and with me, because I am naïve, or I don't know. Sometimes I feel I am really aware, and other times I'm
oblivious to stuff. Then it was pointed out to me, and I began to see it real clearly.

Darcy: You talked early on about not having coping skills, and, clearly--and I guess maybe you can clarify for me--but in recovery, you’ve done a lot, a lot, a lot of work on yourself, and you have been involved with people who have been rigorous in their honesty, and you have worked the 12-Steps and worked them again, and you stay mindful of that, and you have a Higher Power that you rely a lot on, so clearly, you have got some healthy coping skills going on there, and you are an honest person, and you are direct. [Phone rings.] [Resumes.] I am wondering how else you would describe your personality. You know, you are honest. You’re direct.

Jennifer: I would say naïve. I mean I’m definitely naïve. I don’t--it isn’t that I don’t choose to see what’s right in front of me, but I choose to absolutely believe the best about people until something happens. I refuse to walk around in this world afraid or not trusting. I think there’s a lot of good in the world and a lot of good people, and I just refuse to close my eyes to it, so I am going to run into a few that aren’t, but I think for the most part--and I guess that might lead into the naiveness, or maybe super optimism, or--I don’t know--something like that.

Darcy: I guess you would be an optimist.

Jennifer: And yet, you know, when it comes to myself and how I am and how I see myself, I am very critical. I’m too critical and too hard on myself because I think that--you know, I still work on self-forgiveness, and I don’t know if it’s like I think I should be perfect by now or geez, I have 20 years of recovery. I should have it all down by now or what it is exactly, so I might say maybe I am too hard on myself.

The other thing--I have a really big mouth. I mean like I’m--I can be really obnoxious, and I don’t mean to be. I’m loud, and I never realized I was really loud until Flavia told me, “Jennifer, you’re really [begins laughing] loud,” and I said, “I am?” She’s like, “Yeah!” [Continues laughing.] Oh, my gosh! My whole family’s like that. I didn’t know we were loud. [Laughs.]

Darcy: Is it a cultural thing, though?

Jennifer: Yeah. Absolutely!
Darcy: So you’re not loud in the culture. You would be normal in the culture.

Jennifer: I’m normal.

Darcy: So in this white community--she’s responding more to that.

Jennifer: Yeah, the office space--you can’t talk loud. You can’t be “bothering” other people. Watch what you say and how you say it. It’s the tone of voice. I mean it’s all like that where I work, and I never realized it--for about six years I worked for Soaring Eagle in Sacramento, which is, you know, a left over clinic from the hippies.

Darcy: The hippy times.

Jennifer: Yeah, and we did out--patient treatment, and it was Stay Straight, and it was drug treatment and, you know, it was pretty laid back, and if you had a feeling, you told it to your supervisor. I mean nobody got in trouble. You could say what was on your mind. I mean you could even cuss at each other sometimes.

Darcy: Nobody was afraid of feelings.

Jennifer: No, and that’s the way it went. I mean it would take an act of God to get you thrown out, you know, of your job [laughs]. You know, you would have to be pretty bad, or be violent, or threatening to somebody, but you could express yourself. You could be who you need to be.

Jennifer’s concern about her culture will have major implications for her when she returns to school. She wants to reconnect with her Mexican heritage and to give something back to the people from that culture. She feels at home and comfortable working with Hispanic people. She understands them, and she feels respected by them. She values their respect because it is an acknowledgement of her understanding of the culture.

Darcy: I remember you talking early on about--a lot of your focus has been in regard to continuing your education. It’s been around what can you give to the Hispanic culture.
Jennifer: Uh huh.

Darcy: And it just seems like--clearly, you don’t feel appreciated for what you bring to the table, and, clearly, your goal is to work more with the Hispanic culture where you would feel more comfortable. Even though there has been some disjoint for you from the culture.

Jennifer: Sure, yeah.

Darcy: You have come to the place where, clearly, your personality is a better match where people are genuine--you have a sense that they are genuine. Where if people have a feeling, they express it.

Jennifer [clears throat]: I mean, granted, you are going to get people that don’t respect you. I mean some of the Latino men, but for the most part, they call me majestra.

Darcy: What’s that?

Jennifer: Teacher. Professor.

Darcy: Ohhh!

Jennifer: Majestra.

Darcy: Spell that just for the record.

Jennifer: I have no idea. I’m still working on writing. I can read it pretty good, and I’m almost to where I can completely write it, but not quite. Majestra would be m-a-j-e-s-t-r-a. Majestra.

Darcy: Okay, so they call you majestra.

Jennifer: Yeah, and, for the most part, they respect me.

Darcy: I was going to say. That sounds like something of honor.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Darcy: Yeah, it would.

Jennifer: But some of that respect--like I would with the English--speaking population--I can tell them I’m in recovery. I can tell them, you know, where I have been--not where I have
been, but that I’m in recovery and stuff and that holds more power for the clients. The, the Anglo clients—for Hispanic clients, Hispanic ones would lose favor with me if I told them that I was in recovery. Oh, my gosh! They would look down on me, and the respect would go out the window. As it is, it’s kind of hard because they know I was born and raised here, so already there’s that little edge to it. I would totally lose any ground. I would totally lose any ground, and believe me, they get curious about me a lot.

Darcy: Have you—you know, [inaudible].

