

## **FAITH, DISSONANCE, AND THE ADULT LEARNER**

**John C. Shirk, EdD**

*“Man has always been his own most vexing problem. How shall he think of himself? Every affirmation which he may make about his stature, virtue, or place in the cosmos becomes involved in contradictions when fully analyzed.” (R. Niebuhr)*

**5934 Par Four Drive**

**Houston, TX 77088**

**October 2011**

## INTRODUCTION

**As I approach my thoughts on faith and the adult learning I will concentrate my deliberations on faith, spirituality and dissonance, and the adult learner as reported in in-person dialogs selected from four studies (Shirk, 1990, 1998, 2005). Consideration will be given to the sociopsychological aspects of and the costs and benefits related to learning something new over a one year time span. Research vignettes will be followed by entries from my personal faith development journals.**

**Religion, faith, spirit and spiritual experiences were not the focus of my initial adult learner studies although direct and indirect spiritual episodes were voiced. The purpose of this section is to give attention to, and explore evidences of spirituality and faith in the lives of adult learners.**

**Faith and spirituality are intertwined in the sociopsychological life-space of the adult learner. Who is the Learner? What is faith? I will approach these questions with an Adult Learner's Credo.**

**An Adult Learner's Faith Credo: John C. Shirk, EdD, 2011**

**My basic premise is learning is relative and situated in space and time for every actor.**

**Learning occurs in the context of internal and external actions relative and situational in meaning for every actor.**

**Every actor is the product of events to which responses are made.**

**Every actor is relatively and situationally caged in one's life space.**

**Migration and expanding one's life space occurs in the midst of intended and unintended consequences.**

**Migration and expanding one's life space is influenced by personal economic and sociopsychological costs and benefits.**

**Migration and expanding one's life space introduces the actor to varying degrees of dissonance.**

**Migration and expanding one's life space produces learning opportunities.**

**Learning is a spirit and spiritual act that occurs in the context and contest of will, discipline and an inquiring mind.**

**Learning entails acts of faith in the context of ambiguity and mystery.**

**Acts of faith require individual perseverance and result in opportunities for self-discovery.**

**Acts of faith are influenced by one's ultimate concern.**

**Ultimate concern is fluid and evolves across one's life span.**

## **FAITH**

**Faith is an act of natural and ultimate concern that is uniquely relative and situational to each and every actor.**

**Faith as natural concern exhibits a sense of the “ultimate” in its ability to experience closure and completion. Closure, however, has the potential to spin-off new and open-ended hopes and dreams. Natural faith may potentially encompass ultimate concern.**

**For the remainder of this section, faith will be interpreted as natural or ultimate concern. Faith promises not the luxury of certainty—it is an existential experience in concrete and abstract metaphysical states of being that provide limited empirical evidence and proof. It is formative across the lifespan and acted out in spirit and spiritual acts of being and becoming while migrating toward that which is “approachably” infinite.**

**Acts of faith may be experientially supported by transcendent moments of embracing mystery. Maslow (1976) identified these brief to extended moments in time as “peak experiences” (brief, intense, sometimes ecstatic, peaceful, or joyful transcendental moments of encounter with mystery) or “non-peaker experiences” (rational, intellectual pursuits through meditation, relationships, or spirit/spiritual exercises).**

**Not to be confused with trust, faith evolves within and beyond the limits of emerging relationships and situations that solve not questions of ultimate concern. Trust experiences are birthed in formative relationships of protection, sustenance, comfort and spiritual awakenings that may result in unintended and unexpected peak**

experiences. Faith grapples with unnamed mystery and ultimate concern.

Faith offers not the luxury of certainty though it calls for ultimate affirmation in the context of transitory experiences, feelings and thoughts that are conditional and finite. Consisting of elements of trust faith eclipses trust in that faith's object, though opaquely elusive, encourages hopeful longing in the context of conflicting states of dark, discouraging and wearying interruptions. Teilhard de Chardin (in Mooney, 1964) expressed it thusly: "As much as anyone, I think, I walk in the darkness of faith."

As an actor migrates beyond the protective stage of human development, exploratory will and resolve emerge in the context of unfolding but not unlimited freedom. Lewin (in Cartwright, 1951) described this freedom as "space of free movement." Space of free movement includes parental, social and cultural boundaries within which one experiences a sense of protection, safety, security and well-being.

Acts of faith steer the actor beyond boundaries which exceed comfort limits. Acts of faith make one vulnerable to the unknown. Thrusting self and being into a swirl of uncomfortable uncertainty provides opportunities through which one must dare to plow and cultivate. In the swirl of faith one may encounter babbling sounds of dissonance out of which are birthed intended and unintended learning opportunities.

"This year has been such a disturbance, a wild year" exclaimed a single mother recovering from loss of employment and another source

of income due to a tragic accident that left her in a coma. Searching for self-meaning she enrolled in a spiritual healing class and a metaphysical spirituality group. After investing \$200 and estimating nearly 1,000 hours she said “I’m doing this all the time” (Shirk, J. C. in Fellenz, R. A. and G. J. Conti, G. 1990).

Intrinsic and innate, yet in want of, and while lacking assurance, faith is a spirit, spiritual, communal and solitary effort. Early on the self is influenced by varieties of familial and community coaching and infusion of cultural rites and values. As the self becomes more defined it reaches beyond familiar safety zones to that which cannot be named. These acts in search of ultimate being beg for the luxury of affirmation and confirmation. For some a semblance of confirmation occurs in communities of faith resulting in the evolution of sets of beliefs and values.

Fowler (1995) notes that faith is an actor’s way of moving into and through life’s force fields. Lewin’s field theory expounds on the dynamic influence of field forces across the life span—these forces externally and internally challenge, confront, stretch or shrink one’s life space as the actor attempts to make sense out of moment-to-moment, day-to-day situations. Crises may unexpectedly threaten, handicap or plunge one into throes of ambiguity. In the context of serendipity crises may also point to spirit and spiritual enlightenment dimly or clearly recognized after the fact. Faith dares to embrace the very darkness that cloud one’s way. It is the stuff of one’s maturing process that dares to say yes to the incapacitating no.

More problematic in the life of the actor may charge unexpected windfalls. Settlements and monetary gains may challenge one to reverse one's life-course from one of faith to self-protection, skullduggery, and frantic prejudice.

On matters of faith and belief Smith in Fowler (1995) identifies several all-encompassing questions to reach a significant level of depth between both: "On what or whom do you set your heart? To what vision of right-relatedness between humans, nature and the transcendent are you loyal? What hope and what ground of hope animate you and give shape to the force field of your life and to how you move into it?"

Faith is an on-going nurturing and maturing process that continues to evolve across the life-span. When instigated by a quest for existential meaning faith may take the form of intellectual pursuits and inquiries that are extensions of early nurturing. In the context of this on-going plastic nurturing process faith may be influenced by an interpretation and confluence of personal events and circumstances resulting in formations, reformations, and refinements of an actor's life perspective.

Caution, prudence, and vigilance promise the actor no protection against conflicting states of faith: as a religious act it is being tested, tried and unevenly developed across the life-span. It is this testing, trying and uneven development that may strengthen faith's evolution into but never beyond life's ultimate mysteries.

Faith (natural), in the context of learning something new, dares the actor to expand or contract boundaries of one's life-space. Natural

**faith, related to learning something new is always instigated by a conscious/subconscious secular/spiritual quest driven by curiosity, accident, necessity, latent desire, and is influenced by negative/positive external influences to which the actor responds with negative/positive internal responses (see my section on The adult learner: A Sociopsychological Perspective).**

**Portions of what follow are reflections from Tillich's Dynamics of Faith.**

**“Faith is a total and centered act of the personal self, the act of unconditional, infinite and ultimate concern” (Tillich, 2001).**

**Faith is an actor's apprehension with ultimate concern in which is embedded the risk of failure—yet the actor dares to say yes, even to failure.**

**Faith is existential and uniquely empirically experienced and performed by an actor in the absence of proof. It is formed across the lifespan and consists of courage, dissonance, doubt, risk, and uncertainty. It, in the words of Conrad (1920), approaches life as if loneliness were a hard and absolute condition of existence in which there remains only the capricious, inconsolable, elusive spirit that no eye can follow, no hand can grasp.**

**In the context of Tillich's concept of faith persons of faith have been identified as pilgrims, dreamers, exiles, wanderers, nomads, wayfarers, travelers, refugees, seekers, holy ones, seers, idealists, romantics, mystics.. Faith is always uniquely relative to the individual in time, place and situation. It is a finite act directed toward unconditional, infinite and ultimate concern.**

**Bonhoeffer attempted to break away from the barrier of explainable religious jargon and cultural values to “religionless” values that could melt into ultimate concern.**

**“I often ask myself why a ‘Christian instinct’ often draws me more to religionless people than to the religious....While I am often reluctant to mention God by name to religious people—because that name somehow seems to me here not to ring true, and I feel myself to be slightly dishonest (it is particularly bad when others start to talk in religious jargon; I then dry up almost completely and feel awkward and uncomfortable)—to people with no religion I can on occasion mention him quite calmly and as a matter of course....God is beyond in the midst of our life.”**

**Bonhoeffer’s religionlessness embraces a faith beyond all boundaries and right propagation of religion. Our life is not ordered by God—faith embraces every moment of our own ordering, allowing it to evolve into His purposeful ordering. Faith understands not that process even as it is accepted or rejected.**

**I struggled with this as I attempted to view faith in one’s skills, or learning new skills to come to grips with a problem. Faced with a real dilemma, the actor embraces a set of guidelines that will hopefully bring satisfactory closure, an “answer” to the actor. Mystery in a secular sense is tentatively resolved, named, by faith in observable responses to calculated actions that introduce new questions that beg for more answers. In secular learning episodes faith can be considered natural faith.**

**Of Nineteenth Century Walden, Thoreau wrote, “I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live sturdily and Spartanlike as to put to rout all that is not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life in a corner and reduce it to its terms....” Transcendental**

mystery would surpass natural reality or knowledge in those fleeting moments of illumination. Transcendent faith, akin to Maslow's peak and non-peak experiences, temporarily images "the big picture," illuminating and mystically informing uninformed reality.

As for "dead end" to knowledge, a reliance on faith as a stop gap for the lacking of our knowing, Bonhoeffer emphasizes "quite clearly how wrong it is to use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge." He continues,

If in fact the frontiers of knowledge are being pushed further and further back (and that is bound to be the case), then God is being pushed back with them, and is therefore continually in retreat. We are to find God in what we know, not in what we do not know; God wants us to realize his presence, not in unsolved problems but in those that are solved. That is true of the relationship between God and scientific knowledge, but it is also true of the wider human problems of death, suffering and guilt. In point of fact, people deal with these questions without God (it has always been so), and it is simply not true that only Christianity has the answers to them.

Throughout history, ranks of figures of faith are filled with the great and the little known. James (1929) directed his readers to men and women of faith whose lives, in search and expressions of faith embraced and endured physical and psychological tormented states of being. Among the counted are Mohammed, Buddha, St Francis of Assisi, Augustine, Teresa of Avila, Fox and Wesley. More contemporary figures include Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Kierkegaard, Black Elk, Buber, Teilhard de Chardin, Bonhoeffer, John Wesley, Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi, Mandela, serfs, slaves and homeless street people. Exiled and often without a sense of place, they dared to

endure. Several respondents in my studies specifically referenced James' Varieties of religious experience as a source in their search for personal faith development.

Said (2003) in his essay "Reflections on exile" said (which could be said of any person in search of a sense of place and being):

Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure. Exile in the words of Wallace Stevens, is 'a mind of winter' in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable. Perhaps this is another way of saying that a life of exile moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than a life at home. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew.

All humanity experiences longings for faith quests and encounters with ultimate concern, the "ultimate questions." It is the stuff of youth's vision quests and frayed dreams of the elderly. Becoming one with the river, the arrow, the moment has been breathed through spirit lives of beings as they experience ecstasy, endure grief, consternation, condemnation and innumerable moments of doubt while pursuing larger truths encapsulated in the rigors of their faith journeys.

Writers of folk hymns embraced exile states of mind with affirmation. Faith chants and hymns, the likes of "Beulah Land;" "I am thinking of the rapture;" "I am on my way to heaven;" "I long ago left Egypt;" "In the city where the Lamb is the light;" "Some golden daybreak;" "Swing low sweet chariot;" "Tell mother I'll be there;" "There's a land beyond the river;" "This world is not my home;" "We're marching to Zion;" "When the roll is called up yonder" etc.

Each evinced a longing for escape from the throes of this exile-life while bolstering the will to endure and shore up sagging faith.

Faith “sees” in a concrete piece of reality the ultimate ground and meaning of all being. No piece of reality is excluded from the possibility of becoming a bearer of the holy; and almost every kind of reality has actually been considered as holy by acts of faith in groups and individual actors.

Faith grapples. John of the Cross wrote of his dark night of the soul; Wesley, his heart being strangely moved. Frankl, out of the horrors of the holocaust said “He who has a why can endure most any how.” Kierkegaard filled pages with his interior struggles about an external institution that seemed lifeless and wayward. Augustine’s “Confessions” documented a troubled soul who, in submission and surrender said: “Love God with all your heart and do as you please.” Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi, Moroccan philosopher, suffered near death interrogations during French colonialism yet turned to the French academy to formulate his theses. In faith Bonhoffer (1967) sealed his own death knell in a failed plot to kill Hitler. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, “When I read your letter yesterday, I felt as though a spring, without which my intellectual life was beginning to dry up, had begun once again to produce the first drops of water for a long, long time. Of course, that may sound to you an exaggeration...but in my isolation, it is nothing of the kind. I am forced to live on the past” (1967).

Faith leads one to the “road less traveled” resulting in isolation and, into the depths that promise only further depths. In faith the actor becomes an exile and prisoner of hope that defies circumstances. Faith

led Jesuit scientist Teilhard (1962) into obedience, even obedience to repeated banishments and rejection by higher ecclesiastical authorities (Speaight, 1967). He would declare that nothing can stop the evolutionary process that the cosmic Christ in God is in creation.

On matters of faith in the life of an actor is embedded dissonance. Inseparably bound, faith and dissonance can become the impetus and drive to learn across the life span. Mixed signals of hope, doubt, failure, hopelessness, compete in the mind of the actor.

Faith is an ultimate concern whose true content can neither be identified with a piece of reality nor be expressed in terms of a rational system. “It is a matter of ecstatic experience, and one can only speak of the ultimate in a language which at the same time denies the possibility of speaking about it” (Tillich, 2001).

## **DISSONANCE, FAITH AND LEARNING**

Camus: The (priests) at Fiesole who live among the red flowers keep in their cells the skull that nourishes their meditations. Florence at their windows and death at their tables. A certain continuity in despair can give birth to joy. And when life reaches a certain temperature, our soul and our blood mingle and live at ease in contradiction, as different to duty as to faith. Lyrical and Critical Essays, In the desert (1970).

Dissonance, faith and learning are intertwined. The luxury of confirmation too often eludes the searcher who succumbs to messy doubts and failures resulting in states of submissive exhaustion with questions unanswered. So Thompson’s “Hound of Heaven” depicts the seeker racing across eternity’s expanse in search of Mystery only to be

the pursued—not pursuer. Hard times come no more?—embodied in the race from “hard times” is the promise of “hard times.” Yet herein lay faith’s contradictions and seeds of learning—seeds that sprout in spite of failures, hard times, and daunting and intimidating circumstances. Curious minds hope and dare to revive and reinvent dormant aspirations, brave chance encounters and unintended consequences. Happy accidents and serendipity revitalize faith to catch impossible dreams—dreams at which taunts may be flaunted. Faith, peering through smoky dyslectic mirrors glimpses dim lit flickers of light at tunnel’s end. Cheers, perhaps. Silence, more likely.

Dissonance is a universal phenomenon that will be experienced by an actor someplace, some where, some time, some how. It is aroused when an actor is exposed to information inconsistent with ones beliefs and is aroused when an actor does or says something that is contrary to a prior belief or attitude (Harmon-Jones and E. and J. Mills, 1999).

Dissonance is situational. It grips one’s spirit and can persist with increasing intensity. It is experienced by an actor in the context of relationships and external and internal contentions of being and doing. In states of ambiguity, disagreement, discord, or incongruity dissonance is relative in intensity whether in relationships, making, doing, or personal becoming.

Dissonance influences situations, relationships, states of mind; and social, economical, political and spiritual formations. Camus (1970) said “There is no love of life without despair of life;” and quoting Nietzsche he said, “Within a superabundance of life-giving and restoring forces, even misfortunes have a sunlike glow and engender

their own consolations.” In the same essay he provided personal reflection about an illness that interfered with his mental faculties but whose side effect offset negative consequences saying,

Even later, when a serious illness temporarily deprived me of the natural vigor that always transfigured everything for me, in spite of the invisible infirmities and new weaknesses this illness brought, I may have known fear and discouragement, but never bitterness. The illness surely added new limitations, the hardest ones to those I had already. In the end it encouraged that freedom of the heart, that slight detachment from human concerns, which has always saved me from resentment.

Speaking of the Algerian working class Camus said,

One probably has to live in Algiers to understand how dessicating an excess of nature’s blessing can be. There is nothing here for people seeking knowledge, education, or self-improvement. What the land needs are clear-sighted souls, that is to say, those without consolation. It asks that we make an act of lucidity as one makes an act of faith. A strange country, which gives (people) it nourishes both their splendor and their misery....There is no truth that does not also carry bitterness.

Depending on the actor’s response to dissonance, reconsideration, rejection or withdrawal from a situation may occur. Dissonance does have the built in capacity to turn the absurd into renewal.

Faith and learning are rooted in dissonance. It is formed in developing relationships, establishing and meeting challenges, finding ways to become detached from life’s more serious side, making risk shifts, attempting to make sense out of the nonsense of life, bridging gaps of economic and social uncertainty, information blockages, or simply trying to survive. In its survival mode the process may even

unwittingly or deliberately involve secretiveness, deception, and self-deception (Chatman in Shirk, 1996).

Learning can be an awe-full, fearful, mystical, overwhelming experience in self-discovery—as such it can be a spirit/spiritual activity in which the actor finds “time standing still.” It is not limited to academically recognized accomplishments, deliberately invented activities, or intricate cognitive pursuits. It is more than incorporating formal, self-planned acts into one’s life space--it is learning to embrace happy accidents, serendipitous recall, experiential failures and successes. It is a combination of learning styles. It is in the gutsy essence of being and becoming. It is in the gutsy essence welcoming the pause between daring to live while embracing absurdity and death as our mystical friend.

The actor may evaluate on-task progress through trial and error, flying by the seat of the pants, entering a student-teacher relationship, or varieties of personal formative-summative evaluations. Final results may transform one’s values and beliefs...for a time--or send the actor “back to the drawing board.” Outcomes may dare the learner to face inner fears and embrace failures in the ongoing process of becoming. Dissonance can be an actor’s disguised learning motivator. It can trigger inquiry, investigation, self-reflection as it calls into question one’s assumptions, expectations, resolves, suppositions, or states of mind.

Perinbanayagam’s (1985) perspective on constructing social acts between actors construes them in what could be considered aspects of situational dissonance (see SOCIAL SPACE AND SOCIAL ACTS).

**Dissonance may occur between an actor and one or more others... each differs in faith development, biography, interest, immediate concern or foci of attention. Each approaches minor or major sets of problems to be solved with various conceptualized degrees of solution. The actor may perceive others to be “friendly familiars, cooperative strangers, hostile strangers, or unfriendly familiars.”**

**From the point of view of faith development, absence of dissonance can result in ill-formed ideas or inhibit growth and refinement of concepts, values or views. Dissonance, discord, doubt or disagreement can provoke the actor to reflect, redefine, redesign, or refine concepts that may lead to improved beliefs and ideas.**

**In the context of faith and dissonance, noted persons of faith in the Twentieth Century who accepted imposed exile made use of dissonance in their life-struggles. Among those, Tielhard de Chardin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned some of their most significant works while in exile.**

**Some scientists, mystics and hermits have achieved a semblance state of solitary being. During my Peace Corps assignment (1998-2001) Cave-dwelling Moroccan Sufis were observed on location. Less than a monastery-like environment, their barren and isolated existence provided a limited distraction-free environment to pursue their life-quests. Burke’s Among the Dervishes further describes Sufi thought, including their respect for the writings of Tielhard de Chardin.**

**Dissonance can be a disguised learning motivator: it can trigger inquiry, investigation, self-reflection even as it calls into question one’s assumptions, expectations, resolve, suppositions, or states of mind.**

Finally, faith in the context of dissonance and learning are uneven and fluid across being and time.

As a friend advised me in a time of uncertainty, “John, you must swim through those points of panic.”

## **LIFELONG LEARNING**

Except for interruptions, adult learning occurs across one’s lifespan. It is situational, experiential, directed or self-directed and is encountered in acts of curiosity, response to mishaps or solving problems. It is in the being and becoming of an actors’ life. Social scientists and educators have described it as human drama in which an actor solitarily or with another(s) responds to situations. Performing on life’s stage each player’s life-space is characterized by a degree of uncertainty—during which they assume one of several or numerous roles in a given setting. At any moment one’s physical, mental, or spiritual environment can be influenced by internal and external, positive and negative field forces that can result in its expansion, contraction or stagnation of one’s life-space.

In the context of my research lifelong learning can be seen as an existential affective and cognitive activity, an on-going evolutionary process. It is internal in response to external positive or negative field forces in the life of the actor at any moment in time or across periods of time. Dewey (1916), said:

**It is not a capacity to take on change of form in accord with external pressure. It lies near the pliable elasticity by which persons take on the color of their surroundings while retaining their own bent. But it is something deeper than this. It is essentially the ability to learn from experience; the power to**

retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation. This means power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences, the power to *develop dispositions*.

The altering of one's surrounding conditions and circumstances can be a voluntary and deliberate act of faith (natural or ultimate concern), reason, or the result of an accident or chance happening. In the maturation process the actor discovers and learns how to embrace, discard, ignore, or manipulate stimuli that may produce success, failure or alternative states of satisfaction based on economic, psychological or social cost/benefits.

## **THE ADULT LEARNER**

The following is an account and methodology of my search for sociopsychological, economic, and faith elements in information seeking related to the adult as learner. Based on naturalistic inquiry more than two hundred person-to-person interviews resulted in a "boiled-down juice of human living" (Hurstons in Burdelon, 1999) in the quest for meaning and being as adult learners (Shirk, 1984, 1985, 1990, 1998, 2005). Most interviews were conducted in homes of respondents who were randomly selected from local telephone books. Shared responses divulged in four studies disclosed influences on actors' life-space that in their sense of time and place evolved into learning activities (respondents in the fourth study voluntarily participated at a public library AmeriCorps site, they were not randomly selected).

