**A HEURISTIC JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY: EXPLORING THE POSITIVE
INFLUENCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE HUMAN SPIRIT**

By

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this heuristic study was to explore and discover the essence of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit. The study quest was identified as a central concern that evolved from my personal experience of spiritual awakening in the natural environment and an interest in the concept of connectedness in nursing care and practice. The study also focused on the self of the nurse and the qualities of holistic nursing care.

Guided by heuristic methodology developed by Moustakas (1990) the thesis traces a journey of discovery. Using conversational interviews, six nurses were asked to describe their experiences of their spirit being positively influenced in the natural environment. These nurses were also asked if these beneficial experiences had any flow-on effect to their nursing practice. From these interviews various commonalities of experience were identified as well as some experiences unique to the individual participants.

The participant knowing was articulated using Reed's (1992) dimensions of relatedness in spirituality as a framework. Reed describes these dimensions as being able to be experienced intrapersonally, interpersonally and transpersonally. A substantive body of nursing and non-nursing literature was explored to support the participant knowing and provide strength to the discussion.

The study discovered that the human spirit is positively influenced in the natural environment. The three actions of personal healing and wellbeing in the natural environment, knowing self – knowing others and sustaining self in nursing practice were valued by the participants as contributing to the quality of their nursing care. In bringing together spirituality, the natural environment and nursing, holism was discovered to be the significant and connecting constituent. The study has some implications for the discipline of nursing that are also discussed.

Keywords: Holistic nursing; spirituality; the web of relationship; heuristics.

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Trust the process!

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PERSONAL STATEMENT

Although heuristic research acknowledges that the researcher is also a participant in the study, I have chosen to include only minimal personal data in the thesis. As I began to build on the initial knowing and dwelt specifically in the participant data, I came to understand that the value of my personal experience lay in providing the pivotal influence and the internal frame of reference for the study and would not otherwise provide additional depth or illumination to the thesis. I firmly believe that the strength of the thesis is in the data included.

I do consider that a neglected form of knowledge in nursing is that of our relationship with nature ... our conversation with nature, for in this talking we inspire ourselves, we inspire the life force within us ... Turning the focus from one's self and focusing on the relationship with nature enables aspects of humanity and human beings to be revealed, to become available to us (Martin, 1998, p. 29).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

Like Martin (1998) I believe that our relationship with the natural environment can and does reveal important dimensions of our human lives. Incorporating this valuable knowing into our nursing care has the potential to influence our own wellbeing and self-care and the care we give to others. Focused on the human spiritual dimension and grounded in a personal experience the thesis is based on an assumption that the natural environment can positively influence the human spirit. The study explored this phenomenon with the aim of illuminating it for the discipline of nursing.

In this chapter I will introduce the research study by discussing the wellbeing and nursing ideas and concerns I had prior to undertaking the study and trace the genesis of the research topic and the early stages of the research journey to the eventual identification of the study quest. As well as discussing my early ideas I will also introduce and discuss the early influential literature and in this way I will lead the reader into the study as I began to discover its many dimensions and possibilities. I will then outline the study quest and introduce the methodology used to guide the study before describing the structure, style and outline of the thesis and finish this chapter with concluding comments.

Getting started

The early stages of the research process involved concentrated dwelling in the numerous considerations of a beginning research study and with many ideas surfacing and retreating repeatedly, it was important to establish a method of collecting and tracking crucial insights for later use. This was a time when I

used various methods to write and reflect on my developing ideas and as I read widely, I used an electronic journal, mind-mapped on paper and took notes in a paper notebook. Each of these journal entries, mind-maps and notes were dated for later use and having done this I could clearly track developing concerns and ideas as well as the early influential literature.

For the purposes of this thesis I have taken the definition of literature from Urdang, (1973) who defines literature as a body of writing on any particular subject. Thus, literature is writing that informed my knowing of the experience of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit. The literature for this thesis came from a variety of genres including nursing, memoir and other autobiographical writing, environmental psychology, gardening and nature writing.

To locate my self in the research I will be writing in the first person. Given the wide range of settings that nursing care is practiced in, for the purposes of this thesis the term client will be used as the signifier of the recipient of nursing care except when quoting a source that uses the term patient. For simplicity the self of the nurse will be referred to as her or she.

The background to the study

Wellbeing and holism are closely linked concepts and I believe that it is imperative that nurses care for clients in an holistic manner to foster wellbeing. To care holistically is to care for the whole person and involves caring for the inextricably linked dimensions of the mind, body and spirit. I believe that health and wellbeing are not static conditions and that they are in a constant flux within

the continuum of human life or existence. I understand that the concept of health indicates a wholeness of bodily and mental function while wellbeing is a subjective term and is a unique individual's perception of their condition of existence. Clearly, wellbeing includes the spiritual dimension.

A sense of wellbeing is something that everyone can have and is not determined by where they are on the health continuum. Wellbeing involves the concept of wholeness or holism and I believe that a sense of wellbeing is comprised of optimum health and functioning within the boundaries of chronic and acute mental and physical health experiences. Wellbeing is affected by such human concerns as access to financial and social resources, impairment and ability and disability. Wellbeing is something we have when our four cornerstones of health; spiritual, mental, physical and whanau (family; extended family) are met (Durie, 1997). This understanding of the concept of wellbeing has for some time been the guiding force in my nursing practice, an unquestioned knowing.

The genesis of the study

For the past decade I have studied and thought extensively about wellbeing and related concepts such as empathy, caring, healing, holism and the therapeutic self. In particular, I have spent some time studying the various aspects of spirituality and the spiritual needs of people. Although I have read a significant number of nursing articles, books and book chapters on spirituality and spiritual needs, the work of Ross (1994; 1995; 1997) has been seminal in informing my understanding of the concept. I consider this body of work to be a clear

distillation of the essence of what many other nursing writers have said. It has been a repeated reference for my post-graduate studies and is foundation literature for this thesis.

In three articles published between 1994 and 1997 Ross described her findings from her doctoral study. The study participants were staff nurses and charge nurses working in areas of care of the older person in various National Health Service hospitals across twelve Health Boards in Scotland. Ross' (1994) study included nurses' perceptions of spiritual care, outlined the nurses' role in providing spiritual care, explored the meaning of spirituality and spiritual needs for a small number of older persons and discovered the importance of hope in life and that belief and faith are important to many. These nurses defined spiritual needs as including a need for meaning, purpose and fulfilment, a need for hope and creativity, belief and faith, and a need for peace and comfort.

The nurses in the study also agreed that it was within their role to provide spiritual care. Importantly, Ross (1994) found that the nurses who felt able to provide "spiritual care at a deep level" were people who "were aware of the spiritual dimension in their own lives.... had experienced crises which seemed to act as forces for growth, enabling them to become more self-actualized.... were willing to give of themselves at a deep personal level" and that "[T]hey were particularly sensitive/perceptive people" (p. 446).

Thus, of particular importance for this thesis study were Ross' findings that indicate spirituality is an important human concept, that providing spiritual care is a nursing role and that only nurses imbued with certain characteristics felt able to provide deep spiritual care.

In addition to Ross' work, the other work that had to this date, most strongly influenced the development of my thinking on spirituality and connectedness was that of Golberg (1998). When I discovered Golberg's article in 2001, it was the first nursing writing that I had discovered in my in-depth exploration of the spirituality literature that explicitly articulated the use of the concept of connection in nursing care. In this work Golberg outlined how she reviewed spirituality literature hoping to generate some new ideas on the concept. In the process she developed a synthesis of the repeated phenomenon of meaning, presencing, empathy, compassion, hope, love, religion, transcendence, touch and healing, in nursing care and came to what she considered a more understandable concept for spirituality, the concept of connection. Golberg's idea that a nurse would feel connected if she was meeting the spiritual needs of self or others was an aha moment for me.

This knowing has led me to consider the meaning of the word connect and its similarities to reciprocity and relationship and to re-examine related concepts such as empathy, trust, communication, engagement, caring and touch. I consider connectedness to be a multidimensional concept incorporating mind, body and spirit. As my thinking on the concept of connectedness became firmer and just prior to commencing this research, I developed a *holding for further consideration* definition. Thus, I consider that connectedness is a right relationship experience in nursing and life; a *being at one* with another, natural environment, music, self, animal, the universe; a *just knowing* that it is right (the relationship experience) and that this relationship is of some physical, mental, spiritual or social benefit to the person(s) experiencing it.

As I brought together a deepening understanding of the relationship of wellbeing, spirituality, connectedness and holistic care, I became interested in exploring in more depth the concept of the therapeutic self of the nurse. I accept that personal and professional knowing in nursing care is often blurred and that I come as a unique and complete human being to any nursing intervention. I strive to know a person for whom I am caring so that I may better meet their needs in their unique health and wellbeing crisis. Just as importantly, I believe that in providing holistic care to others, I need first to know my self. I need to understand the needs of my mind, body and spiritual dimensions to have an idea of what another's needs may be and to guide me in how I may work with them to meet their needs. I understand that at all times I am experiencing my own health and wellbeing journey and that I need to care first for myself before caring for others.

Although I was aware of this need to care for myself, it was not until early in the year prior to undertaking this masters by research thesis and during a period of personal dis-ease, that I sought holistic healing. In doing this I had an extraordinary experience; a turning point that influenced the direction that the project would take.

The pivotal influence for the study

On a clear and sunny autumn morning, high on a Wellington hillside with an expansive view over the city to the harbour and beyond to Cook Strait, I had a sudden spiritual awakening, a feeling of epiphany almost. In that moment of recognition I realised how necessary the natural environment was in nourishing

and sustaining my spiritual dimension. This pivotal personal experience that revealed the important and relational concepts of spirituality and the natural environment to me, along with my interest in the concepts of wellbeing, connectedness, holistic care and the therapeutic self established the direction the research project would take. From this experience the subject of the research would be determined as would the methodology. Already the process of discovery had begun.

In my extensive exploration of the nursing literature on spirituality I had already found that for some people a relationship with the natural environment was important to their wellbeing. Also, in my very eclectic reading I was finding many examples of similar experiences to my own; a healing connection in the natural environment. While I continued to consider other meaningful connections we all have in our daily lives on our health and wellbeing journeys, the connection of the concepts of spirituality and of the natural environment seemed to have some particular importance for me. However, at this early stage I was not focused on such detail. Believing that the general concept of connectedness is itself an important phenomenon in and for nursing, I was keen to explore this much wider concept further. Although I had the clear intention in mind to research the concept of connectedness in nursing, I had little idea of how I would do this.

Beginning the journey of discovery

Having been accepted into the masters by research program that would start formally early in 2002, from late 2001 to mid 2002 as I worked to refine my

ideas and discover the study quest, my journal writing, mind-mapping and note taking intensified. I raised questions, considered answers, and pondered processes and directions by using the technique of self-dialogue in my journal and by mind-mapping almost every developing idea. By this process insights were surfaced along the way that contributed to aspects of the final knowing of the research topic, the research process and knowing about my personal self.

In these initial few months I back-grounded nursing literature and concentrated on the potential insights from other literary genres. Although nursing literature was back-grounded, the concepts of connectedness, spirituality and the natural environment were fore-grounded and ever present as I read widely. Still centred on the wider concept of connectedness as the potential study topic, I was open to relational stories that illuminated some meaningful human connection to self, other and/or the natural environment. While I sought general relational material, I found myself concentrating more and more on the connection of the self and the natural environment.

During this time I note that I was reading French's (1999) book where she describes the importance and intensity of nature to her while ill. Friends would take her out but often too ill to eat and enjoy food, she fed on and basked in the natural environment. French, in titling her experience of oesophageal cancer as *A Season in Hell*, provides me with a powerful image of suffering, suffering endured and passing, just as a season in a year passes. Although actually taking longer than a season, the image I have is one of illness, health and wellbeing experienced against the backdrop of the ever present and anchoring cyclical seasons of nature. In documenting her story of suffering, French allows

me to walk the journey with her; to somehow imagine, feel and experience, emotions such as hope, the side-effects of treatments and the process of healing that includes her awakening to the positive effect of the natural environment. During the thesis study, I returned again and again to stories such as French's, stories about making sense of, or finding meaning in life following a health crisis.

As the summer wore on I also read books by people variously described as conservationists, environmentalists and naturalists, writing about human interaction with the land and the degradation of the planet (Williams, 1992; Lines, 2001), as well as published journals and what I called journeying books written by women seeking self, solitude, wisdom and connection to others, nature and something elemental (Grumbach, 1993; Sarton, 1996; MacLaine 2000; Anderson, 2001; Gelman, 2001). This small body of writing provided me with valuable understanding of the human condition and the various connections we make in life.

Although Williams and Lines both write about environmental issues their texts take different approaches. Williams' (1992) memoir is a story of spirit and spiritual connectedness to the land, the sacred environment of the Great Salt Lake area. At the time she is writing of, Williams' mother is dying of ovarian cancer on the background of the family history of breast cancer and Williams' beloved wetland migratory bird refuge on the lake edge is threatened by rising lake levels. From this story of connection and loss, I add to my knowledge of suffering and also of grieving and learn about the need to conserve natural environments for human, other and the planet itself.

Taken together, Lines' (2001) collection of essays is a powerful documentation of reasons why humans need to respect nature and save the planet that continues to sustain our life. The work repeatedly describes how humans have too little respect for our need to fit in with nature instead of the other way around. We manipulate the natural environment to the detriment of nature, animals and ourselves. Lines warns that such continued abuse of our valuable resources will end with humanity's destruction of our natural environment.

The work of Williams and Lines remind me that the natural environment is an ever changing dynamic with potent lessons for humanity. In juxtaposition I read the work of Grumbach, (1993); Sarton, (1996); MacLaine (2000); Anderson, (2001) and Gelman, (2001). This small group of women writers write of personal experiences that illuminate the beneficial effects of relationships in a variety of situations. Be the women seeking understanding of the vicissitudes of personal relationships, the repetition of illness on self, the relationship of self to other, spirit or nature, these works clearly illuminate for me the power of story to provide understanding of situations in both personal and nursing relationships. I understand that what is important to these people in making sense of their experience can also be useful for me in understanding my self and my clients' experiences.

From the journals of Grumbach (1993) and Sarton (1996), two older women writing about making meaning in later life, I find two different views of this experience. While Grumbach contemplates a rather more vigorous view of the changes in her life at this time, her friend Sarton writes of her eighty-second year, reached through years of repeated health crises that included depression,

stroke and other illnesses. In her journal Sarton writes of the great importance of the natural environment to her recovery, healing and wellbeing. Limited for increasing periods in her later life by her health situation, Sarton, living on the coast of Maine, relied more and more on the intimate surrounds of her garden, including the benefits of bringing flowers and nature inside, for a sense of wellbeing.

Both Grumbach and Sarton's journal's are personal, relational and reflective works that also seem to have elements of a journey, journeys that have rhythm and pattern; journeys that trace the contours of the land, the seasons, the ups and downs of both experience and landform. Despite the downs, the stories are ones of beauty and hope written to send a message that humans and nature are inextricably linked. These women's journeys provide some kind of meaning in life, some kind of knowing for them that they feel will be of benefit to others so they write and share their insights.

MacLaine (2000), Anderson (2001) and Gelman (2001) write of actual journeys, also with rhythm and pattern and the ups and downs of experience and landform. These three women all take quite different journeys in their search for meaning in life. MacLaine walks the Camino, a sacred pilgrimage. Describing herself as an unfinished woman, Anderson contemplates her marriage, separation and life in general by spending a year living alone by the sea at Cape Cod. Seeking a more fulfilling way to live Gelman makes dramatic changes in her lifestyle and becomes what she calls a female nomad. Each of these women journey in different ways but each story is one of relationship and includes the connection of the spiritual and the natural environment.

Just as in the work I'm reading, I myself seek leisure and spiritual nourishment in the natural environment. Spending time at the seaside and near other waterways, in the native New Zealand bush and in my garden allows me to still the internal chatter and calm my soul. Focussing on the detail, I find many things in the natural environment that lift my spirit. Tiny fish, silver and indigo, iridescent blues and greens, circling and darting just below the surface of seawater; the cool silence of a bush path, the quiet sssshhhh of waterfall and stream; and late in the evening as the sun sets, bumble-bees endlessly searching for food, lurching over the purple flowers of the carpeting thyme.

Continuing to read a lot, grazing, alert to insights from any genre, potential everywhere, I find some current magazines a source of material about connection. I find an article by Roberts (2002) in *Wilderness*, a New Zealand magazine, about the need to value the thorny and somewhat unattractive South Island Matagouri shrub because it supports a complex environment of numerous flora and fauna. At the same time I find two articles in the *American Artist* magazine that have resonance for me; one by Burlingham (2002) and one by Singer (2002). Burlingham writes about the narrative paintings of Stone Roberts whose works represent a story frozen on canvas, and Singer writes about a painting journey undertaken by Jim Mott. Mott's "landscape paintings connect with people" and he is quoted as saying, 'It seems we can understand ourselves or find our inner experience articulated through the language of the landscape, and in that connection, recognise something within both the landscape and the self that is deeper and bigger than either' (p. 57).

Novels too, provide a source of knowing. As I read Crace's (1988) poetically crafted story set in the Stone Age, I can feel the sea spray on my face and see the view he points to from the cliff tops. I can smell the weed on the shore and imagine the dirt floor of the dwelling and poverty of the woman on the heath. I can visualise the images of destruction and violence and ponder the reasoning of the farmers in their desire to control their farming life. As the geese eat the grain that they have planted the farmers slaughter them. I find that this story has the ability to inform me of the human condition, our ancestral links with the land and also provide me with an example of how over time humans have oft-times found it difficult or impossible to live in harmony with other sentient beings.

By March 2002 it is time for the biannual New Zealand International Arts Festival in Wellington and I discover the work of Soyinka a Nigerian poet, playwright, writer and politician. In Jeyifo (2001) I discover that core themes in Soyinka's writing include the connectedness we have with all things, the "non-linear and cyclical" nature of wholeness and life, "that an unbroken chain exists between all generations, all time, and all cultures" and that he "has written powerfully against the tendency of modern industrial civilisation to cut us off from our links with nature" (p. xv) and therefore our core selves. Unexpectedly found, this description of Soyinka's work seems to be a succinct guide to connectedness.

While searching in the public library I just as unexpectedly find another resource that has great resonance for me. In *A call for connection* Holland (1998) ties caring, healing, the environment, learning, society, spirituality and art together in asking humanity to seek a collective solution to a better world. In these early

days I am clearly thinking about the concepts of connection, holism and the natural environment and searching for relevant literature. Although I am aware that this body of found literature is relevant to the emerging thesis project, how exactly, I am unsure.

Taking what I have learnt to date, from nursing literature and from my recent foray into other literary genres, I prepare my ideas around connectedness, spirituality and the natural environment for research school.

Working to define the study quest

At research school in March 2002 I present my ideas for my intended study and learn one of the first things about the research process; that I have to refine my research question. In undertaking the thesis within the Graduate School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health, which is situated in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Victoria University, Wellington, the topic of study must clearly be a nursing concern. I believe that nursing concerns are also human concerns. The humanities, defined by Urdang (1973) as being “distinguished from the sciences”, include not only “the study of classical Latin and Greek language and literature; literature, philosophy, art”, but also and importantly, are concerned with the characteristics of humanity or, “the condition of being human” and “the quality of being humane” (p. 645). My loose ideas are definitely concerned with the condition of being human and I believe, are also of importance in nursing care.

Nursing research needs to be of some benefit to the discipline. At research school I soon understand that I need more background from nursing literature to

help determine if researching my proposed topic of connectedness will be of benefit to the discipline. In asking if connectedness is a key concept in nursing I need to decide from what angle I intend exploring this idea. I need to find out what it is that I want to ask, who I need to ask and why. I need to ask what I know about this, how I know this and who in nursing has written about this, what this study will tell nursing and what relevance this question will have for greater nursing knowledge.

Although I clearly intuit the important connection of the natural environment and nursing and know what I need to do, I am unsure how to go about refining my research topic. I soon determine that I should find out what has been said about the natural environment by nursing writers over the past few decades. For no particular reason except that it might be somewhere to start, I decide to start with the nursing theorists. I start at the beginning of Tomey & Alligood (1998) with the *Philosophies*. Nightingale is there of course, as well as Wiedenbach, Henderson, Abdellah, Hall, Watson and Benner. I look at what these theorists have to say about the concept of environment and try to find out if the wider natural environment has been considered and written about by them.

I discover that the nursing theorists in the *Philosophies* in Tomey & Alligood discuss the bedside, home and community environments and some touch on the cultural and spiritual aspects of nursing care. But it is Watson's work on caring that excites me in its consideration of holism, human-ness and spirit. In reading the bibliography of her extensive corpus of published work, I found a reference that really stood out for me; *A frog, a rock, a ritual: an eco-caring cosmology* (Watson, 1994), a chapter in *Exploring our Environmental*

Connections edited by Schuster & Brown (1994). Serendipitously I found that the Victoria University Library had a number of copies of this book. After reading not only Watson's chapter but the whole book, I felt that the work provided enough support from the discipline of nursing for me to consider a study linking nursing and the natural environment. However, I still did not have a clear idea of exactly what the study quest would be.

As I sought to clarify the connection of nursing and the natural environment, my journal notes that I returned to literature concerned with the diverse ways of knowing that nurses use to know self and one's place in the universe, and how they then synthesize this knowledge to facilitate client healing. I understand that this involves the concept of the therapeutic use of self and reacquaint myself with the work of Travelbee (1971). I also sought related references to uncover the parts of the nursing relationship that might be pertinent to my yet to emerge thesis topic. I spend a lot of time mapping these connections, adding the insights from my reading and considering the potential direction I may take.

To further aid my information gathering, I also explored a range of nursing literature on concepts such as holistic nursing practice and self care (Dossey & Guzzetta, 2000), self awareness (Rew, 1996; Drew, 1997), eco-spirituality (Cummings, 1991; Lincoln, 2000), earth dwelling (Schuster, 1992) and eco-feminism (Warren, 1997). The knowing from these works as well as knowing from Schuster & Brown (1994), in particular, the work of Watson (pp. 17-37), Taylor (pp. 57-80) and Burkhardt (pp. 287-306) was noted and stored and kept as a touchstone. I wasn't ready for the complete use of this body of work back at this time and I did not fully consider the content or the detail of each of the

various writers' contribution to my thinking until much later. Having confirmed its relevance, the information sat waiting to be used at a later date while I worked to refine my study quest.

I reviewed what I had learnt to date about the wider concept of connectedness and the natural environment from nursing and other literature and realised that much of what I had been reading was concerned with the concept of finding meaning in life. I acknowledged my growing awareness that the concepts of spirit and spirituality would be important in my thesis study and felt that I was venturing along the right path.

At this time in the process, hoping to find more nursing writing on the natural environment, I did an extensive electronic search on the *Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature* (CINAHL) database. I used various combinations of words related to nursing and the natural environment and also did author searches on all of the twenty-two writers that contributed to *Exploring our Environmental Connections*. I found that environment and natural environment were not keywords and that the authors' referenced works at that time, early to mid 2002, were not clearly about nursing's environmental connection. Searching proved frustrating and negative and I began to understand that in future electronic keyword searches I might continue to have difficulty finding relevant nursing literature on the topic of the natural environment.

Because specific nursing literature on the relationship of nursing care and the beneficial effects of the natural environment seemed difficult to find and apparently relevant literature from other genres was bountiful, I re-examined nursing literature that supports the use of literature generally, to learn about the lived experience of the human condition.

As a way to widen our understanding of the experience of others, the use of literature and literary criticism in health has for some time been written about and advocated for, by writers such as Coles (1989); Darbyshire (1994; 1995); Harrison (2000; 2001) and Waxman (1999). Coles, a child psychiatrist and Harvard professor, writes about using the study of stories to teach medical students and others about life issues. Darbyshire, a Professor of Nursing, also uses literature and the arts generally in his writing and workshops to teach nurses about the human condition. To better understand suffering, Harrison, also a nurse, encourages nurses to use certain novels as a way to learn about the concept of suffering. Waxman, an Associate Professor of English, writes from the field of literary gerontology about what can be learnt about aging from the writing of older people. Importantly, she believes that such writing can “show us how to use time differently in later life, how to seize opportunities for intense, spiritual living in the presence of nature” (p. 516).

These writers support my belief that narratives or stories from almost any literary genre have the ability to convey to whoever is reading them, the many aspects of human experience. Such works convey what the experience being described feels like to the person or character experiencing it as well as providing insight into other factors that impact on health, wellbeing and life

generally. From this small body of nursing literature I felt confident that I could continue to seek important and valuable knowing for my nursing research from a diverse range of literature.

By this time I have a growing body of supporting nursing and general literature for my study but continue to keep aware and open to finding potential material. In this way I found a lot of useful writing from many different sources. I read a spiritual/ecological and personal account by Fowles (2000), a collection by Zinsser (1999) that gives a clear insight into spirituality and autobiographical writing and an American college text by Anderson & Runciman (1995). This last work uses writing on the subject of the natural environment to teach students how to develop their critical thinking skills and to read and write academically. This wonderful text that addresses both subject and process is full of short pieces by renowned writers, writing about the connected concepts of nature, health and spiritual wellbeing.

In the preface Anderson & Runciman outline their reasons for producing the book using environmental writing. They feel that “much of today’s best writing is about the environment” (p. v), that it deals with a complex issue that is of importance to us all and that this writing comes from a variety of literary genres. As a learning tool, Anderson & Runciman feel that the topic of the natural environment with all of its complexities and relationships encourages full examination; full examination such as that required by any academic paper. The authors are also interested in environmental issues. They believe that by using the writing that they have done, that it will open the minds of others to the natural environment’s numerous relationships and its importance to life.

With slowly building knowing, by mid-June, 2002 my journal notes that I have almost settled on the research topic; that I have narrowed it to something to do with the role of the nurse and the influence of the natural environment on the spirit and how that manifests as connectedness in nursing practice relationships. From my reading I have also noted that the experience of pain and suffering seem to increase awareness of, and the seeking of, spiritual sustenance in the sufferer. I understand that the experience of a health crisis is one situation that can lead to spiritual awareness. No matter how or why it happens, the important thing is the awareness that results, how it manifests itself and what influences it.

As my knowing built it became clear that I wanted to focus on the nurse as the subject of the research and determined that the motivating force for the study was the spirit of the nurse, the interaction aspect of nursing and the use of the therapeutic self of the nurse. I understood that this interest was a flow-on from knowing how important the natural environment is to my spiritual wellbeing and my strong belief that we, the nurse, go into nursing interventions with the vessel of self brimming with unique traits. I dwelt in this understanding and eventually it became clear that what I was interested in researching was the action of the nurturing of the spiritual dimension in the natural environment.

By the end of July 2002 I had reworked my research proposal to more clearly define my research aims and processes. This activity clarified where I was going and how I would go about it. The proposal abstract outlined that the natural environment in all of its beauty, variety and constant change is life

sustaining and importantly, nurtures and sustains the human spirit. This is linked to the understanding that nurses who care holistically, care for the spiritual needs of their clients.

Additionally, in believing in the blurring of the personal and professional and that nurses come to their practice using their wealth of life and specialist skills that are then expressed by the therapeutic use of self, I then considered how such nurses might care for their own spiritual needs. I assume that like me, some nurses' spiritual needs may be met in relation to the natural environment and note the intention to explore the possibility that the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of the nurse would then contribute to the holistic practice of that nurse.

Identifying the study quest

My journaling, mind-mapping and notes show that it took approximately six months of ranging widely over nursing and other literature, considering the relationship of spirituality to the natural environment within a frame of connectedness, to locate the focus for the research study. The process involved intense dwelling in the core concepts of wellbeing, holistic nursing care, spirituality and the meeting of spiritual needs as an holistic nursing responsibility, the importance of the use of the therapeutic self or vessel in nursing interventions, and the positive influence of the natural environment on a nurse's human spirit, all within the overarching concept of connectedness.

By dwelling in these concepts I identified some key concerns that I believed were important for the discipline of nursing and these concerns in turn

influenced the eventual identification of the study quest. These concerns included; the importance of the natural environment in sustaining human life; the belief that human concerns are nursing concerns; the understanding that holistic nurses practice self-care; the belief that the human spiritual dimension contributes to having meaning in life; and also, that the self of the nurse is relatively absent from nursing literature.

Although I was not fully aware of it at the time, much later I traced the influence for this last concern to the work of Taylor (1992). At the time that she was writing, Taylor found a distinct lack of acknowledgement in nursing literature of the nurse-as-human. From my own literature searching this was confirmed and influenced my decision to fore-ground the experience of nurses to further raise awareness of, and increase nursing knowledge of, the self of the nurse and nurse-as-human.

By acknowledging that my own wellbeing crisis was the pivotal influence for the research and combining that pivot with the concepts of the natural environment, spirituality and the self of the nurse, the study quest was identified as:-

A heuristic study of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit.

At this stage of the research process I understood that I had refined my initial question and identified a research topic suitable for a master's by research thesis. By identifying the study quest I understood that I was going to be exploring a manageable part of a wider concern, the concept of connectedness in nursing care.

Alongside the process to identify the study quest I was also engaged in the equally important process of identifying the appropriate methodology to use for the research. Just as the quest or question was refined, various methodologies that could have been used were also being explored. As the various study concerns and influences were acknowledged and the study quest was revealed, so too was the research methodology revealed.