Jennifer: I drank just like everybody—yeah. I mean, I tell them I haven’t touched a drop in a long time. I don’t tell them I’m in recovery. You know, I just don’t show a lot of that stuff because—whooa! Whatever ground I do have, I would lose it real quick. The clarification is real separate, and they are very much like people say—even though they say they’re not. It is that the woman is held up on a pedestal.

Lastly, by participating in this research, Jennifer has been able to reflect on certain aspects of her life that she might not have been able to do otherwise. In this regard, she felt listened to, she felt heard, and she felt free to go wherever her mind and process took her.

As a result, she was able to be herself. She laughed when the urge struck her, and she cried when the memories became too painful. It was her experiences, her life, and her story, and she told it in a way that made sense to her.

Darcy: The other thing is—you had mentioned last summer somewhere in the course of one of our conversations that being part of this research has had some kind of impact on you. It’s done some things. You have sat with some things that maybe you hadn’t sat with for awhile.

Jennifer: Oh, absolutely, and I think it comes from someone just sitting and listening and then asking questions, which you’re a good question-asker. Drawing that out and going places that I don’t think that I would go. You know, and if you’re in therapy . . . It’s like when I was in therapy for about three years with two women; there was a purpose to it. There was a—you know, I couldn’t come in there with just—share something that was terrible without saying, “Okay, what are you going to do about it?
How are you going to take care of yourself? How are you going to resolve this?"

You know, and this is a little bit different. I can go over what I want. There’s no, no pressure to, to make it okay or to work on it. You know. I can just come out with it and not necessarily have to go anywhere with it. So it definitely allows me freedom to, to, experience whatever comes with it in the moment.

It allows me the freedom to kinda just roam around in myself and, and explore and know that there’s not--I don’t have to come out with something at the end. You don’t have to come up with a product. You just talk. Like you said--just go wherever you need to go in the moment, and it will be okay.

Darcy: Yeah, everybody so far has talked about that very same experience of being in this research. Of just--you know. Some people have really, really divulged a lot, and really, really went places I never could have anticipated nor could they, and even the person who did the least of that said that she had been impacted by just being able to talk, and be part of it, and hearing herself remember those things, and saying it out loud—that it had an impact on her, that it was a positive one, and she liked it.

I guess that’s kind of what I’ve kind of heard from people. It’s been a positive experience for them, and one of the--I was talking to my major professor today, and I was saying--this was a piece of this. I had not anticipated that this research would have such an impact on people. You know, and I talked about how I thought it was empowering for people and that what I see myself doing is sitting as witness as people remember and verbalize their stuff—that I have been a witness.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Darcy: You know, and I think--you know, just the value in listening to somebody go where they need to go. I guess it is really touching me. I mean--wow! You know.

Jennifer: And, you know, it’s interesting. You’re right. You’re right, and what--all of a sudden I just flashed--I’m thinking--gosh, even the mentally ill know that they can’t just talk and talk and talk and go nowhere.

Darcy: Right. That’s true.
Jennifer: And I know support groups are supposed to be like that, but you’re in the room with a bunch of folks, and unless you know them really well, you’re not gonna go there. You’re not gonna go that far, and the ones who do, of course, they don’t have appropriate boundaries [laughs].

Researcher’s Reflections on Jennifer Lopez’s Second Interview

Two themes about her workplace environment came up during this interview. The first was a credentialing hierarchy, and the second one was about cultural differences. I didn’t expect her to talk about experiencing an academic hierarchy at her place of employment. I have had similar feelings in my own career, but I thought that they had just been my insecurity and self-doubts about my credentials. I had no idea that someone else would have experienced the same feelings of disrespect and disregard.

Regarding the issue of self-expression, I think this theme is especially important for agencies that have a difficult time attracting and retaining bi-lingual staff. It does not appear that this particular agency understands or accepts the different ways that people from diverse cultures express themselves. As a result, Jennifer feels suppressed and unable to express herself freely in that environment. Given her sense of disconnection and disregard from the rest of the staff, I wonder how long she will stay working for that particular employer.

In closing this chapter, I find that Jennifer’s story is a testament to the resiliency of the human spirit. It is one of pain and sadness, tenacity and strength. It is one of a bough that was bent but that never was broken, and, ultimately, it is one of a survivor who refused to stop breathing.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) maintain that qualitative research is intended to be open-ended, flexible, free flowing, and welcoming of the unexpected. I believed in and espoused that philosophy, I wanted my participants to go there, and I wanted my work to reflect that perspective, but I apparently assumed that the process would not apply to me. I think that I believed that I could listen to peoples’ stories, witness their pain, and still somehow remain detached from it all—aloof, and in control of my emotions and the process. Boy, was I wrong.

We had barely gotten started when the study took on a life of its own and the other participants and I were all suddenly thrust into a raging river of long buried memories and raw, intense emotions. I triggered this process by simply asking the participants to reflect on their educational experiences. Their best learning experiences were safe enough, but when it came to the worst experiences, the participants’ memories of those times were so inextricably intertwined with her or his emotions and sense of self that I could not review any of the facets of their lives in isolation from the rest of their experiences.

As such, the participants and I all went to places that we had never gone to before. We remembered things long buried and hurts unhealed, and there were times when each of us felt vulnerable and unsure of where we were going or what would become of it all. As such, I think that I speak for all of us when I say that the process was one of reflection and transformation and that a part of me has been changed forever.