Responses to interview probes were percolated through memory-sparking moments and personalized myths in which lapses or

exaggerations may have occurred about events of chance, choice, coercion, compulsion, or curiosity. Personalized myths, formed and reformed could be strengthened reactions to events interpreted and reinterpreted by the respondent (Frye, 1982).

Whatever follows should be accepted as having flowed through various filters that potentially, or actually, created layers of bias. The “stranger value” (Argyle, 1969), however, may have reduced bias by enabling participants to willingly share privileged information with an unknown other. These researcher-to-respondent moments in time reflected the spirit of Hopkins in Said (2003) who noted: “...the world is bursting with meaning.” In his same essay Said, referring to Merleau-Ponty, stated that we are condemned to *meaning* in all life’s aspects for it is “the brute fact of existence.”

It was in the context of this “bursting with meaning” that actor responses were sifted. Conscious of it or not, that “brute fact” of meaning was expressed in life’s micro- and macro-levels and included struggles with absurdity, achievement, affirmation, ambiguity, failure, fear, hope, meaningless, poverty, success, death. It was embedded in their prison house of being. It sustained their will to be and to critically or uncritically examine reality and motivations. It reminded actors of the variety of responses that could be acted out in any given life-station or circumstance. It incorporated actors’ veiled and unveiled situational, existential and relative states of being in space and time. If totally deciphered in any given situation the actor’s world would be “bursting with meaning.”

**Faith, the dare to trust self, relationships, mystery in the face of named and unnamed obstructions arose in and through ambiguity and turmoil to hoped for and expected and unexpected freedom.**

**Mapping, processing, tracing the path(s) of the actor's "learning thoughts" (or any thought) from conception-to-inception-to-scheme-to-implementation or suspension is situated and ensconced in, and enhanced/complicated by mental adroitness. It is a reservoir of past experiences, culture and other forces in which voluntary and involuntary mental switchings and interferences may have occurred.**

**Serendipitous discoveries asked that one trace decisions back to elements that led to discoveries. Serendipity bypassed conscious decision making for unconscious and accidental discoveries, sometimes known as "happy accidents." To better understand the role of serendipity in learning one would have had to attempt to trace and unravel the discovery process.**

**Furthermore, path analyses of positive-negative influences such as faith encounters with mystery and social, psychological, or economic cost-benefits contributed to an actor being condemned to meaning in all life's aspects. The "intended consequence" of a "learning thought" either evaporated in time and space or evolved across time and space. Into this soundless (sometimes crescendo-like) cacophony of will to become, one was met with affirmation, disconfirmation or flirting with faith to will and realize visions of what could be—or retreat into the known.**

**Out of this/these states of being could materialize opportunities for learning.**

In most research endeavors over extended periods of time, evolutionary processes unexpectedly occur. Frye (1982) noted that the purpose of the question is not to find the answer: the purpose of the question is to refine the question. Finding the answer deprives one the privilege of refining the question. My research resulted in a refining the question—it evolved into planned and unplanned stages.

My naturalistic research evolved in planned and unplanned stages including a Texas A&M Record of Study (1984); Visible and invisible networks of learning (Shirk, 1985); Lewinian field theory; Drama and Dramaturgy; Economic costs, benefits; A sociopsychological perspective of the adult learner (Shirk, 1996); and consumer behavior and the adult learner (Shirk, 1998).

#### **TEXAS A&M RECORD OF STUDY**

The intended purpose of my original research was to study relevance of public library resources to urban adults who learned something new over a twelve month period (Tough, 1971). Whatever follows should be accepted as having flowed through filters that have potentially, or actually, created layers of bias. Responses to interview probes were percolated through memory-sparking moments in which lapses or exaggerations may have occurred about events of chance, choice, coercion, compulsion, or curiosity.

The data revealed that adults were more likely to rely on their personal experiences, family, friends and close associates than noted professionals (even though professionals generally received higher ratings for their advice). The study of eighty-one adults revealed that

learning something new was frequently triggered by problems. Actors engaged mind, body and spirit while problem-solving and searching for social and psychological meaning in the context of learning something new. They experienced frustration that gave way to awakened mental, spirit, and spiritual moments resulting in, at times, Zen-like aha moments.

Focus on faith as ultimate concern, or, secular faith as temporal concern, though in evidence, was not the purpose of my research--it was therefore overlooked.

Use of sociograms and field theory served as visual aids to map learning activities. Lewin's field theory contributed significantly to the interpretation of accumulated data.

## **LEWINIAN FIELD THEORY**

Kurt Lewin was considered one of the architects of social psychology. In their introduction to Advances in field theory (1990), editors Wheelan, Pepitone, and Abt cited Henle (1977): "we are in the process of advancing to where Lewin was 60 years ago." His legacy continues.

Lewin defined his concept of field theory in the context of environments and relationships. A basic principle was that actors exist in environments (fields) in which any behavior or changes in psychological fields were dependent not only upon interacting forces at a moment in time, it consisted of the totality of coexisting facts in an actor's life which were conceived as mutually interdependent (Lewin in Cartwright, 1951). Constructs in his understanding of field influences

on the actors' life-space includes, field forces, marginal space, regions of freedom, social locomotion, tension systems, time perspective, and valences.

Field forces were forces that included the impact of all positive or negative forces in the lives of actors. Included among these forces were social, economic, political, vocational, interpersonal, educational, medical and religious. They gave direction, strength, and point of application in actors' lives.

Life-space consisted of all the conscious or unconscious facts, events, feelings, forces and perceptions influencing actors at any given moment in time.

The idea of marginal space was used to identify the location of an actor who is standing on the boundary of, and experiencing the attraction, of two groups yet belonging to neither.

Social locomotion described any physical or psychological move from one region to another resulting in a change of environment that influenced nearly every aspect of an actor's life-space.

The term tension system was used to identify an actor's internal and external states of being during periods of change or flux, including the direction of equalization from neighboring systems and those within the individual.

Time perspective referred to the effect that distance from future and past events could have on an individual's expanding or contracting life-space.

Region of freedom referred to "The determination of the psychological place at which a (person) is and his (her) region of

**freedom of movement, that is, of the regions that are accessible to him and of those regions that psychologically exist...but are inaccessible by reason of the social situation or because of the limitations of his own social, physical, and intellectual abilities” ((Lewin, 1935).**

**Valences were the critical properties of an individual’s life-space, positive, or negative, that determine what direction behavior would take.**

**The Lewinian idea of “boundary” tied these concepts together. The boundary of one’s life-space could be hard (limiting, difficult to penetrate or expand), or soft (open to exploration, innovation, new relationships, or new ways of thinking). Through his creative research, Lewin attempted to map out the life-space and boundaries of individuals. Gold in Wheelan, Pepitone, and Abt (1990) noted: “The effectiveness of social practice in altering people’s experience and behavior is measured by the degree to which practice permeates the boundary in intended ways. Theory useful for practice will be theory that explains the processes of crossing the boundary.”**

**Lewin’s mapping of one’s “space of free movement” and accompanying comments provided insight into his field theory; it was a window into the components that were responsible for the expansion or contraction of the boundaries throughout one’s immediate, or extended timeline.**

**With a little imagination, the reader can envision migration and boundary modification in an actor’s life-space when acquiring new skills and participating in social, economic, political, vocational, interpersonal, educational, medical and religious activities.**

Lewin's concepts of field theory and boundary modification could be used to trace and visualize these ongoing positive or negative, and temporary or permanent, processes. For example, mapping done over a period of time could provide insight into family relationships. Argyle (1969) noted it was not uncommon for individual members and families, as units, to experience states of some degree of "equilibrium". A wide range of crises could however, create periods of dislocation, followed by a return to the previous or new state of stability.

## **DRAMA AND DRAMATURGY**

A number of social psychologists have viewed human existence as drama and individual participants as actors. Moreno (1953) originated concept of drama and dramaturgy in the interpretation of life's everyday activities. He published his findings in Who Shall Survive: Foundations of Sociometry, group psychotherapy and Sociodrama. His sociograms were used to portray the interplay of relationships and personal choices in groups.

Sarbin in Allen and Scheibe (1982) proposed a "dramaturgical model" in order to show the contextualization of social interaction. Referencing Turner (1974), Sarbin listed five principal elements of the model: "meaningful' social interaction; self and the recognition of separate individuality (constructed in social interaction); a dramaturgical perspective (participants in social interaction are viewed as actors who "not only respond to situations but also mold and create them"); participants are not viewed in isolation, they are interacting persons; and "As episodes begin and end, human beings continually

**construct and reconstruct meanings to make sense of their observations of the performance of others and of self.”**

**Building on the dramaturgical model, Sarbin focused attention on the many roles actors could assume in a situation and across their lifetime.**

**Once an interactant accurately locates the position of other interactants on the basis of behavioral symbolic or artifactual cues the range of possible role behaviors is reduced from near infinity to a small number. For example, to a person entering a school building, the number of possible positions he will consider for any person he encounters is reduced from the thousands of positions known to him to four or five. The positions of any persons encountered will be student, teacher, principal, secretary, or custodian. The locations will be compounded by age and sex characteristics, such as young female teacher, male student, and old male principal....(Allen and Scheibe, 1982).**

**Evidences of role contextualization repeatedly surfaced as I sorted my data through visual learning sociograms. Learning sociograms were influenced by the works of Moreno, Sarbin and others. Respondents could be seen acting out a wide variety of roles as they reported about their learning activities, taking on at times a literal sense of drama. It was not uncommon for actors to display with an obvious sense of accomplishment evidences of their newly acquired skills and abilities.**

**The learning sociogram instrument (Shirk, 1984) was developed in an attempt to disclose overt and subtle sociopsychological climates influencing actors at the time of the interviews. These observations revealed resources actors utilized to support their activities. Climate included physical well-being, intimate living conditions, principal learning providers, family states of being, and other social factors.**

Following completion of my Record of Study an invitation was received from an acquaintance to temporarily relocate to a small Puget Sound community. The five-month reflection period resulted in the design of a self-directed self-funded proposal that would replicate my Record of Study.

## **VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE LEARNING NETWORKS**

A replication of my Record of Study began with a survey of a small isolated seaport town with a population of 6,000. It was culturally influenced by forestry and fishing industries, and a defunct World War I and II military coastal defense installation. The military base was converted into a juvenile correctional center. At the time of the study the fort and correctional center were renovated into a state supported cultural center for the arts (Centrum). Community leaders accepted cultural changes while continuing to embrace the town's Victorian architectural ethos.

Long-time residents included military and civilian retirees and a reticent conservative population of commercial fishermen, mill workers, educators, and other professionals who supported service, educational, military, and health-related organizations.

A small group of innovator types seeking refuge from hectic urban living, and a heterogeneous in-gathering of artists, new age adherents and war protestors, added to the mix.

Using a random sample from the local telephone directory, 50 respondents agreed to participate in the study. As the research evolved a departure was made to my original Record of Study. That is, when

possible, respondents were asked to identify support sources assisting with their projects. Sources were recoded for future reference. The list of resources formed visible and, most times, invisible networks of human learning resources in the community.

Snowball sampling (Burgess, 1982) and use of learning sociograms, were used by the researcher to identify local “learning providers.” The learning providers were in turn asked (along with my perusing newspaper notices and community bulletin boards) to identify other community members who were considered to have assisted adults’ formal and informal learning activities. The researcher personally identified and contacted more than 400 individuals, groups, businesses, and organizations who used their expertise to assist others to formally or informally learn something new (Shirk, 1985).

Learning network contexts ranged from invisible and informal one-on-one dyads to formal visible associations, organizations and institutions.

Invisible networks tended toward short-term relationships and acts that disappeared after meeting specific needs. In some instances invisible networks supported an underground economy and on occasion developed into stable, visible organizations staffed by trained personnel. A particular invisible learning episode was pursued by a respondent through a chimney sweep correspondence course. His self-image was transformed from a forty-hour week job at a local navy base to becoming, as he said, “I am one who intercepts fate.”

Visible networks included hospitals, schools, the local library, churches, battered women's center, and formal local and state such organizations as agriculture, fishing, and forestry.

My second study strongly reinforced my Record of Study. Learning was a body, mind and spirit experience. Participants in a highly visible Zen-like wooden boat building program drafted plans, laid keels, and worked with tools that became extensions of the users in nearly every step of their projects.

Projects were frequently born out of struggle and search for meaning. One imperceptible project initiated during the throes of a divorce resulted in preliminary planning for a public marine biology laboratory. The project evolved, took shape, received seed money, and emerged over a twenty-year period as a visible community service. Another respondent lived in a school bus during a self-depreciating time of trying to find a way out of her current dilemma.

Economic costs and benefits were observed. Respondents spent various sums on their projects and occasionally earned cash amounts. Though a formal record of economic transactions was not recorded, economic costs and benefits in learning something new was evidenced.

## **ECONOMIC COSTS, BENEFITS AND ADULT LEARNING**

To further understand the adult learner and economic costs and benefits at some stage in learning something new I was directed to consumer behavior. As noted earlier consumers live and act in complex, unsettled worlds where surprises are commonplace and not mere deviations around trends and worlds full of novelty and

obsolescence, worlds that are, in short, turbulent (Earl, 1986). Adult learners are consumers who are influenced by social and economic trends that affirm and test every aspect of their lives.

#### **MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY KELLOGG STUDY**

Replicating my previous studies a third component to my research was included--an economic dimension (Shirk in Fellenz and Conti, 1990; Shirk, J. C., 1992). This provided a measurable depiction of the economic costs and benefits involved in learning something new.

Actors' were asked to estimate monetary costs and gains from doing something new. Estimating included costs and gains from purchasing new equipment, conducting new business ventures, remodeling homes, do-it-yourself projects, pursuing new hobbies,, enrolling in formal educational programs, health and exercising regimens, testing self-potential, entering new relationships, reordering personal priorities, and responding to unanticipated circumstances.

Interpersonal struggles with marriage, divorce, child-rearing, death and working with the public challenged respondents to find resources to improve their financial status. For some it meant taking part-time jobs, moving back home with parents to save money, enrolling in college courses and pursuing degrees. More importantly, their goals were to improve their life-space and function more effectively.

Economic costs ranged from little or nothing to more than \$5,000 for an undertaking. Even if actors could not place a dollar value on learning activities, they recalled intangible benefits including fulfillment of dormant desires, tests of endurance and expansions of freedom in

**their life-space. Sociopsychological costs and benefits was another factor.**

**Most actors incurred little or no financial expenditures related to religious interests. Inspired, driven, or challenged by the need to feel useful, be more effective in religious work, or more clearly understand fuzzy spiritual needs, they invested more time than finances. In some instances they invested in religious literature, cultural/religious sponsored classes and seminars. One actor hoped to use her developing expertise to open and operate a New Age bookstore**

**Actors seemed to have difficulty recalling learning episodes in which financial expenditures were minimal even though personal value outweighed economic costs. The absence of financial costs could have resulted in self-minimization, and underrating these growth experiences.**

**Actors in every age group found their life-space unique and impacted by their own set of circumstances. The youth appeared more likely to be open to the future. Young adults, though limited by education and economic assets seemed willing to take financial risks. Older adults seemed to accept the fact that life was passing them by. There were those, even in old age, who were going to give their best shot at what time was left. Taking the Lewinian approach it became apparent that every actor's life-space consisted of intricate webs of physical, social, and psychological assets and liabilities that influenced their willingness to respond or not to the myriad of circumstances and chance events that could occur on any given day.**

## **A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ADULT LEARNER**

**In creating a “sociopsychological perspective of the adult learner” (Shirk, 1996) I perused theories of social interaction and lifelong learning advanced by K. Lewin, J. Moreno, T. Sarbin, J. W. Thibaut and H. H. Kelley, R. S. Perinbanayagam, and B. Dervin. Researching their writings helped me better perceive lifelong learning as affective and cognitive activities that occur in the life-space of actors in response to positive or negative field forces at any given moment in time or across periods of time.**

**This phase of research was conceived in three parts: a sociopsychological perspective of the adult learner; vignettes; and the adult learner from a socioeconomic perspective. Results were eventually reduced to two perspectives: one, sociopsychological, the other, socioeconomic.**

**From a sociopsychological perspective my views were clarified and expanded while perusing Perinbanayagam’s Signifying acts: Structure and meaning in everyday life (1985) and Thibaut and Kelley’s The social psychology of groups (1986).**

**Actors may respond positively or negatively to field forces in manners that range from being deliberately focused, or inquisitive, to ones that are ill-defined, or haphazard. Perinbanayagam noted they respond to any given life-situation by assuming a select few roles from among many. Furthermore, referencing G. H. Meade’s thoughts on reflectivity he wrote “After a self has arisen, it in a certain sense provides for itself its social experiences, as so we can conceive of an absolutely solitary self” (1934:140).**

The significance of Mead's affirmation of the self as a learning resource helped explain why respondents trusted their acquired skills as they recalled and employed previously learned abilities. A cabinet maker shared with the researcher how he relied on peer coaching, early American trade manuals, and trial and error. Honing his skills enabled him to master his craft (Shirk (1984).

A carpenter shared his particular version of acquiring new skills. He would hire a sub-contractor to execute a task. Unobtrusively watching how the hired help performed the job, the respondent would take notes then try to do it himself. In time he learned how to by-pass the sub-contractor (Shirk, 1984).

Neither of the previous two mentioned respondents were solitary selves. The formation of and affirmation of an "absolutely solitary self," though an admirable goal, will rarely be achieved in self-imposed social vacuum in an actor's lifetime for "no man is an island."

My research has not indicated that the actor consider him/herself the most reliable resource for learning, no, he/she does dares to "wing it," "fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants," "take-the-bull-by-the-horns," proceed by trial and error, learn from experienced others, or learn from past successes and mistakes.

The dissonance that dares the learner to forge ahead to the unknown and unexplained is made up of the same life's stuff that hopes and evolves into the mystery of mysteries, ultimate concern.

## **GROUP DYNAMICS: COSTS, BENEFITS IN ADULT LEARNING**

**In the act of learning actors may migrate into psychologically and socially unfamiliar regions that are beyond the boundaries of their life-space. They are attempting, through a series of unpredictable responses, to make sense of the challenges and intrigues affecting their lives.**

**In their work, The Social Psychology of Groups, Thibaut and Kelley (1967, 1986) developed conceptual costs and rewards of developing meaningful relationships (dyads) between two or more actors. Influenced by Lewin, Moreno and others, they coined the terms “comparison level” (CL) and “comparison level alternative” (C-L alt). A high C-L for an actor engaging in a relationship indicated that rewards for participating with another outweighed costs; a low C-L indicated costs outweighed rewards and that the relationship might be in jeopardy. If an existing relationship (C-L alt) provided greater rewards than the one being formed, then the new affiliation was in danger of being terminated. Also, when compared with an existing partnership, a new one could replace it when rewards outweighed costs.**

**From a religious perspective actors make choices through out their life times. They may embrace, disregard or pursue paths of spirit inquiry unlike religious beliefs of parents. If disregarded they may follow a path toward statements of faith that offer greater rewards than those of their youth. Conversion based on intellectual quest or satisfaction of psychological and social needs may ensue. Aging and maturation influence faith development. Actual and perceived costs and rewards will affect social integration or isolation in their journeys.**

**Thibaut and Kelley identified eight elements that contribute to dyad development: choice and rewards, choice and costs, rejection, abilities, propinquity (kinship, nearness), similarity of attitude, complementary needs, and power, and status. Each element contributes to the development of some form of meaningful interaction. Choice and rewards could result from participation in networks that provide some form of economic, social, or spiritual rewards to all involved. Not necessarily limited to those with similar convictions, even where differences between actors emerged, rewards could be generated.**

**Choice and costs could be the result of an actor's underestimating the costs in relationship building. In spite of social limitation on the part of one party, the other could be accepting even if there was not a socially acceptable response.**

**Rejection could stem from the fact that "...every individual voluntarily enters and stays in any relationship only as long as it is adequately satisfactory in terms of his rewards and costs" (1986).**

**Abilities possessed by one of the partners are frequently not possessed by the other. This dissimilarity, however, could become the basis of developing relationships.**

**Propinquity (nearness or kinship) is likely to reduce social, psychological, and economic costs in creating and maintaining relationships.**

**Similarity in attitudes could result in meaningful relationships—similar, rather than conflicting, values between individuals are more likely to provide mutual rewards.**

Complementary needs could lend themselves to situations in which both parties voluntarily participate in and mutually assess “the gratification potentialities in the relationships”.

Power and status could be the result of friendships and relationships that engendered prestige, dignity, or upward mobility. In Lewinian terminology, social locomotion (Cartwright, 1951), could be an endeavor in which an actor associates or develops a relationship with another person based on status/power.

## **SOCIAL SPACE AND SOCIAL ACTS**

Perinbanayagam’s concentration in social psychology complemented Thiabaut and Kelley’s. Influenced by G. H. Meade and others, Perinbanayagam’s search for meaning in social events led him to state that actors generate social acts through participation with at least one other that result in the construction of stable meanings, relationships, and worlds which occur in situations. He defined “situation” as

...An encompassing arrangement of space, objects, and persons designed to elicit determinate responses from actors and serves as the locus in which words are exchanged by participants in the social act, leading to further refinements and redefinitions, this time accomplished by manipulating the structures of the language being used.” Exchanges in a situation by actors in a social space were considered relative in intensity and duration as dictated by time and space out of which acts were “produced and directed by the participants in order to aid each other in arriving at the relevant conceptualization of the situation so that each of them can proceed to the next step.”

He added, “these social acts that occur in situations are usually, if not always, characterized by the presence of problematic events.”

## **SENSE-MAKING**

In Dervin’s “sense-making” research a set of concepts and methods are used to “study how people construct sense of their worlds, and, in particular, how they construct information needs and uses for information in the process of sense-making” (in Glazier and Powell, 1992). Set in the context of everyday existence, and in the assumption of discontinuity, it includes life’s isolated peak experiences as well as its raw ambiguity. It assumes that one’s life-space is “potentially discontinuous from time to time and space to space;” and whatever “order” exists for an actor is not directly accessible to an observer and “it assumes that humans do not have available to them an external standard to which they can turn for an assessment of their truth, either in an absolute or even a relative sense.”

Dervin (2003) noted that incertitude and ambiguity are breeding grounds for learning: applications appropriate today may not be appropriate tomorrow. Sense-making is that constant process of bridging life’s pervasive discontinuities and gaps as the actor maneuvers to incorporate information that might hopefully satisfy perceived solutions to perceived predicaments. The actor may not finally arrive at the full meaning of one’s existence; it does place one in the context of a continuum. That continuum though not clearly defined, provides one with an opportunity to refine and redefine, invent and reinvent, and direct and redirect his/her life space through conscious

and unconscious cognitive acts that expand or contract the limits of the one's sense of meaning and purpose. These on-going acts make up the stuff of lifelong learning.