Other methodologies that were considered

Because this research study had its genesis in a personal experience and I am also interested in narrative inquiry, I initially considered the use of, *Writing: A method of inquiry* described by Richardson (1998), or *Topical Reflective Autobiography* described by Johnstone (1999) as possible ways to explore the research topic and explicate the findings. Richardson's work values narratives of the self and experimental writing and requires a disciplined writing life. Although I enjoy creative and descriptive writing I had concerns about the strength of my writing and my ability to sustain the direction and progress required for a thesis.

While Johnstone's work similarly values the knowing of the self and provides a clearer framework, being autobiographically centred the use of this methodology would put an emphasis on my story. I had concerns that my story may not provide a strong enough frame for a nursing thesis and I also had

concerns about the risk of such self-disclosure to me and the value of this to the discipline of nursing.

Also, as the topic for the research became clear it also became clear that participants would be necessary. Because the self of the nurse was central to the study I required a breadth of knowing that would not be possible without participants. In fact, in order to obtain rich depictions of the phenomenon participants were essential. It was also clear that I required a more structured framework to guide my neophyte research than either Richardson's or Johnstone's methodologies could provide.

Thus, heuristic methodology as described by Moustakas (1990) was revealed to be the methodology of choice for the study. The methodology requires an impetus of a personal experience for the research, a passion to explore this further using a process of discovery, and participants to provide a depth of understanding of the phenomenon under study. By using heuristic methodology to explore the influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of the nurse, I would be free to discover the numerous dimensions of the study. As well, any discoveries made would be able to be articulated without interpretation, depicted as described.

The process of discovery is central to heuristic research and this thesis is the documentation of my journey of discovery. It is the documentation of what I discovered when I, a nurse, took my personal experience of spiritual awakening as an impetus to explore the assumption that the natural environment has a powerful and positive influence on the human spiritual dimension. I felt that as this had happened to me and had importance to my nursing practice, that it may

be a similar experience for other nurses. The understanding and acceptance that the wellbeing of my spiritual dimension affects my holistic wellbeing and my self as a nurse, led me to conclude that this could be an important area of knowledge for the discipline of nursing.

Structure, style and outline of the thesis

I have chosen to structure the thesis in a way that will give the reader an understanding of how the work developed. To achieve this, and in an attempt to portray the essence of discovery, I have presented my knowing in a loosely chronological manner. By doing this, and by writing in the first person and in a narrative style, I am also able to retain the personal dimension of heuristic research. The use of a narrative style also enables the strong and vivid depictions of the phenomenon to be conveyed to the reader.

I have purposefully kept the thesis format relatively simple to allow the reader to concentrate on the strength and illumination of the material presented. For similar reasons the supporting and influential literature is presented as the research process evolved and progressed and largely prior to the participant data. In this way the work shows the growing illumination of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit and the participant data is allowed to stand in its strength and vividness.

In Chapter One I have introduced the thesis and provided the background to the study concern. I have described my initial nursing and wellbeing concerns and traced the genesis of the research study as an interest in spirituality and connectedness. I briefly described the pivotal influence for the study and the beginning of the research journey that included how the study concern was dwelt on using journaling, mind-mapping and note taking as I explored early nursing and other influential literature. I have described the processes of how the study concerns revealed both the study quest and the methodology. I have followed with the structure, style and outline of the thesis before ending with concluding comments.

Chapter Two introduces the heuristic methodology developed by Moustakas (1990) that I used to discover the meaning of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of nurses and others. In this chapter I will discuss Moustakas' impetus and influences in developing his methodology, the processes and phases used in the methodology and my experience of using these processes and phases. The chapter also discusses the importance of data generally and participant data specifically, the process of ethics approval, participant recruitment, data collection and the initial exploration of the participant data. I have then reflected on the use of heuristic methodology in my concluding comments.

The literature that more fully informed the thesis as the research process developed is discussed in Chapter Three. Continuing to use the narrative style of the thesis, I begin the chapter by describing the search for relevant nursing literature and for literature from various other literary genres. I have tried to use

mainly nursing literature in the body of the chapter to trace my understanding of holism, holistic nursing practice, caring for self and the therapeutic use of self as nursing concerns.

Following this I discuss the concept of spirituality generally before attempting a definition and then discussing the role of nursing in meeting the spiritual needs of clients. Introducing the concept of the natural environment I first describe nursing's human-environmental connection then the wisdom of indigenous cultures and the concept of eco-spirituality. I then define the meaning of the natural environment for the purposes of the thesis before discussing our human connection to the natural environment and the benefit of gardens. The chapter illuminates the existing awareness of the spiritual benefit of the natural environment within the discipline of nursing and ends with concluding comments.

In Chapter Four I discuss the participant data in three parts. In Part One I introduce and value the six study participants by way of individual word portraits. These individual portraits contain the essence of each unique individual participant in relationship with the study phenomenon.

In Part Two the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit are presented. I have done this using Reed's (1992) work on the relational dimensions of spirituality as a way to structure the knowing. The participants' descriptions of their experiences of the study phenomenon are presented within the three relational dimensions that Reed describes as being intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal.

The value of the experience of the research phenomenon to the participants nursing practice is discussed in Part Three. The participants described three aspects of their experiences that affected their nursing care and practice. In this part I discuss personal healing and wellbeing in the natural environment, the concept of knowing self before caring for others, and sustaining self in nursing work. I end the chapter with concluding comments.

Chapter Five is the final chapter of the thesis. In this chapter I have made concluding comments on the study by way of reflections on the research process and participant withdrawal and discussed the significant discoveries from the study. I have also briefly discussed the limitations and validity of the study and the implications from the study for the discipline of nursing. The chapter is concluded with a personal reflection.

Concluding comments

In this chapter I have traced the initial stages of the research journey. By tracing these initial stages by way of insights gleaned from journaling, mind-mapping and copious note taking as I explored the early influential literature, I have documented landmark stages in the research process. As I began working to identify the study topic I also began the engagement with research processes and embarked on a significant stage of my own personal and professional transformation.

From the base of my knowledge of spirituality and spiritual needs in nursing care and an intuition that connectedness is a key concept in nursing, I built on this knowing as I explored nursing and other literature on the related concepts

of spirituality, the natural environment and the qualities of holistic nurses that include self-care and the therapeutic use of self. By reading and reflecting by way of writing and mind-mapping I was eventually able to determine that I had enough supporting information to undertake this study.

In this chapter I have discussed the background to the study, identified the study quest and determined that the study would be guided by heuristic methodology. In Chapter Two I will introduce heuristic methodology as developed by Moustakas (1990) and discuss some of the processes concerned with participant involvement in the study.

CHAPTER TWO: THE METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT INCLUSION IN THE STUDY

Methodologies are described by Holloway & Wheeler (1996) as the underpinning theories and principles that guide the methods used in research. The methodology chosen to guide a research study must be congruent with the quest or question the researcher is seeking to understand and answer. As such, the methodology falls out of the initial exploration of the research possibilities and is revealed as the study quest is identified.

Although both *Writing: A method of inquiry* described by Richardson (1998), and *Topical Reflective Autobiography* described by Johnstone (1999) were explored as possible methodologies to guide the research study, Moustakas' (1990) heuristic methodology was identified as the methodology of choice. One of the reasons why Moustakas' methodology was chosen over those of Richardson and Johnstone was that heuristics would provide a structure that would guide while allowing the freedom to fully discover the meaning of the study focus.

The use of heuristic methodology requires the inclusion of participants to provide full and rich descriptions of the experience being studied. Since participants are a requisite of a heuristic study and this chapter continues the narrative style of the thesis, I have included participant issues as they arose in the process of understanding and using Moustakas' methodology.

Introduction to heuristic methodology

While Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research methodology provides a structure or guiding framework, it is also relevant as the chosen methodology for three other reasons. One, heuristics requires an autobiographical impetus to the study undertaken. In reading Moustakas' work on *Loneliness* (1961; 1972; 1975) I had a strong impression that my spiritual awakening in the natural environment and my subsequent absorption in the phenomenon, had similarities to his study of loneliness. Two, heuristic methodology requires participants to allow a full discovery of the essence of the phenomenon under study and I agreed that this research topic required such inquiry. And three, the methodology encourages a narrative outcome in a creative synthesis of data. This would be congruent with my interest in narrative inquiry and my desire, if possible, to write a narrative thesis.

Heuristic research starts with a passion, a desire to learn more about a particular concern, a personal experience of some significance. The word heuristic comes from the Greek meaning "to find out or discover" (Urdang, 1973, p. 622) and was used by the ancient Greeks in mathematical analysis and synthesis (Groner, Groner & Bischof, 1983). Although heuristics has been used for some time in mathematics, heuristic inquiry as a qualitative research methodology was only developed by Moustakas in 1990. This was some years following the powerful personal experience of his young daughter's life threatening health crisis that plunged Moustakas into an in-depth exploration of the concept of loneliness, the feeling he had during this time.

Moustakas had a profound need to undertake a journey of discovery to seek the meaning of loneliness and all that this crisis meant to him and his family. This in depth seeking involved thinking and writing about the ever present concern of loneliness and led to Moustakas publishing *Loneliness* (1961), *Loneliness and Love* (1972) and *The Touch of Loneliness* (1975). This body of work describes Moustakas' exploration of the concept and his findings of the meaning of the human experience of loneliness.

Somewhat similarly, this thesis is the documentation of my discoveries, connections and findings from my exploration of the personally important phenomenon of the human experience of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit.

In accepting that heuristic methodology provided the best framework for my research and was going to guide the method of discovery, I needed to be able to use this methodology with confidence. To do this I needed to fully understand the various components of the methodology. I also felt that I needed to have some understanding of what contributed to Moustakas' development of the methodology. Early in the research process I moved tangentially from concentrating on the emerging study topic and spent some time dwelling in the published work of some of the people Moustakas acknowledged as influential in developing his processes, phases and the validation of the research methodology. By exploring this material I surfaced aspects of the knowing behind the methodology that had resonance for my own developing research

process. I began to understand that I was already engaged in a process of discovery.

A discussion of some of Moustakas' influences

Apart from his own work and the unpublished work of his students, it was some of the work of Maslow, Jourard, Polanyi, Buber, Bridgeman, Gendlin and Rogers that Moustakas (1990) referenced as being most influential in the development of heuristic research methodology. It was therefore some of the acknowledged work of these men that I briefly dwelt in. While their influence is found more clearly in particular areas of Moustakas' methodology, this selection of work brings together and values the essential elements of personal, subjective and experiential knowing of the human experience of life. As I read and pondered on the content of these works, I noted fragments that reflected what I was already beginning to know in my own journey.

For instance, I began by reading Polanyi's (1962; 1964; (in Grene, 1969)) work on personal knowledge, the tacit dimension and indwelling. This body of work values the hidden, subjective and experiential reality of objective personal knowing. I understood from this work that knowledge gained from something that is not observable is no less real than that gained from the observable; that the personal and subjective is a legitimate way for us to make meaning in our lives.

Polanyi's work *Personal Knowledge* was built on by Maslow (1966) who further encourages researchers to value the ineffable, the just "is-ness" (p. 91) of the unique and similar, lived human experience of life. Maslow is clear that "[L]ife is

in part its own meaning. That is, the sheer experiencing of living, or walking, of seeing, of tastes and smells, of sensuous and emotional experiences, and all the rest help to make life worthwhile” (pp. 91-92). In his work on self-actualisation, Maslow (1971) made it clear that he felt that in knowing self you are also able to know others.

I found that the investigation into the inner, immeasurable dimension of the human self as a way to further understand others was encouraged by Rogers (1969). In his later work Rogers (1985) expanded on Polanyi’s work on indwelling and immersion and comments that if we research in humanistic ways we will understand how humans function, grow and change. Rogers also urged humanistic researchers to see patterns in nature and to be dedicated and open-minded in their searching and discovery.

To further inform his ideas on the value of knowing self and therefore knowing others, Moustakas also used Jourard’s (1968) work on self-disclosure. Jourard believed that the use of dialogue is the only way to bring understanding of the individual’s invisible experience of life to others. By revealing something of ourselves to others we may encourage them to disclose their experiences so that we may know them.

I also explored Buber’s (1970) work on dialogue and mutuality that was based in his understanding of man’s relations to God, others and self, and re-discovered the value of story in understanding life and death, the value of the concept of relationship and the importance of strengthening the human spirit. I also discovered that Buber believed that the spirit is not to be found within, but

“between man and what he is not” (p. 141). This was an important insight for the research study.

My exploration of the work of Polanyi, Maslow, Rogers, Jourard and Buber strengthened the validity of heuristic research for me. In undertaking a study that endeavours to discover the meaning of a human experience, I felt well supported by the work of these men. In his work on delineations of subjective-objective truth, Bridgeman (1950) too, values what can be understood from the personal experiences of others. Bridgeman’s work clearly asserts that our diverse human experiences of life cannot be replicated in experiments and that the researcher must ask any question that can clarify human experience.

I found Gendlin’s (1988) work on focusing, developed as a therapeutic strategy for personal growth, insight and change, illuminating. This work describes the process of focusing which is the act of inner attention on the issue to be understood on its many different levels. The act of focusing is an important process in heuristic research. Moustakas (1990) describes that in order to focus, the researcher needs to clear a space for thought, writing or considering and take the experience in its constituents and dwell on the experience in a process from question to insight to explication.

In addition to the work described, I also found Douglass & Moustakas’ (1985) work of particular importance to my understanding of the nature of heuristic inquiry. Apart from reiterating the importance of valuing unique human experiences to know something of the general human condition, this paper also describes the differences between heuristic and phenomenological research.

The difference is that phenomenology is interpretive while heuristics allows the data of a human experience to speak for itself and to be valued as known.

From the foray into this body of work I could clearly see the connection to Moustakas' work and this was both insightful and exciting. Although not fully comprehensive, this knowledge provided me with a firm basis from which I was able to feel confident that what I was discovering from personal experience, diverse literary genres and participants was valid. It allowed me to be subjective, connected and located in the personal, to be passionate and intrigued by the research question and to range widely trusting intuition to discover insights. I was within an intense and alive research experience.

It was from influences such as those discussed, that Moustakas developed heuristic methodology's processes and phases. Moustakas developed six processes that are deeply rooted in the internal frame of reference of the researcher and six phases that guide the actual process of the research project. These processes and phases provided me with a strong guiding structure for the research process.

A brief description of the processes of heuristic methodology

The six processes of heuristic research described by Moustakas (1990) include identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling and focusing. The research process begins with a significant

personal experience of the researcher that results in an intense the desire to more fully understand it. How the researcher feels and thinks about the complex meaning of this experience is what is known as the internal frame of reference. This knowing is what the researcher returns to time and again during the research process, seeking to understand similar and connected meanings from new discoveries.

Beginning with this scrap of an ancient map, the internal frame of reference, the researcher recognises the particular potential research quest and has a desire to understand the meaning of this experience further. This becomes the focus of inquiry and the researcher starts the research journey by identifying with the focus of inquiry. In the search for understanding, the researcher, by identifying with the focus of inquiry, goes inside the quest “becoming one with what one is seeking to know” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16).

The second process described by Moustakas is the action of self-dialogue whereby the researcher dwells in the personal experience of the phenomenon to clarify and expand thinking. This process relies on self awareness and an ability to move over and around the various aspects of the phenomenon. By participating in an internal dialogue with the experience, its emotions, actions, patterns and rhythm, the researcher uncovers hidden meanings of the experience and increases their understanding of it.

Moustakas acknowledged the work of Polanyi in the development of the third process of heuristic research, that of tacit knowing. Tacit knowing, is knowing whereby the whole is understood by its constituent parts. Tacit knowing, is knowing about something without fully understanding how we know. It involves

a complex combination of skills inherent in the person experiencing the particular phenomenon and is generally not able to be described.

The fourth process in heuristic research is that of intuition. Intuition differs from tacit knowing in that it is knowing that can be described. The person experiencing the particular phenomenon is able to describe how the whole is understood from its parts. Thus previous knowing allows the researcher to make links or connections that lead to further discoveries of the research phenomenon.

During the fifth process, the process of indwelling, the researcher becomes deeply introspective and reflective. The process requires the researcher to make time to dwell intensively in the various meanings of the phenomenon under study. By considering the extensive material in this way, essential dimensions of the meaning of the experience will be revealed.

The process of focusing, based on the work of Gendlin (1988), is the sixth process in heuristic research. During this process the researcher works to distil and fore-ground the important knowing of the research experience.

These six processes and the internal frame of reference are used during the six phases of heuristic research, the phases of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and the eventual creative synthesis.

A brief description of the phases of heuristic methodology

The six phases of heuristic research guide the journey of discovery and together make up the research design. The researcher, in recognising that a

particular personal experience produces a strong desire to explore the meaning of this further, begins the phase of initial engagement. In this phase the researcher dwells in the broad research concern or interest using the processes of self-dialogue and tacit and intuitive knowing. The exploration of the various dimensions of the interest using these processes eventually reveals the quest or question for the research.

Once the quest or question that the research study will explore has been identified the researcher then moves into the phase of immersion in the topic where all aspects of it are raised and considered. Again, using self-dialogue, tacit knowing and intuition, the researcher is deep within the research interest, open and receptive to illuminating understanding from any personal and social sphere at any time. It is a time of following ideas, adding to the already known, exploring possibilities and making connections during almost any experience. The research quest is with the researcher day and night.

After sustaining focused immersion for as long as required, the researcher enters the phase of incubation. In this phase the researcher actively withdraws from immersion in the study quest or question and in this distancing allows crystallisation of tacit and intuitive knowing. In such a receptive state the researcher discovers hidden meanings.

The phase of illumination follows incubation and occurs during reflection on the building data. In this phase, important and essential new knowing is discovered and added to existing awareness of the phenomenon under study. With this expansion of knowing, the full meaning of the phenomenon unfolds.

Illumination is followed by the phase of explication whereby all data is considered in depth and from every angle to make meaning of the research data. In this phase the researcher must fully understand the meaning of their own experience of the phenomenon in all of its dimensions prior to attempting an understanding of meaning from participant dialogues. By using the processes of focusing and indwelling the full meaning of the complex and unique human experience becomes clear. At this stage of the research process the researcher is involved in arranging the data for the portrayal of the phenomenon.

Having returned to the internal frame of reference to make final connections of meaning in the collected data, the researcher is ready for the final phase of heuristic research, the creation of a creative synthesis. The creative synthesis is the distilled essence of the data presented in some creative medium. From various written styles to the wide range of artistic mediums, the chosen form of the creative synthesis will depend on the skill of the researcher and the audience to whom the data will be disseminated.

However, Moustakas (1990) notes that the creative synthesis “usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples” (p. 32). In this way the various meanings found in the multi-dimensional data are woven into a story that explicates a particular human experience as articulated and understood by a variety of unique but similar human beings.

The processes and phases of heuristic methodology value the concept of discovery. They are the tools that are used to seek meaning and guide the researcher on the journey of discovery. The researcher understands that in

using these processes and phases many discoveries will be made about the meaning of the research quest or question and that these discoveries will contribute to the final illumination or understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Experiencing the processes and phases of heuristic research

Once the research methodology was revealed and I had embarked on this heuristic journey, the research quest was with me continually, sometimes consciously and sometimes not and sometimes it felt all consuming. The very nature of heuristic research meant that I kept myself always open to discovery, aware that I may find meaning when not consciously seeking it. Committed to the “endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on the central question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14), I followed many paths fully prepared to allow thoughts and considerations to come in and out of consciousness like waves in the ocean, rhythmic, measured, repeated and persistent.

I understood that I was involved in a process of discovery and that what was newly discovered would be added to the already known, discovery building on discovery, and that what would be known later may completely replace what was currently known. I had to trust the process and feel confident that what I was doing was going to be useful in illuminating the research phenomenon.

In his description of the phases of heuristic research, Moustakas (1990) indicates that the six phases follow each other to an outcome and this has been so with this research study. I can trace this journey from the initial engagement with the various research concepts to identify the study quest, through the intense phase of immersion in the study quest, the methodology and participant issues and into the withdrawal phase of incubation. With the increased awareness from the phase of incubation I moved into the reflective phase of illumination prior to gaining full understanding of the study phenomenon in the phase of explication. Having reached this stage of understanding I was ready for the final phase of making a creative synthesis, this thesis document, of the multi-layered meanings of the phenomenon discovered during the research study.

While the six phases were experienced in this way on one level, I also found as the whole project moved through what I shall name the macro-process of each phase following the one before, there were also many, many micro-processes. I found that each aspect of the study under scrutiny or consideration at the time had its own process of initial engagement, immersion, incubation and illumination and sometimes extending to explication and even to portions of the final creative synthesis.

Within each micro-process I found myself using the processes described by Moustakas of identification with the current focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling and focusing. I also repeatedly returned to the primary internal frame of reference, my knowing of the experience of my spiritual awakening in the natural environment. In various formations, each

heuristic process and phase occurred numerous times during the research process.

I found that my experience of using heuristic methodology was a very natural process and that the various phases and processes were not usually consciously engaged. This was understood by examining this unique research process itself and finding that I often moved unknowingly through the use of for instance, the processes of tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling and focusing.

I moved lightly from one process or phase to another process or phase, my rich inner life of thought and knowledge moving in a wavelike motion as I considered new information. Lightly moving over material, I would identify with the particular focus or concern at the time and stop for intense concentration on the particular, rereading words and building pictures of the topic under scrutiny, connecting concepts, relating issues, tracking developments, confirming views, modifying thinking and cherishing the insights.

During periods I identified as immersion and open to all of the possibilities of the current topic, I had the growing awareness that almost everything in life seemed to be connected to the project. Whether awake or sleeping and dreaming, everything seemed to be able to contribute to clarifying, crystallising, illuminating and making meaning of the phenomenon under study. Often while I was involved in some relatively solitary activity such as walking or gardening I would also be self-dialoguing, ruminating on the multiple meanings of the specific focus of concern at the time and building on discoveries.

These times of close immersion in the topic where I engaged in conversations with myself, asked questions, sought answers and noted emerging insights

would eventually give way to periods where I experienced the phase of incubation. I would withdraw from focused study and seek distraction to relax and rest, but in a receptive state of mind in places I didn't expect to find it, I would have further revelations about the topic. Such aha moments when hunches and intuitions fell into place, when hidden meanings were disclosed and all appeared to be coming clear, I recognised as phases of illumination.

The illumination phase requires the action of reflection, the ability to look back over a whole experience. This action often revealed hidden aspects, images and insights and illuminate or cast light on the sought meaning of the particular human experience. While some parts of the study phenomenon could be understood in isolation and explicated, full and complete understanding of the various layers of the phenomenon could not begin to occur until the participant data had been collected.

The final phase of heuristic research is a creative portrayal of the research knowing. This phase has had its own micro-processes as I have gathered together the wealth of data to create a narrative depiction of the research findings. To provide a coherent document in the spirit of discovery I have used the heuristic processes and phases to fully understand how the complex layers of my personal experience of the study phenomenon, the experiences of the study participants and the experience of others from my exploration of literature should be presented.

Although my understanding of the research quest was found and enhanced in many diverse places and from a wide range of literature, this knowing was limited to a guiding and supportive role. Literature certainly provided me with valuable knowing but in undertaking heuristic research I needed to understand the immediacy of the experience of the phenomenon under study. It was only by talking with, listening to and dwelling in the rich descriptions of the experiences of people who have experienced the phenomenon that the meaning of the experience would be revealed. I understood that participant data was essential in heuristic research.

The process of selecting participants for the study

In order to provide data of a depth and richness to fully reveal the essence of the phenomenon under study, heuristic research demands participants and having participants in a research project involves various considerations. In this, a nursing study, the participant group revealed itself as the quest was surfaced and potential ways to explore it were considered. The decision to have nurses as the study participants became obvious as I dwelt on the core reasons why I wanted to explore the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit for this nursing thesis.

Drawing together the impetus for the study, my personal experience as a human and in particular, a nurse, the apparent lack of understanding by nurses of their own spiritual needs, an interest in the therapeutic self of the nurse in holistic care, and the actual experience of spirituality in the natural environment, all pointed to the participant group being nurses. By interviewing and obtaining

data from nurses I felt that I would be able to illuminate what I intuited as crucial areas for nurses and the discipline of nursing. These areas include an understanding of the spiritual dimension of experiences in the natural environment, the importance of nurses knowing ourselves before caring for others and the need for nurses to participate in the global awareness of the sustainability of planet Earth. In writing about nurses I would also be foregrounding the nurse as a person, a unique human who has health and wellbeing concerns similar to her clients. I believe that the human dimension of the nurse is a neglected focus in nursing literature and in the body of nursing knowledge.

I determined that six participants would provide a depth of knowing of the phenomenon required for a heuristic study. I decided to interview six registered nurses from no particular practice area or workplace as I felt that this would potentially allow a diverse group to be interviewed and a wide range of experiences to be gathered. The study is located in New Zealand and although the participants were not all born in New Zealand, they are all registered to work in this country.

Once the participant group was defined, I then moved to ethical considerations for the study, recruitment and then to participant data collection.

Participant ethical considerations

In undertaking a research project involving participants, the researcher must consider ethical issues aimed at protecting the participants from any risk or harm. When considering any research project, there must be a balance

between the risk to the participants involved and the benefit of the particular research outcome. Participation in a research project must be voluntary with participant identity and confidentiality preserved. Participants must understand the purpose of the study, consent to their involvement and know that they are able to withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty. Ethical approval for the research study must be obtained from various bodies dependent on who the participants are and where they are from.

Because I chose to interview nurses from no particular practice area or workplace, Ethics Approval from only one body was required. Ethics Approval was sought from the Human Ethics Committee, Victoria University of Wellington to interview six nurses and approval was gained in November 2002 (Appendix One). Once approval was gained recruitment began.

Participant recruitment

I placed an advertisement in the Victoria University of Wellington, Post Graduate Newsletter inviting registered nurses who could articulate that their human spirit was positively influenced in the natural environment to participate in the study. From this advertisement I recruited three nurses, one of whom withdrew immediately after the interview and before any transcription could be done. The two audio tapes from this interview were stored as outlined in the Human Ethics Application (Appendix Two) and were not used as data or drawn on to inform the study. As this participant withdrew at a very early stage in the project there was still time to recruit six participants. As I progressed my study and talked about the project with others at the university, at work and socially,

possible participants made themselves known to me. By this snowballing effect I recruited a further four nurses thus completing the group of six participants.

As each potential participant was recruited I provided them with an Information Sheet (Appendix Three) and Consent Form (Appendix Four) and also made myself and my supervisor available for any discussion required. In this way any potential participant would be able to be made fully aware of the details of the project before agreeing to participate.

I mainly used e-mail to communicate with people who responded to my advertisement for participants and this was quick and efficient and provided an audit trail. I provided information to any interested and potential participant who responded to my advertisement and if I didn't receive a reply after they had received this initial information they were not re-contacted. In this way the first six people that could articulate that their spirit was positively influenced in the natural environment and made themselves available, became the participants for the study. I feel that this provided a transparency in the process and that it was clear that there had been no coercion to participate in the study.

For the purposes of this study I chose not to collect demographic data as I felt that it would not necessarily add crucial meaning to the research topic. However, some broad demographic data was elicited before or during the interviews. Prior to the study five of the participants were known to me either through work or study and one was not. Of the six participants included in the study and at the time of interviewing, one was working in education, one was working in a management role and the other four were working in various clinical roles. One participant identified as being from overseas, one identified

as Maori, one identified as male and of the six, five of the participants were then living in the North Island. The participants are identified by pseudonyms in an effort to protect their identity. Four of the participants chose their own pseudonyms and two of the participants offered me a short list from which I chose theirs.

Participant data collection

As each of the study participants was recruited they were invited to have an audio-taped informal conversational interview with me that was expected to last between one and two hours. The conversational interviews took place between February and August 2003 at a time suitable to the participants and at a place nominated by them. Interview locations included my home, the homes of two participants, the university, one participant's workplace and a motel. One interview took place in the South Island and the other five were all conducted in Wellington. I provided refreshments appropriate to the time of day and this varied from fresh fruit for a sunny afternoon interview, cookies for morning or afternoon interviews, and a home cooked dinner for an evening interview.

At the beginning of each interview and once we were settled, I briefly discussed with each participant, the expectation of the conversational style of the interview. I began each interview by asking each participant to describe an experience in which their spirit was positively influenced in the natural environment. I used an Interview Guide (Appendix Five) to prompt for further expansion if required and apart from the opening question the only other question I had determined I would also ask each participant was if they felt that

having their spirit positively influenced in the natural environment had any effect on their nursing practice.

I wanted the participants to provide examples of the study phenomenon as they were experienced and valued. I withheld personal beliefs, values and ideas as far as possible and allowed the participants to explore and describe in detail the meaning of their experiences for themselves. Each interview lasted approximately 60 – 90 minutes which seemed to be the length of time that the participants took to feel that they had been able to fully describe their experiences of the phenomenon being researched.

As the interviews proceeded, participants often raised specific issues of importance to the study that hadn't been raised before. When this happened I would usually introduce this topic during the next interview if the participant had not spontaneously raised it themselves. This allowed commonalities of experience to emerge. For instance, the related concepts of recycling and conservation of the planet emerged in this way as did the activity and dimensions of gardening.

The early exploration of the participant data

The audio-taped interviews took place over a six month period and were transcribed by me from between a few days to two months following each interview. This was a lengthy process but it was also enormously valuable. The process of transcribing enabled me to reconnect with, and immerse myself in the interview material. Each interview came alive again, the participant's voice

was heard, images perceived and the stories in all of their detail provided me with rich meanings of the research phenomenon.