The following section is an overview of the two predominant themes that arose from our journey down that river of no return. The themes are embedded in the participants’ reflections on their life experiences. The themes are: resiliency and transformation.

From his research of the resilient, survivor personality, Siebert (1996) has developed four criteria that he believes depicts life’s best survivors. He describes those characteristics as: 1) having survived a major crisis; 2) having surmounted the crisis through personal effort; 3) having emerged from the experience with
previously unknown strength and abilities; and 4) in retrospect found value in the experience.

Based on Siebert’s description, Carlie Newmar, Very Blue, South Paw, and Jennifer Lopez are survivors first and foremost, and their lives are a study in the resiliency of the human spirit. However, in order to fully appreciate them as survivors, one must first understand the obstacles that they have overcome and the life stressors that they have endured. The following sections are the shared thematic summaries of the participants’ individual chapters.

**Theme I: Resiliency**

**Parental Drug Abuse and Addiction**

All four of the participants were reared in families where at least one of the parents was dependent on or abused alcohol. In this regard, Jennifer Lopez claims that both of her parents were dependent on alcohol. Carlie Newmar and South Paw both describe their fathers as being dependent on alcohol. Very Blue remembers her father as an alcohol abuser.

In their case studies of children of alcoholics, Berlin and Davis (1989) demonstrate that the issues of resiliency and vulnerability are especially pronounced in children from alcoholic families. In this regard, they found that children of alcoholics are at risk for a variety of problems that include poor school performance; troubled interpersonal relationships, which include aspects such as social isolation and loneliness; delinquency; physical abuse; depression; suicidal behavior; and drug addiction.

**Poor school performance.**

All three of the women in the study dropped out of high school. Carlie Newmar and Jennifer Lopez both dropped out in the tenth grade, and Very Blue dropped out in the 11th grade. South Paw completed high school. However, in this regard, he declares that his school performance was poor and that he barely graduated.
Troubled interpersonal relationships.

Three of the participants experienced troubled interpersonal relationships. Very Blue remembers her difficulties beginning when she transferred to a new school and was never accepted by her new classmates. South Paw attributes his interpersonal problems to his family’s transient lifestyle. In this regard, he remembers feeling alienated from the other students and from the educational community, and he remembers isolating himself in response. Jennifer Lopez attributes her interpersonal problems to her family’s poverty. In this regard, she remembers feeling hated by the other students, and she remembers learning to fight everything and everybody.

Delinquency.

All four members describe participating in delinquent behavior. In this regard, Carlie Newmar reports being involved with gangs, having curfew violations, and being incarcerated in a juvenile detention center. Very Blue recalls that she and her parents had disputes over her relationship with her boyfriend, that she was involved with drugs, and that she had a history of curfew violations and of running away. South Paw recalls having a history of juvenile delinquency in which he was a practiced thief. Jennifer Lopez’ history of juvenile delinquency includes gang affiliation and incarceration in a correctional facility.

Physical abuse.

Children from alcoholic families are often exposed to violence. In this regard, Berlin and Davis (1989) have found that whether a child is the target of physical abuse or simply an observer of the violence, the devastation to the psyche is similar. All four of the participants in this study experienced some form of violence in their homes, and all four of them were negatively impacted by the experience. In this regard, while Carlie Newmar was not physically assaulted in her childhood, she observed her father brutalize her mother, and the memory has been indelibly etched into her mind.
Very Blue recalls an incident in which she was slapped by her father. While she claims that the assault occurred only one time, she says that it transpired at a vulnerable, emotional time of her life, and she describes feeling traumatized by the experience.

South Paw describes a childhood of extreme physical abuse in which he was the target of his father’s fits of rage. He claims that his father’s assaults included such things as burning his hands on a wood stove and hitting him with boards and hammers. Jennifer Lopez also tells of experiencing extreme physical and emotional abuse. In this regard, she remembers living a life of unrelenting fear in which her grandfather and her older brother routinely physically assaulted her and her siblings. She also remembers experiencing the torment and helplessness of seeing her little brother beaten by her older brother.

**Depression and suicidal behavior.**

Carlie Newmar speaks of an adolescence filled with depression and of an involuntary commitment to an “insane asylum.” South Paw, too, remembers feeling depressed as a youth. As such, he speaks of self-hate, loneliness, and isolation. Along these same lines, Jennifer Lopez describes feeling a pervasive sense of sadness and depression. In this regard, she tells of suicidal ideation, of a suicide attempt, and of being institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital.

**Drug addiction.**

All four of the participants have histories of drug addiction that started before they were adults. In this regard, Carlie Newmar, Very Blue, and Jennifer Lopez all maintain that their drug abuse began in their middle school years. While South Paw claims to have begun abusing drugs later in adolescence, he, too, was addicted to drugs before he was 21 years of age.

**Negative School Experiences**

Jarvis (1987) contends that learners bring their social pasts to any learning situation and that the meanings that they ascribe to their experiences will affect their
future learning processes. Thus, he maintains that if the learner feels too threatened by the learning situation, then the learning will be inhibited rather than facilitated. In this regard, all four of the participants remember intense negative emotions in relation to some aspect of their educational experiences, and they recall the events as setting the stage for their disengagement from the academic community.