## **CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND THE ADULT LEARNER**

**Not satisfied with my understanding of the economic characteristics of learning and the adult learner I questioned local information specialists about my dilemma. A well-respected community leader suggested I look at consumer behavior—it was a key that helped open the door to understand why people do what they do (Shirk, 1998). Two years of self-directed study at University of Minnesota libraries resulted in the following observations that have been incorporated into my general theme of faith, dissonance, and the adult learner.**

**Consumer behavior is a robust human enterprise that integrates anthropology, economics, mass communications, psychology, and sociology in its research. It is a discipline that analyzes decision-making processes in which individuals evaluate, obtain, use, and dispose of goods and services in the belief that the consequences will make life happier (Engel and others, 1986; Harrell, 1986; Loudon and Della Bitta, 1988; and O'Shaughnessy, 1987). Schumacher in Gardner and Marsh (1989) considered it a matter of obtaining “the maximum amount of well-being with the minimum of consumption” (Ferguson in Haftron and Dunsing, 1972).**

**Earl (1986) noted that “consumers act in a complex, unsettled world where surprises are commonplace and not mere deviations**

around a world that is, in short, unstable, chaotic, and economically turbulent.”

People do what they do in environments in which acts of faith are integrated into decisions that are not isolated from day-to-day choices. At times overt, but mostly in the context of obscure individual or personal relationships, acts of faith are silently developed or conditioned responses; some are couched in ultimate concern, others, secular. When acts of faith are overt people weigh costs and benefits that choices will make on their lives and those of others.

Natural faith is expressed in the face of economic and social turmoil—so why do consumers buy? Necessity is one factor, self-image another. Additional factors follow.

Consumer behavior is influenced by the family life cycle. Lown (1986) reported that most families can expect to experience financial difficulty; that prosperity throughout the family life cycle is uncommon for most families; that few workers can expect uninterrupted full-time employment; that most workers experience large salary changes over the years; and that the status of men tends to be job-related.

Lown further noted that despite socioeconomic status, education, and employment, “marriage, divorce, death, and remarriage are the primary determinants of whether women and children are financially secure while employment status is the primary determinant for men....Essentially, divorce results in poverty for women and children while it can be a way out of poverty for men.”

Respondents reported that divorce created major financial and emotional strains resulting in disorientation, disruption, and distress.

For some survival meant moving back home with parents; seeking counseling; and/or entering a work force that was demeaning or for which they were ill-prepared. Most of their actions lacked long range goals while faced with immediate and straining financial demands.

Attempting to make sense out of ambiguity, anger, and anxiety, divorce or separation, some women appeared pragmatic in the face of divorce. Behavioral choices tended to be goal-oriented and directed toward survival that included college, career re-training, on-the-job-training, or self-directed learning. For one actor it was drafting a proposal to-become-successful-regional-marine-research project.

On the domestic front consumer behavior was acted out in the lives of respondents through household production. Household production consists of unpaid services which are conducted by and for family members that replace market goods or paid services to someone outside the family and can include the do-it-yourself variety of projects. It was not uncommon for actors share with the researcher newly acquired in-home skills that could be improved with repetition. A 38 year-old actor said “I believe you learn things until you do them then you do it in your head. When you do it yourself you know you can do it again” (Shirk, 1985). Fast and others (1989) reported that hands on experience could reduce the propensity for consumers to become engaged in deliberate, external searching. They have become their own useful resource. “....[It] appears that one’s own experience may be substituted for experience of friends, relatives, and acquaintances in the marketplace...in general.” As earlier reported Meade in

**Perinbanayagan (1985) viewed proficiency gained from one's own experience can become a trusted guide for personal decision making.**

**Household production could be influenced by financial restraints, family size, education, age, physical well-being, etc. Learning projects could be financed with discretionary income from wages, profits from avocational projects, unexpected income, bartering for goods and services, or dissaving (dispensing financial assets to acquire goods or services).**

**Not all human capital skills identified with household production could be equated with existing market services. Could cost estimates be placed on family character development that transmits feelings of belonging, esteem, and altruism? What would parents use to compare the costs of spiritual or values formation?**

**The study of consumer behavior also offered insight into market forces that supported or encouraged "compensatory consumption". Compensatory consumption is the purchase of goods and services that provide one with a real or imagined sense of personal security or well-being (Gronmo in Otnes, 1988). It can be a response to ambiguity, catastrophe, deprivation, failure, misfortune, prosperity or success. Even at the cost of dissaving, consumers may try to satisfy psychological voids with market purchases. Clothing styles, housing, hobbies, recreation, computer technology, or automobiles lend themselves to compensatory consumption.**

**The "pressure line," a variation of compensatory consumption is defined by the goods, services, and other conditions which a family feels it must have to maintain a particular lifestyle (Gove and others, 1973).**

The passionate dream of a young carpenter was to qualify as a professional bowler. If he could aggressively break into the professional circuit financial rewards would offset the present sacrifices his family was incurring to realize his dream.

“Market mavens” in most communities, are those who make it a point to familiarize themselves with product comparisons, prices, places to shop, and other facets of consumer markets (Price and others, 1987). They may include county extension agents, library information specialists, newspaper advocates, trusted friends, and GOOGLE and other on-line search engines.

“Consumer education” is the development and use of strategies to assist actors’ decision-making processes that result in the evaluation of, and the intention to purchase or reject market goods. It may decrease the amount of time an actor spends seeking information and may also improve the efficiency with which information is used in the decision-making process (Fast, et. al., 1989). Consumer Reports was frequently cited as a resource adults used to evaluate potential purchases.

Consumer education has frequently been an issue for the elderly. Considering the act of consumption to be an interactive process across the lifespan, Ames and Kennedy (1981) saw older adults as an “extremely heterogeneous group” with needs that frequently were not addressed in the context of their complex and unique requirements. As their income and mobility decreases “anticipatory socialization” occurred. Moschis (1994) raised several important questions regarding this state of being among the elderly such as: What and how do consumer-information processing skills change across the lifespan?

**Why do some older actors maintain cognitive skills longer than others? How do earlier lifestyle patterns and biological and environmental factors help one understand differences in cognitive declines? How do older actors compensate for cognitive declines? What roles do biological, psychological, and social factors play in predicting older adults' vulnerability to persuasive messages? What is the role of biological, psychological, and social factors in predicting the older person's susceptibility to persuasive messages, propensity to accept new technologies, and capacity to use product information? I would add, what role does religion play in the lives of the elderly as their economic assets dwindle and doors of death near? One respondent seemed guided by fate, while another accepted late-in-life learning as a challenge and opportunity.**

**The objective of recreation in a consumer-driven society is the consumption of "surplus leisure time, purposes for which can include finding opportunities for escape, self-indulgence, pleasure, and status-seeking" (Gardner and Marsh, 1978). Bergier's (1981) model of "Leisure Time Choice Behavior" analyzed adults' willingness to budget discretionary resources to those ends that were perceived to enhance quality of life and interpersonal relationships, either as spectators or participants.**

**Childless couples allocated larger shares of their full income to market goods and leisure, and less in home production than cohorts with children (Douthitt and Fedyk, 1990). With the birth of children, the "full income allocated to the mother's household production increased steadily until the youngest child reached the age of two." An increase in**

family size also resulted in a larger share of the full income being allocated to market goods and home production and a decrease in the amount allocated to leisure. It may also cultivate an awareness of the need for individual and family faith and spiritual growth.

### **Consumer Behavior in the Context of Faith and Religious Development**

Consumer behavior in the context of personal faith and religious development can be expressed in church membership, religious education, spiritually oriented small group formations, and personal life-experiences and expectations that expand their life-space into uncharted territories for self and family. Thibaut and Kelley outlined costs and benefits related to aversion to or migrating toward group affiliations. If the social, spiritual or psychological costs prove too high aversion may occur. If the benefits and rewards outweigh costs participation in a particular group becomes an option.

Included in participation in religious organizations are annual requests for time, talents and treasures. These “giving” opportunities can be considered aspects of individual and family consumer behavior. They can be social, psychological and spiritual opportunities which lead to moral, social, spiritual and religious growth. In times of adversity, failure, loss, faith may be turned to to sustain unexpected predicaments.

### **RESEARCH VIGNETTES**

My intention in this section is not to compare respondents found in my studies with great persons of faith. Episodes are extrapolated from interviews with common folk who responded to my questioning at

particular times and places uniquely intimate to themselves. Respondents self-examined and recalled learning something new in the past twelve months. They were asked to identify the nature of their projects. The focus of the studies was not religion or religious faith. In a sense references to religion could be assumed to be an unobtrusive or a non-response approach to religion, faith and learning. Respondents may have been persons of faith but not in pursuit of identifiable religious learning activities in the previous twelve month time frame.

Episodes presented in my vignettes are a microcosm of faith and learning among little known actors who are representative of a macrocosm of faith and learning among adults at large.

### **Vignette #1**

She said, “He was killed in action when his plane was shot down over Viet Nam.” Since coming to this community the thirty-seven year-old widow had been piecing her life back together. She established a network of friends in a metaphysical community which had become a spiritual focus in her life. While talking about one of her dialogues with a “Ramtha” she interjected: “Hey, I’ve been out on a limb like Shirley McClain...I even talked with Shirley McClain...” The respondent had indeed been “out on a limb”—now she was finding solace in a variety of metaphysical groups in the community including Celtic Runes, work with M\_\_\_\_ P\_\_\_\_, taro workshops and creating and using crystals. At one point in the interview she stopped: “Look at how shiny my teeth are! My channeler did that for me over the telephone.” She then opened her mouth to show the researcher her teeth.

Her life was not solely focused on meditation exercises for she pursued Spanish lessons, aerobics, and tap dancing in the past year.

Apprehensive about caring for her teen-age children during this lengthy time of transition was a major. To create a better understanding of their concerns she accepted a substitute teaching position in their school system. Teaching provided an outlet, balance, objectivity, and sense of detachment within herself and bonding with her children.

The development of a long-term relationship with her significant other also added stability in her life. Like herself he was an avid sailor who accompanied her on several Caribbean and Granada voyages. The three, her oldest son, significant other and she were now planning an around-the-world sailing cruise. “I’m a gypsy at heart” she said.

Preparations for the cruise included creating an itinerary and gathering data and supplies for recording and completing the experience. Finalization of the “home schooling” effort would allow them to complete the trip in time for her son to have enough credits to graduate with his senior class.

Though the respondent considered herself a person of independent means she was possessed with wanderlust. She wanted to expand the boundaries of her life-space—now was not the time to settle down. She wanted to reach out to the wild winds, salty spray, raging seas and taste and feel that which few dared in their life times.

A question not asked nor answered was “to what extent did sailing replace metaphysical meditation in the life of the respondent? “ Put another way, did sailing reduce cognitive dissonance in her life?

Were the challenges at sea great enough to bring an inner release from the dissonance she had harbored in her subconscious over the years since she had found herself “out on a limb”?

### Vignette #2

Silence, stillness, a spark and wisp of smoke, FIRE—ashes and now a once lived-in house and home is reduced to dashed dreams and somber condolences.

Where to begin? How to start over? Insurance settlements, disaster investigations, looking for rental living space, reconstructing inventories took most of the young couple’s time—“We have been working like archaeologists, the fire has been a thing all by itself,” said the wife. How were they to resurrect hope out of the rubble?

The fire may have dashed former dreams and consumed much of their time in the past year: it unexpectedly renewed a bonding to each other and community residents, a bonding that included meaningful spiritual awareness.

Until now the family gave little thought to faith as an aspect of life, they were comfortably self-reliant. Religious they were not—respected, yes. Their former self-reliance was now a shell of hollow feelings and emptiness that begged for sustaining answers. The community’s showering care kindled in their minds need for an examination of a personal religious faith. There was something genuine about the concern exhibited by these people of faith. Was this the faith for which they were looking?

As she thought about faith in the abstract the wife said, “I just want to sort out what direction my spiritual search will take. I just want to trust God.” She was not sure what this might mean for everything seemed so ambiguous and unclear. Now that the fire had undermined self-assurance she was willing to consider some kind of spiritual journey. Perhaps some of those who came to their aid could point them in the right direction. The husband knew he would start by reading James’s “Varieties of religious experience” and other religious writings then proceed from there.

Looking beyond that tragic night the respondents started thinking and acting out feelings set off by their predicament. They saw hope. Beneath the surface of his mind the husband saw himself being more than the sign painter; he envisioned becoming a graphic artist. If wisely distributed, the insurance settlement could be used for building a new home, business and studio space and replacing lost equipment and supplies.

Looking beyond the fire, insurance settlements, vocational changes, family values, both respondents considered expanding life-space boundaries that could redefine their purpose for being. Faced with challenges, some of which had been latent or postponed, they could now perceive possible life changes that would affect family, faith, and careers. Spiritual formation would be included in the family’s future. How that formation would unfold in their journey together would not necessarily emerge as a clear path to enlightenment and understanding. It would be a challenging journey of becoming. It would be encounters with all the stuff that accompanies spiritual growth.

### **Vignette #3**

**The overriding concern of the single parent raising her fourteen year-old daughter was one thing--complicate that with the mother's month-long coma was another (the result of an incapacitating automobile accident)..**

**The forty-one year-old divorced respondent was learning how to live again. She had been to an abyss and back that included relearning motor, memory, workplace and social skills. "I am teaching myself to live again...that includes my relationship with my daughter, getting along with other people, dancing lessons, writing poetry, learning new job skills, and relearning how to play the piano."**

**The respondent's relearning to play the piano, while no comparison with her pre-accident abilities, had a healing effect not only in her life but among her circle of friends. "Yes," she said, "my piano has been my psychiatrist."**

**How did a single parent, severely limited by an accident that restricted her social skills, find the courage to guide her daughter through her own emotional and social development? Was her situation unique? Yes and no. Every situation is unique in its own way. How could she be a caring mother while undergoing her own rehabilitation? The thought consumed much of her time (estimate, 500 hours in the past year), painful and hopeful, here and there and in bits and pieces. Her daughter, family, friends, pastor, a small group and public library resources provided guidance through this on-going process. The respondent reminded herself to believe sequences of events would**

unfold, in time, for the better—she had to learn to “be there” for her daughter and for herself.

#### **Vignette #4**

Motivated by job advancement the actor in this interview accepted a position as director of a community’s parks and recreation program. “I kind of look at my self as a type of person who is reactionary, not as a planner, more an emotional learner than a person who needs to do something. I learn about those things that interest me, not just learning for learning’s sake. I recently started a new position related to park management.” Continuing, the thirty-three year old respondent said, ”I’ve had to learn about purchasing, using and maintaining equipment; lawn, plant and shrub care; insurance and liability; personnel management; and who to turn to for advice.“ Most of his information was garnered from Agricultural Extension agents, books and hand out; conferences; and his personal books and research. The upshot of his preparation was a proposal for consolidating city parks and recreation maintenance. “I pictured myself as having a goal and attaining it, visualized myself doing that. That job concept is a good one. It works. It is good.”

Religious development was a high priority for the actor. His community of faith recognized his commitment, encouraged him to expand his involvement in its activities. Three religious episodes in faith formation in his life stood out in the past year. First, he and his wife participated in a week-end marriage encounter program directed by volunteer teachers in the church. “It was tremendous. It helped me

interpret my emotions and feelings.” Second was a study of the Book of John led by pastoral interns, “This has been a real growing year for me in the area of religion.” Third, “I volunteered to teach Sunday school this past year—training included a Sunday school clinic directed by a teacher from our synod which also contributed to my religious development.”

As president-elect of the local Kiwanis club the respondent studied parliamentary procedure, local and national goals and programs. Training included local and regional Kiwanis retreats and his personal familiarization with the organization. The program offered him the opportunity to envision future development of community parks and recreation. It also introduced him to the launching of the local hospital’s “Focus on Health” program to which he was an invited committee member. An opportunist, Kiwanis member and director of the city parks and recreation program, he agreed to serve. He visualized the arrangement benefiting parks and recreation, Kiwanis and the “Focus on Health” program.

Future plans included job proficiency in horticulture and new equipment; expanding his interest in the arts including writing poetry (a latent interest), oil painting, and music; and certification in Red Cross first aid, CPR, and water safety.

Concluding the interview the actor said “I really found myself giving more satisfaction to those situations in which I had one-on-one contact with those who assisted.

**Vignette #5**

**“The mighty urge” said the seventy-eight year-old retired military officer in response to the question “Why do you put yourself through all the effort it takes to produce a play?”**

**The interview was conducted in the respondent’s heavily used, rustic sculpting studio that contained vestiges of works in progress. He was possessed by an inner daring drive that pushed him to the edge of his limits. Studying Russian focused on one those limits for, as he said, “I plan to go to Russia in the near future.” Sculpting? “I spent hours sitting for a sculpture friend—as I watched him I decided I would try doing it myself.” Future theatrical productions, and learning more about Lewis and Clark trail that traversed nearby were on his “to do” list.**

**What intrigued me most about this respondent was his verbalizing daring with “the mighty urge.” He was possessed with a compelling, curious force that made him alive to himself, his network of friends, and his community.**

**Vignette #6**

**Known for her faith activities, the seventy-five-year-old Mexican-American widow lived alone in a moderately low income neighborhood. A second grade Mexican education was the limit of her formal learning. Illness was a deterrent to learning something new in the past twelve months but not a deterrent to teaching crafts at a community center and providing consolation and prayer for community residents.**

Considered somewhat of a local “shaman” in the community in that she cared and prayed for the sick, local residents turned to her for spiritual consolation, comfort and relief. She did not perceive herself to be an intermediary but said “Sometimes they come to the door asking me to pray for them and I don’t know who they are. I pray all the time....I love sick and helpless people. Some people need advice, you know?” A young person present at the interview confirmed the respondent’s words recalling an incident in which a local woman had a troublesome dream that her 94 year old mother died and that in the dream her mother was calling her. Seeking out the respondent the consoled woman shared her story with intimate others.

The actor expressed faith to local residents using local idioms, dialects and unsophisticated religious lingo. Not ordained to the services of a faith order, ecclesiastical rites and liturgy were absent from her interactions with seekers. Simply put, she was recognized as a caring person.

#### **Vignette #7**

A couple addressed an incident in their lives that clearly reminded them the flower of youth surely fades. The husband, a retired railroad conductor on first-rate passenger trains, was now holding an office in the local veterans organization—an activity that expended much of his energy. The sociopsychological benefits gained by belonging to the group far outweighed whatever costs were incurred. Otherwise his life was a shell of what it had been as a respected railroad conductor.

There was a memory he hesitantly released. Taking me to his office, he directed my attention to a strategically hung photograph of his beauty-contest-winning wife (who incidentally, was not permitted to access this space, even though in it was the family organ that she yearned to learn to play). Memories reminded him of better days. It was intriguing that husband and wife alluded to the “beauty pageant” incident; they both seemed to subtly suffer at being reminded of what had been. Both were finding ways to adjust to the aging process. He could act out his role as World War II veteran (a role far easier to play than his wife’s as a former beauty pageant contestant).

Her interests were primarily related to her local church and studying about Native Americans. Interest in Native American culture provided her with a historical cultural context in which she, as both distant and contemporary observer, could identify with. It was an activity that extended her faith beyond the limitations of her own past.

### Vignette #8

A product of the Montana homestead, an eighth grade educated eighty-six-year-old woman, was aware her life was coming to a close. Recently migrating from a metropolis to a small town, the change radically impacted her life-space—her previously eventful involvement at a cosmopolitan senior center found no replacement in this community. In addition, her restricted walking ability led her to report, “We all have to give up sometime.” She seemed to be resigning herself to living out her days for her grandchildren. For now, establishing new relationships did not seem to be worth the effort, especially when

compared to her previous experiences. Fading faith left her with vacuous days of ambivalence in which walls seemed to be closing in.

### **Vignette #9**

A sixty-nine-year-old financially independent widow was finding a new sense of freedom and control over her life now that she was solely responsible for making decisions about financial investments, art, computers, friendships, and even exploring new issues, such as, a local church's response to homosexuality.

The issue of homosexuality came up when a friend indicated her preference for a lesbian lifestyle. Though perplexed, rather than reject or ignore her friend, she decided to become more knowledgeable about the subject. She garnered information from public libraries and local church seminars, and reported, "I'm glad I have a better feeling about those people. Because, it used to kind of turn me off. It just turned me off completely....Maybe I was afraid I was one (laughter). I know better than that."

A significant learning experience occurred over a recent several year period. Since the 1930s she, her husband and another couple traveled around the world together. Her friend was "the life of the party" while sharing their common interests. Travels recently ceased when the respondent's husband died as did her friend's husband, mother and sister. The respondent said,

She just gave up. We visit her every Saturday. I usually take her some food because you know you get sick of eating. And I have noticed her losing her interest in living. And that has been one of the saddest things I have ever known. She's become a tiny little thing, snow white hair. And so I said 'L' why do you find

**your self in this deplorable state of mind? She said, “If I just had somebody who belonged to me.’ She doesn’t care to live. She said she prays at night she doesn’t wake up in the morning. Isn’t that sad?**

**Daring to extend the boundaries of her comfort zones as cultural barriers were reduced through social and intellectual inquiry, the respondent’s faith stretched beyond previously held phobias. These were learning experiences that expanded her world view.**

### **Vignette #10**

**The thirty-three-year-old high school graduate, waitress, knew the meaning of hard times and personal insecurity. In the past few years she shifted from job to job, at one point living in a school bus to cut down on expenses. She could have understood the lyrics of Stephen Foster’s “O! Hard times, come again no more” (in Yo-Yo Ma cd).**

**Let us pause in life’s pleasures to count its many tears  
While we all sop sorrow with the poor:  
There’s a song that will linger forever in our ears,  
Oh! Hard times, come again no more.**

**An estimated one hundred hours of counseling in the past year was enabling her “To basically learn to stand up for myself—not necessarily on the offensive but also not on the defensive. I have been learning to like myself, learning to be a different person and not being the scapegoat without having to be mean to others.” Although it took courage to come to terms with her mother, that step helped her come to terms with herself.**

**She hoped counseling would interrupt a generational struggle passed from mother to daughter. Now something she never expected to do but with a more comfortable sense of well-being, she found herself encouraging her mother to build her own self-esteem.**

**While trying to get a “handle on her life” she found herself wondering “Why I’m not related to religion?” The subject occasionally arose in her various readings but never as a first choice: it serendipitously and unexpectedly got her attention, nothing more. What did the future of religion promise for her? Structured religion? Not likely. She hoped to focus her attention on the meaning of myths and mythology. Mythology would provide not answers, but new insights. Learning more about mythology could lead to personal enlightenment to life’s broader meaning.**

**Moving from job to job and at one point living in a school bus might lead the casual observer to surmise faith to be an absent ingredient in the respondent’s life. Just the opposite, finding herself at loose ends brought her to the realization that she had to “come to terms” with herself. Daring to enter into a counseling relationship (something her distressed mother seemed not to be able to do) helped her to see what some might call “light at the end of the tunnel.” She was beginning to get a “handle on her life.” It would not be easy. Many bridges would have to be crossed but for now the seeds of faith had been planted in her mind. Learning something new in the past seemed not to be an option. Now she hoped she could learn about gardening, herbs, basic carpentry, embroidery, art history and mythology. Her primary**

source for learning more about these subjects would be the public library, friends and a paid teacher. Yes,

**'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,  
Hard times, hard times, come again no more:  
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door;  
Oh! Hard times, come again no more.**

### **Vignette #11**

Tragedy opened new opportunities for an actor who ten years earlier experienced a severe back injury. With his railroading electronics career terminated it took courage and time to weigh and compare his physical loss with his collective potential. The arduous road to recovery, though slow, (physically and mentally with each influencing the other) provided him the opportunity to redirect his occupational focus. Computer technology seemed a natural fit.