During the months of interviewing and transcribing I was fore-grounding research processes of a technical nature as I grappled with replaying audio-tapes, typing accurately and checking transcription accuracy. As I progressed from one participant interview to the next, I was also fore-grounding each of the participant's stories. Descriptions of new experiences built on previous knowing, and similarities and differences were noted.

For the remaining months of 2003 and on into January 2004, I explored the participant transcripts repeatedly for concepts highlighting the research phenomenon in all of its understood dimensions. In this period, although I was seeking the essence of the phenomenon from the participant data, the participant data also gave rise to continued exploration and discovery of meaning from other sources and from nursing and other literature.

When I had become fully cognisant with the stand-out or significant concepts and meanings in each transcript, I took the transcripts in the order of the interviews and listed the highlighted concepts in a table. I found that some concepts were common to most or all of the individual transcripts and that some concepts were specific to only one or two transcripts. Each participant as a unique human being expressed the meanings of their experiences in their own unique way. This gave much descriptive variation.

However, with repeated readings of the transcripts and attention to the context, I found that some concepts were similar to others and these commonalities of experience of the phenomenon were grouped together. For example, while one

participant described the concept of conservation, another referred to the act of preservation of the environment and another to the activity of recycling. As I listed the concepts and loosely grouped them I also listed against them the relevant page numbers of each transcript. This solidly prepared base was very useful when, at a much later date I began to work with the participant data and write it up.

Having reached this stage in developing the participant data I left the data and returned to the literature, and firstly to nursing literature. One of the reasons I did this was to seek some background to what I had discovered from the study participants. Also, by immersing myself in relevant nursing literature I expected to find a framework that I could use to articulate the participant data. My initial exploration of nursing literature had focused on the concept of spirituality. I now needed to explore nursing literature in more depth to find work that supported my developing conclusions following my initial exploration of the participant transcripts.

Concluding comments

Understanding the chosen methodology for any research project and knowing how to use it is crucial to a positive outcome. At the time that the study quest was emerging I was also exploring various methodologies to find the one that would fit the project and also my skills as a neophyte researcher. In considering the work of Richardson (1998) and Johnstone (1999) I was taking what I

already knew about the germinating research topic and posing questions to see how their methodologies performed in the context of these ideas. By rigorous scrutiny of the personal aspects of the potential research topic, the concepts that I wanted to explore and the possible methodologies I could use, I came to the conclusions that I did.

By exploring the work of Richardson and Johnstone I also discovered the strengths in Moustakas' (1990) methodology. The understanding that I gained from exploring all three of these methodologies enabled me to take with me into the research process, confidence that the subjective is relevant and that writing generally, and creative writing especially, are valid tools to both explore and explicate knowing. I acknowledge that these aspects of the work of Richardson and Johnstone have influenced both the process and presentation of the thesis and supported Moustakas' methodology in this research study.

Identifying the research quest and revealing Moustakas' methodology as the one to use for the research study, drove the need to understand how the methodology worked. The exploration of some of Moustakas' influences gave another layer, dimension or expansion to the methodology. Through this delving I surfaced the theories and principles or bones behind the methodology and gained a better understanding of the processes and phases and how I might use them. This knowing assured me of the reliability of the methodology and it also encouraged me to seek the best methods to explore and then explicate the data. During the research project I would return again and again to Moustakas' descriptions of the processes and phases to confirm that my use of them was sound.

I found that using heuristic methodology is a very personal and connecting experience. The guiding processes and phases with the singular aim of discovery, involve a deep concentration on the various aspects of the study quest and a continual return to the internal frame of reference. The data are vivid, full of imagery and descriptive. Fully involved in the research I recognised that I was reflective and reflexive; open and aware, receptive and continually seeking; introspective, contemplative; thinking, considering and puzzling. During such times, by necessity I was often on my own, all-absorbed, reading, thinking and writing.

Although I had this clear and powerful knowing from my own personal experience and my initial exploration of the literature, the involvement of participants to further explore the study phenomenon was justified. The depth, richness and texture of the participant data were all obvious the first time I listened to the participants describing their experiences of the spiritually beneficial effects of the natural environment. This thick layering became even more vivid in subsequent immersion in the described experiences during transcription and then in repeated readings of the transcript texts.

In this chapter I introduced heuristic methodology that was developed by Moustakas (1990) following his work on *Loneliness* (1961; 1972; 1975). Moustakas acknowledged the influence of a number of people as contributing to his development of heuristics as a qualitative methodology and I have described

some of the work of these men. I then described the processes and phases of heuristic methodology and my experience of using them.

Following this I described the processes of participant selection, ethics approval, participant recruitment, participant data collection and the initial exploration of the participant data. I have also described how I listed and grouped the significant concepts from the participant data thus leaving a comprehensive base to return to once a framework for articulation of this data had been found.

Having described the guiding methodology for the study and completed an initial exploration of the participant data in this chapter, in Chapter Three I will describe the extant literature that informed the development of the central thesis concerns. Of necessity this literature comes not only from the discipline of nursing but also from other literary genres such as memoir, nature writing, environmental psychology and gardening.

CHAPTER THREE: HOW LITERATURE INFORMED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL THESIS CONCERNS

With the data from the participant transcripts back-grounded until I found a framework to articulate it for the thesis, I went back to the literature to rediscover previously found and informing material and also to discover new material. It was now January 2004 and I returned to the detail and content of literature that I had left in May 2002, ready to explore it again and in more depth. Although I continued to find relevant literature until much later in the project, this was the time in the research process when I searched most widely, deeply and significantly for literature that would fully inform the project.

I returned firstly to the nursing literature. I did this so that I could consolidate the knowing I had gained from the participants and also so that I could ground the research within a nursing context and importantly, within an holistic nursing context. I believe that the central concerns of the thesis, the related concepts of spirituality, the natural environment and the qualities of holistic nurses that include self-care and the therapeutic use of self, are also central holistic nursing concerns. The American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) in Dossey & Guzzetta (2000) asserts that:-

Practicing holistic nursing requires nurses to integrate self-care in their lives. Self-responsibility leads the nurse to greater awareness of the interconnectedness with self, others, nature, and God/Life Force/Absolute/Transcendent. This awareness further enhances the nurses' understanding of all individuals and their relationships to the

human and global community, and permits nurses to use this awareness to facilitate the healing process (p.28).

In the first instance I went back to the influential nursing literature concerned with the concepts of spirituality and spiritual needs, seeking to define the concept of spirituality for the thesis. While I have briefly described the influential and seminal spirituality literature of Ross (1994; 1995; 1997) and Golberg (1998) in Chapter One, I felt that the thesis required some clear definitions of what the central concepts of the study quest meant as a basis for explication of the phenomenon.

To find definitions from nursing for the three key concerns of the thesis, the concepts of spirituality, the natural environment and the qualities of the holistic nurse that include self-care and the therapeutic use of self, I reviewed the spirituality literature, the edited work of Schuster & Brown (1994) and the work of Travelbee (1971). This review proved valuable in defining spirituality and the therapeutic use of self but limitations were soon obvious, particularly in regard to defining the natural environment. Finding literature to support the thesis premise is essential and once again my search widened considerably and into other literary genres and from disciplines other than nursing.

In this chapter I will discuss the influential literature that informed the central concerns of the thesis and has not already been discussed in Chapters One and Two. The literature was discovered from within the dominant Western culture and is Anglo-American situated. I will begin by describing my search for

relevant literature from both nursing and other literary genres and discuss the body of non-nursing literature that supported and guided the development of the research study. With the aim of developing the knowing as a nursing concern, from this point on in the discussion I have tried to use nursing literature as far as possible. At times however and particularly in regard to the discussion on the natural environment, the literature that illuminated the thesis topic for me was mainly from other genres.

Continuing with the narrative style of the thesis I will then describe the concept of holism, holistic nursing practice, the therapeutic self and the therapeutic use of self, and the need for self-care. Then, having already determined in Chapter One that the care of the spiritual dimension is essential, I will discuss the concept more widely, move to defining spirituality and describe the role of nursing in meeting the spiritual needs of clients.

I will then fore-ground nursing's human – environmental connection and discuss the insights from indigenous cultures of this connection, describe eco-spirituality and the influential literature on the concept of the natural environment that allows me to define the natural environment for the thesis. I will then describe our human connection to the natural environment and discuss the beneficial effects of gardens. Finally I will describe examples of the awareness of the spiritual benefit of the natural environment that were found in nursing literature and make some concluding comments.

As I previously noted in Chapter One, searching for relevant nursing literature concerned with the connection of nursing and the natural environment had proved challenging at times. By the time the study quest had emerged so too had a method of searching for informing literature that continued throughout the thesis.

The search for relevant literature

There were three clear periods in the research project when searching for literature was my main activity in the process. The first of these was in the early stages of the project when literature was sought generally and from both nursing and other sources. This period included searching for nursing literature to establish the essential nursing focus for the study, searching for literature to better understand heuristic methodology and searching for literature from other literary genres to understand our human connection to the natural environment.

The second period was after the participant data had been collected and a further search for supporting nursing and other literature was necessary. This was the time when I did my major literature search endeavouring to clarify knowing surfaced from previous literature and from the participant data. The third period of searching for literature was around the time of bringing closure to the thesis and writing it up; a time when frameworks and synthesising were necessary and relevant literature needed to be in place to clearly tie ideas together.

Seeking nursing literature

My journal notes from the beginning of the thesis study clearly indicate that finding literature from nursing by way of electronic database searching on the developing study concern was difficult. While the spirituality literature was bountiful, literature essentially concerned with the connection of the human spiritual dimension and the natural environment was more elusive to track. Although the seminal work of Ross (1994; 1995; 1997) and Golberg (1998) illuminated the related concepts of spirituality, connectedness and the natural environment, exhaustive nursing database searches I conducted using the keywords, connectedness and/or natural environment proved futile in surfacing literature on the concepts.

However, by returning again and again to the hard copy spirituality literature seeking insight and understanding, these related concepts which are embedded in the literature were revealed. Although these concepts are clearly discussed in this literature, they are not presented as keywords in abstracts or found to have been developed beyond the spirituality literature. During this repeated exploration of the spirituality literature I established a method of searching that slowly revealed important insights and understanding.

This was the time when I found a wealth of nursing literature that was new to me that informed my understanding of the connection of the positive influence of the natural environment and the human spirit. Immersed in this literature I closely studied the reference lists of any illuminating piece of writing to find related works. This concentrated examination exposed invaluable cross-referencing of both relevant work and authorship. Although this meant that

much of the literature I found by cross-referencing was retrospective work, searching by author allowed more recent work to be discovered. Importantly, I believe that over the years of the study I have managed to locate relevant and up to date literature.

Seeking literature from other literary genres

I also based my search for relevant literature from other literary genres on the related concepts of spirituality and the natural environment and also the strong belief that stories generally provide understanding of the human condition. Like Anderson & Runciman (1995) I firmly believe that writing concerned with the natural environment raises our awareness of the essential components of spirituality, relationship and meaning in life. I realised that almost any writing on the concept of the natural environment had the potential to provide some insight into its effect on the human spiritual dimension.

I was not aware of any electronic database search method for such works apart from library catalogues and those that I searched using similar keywords that I used when searching for nursing literature produced the same kind of outcome. I began my searching by building on my personal interests in reading that include autobiographical and journal writing and started including material on the emerging research concerns. I ranged far and wide and found most of the influential literature by exploring many bookshop and library shelves across many classifications in both Australia and New Zealand.

In one bookshop I would find a writer's work in the gardening section and in the biography/autobiography of another. Many works provided other references to

follow-up on and some material of importance appeared serendipitously while I was searching in a bookshop or library for a previously identified resource. Quite quickly I had a growing body of literature that I found from many different places that guided and sustained me throughout the whole research process.

By using this method of cross-referencing nursing literature, close examination of bookshop and library shelves and following up on possible links from found resources, I discovered material that I believe proves the strength of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spiritual dimension.

Guiding literature

The quantity and range of writing that I found from other literary genres that connected human spirituality and the natural environment, was huge. Often defying easy categorisation, the bulk of the writing that I found of importance to my knowing came mainly from American writers. These writers seemed to be able to articulate their experience of the closely entwined spiritual dimension and the natural environment in a way that was both intuited and obvious.

Fully absorbed, I read widely seeking insight and had many aha moments. I found, as indicated by Anderson & Runciman (1995), that many of the writers, while writing about their experiences in the natural environment, had clearly had their awareness raised of their spiritual dimension, their various human - other relationships and the meaning in life. In the writing that I explored I identified

three linked themes that influenced my understanding of the study phenomenon. These themes included the significance of personal health crises in raising an awareness of the connection of the spiritual dimension and the natural environment; writing that acknowledges that connection and as a result is concerned with local and global conservation; and writing that variously discusses the connection of spirituality and the natural environment.

In their writing of personal life changing health crises, the natural environment is a central concept in Carman (1983; 1992), Ehrlich, (1995), Dillard (2001) and Scott's (2003) stories. As I read about the experiences of each of these women, I was reminded of the powerful insight that I had gained from reading about French's (1999) health crisis that I described in Chapter One; each story similar but different.

Recovering from a severe spinal injury and limited to her immediate surroundings with time to observe and reflect, Carman (1983) finds that her connection to the natural environment and her garden help her heal and records her day to day observances over many years in a garden journal. In her later work, a collection of writing from a gardening diary written for a weekly New Zealand magazine, Carman (1992) begins by reiterating the beneficial effects her garden has to her healing following further spinal surgery.

With her heart severely affected when she was struck by lightening on her Wyoming land, Ehrlich (1995) is forced to move from the wide open spaces to the seaside in California to be nearer family support and specialist treatment. In

this work Ehrlich writes of her experience of healing and recovering from her health crisis. Like Carman her boundaries are limited to the immediate and the focus is on the detail of her connection to place and meaning in life.

Much earlier, a health crisis led Dillard (2001) to seek a closer relationship with the natural environment. Following a severe bout of pneumonia in 1971, Dillard spent some time living alone at Tinker Creek in Virginia in contemplation of the wonder of nature, the human condition and her relationship with the Divine. This classic work highlights the connection of the spiritual with the natural environment.

Scott's (2003) work is also clearly about the connection of the spiritual and the natural environment. Describing what she clearly understands to be a spiritual experience, Scott (2003) a psychotherapist, writes about the beginning of her healing pilgrimage in the natural environment following a severe back injury. Seeking comfort from agonising pain, Scott started walking with her clients in what was to become a life changing experience for her both personally and professionally.

Each of these women writes in quite different ways about their healing in the natural environment but all of their stories are clearly about the spiritual dimension and wellbeing. The phenomenon of a raised spiritual awareness following a health crisis is understood by Reed (1992) who comments that,

... spirituality is an ever-present, sometimes dominant, part of human experience. As such, it is integral to health – health as defined not necessarily in terms of a cure of physical illness but in terms of a sense

of wholeness or well-being. In addition, health-related experiences frequently sensitize an individual to spiritual dimensions (p. 351).

A health crisis that raises a person's awareness of their spiritual dimension is a transformative experience and the life of the person who has this kind of experience is changed. Like health crises, other significant life events have the potential for major changes in awareness. Martin (1994) believes that, "[L]ife transition stories transform. They connect us to the places of our birth and our life as lived" (p. 77). The stories of both Lindbergh (1955) and Bass (1991) are such stories of transformation.

At a particular time in her life and seeking a way to live "in grace" ... with "an inner harmony, essentially spiritual, which can be translated into outward harmony" (p. 23), Lindbergh (1955) takes time on a beach holiday to reflect, contemplate and meditate on the perennial issues in life, her "own individual balance of life, work and human relationships" (p. 9). Using the metaphor of waves turning up the treasure of found objects such as shells, Lindbergh's mind, "left to its ponderings, brings up its own treasures of the deep" (front fly-leaf). During this period of reflection and consideration Lindbergh uncovers what she values in her life.

For Bass (1991) too, a winter spent in an isolated part of Montana was life-changing. During the winter he writes of, a time of living within the structure of the seasons of nature, Bass spent time seeking his authentic self and being creative. It was a time when he made decisions about what was important in his life, his personal relationships and where he would live in the future. While

some stories such as these don't fully articulate a spiritual – natural environment connection, I believe that they strongly evoke it.

The fragile existence of the natural environment is unarguably a human concern and much of the writing that has supported and guided my knowing deals with this concern in some way. Many people who seek pleasure in and connection with the natural environment also share a concern for the degradation of the planet and are or have been active in conservation, preservation and sustainability issues. Such well known and influential American writers include, McPhee, (1979; 1990); Muir, (1989); Gore, (1993); Williams, T., (1995; 2002); Lopez, (1999); McKibben, (1999); and Kingsolver, (2002).

Be they writing of the mountains and forests of California (Muir, 1989), the rivers and open spaces of Alaska (McPhee, 1979), the desert in Utah (Williams, T., 1995; 2002) or of many other places, the pleasure that these writers experience in the natural environment is clear in their writing. Right close alongside this personal pleasure and reverence will be their desire for humanity to live in harmony with the land. These writers all have strong concerns about such issues as human degradation of the planet, climate change and a need for changes in thinking if we want to continue to have wild and meaningful spaces.

Of some importance is Williams', J. (2002) assertion that industrialisation has led to a disconnection with and a lack of care for the environment. Such disconnection and lack of care for the natural environment is especially poignant in the work of Williams, T. (2002) who is strongly and spiritually

connected to the desert and feels that “[T]his is family, kinship with the desert” (p. 157). This sort of belief seems for many, to lead naturally to actions to preserve our life sustaining planet.

In my extensive search for supporting and guiding literature I discovered a significant amount of writing by people from many diverse backgrounds and locations that directly linked human spirituality and the natural environment. This writing came from writers in America (Snyder, 1995; Williams, T. 1995; 2002; Ackerman, 1999; 2002), New Zealand (Kearney, 1997; Park, 2003; Batten, 2005), Australia (Timms, 2001) and Japan (Keane, 2002) and influenced my understanding of the many different ways people express their spirituality in relation to the natural environment.

The work of both Snyder (1995) and Williams, T. (1995; 2002) explores various spiritual and religious, amongst other, connections with the natural environment. Both of these writers understand that some ancient cultures living in close relationship with the land have tended to retain a reverence for the rhythm and pattern of the life of the Earth in their spirituality and religions. On the other hand, the urbanised Western cultures often attempt to exist in what can only be disharmony with the land. People like Snyder and Williams, T. have learnt what it is to live in spiritual harmony with the land.

Kearney (1997) too, also has a strong connection to the land and the life giving seasons. She has an interest in the spirituality of women and spirituality beyond religion and in her work, interviewed other women about their spirituality,

Kearney found that many like her, made connections between their spirituality and the natural environment. For some of the women that Kearney interviewed ritual was an important aspect of their spirituality that connected them to the natural environment. Ritual is something that Batten (2005) who is committed “to personal, community and ecological wellbeing” (frontispiece), values as a way of keeping us connected to the land.

Ackerman (1995; 2002) is concerned with the connectedness and interaction of human, other sentient beings and the natural environment. While Ackerman’s garden is important to her, so is the wider environment. She acknowledges that a balance must be kept between the cultivated planting and the nearby wild creatures who share her spaces. Her connection with the natural environment is practical, joyful and reverent. Ackerman (1995) describes her spirituality as eco-spirituality and with the wide natural environment her church, describes herself as “an earth ecstatic” (p. 109). Ackerman’s (2002) relationship with the natural environment is strongly spiritual. “There is a way of sitting quietly and beholding nature which is a form of meditation or prayer, and like those healing acts it calms the spirit” (p. 6).

Our connection with the land is historical and Park (2003) an ecologist, in his work described as “[P]art ecology, part history, part personal odyssey” (inside fly-leaf), believes that it shapes our cultures. “[S]ome landscapes can tell us more about ourselves than others” but inevitably over time “the land works on us and, generation after generation, shapes a new culture” (p. 15). Timms (2001) explores this relationship as he learns about the land around his home in the Australian bush and makes a garden sympathetic to the area.

The historical and cultural connection to the land is also described by Keane (2002), a landscape architect in his writing about landscapes and gardens in Kyoto, Japan.

As people live on the land, as they build their homes and temples, towns and cities, they form the world around them into the shape of their philosophies. Their social structures and spiritual mindsets take physical form – as mass and space, material and void – and become the world they live in (p. 9).

The use of space in a Japanese garden is symbolic and relational and has strong spiritual and cultural meaning. In Keane (2002) they are described as “both a microcosm of the natural universe and a clear expression of our humanity, mirroring how we think, worship, and organise our lives and communities” (back cover). By replicating the landforms of the wider environment in their gardens, the Japanese bring their ancient connection with the elements of the wild natural environment into their personal spaces.

The exploration of work such as this expanded my understanding of the kinds of situations in life where people experience a raised awareness of their spiritual dimension in the natural environment. I also gained an increased understanding of the cultural connectedness of spirit, land and meaning in life. In addition I became much more aware of the significance of local and global sustainability issues to many people who recognise their connection of spirituality and the natural environment.

With the support of guiding literature I returned to a concentrated exploration of nursing literature that could clearly trace the central thesis components of

holistic nursing care, the human spiritual dimension and the natural environment and describe them for the thesis.

Within the discipline of nursing I believe that our human connection to the natural environment is clearly an holistic nursing concern. From my growing understanding of the study phenomenon gathered from the study participants and from literature, I was also building the belief that our human health and wellbeing needs require holistic nursing care and practice.

A brief discussion of the concepts of holism and holistic in nursing

The concepts of whole and healing are central to holistic nursing care and practice. The central aim of holistic nursing care is healing and Quinn (1997) describes the root of the word healing as coming from the “Anglo-Saxon word *haelan*, which means to be or to become whole” (p. 1). In Dossey & Guzzetta (2000), the AHNA are identified as saying that, with the aim of healing, holistic nurses utilize

... two views regarding holism: that holism involves identifying the interrelationships of the bio-psycho-social-spiritual dimensions of the person, recognising that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; and that holism involves understanding the individual as a unitary whole in mutual process with the environment (p. 28).

I understand that to care (w)holistically is to work with the whole mind, body and spirit or, to use a term coined by Watson (1995), the “mindbodyspirit” (p. 63) of a person, a human connected to the wider environment. I believe that Watson’s term mindbodyspirit accurately portrays the notion of a whole person and I have chosen to continue using mindbodyspirit when referring to this notion in the rest of the thesis.

Thus, holistic nursing care is integrative in that it considers all aspects of a person’s needs on their healing journey. Holistic nurses are interested in the unique lived experience of each client that they care for. Bishop & Scudder (1997) assert that such holistic care “includes personal, aesthetic, and moral care, dimensions of being that are usually considered spiritual” (p. 106). Caring for these dimensions is an aspect of holistic nursing care that provides essential meaning in the life of the nurse and the client. Informed by Dossey & Guzzetta (2000), I understand that holistic nurses use the bio-psycho-social-spiritual model informed by natural systems theory to guide nursing care and healing.

Importantly for this thesis is the view of holism described by Dossey & Guzzetta (2000) involving the understanding of “the individual as a unitary whole in mutual process with the environment” (p. 28). In her work on the concept of the environment, Kleffel (1994) describes the concept of wholeness as

... one huge entity that is comprised of many patterns or elements that are united into a whole that is greater than its elements. The whole of our earth is a part of the whole universe, which is part of a whole cosmos (p.11).

I understand this to mean that every element that constitutes the planet Earth, including humans, is part of this whole and that humans have responsibilities to

care for every other inter-related element. Therefore, holistic nursing practice is concerned with caring for others within the wider environment.

A description of holistic nursing practice

Holistic nursing practice is person centred and relational and requires particular qualities in the self of the nurse and an holistic approach to caring for others on their healing journey. Holistic nurses value intuition and diverse ways of knowing and embrace the use of alternative or complimentary therapies.

Holistic nurses in America are guided in their practice by the AHNA, *Holistic Nursing Core Values and Standards of Practice* as described in Dossey & Guzzetta, (2000). Holistic nurses in New Zealand currently do not have their own association and are guided in their practice, as are holistic nurses in Australia, by the Australian College of Holistic Nurses (ACHN), (2004), *Holistic Nursing Core Values* that have been informed by the AHNA *Core Values and Standards of Practice*.

Although I am familiar with the *ACHN Core Values*, I have chosen to use the AHNA five *Core Values and Standards of Practice* as described by Dossey & Guzzetta, (2000) to inform the thesis. I have done this because I believe that the *AHNA Core Values and Standards of Practice* are fuller and more descriptive and provide a deeper understanding of the concept of holistic nursing and the practice of holistic nursing care than do the *ACHN Core Values*.

Each of the five *AHNA Core Values* is comprised of descriptions of that particular core value followed by *Standards of Practice* to be used by nurses to

meet the requirements of holistic nursing. Although best understood in their entirety, for the purposes of the thesis I have extracted essential and informative aspects from each of the *Core Values* that highlight what I consider to be holistic nursing imperatives.

The aspect that I found to be of most importance for the thesis study from *Core Value One, Holistic Philosophy and Education* (Dossey & Guzzetta, 2000) came from the *Standards of Practice* and identify that holistic nurses “focus on strategies to bring harmony, unity, and healing to the nursing profession” (p. 28). Unity, harmony and healing are important concepts for the nurse herself, for the client and for the practice environment.

The important aspects of the *Standards of Practice* in *Core Value Two; Holistic Ethics, Theories, and Research* were found under the section *Holistic Ethics*. This *Standard of Practice* sets out the requirement that, “Holistic nurses: identify the ethics of caring and its contribution to unity of self, others, nature, and God/Life Force/Absolute/Transcendent as central to holistic nursing practice” (p. 29). Holistic nurses also “engage in activities that respect, nurture, and enhance the integral relationship with the earth, and advocate for the wellbeing of the global community’s economy, education, and social justice” (p. 29). I believe that this *Standard of Practice* goes some way in providing a central guide for holistic nursing practice.

While the first two *Core Values* are more overarching in that they provide a guide to holistic nursing practice, *Core Value Three* is concerned with the important action of *Holistic Nurse Self-Care*. This *Core Value* states that for holistic nurses to be able to care for others, “[H]olistic nurses engage in self-care

and further develop their own personal awareness as being and instrument of healing to better serve self and others” (p. 30). The *Standards of Practice* for *Core Value Three* specify that:-

[H]olistic nurses: recognise that a person’s body-mind-spirit has healing capacities that can be enhanced and supported through self-care practices; identify and integrate self-care strategies to enhance their physical, psychological, sociological, and spiritual wellbeing; recognise and address at-risk health patterns and begin the process of change; consciously cultivate awareness and understanding about the deeper meaning, purpose, inner strengths, and connections with self, others, nature, and God/Life Force/Absolute/Transcendent; use clear intention to care for self and to seek a sense of balance, harmony, and joy in daily life (p. 30).

and “participate in the evolutionary holistic process with the understanding that crisis creates opportunity in any setting” (p. 30).

The AHNA *Core Value Four* is concerned with *Holistic Communication, Therapeutic Environment, and Cultural Diversity*. In regard to communication, holistic nurses “engage in holistic communication to ensure that each person experiences the presence of the nurse as authentic and sincere; there is an atmosphere of shared humanness that includes a sense of connectedness and attention reflecting the individual’s uniqueness” (p. 30).

The accompanying *Standards of Practice* ask holistic nurses to “increase therapeutic and cultural competence skills ... recognise that holistic communication and awareness of individuals is a continuously evolving multi-

level exchange that offers itself through dreams, images, symbols, sensations, meditations and prayers”, and “respect the person’s health trajectory with may be incongruent with conventional wisdom” (p. 31). The importance of this section to the thesis study is that it concerns both the guiding of holistic nursing action and it also involves key elements of spiritual and cultural care.

In regard to the therapeutic environment, “[H]olistic nurses recognise that each person’s environment includes everything that surrounds the individual, both the external and internal (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual), as well as patterns not yet understood” (p. 31). The *Standards of Practice* outline that, “[H]olistic nurses: promote environments conducive to experiencing healing, wholeness and harmony, and care for the person in as healthy an environment as possible” and “recognise that the wellbeing of the ecosystem of the planet is a prior determining condition for the wellbeing of the human” (p. 31). This section provides a deeper understanding of the *Standards of Practice* previously outlined in *Core Value One* and *Two*.

Embracing cultural diversity is also important in holistic nursing care and “[H]olistic nurses recognise each person as a whole being of body-mind-spirit” (p. 31). The *Standards of Practice* point out that “[H]olistic nurses: assess and incorporate the person’s cultural practices, values, beliefs, meaning of health, illness, and risk behaviours in care and health education” (p. 31).

To meet the criteria outlined in these four *Core Values* when caring for clients, holistic nurses are guided by the fifth *Core Value* that outlines the components of the *Holistic Caring Process*. While the detail of this *Core Value* is not important for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to note that skilled

assessment and care planning developed with the client and incorporating their unique needs are necessary for holistic nurses to partner their client on their healing journey.

Guided by these five *Core Values* and *Standards of Practice*, the unique self that each holistic nurse takes into their therapeutic relationship with the client is comprised of particular personal and professional qualities peculiar to that person. The focused use of these qualities in the caring, therapeutic partnership is considered to be the therapeutic use of self, a concept that was first described by Travelbee in 1971.

Describing the therapeutic self and the therapeutic use of self

The therapeutic self is a human condition and the therapeutic use of self is used to describe the essence of the self of an holistic nurse interacting in practice relationships. Travelbee (1971) describes the therapeutic use of self as “the ability to use one’s personality consciously and in full awareness in an attempt to establish relatedness and to structure nursing intervention” (p. 19). To be able to use ones self therapeutically requires an understanding of the human condition and well developed personal qualities. Nurses using their therapeutic self must have insight and an understanding of human behaviours in both self and others and a well developed belief system or philosophy on health and its meaning for people. “To use oneself therapeutically is an art and a science; it requires discipline as well as self insight, reasoning as well as empathy, logic as well as compassion” (p. 19).