Shame.
All four of the participants experienced shame in regard to learning. Carlie Newmar remembers transferring to a new school and being “shame based.” In keeping with this same feeling state, Very Blue recounts a teacher who shamed her in front of her classmates. South Paw, too, remembers being shamed by a teacher. In his reflections on the experience, he recalls the incident as being the point of no return for him in relation to his education. Jennifer Lopez, also, recalls being shamed in front of her classmates, and she remembers responding to the shaming by detaching herself from the educational community.

Trauma.
Three of the participants experienced some form of trauma that negatively impacted their view of the educational community. Very Blue and South Paw both recall being assaulted by their peers. As such, they both remember fearing their classmates, living in dread, and, ultimately, learning to hate school. Carlie Newmar remembers learning to equate school with the chaos and terror of life in a psychiatric ward.

Opportunities at Mid-life: Stabilizing Influences and Mitigating Factors

Benard (1991) contends that in order for resiliency to be developed, every individual needs an opportunity to participate in the life of one’s community. In keeping with this perspective, Werner (1995) believes that openings of opportunities at major transition points enable those with troubled childhoods to rebound in mid-life. In this regard, she notes that some of the most potent
stabilizing influences and mitigating factors in one's life can be: involvement in adult education programs at community colleges, supportive friends or domestic partners, and an attachment to the one's community. In relation to this study, the recovering community appears to have had a powerful, restorative impact on all four of the participants' life experiences.

Recovery from addiction.

All four of the participants in this study appear to have recovered from their earlier life adversities, and each of them describes the rebound as being directly linked to the stabilizing influences of her or his recovery from addiction. Carlie Newmar views her recovery and her involvement in the 12-Step community as her pivotal life-changing events. In this regard, she speaks of the cathartic effect of reflecting on her life, of working the 12-Steps, and of finding a sisterhood in recovery that has helped her to heal her psychic pain.

Very Blue's husband and her recovery from addiction were the primary mitigating factors in her life. Her husband got into recovery first. Then at his insistence, she followed him into sobriety. Once she was stabilized in recovery, she finished her G.E.D., and she then began taking classes at a community college. From there, she ultimately completed her associate degree.

South Paw recalls his treatment experience as being the single most mitigating factor in his life. He claims that his recovery turned his life around and that it started him working in the addiction treatment field.

As with the other participants, Jennifer Lopez views her recovery from addiction and her involvement with the recovering community as the primary stabilizing factors in her life. In reflecting on her recovery, she speaks of the acceptance, support, and direction that she experienced from the members of the 12-Step community, and she explains how the experience empowered her to pursue her education.
Theme II: Transformation

Billington (2000) has said that adults can and do experience personal growth at midlife. Mezirow (1990) agrees with this philosophy, however, he believes that transformation is primarily based on the concept of critical reflection in which one’s assumptions about meanings are rationally identified, critically assessed, and reformulated to form a more comprehensive perspective. As such, his stance on transformation tends to value rationality over affect. His perspective on the matter conflicts with that of other adult learning scholars who argue that one’s feelings and affective state also need to be considered in understanding the meaning of one’s life experiences (Barlas, 2001; Brookfield, 1990; Even, 1988; Galbo, 1998; Kearsley, 2002; Nelson; 1997; Smith, 1989; Taylor, 2001; Tennant, 1993; Yorks & Kasl, 2002).

Carlie Newmar, Very Blue, South Paw, and Jennifer Lopez have all experienced transformation as adults, and in keeping with the above theorists who value affect as well as rationality, the findings from this case study indicate that the participants’ abilities to learn and their choices about their educations were clearly impacted by their affective experiences and that to best serve them one must view their needs from a whole-person perspective. The following section is a review of their transformations.

Transforming Learning Experience

Carlie’s transforming experience transpired when she completed her first college class and received an “A.” As a result of the experience, she went from feeling “dumb” to feeling like a person who is smart and capable of learning.

Very Blue’s transforming experience occurred when she began taking classes at the community college level. Prior to that time, she could not ever remember having had a positive learning experience, and she had viewed the learning environment as a hostile, uninviting place. Conversely, she has many fond memories of her community college years. In this regard, she describes the
community college environment as a safe place in which she was able to take risks and in which she never had to worry about feeling stupid.

South Paw's most transformative learning experience occurred in a workforce development environment where he was able to put his learning to immediate practice, where he was able to direct his own learning, and where his abilities were recognized and valued. He describes the experience as transforming in that it changed his entire perception about the educational process and about himself as a learner.

Jennifer Lopez recalls her best learning experience as occurring when she was enrolled in a class at the community college level. It was there that she had a positive learning experience that reconstructed her beliefs about herself as a learner.

**Educational goals.**

All four of the participants have at least some interest in continuing their education. In this regard, Carlie Newmar and Jennifer Lopez are both interested in pursuing their bachelor degrees. South Paw, too, is interested in continuing his education, but with his age and with just returning to work after a sabbatical, he is unsure how realistic that goal will be for him. Very Blue is also entertaining thoughts about returning to school, but for the time being, she is choosing to focus her energy on her career.