Interest in computers and programming followed a likely progression. Being a teen-age tinkerer (rebuilding radios, etc) in the past helped. His inclination toward solving mechanical and electrical problems paved the way for a position in electronics and now, computers. Not at once but with reflection and determination everything started to fall into place as he pursued his new interest. He said "I was the first person on the block to get a personal computer, now I'm doing my own programming."

Unlike those who perceived new technology to be a threat in 1988, he met it head-on by accepting computers as a challenge and contest to confront, a contest of the mind as well as the will. His programming skills were aided by enrolling in a correspondence course in custom programming that he "waded through" at the cost of nearly 500 hours

of time. When thoroughly overwhelmed he conferred with professionals who helped him decipher unfamiliar computer languages.

Managing to become sufficiently proficient with a software system, he was now creating a quasi-cottage industry in the form of a computerized accounting system he and his wife were marketing to area loggers.

Being self-directed which meant a high resistance to the fear of failure, the actor would, as a last resort, consult computer professionals who could assist with his projects. The role he was acting out pitted himself against himself. Not willing to let go, he indicated that a great sense of satisfaction was generated when he could push through to new levels of competence.

At the time this interview was conducted (1988), adult learning, not faith, had been the focus of the research. Faith, however, can be assumed to have supported the actor through an intense ordeal. A support group of medical, family, friends and his own determination must have provided him with spiritual help and mental comfort that enabled him to endure his pain and anguish.

### **Vignette #12**

Hardened, strengthened and softened by life on the rodeo circuit under a well-known trade name “B B” the now sixty-seven-year-old was entering her twilight years. Though divorced, illiterate and with an elementary school education she was determined to make up for her past limitations! A senior companion and care giver program provided the opportunity for which she was looking...making

a difference in her own life and those of others. Committed to a desire to serve, she received nearly two hundred hours of training over the past year to become a considerate, compassionate, and empathetic senior caregiver. She was helping healthy older adults live independently.

The rodeo circuit required toughness, not literacy. Being successful on the circuit supported her illiterate image—she could stand up to the best of them. Those years were behind her. Self-conscious of her inability to read she tried to devise a methodology that would enable her to at least function in society—it helped but not enough. A doctor, familiar with her literacy liability, provided coaching and support needed to help overcome her limitations. It continued to be a struggle though signs of progress were evident.

The respondent's big likeable smile, while disarming, gave way to an openness about who she was and the journey she was making. Her toughness became an asset. Insults hurled her way about her past were shed with fortitude and purpose. Her compassion and determined care giving allowed the tender side of her disposition to bring encouragement to the elderly.

### Vignette #13

In response to the question “Did you learn anything new in the past year?” the middle-aged woman, in the presence of her husband alluded to a clash in family values with their oldest daughter. They had been struggling to cope with the fact that the daughter married an immigrant who was not their first choice for a son-in-law. For more

than a year, personal contact with the newlyweds was avoided. Now, after the daughter requested that she and her husband be allowed to attend Thanksgiving dinner, the father grudgingly acquiesced. While standing around for the meal to begin, the son-in-law confronted the mother's rejection stating: "You treat your dog better than you treat me. You even bring my wife's old boy friend to this dinner. But I married your daughter, and you are going to have to accept that." The mother told the interviewer, "And he had the brass balls to stand there and talk to us like that. We finally realized we were the ones who were going to have to change. From that time, four months ago, we have been learning how to reconstruct our family.

The real focus of the mother's dismay was the son-in-law's Middle-Eastern background. Being respected leaders in a Christian church, both she and her husband sensed threats to their cherished values. How could they admit one into their family who espoused not their traditional values? The conflict was intense and divisive to the extent the daughter's brother wanted the "intruder" out of their lives.

Other than confiding in their pastor about their dilemma, the parents struggled to find a solution between them selves. Their options included denial, shunning the couple, pressing for an annulment, separation, divorce. Accepting the marriage but avoiding the couple was another. They reluctantly chose to accept the son-in-law into the family and participate in joint counseling with the couple to resolve the discord. They were setting aside differences by accepting the marriage with hopeful reservations that would unconditionally resolve the tensions. Their decision was the first step in that process.

Following the Thanksgiving dinner, avoidance behavior began to diminish. Both mother and father took, in their own eyes, the risk to be come vulnerable by attempting to build a relationship with the son-in-law. At the time of the interview the costs of learning to “reconstruct the family” were still greater than the rewards.

The parents’ faith was being tested beyond anything they had previously experienced. Dissonance was rampant. Risking their own steeped-in-religious-values they embarked on a journey that had the potential for discovering an expanded world view that would reach beyond their own. They had an opportunity to experience growth in their world of faith and learn to appreciate and incorporate unfamiliar cultural and social values into their own life space.

#### **Vignette #14**

The nineteen year-old high school graduate was steered by his father toward a more-than-dash-board-mechanical-curiosity (Barfield, O., 1988). At age twelve he tore down and rebuilt a motorcycle—with dad’s help and assisted dad with automobile tune-ups and repairs. A mutually meaningful relationship created in a physical, mental and spiritual closeness to his commercial fisherman father. Freedom to grow was born out of that relationship.

A year prior to the interview the respondent carried out a self-directed, self-financed European travel plan. “I know some people who did this: they inspired me to do it.” He estimated putting 500 hours planning, working and saving for the trip. It was the first time he would be away from home so the thought of going solo was somewhat scary.

And scary it was—at first. Recognizing self-doubts yet having a strong desire to make the trip he talked a friend into going with him. The experience was worth the expense and effort for he now knew he could survive apart from family ties. With a new sense of assurance he reflected on the ten countries and cultures saying “Now I would travel alone, I know I could do it.”

To save money for the trip he took a position in a bakery. “We built everything from scratch. I thought it would be easy to learn the trade—I was wrong, it took more skill than I thought, at least six months. We started at 4:00AM until noon and took about two weeks before [I was] becoming familiar with the operation and by three weeks I had it all down. But there was always something new.”

“My dad built a sailboat—he is now in Alaska. I had an opportunity to sail it for the first time—alone. I had sailed with him and read about sailing, but when I went out there alone there were things that reading could not, did not, prepare me for. I spent at least eight hours soloing, getting out there on the water. A couple of times I was not sure of myself but I did an overall good job. I’m still learning.”

With the trip in the past it was time to rethink his future, education and a career track. An interview with several nurses in an informal group and several one-on-one interviews with other professionals helped him select a career in nursing. That gave him several months to look for books on chemistry, anatomy and related subjects. Rummaging through neighborhood garage sales, bookstores and the public library guided to information that affirmed his choice.

**Enrolling in classes in chemistry, sociology, biology and psychology in the fall was finalized.**

**The actor, though young, learned how to make decisions he could live with. He accepted challenges that demanded patience, tenacity, daring, and willingness to embrace failure and the mundane. Not headstrong nor having all the answers, he was facing a goal that emerged as a personal dream, a quest.**

### **Vignette #15**

**With engines roaring during lift-off from McCord AFB to Vietnam the young grunt said to himself “I’ll be coming back in a body bag.” He did come back to resume his commercial art career.**

**Twenty-two years later the actor would be hit with another bombshell. Lack of computer graphic skills led to his termination as a graphic art designer at a major corporation.**

**“It’s been a hell-of-a-year....Then came 9/11; it became a crisis of my life. I have been finding out that I must become more assured and have a better sense of who I am. It is because of 9/11 and now I’m being forced to make a change. I’m trying to find a new job at the Work Force Center. I did work in a bank, took a position as a parking attendant, and offered art classes on weekends; now I’m just trying to do something. It’s like I came out of a cave of the self-employed into a world of no vacancy signs. It’s frightening. It’s the biggest spiritual challenge I’ve had in thirty years. I’m trying to do this through philosophy, psychology and becoming familiar with computers. Everything seems so nothing-like. I can’t be stubborn, I must try something.”**

**These words were spoken by a fifty-four year-old commercial artist, a casualty of the technological revolution. They have been**

repeated many times over by others who found themselves displaced by younger computer literates. Lacking computer skills reduced his viability in the workplace. The inner void being experienced was mental as well as spiritual. No longer able to rely on, or trust, his instincts he withdrew into himself. Friends encouraged him, they could not steer him toward jobs.

Taking beginning computer classes at a local library was a start. Becoming familiar with basic computer skills he said “It feels good to navigate and connect, it’s like running the marathon. I faced the music and found I was not afraid to fail. Before this I refused to open myself to change. Now I’m compromising myself by learning something I resisted for a long time. Look, Rome was not built in a day. I can even get on line, cruising, like running my first marathon—it’s a breakthrough, I’m doing it. It’s transforming! I’ve been a control freak and stubborn. I have to let go which is hard for me to do. No matter how much I learn computing I will never make it a career, but it might at least help me become more employable.

When asked to rate (on a scale from 1-5 with five being the most difficult) the difficulty changing at this point in his life he said “It’s a 10 and it is not over with yet. I don’t know if I can keep it together. No question about it, I’m attempting this change—I may not find it tolerable, I may totally withdraw. I’m going to try to give it a ride.”

Broken and experiencing financial stress the respondent was grasping at straws. Yes, he could paint (he was one of the outstanding watercolor artists in the area), he would not deprive himself of that gift, but it was not paying the bills. How could he restore faith in himself

while his career was crumbling around him? He knew what he had left in life, he could paint. With determination he took a position as a night watchman, not as a career move, rather it would make it possible for him to do what he could do best, paint! Henri's (The Art Spirit) advice to an artist experiencing hard times was "I advised him to make tomato-can labels and live well that he might be free to paint as he liked." The respondent in this case knew what Henri said, he also knew times had changed. He had to forge his way through this vocational quagmire on his own.

#### Vignette #16

Cultural and intergenerational conflicts frequently surface among new immigrants. Fadiman's The spirit catches you and you fall down (1997) provides insights into Hmong culture including community, gender, family, marriage, sickness, religion, the soul, and death. For instance, a problem means "The spirit catches you and you fall down." What causes a problem? "Soul loss." What started the problem? "Lin's sister Yer slammed the door and Lin's soul was frightened out of her body."

Though the researcher was somewhat familiar with Hmong culture--he was surprised to discover the twenty-five year-old female Hmong respondent was well-educated, married, and raising a family. A graduate of a major university, she was now considering pursuing graduate studies in business administration—how could she do that as Hmong with two young children? Why did she differ from the traditional view of Hmong women and her peers? "It was my liberal

home attitude about women and education that made it possible for me to attend college. My father did not oppose the idea in spite of the fact that our family relied on welfare to make ends meet.”

After a several year absence from the area the respondent returned to be near parents and family. With the help of a network of friends and her Hmong background, doors opened to a position with the state welfare department. She had been a welfare recipient, now her outlook on welfare and its recipients were radically changed. No longer a looked-down-upon-degrading-assistance she saw it as a lifting-up-offering-hope service to the disadvantaged. “I used to think welfare was just about money to pay bills and solving problems. It is much, much more.”

To supplement her income she took a part-time library position, “I always wanted to work in a library.” Considering herself a quick learner she encountered little difficulty learning about her new responsibilities. It is just a lot of stuff to remember to collect, and remember processes and procedures.”

The father’s world view and the respondent’s determination made it possible for her to span two cultures. It was underlying family support that enabled her to embrace a life-concern that was in the process of emerging into a larger personal and Hmong world view.

### **Vignette #17**

The overt passions of the twenty-five year-old union carpenter were evidenced with bowling trophies in every nook, cranny and highly visible space in the modest bungalow-type home. The awards spoke of

**the smooth thumthumthums of bowling balls paths to strikes, the flow of adrenalin and the spirit rings of success to ear, eye, and heart**

**The second was his union carpenter career. In his own words he said “When I go out and work, I want to be recognized and I want to be something important. I think about it every day. Hell, hell, I can improve myself and one day I’ll get an idea: this, maybe this isn’t the career I should be leading. It pays good money, but I know there’s something out there that pays even better. But I have to go out there and take it.”**

**In the past year he pursued classes in welding, transit level, blueprinting, and roof framing, all related to his trade and union requirements. “On-the-job training is the best way to learn, you will learn a lot more if you can work with somebody than what you can in a classroom.”**

**The actor’s most pressing concern in the past year involved making a possible career choice. He had thoughts of becoming a professional bowler, but the risk of such a venture caused him to think twice about it. Trying to make this decision included long talks with his wife, visiting the company counselor, and talking with friends. It would be a big risk, but as he said:**

**There’s a lot of money in it, and that’s what I want out of life, is for my family not to have to live like a lower middle class family. I want them to know that there’s going to be money waiting around for them. I don’t want to be a crook or nothing. I just want to earn it in an honest way, retire early, instead of having to work until I’m 70-80 years old. I just can’t see anything in life, working till I’m that old. The government might not give me any social security level.**

Driven by youthful dreams and evident measures of success, the actor's ultimate concerns at this stage in his life were his carpentry career and avocation as a hoped-to-be professional bowler. Conflicting financial signals reminded him of his dilemma and risks involved. The decisions were his and his family's to make. Behind it all was an ultimate quest for financial security which was the heart and soul of his youthful dream.

### Vignette #18

My interview with the actor was conducted in a café clamoring with musical sounds of knives, forks, spoons, dishes, cups and saucers to a background of murmuring customers and staff. It was music in the ears of the thirty-two year-old owner. It reminded him of earlier years when he was thought not likely to be a small town success: he was born on the wrong side of the tracks (no pun intended). His cohorts who seemed to make it had connections with the prosperous railroad industry. He was not, his frustrated dreams of better things told him to escape. He did.

Venturing from home led him to café jobs as dish washer, short order cook, and waiter, taking them with an open mind. Could this lifestyle lead to a career? The more he studied the profession the more an idea jelled in his mind. Perhaps he could come back home to manage his own café. Focusing on that vision he scrimped, saved, and economized. One day he hoped to show the home town folk he could make it.

The move home was a capital risk venture. He knew it. Now, at the time of the interview, there were signs of success. The onus was on him to maintain the venture's momentum which included in his own words, "I had to learn how to be a more effective employer, carefully sustain income and outflow, and marketing. This included hiring staff, a bookkeeper to manage pay rolls and a new accountant: some of this was new to me—it has been a challenge. Now I am considering starting a catering service to a local military reserve unit."

In between interruptions he went on to say,

I'm getting recognized in the community. I have been invited to become a member of service organizations, and sports groups have turned to me for support. One thing I am doing to get better connected is I have paid for a membership in the local country club and have started taking golf lessons. I get to meet people who would not come to the café. I even purchased a \$1,500 VCR and camera to help me with my game. Now I'm looking forward to expanding my business and invest in property for that purpose.

It was a personal faith and driving spirit that challenged the actor to prove something to him. Weighing the costs, he made the commitment by risking everything to accomplish his dream.

### Vignette #19

Voicing ninety-two years of respected parental influence (even after their passing), the retired sheep herder and co-owner of an art gallery said:

You learn so much when you help people. You learn to beat the band big time! Working in the gallery helped me to see what all these frontier people went through. I like to, want to help everybody, I try to think positive. I learned that from my mother

**and father, they refused to be defeated in hard times. They were a big influence on my thinking.**

**Displayed in his home were awards and framed photographs from years past—they reminded him of his journey across time. Shelves of books added to his eclectic tastes.**

**Commenting on his diverse collections he said “God gave me an education: why not use it?”**

**A major heart attack disabled the respondent in the past year. “I did a lot of praying and reading while at the VA. I know what it is like to look through the pearly gates.” Now in recovery he reiterated, “The Lord left me here for something, I must work through this. The nurses and reading from my Bible helped me.”**

**In recovery he said to himself it was not too late to study about photography, even become a photographer--he was reminded of past impacts photography collections had on his thinking. Maybe it could be his turn to contribute something by interpreting the world as he saw it through the camera lens.**

**The respondent experienced life-changing faith episodes across his life span. Parental influence on his character was profound. Its spiritual impact he never forgot,--it imparted in him a spirit of fortitude. It followed him in the home, school, studio, on the range, hard times, and when facing death. Even in late life he believed he could learn something new and make a difference.**

**Vignette #20**

The interview with an Eastern European immigrant to the United States was conducted in the confines of his Gulf Coast fishing boat. Temporarily pursuing a fishing career, he surmised it would provide a provisional source of income toward fulfilling his long range goal. With his wife's encouragement, he had his mind set on acquiring an engineering degree. Both knew the road ahead would not be easy. Though the boat was not a dependable sea-worthy vessel, he and his wife were not deterred.

One issue led to another. If the boat was in need of a major overhaul why not consider building a replacement, from keel up? He had already been using his skills to perform some repairs that included creating a successful bilge pump design. His design was submitted to the U.S. Patent office. Hopefully a reply would be forth coming. He exclaimed "I at least know some of the requirements for submitting a patent, it isn't easy."

A self-directed learner, he relied on his own ability to diagnose and resolve mechanical and electrical problems. If he hit a dead end he had a hunch where to turn for help. He was not afraid to ask associates and others for help, no qualms at all.

**Vignette #21**

The 39 year old homemaker was reluctant to participate in the interview. She "was not a learner" at least not when compared to her high school education. In her mind, skill and proficiency acquired by the way of personal experience lacked accreditation—it could not be

equated with learning. Furthermore, if she set a goal for herself fear would take over—she would find a way to procrastinate.

As the inquiry progressed the respondent, with surprise, unenthusiastically recognized several areas in which pursuit of a skill occurred. Improving sewing skillfulness was one; an on-going Bible study, another; and teaching in her church school, came to mind. That led to recalling having to learn how to set up an office routine for her husband's business. Other than these she considered herself "just" a homemaker.

Her church women's group had a weekly project-oriented activity. Most recently the group learned how to make candy, an effort that consumed 30 hours of her time. "But that, see, to me is not learning, it's not something that's going to benefit anybody." At this point in the interview the husband interrupted saying "You need to tell him how much work this took. That's what you did."

As for organizing the office for her husband's newly formed business she said:

That was our own business; that was like six months. I learned books and how to fill out forms, dealing with people a lot, public relations, talking with people on the phone, how to handle people and the men who worked for us. (Pause) And it was new for me, gol. I was in there like 8-5 every day then when we came home (a pause to consider amount of time spent processing new information) I'd say 5 hours a day, because it was new to me. She was also responsible for training her replacement. None of this was perceived to be a learning activity when the interview commenced.

Recognizing that she had been a learner in the past year, she began to interpret everything as learning. This transference from being the non-learner to “learning all the time” was a form of respondent response (Borg & Gall, 1979).

### Vignette #22

The following is a classic example of the impact aging has on a respondent’s life-space. Seventy-one years old, the respondent was reflecting on life. Illness restricted her mobility and mental state; she wanted to move beyond that to a state of “happiness” that was eluding her.

“I have been trying to make myself happy. I’ve learned again you can be sick, you know, and if you concentrate and pray and talk to the Lord ‘bout these things when you’re in pain...I’m not that well again. I’ve been sick quite a bit for the past five years. And ah, I learned how to ah, cooperate with peoples...and I wants to do right by everyone because that’s the way I want it.”

Limited by her illness she now wanted to do some of the things she had been put on hold too long. Traveling was “one of those things.”

I wants to make myself happy. And ah...well it was just something like I just wanted, a trip to get away from it all. So I taken a short little trip and I enjoyed it very much. I really likes to go. I went to Dayton, Ohio and that was in August. And about three weeks ago I went to San Anton’, but we motored to San Anton’ but I flew to Dayton, there and back.”

**One thing I tried to improve myself on, it is ah, going to church and learning more 'bout the Bible and how to explain different things like that. I tried to improve myself very much...learning how to cooperate with people.**

**During therapy sessions in one of her hospital stays the respondent was introduced to macramé. “They would come and pick me up and I would stay in the classroom an hour. They had certain days, Tuesdays and Fridays. I really want to learn how to do that. And I’ve been trying to rack my brain to find out where I’m going to get me some of these senior citizens places where they will do it.”**

**Life had been tough on the respondent over the past five years. Now, reflecting on her situation she wanted to put that behind her. She thought she could do this if she could do volunteer work. Continuing her church work and Bible studies was another priority.**

### **Vignette #23**

**Issues impacting the actor’s life-space in this interview included employment, religion, and cultural influences. Each affected his life-space with varying degrees of intensity. A self-directed learner, he would rather learn from experience. He tended to follow his inclinations, even in the work place. When he sensed the “wind blowing” in his cultural surroundings he challenged himself to expand his boundaries. Spanish language acquisition was one effort. As his eyesight diminished he gave thought to changing vocations. He also had**

a latent attraction to religion, one that stemmed from his youth. These issues took time and effort to work through.

“Tool making has become a second sense to me. That doesn’t mean I’m satisfied with what I know. I’m always trying to improve myself.” The respondent knew enough about his self-made trade (he earned a GED and eventually took community college courses) that he could rate himself “completely satisfied” with his ability to not only solve problems, he could incorporate, transfer and modify old techniques into new situations.

With increased migration of Hispanics in the region the actor knew a change in the cultural climate was occurring—the work place was without exception. He took it upon himself to learn Spanish (an estimated 1000 hours in the past year) and to a lesser extent, German. He said “I work with a bunch of foreign people so consequently I have made this concerted effort.”

Religion and spiritual awareness did not play a necessary, nor important, role in the actor’s life. He said “I think I find myself not as needing religion but liking it. I understand it a little more than before. I think that requires a four o’clock in the morning commitment.”