Importantly, Travelbee (1971) understood the place of humanity in the universe and held humanness and life as sacred object.

It is to concretize and vividly realise the infinite value of every human being, and to expand and vitalize this realization until it permeates our every contact with others. It is to respect each individual, fully realizing that each person is a one-time-being in this world and hence is irreplaceable (p. 20).

Valuing our humanness, Travelbee (1971) promoted the idea of human-to-human relationships in nursing practice over the more pervasive description of the nurse-to-client relationship in nursing writing. By taking time to establish a rapport in a human-to-human relationship where, “both nurse and ill person perceive and relate to each other as unique human beings (p. 119), ... [T]he relationship is significant and meaningful in that *both* nurse and recipient have needs met as a result of this experience” (p. 123).

In such relationships, both nurse and client are acknowledged as human and both as having needs. By working in partnership to assist a client on their healing journey, both nurse and client have the potential for their needs to be met. This reciprocal interaction is understood by Travelbee (1971) to be a more positive and gratifying relationship than a nurse-to-client relationship and with the additional potential to provide the nurse with “job satisfaction” (p. 124).

Since Travelbee, many other nursing writers have explored the concepts of the therapeutic self and the therapeutic use of self. The concept of the therapeutic self has been variously described as an “healing environment” and a “sacred healing vessel” (Quinn, 1992, p. 27), having a self awareness (Drew, 1997),

being “an instrument of healing” (Dossey & Guzzetta, 2000, p. 6) and being “a healing and caring presence” (Wright & Sayre-Adams, 2000, p.26). I believe that the therapeutic self is what Taylor (1994a) is inferring when she describes nurses as being *fairies in gumboots*.

The intentional use of the therapeutic self has also been variously described as relating using the ordinary self (Taylor, 1994b), acting with “awareness in healing” (Rew, 1996, p.xiii) or “an authenticity of being and becoming” (Watson, 1997, p. 50-51). Watson (1999) has also referred to this experience as a “transpersonal caring moment” (pp. 116-117). Quinn (2000) has expressed this interaction as being one of “right relationship” (p. 19) and Cumbie (2001) as the nurse bringing “an authentic self” (p. 57) to practice interventions.

In addition to the work of Travelbee (1971), it has been the work of Taylor (1992; 1994a; 1994b), and Watson (1997; 1999) that has primarily added to my understanding of the therapeutic use of self. An exploration of Taylor’s (1992; 1994b) work on *Ordinariness in Nursing* and Watson’s (1997; 1999) work describing transpersonal caring, provided me with an expanded understanding of the condition of nurse-as-human and the importance of this notion to the therapeutic self and effective practice relationships and outcomes.

Both Taylor (1994a; 1994b) and Watson (1999) in describing the therapeutic relationship of nurse and client as interacting and reciprocal and therefore potentially beneficial to both, value the humanness of both participants in the

caring, healing intervention. Taylor (1994b) believes that this human condition is the

... phenomenon of ordinariness in nursing, that sense of shared affinity nurses and patients have for one another as humans, that accounts, at least in part, for the caring and curing that occurs when nurses and patients relate to one another as humans in health care contexts (p. 22).

I believe that Watson (1999) in describing the therapeutic intervention as a “transpersonal caring moment” (pp.116-117) agrees with Taylor in that the effectiveness of the interaction is due to the shared humanness of the nurse and client. Importantly, Watson attributes this effectiveness of the interaction as being due to the active use of the spiritual dimensions of the participants. In using this human spiritual dimension, both nurse and client are able to learn from each other important human knowing. A transpersonal caring moment is connecting and possibly transcendent.

If the caring moment is indeed transpersonal – it allows for the presence of the spirit of both – then the event of the moment expands the limits of openness and has the ability to expand human capabilities’ ... in ‘the moment, as well as in the future. The transpersonal caring moment becomes part of the past life history of both persons and presents both with new opportunities. Such an understanding is based upon a belief that we learn from one another how to be human, by identifying ourselves with others or by finding their dilemma in ourselves, and by connecting with the universal human experience. What we all learn from this is self-knowledge and deep wisdom. The self we learn about or

discover is every self; it is universal – the human self. We learn to recognise ourselves in others. This connectedness with other, and yet beyond self and other, keeps alive our common humanity. It helps us to stay connected with the human spirit, helping us to avoid reducing the human being to an object, separate from spirit of self and from the spirit of the wider universe (pp. 116-117).

Thus, I believe that the therapeutic self is an important concept in holistic nursing care and the therapeutic use of self is essential in effective nursing interventions. The quality of the therapeutic relationship is enhanced by the particular qualities that the nurse brings to holistic, healing interventions and these qualities value our humanness with all of our similarities and our differences and diversities and uniqueness of being human.

By acknowledging our oneness as human and using our own world view as a basis for understanding that others have unique beliefs and values, what we know about ourselves can inform our caring, healing interventions with others. Each nursing interaction has the potential to be enlightening and insightful to both the nurse and the client. The skill of the nurse is to bring enough of her self to the interaction to grow the beneficence of the action.

Believing that any and all knowing has the potential to be useful in my nursing practice and that what is beneficial to me may be beneficial to others, I add new knowing to my therapeutic self, my therapeutic vessel. Thus the notion of the therapeutic self is understood by me to mean that I go into any nursing intervention with a self that is multidimensional; a human with a personality imbued with personal and professional knowledge.

I agree with Travelbee (1971) who understood that “the nurse is a human being and, as a human being, is needful. A nurse does not cease being human (or needful) during her” (p. 124) nursing practice. Therefore, for nurses to be able to care holistically and be authentic practitioners they must care for the needful self by actively participating in self-care behaviours themselves.

Knowing how to care for ourselves is critical when we care for others and how we care for ourselves is individual and unique. We need to address our own healing processes in preparation for promoting healing in others and our personal and professional lives need to have a certain balance. I believe that we need to be in a state of wellbeing to provide expert healing care.

The concept of caring for self

As Wright & Sayre-Adams (2000) remind us, *Caring can make you sick*. To avoid burn-out and other outcomes of continual caring in often less than optimum conditions, self care is essential. Both the AHNA *Core Value Three* and one of Watson’s (1998) “11 assumptions related to human care values” (p. 147) clearly state that we must care for ourselves in order to care for others. To care for our self means caring for the dimensions of mind, body and spirit. To care for self means going inward to seek that which makes us whole, our mindbodyspirit one; in harmony and in a state of wellbeing.

In caring for our selves we gain valuable understanding of what and who we are. Recognising that we ourselves are human, holistic beings and as nurses have needs, and that in meeting those needs we may have some understanding of the needs of others, is important in keeping us well to care for

others. With an awareness of our health needs and our illness experiences as well as having an understanding of our personal condition and our behaviour, we are potentially able to understand the human condition of others. By understanding our own experiences and living in a more balanced way, living intentionally and simply, with consciousness and self-awareness, Musker (1994) believes that our nursing interventions will be more authentic.

The spiritual dimension is one of the central concerns of this thesis and holistic nurses are encouraged by Burkhardt (1994a) to nurture themselves and to “pay attention to the spirit or sacred space within” (p. 300). Watson (1999) too, advises holistic nurses to learn the best way to replenish their energy and attend to their need for “regular spiritual, contemplative, meditative centring practice” (p. 179). To sustain our caring role in a state of holistic wellbeing, Wright & Sayre-Adams (2000) suggest that each nurse explore the meaning of spirituality for their own unique self and seek a “safe sacred space from which we can be in the world as a healing and caring presence” (p. 26) in nursing interventions.

The human spiritual dimension is an important component to our human self. In her work in *Postmodern nursing and beyond*, Watson (1999) describes her aim of “promoting a fully embodied spirit (in the personal, expanded notion of what being human means)” (p. 8) in nursing. Looking forward and into the 21st century, Watson’s work describes her vision of a future where people generally will be more interested in seeking inner knowledge, subjective, spiritual and human knowledge and expanding the concept beyond science, of what it means to be fully human.

From this work I understand that Watson is indicating that to become more fully human we need to reconnect with our spiritual selves, our inner core. The terms, spirit and spirituality are derived etymologically from the Latin word for breath, strongly indicating that the concepts are important to life (Burkhardt, 1994a; Burkhardt & Jacobson, 2000). Spirituality has been defined by Burkhardt & Jacobson (2000) as “the essence of our being, which permeates our living and infuses our unfolding awareness of who and what we are, our purpose in being, and our inner resources; and shapes our life journey” (p. 91). However, they also state that, “[S]pirituality is perhaps the most basic, yet least understood aspect of holistic nursing” ... often eluding “the cognitive mind because it is intangible in many ways and defies quantification” (p. 91).

Discussion of the concept of spirituality

For the past three decades, taking us to the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, Anglo-American nursing writing on the related concepts of spirituality and spiritual needs has increased and now occupies a significant and substantial place in nursing literature. As we consider a move from the Cartesian reductionist split of mind, body and spirit in healthcare, to a more holistic, integrative approach, what Watson (1995) considers a maturing process for nursing, like Watson (1999) I see this interest in spirituality reflected in a general Anglo-American societal interest in the concept. As I have already noted, there is much writing to be found on the subject of spirituality in a variety of literary genres.

At various times both prior to commencing this thesis study and during it, I have explored the nursing literature on spirituality and spiritual needs and discovered that nursing writers have considered the various aspects of spirituality in depth. They have considered and analysed the meaning of spirituality by reviewing the literature (Burkhardt, 1989; Golberg, 1994; Dyson, Cobb & Forman, 1997; Baldacchino & Draper, 2001), and considered the aspects of spirituality prior to commencing their own research studies (Ross, 1994). Research studies have focused on specific populations such as older persons (Ross, 1997) and women (Burkhardt, 1994a; 1994b). They have described spiritual coping strategies in illness (Baldacchino & Draper, 2001), and considered the importance of the spiritual dimension to clients health, wellbeing and quality of life (Ross, 1995).

Both Reed (1992) and Burkhardt (1994a; 1994b) describe spirituality as relational and interconnected. Reed (1992) describes this relatedness as being able to be experienced intrapersonally, interpersonally and transpersonally and Burkhardt (1994a) believes that “[I]t is within the self that spirituality is experienced and expressed. Relationship with self, a core manifestation of spirituality, encompasses one’s being (the essence of who one is), one’s knowing (both content and process), and one’s doing (the actions of living)” (p. 288).

Spirituality and spiritual needs are central to this thesis and are clearly recognised as significant human and holistic nursing concepts. From an in-depth exploration of writing on spirituality and spiritual needs, I found some commonalities – that spirituality is difficult to define; that spirituality is an important concept in nursing; that the spiritual dimension is an important aspect

in holistic nursing care and that spirituality is a broad, immeasurable concept experienced within the person, with other and transcendentally.

Although accepted as difficult to define, for the purposes of this thesis I feel that some guide to a general understanding of what spirituality means should be attempted. In doing so, I wish to include what I consider is an important insight into why spirituality may be so difficult to define for the discipline of nursing involved in nursing people from many different cultural backgrounds and understandings.

Attempting a definition of spirituality

Markham (1998), a theologian, asserts “that ‘spirituality in health care’ is primarily an Anglo-American debate” and that “the health care understanding of ‘spirituality’ is a secularized version of the Christian understanding of spirituality” (p. 74). Markham makes it clear that there are many other approaches to spirituality and that the important thing is to “treat people holistically” (p. 86). I accept that this thesis sits very much within the Anglo-American context described by Markham and found that his work provided me with an important awareness from which to consider a definition that would provide a general understanding of the concept to support the study discoveries.

Continuing to seek an appropriate definition of spirituality I explored McSherry’s (2000) comprehensive work on spirituality. I felt that this work had particular resonance for me following my understanding gained from Markham. McSherry acknowledges that some of the content of his work “reflects a Judeo-Christian approach to spirituality” (p. viiii) because that is his cultural location. The work

explores the Anglo-American history of spirituality and nursing, various definitions of spirituality and amongst other things, also looks at the education and skills required by nurses to provide spiritual care.

One of the nursing writers on spirituality that McSherry referenced from his exploration of the various definitions of the concept was Reed (1992). I returned to this work and felt that it provided the most insightful definition of spirituality for the thesis. Reed (1992), in working within a developmental-contextual worldview of human beings describes spirituality as

... the propensity to make meaning through a sense of relatedness to dimensions that transcend the self in such a way that empowers and does not devalue the individual. This relatedness may be experienced intrapersonally (as a connectedness within oneself), interpersonally (in the context of others and the natural environment), and transpersonally (referring to a sense of relatedness to the unseen, God, or power greater than the self and ordinary resources). There is an expansion of boundaries inward, outward, upward. Spirituality then is manifested through these various patterns of connectedness ... (p. 350).

In addition, Reed (1992) goes on to say that spirituality is potentially ever present and is therefore integral to health.

I believe that spirituality is important to people, that it is personally meaningful and unique to the person discussing their beliefs, but with some connecting or common threads. These common threads include; a strong desire for meaning in life, an understanding of our human connection to other sentient beings and the wider universe, and a personal world view or philosophy for life, all of which

have the personal benefits of wellbeing. Subsequently, spirituality has come to be understood by me as a multi-factorial concept best described as the spiritual dimension of a person.

While spirituality may be difficult to define, Jacobson & Burkhardt (1989) consider that “spirituality” is the “cornerstone of holistic nursing practice” (p.18). I agree with Jacobson & Burkhardt and I also agree with Taylor (1994a) when she asserts that while nurses are “spirit-filled beings” (p. 34) there is often little evidence in practice that this spirit is expressed. She offers a reason for this in saying that “[I]t may be possible that, in becoming sophisticated in nursing skills and knowledge, nurses may have lost sight of their essential nature as people” (p. 34). Taylor later adds what I believe is a very pertinent comment, that nurses, “[I]n living their daily routines, they may have forgotten something of their spiritual heritage and their interconnectedness with all things” (p. 236).

The role of nursing in meeting the spiritual needs of clients

Holistic nurses guided by the AHNA, *Core Values* and *Standards of Practice* need to care for the holistic needs of their clients as well as their own holistic needs. These needs clearly include the identification and meeting of spiritual needs. Narayanasamy, (1993); Ross, (1995); and Narayanasamy & Owens, (2001) found that although some nurses felt it was their responsibility to provide spiritual care for their clients they often didn't feel confident doing so.

Acknowledging this Narayanasamy, (1993); Golberg, (1998); Ross, (1994, 1997); McSherry, (1998); and Narayanasamy & Owens, (2001), have concluded that nurses need to be better prepared to provide spiritual care. They have explored the educational needs and the training that is required for nurses to gain the essential knowledge that will better prepare them to meet the spiritual needs of clients.

From this literature, I believe that it is the role of nurses to meet their clients' spiritual needs. I believe that the meeting of all dimensions of the whole person is important and that the various dimensions cannot be split from each other. I also understand that spirituality is a difficult concept for some to understand. I believe that for nurses to confidently and expertly meet their clients' spiritual needs that appropriate preparation and training is required.

Importantly for this thesis, being in nature is continually identified as being of an important spiritual benefit (Burkhardt, (1994a; 1994b; 2000); Martin, (1998); Taylor, (1998; 2001); Watson, (1994). We seem to be inherently drawn to nature, to seeking solace and peace within its realms, to enjoy its beauty and spend our recreation and leisure time at play in its varied landforms, its mountains, fields, forests and waterways. This connection with nature has been described by Burkhardt & Jacobson (2000).

People often express a particular feeling of closeness to their spiritual selves while walking a beach, sitting by their favourite tree, viewing a sunset, listening to flowing water, watching a fire, caring for plants, and

otherwise experiencing the natural order. Being in nature can be a source of strength, inspiration, and comfort, all of which are attributes of spirituality. A sense of awe at the wonder of life and a feeling of connectedness with all things, with or without a belief in a Divine being, is an experience of spirituality (p. 95).

The natural environment is clearly a concept appreciated within the realm of holistic nursing and understood to be closely connected to the concept of spirituality. In having determined that this thesis would fore-ground the healing connection of spirituality and the natural environment explored what was known of the broader concept of environment in nursing literature.

Fore-grounding nursing's human - environmental connection

Like Kleffel (1991; 1994) in her earlier search for such literature on the concept of environment, I also found that nursing literature has continued to mainly confine the term environment to the physical environment of the client and to their bedside or immediate social or community environment. Much of my understanding of the current place of the natural environment in nursing has come from the base of the work edited by Schuster & Brown (1994) and my knowledge gained from the spirituality literature.

From her research, Kleffel (1991; 1994) posits that nursing and the natural environment are closely related. I discovered that many nursing writers other than Kleffel have also recognised this relationship and through their writing have brought the broad concept of the natural environment into nursing literature (Jacobson & Burkhardt, 1989; Reed, 1992; Schuster, 1992; Brown, 1994;

Appleton, 1994; Burkhardt, 1994a; 1994b; 2000; Taylor, 1994a; 1994b; 1998; 2001; Watson, 1994; 1995; 1997; 1999; Plumbo, 1995; Parkin, 1996; Martin, 1998; Burkhardt & Jacobson, 2000; Lincoln, 2000; Quinn, 2000; Schuster & Keegan, 2000; Struthers, 2000).

Some of these writers have described and discussed various aspects of the relationship of nursing and the natural environment, the interconnectedness of human, Earth and the wider cosmos and the meaning that these connections have for many indigenous cultures. Others of these writers have explored and described the importance of the natural environment to spirituality, healing and wellbeing and the relationship of the natural environment and global health issues and therefore include the discipline of nursing. These writers understand that the various connections involving the natural environment and health and wellbeing are important issues for the discipline of nursing. Like Burkhardt (2000), I believe that nursing's partnership with the natural environment needs to be developed.

I agree with Lincoln (2000) when she says that holistic nurses' practice within a "theoretical framework that is intrinsically spiritual in nature" and that such nurses "generally feel a sense of connection to and concern for the environment", but that "[A]lthough studies have been done both in the environmental domain and the spiritual domain, there has been little inquiry concerning the relationship between the environment and spirituality" (p. 228). Similarly, Brown (1994) in summarising comments from nurses at the conference that gave life to *Exploring our environmental connections*, noted that

“[N]ursing and the environment have been disconnected” and that the “[E]nvironment has been viewed as a separate area of nursing knowledge” (p. 335) even though “nursing and the environment are totally interrelated” (p. 336). Martin (1998) too, considers that our relationship with the natural environment is “a neglected form of knowledge in nursing” (p. 29).

I believe that Schuster (1992) was inspired when she suggested that holistic nurses and nursing adopt a way of being in the world that values the interconnectedness of all, the sacred relationship of human and other and used the term “earth dweller” to describe this phenomenon (p. 5). Although not identified as such, earth dwelling has some similarities to the holistic beliefs of indigenous cultures and the Western concept of eco-spirituality.

The wisdom of indigenous cultures

Although humanity’s complex relationship with the natural environment has existed since the beginning of our time, as we have become more industrialised and moved away from the close connection to the land as a way to survive, people in many cultures have lost sight of the awesome spiritual connection to the natural environment and its benefits. Kleffel (1994) noted that the concept of “the environment as alive, whole and interacting is currently not in the mainstream of Western scientific thought” (p. 6). The anthropocentric, dominant Western paradigm is at odds with the beliefs of many indigenous cultures when it places humans above others in the universe.

Durie (2005) asserts that the close relationship with the natural environment is common to all indigenous peoples and that “indigenous world-views emphasise interconnectedness, so that spiritual factors ... cannot be readily unbundled from resources, nor can human well-being be considered in isolation from the range of global factors that impact on individuals and groups” (p. 236). Indigenous peoples understand that every living thing depends on other living things in the cycle of life and death. Humans are not dominant in such cultures but at one with the plants, animals and land. Close to the sacred, sustaining natural environment, these people are at home, in harmony with the land as a provider of foods and a place to dwell, as well as a place to seek peace and succour (Pierotti & Wildcat, 1997; Parkin, 1996).

For many indigenous peoples, because spiritual beliefs and the natural environment cannot be separated (Plumbo, 1995), health and wellbeing are understood to be greater than the self. With such a world-view holistic care is quite natural to many indigenous cultures. Plumbo (1995), interested in what defined the unique qualities that Native American nurses take into their nursing practice explored this concern in her study. One of the things she found was that, “[S]pirituality, the primal force, which establishes the myths and truths, values and beliefs of the Indian people, is truly what defines them as people. It forms the basis of their heritage and language and the practice of their vocations” (p. 166).

In 1982, concerned that the Western medical model of health was not meeting the needs of Maori, Durie (1997) developed the Whare Tapa Wha model, a Maori health view that seeks a balance of traditional Maori health beliefs and

those of Western medicine. The Whare Tapa Wha model describes health and wellbeing as a four sided house; “all four being necessary to ensure strength and symmetry, though each representing a different dimension: taha wairua (the spiritual side), taha hinengaro (thoughts and feelings), taha tinana (the physical side), taha whanau (family)” (p. 70). Importantly, Durie noted that generally for Maori, spirituality is an essential component for health and that spirituality is strongly connected to the natural environment. Also of importance in the Maori world-view, is the notion that “[T]he spiritual world is said to interact with the physical world, and a three-tiered Maori world-view has been described as incorporating a spiritual realm, a human realm, and a realm of the dead” (Durie, 2005, p. 237).

This transcendental dimension is also an important aspect of the belief systems of other indigenous cultures. The ability to move from one plane of consciousness to another is not uncommon in many indigenous cultures. Parkin (1996), who grew up in close contact with the local Canadian Plains Indians described the close intuitive relationship her Scots grandfather, mother and the Indians had. “[T]hey shared a unique psychic bond born of trust and intuitive knowing that provided them with almost instant mental contact, even over long distances” (p. 39). From these people Parkin (1996) learnt “to communicate with animals, feel what was hidden, know the unknown” (p. 39).

A participant in Struthers’ (2000) study of Ojibwa and Cree women healers talks of similar experiences of visions and dreams saying that, “[I]t is true that our

spirits can really soar. You know, take us to another plane ... We can become totally and in tune with the Creator. When we have those visions, it's very deep spiritually" (pp. 271-272). This participant, identified as Golden Eagle Woman, went on to describe how she had travelled with her cousin part of the way on her journey after death, up into the skies, through star systems to a place where the ancestors would meet her to continue the journey before returning to this temporal plane.

Watson (1994) acknowledges the influence of the ancients and various indigenous cultures on her holistic knowing. Taylor (2001) too, in her in-depth study of holism, describes the wisdom of the ancients and many indigenous cultures and their belief in the "interconnectedness of people with Nature" (p. 9). The strong and ever present connection of health, spirit and nature was learnt by Burkhardt (1994a) from the Native Americans. In understanding that, "spirit is in all of life, and thus we are sisters and brother with rocks, trees, plants, birds, water creatures, all four-legged as well as two-legged beings", Burkhardt also understands that, "[W]e must learn to live this interconnectedness if we are to truly bring healing to ourselves and our world" (p. 289).

Burkhardt (2000) continues to encourage nurses and people generally to learn from indigenous peoples and engage in a closer healing relationship with nature. To be close like this is to acknowledge that humanity and nature exist together and that humans need to live in harmony with the land, be mindful of how they treat the natural environment and thus be conservation minded.

In his book about his experiences of travelling in Australia, Stevenson (2003) described a conversation that he had with a Northern Territory Aborigine woman, Miriam Rose. This woman feels a close connection to the land where she was born under a tree and said that, “[T]he bush is part of my life, it is me” (p. 225). Continuing to describe this phenomenon she went on to say:-

I hang around billabongs to heal myself, to renew my spirit. We need that even more than others. We have this beautiful gift, this appreciation of nature. When I am out hunting, among the trees, on a hill or by a billabong, these are the times when I am in God’s presence. It is not just me. My people are bound from before birth to after death into an intimate personal identification with the land and its specific features ... We were always very spiritual people ... Spirituality is about the awareness and responsibility for knowing your place and role in the world. It’s about being aware of the inter-relatedness of all that was, and is, and will be. It’s about knowing your responsibilities for the past, present and future (p. 225).

While the sacred connection of the human spiritual dimension and the natural environment is inherent in many indigenous peoples, Western culture tends to use the term eco-spirituality to describe this phenomenon.

A brief description of eco-spirituality

Cummings (1991), in taking the Greek root *eco* which means household or environment describes eco-spirituality as “a spirituality of feeling at home in our own house” (p. 65). Eco-spirituality is an holistic and inter-relational concept

whereby the spiritual human self lives in harmony with the wider universe. “Eco-spirituality understands the cosmos as a network of interdependent beings whose future lies in unstinting collaboration with one another. What concerns one concerns all” (Cummings, 1991, p. 78).

Lincoln (2000) further describes eco-spirituality as a concept of connectedness, representing “a synergy between science and spirituality, intellect and intuition, objectivity and subjectivity, and human and plant” (p. 230). Believing that a study of the concept of eco-spirituality would increase the understanding of the connection of the environment and spirituality and be beneficial to holistic nurses self care and practice, Lincoln (2000) undertook a study with holistic nurses using focus groups. Lincoln’s study identified the essences of an eco-spiritual consciousness as being tending, dwelling, reverence, connectedness and sentience (p. 239) and used Schuster’s (1992) description of earth dwelling to define this essence. The results of the study found that “[H]olistic nurses, and others who develop eco-spiritual consciousness, are more likely to be attuned to the needs of self, other, and the planet and more likely to actively work to heal self, other and the planet” (p. 241) thus supporting Lincoln’s premise at the outset of the study.

Many nursing writers clearly value the interconnectedness of holistic nursing, the human spiritual dimension and the natural environment. In this chapter so far, I have described the concept of holism and the related concepts of holistic nursing care, the therapeutic self and self care and clarified the meaning of

spirituality for the thesis. I have referred to the natural environment many times but have not yet clearly defined the concept, which I will do in the following part.

Defining the concept of the natural environment

The natural environment surrounds us but depending on the location of the reader and their world-view, will manifest in different ways and may mean different things and be described in different ways. A brief exploration of conventional dictionaries including the electronic *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2004) database gave no definition of the combined words of the concept. I then searched the Internet for a definition of the natural environment and found that *Wikipedia* (2006) described the natural environment as an environment

comprised of all living and non-living things that occur naturally on Earth. In its purest sense, it is thus an environment that is not the result of human activity or intervention. The natural environment may be contrasted to 'the built environment'.

Wikipedia's definition is broad and includes the wide range of natural environments found on Earth. However, this thesis is located in the temperate climes of New Zealand where the natural environment could be generally described as a green environment. My understanding of the notion of the green environment has come primarily from the work of Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) and Lewis (1996).

Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) describe this green and natural environment as an environment that

... includes parks and open spaces, meadows and abandoned fields, street trees and backyard gardens. We are referring to places near and far, common and unusual, managed and unkempt, big, small, and in-between, where plants grow by human design or even despite it. We are referring to areas that would often be described as green, but they are also natural when the green is replaced by white or brown or red and yellow.

Nature includes plants and various forms of vegetation. It also includes settings or landscapes or places with plants (p.2).

For the purposes of this thesis, the natural environment is as defined by *Wikipedia* and described by Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) above. I further define the natural environment as that of temperate climes such as that found in New Zealand or other similar Anglo-American environs; natural environments that include a variety of landforms and waterways.

Our human connection to the natural environment

Dwelling in the temperate climes of Earth the fact that our human lives are strongly entwined with the lives of our green world is obvious and unarguable. We rely on the complex organism that is Earth to sustain our life, our physical bodies. We depend on clean air to breath, clean water to replenish our daily expenditure of moisture and also to nurture the plants and animals that provide

us with food. We need trees, considered by some to be symbolic of life and to have healing energies (Bouchardon, 1998) or healing powers (Beringer, 2003), to cleanse the air and provide shelter and fire. And many of us need the healing and medicinal qualities of particular plants (Buhner, 1996; Burkhardt, 2000).

In living on Earth we are interdependent with this great human support and must live in harmony with it and all sentient beings. Humanity relies on the cycle of nature, on its life and death and decay and the husbanding abilities of the seasons and weather to scatter seeds and grow crops to replenish food supplies. We rely on the Earth's waterways, its circulatory system of rivers, lakes and oceans, to transport us and feed us as well as provide us with places to spend our leisure time. We rely on the diversity of our natural environments and their associated ecology to provide us with places where we can enjoy activities such as walking, tramping, climbing, boating and skiing.

This green Earth also provides us with a stimulating environment in which to dwell as well as natural and peaceful places that provide us with restful and tranquil spaces that encourage spiritual reconnection with our green past. The natural environment has the ability to enliven our minds and enrich our lives. It encourages the use of our senses to better utilize its health giving properties. The sun warms our skin stimulating the production of Vitamin D. Light enhances colour and smells alert us to pleasure and danger. We respond with different emotions to the feel of the many textures of nature, the bark of a tree trunk, the slip and shine of a leaf, the graininess of sand and the delight of cool water enveloping our body on a hot summer's day. The variety of birdsong tells us what birds are in our area, feasting and dispersing seeds as well as drawing our

eye to marvel at feather colour and identify detail such as that of the tui cravat or silver ring of a silvereye, the teal flash of a kingfisher. Other natural sounds such as the deep whoosh of wood pigeon soar remind us of the power of flight and the drowsy, busy thrum of a bumble bee alerts us to take a closer look to see how much pollen is stuck to its legs as they land on a swaying dandelion.