**Confusion and anxiety about returning to school.**

Carlie Newmar, South Paw, and Jennifer Lopez have all experienced feelings of confusion and anxiety about the thought of returning to school as adults. Carlie says that she is at a loss as how to even begin the process and that she needs a "cheerleader." South Paw claims that he feels alienated from the whole educational process and that he does not have a clue about how to navigate the academic waters. Jennifer Lopez describes the process as intimidating, and, like Carlie and South Paw, she is unsure of how to even initiate the process.
Participants’ Self-Discovery, Catharsis, and Transformation

Moules and Streitberger (1997) have said that stories are (p. 1) “powerful and guiding representations of a family’s, past, present, and future lives,” and that “stories reflect lived experiences of past events and shape the way future events will be lived.” As such, they believe (p. 1) “that there is implicit value and cathartic effect inherent in the process of telling one’s story.”

This research is a work of life stories, and, at a minimum, all of the participants profess to have experienced a heightened sense of self-awareness through their involvement in the study. Further, three of the participants claim to have experienced personal transformation and catharsis as a result of having shared the more painful aspects of their life stories.

In this regard, South Paw describes having experienced a sense of empowerment, introspection, and transformation. Jennifer Lopez describes her experience of the study as a frightening, cathartic, cleansing one in which she was able to reflect on all the aspects of her life and one in which she was able to process some of her unresolved life experiences.

In her reflections on the process, Carlie speaks of the journey as an emotional one in which she experienced a sense of inspiration and integration and one in which she gained an understanding of how her unresolved issues from her childhood continue to affect her choices about her education. Lastly, she speaks of the process as being one of healing. In this regard, she explains that she has finally shared her entire story with the 12-Step community and that she has experienced a sense of release and letting go as a result of having made the disclosure.

Reflections of the Researcher-Participant’s Process

Qualitative research is a process in which the researcher must be willing to look inward and be prepared to expose the vulnerable aspects of one’s self as a researcher and as a human being. It is an on-going process of conscious critical reflection in which the researcher-participant is expected to come to know one’s self as both inquirer and participant (Creswell, 1998; Ellis & Bochner, 2000;
Lincoln & Guba (2000). It is from this perspective that Janesick (2000, p. 392) has written the following haiku about her experience regarding the process of conducting qualitative research:

Willingness to fail,
Easing into silence,
Stumbling upon secrets.

In my experience, qualitative research has been all of the above and much more. Thus, in this reflexive section, I discuss this process as it relates directly to my experience of being the researcher-participant in this study.

In self-help communities such as Alcoholics Anonymous, members often talk about a disjoint that occurs between what one says and what one does. In this regard, they refer to the concept as the need for one to “walk one’s talk.” In relation to research, it would seem simple enough for the researcher to remain true to one’s philosophical perspective and to “walk one’s talk.” However, in actual practice this appears to be more difficult than it would seem.

As I outlined earlier, my professional work has always been based on close, caring interactions with others. Based on that experience, I wanted to conduct this study in a connected, relational style. That being the case, my natural inclination was to embrace a constructivist perspective, and my intention throughout the course of this inquiry was to adhere to the tenets of qualitative research.

For the most part, I was able to remain true to that philosophy. However, upon critical reflection of the entirety of my study, I discovered that there were some key junctures along the way in which I inadvertently lost sight of this perspective.

In retrospect, I should not have been surprised that this disconnect happened. In spite of my assumptions about the nature of the human condition and the acquisition of knowledge, the bulk of my research training has been firmly ensconced in the quantitative research tradition.

In this regard, I had made a conscious decision early on in my academic career to focus the bulk of my formal training in the quantitative discipline. I did this
because the majority of my college professors routinely advised me that qualitative research is considered to be a soft-science and that it is afforded little credibility in the real world. Thus, they had recommended that if I wanted my work to be taken seriously that I needed to focus my learning and my work on quantitative research.

As such, while I had a couple of college courses that focused specifically on qualitative research, I gained the bulk of my understanding of that discipline through an informal, self-directed learning process. In this regard, throughout the course of this inquiry, I have continually studied texts and journal articles that focus exclusively on qualitative research.

The most apparent point of disjoint in my thinking was in my expression of my epistemology. In reviewing my first draft of this document, I discovered that I had inadvertently vacillated back and forth between referring to the individuals in the study as “participants” and “subjects.”

Obviously, there is a marked epistemological difference between the concept of a participant and the concept of a subject. For me, the word participant infers that all of the individuals in the study are active, equal members and that the researcher-participant respects and values their perspectives. On the other hand, the word subject implies for me that the people in the study are passive, that they have no voice, and that they are subject to manipulation.

Clearly, I intended my “voice” to be congruent with my epistemology. In this regard, I respect all of the participants, and I view them all as valued, unique individuals whose participation was crucial to the success and the flavor of this study. Thus, for the final draft of this paper, I went back over the entire document and changed any points where I had referred to the participants of this study as subjects. As such, any reference of this nature that is found within the body of this document is purely unintentional.

Along these same lines, my epistemology about myself and my role as a researcher also evolved throughout the course of this study. In this regard, I found myself being transformed from an emotionally detached observer who sat safely on the sidelines to that of a fully involved, emotional insider who was willing to take risks and to give something back to the process as well as take from it.
I took the risk to step inside the circle, and in so doing, I was no longer the captain of the ship. I was one of the hands on board, and I, too, was along for the mutual thrill-ride into the abyss of the unknown. As such, I automatically began thinking of and referring to myself as one of the participants, and my work became more collaborative and egalitarian in nature.