Husband and wife renewed their marriage vows in the past year. They chose to do it for themselves and their children. After voicing his thoughts and feelings about religion he recognized, with some nostalgia, he was returning to his religious roots. “I was raised in this religion and I’m returning to it.” Now that he and his wife were confronted with issues related to raising a family and the role of the church in that effort

was too important to be neglected. He was returning to a more mature and continuing to unfold religious and faith view.

If, however, religious adherents knocked on his door to try to make a point about a particular view he cut them off. The actor did not like sales pitches of some door-to-door church people.

As he looked into the future the respondent knew his eyesight was failing. That would diminish his skill as a tool maker. He said “I learned that because through failure to do my job as a tool maker, ah, I was losing my eyesight. I thought I could always use photography as an alternative.” To make up for this on-coming health deficiency he assessed his situation and decided to pursue photography as an alternate skill.

#### **Vignette #24**

The respondent in this interview was reluctant to participate--the name of the Reverend Dr. Charles L. Allen struck a chord. As the interview progressed several significant learning activities were discussed. For one, the church played a significant role in her life. Another was her expressed reading habits that left an impression on her personal values and world views. The politics of Reaganomics had an impact on her life as well—it influenced her spending habits, savings initiatives and consumer behavior.

“Yes, I received your letter. No, I do not want to participate in your study.” *A letter of introduction containing several prominent Houston references had been sent to randomly selected respondents. Dr. Charles L. Allen, Pastor of the largest United Methodist Church in*

*Houston, Texas signed as a reference. A follow-up telephone call was made to determine whether or not the letter of introduction had been received: if it was an in-person interview was requested to be arranged at the respondent's residence. The respondent refused a second time to participate in the research. Finally, to increase response acceptance rate, I made an unannounced visit to the respondent's home. The residence was burglar-bar proofed and porch light lit. I rang the door bell. "Who is it?" "I am John Shirk, the person from Texas A&M who sent you a letter and called you about my study." The door opened. With emphasis the respondent said, "YOU ARE THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN CALLING ME ONLY ONE PERSON WILL ALLOW YOU TO COME THROUGH MY DOOR, REVEREND CHARLES L. ALLEN. COME IN."*

*With further introduction the thirty-eight year old African-American postal worker participated in the interview. She then said, Dr. Allen is so influential. He is so well respected in the Houston community by all races of people, just to see Dr. Charles Allen's name. You know, because he has gained so much respect I know people that never leave their homes in the morning until they listen to First Methodist.... But now a days we're so leery of people coming in because the city is so big....See, I'm locked all the way in with my burglar bars. I'm not used to being like this in Houston.*

*Influenced by a sister and friends the respondent enrolled in a Bible study class at her church—that was six months ago. The conversation and content in the small group provided an opportunity to*

explore issues in an open-minded and meaningful way. Thibaut and Kelley viewed participation of this kind as the propinquity effect in dyad and group development. Social, cohort and familial closeness among participants assured cohesiveness and openness. “I’m doing this because I think it will make me a better person. I read the Bible twenty minutes a day during the week. I do that to make me a better person, too. I also read to improve my vocabulary improve my reading comprehension.”

I also read a lot too, usually popular books. For example, ah, the last one I read was Absence of Malice. I also read and love to read books by Michner. I wanted to read Michner’s The Covenant which was too expensive in hardback so I waited to purchase the paperback version. Oh yes, and I read about a movie star...I can’t think, oh—Shelly Winters book. Those books are expensive so we trade with each other. Other authors include James Baldwin and Oral Roberts’ books. And I read Guideposts. Every day I read some, often during lunch hour. But I don’t read on weekends. I just read during the week--vacations are different, then I read more. After reading about some people’s lives I feel I can understand some people better.

You said you trade books with friends. Do you and your friends like the same kind of books? With a laugh she said,

My friend brought me this book a hooker wrote about an affair with one of the senators. She knows I like to read so she brought one on that hooker and another book. I just got so upset when I read the book because the language was terrible. I told her don’t ever bring me a book like that again. But some of the books I find very satisfying. I read autobiographies the most recent was by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. I feel like I know this man.

To keep up with latest styles and trends in the Black community she subscribed Jet and Ebony. “It’s for Black people, to know what

they are among Blacks in America. I find if I don't take Ebony and Jet I really don't know as much about my people. So this is why I read Jet and Ebony.”

The respondent knew she had to pick certain types of people to associate with, she was conscious of that. She knew she could not discuss James Baldwin with some people, particularly those who knew he was homosexual. She could discuss most anything with her sister. They were close to each other.

The respondent had a limited understanding of Reaganomics so she tried to learn about it. Editorials, magazine articles were the source of most information. “I try to learn about it because its part of all of us and I feel that I'm in the work force myself and what affects me, Reaganomics, affects everyone around us. So I feel I should keep up to know what's going on. How can I prepare myself for what might come. If I know how to budget myself, know what not to spend, right now I know I have to cut down. I have been trying to get most of my bills paid out. It's made me think twice because I used to just go out and buy. Since Reaganomics has come about I've become more conservative in my buying. I've cut down, I have to cut down. I've also begun thinking about an individual retirement [account] because I want to work then retire at fifty-five.

Religious faith was a stabilizing force in her life. Her sister, friends and the church provided a stimulus that sustained her values and beliefs. She was also strongly influenced by the television ministry of Dr. Allen who was known for his influence in civil rights and integration issues in Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas.

**Vignette #25**

**Demeaning, disgusting and disturbing, the twenty-nine year-old single mother recalled growing up singing gospel vocals for her itinerant evangelist parents. “I grew up as a professional gospel singer with my parents. It was terrible, trying to understand what Christianity meant when, as far as I was concerned, it was not real...but I had Hodgkin cancer seven years ago and I believe the Lord really healed me of that.” She was now a wandering “exile,” a former victim of an abusive faith. At the close of the interview she boldly penned “I give J\_\_\_\_ S\_\_\_\_ my permission to print in articles, things that we have discussed in this interview.”**

**As the interview progressed she shared how she was finding a new, meaningful faith experience. “I had been trying to do it on my own, learning by myself. Now I have found it through my new church. I have devoted my life to the Lord, rededicated myself to Him. I am learning from the Bible—the biggest thing is that it blows my mind, reading the Bible again. Friends and prayer have helped broaden my understanding of God. Actually I would like to sing again, sing to different groups and organizations. I would also like to learn Greek.”**

**During this transition period that included raising her young daughter the respondent opened a foster care program. “I received my foster care license from the state several months ago. I was doing this through my love for helpless kids.”**

**The respondent was now pursuing an official state licensing course to become a licensed adult care-giver. “I never had any**

grandparents. I am doing this because I don't want them (elderly people) to end living unhappily in rest homes."

Warm religious vestiges of the respondent's past persisted in her subconscious. All was not demeaning, disgusting or disturbing. She was now searching for a faith that could provide "blessed assurance," versus doubt, ambiguity or resentment. Did she find it? She thought so. She was finding a faith that could be acted out toward the disenfranchised—that provided a sense of satisfaction for them. The formation of a new outlook on life and faith supplied her with a reason for being. Service to others was included in her new outlook on life.. Tillich noted that faith is expressed in an actor's commitment to an ultimate concern and that ultimate concern is relative to each actor's situation. One's ultimate concern is fluid, unfolding and unique, influenced by major as well as minute daily chains of events. Never arriving at that perfect state of being, faith challenges the actor to act courageously in any state of being. Faith for one respondent is something that cannot be imposed on another.

### **Vignette #26**

The twenty-seven year old precision sheet metal worker pursued several past-time hunting and fishing projects in the recent twelve months. He made his own fishing rods, learned how to reload hunting shells, and took up leather work. These projects helped the actor separate career from pleasure and, supported his self-image as a creative person. The activities did provide an economic value for the time involved proved more valuable to him than if he had taken a short-

cut by purchasing the items in the market-place. He could say he did it himself.

Of significance was the actor's sense of inventiveness which at times created problems. He completed the eleventh grade then enlisted in the Air Force where he earned his GED and attended several service schools. He lived with the nagging image as a high school drop-out, particularly when he compared his abilities with engineers and college graduates. This evidenced itself when he took a position in an engineering firm. It was not an overwhelming regret; he refused to let his past mistake dampen his inquisitiveness—it spurred him on.

After the actor's military discharge he migrated toward a career with an engineering firm that produced solenoid operating systems. Working with engineers' blueprints they would say, "Let's build it this way." "Well at that point when I get hold of it and build all these little parts that go to it to see if it will work the way it should five out of six times it wouldn't." "What I'd do if it didn't work I would do what was necessary to get it to work and then I'd say look, here's what you got. Here's what I did. What you did didn't work. What do you think about it? They'd draw up a little blue print of it and either approve or disapprove it. A lot of them, they'd disapprove and end up scrapping the whole project. I spent many hours learning, experimenting trying to figure things out." Dissatisfied with progress he was making in the engineering firm the actor took a position in a sheet metal company.

What I do now is precision sheet metal work like computer chasses, instrument panels; electrical chasses I guess would be the best way to describe them. Some go into oil rigs and a lot of what I do goes to NASA. There are a lot of big companies we work for so I'm always learning something new. We work with different

metals and alloys that react differently under different conditions. I worked on a project that took me two weeks learning about the aluminum alloys under stress and how it bends one way but not another. I'm no mathematician but I imagine that the trig and geometry I've learned since I got out of school would probably get me through college, I'm just guessing 'cause I've got a cousin of mine that's a geologist and he was a math major before switching to geology. He's the one who sat down with me and showed me this stuff a few years ago and then got back with me five-six months ago and laid a couple of problems on me that he didn't think I would ever in this world finish and I sat there and worked and finished them. There is a lot of math involved.

My wife and I are planning to buy a piece of property and build a house on it. I have been reading about doing this in the Whole Earth Catalog, a spur off the hippie movement. Another magazine is New Shelter and looking at solar energy and things like that. It is off in the future but I'm learning about it now. I even looked at solar water using different colored copper tubing. I got some of that information from the Government Book Store off Highway 45.

One of the actor's favorite magazines was The Smithsonian. He ordered a set of Handel's Messiah from the magazine, using it to listen to the music and learn more about the life and time of the composer and musical instruments used. Thoughts about the composition led to insights into his religious life.

The respondent was "born and raised in the church." He attended services 3-4 days a week and sometimes 3-4 hours a day. It was a family matter handed down from grand parents, parents and to the children.

My mother was secretary of the church choir and I spent an unbelievable amount of time at church for a child, a kid 7-9 years old. My friends would ask where I was going, I was going to church. And I was happy about it because I had friends there. I

enjoyed being there and enjoyed singing in the choir. I used to ask a lot of questions that I always wanted answered so I would ask Grandma, Grandpa. I used to work with a person who was a complete atheist. He would ask me trick questions. They were tricky. That didn't bother me.

The actor's religious values were formed in a stable early childhood environment that included family, grand parents and close friends in the church, "I was happy in the church....I used to ask a lot of questions...." The stability in his religious environment provided a support network that sustained him even when awkward choices were made (quitting high school).

#### **Vignette #27**

For confidentiality the interview was conducted in the forty-six year old Superior Court Judge's separate chamber (as judge he heard civil and criminal cases in his jurisdiction). Several thoughts came to mind as he reviewed personal learning activities in the past twelve months. Seminars at the National Judicial College and a week-long Olympia Annual Judicial orientation were the most noteworthy. His spring and fall continuing legal education events were less significant—more talking shop and chit chat than learning.

To keep abreast of issues and cases in the court room the actor took a seat among visitors in the court to observe proceedings of other judges. "Some judges even make body language notations," he said. He informed young lawyers they played a role in teaching him as they made their opening and closing arguments at trials. Passionate, he liked to

think his outside-the-bench-court-room- observational-behavior influenced young lawyers to follow his example. A small number did.

The actor's in-laws were of Scandinavian roots so he made an attempt to learn more about their culture by attending folk dancing at nearby folk festivals. He knew he would never be skilled dancer but the activities served their purpose.

A religious event worth mentioning was the actor's participation in a planned two-year "Crossways" program sponsored by his local church and synod. Sessions were conducted twice weekly by the pastor. Members studied biblical history, character development, theology and contemporary implications. An extended session was held at the synod's retreat center with Dr. Martin Marty as presenter. Time constraints and a growing dissatisfaction with the local pastor's conservative theological position limited the actor's participation. He thought it was a good idea, up to a point saying, "T... takes a dogmatic theological position that he's sure is right. I'm more skeptical so there is not much room for debate. I have a religious concern and lingering feeling that I should take advantage of this opportunity. T... did not want to see me drop out saying we would get a better understanding of the Old Testament and who the Jewish people were. I agreed, within my constraints."

Motivated to renew his interest in Spanish occurred when his daughter wanted to study high school Spanish in high school but could not fit it in her schedule. He was purchasing Berlitz Spanish tapes both could use.

Looking into the future the actor considered family, church and community associations of highest priority. Professional development including appellate court and jurisdictional rulings were of necessity a particular interest). Those close to him knew his docket was determined by his professional career and was at times unpredictable but not overwhelming. Family values were too valuable to be consumed by his career.

The actor seemed to feel comfortable with ambiguity and his open-minded religious views. Dogmatic surety was not his lot. Neither was he confrontational. When credentialed figures presented their less flexible positions he politely listened.

#### **Vignette #28**

The twenty-three year old musician's formal education ended in junior high school. Though somewhat socially adrift, her closest friends were local band members. Since she could not read sheet music she spent an inordinate amount of time (twelve or more hours a week) listening to and memorizing lyrics and melodies from records and cassette tapes. "I was very satisfied with the cassettes and tapes if I could buy them otherwise I borrowed them from friends. Friends and band members jammed and we went to concerts which eventually led to a rapport, a cohesive group, and some gigs. I always got paid when I went on gigs, not much, but I got paid. It is the only thing that interests me."

The respondent was credited with co-authoring harmonies and melodies but not lyrical parts. Lyrical parts were more difficult.

Was an interest in medieval and military history a coincidence or could it have been a memories from the respondent's formal schooling? Sources used to pursue interest in medieval history and Oliver Cromwell included her books and a friends. The public library's resources on military history were rated outstanding.

As she looked to the future the respondent wanted to collect more records, familiarize her self about guns, and take martial arts lessons. She said, "A Seattle company is well known for its eclectic collection, old and new. It gets collector items from New York and around the country. Three of my friends go there."

The respondent was not lonely yet seemed adrift. Quitting junior high school for what ever reason may have contributed to her semi-isolation. She was deeply connected to her musician friends; it provided respect, friendship and a limited income. It was her life at this point in time. She may not have voiced it as a spirit and spiritual experience which is true of many artists who talkk the lonely walk. Henri in The art spirit said, "There is a joy in the pursuit of anything. Life is finding yourself. It is a spirit development....Originality can be halted but not stamped out or taken away....Let yourself free to be what you will be." Music was one area of her life in which she seemed to be finding herself.

### Vignette #29

"I'm definitely not a reader, I'm a doer. When I decide to do something I jump in with all fours." The thirty-two year old respondent took a job in a yarn shop in the past six months. Her eyes were opened to an assortment of materials, stitches, patterns and paraphernalia used

by beginners and expert knitters. “I’ve done lots of my own knitting it just becomes different when I help people with their projects. I want to try to do what some of the customers are doing.. I think I spent 80 hours learning from the customers and the shop owner. My husband was impressed as well.

The respondent developed a participant interest in women’s soccer for the first time. It was grueling, punishing and tough. The sport was difficult and arduous but had its rewards, i.e., camaraderie and strenuous exercise.

The pursuit of weight lifting was a personal matter. The local gym offered a training schedule that the respondent decided to pursue. Following a three-a-week training program she hoped she could enter competitive meets.

An area of dissonance and disturbing contention was the respondent’s aggressive relationship with her mother. To calm that side of her nature she entered assertiveness and counseling programs.

It helped me. In the past seven weeks I entered the assertiveness program I’ve tried to practice it. Counseling will be a big help as well, not only with my mother but my own nurturing skills. If you go into this thinking you are going to find change you will not find it. You will find she [mother] meant well which is a better way of looking at what happened.

Looking into the future the respondent was going to teach herself to crochet, needlepoint and cross stitch. She saw what the yarn shop customers were doing, why could not she?

Planning a trip to Germany was next. Preparation would include enrolling in classes at a local language school and purchase German language practice tapes.

The respondent engaged in activities that challenged her competitive spirit and the artist within. It was the distance between mother and daughter that displeased and strained their relationship. She knew it. She knew it and decided to do something about it. It took courage and faith in a process to bring about resolution to a condition to which she was an accessory. It was resolution in progress.

### **Vignette #30**

At the time of the interview with a thirty-five year old musician-artist, a set of drums and four stereo units were in place around the room. The public television news hour was in progress. He migrated to the Olympic Peninsula community for it was becoming home for well-known artists, writers, and musicians. To support himself he was learning to hone his carpentry skills, spending nearly 100 hours in training, installing and self-improvement.

Distraught about the state of public education in the community he said, “We are becoming androids...a good education to separate people out into classes where one percent of the population gets the best and the rest for the masses.” He considered himself an excellent high school student who completed two years in college before dropping out. He said to himself,

**Is this all there is? I started hitch hiking around the world, India, Europe and other places. I am curious. There is always something to know and learn. We can learn from others who can teach us. We can find our nitch in spite of all the odds and we can bounce back. I must have spent several hundred hours doing this in the past twelve months. Learning and bantering back and forth among family, friends and relationships that is what we do as we sit around developing plots and theories while asking ‘Why**

the contradictions?’ Its fun as we come up through the process of elimination. We have been doing this as we play dungeons and dragons: we create our own scenarios and work a lot on character development, some from the middle ages, others from the fall of Rome. We draw them out so we can visualize them. Mary Renault wrote about characters such as Fredrik II, that helped us.

The actor purchased a \$30.00 set of Joseph Campbell’s Myths to live by used in his continuing search for meaning. It was an outstanding addition to his personal library. His A history of the middle ages proved a disappointment and unreliable...that was his fault...he picked it up at a local yard sale. He usually trusted his wife’s insights and instincts but not for this one.

Attempting to pursue projects was difficult for the actor. “That is a real strange one. I have to think about it. Things become apparent when they are due, in a way. I have things I would like to do—to focus on them is different.” As he pondered over that he was reminded of social and political conditions in the United States. “How do you find the truth about what is really going on in this bloody world...what groups are running and who is behind it?

In his concluding remarks the actor said, “What about truth and goodness? The ones out there know all this stuff but people at the top want to keep others in mental bondage. If I get to be a threat will I be eliminated? Mind control gets to be more blatant as I get older. I want to know more about truth and goodness.”

Even though the actor seemed driven by curiosity he was marginalized in the community at large. He was living on the edge. His actions and words set him apart as he tried make sense out of politics.

**It was expressed in his scrutiny of public education, social world view and philosophy of life.**

**The closest he came to expressing spirit and spirituality was his interest in pursuing thoughts on truth and goodness. Would his quest for truth and goodness be too far-fetched or radical, even for himself? Would he become a threat? Would somebody try to silence him? Or, was he paranoid?**

### **Vignette #31**

**As ski instructor at several major ski runs and a northwest community college the sixty-four year old respondent was staying certified in latest techniques, equipment, first aid, and search and rescue. In the past year extra time was spent improving training programs in the classroom and on the slopes. He was responsible for certifying new instructors to associate and fully certified levels--one in ten applicants usually achieved full certification.**

**Finding and assisting his daughter's enrollment in a college program was eye-opening, far different from his own experience. "I've been in the teaching profession for 30 years. Enrolling in college is different today. We traveled around the state visiting campuses and programs, we got out and met people."**

**"An experience resulting in growth for all of us happened when we took a young woman into our home...it wasn't expected on our part, it evolved. The more we learned about her the more we sensed her need for a stable environment, and she wanted to stay with us. As our**

decision firmed we established rules, space and structure. It has been a growing experience.”

Retired navy and retired educational administrator, the actor had no thought about pursuing new learning projects in the next twelve months, at least not anything uniquely new or that he could think of. Routine maintenance the small family ranch was of no major concern. Comfortably settled in with an avocation that provided satisfaction and challenge, the only issue that seemed to be carefully handled was the assimilation of a young woman into the family. The rewards of the decision were unfolding and being experienced by all.

### **Vignette #32**

Nursing was the profession of the seventy-eight year old respondent. “Humanitarian reasons make me want to get back in to nursing if I could but I have to accept the fact that those days are behind me. Nursing is my first love. I still subscribe to nursing journals to stay abreast of current and new nurse and doctor procedures. I can at least do that. I never give up on it.”

The respondent remembered the time, as a young girl, she made a replica camera out of cardboard. Impressed, her father bought her a Kodak box camera—a gripping attraction to photography resulted until academic studies drowned it. Photography remained with her as a latent interest. This was the year she lit a fire under her past as she remembered the rush of emotions over sharing the magic of black and white images frozen in poses, snapshots of beings in time and place. She

subscribed to photography magazines and enrolled in classes at a local yacht club as she experienced the resurrection of a latent interest.

Grit, determination and trial and error were the critical components in her “successful” construction of a fire place for her home. Her son-in-law gave her the unit, the rest was up to her. As she showed it to the researcher she said, “It was either do it or die so I did it by myself. It works, that is what matters. Yes, I did it by myself. Actually I get an idea and work it out my own way. I decided to make it and I did it. Of course my son-in-law bought the unit so I had an obligation to install it. I did.”

“There are so many things I do that I can’t distinguish what is new and what isn’t. This past year I went digging for rocks in Arizona. My son gave me \$300.00 to do that. I spent days digging for rocks, gems, thunder eggs, turquoise and petrified wood. It’s a marvel to see petrified wood, I tell you, I love that! I don’t think there is anything on earth as educational as nature. Trying to learn from a teacher in a classroom is just different.” Jars and boxes of polished stones, rocks and gems were evidences of the hours and days spent caring for and classifying her treasure trove.

The respondent still had a longing to get back into nursing in the next twelve months. She longed for the purpose and passion that gave her life such rich meaning. Could she go back?

One last thing she wanted was to return to Holland. It was a longing for part of her past.

A spirited and caring person, the respondent sensed the effects of vocational time restraints on her life. It left a vacuum, an empty life

space. If she could not stop the clock she could deliberately maintain more than a modicum of interest in her profession through self-directed readings and latest nursing alerts.

Looking back on her youth she remembered the make-shift camera she made and her father's positive response. For many years the thrill of photography would lie dormant, giving way to studies, vocation and family. Now was the time for the revival of photography's magical return.

Retirement offered learning opportunities known not to the work place or nursing. With the help of a supportive family the respondent concentrated part of her time in the pursuit of lapidary digs and exploration. The marvel of nature beckoned its spiritual call while time calmed to its stillest hour.