Our senses feed our spiritual need in the natural environment with sight having some primacy. We feel wonder and awe at the expansiveness and beauty of green nature. We feel a part of this environment, this Earth, this universe. As Lewis (1996) reminds us, this connection to green nature has been with humanity since the beginning of our time on Earth and that humans evolved in an already green environment. Scientists have found that both chlorophyll and haemoglobin have a ring of carbon and nitrogen atoms surrounding a single atom, in the case of chlorophyll, magnesium and in haemoglobin, iron. This connection to the natural environment remains inherent in our modern selves as we seek experiences in individual preferred environments in which we seek to nurture self.

For ten years the environmental psychologists, Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) studied human experiences in the natural environment. They found that preferred environments tend to be the ones that are familiar and holistic in their ability to grow and support humanity, from the more basic needs to the sublime, from green spaces nearer to home to the wilder outdoors. Preferred environments are therefore, culturally and socially constructed. In the solitude of the natural environment, people feel able to ponder the meanings in life as they affect them

individually and are able to consider their spiritual dimension that can lead them to a deeper understanding of self.

One of Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) studies included an Outdoor Challenge Program where people would come in groups for a two week experience in the Wilderness Laboratory, an area of 17,000 acres that included dense forest. From this study Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) found that people responded positively to their outdoor experience and felt more whole and in touch with themselves and their needs. Just being in the natural environment provided these people with spiritual replenishment, a peacefulness and a relatedness or oneness with nature. They felt a sense of wellbeing, felt invigorated, renewed and restored and were able to recover from mental fatigue.

Being away or escaping to nature rests the *chattering mind* and restores mental capacity. Just knowing that a natural setting is nearby or a glimpse of a green space invokes a sense of wellbeing and allows the mind to relax and consider the deeper meanings in life. Repeated positive experiences in the natural environment provide memories that stimulate repeat experiences and pleasures in just the remembrance.

As well as providing memories, the benefits to the inner self from experiencing the raw and immediate natural environment can also be experienced by views from a window, photographic displays in magazines or books and through descriptive prose and poetry. The natural environment is not always green and includes easily accessible river, lake and stream walks and sandy or rocky coastal seaside places. Our forays into the natural environment don't have to be far or involve hikes into the bush or wilderness; the natural environment can be

experienced in our own domestic gardens, public parks and gardens as well as any small spaces of green that break up our manmade environment.

The beneficial effects of gardens

Gardens, be they larger park-like spaces cultivated for public enjoyment, or our usually smaller domestic gardens, are a common way we can experience the benefits of extensive, more natural environments on a daily basis. Gardens are cultivated to provide food and pleasure and “are powerful settings for human life, transcending time, place, and culture. Gardens are mirrors of ourselves, reflections of sensual and personal experience ... [T]hey connect us to our collective and primeval pasts” (Francis & Hester, 1991, p. 2).

Gardens are variously described as sacred spaces (Murray, 1997), healing (Rawlings, 1999; Search, 2001) and as being peaceful (Donaldson 2003). Lewis (1991) acknowledges that although

[T]he role of plants in human healing is based on ancient natural remedies for illnesses ... today, however, we seek a healing quality in gardens and gardening that acts primarily on mind, not body – medicine not to be taken orally but rather perceived sensually, to heal scars on the human psyche (p. 244).

Gardens are places to find tranquillity and restoration from our industrialised lives and are places that provide us with a connectedness to the wider natural environment (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1991; Betrabet, 1996). In their study aimed at finding what value people ascribed to their gardens, Dunnett & Qasim (2000)

found that gardens are used for relaxation and stress reduction and that people felt that their gardens influenced their well-being. They also found that private urban gardens “are the most heavily used type of outdoor space and represent the most frequent contact with nature for most people” (p. 40).

Gardens involve the senses; provide scents, visual stimulation, touch, taste, sounds and feelings. The garden is a place of community, creative and cultural expression, a place to grow beauty and sustenance in the form of food and spiritual replenishment. Gardens are places of creativity, memory and ritual. In our often transient lives, gardens keep us in touch with the cyclical nature of life and the seasons, our relationships to others and self and provide us with a sense of place and connection (Francis & Hester, 1991).

Our wellbeing is something we have to constantly attend to. Be it our physical needs for basic food, fluid and rest; the needs of our mind for support, love and emotional balance, or the needs of the spirit for nurture, each of these human dimensions are equally important for holistic wellbeing. These multidimensional needs are forever in flux and our attention at any given time will vary to meet each dimension's need. The met needs of each dimension impact on the whole and if any one area is not nurtured, the whole being, or wellbeing can be affected.

Whilst acknowledging that the needs of all human dimensions must be met for wellbeing, it is not within the bounds of this thesis to explore the human dimensions other than the spiritual. As with the other dimensions, the spiritual

dimension requires nurturing and constant replenishment. Nurses, like others, need to attend to their spiritual needs and identify how they can be met.

Nurses' awareness of the spiritual benefit of the natural environment

The wide range of literature that has been discussed in this chapter clearly identifies that being in the natural environment is beneficial to the human spiritual dimension. In describing the concept of spirituality, Reed (1992) considered the various ways humans experience spirituality in the three aspects of inward looking, looking out from the self and looking beyond the known boundary of human and universe. Intrapersonal relationships or connections refer to the inward looking that we humans do in seeking to understand self, others, the natural environment and that which is mystical or transcendent. When we look inward we seek harmony and balance, a peacefulness or bliss. For many, going into the natural environment and experiencing its myriad wonders, is a way to nurture the spirit and seek inner meaning.

Holistic nurses understand that they must undertake self-care practices and that this includes the care of the spiritual dimension. I discovered that some nursing writers clearly understand the phenomenon of the beneficial effect of the natural environment on their spiritual dimension and actively seek the repeated experience (Burkhardt, 1994a, 2000; Watson, 1994; Martin, 1994, 1998, 1999; Taylor, 1998).

The natural environment is a repeated influence in Martin's (1994; 1998; 1999) life and work. Using metaphors of the natural environment that evoke for me strong images, Martin's work surfaces the related concepts of story telling,

nature, healing and connection. Martin (1998) encourages the discipline of nursing to consider working from our inner core, our hearts, in our healing practice and believes that this inner core, our heart, can be reached through our relationship with nature. She has learnt to “talk straight through nature as the teacher, recognising how nature informs and transforms in both subtle and obvious ways” (p. 29). By listening to her client’s stories with a close attention to the teaching of nature, Martin nurses “with the word intuition as the link with the spiritual which is the whole, the cosmos” (p. 30).

An understanding of the interconnectedness of all is what Burkhardt (1994a; 1994b) gained from her study of the connection of spirituality and the natural environment involving twelve Appalachian women’s view of spirituality. One of the outcomes of Burkhardt’s (1994a) study was the suggestion “that renewal of spirit is at the heart of living our interconnectedness with all of life”, the dimension that unifies the whole and that, “[A] sense of connectedness to the earth and of deriving strength from nature is a strong element in this understanding of spirituality” (p. 287).

Burkhardt (1994a) herself, understands that she is part of a greater whole and needs to spend time in the natural environment attending to her spiritual dimension. Encouraging nurses to deepen our healing relationship with the natural environment, Burkhardt (2000) describes how this may be done.

Many people connect with nature through activities such as gardening, walking in the forest, the mountains, or the local park, or spending time by the water. Nurturing pets and house plants brings us into relationship with nature. Whenever there is a consciousness with any part of nature

there is an opportunity for deepening our relationship. Taking in a beautiful sunset, listening to the songs of birds, marvelling at the power of a lightening storm, feeling a gentle breeze on our face all draw us to be aware of the life and energy of our environment, and may call us to that still point deep within us. Many people discover and experience closeness with their God or sense the Life Force through the wonder and beauty of nature. Gazing at a starlit sky or feeling the energy of an old-growth forest can open us to consider our place in the cosmos and sense a deeper connection with creation and creator (pp. 36-37).

Taylor (1998) too, appreciates the healing qualities of the natural environment. Energised by the light and colours of the natural environment outside her home, Taylor is reminded of her “spiritual heritage and the joy which is packed into every atom of nature” and encourages other holistic nurses to “[L]ook at the colours and light, take respite momentarily, and carry it with you in your soul” (p.3).

Experiencing spiritual replenishment in the natural environment is as necessary to Watson’s (1994) soul as it is to her body. She is sustained by nature and seeks spiritual replenishment as often as possible and graphically describes the experience of this phenomenon for her.

Personally, nature, the mountains, and the sea are my sacred environmental spaces; they restore and soothe; they provide life energy itself for me personally, as they also connect me with all living things. Nature is my solace – my soul care that I seek and need on a regular basis. If I lose touch with nature, I lose touch with self and my soul and life spirit. In hiking into the mountain park, which is two blocks from my

home, whether alone on the Sea of Cortez in Mexico or another part of the world, nature calls me to gain my balance and reconnect with my deepest self.

In my home in Boulder, Colorado, I seek this alone time. I sometimes sit on a special rock that faces the Flatiron Mountain formation and meditate and journal. Other times I sit quietly by the mountain stream which is the site of the snow run-off and quietly watch and listen to the sounds of the birds, the wind, and the running water, all reminding me of the passing of all things, the life energy run-off that keeps all things flowing with the river of time, like life itself.

So, whether on a snowcapped mountain, hiking on Bald Mountain, communicating with my gargoye tree, the one that is old and wise and gnarled, or sitting alone in my yard with its big trees and bird life, I am called to nature, just as surely as are the birds. Nature is my art and my spirit for life's livings and life's beauty (Watson, 1994, p. 37).

Concluding comments

By the continued use of the narrative style of the thesis in this chapter, I have described the influential literature and traced and built an understanding of the related thesis concerns of spirituality, the natural environment and holistic nursing care and practice. In using nursing literature where possible to highlight the relationship of these concerns, I have clearly identified that these concerns are an holistic nursing concern with importance for the discipline of nursing generally.

The wide range of literature discussed also raises an awareness of the importance of the concept of connectedness in life and develops an understanding that this nursing concern is also a human concern. The study quest is supported by the literature discussed in this chapter and the discussion provides a foundation for the explication of the participant data. In Chapter Four I will present the participant knowing that describes the essence of the experience of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANT KNOWING

Participant knowing provides this thesis with important and valuable first hand experiential knowledge of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit. The participant data being something that unique human beings have actually experienced and described to me, a heuristic researcher, provide the full illumination of the phenomenon that is supported by my own experiences and the informative literature.

Relating to or connecting with nature involves the senses. The participants are all sighted; and seeing, looking and watching are all adjectives they used to describe certain activities or experiences in the natural environment. Sight allows us to capture images, register colour and shape and patterns, and see a landscape view or the detail of constituent parts of the natural environment.

Because we are whole beings, human constituents such as senses are difficult or impossible to isolate. While sight was the principal sense that was used by the participants, other senses such as hearing, touch and smell were also noted to be important in the participant experiences related during the interviews. Senses allow the initial benefit of an experience to flow on and be experienced in a whole or rounded way.

In this chapter I will unfold the participant data and present it in three parts. The presentation of these three parts has been guided by the method described by Moustakas (1990). Moustakas suggests explicating the essence of the

individual participant experiences in some form of creative portrait as well as explicating in some way, such as a narrative, the commonalities of the shared experience of the phenomenon. Thus, the first part comprises the individual participant portraits and the second part is a narrative depiction of the commonalities of the experience of the phenomenon. The third part of the chapter is also a narrative of the commonalities of the experience of the phenomenon that describe the value of the experience to nursing practice.

In the second and third parts of this chapter I have used as many of the participants' actual words, phrases and narrative as possible and expressed them *in italics*. I have used my own words minimally and expressed them in plain font, in an attempt to retain the distinctive and alive tone of the participant data. While I have acknowledged each participant's experiences in the text I have chosen to depict all of the participants' words in the same *italicised* font. I have done this in an attempt to intimate a similarity of the experiences while valuing each unique individual's contribution. I believe that by presenting the data in this way that the rich descriptive data provided by the participants is held as a vivid portrayal of the various experiences.

Firstly I will introduce the participants by way of individual word portraits. In this part I will draw attention to the individual participant images that were evoked during the interviews and subsequent immersion and dwelling in each individual transcript. These word portraits are representative of the essence of each individual participant and their experience of the phenomenon.

The participant portraits are in the manner of small creative syntheses as described by Moustakas (1990) in that the images described in these small

depictions are composites of participant data and my personal knowing. Although I have used some of the participants actual words I have chosen to present the portraits in a single and plain font. I have done this to reflect the multi-layering of such images, the images coming not just from the interviews and transcripts but also from the more complex and contextual background of my personal knowing, relationship and imagination.

In the second part I will lay out the participants' experience of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on their spirit within the framework of the dimensions of relatedness in spirituality described by Reed (1992). Reed asserts that these dimensions of relatedness can be experienced intrapersonally, interpersonally and transpersonally.

In the third part I will present the participant knowing that is particularly important to the discipline of nursing. This knowing focuses on the concepts of personal healing and wellbeing in the natural environment, knowing self – knowing others and sustaining self in nursing practice.

At the time of writing up the thesis, I contacted the participants and asked them to examine their interview transcript, word portrait and the section on participant knowing to ensure that I was accurately representing their views. Of the responses, only one asked for a minor change in the tense of a representation which I corrected immediately.

Part One: Individual word portraits of the study participants

In this section I will introduce the six study participants by representing them by way of individual word portraits. Although each of these participants is a whole, multidimensional human and a nurse, the purpose of the portraits is to focus on their spiritual dimension and I have therefore chosen not to include demographic or other details. These portraits hold the essence of the spiritual dimension of each individual in images that their words evoked for me as they described their unique, spiritually uplifting experiences in the natural environment. They highlight the unique individual experiences, the difference of experience and the range and subtlety of spirit lifting that can and is, experienced in the natural environment. For me, these images are multidimensional, vibrant and colourful snapshots or small movie clips of the participants' descriptions of their experiences.

For me, each of the six study participants is active and identifiable in the experiences they describe. As I listened directly to the stories they told me during the interviews and later during transcribing, and dwelt in the printed transcripts, I could picture them participating in their unique experience. These images are vivid and plentiful and I am able to imagine or visualise each participant's experience as if a bystander to the action. As I listened to the stories and later read and re-read them, the images would flare and appear in all of their totality, colour and vibrancy. I could feel myself again and again on the periphery of the image, much as a photographer behind the camera lens.

The images in each portrait are multi-layered and they are drawn primarily from reflecting on the interviews and dwelling in the transcripts. As well, the images

have been influenced by my own similar experiences, whether these experiences have been directly experiential or gathered in a lifetime of visual and auditory experiences; from art, photography, theatre and movies or from reading and listening to stories.

The portraits were completed some time (3 – 12 months) after the interviews, during which time I had explored the transcripts in depth, fully immersing myself in each participant's data. Honouring the method of discovery in heuristics, I have presented the portraits in chronological order of my receiving the data so that if there is any building of imagery from the previous participant it should be obvious. Each participant is honoured with their portrait being placed in a way that allows the reader to pause and savour the essence of the spiritual dimension of each unique person.

Genevieve's portrait - recycled wood frame

The middle of a summer's day, sunshine and the seaside, that dry, salt sand smell, the coolness of the forest intuited by the backdrop of dark green trees. Genevieve and I turn our backs to the sea and talk on her deck.

Genevieve is earth centred, connected to the feminine and acknowledges a deep attachment to Mother Earth. She treads lightly as a partner with the natural environment, honouring the sustaining body with ritual and recycling. Ritual strengthens her resolve to nurture the natural environment. Her life is guided by beliefs rooted in her Celtic ancestry, a lifelong spiritual connection to nature and her individual theosophy that sits somewhere between Buddhism and Christianity.

Trees provide a whispering, background music to quiet periods of contemplation and journaling. Beach walks provoke open armed chanting and singing. Wind lifted washing a source of wonder and delight. Connections in the natural environment provide inspiration to draw gloriously colourful mandalas or healing wheels using the soft, mutability of pastel. Drawing, journaling and photography are both expression and communication. Under a wooden table, a wide cane sphere holds found objects, tangible reminders of the wonder of nature, the outside brought inside.

Fascinated by seasonal changes since childhood, the colourful leaf fall of autumn and the yellow of daffodil fields in spring as well as the solitude of the local bush, Genevieve has felt nourished by the natural environment all her life. Nature's cyclical rhythm, a pattern or metaphor for human life. Seasons and

weather understood and accepted as necessary for the continuance of the life of the natural environment; and enjoyed.

The heart rhythm of the waves and the fall of waterfall water, the distinctive gush of a brook, nurture her soul. She is awed by the grace and beauty of bird flight and open to life lessons from her cats. Throughout life Genevieve has made regular withdrawal to retreat, surrounded by the natural environment of sacred mountain and lake.

Brigid's portrait – antique silver frame

An early autumn evening with the weather about to change and rain and dusk coming on rapidly, Brigid and I met at my home to talk. We shared a dinner I had cooked, and wine, and caught up.

Brigid's spirituality is a deep energy she has that helps her make meaning in her life; meaning in relationships with self, other and higher being, God. Everything around her is seen as a gift, magical and beautiful. Brigid treasures the beauty of a sunset, rainbow, waterfall. She recalls her experiences in the natural environment to calm and inspire and provide strength to make changes in her life and work.

Her experiences often affect a combination of her senses and many have had a mystical, transcendent dimension. She has experienced the presence of others, ancestors, whilst horse riding in an isolated area and has visualised herself as a kereru during a spiritual workshop and often uses her ability to transport herself, return herself to spiritually energising natural environments when working through difficult work or life issues.

She finds it easy to visualise the warmth of sand beneath her body or the grass of a cool, forest glade, experience the smell of damp humus or the sea brine laden breeze. This ability has been nurtured since childhood, recognised for its creative spark to transform.

Music is a powerful influence in Brigid's spirituality and also used to transcend. Classical, melodic, harmonious music can bring her to tears and rain on the roof, the crickets in summertime, or a babbling brook all evoke pleasurable

memories of previous experiences in the natural environment. Some have been exceptional, epiphanal or peak experiences such as the time she sang in the Waitomo Caves; a tonal rising, a holy experience.

Tui's portrait – second-hand frame decorated with found objects

A sunny early autumn afternoon and Tui interrupts her gardening to sit inside her new home and talk. On a hillside with the trees and garden at close proximity and doors open, it doesn't feel like we are inside, but an integral part of the natural environment surrounding us.

Tui experiences much of her life in the outdoors and open spaces. She loves to garden, watch things grow and encourage the natural cycle of life, grow native trees and nurture the native wildlife in the area. She is grounded in the earth, at home anywhere in the world preferring to see, not separate countries but one earth, one environment. Weather has an emotional dimension to it. Cold, storms, rain and sun are all accepted as earth sustaining, the balance of life.

Holidaying in the natural environment is important to Tui and she and her partner tread lightly to limit damage to the earth. They limit their use of fossil fuels and consumerism generally and recycle and farm worms. She loves to camp, canoe and scuba dive. She describes diving in kelp forests, great areas of underwater vegetation with bright fish like underwater birds swimming through the fronds. I picture her in a canoe, silent on the water, watching quietly, the everyday movements of a flock of herons in the mangroves.

From an early age Tui would spend hours walking in local wild places, enjoying the solitude and peace and ability to notice the details of plant and animal, the minutiae of nature, dragonflies, plants and ponds. Now she brings plants inside and trinkets, silly things such as a seed pod, a piece of shell, a tiny abandoned bird's nest.

Her garden is her prime way of creative expression, her artistic outlet. She loves the cyclical rhythm of nature, storms, the sound and smell of the sea, birds in the morning.

Magenta's portrait – hand-made modern material frame

On a beautiful, sunny autumn afternoon I meet with Magenta in a room at the university. Outside there is a leafy courtyard and the cicadas are singing.

Sustaining breaks from nursing work taken in the natural environment are common for Magenta. Feeling a closeness to the New Zealand native bush and grasslands, she has used her love to motorbike to bring her close to nature's detail. Whilst living and working abroad, she has biked beside the ocean and skied in mountains with trees above the snowline.

The cyclical life of nature is used as a metaphor to make meaning for self and others, of the cycle of life and illness and death. Soil, decay, and recycling support new life; the garden prospers, plants are consumed by insects. Magenta knows quite clearly that we all have our place in the cosmos and we are all born of the earth and we all return to the earth.

The artist's eye for detail and the clinical gaze decipher context and intention of the local and the global. Sight has primacy, images, artworks, photos in print, in books and magazines. But the sound in nature is important too; the sound and movement of rivers and lake water, the birds and plants in their natural habitat. The energy and invigoration of the weather, wind in the trees, and sunlight, ocean smells, tussock sway, mountain swoop.

Jim's portrait – clear to the edge frame

On a beautiful late autumn morning while I waited for Jim I watched fantails, waxeyes and blackbirds amongst the autumn gold. The pale blue sky held a cat's claw moon in its lightness; leaves held dewdrops; the morning was hushed in its soft warmth.

Jim has a lifelong connection to the land. Whether it is bike riding or coastal kayaking or climbing in the mountains, he has always done physically active things in the natural environment. He combines energy expending exercise with the calming, soothing and stabilising effects of the outdoors. He will pause beside the soothing flow of water, stilling his inner turmoil, and allow himself to become aware of the detail of his surroundings, the trees, birdsong.

Preferring mountain environments, Jim has tramped and climbed often, and often alone. He has experienced a green light magic of a summer sunset from high up with the valley thousands of feet below; chosen to camp in inclement weather lakeside, to the dry confines and company in huts, always mindful of the risks and sometimes harsh unforgiving-ness of the natural environment.

Jim holds his Christian values beside Zen and myth. A passionate photographer, he recognises a creative desire to return to sketching and painting. Listening to beautiful, choral singing in the space of a big church or cathedral is uplifting; memories of outdoor experiences, brought home round stones.

Wai's portrait – hand-woven flax frame

On a sunny, almost spring day, Wai and I met at the place she was staying, familiar to her, in my city. We hadn't met before but had connected with e-mails. For me, it was a comfortable meeting and Wai chose to share her thoughts with me, with her good friend in the background.

Deeply connected to her family land, Wai experiences its influence in various ways when she is away from it. Her connections with home are never tenuous, often strong and sometimes transcendent. She carries the connection of the ancestors wherever she goes, sometimes tangibly in photos. They care for her and nurture and protect.

Far north tangata whenua woman, Wai knows that the natural environment has healing powers. She was steeped in the traditional use of natural remedies by childhood collecting experiences with her grandmother. Wai acknowledges her knowing in health is beyond Western influence, that what is imbibed and experienced by this corporeal body affects future corporeal bodies.

To be fully sharing, lifting, valuing others, it's important for Wai and her colleagues to meet in places within the natural environment, the closeness to the sea, the forest. Gorge, native bush, trees, leaf, poultice; soda spring, lemons, connections by visiting, passing or transporting back when far away.

Guided by beliefs and values that balance, Wai has strength from knowing her place in her family and that things will happen in their own good time. She just makes sure that she lives according to her position and life will evolve as it should.

Hands, trade, people, places, ancestor connections, sun peeking sunrise over mountain and river entrance, brisk, chill wind, lifting and dropping whatever is in its path. Fascination with plants and flowers, passionate about gardening, peacefulness from being on the soil, splitting the flax, weaving, kete, collecting, bags. Cosmic wonder, stars, photography of nature's minutiae, mist, sun, cobwebs, moon.

Part Two: Participant knowing of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit

In this part of the chapter, I have articulated the participant's experiences of the phenomenon within the structure of Reed's (1992) dimensions of relatedness in spirituality. Constructed in this way, the material is repeatedly, uniquely and similarly explicated giving the reader a sense of essence, a rich and intrinsic depiction of the phenomenon.

Introducing Reed's (1992) dimensions of relatedness in spirituality

This thesis is about the connectedness of the natural environment and spirituality; and the study participants, in telling their stories clearly expressed the importance to them of both concepts. For them, spirituality is an obvious component to their whole, important to their wellbeing and present in varying degrees in their lives. Spirituality is unique and personally meaningful to the person experiencing it and is a quality to be sought or acknowledged for personal reasons and in personal ways.

For the study participants the natural environment is acknowledged on a daily basis as an important relation or connection in their lives and they can trace this important connection as being of lifelong importance to them. The natural environment has a profound impact on their wellbeing and is seen as essential to their life. They understand that the natural environment is essential to human life and that it requires attention and nurture if it is to continue to support humanity and life.

Although each participant expressed their knowing and feelings in differing ways, they all interpreted these experiences as belonging within the concept of spirituality experienced in the natural environment. Given the personally unique qualities of each individual's experience of the phenomenon of their spirit being positively influenced in the natural environment, the participants' stories provided many concepts for further exploration. Some concepts were common to more than one participant and other concepts suggested loose associations with other concepts. I dwelt for some time on the data in its various parts, and also as a whole and it seemed to be unwieldy, too bulky to manipulate into a cohesive understanding of the commonality of the phenomenon. This was not surprising to me given the difficulty of defining the concept of spirituality.

As a heuristic researcher I was ready to adopt whatever method best met the research need and keen to produce a creative synthesis of the data depicting "the experience in accurate, comprehensive, rich, and vivid terms" (Moustakas, (1990), p. 49). In seeking a vehicle to explicate the participant knowing of the phenomenon with its wealth of description and variety of experience and personal meaning, I returned again and again to Reed's (1992) article that explores the emerging paradigm she suggests for future nursing research into the concept of spirituality. Reed took the basic tenet that humans are whole or holistic beings experiencing this wholeness as wellbeing within the variable flux of health. As such, spirituality is a dimension of this whole, an essential adjunct to other dimensions such as the physical and the mind.

Reed understands spirituality to be a concept of relatedness or connectedness providing our humanness with a way to seek inner meaning in life, allow or

nurture feelings of love, hope, generativity and a purpose in life. Wellbeing allows us to be joyful and creative. Reed (1992) sees this connectedness as being intrapersonal or inward looking, a self in harmony; as interpersonal or outward looking, connecting self with other sentient beings and the natural environment; and as transpersonal or upward looking, “to the unseen, God, or power greater than the self and ordinary resources” (p. 350), therefore including mystical and religious experiences and a relatedness to an ultimate other.

Although Reed describes the natural environment as part of the interpersonal experience, I believe that the participant data portrays the natural environment as a more pervasive element in our lives; an element with the ability to influence our intrapersonal and transpersonal relationships or connections, as well as being a fundamental interpersonal element.

Because a large part of what the study participants had said seemed to be comparable to the relational dimensions of spirituality that Reed identified as intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal I decided to use these dimensions to articulate the participant experiences of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit. In using these relational dimensions as a way to present the data, I understand them to be arbitrary with wide and blurred boundaries. For instance, oft-times, the interpersonal may also be intrapersonal or even transpersonal as well. Also, within each relationship area, the experiences whilst similar to more than one participant may be described with another adjective. Thus, what is described as meditative by one may be contemplative to another and nourishing to yet another.

Having decided to use Reed's (1992) dimensions of the relatedness of spirituality as the way to communicate the participant data for the thesis, I serendipitously rediscovered that Brigid, at the very beginning of her interview expressed a similar notion of spirituality to that described by Reed. I have included her powerful description here to connect the chosen framework and the participant material explicated in the following part of this chapter.

... maybe I should start off with just a little sort of statement to disclose my understanding of things spiritual ... because in so doing I guess you will see how relationship with the environment is so intricately involved in that, all right. So that if I say that in a sense my spirituality is the energy that I have within myself to search deeply the meaning in my relationships and my relationships within myself ... relationship with self, relationship with others, relationship with environment and my relationship with God. And this whole thing really is ... searching for meaning within those relationships, in the past, in the present and into the future. And I guess that my understanding of the importance of the environment in the whole thing really I suppose, stemmed from my upbringing and appreciating the fact that our environment, our physical environment, and not necessarily the clay, the mortar, the physical, tangible things that you can touch but also the things, the environment in terms of what you can smell, what you can see, what you can hear. ... kind of in terms of my belief in, and appreciation of all of this comes down to the fact of, OK, these are God given gifts. So, from a very early

age I guess, my appreciation of my environment in terms of the bigger picture really, of who we are, of why we are here and all the rest of it was very important to me... my whole sort of enculturation into this life has been really appreciating the fact that everything is a gift, that we make of it, that we see magic in everything around us, we see beauty and we sort of think, 'Wow, that sunset, that rainbow, that waterfall' and even in the mundane, you know, of the things of the not so beautiful somehow, there is still mystery to be seen in there if you can free up your hang-ups ...

Experiencing the phenomenon intrapersonally

Intrapersonal relationships or connections refer to the inward looking that we humans do in seeking to understand self, others, the natural environment and that which is mystical or transcendent. When we look inward we seek harmony and balance, a peacefulness or bliss. Importantly for the study participants, going into the natural environment, experiencing its myriad wonders, is a way to seek inner meaning and nurture the spirit or soul.

The benefits to the inner self of experiencing the raw and immediate natural environment can also be experienced by views from a window, photographic displays in magazines or books, through descriptive prose and poetry. Our forays into the natural environment don't have to be far or involve hikes into the bush or wilderness. The natural environment can be experienced in our own gardens, city parks and gardens, small spaces of green that break up our manmade environment, river or stream walks as well as not so green spaces

such as the seaside. Often we will have chosen environments in which we seek to nurture self.

Genevieve's *chosen, absolutely chosen environment* is the seaside and it was an experience she had there that she told me of when we first talked. She described being in a beautiful local area known to both of us and what happened as she sought a period of *isolation and reflection*.