My concept of confidentiality also evolved throughout this process. In my first draft, I wrote freely about many things that had occurred in my life, and then in reflection, it occurred to me that the cloak of anonymity that covered the other participants in the study did not protect me. As such, by telling my story, I would have automatically breached the confidentiality of those whom I love and care about. As such, when I prepared the final draft of this document, I removed any references to others in my life that might have been made vulnerable or harmed in some way by the sharing of my story.

Lastly, this project has shaped me in incalculable ways. I initially approached it in what now appears to have been a guarded, hesitant manner, and when I wrote it up, I kept it sterile and measured, and I spoke about it in a detached, conservative voice. However, when my Committee pushed me to reflect on my own transformation, not just the participants' transformation, I was forced to sit with myself and to identify some of my own subconscious processes. As such, I have been shocked by what I have learned about myself as a person and as a researcher.

This whole research project has brought up so many old memories and emotions for me that I had a difficult time deciding how best to explain my experience or how much of it to share in this document. In fact, I was so afraid to expose my truth and to commit it to paper, that I needed to write this piece during the quiet, protective hours of the early morning when my family was deep asleep and when I was alone in the darkness of my bedroom, staring into the void of a blank computer screen.

When I began thinking about writing this reflective section, I became aware that I was feeling anxious and vulnerable. I think I was afraid that if I opened my mouth and said what I really thought and what I really felt that I would alienate those who sit in judgment of my reality and of my performance.
For most of my learning experience, I have been taught to think the “right” way, to say the “right” things, to act “like a lady,” to color “within the lines,” to march in step, to stay within the box, to nod in agreement, and to conform to the demands that those in power and authority had required of me.

As such, I have often felt no different than the trained monkey on the organ grinder’s leash. You know that monkey; she is the one who dances to the master’s tunes. The only difference between that monkey and me is that she has always performed for the shiny bright coin while I have always performed for the grade at the top of the paper.

I wonder how that monkey would behave if we were to set her free and to leave her to her own devices. Would she still care about the coins? Would she still dance? Would she run away? If she ran away, would she stay away forever, or would she run up and down the street and then come back and stop at that same old corner?

Would she scream in anger, and if she were to scream in anger, would she recognize the voice rising up out of her throat as that of her own? Would anyone else hear her voice? Would anyone else understand why she screamed? Would they care why she screamed? Would it matter to her whether anyone else understood her screams or the emotions behind them? Better yet, would she even remember how to scream?

Oh yes, by reflecting on this process, I have tapped into the depths of my own subconscious emotions and anger, and I have gone from just paying lip service about being a “passionate participant” to actually “walking my talk.” In this regard, I recognize the fact that I am experiencing some vicarious anger about the other four participants having been shamed as a by-product of their education. At the same time, however, I realize that part of the anger that I feel for the other participants is also a part of the anger that I feel for the little girl in me who also remembers having been shamed by a teacher.

In fact, I am not just angry. That word somehow does not seem to fit the level of emotion that is aroused for me on this subject--I am mad. I am mad that any child, indeed, any learner of any age should ever have to feel ashamed or humiliated.
in order to gain an education, and I have to wonder about the psychological make up of any teacher who abuses the role of the educator in order to wrestle with his or her own inner demons.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the meanings that four Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselors (CADC’s) have constructed about their life experiences in relation to their choices about higher education. The intent of the study is to allow the reader to view the world through the participants’ eyes and to have the work resonate with the voices of the participants’ lived experiences. At the same time, it is also intended to illuminate a current workforce problem.

Two themes emerge from this data. Those themes are resiliency and transformation. In this regard, like the participants in Werner’s (1994) Kauai study, in spite of early lives filled with extreme stressors, obstacles, and adversity, all four of the participants in this study were able to develop resiliency skills well beyond their childhoods, and they were able to transform themselves into competent, caring, achievement-motivated adults. In relation to their successful adaptations, it appears that their primary stabilizing influences and their mitigating factors were 1) the social supports, role models, and mentors that they developed in the recovering community and 2) the reconstructive learning opportunities that they experienced as adults.

In regard to workforce development concerns, the three Caucasian participants all intend to remain in the addictions treatment field. The Hispanic participant is also open to continuing to work in the discipline, but her primary focus will be on the social service needs of the Hispanic culture, whatever those needs may be. As such, she may ultimately leave the field.

All four of the participants believe that they will need to enhance their education if they intend to remain working in the social services arena. As such, they all have at least some interest in returning to school. At the same time,
However, three of them voiced feeling anxious and confused about how to initiate the process.

Lastly, all of the participants demonstrated the ability to think critically and reflectively about their lives, and all four of them appear to have experienced at least some level of self-discovery, catharsis, and transformation through their participation in this study. In this regard, they claim that they learned more about themselves and their life constructs, that they experienced release and healing, and that they were able to take risks that they never would have imagined before their participation in this investigation.

**Limitations**

This case study is based on the participants’ subjective accounts of their lives, their constructs of their reality, and their interactions with the researcher-participant. At the same time, however, it is intended to illuminate a workforce development problem that is occurring in the addictions treatment field. Thus, while I consider my findings to be subjective and context dependent, my intention was to describe this case in such detail that the reader can compare this case to other cases that he or she deems to be similar.