The aging process created a vacuum in the respondent's life. It also offered off-setting and unexpected sensitive and sensual opportunities that made small corners in her life vigorous and robust.

### **Vignette #33**

Living in a small house in a low-income part of a company town, the under-educated fifty-two year old married "handyman" had been unemployed nearly two years. The dusty yard was strewn with small pieces of equipment, scrap lumber, and two old vehicles (one of which he was attempting to tune up). Laid off at the local saw mill, he was surviving on welfare and supplementing his income doing odd jobs around town. Attempting to find a job at the local employment office

was futile. He could not think he learned anything new in the past year, trying to make ends meet was too time-consuming.

Though severely marginalized, despair did not give into hopelessness--the actor's state of mind was grim (Harrington, 1971). As the interview progressed bits of insights into his plight emerged. He voiced regret for his limited fifth-grade education which he attributed to poor eyesight and his parents' response to it. His formal schooling was terminated at the end of that year.

Not satisfied being a welfare recipient the actor knew his age and education did not bode his future well. He wanted a full-time job that would give him a small sense of dignity. He did not belong to any organizations and his network of support groups outside of family and friends was almost non-existent. The town role he could play was that of handyman and it brought about as much satisfaction as being a welfare recipient.

#### **Vignette #34**

Mississippi was an unvisited state by the forty-eight year old librarian. That would change when he and his wife planned to visit extended family and friends. Encouraging work-place friends from the state said, "Make the trip." To prepare them selves study books and maps were purchased to peruse and create a trip itinerary. Ignoring interstate routes, the couple chose blue roads to explore out-of-the-way places. The predictable route gave way to unpredictable sights, smells, sounds and diversions.

**"We visited friends in New Orleans and family in Hattisburg-- returning home would be different. When we asked about places**

to eat people would steer us to places acceptable to tourists and whites. That's not what we wanted. It makes me think about my own thinking about life. Do I do the same thing? Do I edit reality according to what I think people might want? This part of the trip made us acknowledge differing views of reality. My wife talked about it at work when we got back. It meant a lot to us.

Significant to the actor was learning new guitar cords. "I had been playing guitar with standard tuning for more than a quarter of a century. I knew about open tuning for a long time but never got around to messing around with it. I can't read music so always play by ear."

It was a friend who motivated him to try fingering chords using open tuning.

Its nice having new doors open to you, I feel good about that, why not, what the heck. I remind myself that if somebody else can do it I can too—its not rocket science. Sometimes you are just blocked and sometimes you have a feel for it; other times you just have to put it down. Within two months I sensed progress. Its nice, a different way of making music or sound. It teaches more about the instrument itself, there are more ways to express yourself than you think. I must have practiced at least 100 hours before I felt comfortable with it and I am still learning.

Looking into the future the respondent voiced four interests he hoped to pursue. Applying for, getting a driver's license and learning to drive was his number one goal. He was planning to take lessons at a driving school—his wife, being the experienced driver would be his coach.

Serving in an inner-city library constantly reminded the actor of his need to improve his communication skills. Enrolling in conversational Spanish was second on his list of things to do. For another he made a New Years resolution to fulfill a latent ambition by

taking drawing lessons. Even though time limits interfered it was still on his agenda of things to do. Finally, being a musician, the urge to write poetry was in his mind's eye. The actor's first introduction to poetry and art was in high school, then it was a way to skip harder classes, until, that is, he learned to like both. Now those latent senses of satisfaction created a buzz in his ear.

The actor knew music, art and poetry were forms of story-telling which embraced universal messages. Maybe this was time to pursue those dormant aspirations. Perhaps he could personally capture biographical and autobiographical themes that touched the heart. It was spiritual though not expressed in religious themes. He felt a need to communicate with people in meaningful ways. He wanted to continue to feel, hear, taste and see life.

### Vignette #35

“It all started five years ago. Somebody gave me a book about health, stress and food; it ended up under a pile of books and remained that way, out of sight for five years.” That is how the interview began as the forty-three year old nurse aid talked about diet and stress.

“I had a good reason to read it. I've been experiencing quite a bit of stress and high cholesterol. After all, it gets pretty hectic when thirteen kids are around” (seven were her own, the others nieces and nephews). I didn't get as much out of the book, maybe because I was reading bits and pieces at a time. I did appreciate getting it though and when I was told my cholesterol level was at 283 I paid more attention to it. But a diet can be expensive so some things I couldn't afford. I did buy a papaya for the very first time and even got on yogurt for a whole week. I was so proud of myself. Now my basket is full of fruit...before it was

**filled with junk food. We even have corn-on-the-cob, my kids like that and other things too. Kids will eat anything.**

**Quitting smoking was a losing-battle. As hard as she tried she could not break the habit. Alarm set in when she discovered she had a rapid heart beat: “I tried to quit smoking for three and even got to go four days then just had to have a drag.” It wasn’t her first time to work hard at it and it wasn’t the first time to give in.**

**The results were deplorable. I was stretched. I screamed. I hollered. I was a mess! What with thirteen kids in the house on weekends and my husband. It was so bad and the kids would say I was mean! I had to take a drag. The cigarette is your best friend, you take a puff and you feel a release.**

**She tried an alternative to smoking during this three week period, coffee. “I had to try something that would release me so I tried coffee, hot coffee. And I had to be moving all the time. I even drove fifteen miles for Krispy Kremes and hot coffee. It helped somewhat. Then I would go three days with out a drag and on the fourth day....”**

**The economic costs involved in trying to quit cigarette smoking during the three-week period was not that great, just coffee, the cost of gas and buying Krispy Kreames. The mental costs were much greater. She was determined to quit “next year.”**

**The diet had a price of its own including fresh fruits, vegetables and healthy foods instead of junk. The whole family could tell the difference.**

**Vignette #36**

The sixty-six year-old activist for the less fortunate was a member of AARP, Friends for a Non-violent world, Alternatives for Violence Project, and a Committee for Affordable Housing. He also served as a nursing home recreation director. A long-maintained interest in aviation required regular FAA certification upgrades which provided detachment from some activist responsibilities.

Conducting workshops for the Violence Project required excellent communication skills including two-way communication between sender and intellectually diverse receivers. A self-directed learner, he used a basic message for the uninitiated and advanced materials for training of trainers. He said,

I had to continually strive to know myself, know the audience and constantly sharpen my ability to hear what the participants are saying. One thing I do is improve myself by getting information from participants that differ with my own way of thinking to see that which I can incorporate in my mind.

A chance encounter at a state fair booth introduced the respondent to the working homeless.

I'm a doer always have always been a doer. When I liked what I heard I attended one of the Housing Minnesota meetings then started photo-documenting homeless issues. For instance, while watching a marathon I saw porto-potties so I took shots and sent the photos to people at the state legislature saying, 'This is affordable housing for some people.' Did this experience change some of my assumptions about the homeless? Not necessarily but affirmed some.

A temporary position as staff member at a nursing home opened learning opportunities for the respondent. "For a nursing home it was

the classiest place I had ever worked. I was amazed how it operated. When I turned in my resignation the staff urged me to remain but I had accepted a position with the Alternatives to Violence Project.

A part-time position as planner with the Department of Labor grant known as the Alternative to Violence Project was intended for people empathetic to non-violence as a way of managing anger and violence. His role in the organization was to assist in planning two-phase workshops, basic and advanced. Workshops were presented in a variety of interpersonal situations including the potentially violent and for those who had a need to know and might be assigned to such situations.

An intensive process focusing on listening demanded much of his energy even though it was a part-time position.

“I would get tired of it at times, just had to stay away from it, I didn’t want to talk to others. That’s when my house became my limbo, my Hernando’s hideaway. When I first started the job I thought I would have all the answers. Maybe I was missing something.”

Working with upscale people and important others empathetic toward the peace movement provided a sense of satisfaction that made up for some of the intensity experienced in some workshop settings.

A spirit person, drawn to the needs of the less fortunate allowed the actor to embrace personal and interpersonal conflict resolutions. Never immune to turmoil the respondent dared to see beyond his and others immediate issues. Easy? No. Personal failures? Yes. It was more than “all-in-a-days-work. He tried to focus not on the “here and now” to the “What if?”

**Vignette #37**

**“If you knew who I was you couldn’t stand me” said the fifty-nine year-old community organizer. Confined to cane and mobile oxygen tank she harbored a hidden sense of shortcomings and inadequacy. “I was a reluctant dragon and didn’t want to change.”**

**The greatest hurdle she faced was summed up like this: “I think it is that rock bed belief that if you knew who I was you couldn’t stand me.”**

**Challenging her self to become more open, listening to what people saying, listening for the tone and listening without a ready judgment were steps she was consciously taking to bridge whatever communication gaps there may have been between her self and her house mate and community residents. “And I don’t achieve it every day, especially if people are baiting me.”**

**Four changes were noticed taking place in her life over the past twelve months: a softer tone and more relaxed demeanor; asking more questions; a diminishment in quick judgments; and “the other piece is caring more for myself—liking my self more.”**

**A three-year VISTA-AMERICORPS volunteer as a community advocate paved the way for the respondent to create a post VISTA networking system approach to community library fund-raising. It proved to be one of the respondent’s most significant learning experiences. Her VISTA project was limited to a single branch library—no longer. She was now setting her sights city-wide. Participation in a city-wide e-democracy issues forum consisted of more than 900 adherents from all walks of life. She said “I just listen to the**

tone of what is being said and organizing my replies to the weaknesses of their positions. I could get hooked into their rhetoric but instead I bring facts to the table. This has made me visible to nine hundred people and they are beginning to listen to me.

The respondent spent approximately twenty hours a week and two hundred dollars researching issues and preparing for appearances before the organization. As a citizen volunteer reimbursement for her efforts were not budgeted, they were accepted as gratis.

Significant projects demanding her immediate attention were neighborhood freeway revision (“We need to see the shovels working”) and continued input into library networking legislature. Her major domestic issue was restoring her 1915 home to closely resemble its original state.

### **Vignette #38**

The interview was conducted with a couple who were experiencing mid-life crises. Social issues included reformulating religious values; migrating to an unfamiliar city; facing extended family health and wellness questions; and confronting the empty nest syndrome. The move three years earlier created limited economic concerns and a social vacuum that the respondents were with some effort making adjustments.

“Learning something new?” the wife asked, “Do you mean things like advancement in your learning about religion or cooking or maybe job wise?” My response was yes. She went on to say, “You do it, it’s

**just a day to day learning process that you just do as you become interested in something. I want to know more about this or that and you stop and try to dig it out.”**

**The respondent’s reformulating religious values was combined with relocating to an unfamiliar city. Her husband noted they had been in the city three years and,**

**“We have not taken anything special like learning crafts or studying the Bible or different books. We have only accomplished a little bit at a time whereas in the past we have been very active in the church, social activities outside the home, learning. We have been so busy in the past, in the church, boy scouts, doing, doing, doing. We never had time to reflect on what’s going on.” [Husband to his wife] “She has been figuring some of this out for herself.” As for learning itself he said, “We only think of learning as a classroom experience, go in and sit it out.”**

**[Wife to husband] “I think solitude is lots of time important. We always had so many kids in the house, so many responsibilities you’re responsible for that and any of this solitude; you have to snatch it and grab it. You don’t have time to reflect. So it is not always the worst thing in the world when you think of getting older.”**

**In the past year the wife accepted a position in an unfamiliar environment that challenged a major value in life.**

**I worked this past year and really, I think tolerance is one of the biggest things I had to work on. I faced the need for it from the time I walked in the door until I left. You either showed tolerance or lack of it, one or the other. It was an emotional experience. You either developed it or didn’t. That was the way it was for me. It is one of the things I personally learned, in fact I**

just thought about it today. Tolerance for people for me is not becoming so judgmental because of the differences of backgrounds. The difference of [peoples] abilities to learn causes them to have different viewpoints or maybe a viewpoint not quite like your own. Maybe for less of an opportunity or more of an opportunity, you know. It is in my self because I can relate in my own mind to my younger days, how intolerant I was. I was more or less critical if people didn't share my viewpoint or views. Then I would say, "Oh, everybody should know this" or "Oh, that's just inexcusable." Tolerance started in my new home church but mainly through your [my] own reading and being sincere and openly trying to listen to people's ideas. And really I was just trying to learn more about [my self]. I am made to realize what a lot of different areas there are, lot different than you have been, not as broadminded as you should have been.

I think tolerance is one of the biggest things in my life this past year. Because in this area that I worked for a little while, I've always been a person who's been: "Do, do it right" (she snaps her finger at this point for emphasis). I mean there's not much tolerance to not know people's lifestyles and backgrounds. I mean I look out and try to realize that their backgrounds and their environments do help people react differently. There are circumstances in their private lives and I think that I found this—I've really grown this way. In my younger days I can see how intolerant I was. I was more or less critical when people didn't like my viewpoint, I was just intolerant.

Additional incidents affecting the couple in the past year were their grandson's health and their son's rebelling. The two-week stay at the hospital with their grandson raised questions, and "answers"—some of which were provided by doctors and nurses, and books to which the couple turned for information. Twenty-four hour a day hospital stays were for the sake of their daughter and grandson as well as themselves.

**Their son's rebellion in school and home stymied the couple. Was it something they had done? Was it the transition from one home to another while the son remained "back home?" Mother and father were in the same mix. Friends were "Back there in their old community"—were they telegraphing that message to their son? Or was it a phase in the son's life. The parents said,**

**"We saw our seventeen year old son rebelling. It may not have been rebelling but to us it was. It is a new experience for us because it is a new learning center. Our other children were never involved in a State School. This is what's been different. We've learned a lot in dealing with long distance. That's a crushing thing. And I think we need tolerance and understanding to get through this.**

**They continued their comments with:**

**This is a readjustment and relearning time for us. It's for us to realize that a child who goes out on his own you have to do that for it is their survival and their ability to survive. And you got to guide them but you can't. That's what you have to be, guiding. And you got to create in that area a tremendous amount of love flowing over that telephone and letters. Let them know. They just...I think if parents could realize that Jesus Christ is the answer and that it's His love working through you, you can just absolutely envelop that child to where he starts responding to love rather than responding to you.**

**Tolerance was emerging with some success in the life-space of the mother while intolerance crept back into intimate areas of family life. Relocation to a larger city did not promise a network of friends, three years later a void continued to hold sway. Conscientious learning to integrate some issues into their life space continued to result in social/psychological costs greater than benefits. There was hope. The**

**couple was creating a year-long plan to better understand and become better integrated into the community. The church was an available resource however diversity existed between churches. They would have to find their nitch. Finally, the empty nest did not prove to be an empty nest. Their faith, understanding, a network of friends and professionals would have to be relied upon to bridge the gulf between son, family and society.**

### **Vignette #39**

**With middle-age slipping away the fifty-four year old actor found himself determining to make library service to a low income community relevant. Responding to his perceived needs of the community was his most significant professional learning experience. Public organizations and media sources recognized his work site as the best in the metropolitan region. The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra invited itself to hold a live performance in the library; A former Tuskegee Airman shared his WWII experiences with the public; and six local jazz musicians led by a Minnesota Jazz Hall-of Fame who would later form a local jazz band called ‘The Legends.’ These and other services including a computer learning center built and paid for by community funds made the library a source of cultural learning and awareness to the multi-ethnic community. His administrative superiors viewed his unorthodox style not in line with administrative policies.**

**“Incompetent?” The accusation was repeated again and again by the library administration. As major as the accusations were they were “small potatoes compared to “Titus” accident. At the height of the**

accusations the actor was given a notice to vacate his office in three days. Three days later he was told to return. “The surprise was the unscrupulousness of it, people in the administration not following their procedures then calling me unscrupulous. The union said that I won but what did I win? I learned about people and myself.”

To offset the accusations the actor decided to be above board in everything he did, put it in writing. “I was deliberate in the way I approached it, in communication with my director. I learned to be logical in my approach, have facts in order, have support from the community, have control of myself, and I had to rely on my allies and friends to do their part.” He also prayed for wisdom and guidance on how to handle the accusations, to be able to accept the results wherever they might lead.

His son’s nearly fatal accident led the respondent to say, “Even in the darkest moments there are times of enrichment. It helps me understand Lamentations, wrestling with God. I definitely believe in miracles, it is much more personal to me now.” This is one of the ways the actor looked back on his son’s automobile accident. Friends, neighbors and medical staff offered condolences including the cleaning lady. She said, “I tell you what, I’ve seen a lot of people come in and your son looks like he’s filled with piss and vinegar and I think he’s going to make it.”

Early in the morning, despondent, the actor walked past a television program—“So you are praying for a miracle in the name of

the Father and the Son, what about the Holy Spirit?” “That uplifted me.”

Frequently asking doctors for information about his son he said, “At one point I got news I didn’t want or like. The doctor said, ‘His brain stem snapped. He won’t get better.’ That was a no hoper.” I didn’t feel angry at the doctor for saying that for he was giving his honest opinion. But two days later Titus woke and put his thumbs up. I watched my son being reborn, step-by-step, day-by-day.” The cost of the ordeal was at least \$30,000.

His pastor invited the actor to teach about prayer to a confirmation class of twenty-five youth—in sixty minutes. The most difficult thing was finding a definition conveying the meaning of prayer. One definition in the Oxford English Dictionary was “one who prays.” He jokingly said, “That was a real insight.” Other resources included writers by Luther, The Interpreter’s Bible and world religions.

On the morning of the class and after doing the biblical and theological research he said a prayer and went in. “The spiritual stuff took over.” He said. Even so it was an emotional, embarrassing experience but also rewarding. “It made me not afraid to witness about my own religious belief. It was very important for me personally. For the kids it may have been insignificant.” His only expense was a sixteen dollar book about Luther.

“I’m a lawn person but never even remotely cared about doing this before, starting bit by bit and I’m still doing it. How ridiculous

does it look picking out crab grass?” Reading library books and consulting with friends but in the end “I did it by the seat of my pants. It was therapeutic after the events of this past year—a kind of escape from everything else, a time to reflect,”

Four window frames were rotted, needed replacing. The respondent decided to do it himself. He first talked with friends then read how-to-do-it books. Two obstacles were encountered: lack of confidence and lack of power tools. The job was bigger than replacing rotted pieces. The entire windows had to be rebuilt using cedar wood. “I cursed and just did it using a plain old saw, hammer; battery powered drill...and made mistakes. Each window got progressively easier. It was a rewarding experience. My neighbors and wife were wowed! I’m more of a survivalist than I used to be.”

Unexpected help in the person of a neighbor arrived when the actor decided to replace the back door frame. Power tools were available this time. “One of the first things my neighbor negotiated was, ‘We’re not going to get angry, we’re going to stay in control of ourselves.’ It didn’t take long for my over-zealous neighbor to start swearing. But he got into it, did a good ob. I was like his assistant,”

With his self-confidence raised to another level the actor said, “It was a goal that I wanted to do that nobody thought I could. It got me into a more domesticated mode than I had been in for some time.” Only his impatient wife complained saying, “You’re making a big mess. You’re killing a perfectly good weekend.” Cost of supplies for the two jobs was approximately \$450. Estimated savings was \$1,200.

**Vignette #40**

**“I’m sick and tired of being exacerbated by retirement,” said the seventy-five year old accountant. It was proving to be a time of ambiguity, insecurity, uncertainty and a withdrawal from people. Low-level depression was jading her life. Pursuing new activities in the past year seemed to provide relief and distance from the anxious shell that had enveloped her. Joining a newly formed book club, becoming connected with herself through Tibetan meditation, learning more about the geopolitics of the Middle East and modifying her literary and reading genre were primary schemes enlisted to modify her static state of being. From a hygiene perspective she had been consciously reducing her dependence on a sixty-year nicotine habit.**

**Three people formed the nucleus of the book club, “I thought it would be boring but not so, even if people disagreed. It was meaningful because of interaction within the group—people with ideas made it happen.” At one point the respondent said, “This hasn’t really changed me except as making a commitment. I’ve been afraid of making commitments, like I was in jail. Now I can do it.”**

**Why Tibetan meditation? “I have been depressed and am so sick and tired of being exacerbated by retirement. My sister, a Jungian therapist, introduced me to Tich Naht Hahn, a form of meditation practice. Basically the bottom line is emotional health. It has not been fantastic but I can remember coming out of the shell, gradually lessening fear of other people.” Meditation included listening to tapes and practicing “stop light meditation.” “That stop light meditation is**

**your friend. You use it while stopped in traffic, cooking, dish washing and things like that.”**

**“I retired in 2000 shortly after that my mother died. Then health deteriorated, not life-threatening but one thing after another. My dependence on cigarettes was one of the things I tried to eliminate. Now when I do smoke one or two they don’t do anything for me. But I continue to struggle with that persistent reaction to reach for a cigarette. It was that automatic taking the cigarette out then the conscious thought of putting it back. NO! I took a piece of gum instead.” She used sugar-free bubble gum, nicotine gum, just things to break the habit.**

**“When I get nervous I try to remember the present moment and breath in, breath out and try to learn to be compassionate with myself. Tich Naht Hahn helped tremendously.” She was down to two cigarettes a day and “beginning to feel free somehow,”**

**Current Middle East events were more than a curiosity to the respondent—not that she had vested interests in the region, she just wanted a clearer picture of issues for herself. “I kinda gave up on books from the public libraries they just didn’t keep my attention. But I didn’t completely give up on them.**

**The readings quickened anger within her, particularly against the colonial powers, for messing up borders to the advantage of colonialism. “I thought a course taught by professionals would be more interesting.”**

Reading southwest mysteries was becoming a disappointment. “I read the mysteries for their background, plots, and authors’ anthropological approach. Those kinds of mysteries were a form of escape as well as learning about the southwest. I’m now reading southwest stories, Pueblos and other area communal groups. I would like to visit the southwest, participate in an elder hostel program to better understand the region.”

#### Vignette #41

The thirty-nine year old respondent recently completed a two-year Peace Corps assignment. A musician by profession he realized it was time to become rooted in a community but where? Receipt of a contract to teach music at a small town Catholic school settled that. Looking around town he noticed young professionals owed homes—they belonged, they were rooted in the community life; should he do the same? Should he buy a home? Would purchasing a home gratify his need to develop meaningful relationships? This issue led to another.

Purchasing his \$154,000 home was a financial, social and psychological investment. Twenty years without home ownership generated inferior feelings. Acceptance by friends who were home owners could reduce those feelings. Three visits with realtors completed the transaction. He then said, “I chose what I could afford and what I liked. I have a different sense of myself, sense of pride, this is my space. I could have stayed in apartments for less than what I;m paying now but I would have lived here for a short time then moved on. I am

staying now. I own a home here. I'm part of the community. I can also hold social events.”