... I lay down on the beach and as I lay down, you know, like I was really aware of the movement of the sea. It was hardly perceptible. And it was like the water slowly coming towards the, slowly towards the shore, without great noise, without ... yeah it was very quiet, and I remember having my head down on the sand and watching this, and as I was watching it, it was like this heave, and this letting go, and there was this rise and this fall of the water without any waves, and I remember being totally in connection with the earth in that moment. Like it seemed to me to be, that this was the breath of Mother Earth. It was like her breast rising and falling, you know with a deep inhalation of her breathe. And that lasted for some while, I just lay there thinking about that, you know, and thought, and thought how wonderful it was to be alive on such a beautiful day, and to be totally aware and at one with the Earth.

Genevieve needs connection with, and *deep nourishment* from nature, recognising that it is ... *crucial to my being, totally, it's the essence of who I am, you know like my soul is the essence of who I am. If I take care of my physical*

body I need to take care of my spiritual body, my soul too ... Genevieve may do this by taking a retreat as she has many times, in a beautiful natural environment, a very special place, an extremely spiritual place way up on a hill where you overlook the lake and toward a very sacred mountain.

Listening to the healing music of the natural environment, the sound of a waterfall, a brook on a bush walk and the sea, the wind on the sea is incredibly nurturing to her soul. Taking time for quiet contemplation in the forest, just sitting under a tree, with all the music of the trees around, the whispering, is so nourishing. Being contemplative, being in the moment, being totally present in the moment, focusing on the breath and just allowing herself to be, letting her mind stop is very important to Genevieve.

Water is important to Brigid; she responds very, very positively to the effects of water be it seaside, river, waterfall or rain. Water is a soother, an unblocker of the flow of energy, of thought processes, a whole manner of things. It is not unknown to Brigid when grappling with a real problem to go home and immerse herself up to her nostrils in her bath to achieve unblocking.

Like Genevieve, Brigid recalled a powerful seaside experience that continues to provide her with quite a degree of peace. One evening during a summer holiday when she remembers spending three weeks living in her togs, she was sitting on the beach watching the sun set, the residual warmth of a very hot day in the air, the smell of the sea, the sounds, the tide washing up over the pebbles that were already on the foreshore and the rattling as the backwash went out, and looking out onto the horizon, she kind of let herself go into a deep sort of meditation, a sort of existential kind of time of contemplation and for a split

moment, a split moment ... I absolutely knew the answers to everything. Brigid says of this experience that you could call it sort of an epiphanal moment really.

A river walk often helps Jim to find spiritual replenishment. He acknowledges he lives in a beautiful place with *beauty all around* him and spots in which to seek this nourishment abound. In such a place, *beside the flow of water*, he might *stop a while* allowing himself to become *aware of his surroundings*. In becoming aware in these *moments of contemplation*, Jim may *focus on the detail, stare into the water, notice a tree, a bird singing or the sound of the water* and finding the movement of water *incredibly soothing*, inducing ... *a feeling of calmness which I have come to recognise is very much part of the underlying spirit of me and something that both replenishes my energy, calms and stabilises, grounds my spirit ... who I am ... where I am ...* Jim also understands that his connecting moments in the natural environment are *very much about finding meaning, of the spirit as well as connectedness and the bigger cosmos.*

Doing something physical in nature is Jim's way of boosting his inner reserves and his excursions into the natural environment are not just contemplative but also rejuvenating emotionally, recharging his inner batteries. He will often go into *the mountains, his chosen environment*, alone, for days at a time and *do some journey*, seeking *solitude* and *real sustenance* knowing that he finds this environment *spiritually uplifting*. Jim *loves the coast* and he may kayak in the local coastal waters, *just be out on the sea* or go for a bike ride or walk the coastal hill tracks. It is important to Jim to actually stop for a period and sit and in a way, quietly meditate. As he enjoys these *quiet, meditative moments* he often feels he is *recharged from nothingness*, a very *Zen-type thing, simplified*

down, where he is *aware of the simplicity of everything*, replenished. Jim has also been influenced by Joseph Campbell's writing and his philosophy to always try to *follow your bliss* (Maher & Briggs, 1990).

Magenta seeks spiritual replenishment in the mountains as well. There she likes to ski to feel *reinvigorated, restored, balanced*. Also, for her the New Zealand bush is a special place, her *chosen environment*, an environment she loves, a place to hear the birds and *see the plants*, to feel *joy and happiness*. She loves the natural environment of mountains, bush and waterways such as *rivers and lakes* for their *quietness and peace*, loving the *sound and movement of water*. While Magenta gets benefit from experiencing the actual environment she also derives a similar benefit from *looking at and reading plant magazines or books on native plants*, something she does for *relaxation*.

The tussock lands with their grasses are a place Magenta loves to *sit and watch*, not actually seeing the wind but *watching the wind going through the grasses*. And as a way to relieve stress, Magenta finds sitting somewhere such as Red Rocks on the *rocky Wellington coast on stormy days watching the wind and weather*, helpful.

Being in the natural environment, preferably never *too far from the earth, nature, greenery, water*, Tui's soul or spirit feels *grounded*, providing her with a *stability, an inner wellbeing, relaxing, calming, a meaning in life*. From the age of *nine or ten*, Tui remembers that she sought isolation from others in the nearby moors, *quite a wild place*. She would go off alone for *long walks, for a day, like five hours at a time, just looking at things and noticing things*, feeling *peaceful, kind of melting into everything*, feeling a part of the wider natural

environment she was in and in this state, being *more receptive to nature's detail, the small different types of plants, dragonflies and ponds.*

While on a recent holiday with her partner Tui described how ...*we took a canoe and went through the mangroves and found a flock of grey herons and we sat and watched them for quite a long time. Now, that, I like to do ... watching things going about their everyday business ...* This is a time for Tui to feel a part of the natural environment with minimal intrusion or damage to her surroundings, *in canoeing you're not causing any harm, you're not interacting too much with the environment, you know, you're coming and going, you're not really leaving anything,* just ripples on the water that slowly smooth the surface. Holidays in the natural environment such as this are used by Tui to recharge her *mental batteries.* She *likes feeling alone with the natural environment around her,* alone but not *lonely* because when she sits in a natural setting she feels a part of it, a feeling of belonging, a solace.

Scuba diving is another way that Tui can be alone in a natural environment whilst with others *sharing a similar experience.* She *really enjoys diving, likes the water* and likes it that you can't talk about it while you're there, a good thing, a *wonderful thing.* Her body insulated with a wetsuit but her hands and face can feel the cold and she *can feel currents drifting and fish that come close enough to brush against her* interested and fearless in their investigations of noises. This was the first time for Tui diving in *kelp forests,* an *incredible* experience of a *garden really, earthy greens and browns* with a lot of fish, *shoals of fish, moray eels, rays, manta rays, purple fish, fish with spots.* A *three dimensional experience* of being able to go down to *the sandy beds that meander through*

the kelp forest, a little pathway in a little garden and then up through the foliage and while there she saw a bird dive under and down and swim straight underneath her partner and then back up to the surface again.

For Wai, the sea and the forest are chosen environments and of special importance to her is a gorge near where she comes from, with lots and lots of native bush and with a soda spring as well. This place has been known to her since she was a child when she helped her midwife grandmother gather natural remedies there. Wai travels through the gorge each week for her work and she often takes time to wander on its different tracks before going home, a time used for 'dropping off' workday issues, a time of winding down, a time to refocus.

Other places that provide spiritual replenishment and feelings of exhilaration for Wai have been when she has been climbing mountains, going to the top of mountains and looking down and hearing the history and the story that goes with them. She remembers another time on a brisk and chilly morning when she watched the sun rise over the Hokianga harbour entrance where Kupe came through and with the sun peaking and coming over the mountains with the shadows that it flicked out, she had quite a buzz. Wai can buzz out on things that most people probably don't even notice she thinks. Things that fascinate her are things like seeing a wind coming and what it does to the trees and to the leaves and that and how it flicks everything up. She takes photos of things like mist and mountains and suns ... and cobwebs, transportable images of the natural environment that can sustain her wherever she goes.

Experiencing the phenomenon interpersonally

Our human relationships with other sentient beings and the natural environment pervade our daily lives in varying degrees of intensity and importance. These relationships can sometimes be scarcely noted as we move in and out of our various daily tasks but they can also be of great importance and affecting as well, providing us with purpose and meaning, intense feelings, joy and wonder and sustenance for our soul or spirit.

These relationships or connections in our nursing lives are important in promoting wellbeing in others and maintaining it within ourselves. Each of us would be able to recognise many relationships of utmost importance to us, relationships that provide us with great depths of intense meaning. These relationships may be with family, animals, and other people in our working and leisure lives and with the natural environment. All of us are affected in some way by the natural environment as we move through the paths and green environments to our work or play.

For the study participants the natural environment is acknowledged on a daily basis as an important relation or connection in their lives. They can trace this important connection as being of lifelong importance to them. The natural environment has a profound impact on their wellbeing and is seen as essential to their life. They understand that the natural environment is essential to human life and that it requires attention and nurture if it is to continue to support humanity and life.

The study participants recognise that the natural environment is important as another physical entity in their lives and also that it powerfully impacts on their spirit. As such, Genevieve quite definitely knows that the natural environment has influenced her spirit and that is *has been one of the most important things in her life*. She has a *lifetime of experiences* that echo this knowing. For her *it's like that we're all interconnected, the Earth, the sky, the nature and we as people, are interconnected*. Genevieve describes this as *the collective soul of the Earth*, a being *at one with the Earth, Mother Earth*, a relationship she needs to *nurture as she, Mother Earth, nurtures her*.

This lifelong connection to the natural environment is remembered back to her childhood when she would take long walks to her grandmother's by way of the Town Belt. *The autumn and spring were favourite times* as she *loved and still loves, the trees and changes to the leaves* that seasons bring, the *watching as the leaves change colour and fall*. *Fascinated* by the leaf fall and the movement of the *wind in the sycamore trees* she would play with others in this environment as well as enjoy times of *solitude*.

At the time of our interview, Genevieve was living by the sea, one of her *chosen* environments. With *sacred mountains* behind her and an exotic *forest* nearby, Genevieve felt she was in a *vortex of energy, vitalising and soul or spirit nourishing*. She believes that *the ions that come from the sea and the energy that comes from the sea are really important* and that the benefits of living by the sea far outweigh the corrosive effects of salt. She loves the mutability, the ongoing *change* of the *landscape* and often walks on the beach with arms outstretched, singing or chanting and absorbing the atmosphere of the environs,

noticing the patterns on the shore and the ripple of and *reflection on the water*. Genevieve takes this change and these patterns as *a metaphor for life* and the *difficulty* we have of knowing *that pattern because we are so steeped in living our lives*.

Brigid too, remembers her spiritual connection to the natural environment dating back to when she *would have been quite a young girl really* as does Tui. Tui, with a *love of nature, greenery, and water too*, has a *very strong sense of belonging to the Earth and being part of the natural environment*. She feels at home wherever, thinking not in terms of belonging to an *individual place or country but in terms of one world, one sort of environment, natural environment*.

Jim was *brought up in a small rural setting with access to farms* and has *always been into the outdoors, drawn to tramping and mountaineering*. He too, feels *very connected to the land, to the natural environment in many ways*. In the natural environment Jim can *connect back to spirit, to finding meaning*. Although aware of his connection to the natural environment from an early age, he acknowledges that its impact on his spirit is something that he has gained *awareness of as he has grown older* feeling that his *experiences and knowledge and awareness enriches over time*.

Connection to the land is something Wai has been aware of throughout her life, the importance of her ancestral land ever present no matter where she may be living or working. Her excursions into the natural environment as a child, helping to gather healing herbs for her midwife grandmother were *annoying* to her then but are an enduring memory in linking her to a love of the natural environment. When we talked, Wai described a situation where she and her work colleagues,

needing to hold an important meeting, picked an area where *you can see the beach and the sea, a nice environment so that people felt valued in being there.*

The natural environment is a widely diverse and complex phenomenon including bodies of land and water with differing compositions and shapes, including varied vegetation and supporting fauna and an atmosphere with its variety of weather and temperatures. Brigid said that her *understanding of the importance of the environment in the whole thing really, stemmed from her upbringing, in appreciation and appreciating the fact that our environment, our physical environment, and not necessarily the clay, the mortar, the physical, tangible things that you can touch but also the things, the environment in terms of what you can smell, what you can see, what you can hear, are God given gifts.*

Being in nature includes pleasant and not so pleasant experiences, such as changing weather and *gathering storm clouds* that can threaten safety and equilibrium. Just like human to human relationships, this relationship requires repeated experiences to grow trust and knowing, to develop feelings of joy and hope. Tui believes that *weather is emotional* and that people let it affect their mood for the day, feeling down if it's raining for instance, but *rain is great, it's good*. It has to rain as *nothing would exist without it*, its part of the cycle of life on Earth and *we belong to the Earth, not the other way around and we need to treat it that way more*. Tui *likes weather and it doesn't always have to be nice weather, a nice, warm sunny day*. She quite *enjoys storms and rain and even being cold as it feels invigorating*.

Jim too loves *the changes and shifts in conditions* and tramping in the mountains in *inclement weather* said such an experience is *still really good*. He likes a *good storm and snow* having come from more southern climes. Magenta likes *the invigoration you get from the natural environment and the energy coming from the weather* and she remembers when growing up in Wellington, *times when she has gone out and sat on stormy days on the rocky coast, using the sublime to overwhelm her, to get past whatever she needed to get past*.

Genevieve also loves *the changes in the weather and seasons, the heat of the summer* when she can *get out and swim, the beauty of autumn* her favourite season, her birth time, autumn with its leaf fall. Some winds *get to her* such as the *howling north-westerlies, the prevailing wind* where she lives, *that pushes the trees to one way* but overall she thinks *the wind is very useful* as without it we *wouldn't have* the enormous benefits of *seed scattering or pollination or the shifting sands, the shifting landscape*. Genevieve likes to watch *the wind pushing clouds away and just loves watching the clothes on the washing line fill and billow and is absolutely blown away by the strength of even the tiniest bird against the wind, their absolute determination to get where they are going regardless of the obstacles in the way, a huge metaphor for life. Geese in formation against the wind and seagulls, incredible, amazing creatures that hover and dive and have to drop the pipi seven or eight times before it will break ... it's just amazing ... patterns within patterns within patterns you know within nature ... and the wind's all part of that really ...* Wai sometimes likes a good wind finding it *interesting if she is outside, to see a wind coming, what it does to the trees and to the leaves and that and how it flicks everything up*. She is

fascinated by the power of the kind of thing like a mini tornado coming up the hill flicking up stuff in its path. It gives her a buzz.

The natural environment is a place to interact with, alone or with others, from *riding on horseback in a very isolated part of the back country* as Brigid did often from an early age until a young adult, her *relationship with her horses probably closer than she had with any person in that time*, to other sporting activities such as kayaking or canoeing like Jim and Tui, mountain climbing, tramping, skiing, diving, camping, gardening and walking or just sitting and being 'in' or just being part of or around nature.

Another experience important to Genevieve is the experience of *Earth centred theosophy and ritual* and she may celebrate these *Goddess rituals* alone or with other women. Such a ritual in the natural environment, on a beach for instance may be used to mark the passing of a life stage. The practice of ritual *has heightened and strengthened* Genevieve's *awareness of the need for conservation as humanity seems to be placing the Earth on a path of destruction*. Genevieve also loves to take regular *retreats* in a beautiful spot, *high on a hill overlooking a lake and toward a sacred mountain*. She also does shaman things such as *drumming* that are centred in her Celtic roots where *the tree is important as Celtic mythology is based in the tree and you go through the tree to the underground or you come up the tree, going up and down the trees*.

Tui when talking about experiencing the *power and energy* of a seaside storm experienced in the past, noted the smell and taste of the sea air. Now that she lives further from the seashore and in the local hills amongst the green of an old and somewhat native environment she is more aware of *the sound of the birds*.

By the sea *the sound of the sea* is more obvious and pervasive. Jim will notice the sound of *native birds and the sounds of water and the sea, waves and so on* when focused in a *contemplative moment*. Genevieve thinks of the sounds in the natural environment as music and that musicians such as Mozart must have drawn *inspiration from nature*. Sounds such as the *sea, the wind on the sea, the gush of a waterfall, a brook in the bush* have a *rhythm, rhythm waves, alpha, beta, theta*.

These are things that Tui notes in going about her life and work as well. She feels that working alone in the act of *something as simple as growing a plant, sustaining a plant life can give someone a sense of fulfilment, a meaning in life*. She also feels that people *get a sense of community* and great benefit from work in relation to activities like *conservation projects because they get the teamwork element out of things, they get the communicating with other people to achieve something with a visible outcome*.

Believing that *it is essential to keep the health of the planet*, Genevieve, Magenta and Tui are actively involved in conservation of the environment and employ some organic practices and recycling. These acts are seen as *a natural progression* for people who recognise the benefits of sustaining a natural environment so that they can continue to live well, continue to nurture their spirit in the natural environment and promote personal and human wellbeing. Magenta *dreams of having an energy efficient, eco-friendly house which takes care of the environment and reduces energy loss and all those sorts of things*. Tui is pragmatic in her approach to living her relationship to the land and appreciates the fact that *New Zealand has hydro power* (instead of like for

instance in *England where it is mostly coal and nuclear*) and that people have had to accept the *cost to that* and *lost their valleys* in some places. *There are always two sides to the coin and people just have to change their lifestyles.* In our interconnectedness with Earth, there has to be some cost to humanity to live on this Earth. Humanity may be *at the top of the food chain* but we need to accept that we *belong to the Earth and not the other way round.*

Tui acknowledges that *everything we do is a political act* including recycling. We all have *choices* about how much we do or don't do in this area. Although *its nice to be surrounded by good and nice things*, Tui feels that *consumerism* is a *terrifying* thing and that generally we don't need material things that *so many people are caught up in, that what they can't see that really is important is that their happiness in everyday life is to relate to other people for a start.* She and her partner *recycle as much rubbish as they can*, trying to *buy as little stuff that's packaged as possible*, being aware of *how much energy they use*, travelling *as economically as possible, biking, canoeing or by using public transport* and *try to consume as little as they can realistically.* She tries to avoid buying fruit and vegetables out of season and feels that we *have too much choice, that there is a lot of waste and that foods high in fats and sugar should be more expensive.* They try and *recycle food scraps and things* and have a worm farm as does Magenta.

Magenta *loves her worms*, in fact, *is very proud of them.* The worm farms are a part of the cycle of living and dying in the natural world. Tui likes it that the worms are *one hundred percent recycling ... they basically just eat through everything vegetable based.* They *don't put any meat in there, as it attracts*

maggots but they put in any household waste. It goes into where the worms are kept quite moist and dark and they eat it and through the bottom they get some great plant food which they feed to the plants.

Magenta has always been interested in the natural environment, having an enjoyment of it and loving to see *the growth and regrowth* of plants and insects, they being a *part of the world* as she is. Both Magenta and Tui's gardens are planted with natives and Wai has *always had flax* growing, *actually the flax that's used for weaving*. In planting and growing *native plants* such as *kaka beak, kowhai, pohutakawa and ferns*, Tui is actively encouraging the local birdlife of *tuis, bellbirds, silvereyes, fantails* and the occasional *wood pigeon*.

Magenta likes to see *plants, the bush, in its own environment*, loves *being able to see rewarewa and the sort of different trees or nikaus, the richness of the podocarp forest* and when she *planted her garden out* she would go down to the *Botanical Gardens or into the Waitakare's to see what plants were like in their natural environment*. In this way she would have *an idea of what was going to happen with them domestically*. When Magenta prunes her trees and plants she lays these prunings *down on the soil, putting life back into the soil* to provide compost for *new growth*. She loves to see *the growth and regrowth* and *insects* and even *plants in despair* because she knows it is all part of the cycle of life.

Genevieve is very aware of what she puts back into the earth. She uses organic herbicides and *encourages people to not put anything down the loo but what they do*, and in the case of toilet paper she does *not use scented stuff but natural and recycled stuff*. She also has a *compost bin that's organic* and uses *organic vegetables* and *GE free foods*. In taking care of the Earth, Genevieve is

taking care of things so that there will be a future for our children, our greatest heritage. It concerns Jim too, that human beings are changing and destroying the environment and the impact on the planet is less and less space for spiritual connectedness within the context of a natural environment. As he says, we're very fortunate in New Zealand to still have the opportunity for those connected moments because there are still streams and trees and so on.

Genevieve is very concerned about the current eradication program, for the pest, the painted apple moth that is a threat to New Zealand's gardens, crops, forests and native bush. Although the pest is a threat, Genevieve wonders about the effect of the spraying on people, *asthma attacks and eczema and other skin diseases and things.*

And getting back to nature and the environment, you know, that whole business that if we don't breathe air that is good, you know, then it destroys the earth, you know like the pollution is destroying the earth, and then we too are a sort of a microcosm of the earth, each individual person is a microcosm of the macrocosm, you know and like when we think there's pollution in the earth and in the waters we think about pollution that happens within the human system, the microcosm, the increase in leukaemia's. You think about the circulatory system is like the rivers of the earth, they are the river's of our system and once they are polluted then it causes huge problems. Yeah, so what's happening in the earth, like happens in the human body too.

Magenta feels that in New Zealand we live *in a luxury country* that we need to care for. Although she believes that *anybody who's not out there in the*

environment needs to be taken out into it and start appreciating what we've got, she is aware that some people don't have the same access to the natural environment as she does and understands why they may not feel as she does. How can those people think about the environment and preserving the different species, diversification and things like that when they live in tenement housing and they've got no green grass anywhere and no trees anywhere and you know that they can't ... why, why would they want to think about a tree?

For some of the participants, animals, fish and birds were seen as integral to spiritually uplifting experiences in the natural environment. The importance of animals as companions and from whom lessons about life can be learnt were described by Genevieve when she talked of her found cat Mozart, how she nurtured him to live and Brigid who has *always had animals and animals are her friends* and interactions with these friends provide her with *a sense of fulfilment*. Tui has noted that *a lot of people have pets, companions, birds, aviaries or cats or dogs or whatever and that they bring them a lot of joy, a lot of comfort*.

We have a sort of wonder in our relationship with the natural environment that makes us use words such as magic, beauty and mystery to describe the experience. Brigid believes that all things *are God given gifts ... everything is a gift ...* and tries to always appreciate the *magic in everything around her*, the beauty of a sunset, rainbow or waterfall and says that even in *things of the not so beautiful there is still mystery to be seen* if you can allow the seeing. Brigid knows that if she is to have things in the natural environment *positively energising her spirit*, she *has to put a bit of something of herself into it too*, and sort of say, *OK, now let's be aware of what's around me*. She tries to go beyond

the seeming constancy of the backdrop of nature and really see the *tree, the hills in the background, the horizon, the variances in the sun, the position it is in, what time of the day it is, what time of the year it is, how much cloud cover there is, and how much light there is generally, that the sun is setting.*

In contrast to the constancy of *the natural world, the manmade world* is considered by Tui to be in *turmoil*. However, she thinks that *some people find being outside in the natural environment quite stressful* and that those people *prefer the predictability of the inner, manmade environment*. Magenta feels that although people living in cities with high density populations may feel they live invigorating lifestyles, *it's a very mechanised sort of invigoration, people in cities, in structures and it's not the invigoration you get from the natural environment and the energy coming from the weather and ...* A few years ago when Jim and his wife were travelling, they *wanted to live in a very large city for the experience*. They lived this city life *for a couple of months and Jim found it incredibly claustrophobic and just wanted to get out of it ... it was very hard to get out of the city, but there was that sense of feeling, I just can't tolerate all of this.*

Experiencing the phenomenon transpersonally

For the participants in this study, finding meaning in life beyond the ordinary resources of the self and the boundaries of its corporeal body was variously described as being *at one with the Earth*, a peak experience and *a deeper level of consciousness*. This dimension included thoughts and experiences of reincarnation, religions, *theosophy*, *epiphanal* experiences, dreams, visions, out

of body experiences, creative visualisation and transcending or moving to another space. It also included a notion of the wider cosmos and feelings that things are awe inspiring and beautiful, magic, mysterious and indescribable.

When Genevieve described her experience of lying on the beach alone *watching the hardly perceptible movement of the sea as being totally in connection with the Earth in that moment*, she felt that *the heave and letting go of the swell was the breath of Mother Earth*, an immensely powerful experience. Genevieve felt that this was *like the rise and fall of Mother Earth's breast with each deep inhalation of her breath*. Genevieve thought how wonderful it was to *be alive on such a beautiful day and to be totally aware and at one with the Earth*. She just felt ... *as though she was sitting on the belly or the breast of Mother Earth watching it rise and fall*. This experience stands out in her memory as *being of another world, of another consciousness, a deeper level of consciousness, uplifting and like being on a physical high*. Genevieve believes *we're all interconnected, the Earth, the sky, the nature and we as people, are interconnected and that this is the collective soul of the Earth, the collective soul and the experience of being one with the Earth at that particular time was like experiencing that connectedness, that interconnectedness with the Earth, with nature, with all peoples*.

Genevieve's earlier life *was steeped in religion* but *most of her adult life has been centred on Earth centred theosophy and Earth centred rituals with the women's groups she belongs to*. *Women's rituals and Goddess rituals where*

the Earth is the centre has strengthened or heightened Genevieve's awareness of the way of nurturing the natural environment and the universe. And such rituals with others in the natural environment are used to acknowledge significant milestones in her life. Ritual involves a process like a meditation or quiet contemplative time and generally Genevieve prefers a contemplative way of being, being in the moment, being totally present in the moment, focusing on her breath and just allowing herself to 'be' to the more formal meditation of religion. She often uses the parables of Anthony De Millo, a Jesuit, to focus her thoughts, contemplating stories and their deep and significant meanings. Her thinking now is kind of between Buddhism and Christianity. Genevieve also reads sacred cards, Celtic cards and Barry Brailsford's 'The Four Trails' and participates in workshops by guides such as Jean Houston and the very special place of retreat, seeking and achieving the impossible, looking for self. Genevieve finds that she is leaning more and more toward ideas of reincarnation, souls with many experiences coming back and back and back.

Religion is part of the way that Brigid expresses her spirituality and for many years was the chief way, the main way that she expressed her spirituality. Over the last twenty years or so she has come to have a far deeper understanding of what spirituality means, that religion is only a modality of spiritual expression, a framework. Her spirituality is the energy she has within herself to search deeply the meaning in her relationships with self, others, environment and God. A searching for meaning within those relationships, in the past, in the present and into the future. Sitting out watching the sunset that summer evening, would be one of the real epiphanal experiences that Brigid has encountered.

Brigid has a fine voice and at times when she has been *able to sing in certain settings, when she is singing stuff that is very, very close to the real framework with which she expresses her spirituality*, such as part of a church ceremony, *the singing coupled with the resonance of the church and a whole lot of other things she has felt a huge sense of freedom and emancipation. Music is one of the keys, one of the very fundamental, centring points for her whole spirituality.* Brigid thinks it was *St Augustine who said that music opens the window of the soul and for her this is definitely so, music with its harmonies and the way the notes are put together. Some music having the capacity to sort of transcend the here and now can lift her out of herself, onto a different plane.* Brigid once *had a little sing in the Waitomo Caves and that was quite amazing.* The sound allowed her to *sort of visualise the tonal sounds rising like saints have described a choir of angels rising with the incense up to God, a sort of mystical transportation.*

Tui acknowledges that she is not *a religious person as such as in a religious spiritual stance, doesn't believe in heaven or hell* but has *a very strong sense of belonging to the Earth.* Magenta too, describes her spirituality similarly. Going into the natural environment is going into *precious* places, places whose longevity are threatened by current human usages, the proliferation of garden centres and the forestry industry introducing exotic plants and seeds into the environment. This going into the natural environment is her *version of religion*, a part of her *belief system* that we are part of the *cyclic nature of life, a cosmological viewpoint* that we are part of the cosmos, *we have our place in the cosmos*, and like Tui, holds the belief that *we are all born of the Earth and we all return to the Earth.* Magenta feels that the experience of going into the natural environment is *using the sublime to overwhelm you to get you past whatever*

you are going to get past. Jim too, has had similar experiences in the mountains.

There are different aspects of mountaineering, as well as the physical climbing but also the real spiritual uplifting of being in those environments and I can think of one time when I was in my late teens, a friend of mine and I went to climb this quite difficult mountain ... and we were climbing and looking out over the valley with a drop down of thousands of feet with the background of the sun setting. It wasn't your typical sunset; it was this beautiful, it was almost a green light and these shades and colours ... This was early summer and you know, it was the sort of environment that somehow ... and the setting somehow just ... totally connected me to ... gave me a feeling of something that's indescribable ...

Like Magenta, Jim feels that human changes to the natural environment threaten our ability to find spiritual connectedness within the context of the natural environment. While he doesn't *adhere to a particular religion or a particular following* feeling that *religion is a way of putting a formal structure around spirituality*, a thing that *societies have had to do for a whole range of reasons for millennia* and that while he *isn't a Christian in the traditional Christian sense*, *Christian values are very much a part of him*. He has read very *eclectically about a whole lot of different things* and *Zen is something he can relate to, something that helps describe how spirituality works* for him. Jim admits that some of his *spiritual needs can be met in a church*, a place of solitude, contemplation, meditation a place *where certain types of music* can

move him a great deal, the moving of a spiritual connectedness to some thing. In their construction big churches and cathedrals have a lot of space which is uplifting. They are constructed closer to heaven and some organ music and singing in churches is especially uplifting to Jim.