**Recommendations**

This foundational study lays the groundwork for future research in exploring the role of CADC’s life experiences in regard to their educational choices. For future research, I recommend comparing a group of recovering CADC’s who are adult children of alcoholics with a group of non-addicted CADC’s who are adult children of alcoholics in order to determine if there is a difference in their constructs about their lives and their choices about their educations.

Another recommendation for future research would be to study adult children of alcoholics who have achieved at least a bachelor’s degree. The intent
would be to explore the characteristics of their resiliency in the face of the life stressors that are routinely experienced in alcoholic homes.

**Implications**

This study suggests that some CADC’s without advanced degrees may have had life and educational experiences that have negatively impacted their choices about their education and their feelings about themselves as learners. It also suggests that they have some interest in pursuing higher levels of education but that they have some reservations in this regard. As such, this study has workforce development implications for the addictions treatment field.

When I initially began discussing the implications of this study, I addressed my comments to the academic field, and I made several pointed declarations about what I thought the adult learner would need once he or she entered an academic program. Then it occurred to me that I had never intended for this study to address what adult learners need once they have formally connected with academic institutions.

Instead, it has always been my intention to try to better understand what prevents CADC’s without advanced degrees from returning to school in the first place. As such, it occurred to me that I should not be making recommendations about what kind of an educational program we should be designing for them once they are connected to an institution of higher learning. I should be making recommendations about what it will take to get them there in the first place. In essence, if we cannot get them through the front door, it does not matter how great of a program we have on the inside.

In order to guide my thinking about designing a return to school program for CADC’s, I would begin by conducting a needs assessment. In this regard, I would go back to the four participants of this study and conduct survey interviews to discern if any of the four of them have any interest in participating in a program of this nature.
Assuming that at least one of the participants would be interested, I would ask them if they would like to take part in a focus group that would be designed to examine this issue further. Ordinarily, I would just ask the participants if they would like to be the core of a focus group themselves, but since identifying the four of them as the core of a group would jeopardize their anonymity, my scope would need to be broader in this particular situation.

Again, assuming that at least one of the case study participants would be interested in examining this issue further, I would begin planning to organize a focus group. In this regard, I would ask them for referrals of other key informants whom they think might be interested in the project. Assuming that they would know of others who might be interested, we would then decide on an approach in which to invite other participants; I could invite them, they could invite them, or one of them could invite them and I could do a follow up invitation.

If I did not get between 8 and 12 referrals for the focus group, I could ask key informants from ACCBO or from treatment programs in the region to identify other potential members. If the number of people who were interested in this project was great enough, I could convene additional focus groups.

In the focus group, I would begin by initiating a discussion that would focus on the participants’:

- Academic goals and needs.
- Ideas about how to design an educational program that would meet their needs.
- Level of interest in having academic advisors who would do outreach and meet with them at their places of employment.
- Preferred way of taking classes, such as in the traditional model where they attend classes on campus or through non-traditional methods such as attending classes at satellite locations or through some means of distance education.
- Interest in being part of a support group of other returning students. If interested, would they want to be part of gender specific or culturally specific support groups?
• Ideas about having mentors. If interested, would they want someone:
  • In recovery, or not in recovery?
  • From the 12-Step community?
  • From the same gender?
  • From the same culture?
  • From the same age range, or a different age range?
  • Accessible in person, by phone, or by e-mail?

Assuming that the focus group or groups would determine that there was a need for a program of this type, I would ask for volunteers to be part of a workgroup to help design the program. In this regard, I would need to limit the membership to between 10 and 12 of the most committed volunteers who would be able to spend a considerable amount of time in helping to develop a program like this.

Since I can assume that time constraints may be an issue for the participants, I would work with the agencies to see if they would be willing to give the volunteers paid time off to participate in the project. If money were an issue for the programs regarding reimbursing the employees for their time off, I would pursue funding through OADAP’s training unit. As I noted earlier, OADAP has dedicated 25% of their budget for providing technical assistance to projects of this nature.

Lastly, in the event that there were recommendations that classes and support be offered at non-traditional sites such as treatment agencies, treatment programs and colleges could develop partnerships in which the academic programs could take the classes to the learners. Thus, courses could be offered at regionally positioned treatment programs or at regional conference centers. Again, assuming that funding might be a concern for programs, I would rely on the OADAP training program for assistance. In this regard, they have the ability to fund projects such as agency-sponsored continuing education programs, college based workforce enhancement programs, and technical assistance for individual program projects and regional consortiums.
Addiction Counselor Certification Board of Oregon (2001). ACCBO statistics on CADC’s and Applicants. Paper presented at the meeting of the Workforce Development Coalition, Salem, OR.


APPENDICES
Appendix A - Glossary

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA):** An international, nonprofessional, self-supporting association of men and women who have had drinking problems (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2002).

**Credentialing:** The process of reviewing, verifying, and evaluating a practitioner's credentials to establish the presence of the specialized professional background required for membership (American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association, 2000).

**Narcotics Anonymous (NA):** An international, community-based association of people who are recovering from drug addiction (Narcotics Anonymous World Services, 2002).

**PCS:** Possession of a Controlled Substance.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Psychiatric disorder that can occur following a person experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event (American Psychiatric Association. (1994).