Home ownership had hidden costs. He had not planned for them until coming to the conclusion that replacing carpets with wood flooring was, in his mind, a necessity. As the task developed plans were modified. When an unexpected wood flooring sale appeared he got an estimate for the “stuff” and decided to do the whole house. “It’s an expression,” he said, “but it was more than I expected, I’m proud of it. The house now has a certain style, taste, and character.”

Teaching music in a small Catholic school system was a challenge, “I’m a city slicker” he said. “I wanted to be in the city with people who wanted to be taught. The supervisors could have helped more but didn’t.” Even if disappointments came along the way, disappointments that demanded “real patience” he did not want to show, he tried to challenge the students. Something he learned about himself in the past year was his own childishness in difficult situations. “Well, that’s how kids are” as he compared his own behavior with theirs. “It was a worthwhile experience, not always pleasant but could lead to a better job.

A highlight of the year was the student presentation of Handel’s Messiah for young voices. It was a worthwhile project that eventually led to his proposing to the administration a school choir tour to the Vatican. The parish school approved the idea of a Vatican choir trip when presented to the school administration.

Needing finances after accepting the K-6 position the actor responded to an ad for a music camp teacher. He was hired. “Many talented students were enrolled in the program reminding me of my youth. I was talented as a kid. It was like revisiting my past. Now I was planting seeds, giving kids blueprints. But camp got boring, recitals, recitals, recitals.”

When the actor saw the announcement on a web site for a church-sponsored Gay-Lesbian pot luck he decided to attend. He was looking for something like this. “I had to take responsibility for my own socialization. It’s connecting. I live in a small town and was infatuated with somebody and needed to get out and stretch myself. Not just sit home alone. I had never socialized with people like that outside of bar situations.” He and a friend did a recital together and decided to attend the event. His friend felt uncomfortable. Not him. “It was good to be with people who were comfortable with themselves. It was a conscious attempt to reach people, enjoy others, just talking with people as people. This is just life and I am part of it, even with the conflict. I am no longer fearful. I experienced affirmation, tolerance, and respect for human beings.”

“I did run an 8K this past fourth of July. I wanted to be connected with the community. It was like becoming part of the body of Christ. I wasn’t seeking money. I wanted to be part of something. I felt disconnected in the past, lacked intimacy. I want to contribute to society, discern my charisma, find an outlet for genuine fulfillment to humanity. That’s why I did it.”

**Vignette #42**

When asked “What did you learn this past year that was new to you?” the forty-three year old secretary insurance adjuster was reminded of revisions to her job description. She said,

**I took on a new job. I work with an insurance adjusting firm. The further I go with it the more I learn about it. I am now responsible for handling employee benefits including health, life, long term disability, and dental programs. When I took the new program it took the better part of a five day work week just going through our old records, nothing had been done of a cohesive nature. No system had been set up. I'd have to almost work backward....It took me , it really took me a whole 40 hour work week to set up, to get familiar with what my end result would be and begin to set up a system which ,of course, has been refined as I have gone on.**

**I also handle our fleet policy for our cars and fire policy for our different offices. I handle all our insurance for all of our company. Those have also been handed to me, that is new. On and off I spent approximately two-and-a-half full weeks learning the new procedures.**

**“I did set up a six week curriculum for my church for a process called community evening. It was...that was quite an experience. I don't know whether it would be a learning experience in a relationship type of thing. It was very time consuming because I was in charge of it. We had thirteen courses that we offered. And I dreamed up the program, did all the work on it because I had to feel my way all along. It took a solid month to plan the program. We had a common goal. It was fascinating, I loved it. We are going to do it again in the spring.”**

**“I’m Catholic, serve on the parish council as education commissioner. We created a mission statement for our parish. It took hours to labor through every word of it, the consensus, the wording. We spent 15 hours over a four month time doing group writing, setting goals. Four of us finally wrote the mission statement.”**

**“I’m a member of the women’s ordination conference. I attended four workshops on that one of which was for an entire weekend. We are setting up dialogues and structures for a branch of the program.”**

**For relaxation, detachment from work and church activities the respondent has been creating an interest in gardening. It has been a trial and error effort and conversing with friends, nursery professionals and reading how to do it books. “That was hard work. My young son and I even found another way to start a spring garden”**

**“Another thing I do is work on my own car. I recently changed the starter—it took a long time, seemed like forever. I started it, had to stop to find out what I was doing wrong then go back to it. It took two full days. I can do it again, I know.”**

**To do something nice for her self the respondent told about her trip to the Big Bend National Park and Davis Mountains.**

**“I took a week of vacation, just myself. It was strictly for me. We didn’t take the children. We needed time off. Somebody drew up plans for the trip and we read literature about the area. We were gone five days. It was the greatest experience I’ve had in a long time. Seeing it and reading about it in the evenings. I was renewed.”**

**Vignette #43**

**When the actor was first contacted about the study he refused. Thinking formal learning was the focus of research, he could not honestly recall efforts like that. Several months later I again contacted him, unannounced. He agreed to participate.**

**As the interview commenced the fifty-seven year old actor spoke about disheartening changes in the work place, some resulting in revenue loss. “As plant supervisor I tried to offer my suggestions as best I could. Since I was nearing retirement age I decided to take stock of things, pull back. Faulty decision making resulted in a bad cash flow problem.”**

**Not losing his sense of responsibility to the organization the actor willingly studied Spanish to more adequately communicate with twenty Spanish speaking employees. “I have been learning Spanish on my own enough to get an idea across.” Personal books and tape recordings were his primary study resources. When asked how helpful they were he answered, “I like them very much. They’re simplified, it’s the beginning stage. They teach you just enough to tell people what you want, or ask something. They help with my pronunciation.”**

**The actor also had an intense interest in his investment portfolio. Although he relied on stock brokers to assist him he lost confidence in them saying:**

**I don’t think brokers know any more about it than I do because they all have the research department. They’re told which ones**

are rallying and they called us last year and said: ‘Buy some ( ).’ We bought it for \$51.00 a share. Well luckily we sold out at \$50.00 and we were very lucky. (pause) It hit \$32.00 the other day. From \$51.00 to \$32.00 and I’ve had other instances where I was burned when I stayed with it long enough.

The actor did not at first identify his investing as a learning venture. As he continued conversing it became evident he taught himself as well as picking up trading tips from his broker.

As an independent learner the actor recalled learning to fly private aircraft. Since his work schedule interfered with classes and written tests to get a private license the actor crammed independently. Purchasing a book and “other stuff.” he studied on his own and passed the test. He then went on to say, “Well. I would have liked to have gone into the classroom, sitting there batting information back and forth.”

Buying his personal airplane supported the actor’s flying hobby. That came to an end when he sold it, anticipating retirement in the near future. Considering withdrawing from work demanded an evaluation of his retirement strategy.

Following the interview the actor recalled his wife’s operation for a brain tumor. It was a learning experience he would have rather not undertaken. It was an unanticipated intrusion into his life space that added reevaluation of his retirement strategy.

#### Vignette #44

“I took a risk how I was going to live my life” said the sixty-one year old female respondent. “Yes, I used to have a passion in the way I

worked, quality. Now it's a passion toward life. I've thought a lot about it. After turning sixty I started giving myself that freedom. It is more crucial that I'm freeing myself up. My goal is to work thirty hours a week, simplify my lifestyle. My mantra is to simplify—"Tis a gift to be simple."

Talking to a friend, "an old soul," resulted enrolling in a class on spirituality and resiliency about life in general, what it means to live. "It (the class) was very good. It included three hours of conversations around the table every other Wednesday and every other Saturday. The class was widely diverse culturally and generational. The instructor was working as hard on her own issues as she was helping us with ours."

She went on to say, "I think I'm really comfortable with the idea that I'm making some risky decisions because I know what I'm doing. I feel comfortable with the ambiguity involved in the risks. Like Dali Lama I stand back, don't get totally involved. Every day, little by little I approach little tasks with a good heart."

Family incidents including her mother's broken hip and son's near death experience were unexpected impositions that had a serious impact on her life space. "In a space of two weeks tremendous complexities occurred. My mother, she said, is very independent. I'm doing home health care for her. I'm trying to let the children go, step back and let things go their own way."

**Ben's near death experience was not difficult, accepting and letting go of him. The difficult part was seeing her children drawing close, beginning a slow ten year return to a meaningful relationship with him then suddenly seeing it come to an end. That was difficult.**

**A major decision had to be made regarding the respondent's doctoral program. She had been working with a small cohort of masters' degree students who were now working toward PhDs in youth work. "We've been meeting every three or four months and now the question is can I continue jumping through the hoops. I get excited when I meet with the students then revert back to my indecision."**

**Concerns for the respondent were family set-backs, getting laid off from work and asking what it meant to be a good, effective youth worker. Was youth work what she really wanted to do?**

**The interview concluded with her voiced dilemma, "Why should I do what I am not sure I want?"**

#### **Vignette #45**

**An obvious surgical scar stretched from one ear up and over his skull to the other. At one point during the interview the fifty-three year old respondent said, "The pursuit of learning keeps my mind off my pain." His extended struggle with medical problems ignited curiosity at an early age. Recalling the incidents that birthed curiosity he said:**

**I did not learn to read by Christmas in the first grade so my teacher made me stay after school an hour a day until I could read. She worked with me 45 minutes the first day then let me go.**

**The next day it was 30 minutes and soon it was twenty. Before long she said I had another problem, I was reading at the fourth grade level so she sent me to the library to read anything I wanted, Norse mythology or anything else so I had a free education. It absolutely ruined me for schooling. I got into independent study since first grade, that's what its all about.**

**Severe physical limitations rendered the respondent unemployable. Residing in public housing and depending on state subsistence he still found ways to keep his mind stimulated. Public libraries were his haven for as he said, "I have nothing else to compare with the public library. It's the place to go if a person wants to know about something. I would kill to keep them open. Once in a while I run into something not available—then I try to find it in the stacks. When all else fails I try interlibrary loan."**

**It was the attack on the World Trade Center that influenced the respondent's interest Mesopotamia. "Since we are bound to conquer it (Mesopotamia) again that is why I have been reading about it. Colonial interests by the British, BP (British Petroleum) and Dutch eventually drew them into World War I. Now we are there."**

**A chronic intestinal fungal infection and widespread use of antibiotics led to severe complications that restricted the respondent's ambulatory capacity. Finding little relief through his health care services he tried to learn as much as possible about his illness on his own. Though questioning doctors provided a better understanding about his condition little physical relief resulted. Public and university library searches were his other resources for understanding his condition. Again, little relief resulted from his searches though it did**

help him better understand the nature of his disability. He then asked “Why can’t the medical community do more to understand my infection?”

#### **Vignette #46**

**A marriage encounter experience was one of the significant events in the life of the twenty-six year old actor. It consisted of four weekends of soul searching through group interaction, writing and engaging interior and exterior spiritual awareness.**

**“We learned a form of communication called ‘dialoging’ by practicing every day, writing and expressing focusing on our feelings. And, ah, the thing I learned was feelings are one of the most misused word in our language these days. People say ‘I feel’ when they mean ‘I think.’ You no longer feel but have a thought and a judgment. Our actions can be motivated by our feelings and once we learn to understand and accept them and accept our spouse’s feelings then we learn to control actions that are related to feelings which deal with moods and everything else. The program is not counseling and it is not group therapy, it is enrichment, a learning process for spiritual growth. It is designed to enrich a marriage. There is an ‘I’ phase, ‘we’ phase and a ‘God’ phase.**

**Marriage encounter sessions helped both parents better understand childhood development. “My wife researched it and I practiced what she was learning. “Not only am I more aware of what our son is doing; my wife and I are learning together.”**

**“Another thing I got involved in with our pastor was a spiritual growth program titled ‘Genesis II.’ It is spiritual growth through prayer. When I made reference to the Bible I always looked at the Bible**

as something that older people read because possibly they were bored or something or were religious fanatics. That is something that I could be labeled by some people who were where I was several years ago. I found the Bible to be an excellent reference book. Although I haven't really taken any courses in it lately or anything like that I have done a lot of studying [with it]."

"My father is a professional engineer. I thought about that as a career; follow in my father's footsteps. I learned a lot from him this year but my grandfather on my mother's side was a wood working craftsman." Watching his grandfather influenced the actor to consider his career choice. Referencing that decision he said,

I've been a cabinet maker for seven years and the most significant thing I worked with this year has been the compound miter. My reference for that was an older man who had been doing and using it over fifty years. He has a handbook on joinery that was from England and dated around 1730. Some of the joinery we use today is very simple forms of the old stuff where they didn't have all the hardware that we have now. Everything was made from wood, some iron and stuff but mostly wood. As I was thumbing through it very carefully I found a section on the compound miter which is very basically the way you take wood and hide your ingrain when you're joining it. Each cabinet maker determines his own way of doing things. When I began to experiment with that idea I came up with methods of holding two pieces together while protecting the edges at the same time. When I was finished it was better than anything I had done in the past. Of course we're talking about fine furniture not found in stores." The respondent estimated spending 300 hours, learning how to use the system.

Discovering the wood working handbook led the actor to collect antique wood working tools. "I've been doing this for the past two

years, going into antique shops and things like that. I had to make parts for some of the tools. Tools used by those craftsmen were simple and more than that they just used a few tools; the rest of it was in their heads.” A visit to Texas A&M library wood working and cabinet making collection further enhanced his awareness of the subject matter. “I even got to tour the university wood shop and was really impressed. So I’m finding that the methods and techniques don’t rely on old methods from the past.”

Visiting a King Tut exhibition furthered the actor’s interest in antique furniture design. Examining furniture over 3,000 years old, he said, “The wood work and joinery was better than that I have seen today. That too helped prompt me to consider researching old wood working methods and how they did it.”

The “green” method of chair joinery was another task the actor learned from the old shop master. People bring their antique chairs to be refinished so the wood workers completely disassemble the chairs, sand every thing down and forget that when the chair was originally assembled green wood was used. No glue, the green wood expanded and contracted making for a fit very tight. No glue. The chair, when disassembled during refinishing, could result in ruinous loose fits. “The old man taught me to drill a tiny hole and use a syringe to inject glue to the loose section. That was another thing I learned about classical furniture repair.”

Working in the shop required specialized tools that he created. Known as “jigs” they sometimes served a one time specific occasion

other times the actor added the tool to his collection. He thought about patenting one of his jigs at a later date. “I’ve been learning about these things so I can make a better product.”

One of his hobbies was creating miniature figures, some musicians, others day-to-day characters, all to scale. The actor visited music and hardware stores with calipers and measuring instruments in hand to create realistic accessories for his characters. “It is an on-going thing and takes months to complete an object, a little bit at a time.”

Father and grandfather nurtured a creative, curious mind-set in cabinet maker. He was interesting to himself and interesting to others as he continued to expand his skills.

#### **Vignette #47**

The sixty-six year old respondent was sitting in a quiet corner of a restaurant as she shared her thought about how she thought she knew more about tutoring Attention Deficit Disorder students than her instructor.

When I first got into the classroom I felt I had more experience than the students needed. I quickly discovered my experience was limited. That is when I began seeing things that were happening so I started listening, watching the teacher. That is how I began to learn how to relate to children with ADD. Listening, watching the teacher is what I did. Little by little I began picking up on learning to deal with behavioral problems. I had to learn how to observe, emulate the teacher. One of the ways I changed is that

**instead of being overbearing I had to learn about my own way of dealing with my feelings, rejection. I had to learn to put a positive spin on things.**

**The respondent' second learning episode was sparked by a newspaper clipping about a pioneer community that had a familiar ring to it. Was her family's history linked to that particular community? She discussed the article with an accompanying friend who showed little interest. Ignoring her friend's apathy the site kindled an interest in older times not only for its own sake but for the way it probably influenced her family's background.**

**A result of the initial visit was a return to the site with her sister. Intrigued by what they saw the sisters began imagining how the early settlers built and lived in "shacks" in the area, how they survived under primitive conditions, and how they eventually migrated to another part of the state.**

**Fascinated by the second visit the respondent selected books about early settlers in the area which led to reading Moberg's "The settlers." Afterward she purchased the book "On to a good land." She eventually found the last standing house from that era. The most significant impact the stories of the settlements had on the respondent was a new admiration for her "very old fashioned father, a revelation and a profound appreciation for how the people survived under the harshest conditions."**

Trying to understand bewildering feelings stemming from childhood, recent burglaries and “loss, loss, loss” compelled the respondent to seek therapeutic help. She said, “My first therapist hit the nail on the head when she asked me to write about myself, my family and my history. She had to terminate our relationship when she got pregnant but she initiated a process for me to follow. It seemed that I was able to more easily put things together in more of a structured flow. What came out that I didn’t expect was that I was jumping around in my thoughts, maybe I was ADD.”

The respondent described overcoming her doubts as she wrote about growing up. “That’s when my therapist said, ‘Write, write, write.’ Now that I have all my experiences I want to write about my family history. I’m tying strings together, making sense out of a lot of it. I always had an inkling about writing, now I’m doing it. It has given me more of an appreciation for my family. My therapist even had me write letters to family who died. It helped me take care of unfinished business.”

Though not insurmountable one mental block the respondent had was “trying to find time, put all my energies in one place, settle my things down and finish undone projects. I even purchased a notebook, started writing while leaving other things undone.” She was beginning to tie things together.

Looking into the future the respondent started thinking about writing a children’s story based on her family’s history. “The hardest

part would be starting out. My fear is that somebody will not be around to appreciate it. What I'm doing I will be doing for myself."

#### **Vignette #48**

"Ever since I got sick in '78 I felt like the odd one out." So began the fifty year old college educated respondent's reply to, "Did you learn anything new in the past twelve months?" Dialectical Behavior Therapy was by far the overwhelming influence. It influenced nearly every aspect of her life including getting a part-time job, traveling to visit siblings, and participating in group activities. Single, she continued to struggle with personal isolation tendencies but was now hoping to expand her collective life by participating in fitness and group activities. Moving into a condominium was a future consideration.

The devastating emotional struggle ruled the respondent's social and personal behavior for over twenty-five years. Consultations with psychiatrists and therapists would eventually introduce her to DBT.

I heard about it from a former psychiatrist who suggested it several years ago then I became angry and uneasy. I thought I might try it so I gathered a little reading material and sampled group experiences before making a decision to participate in the program. I felt uneasy about that because I thought would have to quit the other therapist and I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I tried to engage the other therapist in the decision making. He actually said we are going to try this for a year to see how it would help me.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy helped the respondent in several ways. "It has given me a lot of hope for the future and it helped me

work on my impulsive buying.” It influenced her attitude toward work as well.

**Not having worked I didn’t think I would succeed. I decided to volunteer to work as a program assistant at an intergenerational day care center. Though I didn’t think I would succeed, I did it for three years partly because it was a way of getting out of bed in the morning. And I thought the little kids would get me going during the day, and partly because of Social Security Disability.**

**After volunteering three years the respondent decided to terminate. Shortly after quitting the center called asking if she would like to work part-time? “Getting a job was not my intention. I’m struggling with excessive doubt and wondering if I’m as good as the rest of the employees and am also struggling with obsessive compulsive disorder.” She talked with her doctor about the offer and he said, “You get in the driver’s seat.” That was one of the reasons she took the job and then went on to say, “He is one of my biggest cheerleaders.”**

**Was the decision difficult? “Within myself, deciding to it...I haven’t worked since 1983 and I got panicky, thinking I would have to work for the rest of my life. What have I done?”**

**Trying to resolve what seemed to be a dilemma she made an effort get control over her schedule by consulting with a work retention specialist. Dialectical behavior therapy also helped. “It can help anybody,” she said.**

**Another life-changing experience for the respondent was a good friendship that went bad in the past year.**

**I was experiencing harassment and verbal abuse on the telephone. Had I not been in Dialectal Behavior Therapy I may not have had the courage to take that step. My group was working on the relationship thing, self-respect and finding my own self-respect verbal abuse. When I filed the court order I felt a sense of self-respect.**

**Making the decision to go to court could have been devastating for the respondent for she had been a long-time friend with the person she was accusing. What made it more difficult was her accuser was part of the same DBT group. “In the end the group supported me so in a way I lost a friend, somebody who supported me during my dad’s death. I also thought his family would be angry toward me.”**

**“To overcome my indecision to file a court order I depended on the DBT group, did research in the public library and consulted with family, friends, and physicians. After filing the order I was left with a sense of sadness yet realized there were some legal things I could do for myself.”**

**“A big step for me was travel to visit family. Anxiety was high even after a mental health worker encouraged me to make the trip. She said I didn’t have anything to lose by doing the travel. I don’t think that was her intention, to get me to do it but that’s the effect it had on me. I think my father would have wanted me to make the trip too. I used to say, ‘When I’m ninety I’ll do it.’” Another reason for going was her mother’s accompaniment—that reduced some of the anxiety.**

**Looking back on the trip, how it affected her, the respondent said, “I feel more a part of the family now. Since I got sick in ’78 I felt like**

the odd one out. Now I can do what they do. Now I can talk about the family, picture them whereas before I could not. I didn't come home with a lot of money but came home with a lot of neat experiences.

The respondent compared two family trips in the past year, one pre-DBT and the other while in the program. The difference in the second was "I again got angry with my mother and other brother but this time I got out the papers (DBT) and read. It calmed me down. It was like having a friend in my pocket."

The respondent commented on her doubts about pursuing an interest in a crafts program. She said,

I saw an ad in a little community paper about an open-ended arts and crafts group. It was something I had been looking for, a group where people worked at their own pace. The most difficult part about joining was my feeling like an intruder. I tried to sit and work on my stuff and listen and ask questions to see how much they wanted to share with me and include me in the group. After some months I talked with the leader about the group. I felt more belonging after that. I was also quilting. The group was curious about that. It was a place to go on Wednesday nights, belong, and not feel like I was wasting my time.

Looking toward next year the respondent hoped to start a board game group at the community center, renew her interest in playing the piano, participate in a woman's walking club at a heart institute, and the possibility of moving into her own condominium.

**Vignette #49**

**The interview was conducted in the home of a fifty-two year old woman who was a member of “a real learning church.” In the past year she accepted a part-time position as a teacher at a local church. She responded to the initial question about learning something new in the past year with,**

**Well, I started working part-time, only four hours a day a week for a ‘Mothers’ Day Out’ program at a church. It required my taking courses in CPR, life-saving and fire prevention. We have to take twelve hours of courses a year in everything we do as far psychology and training children. I work with three year olds in the program and every day is a new experience working with them. It is not only the children from whom I learn—I have been learning how to use office equipment, class materials, record keeping, medical forms and things like that. I’m also responsible for buying teaching aids from Teacher Supply. I’m not just babysitting.**

**As for her family being members of “a real learning church” she referred to two classes she attended in the past year, one on the book of Mark and the other, the book of Acts. Each study was comprised of nine two hour sessions. “We really only spent about two-three hours homework for each session. I would like to continue the studies next year.”**

**“I also refinished a piece of furniture, actually my husband and I did. We went to the hardware store to get supplies and information and things like that. I spent about five hours helping my husband, he did the rest.”**

To keep track of medicine purchases the respondent bought a Physician's Desk Reference because of new drugs and vitamins in her home.