Wai's spirituality is an integral part of her belief system, a part of her culture and pervades her life and work. She has a wide understanding of the transpersonal for herself and others including her *tangata*, her *people* with mental health issues. She has *been brought up with an understanding that is one of matakite* ("seer; second sight; prophesy; intuition", Ryan, 2001, p. 151), that there are *those who are born and see beyond this world*. To her there is an enduring aspect to life and that *whatever you put into your body not only influences your life but changes the generations to come*. Her world view includes an understanding of what it is *to be wairangi* ("excited; reckless; temporarily deranged", Ryan, 2001, p. 335), *wai being water so a transparency, that there is something moving in there that you can't see*. For Wai, *part of her job in working in a Kaupapa Maori* (Maori "strategy; philosophy", Ryan, 2001, p.101) *service means that each day is full of spiritual experiences whether good, bad or indifferent*.

Both Wai and Brigid use visualisation or transportation techniques to feel spiritually connected to a natural environment in times of need. Wai can *actually place herself back in the bush* if she is somewhere *and something is going on* that she doesn't *quite get*. *If there is stuff going on* that she finds *pretty wild and woolly and flying all over the place* she can *ground herself and see herself on Ninety Mile Beach right on the sand*. She also finds peace in her *understanding*

of a te wa; that things happen in their own good time, that there are things she can move and there are things that she cannot move. This keeps her in a place where she can be quite peaceful. As long as she has done her bit, Wai understands that there are other players that will come in, that all people have their own part to play and that different parts come into play at different times and that she can only manage her own part, not others.

Wai remembers a time when she was away from home *at a conference* and she *had to step out* for a while because she *was sore*. While she was taking this timeout her aunt from home rang and asked her what she was doing, that the reason she was sore was because she hadn't *done a prayer* before leaving for the conference *to cover that particular area of her forehead*. Her aunt reminded her that she needed to *make certain that she protect* herself so that she doesn't pick up the pain of others. Usually Wai would perform certain rituals on leaving home to protect her because she would be moving through lands that she is not traditionally connected to.

Recognising a need for the positive influence of the natural environment, Brigid will use transportation techniques such as *creative visualisation* to go into other places. She uses her *memory and her perception of her environment without actually having to be there*. She can *conjure up an image* of herself *in lots of settings*, often when *lying in bed or sitting back in her chair trying to get out of writers block or solve a problem* and will think of a seaside or a river or a waterfall or something and will imagine everything to do with that with all of her senses. She will smell *the damp, earthy, humus smell of forest leaf mould*, the brine of the sea, hear the waterfall or rain, *the wind murmuring in the leaves or*

the wind coming in across the ocean, or feel the soft, cool grass of a little clearing or the heat of the hot, black iron sand against her shoulders, against her lower back.

In describing an experience he had in the mountains when in his late teens, Jim said that as he looked down and *out over the valley with a drop of thousands of feet with the background of the setting sun*, an atypical summer sunset in its beauty with its *almost green light and shades and colours*, he had a *feeling of something indescribable* in its spiritual connectedness.

There are many experiences that Wai has in the natural environment that she would describe as an *absolute high* or a *buzz*, things *that fascinate* her but *things that most people probably don't even notice, mist and mountains and suns and cobwebs.*

As well as describing the spiritually beneficial effects of the natural environment, the study participants were also asked how or if, this affected their nursing practice. Their comments were collected under the three broad themes of personal healing and wellbeing in the natural environment, knowing self – knowing others and sustaining self in nursing work.

Part Three: The value of the study phenomenon in nursing practice

The study participants definitely agreed that they felt that being in the natural environment is beneficial to their wellbeing. They also felt that it is important to know that you your-self, as a healing vessel, need to experience wellbeing before you care for others. Importantly, the experience of the phenomenon sustains the participants in their nursing practice. By presenting these comments as a separate part in this chapter, the importance of the phenomenon to the discipline of nursing is allowed to stand out.

Personal healing and wellbeing in the natural environment

To have wellbeing, there must be attention paid to the balance of the dimensions of the mind, body and spirit. Each dimension requires nourishment. The body requires appropriate foods and fluids, exercise and rest. The mind requires stimulation and periods of rest, healthy amounts of stress and a certain equilibrium. The spirit requires complex nourishment affecting the intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal connections unique to the person. This study focused on the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit and participants acknowledged that the notion of spiritual nourishment is complex with shifting boundaries or is boundary-less. Spiritual nourishment involves the senses and while sight is extremely important to the participants, sound in the natural environment is also important to their spirituality and wellbeing. Our senses register and help make meaning of the myriad experiences of our daily lives (Ackerman, 2000).

The natural environment is a place to revitalise, energise, replenish and regain balance in life. It is restorative, awe inspiring and often beautiful, spiritually uplifting and invigorating. To function well in our nursing practice we need to feel vital, energetic, and alive and we get that from deeply experiencing the natural environment.

Genevieve is very clear that nourishment from the natural environment is extremely important to the balance of her holistic self, providing balance of mind, body and spirit. This nourishment is in fact her

... raison d'être if you like ... that's crucial to my being, totally, it's the essence of who I am, you know like my soul is the essence of who I am. If I take care of my physical body I need to take care of my spiritual body, my soul too. So it's very important that I have that and it's why I live by the sea; the ions that come from the sea, the energy that comes from the sea are really important, and we have the sacred mountains that we can see all around us and the forest. It's like this vortex of energy that's here that's so vitalising and soul nourishing, spiritually nourishing ...

Genevieve needs the *deep nourishment* for her soul that she gets from nature. This nourishment is gained using all of her senses including her hearing. *We are just beginning to realise that the music of whales and dolphins is incredible and that this natural music is healing. Listening to the waterfall, the gush of a little waterfall, going through the bush and listening to the brook, the music of that is incredibly nurturing to the soul.*

Despite the fact that *there's lots of things about living by the sea that are negative* such as *your house rots and everything goes rusty and there's sand all over the place, there is nothing to compare with the benefits you have by living by the sea. It is always changing, the ripples on the shore, the sparkle, the ripples, the reflections on the water, patterns* a metaphor for life. Being so *steeped in living our lives we often find it difficult to see the patterns* in our life, the beauty of changing patterns and weather and seasons.

Although she *listens to a lot of music and loves the sound and the movement of water, sight has primacy* for Magenta. Being in the natural environment is described as *a relaxation* and Magenta can get this as well from *looking at plant magazines or books on native plants and things*. She has noticed the healing effects of the natural environment at times in her life and especially when she was working in America, when her work environment was stressful, the mountains in winter were a restorative, healing environment that gave her a *sense of balance again*. She feels that if you *watch the details of nature a little bit, the little bits of growth and things growing you can translate some of those ideas into people getting well*.

An often stressful work environment with *the intrusion of one's stresses and worries* sends Jim into the natural environment to *quietly meditate or spend time with quiet moments that in their simplicity bring calmness and spiritual awareness*. Jim realises that *to cope and get on with life he has to be able to not have those things intruding* and getting out into the natural environment is healing. As he has *grown older*, Jim has become more aware of his spirituality, his *experiences and knowledge and awareness enriching over time*.

Stopping off at her gorge *to wander on different tracks for a while* is a time for Wai to *wind down whatever has been going on*, a time to *refocus*, a time of *dropping off*, a time, *if it's a Friday and she is going home*, to *get ready for the weekend*. Wai is as likely to get an *absolute high*, a *natural or spiritual high*, an *exhilaration*, from *the energy of people some of them kaumatua* (male elder, Ryan, 2001) and *kuia* (female elder, Ryan, 2001), as she is from *some places* she has *gone to*, such as mountains or culturally important places at sunrise. Wai believes *that as a profession, a healing profession that one of our foundations is about the spirituality each of us share with one another and with clients*. Wai is aware of the benefit of a view of the natural environment for personal wellbeing and of benefit to others in times of stress. Wai and her colleagues for instance, chose a sea view to provide a calming and personally valuing atmosphere for an important work meeting.

When Brigid needs to re-find or rejuvenate energy and she cannot get out to the natural environment, this is when she will visualise and transport herself to previously rejuvenating experiences, forest clearings with *long grass, soft grass that nobody's ever been to before* or the *comforting, soothing heat* of warm sand underneath her. In such situations, Brigid is *responding with all of her senses* for instance, *hearing the wind murmuring in the leaves or coming in across the ocean, smelling the leaf mould or the ocean and feeling the warm sand or soft grasses* with her back or feet.

Jim gets *a real sustenance* from going alone into the mountains to *do some journey, spending days on end just by himself*, or from being on the coast walking coastal tracks or out on the sea in a kayak. *Being in and around nature*,

being a part of nature, being quietly alone is connecting, uplifting and sometimes, *magic*. There is a heightened awareness in the natural environment that is spiritually *recharging*, *utterly rejuvenating*. *Just being aware of the simplicity of everything and a quiet meditative moment* can make Jim *feel so recharged from nothingness, very Zen*.

Being close to nature on a daily basis provides a *stability* and sense of *wellbeing* for Tui, the *constancy of nature* being *very calming* and at the same time effecting a *recharging* of her spiritual *batteries*. Feeling calm and relaxed promotes healing and feeling balanced is essential to function well in daily life.

Knowing self – knowing others

As nurses we need to care for ourselves so that we are in optimum health and able to care well for others. By recognising that we, as holistic beings have health and wellbeing needs to meet, we may in turn have some understanding of the needs of others. In caring for ourselves we must also care for the life giving natural environment. Without good air to breathe and a healthy environment, humanity cannot survive and nursing would have no-one to nurse.

To know our self means going inward to seek that which makes us whole, our mindbodyspirit as one, in harmony, a state of wellbeing. It is what is inside that is our strength, our spirit. Identifying our own spiritual needs is important as it is this knowing that allows us to connect to others in a compassionate healing moment.

Wai's knowing of self and others is holistic with a strong spiritual element, all pervasive and based in a particular world view. Her knowing is steeped in, and she lives within, a relational belief system. Wai takes into her *nursing understanding a world view that doesn't quite go with the books ... a knowledge base that is not medical and it's not Western*. Her knowing *is based on her own beliefs and her own values and it's very much the way that she nurses as well*. Wai has found that Western nursing knowing is very particular, *very defined ... there's a definition, everything is defined* compared to the *understanding from her world view*.

Wai believes that because she is *a lot more grounded in her identity* she has *an awareness that other people have things that they value and believe in, that are important for them to heal*. In her nursing Wai feels that it is important to recognise her clients *as tangata, as people ... a philosophy in itself*. Wai's world view helps her understand the particular situations of her people and knows that it is important in her nursing practice to add to the Western knowledge because in many situations *there is no understanding from Western practitioners ... it's the thing about things that are outside of the beliefs and the culture system and the spiritual understanding ... they miss a number of the cues. We have to try and explain the situation from a body of knowledge that they understand*. Wai knows that this *does mean that we've got to have a clear understanding of ourselves and what that means to us. Not all of us were brought up the same way and we all come with different levels of understanding. What we try and do is share that out*.

In knowing her self and acknowledging her strong cultural and spiritual beliefs, Wai is able to provide appropriate care to her clients. She is also able to pass this knowing on to other clinicians she works with. In adding to Western knowing she knows that she and others can work *to add to it so that we can bring a wider perspective to the people that we are working with.*

Genevieve definitely believes that it is essential to know your own self before attempting to know and care for others. For her to be closely involved in healing work, Genevieve believes she must be familiar with her own spiritual needs.

This is the koru, the symbol of my practice ... like, I need to go within, I need to walk within and do my own journey, you know, before I can walk the journey with another, ... and I believe that's what ... I think that's what we as nurses need to do, we need to walk out in journey, to spiritual knowing and understanding and ... healing ... before we ... even as we are walking the journey with another. There is nothing more arrogant and oppressive than somebody who thinks they know it and walking somebody else's journey.

Genevieve is holistic in her nursing practice, her *life of working with the living and the dying*, and teaches other nurses *healing touch, massage, therapeutic touch, visualisation, meditation and those sorts of things*. In the quote below she describes how her knowing constitutes her self as a healing, therapeutic vessel, and that she is also able to use this knowing to inform others.

I'm now walking with students that are going to take care of clients, so that the experiences that I've had, you know, in my life and my stories, I pass onto the students in the hope that that will nourish them and that

will give them another way of viewing nursing rather than just someone who places a drip, that we are our own therapeutic tool. The only thing I need is my hands and my head and my heart and a huge amount of compassion and caring, and love, unconditional love and support. It doesn't mean to say I don't use my judgement about stuff but I endeavour to not judge people and listen to what they've got to say and make judgements; which I'm paid to do in my job, on the supporting evidence. I'm talking about the therapeutic relationship, the nurse as a therapeutic tool. All I need is my hands. I don't need a whole lot of other equipment.

An important way for Genevieve to know her self is by journaling. She has used a journal for some time and writes in it when she feels *a need to write in it*. Her journal is her *soul talk, a soul journey, a story, a narrative of where she is in a given moment, what her feelings are in that moment and what she is learning in that moment. It's about relationships; it's about making sense of stuff that doesn't seem to make sense at all*. She is able to look at a bigger pattern, go back and read stuff she has written years ago and is able to trace her development, think, gee, *was I really there at that time*, and see how much she has moved since that time.

Knowing that her spirit is positively influenced in the natural environment, gives Brigid an understanding, *a very great respect for the fact that her clients or patients spirituality or spirit can likewise be very much enhanced and made well by the things within their environment that are important to them*. For Brigid, *nursing is all about trying to discern the harmony with which everybody moves*

and has resonance with, and to facilitate that in nursing; so everything is related to all of the senses. Harmony is holistic and is a sort of total integrity of the person, mind/body/spirit and within each of those factors all of the things related to all of the senses.

Brigid feels that it is important to be spiritually alive or well when caring for others but that a lot of people are *totally shy really of the whole spiritual dimension because they feel that uncomfortable about it within themselves that they just don't feel comfortable, confident, competent in going near there with others and that many, including some academics believe that by and large nurses are probably not prepared sufficiently in their basic training about their spiritual selves and how the spirit needs to be tended to and how it can be tended to.*

Brigid echoes Ross' (1994; 1995; 1997) study finding that nurses often feel uncomfortable trying to provide for clients spiritual needs and that this may be due to not knowing the needs of self, as well as not being fully prepared to provide spiritual care in nursing training. The study participants believe that they have spiritual needs and that having these needs met is crucial in sustaining themselves in their nursing practice.

Sustaining self in nursing practice

Tui feels that *when you are a nurse you see a lot of suffering, you see a lot of people fearful, especially things like death ... you see a lot of anguish, a lot of regret, a lot of people desperately trying to clutch to their life. Whereas, if people stepped back and looked at what their life really was, they wouldn't be as fearful of everything, that the natural environment reminds her that you can't control things, that you can only control yourself and when something like an illness takes over, you may not have that control either and that's what people are very scared of.*

Without the natural environment generally, Tui thinks she wouldn't have any quality of life and she feels that she couldn't interact with people as you need to, at the level you need to in nursing, without the relaxation and the calmness she gets from the natural environment. Tui knows that she wouldn't be able to deal with one (nursing care) without the solace of the other (sustenance from the natural environment) basically. Tui is aware that in every nursing intervention you have to be functioning in an holistic, non-harming, objective manner and that you can't function as a nurse at the level that you are expected to function at without feeling balanced yourself.

If she didn't have spiritual nourishment, Wai doesn't think that she *would be as good at nursing as she is now. Because she is a lot happier in herself and has a better understanding of what she needs she thinks that without spiritual nourishment she doesn't know if she would feel as comfortable in the service that she is delivering. She doesn't know if she would think it was the best she could do.*

For Brigid, being spiritually alive and well certainly has an influence on her ability to practice as a nurse. She realises that for some it is similar and for others not and that *by and large nurses probably are not prepared sufficiently in their basic training to know about their spiritual selves and how the spirit needs to be tended to and how it can be tended* and that it is important in caring for others.

Magenta has worked a lot in intensive and critical care with the associated suffering and death and describes it as *a hard environment because you never ever see anyone really well*. For a while when she was abroad, Magenta also worked in a trauma centre nursing the *underclass*, witnessing outcomes of *violence and crime*. As a contrast, she recognises that she *only really sees the good things in the natural environment and that that probably counter-balances the negative* aspects of her nursing life. These experiences have made Magenta aware that without the sustenance she gets from the natural environment she would easily be *completely drained* and find her ability to work in nursing difficult or impossible.

Jim works *in mental health* and acknowledges that *a lot of the time it is not a particularly positive atmosphere to work in*. It is a working environment where *some people are quite high risk and he will have to manage that risk on a day to day, week to week basis and no matter what he does, there will be times when something will go wrong and that may not have been a mistake or anything, may not have been an over sight, it just happens*. As a self-care measure, Jim focuses on trying to make it as positive an experience as possible although with *the stress of the work and sometimes in the bigger context in which he works*

there's a lot of negativity, there's a lot of focus on things that don't go well, there's a lot of disaster, with inquiry after inquiry after inquiry. He feels that that can't help but affect you. For Jim though,

... spirituality works for me, it works. I go and quietly meditate; or meditation can just be spending time with quiet moments from here and there and what comes from that is that simplicity in that trying to shake off and get rid of all of the complexities of my life brings that calmness and that spiritual awareness which in a way is hard to describe, it just IS. It helps to get rid of those intrusions that tend to just come back in an intrusive way, you know, like the intrusion of one's stresses and worries. I find that when I'm immersed in nursing and especially if I haven't had much of a break from it for a while, then I'll continually be ruminating; there'll be worries or there'll be things that I've dealt with during the day or last week, or some situation that I'm worried about, or some person that I'm worried about, or some interaction or some relationship that I've had at work with my colleague or patient or groups. Those things are hard to get rid of or just shake off. To cope, to get on with your life you've got to be able to not have those things intruding because of the intense nature of the work.

Jim knows that there is often *a lot of negativity, chaos and disaster* in his work environment where *managing risk* is essential *on a day by day basis*. His clients *struggle to find hope in their lives, meaning in their lives*. In this often stressful environment, Jim is aware that *it's vital, absolutely vital* to have his spiritual needs met in the natural environment and that he would be *much less able to*

work as he does *with other people*. It certainly *helps* him to work *in a holistic way* with others. In recognising that meeting his spiritual needs is *absolutely vital* he can *focus on how* his clients can *meet their spiritual needs* and *find meaning in life* in appropriate ways for them.

In the complexities that are our working lives there is often an accompanying intrusion of background chatter and to work well it is necessary to calm the chattering mind. Going into the natural environment is the way Jim and Genevieve achieve this. Genevieve feels that it is *important just to let the mind stop from time to time* and just be *in the moment, totally present in the moment, focused on the moment, focusing on the breath*.

Genevieve is absolutely clear that if she didn't nourish herself in the natural environment then she *wouldn't be able to sustain, or wouldn't have sustained some of the events of her life, her past life, because as nurses we hold so many stories of other peoples joy and pain and suffering and death and you know ... non healing and healing. We hold all the stuff within us and confidentiality demands that unless we have supervision we've got to do something with it, because otherwise it would gnaw at us*. To avoid going crazy, going absolutely nuts Genevieve is clear that as a nurse she *needs to find a way of caring for herself and the way that she cares for herself as a nurse is to be out, to commune with nature, to be one with nature and to support the natural environment*. Genevieve *finds that in taking care of herself, being at one with nature helps her to be able to hold those stories and do the caring work of a nurse*.

By presenting the participant knowing as far as possible in the voice of each participant and within the framework of Reed's (1992) dimensions of relatedness in spirituality, I believe that the study phenomenon has been clearly illuminated. Each participant's vivid descriptions of their various spiritually uplifting experiences in the natural environment included experiences that can be considered intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal. As well, each participant felt that their spiritually beneficial experiences in the natural environment were acts of self-care and that these experiences also have positive impacts on their nursing care and practice.

Concluding comments

The aim of heuristic research is to discover the meaning and essence of a particular human experience, "to uncover and disclose that which is, as it is" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). I understand this to mean that the unique participant descriptions of their experiences are not interpreted or objectified in any way and that they are valued as they *just are*.

In this chapter I have presented the participant knowing in a narrative style synthesising each participant's words with mine to creatively depict the experience being described. I have been able to do this by way of repeated immersion in the participant knowing of the study phenomenon, reflecting back to my own internal frame of reference and by using tacit knowing and intuition to surface the patterns of the participants' experiences. By presenting the

participant knowing in this way I have been able to retain “the essence of the person in experience” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43) and illuminate the notion of relationship or connectedness.

Guided by Moustakas (1990) in the presentation of the participant knowing, I introduced the six study participants in Part One of this chapter by way of individual word portraits that honour their essence and uniqueness. Each portrait is a snapshot of that particular participant used to fore-ground aspects of their personhood important to the study phenomenon.

In Part Two of the chapter, again guided by Moustakas (1990) in how to explicate the participant data in a creative synthesis, I presented the participants’ experiences of the study phenomenon using Reed’s (1992) relational dimensions of spirituality as a structure to guide the narrative. Thus, the participant’s unique experiences of the positive influence of the natural environment on their human spirit were presented within the dimensions of spirituality described by Reed as intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal.

The third part of the chapter I presented the participant data that described the relationship of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit and nursing practice. The three concepts discussed include personal healing and wellbeing in the natural environment, knowing self - knowing others and sustaining self in nursing practice. In both Part Two and Part Three I have used the participants own words as much as possible to allow the participant knowing to retain its freshness, vividness and intensity of the described experiences of the study phenomenon.

In the next and final chapter I will make concluding comments and discuss what I discovered during this heuristic journey. The discussion will include reflections on the research process and participant withdrawal and a discussion of the significant discoveries that were made from the study. I will also discuss limitations and validity of the study and implications for the discipline of nursing before concluding with a personal reflection.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUDING COMMENTS INCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

When the writing up of the research journey reached this stage it was time for me to consider the meaning of the work itself and its meaning to the discipline of nursing. It was a time for me to reflect on what I have discovered during my heuristic journey about the various elements of the study phenomenon and the research process.

Continuing with the narrative style of the thesis, in this chapter I will bring the remaining parts of the project together and in doing so, make concluding comments. I will begin by reflecting on the research process and then the experience of having a participant withdraw, and briefly discuss the limitations of the study, generalisability and the validity of the research. Following this I will discuss the significant discoveries that I made about the study phenomenon. In this way I will be reviewing the research journey generally before presenting the study discoveries that I believe have implications for the discipline of nursing.

I will then discuss the implications for the discipline of nursing before concluding with a reflection on my personal transformation that occurred during this heuristic journey. I have been guided in the development and writing of this chapter by the work of Holloway & Wheeler (1996).

It is now mid 2007 and the research journey has spanned more than five years in its entirety. The journey with its own unique rhythm and flow has included

times of intense work; searching, thinking, dwelling on surfaced insights and taking time to ponder and consider. These were periods when interest, concentration and other things in life that impact on study combined to provide an environment conducive to exploration and writing. At such times work flowed at a steady pace. And then there have been times, months at a stretch, when study has been impossible for various reasons; times when I have needed time out and put the thesis aside altogether.

When I look back to the very beginning of the journey I was excited by what I would find out about the concept of connectedness in nursing and the research process itself. I was equally excited by what I would find out about my self. I knew that I was stepping forth on a project that would result in an expansion of nursing knowledge and that the journey would also increase my personal knowledge of the research concern and research process. When it became clear that the methodology I would use was heuristics I knew that the project would also be personally transforming.

In undertaking a heuristic research project I took up the challenge to value a personal experience, understand its many dimensions and using this awareness seek other examples of this distinctive human experience. The research process has involved a deep awareness of a personal experience and the desire to explore, discover and unfold what this specific experience meant for others. It took courage to believe, have faith, and taking what was personally known and valued, discover the myriad connections that are revealed during heuristic research.

As the journey of discovery unfolded I have felt a variety of emotions that have included excitement, eagerness and frustration. At other times I have felt daunted, thwarted and overwhelmed; challenged, disappointed and successful; joyful, proud and humble. But always I have felt amazed by the power of discovery, in awe of the wisdom of others and entranced by the affects of the ever changing natural environment on my wellbeing.

Reflection on the research process

I understand that every piece of research undertaken follows a general process that begins with an idea that has the potential to reveal important knowledge, usually to a particular discipline or service. The general research process also includes refining that idea, identifying the study question or quest and determining the best methodology to be used. Once the appropriate methodology for the study has been identified the research process involves setting up and undertaking the study followed by disseminating the study findings in some way. Research also requires a literature search at some time in the process to find out what is already known about the subject of the study.

As well as the general process, each piece of research undertaken will follow a more prescribed course determined by the sort of study to be undertaken, the methodology and the audience or area in which the outcome will be shared. The researcher needs to determine the study question or quest, if the study will use quantitative or qualitative methods and methodologies and if the findings will be best served by being presented as a thesis, book, journal article or some other material.

This piece of research, undertaken for a Master of Nursing, did not have to be original but needed to contribute in some way to the body of nursing knowledge. The research concern also needed to be of some significance to me, be something that I would feel passionate about and something that would be able to sustain me through the research process to completion.

The earliest thing that I learnt about the research process was that while I had had an idea that might have been original and that I also felt passionate about, I did not fully know what was already known to the discipline of nursing about that idea. In fact, it would take quite some part of the research journey before I did discover what was known to nursing about connectedness. What I do know is that while I took the idea of the concept of connectedness in nursing to research school as the concern I would study, I had already begun thinking about the more specific connection of the spiritual dimension and the natural environment as the potential study quest.

I know this from my journal; that I had the idea of studying the concept of connectedness in nursing; that this interest was somehow related to my personal experience of spiritual awakening in the natural environment; and that I then spent some months exploring environmental writing and reading about the experience of others seeking meaning in life. When I started writing a journal and making mind maps to develop my ideas I had been advised by my supervisor to date them which I did. It was not until later when I was writing up the thesis that I realised the value of these practises in tracing the journey of discovery. At that first research school when I found that I did not actually have a research quest identified and ready to fully explore, I understood that during

my masters' candidature I would be skilfully guided to seek and discover. I was often reminded to *trust the process!*

Doing research for a master's thesis identified for me my status as a neophyte researcher. Almost everything was a new challenge and retaining confidence in myself and the process as it would be made known, took ongoing courage. In those early days I already knew that my unfocused research concern would more than likely be a piece of qualitative research and that my research ideas and concerns would be explored using a relevant methodology. Those early months of searching for nursing literature to support my research idea and reveal the study quest were busy and exciting. Early days meant that time stretched ahead and I could enjoy my current place in the process. As the study quest and the methodology were identified I began to learn that the heuristic research process is indeed a journey of discovery.

Following an apparently naturally laid path I confidently enjoyed the freedom within what I felt was an easily understood construction of Moustakas'; to seek, discover, consider and expand my knowledge of the phenomenon under study and the research process itself. With Moustakas' methodology supporting my work, I entered a period when my thesis study required me to take a somewhat concrete approach. My next steps in the process were very clear.

The way ahead was determined by the need to seek ethics approval and recruit participants. I had guidelines to follow for ethics that in turn guided participant issues. These included the need for an information page about the study, a consent form for recruited participants and an interview guide, things that would provide the project with boundaries and safeguard the process for participants

and myself. Following this I was involved in the processes around participant data collection. These processes included advertising for the participants and participating in the interview process before moving on to transcribing the audio tapes and eventually organising the various concepts of the participant knowing onto a table of ideas.

This part of the process took around a year and was a stimulating and enjoyable experience. I found the study participants quite quickly and easily and busy with interviews and transcribing, time moved swiftly. As each interview was completed, I transcribed the audio tapes myself quite soon afterward. While transcribing the audio tapes from six interviews was a time consuming task as I had no specialist equipment to aid me, the process gave me the time to dwell deeply in the material, the voice of the participant and the interview proper. In doing this I was steeping myself in the data, recognising the familiar and repeated ideas and pondering the possible meanings of the new ideas that each participant raised. Once the transcribing was done, the hard copy of each transcript was explored repeatedly and insights highlighted and noted and linkages made in the margins.

Alongside this process where the knowing was alive, vivid and colourful and I was fully involved in the experience, I delved into the past and spent some time familiarising myself with the work of some of the people who influenced the development of Moustakas' methodology. I was fascinated with the knowledge I gained of how Moustakas may have used these works, and limited by Moustakas' (1990) reference list and access to the resources the exercise occupied a relatively finite timeframe. I do not regret this foray and feel that it

gave me a well rounded understanding of the background to heuristic methodology as developed by Moustakas.

Once I had embarked on the research project and really began using the methodology I recognised that I was already using some of the processes and phases of heuristics. As I continued to work through the various stages of the research process I regularly paused to check what process I was using or what phase I was currently in. With the study concern always with me in some way I quickly became very familiar with the various processes and phases of the methodology. I enjoyed the fact that such subjective concepts as intuition and self-dialogue for instance, were accepted research processes that I was able to use to discover the essence of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit.

As the quantity of my knowing grew I began to understand the potential complexity of qualitative research, research that is focused on unique human qualities. I came to understand that the depth and breadth of work required for a master's degree by research thesis should never be underestimated. While the participant data provided depictions of the study phenomenon that did not need further explanation, the research process requires the substantiation of supporting material. This involved a vast amount of searching, reading, sifting and analysing of information to facilitate the required connection of concepts. However I found this to be a deep and richly satisfying experience.

At times the bulk of notes, mind maps and larger pieces of writing overwhelmed me and the progress of the project was stalled by my inability to construct a meaningful whole. There were other times when the vicissitudes of life that

included the needs of relationships, home and work, sickness and responsibilities, interrupted the flow of the study. Courage to continue was tested; failure was not an option. A balance was restored; a way was found.