**Sponsor:** Recovering person who shares his or her experience, strengths, and hopes with another person who is addicted to chemicals (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2002).

**Third-party payors:** Health insurance companies (American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association, 2000).

**12-Steps:** A group of guiding principles (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2002).
Appendix B – Initial Contact Script

This is Darcy Edwards. I am a doctoral candidate at Oregon State University. My major is adult education, and I am studying certified alcohol and drug counselors to see if their educational experiences have impacted their choices about higher education.

The people in my study need to be certified addiction counselors who have less than a four year college degree and who are employed with substance abuse treatment programs in the Willamette Valley area of Oregon.

I understand from speaking to ________ that you meet my study’s criteria. Is that correct? [If, “No”, I will thank them for their time and close.]

Are you interested in hearing more about the study? [If, “No,” I will thank them for their time and close.] If you decide to participate in the study, you will need to read and sign a consent form at the first visit.

We will meet face-to-face up to ten times for a maximum of 20 hours. In the interviews, I will ask you some semi-structured, open-ended questions about your experiences and plans regarding your education and about your employment plans. In essence, I will just be asking you to tell your story.

I will audiotape all the interviews. A professional transcriber will transcribe them.

Additionally, I will ask you to maintain a journal to record your thoughts and feelings about the interview questions. I may need to contact you by telephone to clarify minor points regarding our previous interview sessions. You will have an opportunity to review all the materials and make corrections, deletions, and/or additions before your transcripts are included in the study.

At any time during the process, you will have the right to change your mind about participating. If you change your mind, none of your information will be included in the study. It will be destroyed immediately.

Do you have any questions? [I answer any.]
Would you like to go ahead and participate in the study? [If, “No,” I will thank them for their time and close.]

When would be a good time for us to meet, and where would you like to meet? [We schedule time and place that is convenient for them.]
Appendix C – Consent to Participate in Research

THE ROLE OF RESILIENCY IN THE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF CERTIFIED ALCOHOL AND DRUG COUNSELORS

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT.
The purpose of this study is to see how alcohol and drug counselors educational experiences have impacted their choices about higher education.

INVESTIGATORS.
The researchers are: Jodi Engel, Ph.D., Principal Investigator and Darcy Edwards, CADC II, M.S.W., Doctoral Candidate, Secondary Investigator.

PROCEDURES. I understand that as a participant in this study the following things will happen:

1. **Pre-study Screening.** The researcher will meet with me to explain the purpose and the procedures of the study. The researcher will answer any questions that I have about the study. After the initial screening, I may or may not be asked to participate in the study. In the event that I am asked to volunteer for the investigation, I will be asked to sign a consent form. If I do not agree to sign the consent form, I will be considered a non-volunteer, and I will not be included in the study.

2. **What I will do during the study.** I will meet face-to-face with the researcher in a place of my choosing. The interview sessions will last between one and two hours. We will meet no more than ten times. During the interviews, I will discuss my educational experiences and plans. I will also speak about my employment plans. I will maintain a journal in which I can record my thoughts and feelings about anything else that later comes to mind about the interviews. The investigator might contact me by phone to clarify minor points of the interviews.

3. **Foreseeable discomforts.** As I remember and talk about my learning experiences, I may experience some uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. If some aspect of the research poses problems, hardships, or risks to my well-being, I agree to advise the researcher immediately. If the situation cannot be adjusted to my satisfaction, I have the right to withdraw from the study.

4. **Expected benefits of the research.** I understand that by participating in this research, I will be contributing to the body of knowledge about counselor education and workforce development.
CONFIDENTIALITY
I understand that the investigators will maintain my confidentiality to the best of their abilities. In the report, I will only be identified by a pseudonym that I have chosen. The researchers will use my pseudonym in the event that the research is published in journals. None of my identifying information will be revealed in written reports or professional journal articles. I will only be connected with the study through a master file that will be kept secured in the secondary researcher's office. Only the researchers will have access to the master file. At the end of the study, the master file will be destroyed.

Further, in order to protect my clients from any discussion that might incriminate them, the researcher will terminate the interview if I discuss any of my client's illegal behavior.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT.
I understand that my participation in this research is completely voluntary. I am free to say yes or no regarding my participation in this research. Furthermore, even if I volunteer for the study now, I have the right to change my mind later. If I change my mind later, I can stop participating in the study, and I can ask that my data be withdrawn from consideration.

IF I HAVE QUESTIONS.
If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, or if I want a summary of the findings, I can call: Darcy Edwards, CADC II, MSW, (503) 378-6414 or Dr. Jodi Engel, (541) 737-4661. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the IRB Coordinator, at the OSU Research Office, (541) 737-3437 or by e-mail at IRB@orst.edu.

My signature below indicates that I have read and that I understand the procedures that are described above and that I give my informed and voluntary consent to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form.

My Signature ___________________________ Date _____________

My Mailing Address ________________________________

My Phone Number ________________________________

CC: Volunteer
Appendix D – Interview Questions

Name: ________________________________
Age: ________________________________
Race: ________________________________
Gender: ________________________________

What is the highest level of schooling that you have completed?

What is your educational status at this time?

Do you have any educational goals at this time?

What was your best learning experience?

What was your worst learning experience?

How do you feel about yourself as a learner now?

Do you plan to remain in the addiction treatment field?