Of the many parts of the research process, writing up such a personal and subjective experience has been the most difficult part of the project. Writing has not been a singular process, achieved from beginning to end in one long smooth, coherent piece and has taken a substantial amount of the time of the life of the thesis. Having used heuristic methodology to guide the research project I had to determine the importance of the wide range of information I discovered and collected, and work out what should be included as being illuminating of the study quest.

At many times during this journey the accumulated data has seemed amorphous and unwieldy and for some time I struggled to find my writing style and the way to write-up the various chapters of the thesis. Also, it was often difficult to find a stretch of time to think and work this out. Supervision provided some guidance on how to progress but I was really on my own with the data and the essence of the study. It often felt a very lonely experience.

Although some parts were easier to write than others, pulling these parts into a whole, cogent thesis document has often been elusive. There were periods when I had to take time out to recover the desire, strength and fire to continue but eventually a shape emerged. Having been reminded many times by others to be guided in my writing by the fact that the research process was one of

discovery, I finally acknowledged this and settled on the loose chronological and narrative style of presentation that the thesis document has become. Writing within the guideline of discovery gave me steps to follow and has allowed me to present discoveries as revealed. I believe that it has also given the thesis the flavour of a journey or pilgrimage.

I found that there was a certain ebb and flow to the writing but like the tide, constancy had to be established and a routine adhered to. To get the thesis written I had to write. Of course, some parts of the thesis were easier to write than others and the methodology chapter for instance, was relatively straight forward. Also, when I uncovered Reed's (1992) dimensions of spirituality as the best way to write up the participant data, the writing of that chapter became a pleasure. However, managing the extant literature from nursing and other genres became my *bête noire* and I had to write and rewrite this material time and time again. It is true that by writing you find out what you know and what you want to say (Richardson, 1998).

The act of doing research is not a process of certainties and the researcher needs to incorporate any unexpected events that occur during the study. Participant withdrawal is potentially one such event. I could not predict that a participant would withdraw from the study and while significant it did not occupy a major place in the process. When it happened the experience became a part of the narrative of the thesis and I spent some time reflecting on the occurrence.

A reflection on participant withdrawal

Like Heather (2000), when I was setting up the research project the possibility of having one of the participant's withdraw was something that I really did not consider. Although processes were put in place to manage this eventuality, the experience of it happening had effects that could only really be explored after the event. The circumstances of Heather's participant withdrawing were somewhat different to mine in that her participant withdrew at a much later stage in the project with different implications for Heather and her study.

The first four interviews that I had had with the study participants were with people I knew if even only a little, and were relatively relaxed. The fifth interview was with the participant who withdrew whom I have named Yvonne and this was not a positive experience for either of us. Prior to the interview Yvonne was only known to me through our e-mailing but her e-mail's to me had been full of interest in my research topic and her enthusiasm to be a participant. On the mid-autumn evening as I waited to meet her at the university, I felt uneasy. I hadn't noticed the same kind of feelings prior to the previous interviews and I considered why I might be feeling differently before this one.

The surroundings were familiar and I had interviewed other participants so I attributed my feelings to the usual concern that things would go alright, the audio tape equipment would function and the ideas would flow. When we met and there was no immediate rapport I felt uncomfortable and this continued throughout the interview. No rhythm was established and I felt that it was difficult to encourage Yvonne to be forthcoming with her ideas on the study phenomenon. She felt that I did not understand her and said so at the end. We

parted and within a few days I received an e-mail from Yvonne withdrawing from the study.

Although I was not surprised by the outcome, I spent some time reviewing the experience and considering my feelings about it. I sought to understand what had happened and why. Within the consent criteria, I could have no more contact with Yvonne and could only concern myself with my own impressions. Importantly, I could not use her data.

Following Yvonne's withdrawal from the study I recruited another participant and had two more interviews. One was with someone I knew and one was with someone who again, I only knew from our e-mailing. By reflecting on the interview experience with Yvonne I gained some insights that I took into the remaining two interviews. In particular, in each of those interviews I was mindful that the participant felt understood. Both interviews went well. As I write this I am still unclear about what I could have done that would have made a difference to the outcome of my interview experience with Yvonne.

The significant discoveries that I made from the study

In undertaking this research project and by interviewing nurses I expected to illuminate the phenomenon of the beneficial effect of the natural environment on the human spirit. I hoped that during the study I might discover three things. I hoped that I would discover that what I already knew about the study phenomenon would be strengthened, that I would discover a lot more about the study phenomenon from other nurses and from elsewhere and that the outcome would be beneficial to the discipline of nursing. I also hoped that this study

would surface further knowledge of the concept of connectedness in nursing care and practice.

When I engaged in this study I already understood from nursing literature that spirituality was an important concept in nursing. I also understood that many people had an awareness of their spirituality and met their spiritual needs in various ways, one of the ways being a relationship of some kind with nature. That the connection of spirituality and the natural environment as a wider human concern was also clear to me from my own experience of spiritual awakening and from literature generally. As I set out on this journey of discovery with a clear understanding that the natural environment had a strong and beneficial effect on my spirit, I wondered if like me, other nurses had similar experiences and felt sustained by the details and patterns of nature.

I wondered; did other nurses feel that their spiritual dimension was affected by the shapes of leaves, the variations of green, the diamonds of rainfall on spider webs and the flash of blue and teal as the tui alights on the bottlebrush to feed? I also pondered that if other nurses did have these experiences and their spirit was replenished in the natural environment, did this phenomenon influence their practice, their caring, their ability to heal and their profound ability to *just know* what was right, what was needed.

As I worked on the project and each interview unfolded and the rich and diverse experiences of the participants were shared with me, I discovered many facets of the connectedness of spirituality and the natural environment. As each of the participants talked of their experiences, the collected data built a powerful agreement that the natural environment was an essential component in the

meeting of their spiritual needs. In addition, each participant was quite clear that the spiritual benefit of the natural environment contributed to their personal healing and wellbeing and sustained them in their nursing work. Their understanding of their own needs also gave them some understanding of the needs of others. With this growing knowledge I slowly built a web of understanding that located the human concern of the connectedness of spirituality and the natural environment within the discipline of nursing.

I found that the knowing that I was gaining from the participants began to drive my exploration and discoveries. Maintaining a certain momentum and immersed in the accumulating participant data, I highlighted important insights to explore further with following participants and from literature. It was in this way that I was made aware of a number of aspects of spirituality and the natural environment that were not previously known or only vaguely known to me and my worldview.

In particular, the participant data led me to explore in greater depth the area of belief systems including ancient and indigenous worldviews, the concept of holism and the notion of transcendence as well as the meaning of gardens, global sustainability issues and the need to be more politically active. By dwelling in nursing and other literature that was concerned with these subjects, I discovered the key elements to the illumination and explication of the thesis data. It was during these phases of the heuristic journey that hidden realities about the study phenomenon were fully understood and final connections were made.

By bringing the human concerns of spirituality and the natural environment together with nursing I discovered that the connecting constituent was the concept of holism. The connection of spirituality, the natural environment and holism represent the most significant discovery that I made during this heuristic journey. From the study participants and from the literature I discovered an understanding of the various elements of these concepts that strengthened my prior knowing. As the study data grew by way of the participant descriptions of the study phenomenon and both nursing and other literature, I recognised aspects that together contributed to accepted descriptions of holism in nursing and elsewhere.

Holism is a well known concept in nursing and is central to holistic nursing care. Holism concerns the care of the mindbodyspirit and the inter-relationship of human and the wider environment. Holistic nurses partner their clients on their healing journeys by using their unique and therapeutic selves and incorporating cultural sensitivity and awareness. Holistic nurses practice self-care, value the spiritual dimension and seek harmony and balance in their life and work. The connectedness of spirituality and the natural environment is known to me, the study participants, and to many nursing writers.

Although holism may not be so universally understood by Western industrialised societies, many indigenous cultures hold an holistic worldview that is based in their spiritual beliefs. Their spirituality is understood and experienced as having a past, present and future and is closely linked to health and wellbeing. Such people live in harmony with self, others, the natural environment and the wider

universe. Living in harmony with the natural environment of necessity involves global sustainability concerns.

I believe that the understanding of the study phenomenon described in the thesis is beneficial to the discipline of nursing. I also believe that the study surfaced hidden knowledge of the concept of connectedness in nursing care and practice. This significant knowing has implications for the discipline of nursing and these will be discussed following a brief discussion of the limitations and validity of the study.

Limitations and generalisability of the study

Although my personal experience of spiritual awakening and ongoing succour in the natural environment and the various positive experiences of the participants can be reflected in numerous accounts found in the literature quoted in the thesis, the participant group was relatively small and the study limitations are in this small sample. While the study sample was small, this piece of heuristic research can stand alone as an explication of the human experience of the phenomenon of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit.

From Holloway & Wheeler (1996) I understand that generalisability is not usually claimed by qualitative researchers due to the usually small sample size. However, I believe that the numerous depictions of the experience of the study phenomenon found in the literature indicate some aspects of generalisability.

Validity of the study

The validity of heuristic research lies with the researcher who determines that the collected data depicted in the creative synthesis reflects the meaning or essence of the experience of the study phenomenon researched. By repeated examination of the various elements of the participant's descriptions of the research experience in relationship with the internal frame of reference of the researcher, congruity is established (Moustakas, 1990).

The participant knowing that was presented in Chapter Four clearly describes the essence of the experience of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of six nurses. This knowing is consistent with my personal experience that I described as the pivotal influence for the research quest, and also with experiences from nursing and other literature that have been described throughout the thesis. I believe that the essence of the meaning of the human experience that the research study explored is clear in the thesis whole.

Implications for the discipline of nursing

This research study clearly demonstrates that spirituality experienced in the natural environment is important to the wellbeing of a wide range of people. The thesis described many unique and similar examples of the experience of the study phenomenon from the study participants, many other nurses, many indigenous cultures and people generally. These experiences were generally acknowledged as aspects personal wellbeing or healing as well as actions of self-care. Self-care requires an awareness of needs that the study participants

acknowledged as assisting them to know themselves before undertaking their caring journeys with others. The benefit of having their spiritual needs met in the natural environment was that the study participants felt more able to provide appropriate nursing care to their clients.

The study indicates that the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit is a phenomenon that is generally experienced within what constitutes the concept of holism. Being a relational and integrative concept, holism involves an understanding of the various dimensions of the human in harmony and unity with self, others and the wider universe. Living in this way requires not only care of self but care of the natural environment that sustains human life, and care of, and for, all aspects of the wider universe. The study revealed that such holistic action is a local and a global issue, a concern for humanity and a concern for nursing.

Although humanity has always known of the sustaining qualities of the natural environment, I feel that the global imperatives of our relationship are just becoming universally accepted. On the 13th February 2007, in her speech at the Opening of Parliament, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, declared that the government needed to lead the country in the development of long term sustainability strategies. To my knowledge this is the first time that a New Zealand Prime Minister has made such a statement that recognises our fragile relationship with Earth.

From extensive and intensive dwelling in the study discoveries, I found that this research study highlighted three main areas of concern that could benefit the discipline of nursing. These three areas include the need to consider if the principles of holistic nursing practice should be adopted as the way to nurse generally in the future; that further research on the concept of connectedness be undertaken; and that the use of heuristic methodology should be encouraged as a way to explore further nursing concerns.

Given that global sustainability issues are currently major human concerns the study discoveries indicate that the discipline of nursing would be well served by adopting the values and principles of holistic nursing for nursing care and practice generally. If every nurse was encouraged to practice holistically using guidelines such as those of the ACHN, the health and wellbeing of self, other, the natural environment and the wider universe would be addressed as a whole. Here in New Zealand where we have no formal guiding body and holistic nursing is practiced within Australian guidelines, a body to promote this initiative would be required and could be achieved by first seeking a steering group of nurses interested in the proposal.

During this research journey I discovered that the concept of connectedness is closely linked to holism. While this study began with my strong intuition that connectedness is an important nursing concept, the study quest was refined to consider a much more manageable aspect of connectedness, the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit. However, during the research journey I found that the notion of relationship or connection was repeatedly discussed and described by nursing writers writing about spirituality.

By taking this insight and coupling it with the notion that spirituality is an Anglo-American construct, I propose that further research needs to be undertaken. Nurses' care and practice across all nationalities and religions, beliefs and cultures, and research that seeks to discover if connectedness would be a more appropriate term to use than spirituality to describe the concept, would be useful. I suggest that a review of nursing literature that describes the concepts of spirituality, connection and relatedness would be a good starting point.

In addition to highlighting the potential benefit of adopting holistic nursing as the way to nurse in the future and the importance of the concept of connectedness in nursing, the research study also illuminated the effectiveness of heuristic methodology as a way to research nursing concerns. The methodology provided a clear and relatively straightforward framework for exploration of the study phenomenon as well as a guide for the explication of research discoveries by the use of narrative. The experience of using this methodology left me with no major concerns about using it again but with one caution. The heuristic researcher must be aware of the need to manage the corpus of discovery and be clear about writing methods that will help contain the project. Other nursing researchers should definitely consider if their study concern could be best explored using heuristic methodology.

Personal reflection

Heuristic research involves a personal experience that affects the researcher in such a way that they begin their search for insight and meaning to fully understand its many dimensions. With a raised self-awareness the researcher

enters the research process where every possible knowing is sought to illuminate the study quest. The self of the researcher is fully present in the research and Moustakas (1990) describes the research process as involving the researcher in “self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery” (p. 11). During the research journey “[S]elf-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously” (p. 13). Therefore personal transformation is an acknowledged dimension of heuristic research.

Fully engaged in heuristic research I experienced the active awakening and transformation of self described by Moustakas. Working with a personal experience to illuminate an idea or feeling is essentially therapeutic and open to new understanding my self could not remain as before.

I began my heuristic journey with the usual sorts of trepidation a traveller has when they set out to cover new ground. Knowing that the journey would take some time, I knew that I would grow and change. Over the years that it has taken me to complete the thesis various things in life have impacted on me the person and study is just one of these. However difficult or impossible it may be to separate one complexity of the whole from another, in this reflection I will attempt to discuss things that were transformative for me as they related to the experience of undertaking a masters thesis itself.

On this journey I learnt a lot about my self and I also acquired numerous skills of use in my personal and professional life. Through the thesis process I have gained a general knowledge of qualitative research skills and specific and

valuable knowledge of heuristic research processes. Research has developed my critical thinking skills and improved my evidence base for action. Developing these skills has improved my ability to reason and influence change and in turn, increased my confidence.

By undertaking this study using heuristic methodology, I learnt that personal experience is to be valued as an authentic way of knowing about the meanings of human experiences. I learnt that the similarity of the experiences I was hearing about from the study participants or reading about from literature, gave an important image or portrayal of the phenomenon under study. These experiences did not require any measure or particular analysis, they just *were*.

Heuristic research requires the researcher to spend long periods alone with the study concern and as I journeyed I found that it can be quite a solitary experience. The one time of sustained interaction with others is during the time that participants are being recruited, interviews are set up and the actual interviews are undertaken. This is a time when interpersonal communication and interviewing skills are required. The process often does not allow much time for rapport to be established and trust to form. Although I rely on excellent interpersonal and interviewing skills in my work, preparing to interview colleagues was different; the relationships are different.

At many times on the journey I was totally absorbed and often amazed at the wealth of information that I gained from the study participants and elsewhere. I read intuitively, *just knowing* that that particular material mattered, that it was right and I had many confirming moments as I built on assumption to confirmation. The freedom to seek meaning from diverse areas provided me

with the potential to gather enormous amounts of data that while always interesting and informative for the research, was not necessarily essential for the thesis.

I felt at times that I ranged too far and too wide. I know that I travelled many tangential paths and I know that I read much too much literature. With the study quest always with me I sought understanding from almost every experience I had. Attempting to keep within the thesis boundary of a specific topic and methodology I still learnt a lot about things that I might never have discovered otherwise. Especially, what I learnt about humanity's relationship with the natural environment changed my worldview completely making me more mindful of others and more fully appreciative of diversity.

Connecting the discovered study data to say what I wanted to say in the thesis document was a challenge but immensely rewarding. As I acknowledged the determination and commitment required to understand the study phenomenon at this level I discovered an inner strength to be valued. The experience to date has been extremely worthwhile but the process is not yet complete. I now have to find ways to disseminate the research discoveries to the wider discipline of nursing.

Possibly the greatest thing that I have discovered on this heuristic journey has been the immense benefit that I have realised from having the courage to take a risk. I believe that it takes courage to use a personal experience and especially a personal health experience, as the impetus for a thesis. At the start of the research process I did not know how much of my experience I would need to include in the work. Undertaking this large piece of work with the potential for

personal disclosure, that would on completion sit primarily with my colleagues, was a personal risk that I clearly felt worth taking. It was not until I was some way into my journey and had collected substantial data that dictated the thrust of the work that I realised that the detail of the actual experience had no place in the thesis. This was just one of many times when I understood that I simply had to *trust the process*. I learnt courage.

In undertaking this thesis I realised an ambition to achieve academically and this powerful life-changing experience has significantly enriched my life. I learnt that this heuristic journey was indeed a pilgrimage; an act of devotion that revealed many insights of immense value to my self, my project and for my nursing practice.

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APPENDIX ONE

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Tē Whare Wānanga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

MEMORANDUM

TO: Annette Bridgen
Nursing and Midwifery

FROM: Graeme Kennedy
Acting Convener, Human Ethics Committee

DATE: 19 November 2002

SUBJECT: **APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL: A HEURISTIC STUDY OF THE POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE HUMAN SPIRIT OF SIX NURSES**

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved, subject to the following amendments:

- 1 On the consent form please delete the last six words of the first paragraph (referring to penalty) as this is not appropriate in this instance.
- 2 On the application form, the committee has assumed that you intended to delete (ii) and (iii) of section (i) on the nature of the consent being sought.

Please forward a copy of these amendments to the Secretary of the Human Ethics Committee for our records. In the meantime your application is approved for the period 19 November 2002 to 28 February 2006.

Graeme Kennedy
Acting Convener, Human Ethics Committee

APPENDIX TWO

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE **Application for Approval of Research Projects** Please write legibly or type if possible

Note: The Human Ethics Committee attempts to have all applications approved within three weeks but a longer period may be necessary if applications require substantial revision.

1 NATURE OF PROPOSED RESEARCH:

- (a) Staff Research/ Student Research (delete one): Student Research
- (b) If Student Research Degree: MA Nursing Course Code: 591
- (c) Project Title: A heuristic study of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of six nurses

2 INVESTIGATORS:

- (a) Principal Investigator: Annette Bridgen
e-mail address: annette.bridgen@paradise.net.nz

School/Dept/Group Graduate School of Nursing and Midwifery

- (b) Other Researchers: N/A

- (c) Supervisor(s): Professor Bev Taylor,
Southern Cross University, Lismore, Australia.

Rose McEldowney (Lecturer) on leave Aug 2002-Jan 2003

3 DURATION OF RESEARCH

- (a) Proposed starting date for data collection: February – March 2003
(Note: that NO part of the research requiring ethical approval may commence prior to approval being given)
- (b) Proposed date of completion of project as a whole: 28 February 2006

4 PROPOSED SOURCE/S OF FUNDING AND OTHER ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

(a) Sources of funding for the project

Please indicate any ethical issues or conflicts of interest that may arise because of sources of funding e.g. restrictions on publication of results

This project will be self funded by the researcher.

(b) Is any professional code of ethics to be followed:-

Yes

If yes, **name:** New Zealand Nurses Organisation

(c) Is ethical approval required from any other body

No

If yes, name and indicate when/if approval will be given

N/A

5 DETAILS OF PROJECT

Briefly Outline:

(a) The objectives of the project

To explore and explicate the positive effect of the natural environment on the human spirit of six nurses and to explicate the effect of this personal experience on their nursing practice.

(b) Method of data collection

Informal conversational interviews with six nurses aimed at free disclosure of the experience being researched. Each participant will be interviewed no more than twice for up to 120 minutes in all, and these interviews will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. Participants will also be invited to share journals, artwork and any expressive medium that explicates the experience being researched.

(c) The benefits and scientific value of the project

The importance of spiritual care for the wellbeing of people is well documented in nursing literature (see for example, Linda Ross; 1994,1995,1997). There is some documentation in nursing literature of the benefit of the natural environment to the human spirit of the nurse (see for example, Schuster and Brown (Eds), 1994). In linking these two concepts in a novel field of inquiry, this study will add to the understanding of how nurses care for themselves in their caring role and therefore be of importance to the universal of nursing.

(d) Characteristics of the participants

Research participants will be New Zealand registered nurses who can identify that their human spirit has been positively influenced by the natural environment.

(e) Method of recruitment

Participation will be voluntary and no specific nursing area will be targeted. Participants will be sought through the Victoria University Post Graduate Newsletter and by a snow-balling technique.

(f) Payments that are to be made/expenses to be reimbursed to participants

The researcher will pay to go to the participant and to a mutually agreed place to conduct the interviews. There are not expected to be any payments to participants required.

(g) Other assistance (e.g. meals, transport) that is to be given to participants

Light refreshments appropriate to the time of day will be provided to participants by the researcher at the time of the interviews.

(h) Any special hazards and/or inconvenience (including deception) that participants will encounter

There is not expected to be any special hazard or inconvenience to the participants.

(i) State whether consent is for (delete where not applicable): Consent is not required for (ii) or (iii) below. Consent is required for (i), (iv) and (v).

- (i) the collection of data
- (ii) attribution of opinions or information
- (iii) release of data to others
- (iv) use for a conference report or a publication
- (v) use for some particular purpose (specify)

MA in Nursing thesis

Attach a copy of any questionnaire or interview schedule to the application

(j) How is informed consent to be obtained (see paragraphs 4.31(g), 5.2, 5.5 and 5.61 of the Guidelines)

- (i) the research is strictly anonymous, an information sheet is supplied and informed consent is implied by voluntary participation in filling out a questionnaire for example (include a copy of the information sheet)

No

- (ii) the research is not anonymous but is confidential and informed consent will be obtained through a signed consent form (include a copy of the consent form and information sheet)

Yes

- (iii) the research is neither anonymous or confidential and informed consent will be obtained through a signed consent form (include a copy of the consent form and information sheet) **No**
- (iv) informed consent will be obtained by some other method (please specify and provide details) **No**

With the exception of anonymous research as in (i), if it is proposed that written consent will not be obtained, please explain why
N/A

(k) If the research will not be conducted on a strictly anonymous basis state how issues of confidentiality of participants are to be ensured if this is intended. (See paragraph 4.3.1(e) of the Guidelines). (e.g. who will listen to tapes, see questionnaires or have access to data). Please ensure that you distinguish clearly between anonymity and confidentiality. Indicate which of these are applicable.

- (i) access to the research data will be restricted to the investigator **No**
- (ii) access to the research data will be restricted to the investigator and their supervisor (student research) **Yes**
- (iii) all opinions and data will be reported in aggregated form in such a way that individual persons or organisations are not identifiable **Yes**
- (iv) Other (please specify)

N/A

(l) Procedure for the storage of, access to and disposal of data, both during and at the conclusion of the research. (see section 7 of the guidelines). Indicate which are applicable:

- (i) all written material (questionnaires, interview notes, etc) will be kept in a locked file and access is restricted to the investigator **Yes**
- (ii) all electronic information will be kept in a password-protected file and access will be restricted to the investigator **Yes**
- (iii) all questionnaires, interview notes and similar materials will be destroyed:
 - (a) at the conclusion of the research **No**
 - or (b) five years after the conclusion of the research **Yes**
- (iv) any audio or video recordings will be returned to participants and/or electronically wiped **Yes**
- (v) other procedures (please specify):

N/A

If data and material are not to be destroyed please indicate why and the procedures envisaged for ongoing storage and security

N/A

(m)Feedback procedures (See section 8 of the Guidelines). You should indicate whether feedback will be provided to participants and in what form. If feedback will not be given, indicate the reasons why.

Consistent with Heuristic Research methods, the participants are co-constructors of the data with the researcher. Therefore, individual word portraits will be provided to the individual participants for examination of accuracy and as a means of validation of what was said in the interviews. These word portraits will also include representations of any other materials provided by the participant that explicated the researched experience. A composite word portrait will also be provided to all participants for feedback of this collective interpretation of what was said in the interviews.

(n)Reporting and publication of results. Please indicate which of the following are appropriate. The proposed form of publications should be indicated on the information sheet and/or consent form.

(i) publication in academic or professional journals	Yes
(ii) dissemination at academic or professional conferences	Yes
(iii) deposit of the research paper or thesis in the University Library (student research)	Yes
(iv) other (please specify)	

N/A

Signature of investigators as listed on page 1 (including supervisors).

NB: All investigators must sign before an application is submitted for approval

.....	Date.....
.....	Date..... 02
.....	Date..... 11
.....	Date.....

[Handwritten signature: A. Brindley] *23/11*

*Amended copy as per
attached memo.*

APPENDIX THREE

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH

My name is Annette Bridgen and I am a MA student in Nursing at the Graduate School of Nursing and Midwifery, Victoria University of Wellington. As a part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. The University requires that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants.

Title of the research project: *'A heuristic study of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of six nurses'.*

I am inviting New Zealand registered nurses, who can identify that they have experienced the positive influence of the natural environment on their spirit, to participate in this study.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one that relies on obtaining detailed descriptions of the experience of the research topic. Participants will be invited to have two informal conversational interviews with the researcher of no more than two hours each, during which they will tell the story of their experience. I am looking for vivid and detailed descriptions that will accurately portray the research experience. Participants will also be invited to share with the researcher other materials that will further illuminate their experience, and these materials may be journals, art works, poetry or other writing, music and photography. Interviews will be at a time convenient to the participants and at a place chosen by them.

Prior to the commencement of data collection, written consent will be obtained from each participant regarding confidentiality and the use of data. During the research process all written information collected will be stored in locked files and electronic data will be kept in a password protected file with access restricted to the researcher. No other person besides the researcher and my supervisor's Bev Taylor and Rose McEldowney, will see the research materials. Participants can be assured that should they at any time before the data is analysed, feel the need to withdraw from the project, they may do so without question or penalty. Consistent with heuristic research methods, research data collected from each participant will be transcribed and written as an individual word portrait and the accuracy will be checked with each participant. The individual portraits will later be synthesised into a composite portrait that represents the flavour of the shared aspects of the research experience. Research materials will be destroyed 5 years after the end of the project and audio-tapes will be returned to the individual participants if wished, or wiped electronically.

The thesis will be submitted for marking to the Graduate School of Nursing and Midwifery and deposited in the University Library. Research findings may also be disseminated at professional conferences or published in professional journals.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me by e-mail at; annette.bridgen@paradise.net.nz or by phone on (04) 939-4233; or contact my supervisor's, Rose McEldowney at the Graduate School of Nursing and Midwifery, Victoria University, Wellington on (04) 463-6651, or Bev Taylor at Southern Cross University, Australia on 02 66203156.

APPENDIX FOUR

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title of the research project: *'A heuristic study of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of six nurses'.*

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project and understand that the project's primary purpose is to meet the requirements for a MA in Nursing by thesis. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from this project before data analysis is complete without having to give reasons and without penalty of any sort.

I consent to take part in this research project and understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher, transcriber and supervisor's, that the published results will not use my name and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me. I agree to participate in no more than two informal conversational interviews of any more than two hours duration each, at a time and place convenient to myself. I understand that I will need to be available to check the accuracy of the data contained in my individual word portrait and examine the composite portrait of the research experience. I will also be provided with a summary of the research at its conclusion. I understand that the audio-tapes of the interviews will be electronically wiped at the end of the project unless I indicate that I would like them returned to me, and that journals and other work I have shared with the researcher will be returned to me or destroyed five years after the conclusion of the research. I understand that the data I provide may be used for publication in academic or professional journals, be disseminated at academic or professional conferences and that a copy of the thesis will be deposited at the Victoria University library.

I have read the information above and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant

Signature of participant..... date.....

Name of witness.....

Signature of witness.....date.....

Signature of researcher.....date.....

APPENDIX FIVE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title of the research project: *'A heuristic study of the positive influence of the natural environment on the human spirit of six nurses'.*

The questions presented in this Guide are pertinent to the experience of each individual involved in the research. Heuristic research relies on obtaining vivid and detailed description of the individual's story told in an informal conversational interview. In keeping with this, the researcher/interviewer should ask very few questions. However, some questions will be necessary for example, to start and to probe for expansion and meaning.

The opening question will be used to encourage the participant to explore their experiences of the positive influence of the natural environment on their human spirit.

'Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my research project. Because you feel that your spirit has been positively influenced by the natural environment, I would like you to think of a situation when this occurred and tell me about it'.

Following questions need to keep the flow of thought going.

'What happened then?'

'Tell me some of the positive influences this experience has had in your life'.

'Let's explore more deeply your comment about ...'

(Describe an experience) 'Can you tell me of any similar experience you have had?'

Silences may mean the participant is reflecting or thinking more deeply. At other times the participant may stray from the topic under research and the researcher needs to recognise when this happens and be able to bring them back.

'You were telling me before ...'

'I was interested in ... Can you tell me more about ...?'

I hope that this research will show a flow on from the personal experience to the practice realm of the nurse. If this does not come up spontaneously the researcher/interviewer may need to ask a question such as;

'I would like to explore if you have felt that your experiences have been beneficial in any way for your nursing practice. Can you think of a time when this has happened and tell me about it?'