My daughter is using it to check on her medications and I'm using it too, to find out the side effects of some of the drugs prescribed to me. Some doctors don't take the time to explain about the drugs they prescribe. It did take a while for me to learn how to use it. I even took it with me when we went to see my brother who has multiple sclerosis and arthritis.

The respondent also helped organize a senior citizens' breakfast that was designed to feed 200 people. Planning menus, purchasing supplies, cooking and cleaning up, and promoting the program required a list of volunteers who would perform specific duties. As with any volunteer organization morale of volunteers had to be held high.

When asked if there was anything "unique" she would like to do in the coming twelve months she responded with, "I don't know what I would like to do but I think I'd like to go back to school and see if I can still book learn." Other than that she hoped to improve her prayer life.

#### Vignette #50

It all started years ago with an injury, that was how the actor said he was introduced to opiate drugs. It was an addiction that followed him through doctoral studies in near eastern philosophy at the University of California, Berkley. After graduate studies he lived ten years in India and Tibet—his addictions persisted.

**Drug habits and a poverty-ridden life style left his body severely damaged. Returning home he was diagnosed with Hepatitis C, bone infection and massive bone deterioration from his pelvis to his leg. Even when confined to hospitals, psychiatric wards, and nursing homes he failed to follow prescribed regimens. Ignoring medication in favor of drug binges was tantamount to a death sentence.**

**After sixteen decimating operations the bone infection that nearly claimed his life was cleansed. The actor decided he would not recover from another drug binge.**

**I went two and one-half years without anything connecting my pelvis and leg. Following replacement surgery I spent three months in a nursing home. The orthopedic surgeon informed me that where there was a removal of all parts as in my case, the possibility of re-infection occurred seventy-five percent of the time. I'm beating that twenty-five percent who do not get re-infected and removal of artificial parts.**

**Periods of black depressions, exacerbated by interferon treatments and constant pain overwhelmed him.**

**During and following the operations the actor experienced other bodily symptoms.**

**I knew something was not right when I started gaining weight, a lot of which went to my chest, and a shrinkage of my 'lower parts'. I almost had to be clubbed before I knew something was desperately out of whack, when I saw my breasts were enlarging. I didn't know about thyroid testosterone so when it was mentioned I did searches on the internet. It was my doctors who helped me understand what was happening.**

**In the past year, with help from doctors, orthopedists, psychiatrists, and a personal belief in Karma the actor was able to recover sufficiently to bring new order to his life. He started swimming and doing other physical therapy exercises. “I’ll probably never get back a chunk of muscle. As for medications, there are a variety of tradeoffs. They affect the endocrine system so much that I feel like I’m walking around in somebody else’s body.”**

**Only after “wasting time” on the internet did the actor learn how to “tweak” it to find information. It became a useful information resource.**

**How did the actor sum up the changes in his life over the past year?**

**I’m some what better, a lot of extra help from the county, state and feds. I’m better than I was. I’m doing just what I have to do just to survive. What kept me alive this past year is my connection with my Lama, Karma. My teacher is my major source of strength. I also get strength from my wife and children. Even though we live in different places we are closely knit. My children said, “Until you get better, daddy, we can’t live with you.”**

**Paying medical expenses was out of the question. “I don’t have a pot to piss in any more. I get SSI, county money and Medicaid to help pay the bills.”**

**For the past year I’ve been fighting off mental signals to mind and body—all the time. I’m avoiding people I used to see all the time. Having no money helps. Exercise helps. I structure my time better for I have to work on a monolithic time control. That helps. I also know I will not survive if I do drugs again.**

**The actor accepted a position as homework helper in a public library in the past year. “I don’t know how I came across the job--I think somebody saw it on the internet and told me.”**

**Though the actor had not taught in seven and one-half years, being a homework helper was positive reinforcement, even on those days he worked four and one-half hours. Although exhausting work, he earned eight hundred dollars.**

**I couldn’t fight the exhaustion. I would be a mess when I got home and sleep. I still seem to need more sleep than I’m accustomed to. But I learned so much from the kids, they keep you alive. This summer is the first time in years that I have not been spending days in the hospital. My family is really proud of me! My therapist wanted me to back off but I felt committed to doing it.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Scrutinizing faith and dissonance in the lives of adult learners was far from my mind when I first studied adult learning behavior (1984). Since then, inquisitiveness and my stubbornness to try to “squeeze blood from a turnip” I found myself trying to stretch my research into unfamiliar domains, (i.e., economics, consumer and sociopsychological behavior, etc.). A particular domain that influenced my thinking from adolescence to young adulthood and the ordained clergy was religious thought. It was not an intentional attempt to avoid religious and faith themes--naturalistic inquiries provided some impetus to pursue that line of thinking but not sufficient to tip the balance. Faith, as my final**

thrust into research about the adult learner, became a void I sought to address. That has directly and indirectly led to this effort.

As I conclude my remarks I will repetitiously incorporate thoughts from sages and masters of religious and secular reflection as well as reflections lifted from selected vignettes in my studies. I have been trying to present a sociopsychological perspective of adult learners from social, cultural, and economic characteristics where, “aspects of faith” and dissonance evince.

My approach toward a definition of “faith” has been influenced by Tillich’s “ultimate concern” with “ultimate” stretching limits of faith to absolute detachment from the real and now to unexplainable mystery. Bonhoeffer attempted to break the barrier of explainable religious jargon and cultural values to a “religionless” language that could meld into ultimate concern. His efforts continued to be formed in a prison cell at a time when many of Germany’s religious leaders were influenced by the rhetoric of racism and nationalistic fervor.

I struggled with this as I attempted to view faith in one’s skills development or learning new skills to come to grips with a problem. Faced with a real dilemma, the actor embraces a set of guidelines that will hopefully bring satisfactory closure, an “answer.” Mystery in a secular sense is tentatively resolved, named, by faith in observable responses to calculated actions.

“Faith,” though not so expressed in Thoreau’s Nineteenth Century Walden appeared as “I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live sturdily and Spartanlike as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a

corner and reduce it to its terms....” Reality would embrace the mystic while reducing life to its essence.

Life for the adult learner in the Twenty-first Century provides a treasure-trove of electronic and digital sources and apparatus for the actor to immerse one’s self in a luxury of finger-tip transcendentalism beyond known cultural, political, and economic systems. It is possible for a transcendent spirit to succumb to an inflexible dogmatism that tends to reduce the learner to an emasculated pawn on a rigged chess board. Technological “transcendentalism” came to Twentieth Century life of secular faith as depicted in Kidder’s The soul of a new machine. Efforts of a group of computer scientists dug and clawed their way through frustrated dead ends. Secular faith, persistence, and dogged determination led them to believe it was worth their while to pursue their hunches.

Experience guides the learner up to a point. Time, accident, fate, nature, unexpected challenges dare the actor to swim through points of panic, surrender to the ethereal elements—embrace mystery. Casting self upon mystery leads the learner to answers, and, non-answers. It may hide itself in a frail cloak of doubt and disturbing dissonance that raises more questions than answers. The evolution of mystery, from mystery to Mystery dares the actor to ask, Why? Why? Why me? Mystery? Where is God? Unanswered dissonance contain teachable moments.

Peter Bohler’s advice to a disheartened John Wesley was, “Be still, move on.” Is that advice better than flying by the seat of the pants? Is there a teachable state of mind, an elasticity that enables the

actor to bend and weave through experience that disrobes myths and old wives' tales while approaching Mystery? Or, does one fly by the seat of the pants, trusting chance? Where do myths and old wives' tales yield to Mystery? Is Mystery extraterrestrial? Does faith, ultimate concern, guide the actor through states of loss, doubt, exile,-- toward hope and a set of values that embrace, redeem even the most inconsequential in all creation? Is "Be still, move on" an option for the learner?

A house fire, coma producing accident, heart attack, hard times, disillusioned religious experience, exile states of mind, family disruption, mental collapse, press in unexpectedly—dissonance producing all, dare the actor to say no and yes to each episode, to dance on gimpy legs, sing through failed vocal chords. To not dance, sing, hope, fast feeds entropy.

There are doors ajar that the adult learner is ushered into that are the stuff of life. No excuses are emitted from on high, down low or from in between, no explanations. What about privilege, does it not count for something? Or race, nationality? Does every adult have equal access to equal opportunity? No, life is not fair. Yet doors ajar for opportunity there are for every adult. They become doors to self-discovery, growth, self-actualization.

It is through doors ajar that the adult learner is ushered into the stuff of life. It is through doors of opportunity the adult learner attempts to solve problems, develops critical thinking skills, expands one's basic skills and world view. How one is prepared in advance for embracing opportunities that face the predictable and unpredictable is

a question that is situationally, educationally, culturally enwrapped. It is up to the learner to respond not in haste...unless the moment waits not—instinct, then, is called upon to respond.

Instincts may be conditioned or fashioned over time. Repetition may improve acquired skills as they are elasticized from situation to situation. Self-affirmation becomes a willingness to evolve toward thoughtful, critical growth over one's life-span.

The artist is familiar with this process as he/she approaches the creation of a new score, writing, blank canvas. The first stroke, note, word, robed in mystery, dares the creator to breath deeply, question, analyze, probe from within and without, constantly searching, probing for the “big picture.” “Success” may elude the artist, failure more likely. Embracing failure with determination and a “next time” attitude fills any and every artist with an inextinguishable spark, a MIGHTY URGE that surprises the most accomplished. The artist knows what he/she is trying to do, knows the formulas, and is surprised when, AHA, there it is.

Moreover, creativity may be contagious within the self. With dreams, motivation, team-spirit, self-reliance, one presses through obstacles, shuns ridicule, taunts, fear of failure. It may be long on struggle, short on success. Likened to child birth sighs of relief, laughter, toasts, cheers, tears of joy, profound silence may announce accomplishment: then, the morning after—questions, what next?

Financial restraints forced a home-maker to come to terms with the run-down, out-dated, disabled washing machine. With an irritated groan, sigh, and piles of smelly clothes, she thought, what next? Coming

to her senses she assessed her dilemma and made a choice, either do nothing or try fixing it herself. She settled on the latter. Knowing the belt was less expensive than calling a repair person, a parts store sold her a replacement. The ordeal was completed four hours later. From a home production standpoint doing the repair was more expensive than hiring a utility person. During the interview, the respondent recalled the ordeal with such clarity she had to take me to the storage room to show what she had done. “I did it myself,” she exclaimed. Did she announce her accomplishment out on the sidewalk? No, the interview provided that opportunity!

The adult learner is confronted by contradictions and problems that offer contrasting approaches to faith. Solutions to problems are arrived at through contemplation, assessment and decision-making that provides satisfaction and an immediate provide that satisfy immediate state of mind and situation that may or may not stand the test in similar state of being. Where solutions are repeatedly affirmed they are incorporated in the actor’s lifestyle as trusted habit-forming guideposts. However, even the most trusted habit may fail. An addictive habit or drug may produce sensations and states of being that lose their potent effect over time.

Fate, “God’s will” may act like keyless locked and chained minds with little sense of purpose. Bonhoeffer, through a short-lived thirty-nine years, refused to second guess his current prison situation that would ultimately result in a final solution—death. Confronting his final days, he said: “The idea that we could have avoided many of life’s

difficulties if we had taken things more cautiously is too foolish to be entertained for a moment.”

Adults face life’s contradictions in their situated states of being—some more pronounced than others. Two affluent husbands and wives were long-time travel companions. The husbands died, leaving behind well-cared for widows. One widow, bed-bound and willfully wasting away, was succumbing to futile entropy. Hardened boundaries of her late-in-state life left her staring at blank walls, faded memories and empty loneliness. On the other hand the interviewed respondent embraced life as an opportunity to assume family responsibilities, financial, social, spiritual and otherwise.

Contradictions existentially and relatively situated in time and space and are challenged and confronted by the perceived here and now, the known and unknown. However one might express it, the actor experiences positive and negative external forces in his/her life space that might be identified as by-the-sweat-of-the-brow, chance, creativity, destiny, luck, providence, or purposeful will. It may lead an actor to respond to external forces with internal positive responses such as aha moments, new insights, determination to experience fulfillment, finding pieces to the puzzle that reveal bits of the big picture or it may lead to negative responses such as failure, fate or resignation. The actor may also respond to a situation by picking up the pieces and trying and trying again before moving on in time and space. Although the actor never finally arrives at the full meaning of his/her existence, it does place him/her in the context of a continuum that though not always clearly defined, provides an opportunity to refine his/her life space that

**includes on-going acts of redefining, redirecting, or reinventing conscious and unconscious cognitive acts that expand or contract his/her space of being.**

**Into these formations of being induced by change, problems, meditative insights, momentary transcendence, doubts, fears, emerge desires for hope and a dare to express a faith that embraces and transcends all states of being. Never in the form of proof supported by answers, into, and out of these transitive states of being emerge a longing for a sense of place that succumbs to ultimate mystery.**

**The adult who ventures into a new learning activity, whether it be macramé, carpentry, auto repair, new relationships, child care, art, home repair, music, gambling, job skill, sport, pursuit of a formal degree, economic investment is engaging in an activity that transcends the given moment. It links him/her with ancient and contemporary philosophers, historians, scientists, theorists, writers, artists, musicians, and the religious, resulting in Zen-like quests that may or may not result in immediate self-actualization. As a learner, he/she has the potential for spawning intended and unintended consequences and relationships. It reminds me of a conversation I had with a machinist who said that all he did day after day was to produce one little part. I told him not to underestimate what he was doing for that little part fit into another part and by the time he followed the consequences of that one little part he was influencing world culture, economics, and politics. Learning is an existential enterprise that is an “every person” phenomenon.**

After having interviewed more than two-hundred adults in person and most frequently in their home environs I can attest that actors are inventive, creative, fearful, self-depreciative, self assured, all in one, walking, breathing, living pieces of humanity. It is for these reasons that I focused my thoughts on the adult learner as his/her most frequently attested resource for learning something new. It is a longing for a sense of place formed in solitary quests and supportive communities that fuels natural faith and ultimate concern.

Frank Gehry, internationally renowned architect, is quoted as saying “Why do we make things? We do it to shape ideas and thoughts with other people. Any creative expression is an attempt to connect with the folks around you in some way.” I would add that we make and do things in order to shape ideas and thoughts within ourselves as well. Frank Gehry, internationally renowned architect. The Don and Gail Cook Lecture, Tate Distinguished Lecture Series, Feb. 7, 2006. SMU Magazine, Vol. 56, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2006.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, V. L. and Scheibe, K. E.  
The social context of conduct: Psychological writings of Theodore Sarbin.  
 NY, NY: Praeger, 1982.
- Ames, B. D. and Kennedy, C. E. "Consumer Information for Older Learners: A Framework for Program Development." Educational Gerontology. Vol. 6, No. 4, Jun. 1981, 317-325.
- Anderson, R. E. and Carter, I. Human behavior in the social context. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1978.
- Argyle, M. Social interaction. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The social psychology of every day life. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Barfield, O. Saving the appearances: A study in idolatry. [London, Faber & Faber 1957], Wesleyan Paperback, 1988.
- Bergier, M. J. "A Conceptual Model of Leisure-Time Choice and Behavior." Journal of Leisure Research. Vol. 13, No. 2, 1981, pp. 139-159.
- Bonhoeffer, D. Letters and papers from prison. NY, NY: Macmillan, 1967.
- Bordelon, P. (Ed.) Go gator and muddy the water. NY, NY: W. W. Norton, 1999.
- Borg, W. R. & Gall, M. D. Educational research (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), New York, Longman, 1979.
- .Burgess, R. G. Ed. Field research: A sourcebook and field manual. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982.
- Burke, O. M. Among the Dervishes. London, The Octagon Press, 1973
- Camus, A. Lyrical and Critical Essays. N.Y., N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Cartwright, D. (Ed.) Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers. NY, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1951.
- Cross, K. P. Adults as learners. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.
- Conrad, J. Lord Jim. NY, NY: Signet Classics, 1961.
- Dadswell, G. "The adult independent learner and public libraries—  
 A new perspective for library service. Adult education. (London), Vol. 51 #1. May 1978, (pp. 5-11).

- DeRivera, J. (comp.) Field theory as human science. NY, NY: Gardner Press, 1976.
- Dervin, B. "Designing everyday coping information services for communication planning. Workshop, Honolulu, 1976
- \_\_\_\_\_. An overview of sense-making research: Concepts, methods, and Results to date. Presented at: International Communication Association Meeting, Dallas, May 1983
- Dewey, J. Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of Education. NY, NY: Macmillan, 1916.
- Douthitt, R. A. and Fedyk, J. M. "Family Composition, Parental Time and Market Goods: Life Cycle Trade-offs." Journal of Consumer Affairs, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1990, pp. 110-133.
- Earl, P. Lifestyle economics: Consumer behavior in a turbulent world. NY, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1986.
- Engel, J. F., et. Al. Consumer behavior, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. NY, NY: Dryden Press, 1986.
- Exupery, A. Wind, sand and stars. NY, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946.
- Fadiman, A. The spirit catches you and you fall down. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997.
- Fast, J., Vosbrugh, R. E., and Frisbee, W. R. "The Effects of Consumer Education on Consumer Search." The Journal of Consumer Affairs. Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer, 1989, pp. 65-90
- Fellenz, R. A. and G. J. Conti. Adult learning in the community. Bozeman, MT: Montana State University, 1990.
- Fowler, J. W. Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the Quest for meaning. NY, NY: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Frankl, V. Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy. NY, NY: Washington Square Press, 1966.
- Freire, P. Pedagogy of the oppressed. NY, NY: Seabury Press, 1968.
- Frye, N. The great code: The Bible and literature. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982.
- Gardner. And Marsh, J. "Recreation in Consumer and Conserver Societies." Alternatives, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1978, pp. 25-29.

- Gehry, F. The Don and Gail Cook Lecture, Tate Distinguished Lecture Series. SMU Magazine, Vol. 56, No. 1, Spring/Summer, 2006.
- Gove, W. R., et. Al. "The Family Life Cycle: Internal Dynamics and Social Consequences." Sociology and Social Research. Vol. 57, No. 2, Jan. 1973, pp. 141-149.
- Hafstrom, J. L., and Dunsing, M. D. "Satisfaction and Education: A New Approach to Understanding Consumption Patterns." , Vol. 1, No. 1, Sep 1972, pp. 4 -12.
- Harmon-Jones, E., and J. Mills (Eds.) Cognitive dissonance: Progress on a pivotal Theory in social psychology. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999.
- Harrell, G. Consumer behavior. NY, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986.
- Harrington, M. The other America. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1971.
- Henri, R. The art spirit. NY, NY: Basic Books, 2007.
- Hollingshead, A. B. Elmtown's youth. NY, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1949.
- Houle, C. O. The inquiring mind: A study of the adult who continues to learn. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1961.
- Horton, M. Unearthing Seeds of Fire: The Idea of Highlander. Winston-Salem, NC. J. F. Blair, 1975.
- James, W. The varieties of religious experience. NY, NY: Longman, and Green, 1929.
- Kidder, T. The soul of a new machine. NY, NY: Little Brown and Company, 1981.
- Lewin, K. A dynamic theory of personality: Selected papers. NY, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1935.
- Loudon, D. L., and Della Bitta, A. J. Consumer behavior: Concepts and applications. NY, NY: McGraw-Hill. 1988.
- Lown, J. M. "Family Financial Well-being: Guidance from Research." Journal of Home Economics, Vol. 78, No. 4, Winter, 1986, pp. 5-8.
- Maslow, A. H. Religions, values, and peak-experiences. NY, NY: Penguin Press, 1976.
- Mey, H. Field-theory: A Study of its Application in the Social Sciences. NY, NY: St. Martins Press, 1972.

- Mooney, C. F. Teilhard de Chardin and the mystery of Christ. NY, NY: Harper and Row, 1964.
- Moreno, J. Who shall survive: Foundations of Sociometry, Group Psychotherapy and Sociodrama. NY, NY: Beacon House, 1953.
- Moschis, G. P. "Consumer Behavior in Later Life: Multidisciplinary Contributions And Implications for Research." Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Vol. 22, No. 3, Summer, 1994, pp. 105-204.
- Otnes, P. The sociology of consumption: An anthology. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International. 1988.
- O'Shaughnessy, J. Why people buy. NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Penland, P. Self-planned learning in America. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 1977.
- Perinbanayagam, R. S. Signifying acts: Structure and meaning in everyday life. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985.
- Rogers, E. N. and F. F. Shoemaker. Communication of Innovations. NY, NY: Free Press, 1971.
- Said, E. W. Reflections on exile and other essays. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Schaie, K. W. & Willis, S. L. Life-span development: Implications for education. In L. S. Shulman (Ed.), Review of Research in Education (Vol. 6.) Itsaca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1979.
- Shirk, J. C. Relevance Attributed to Urban Public Libraries by Adult Learners: A Case Study and Content Analysis of 81 Interviews. University Microfilms, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The invisible network of learning in a small community (a brief comparative analysis of two adult learning studies). ERIC ED259094, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The adult learner: A sociopsychological perspective and vignettes. ERIC ED405456. 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The costs and benefits of lifelong learning: Consumer behavior. ERIC ED419078, 1998.
- Speaight, R. The Life of Teilhard de Chardin. NY, NY: Harper and Row, 1967.
- Teilhard de Chardin, P. Letters from a Traveler. NY, NY: Harper & Row, 1962.

Thibaut, J. W. and Kelley, H. H, The Social Psychology of Groups (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).  
New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991.

Thoreau, H. D. Walden. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Tillich, P. Dynamics of Faith. NY, NY: Perennial Classics, 2001.

Tough, A. The adult's learning projects. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for  
for Studies in Education, 1971.

Wheelan, S. A., Pepitone, E. A. and Abt, V. Advances in field theory. Newberry Park,  
CA: Sage Publications, 1990.

## VITAE FOR JOHN C. SHIRK, EdD

Permanent Address: 5934 Par Four Drive, Houston, TX 77088  
 Telephone: 281-931-6879; E-mail: [johncshirk@yahoo.com](mailto:johncshirk@yahoo.com)

Record of Employment:

2003-2005 AmeriCorps, Community librarian, Minneapolis, community program development  
 2001-2003 Minneapolis Public Library, substitute librarian  
 1998-2001 Peace Corps, Morocco, English library, University Moulay Ismail, Meknes  
 1987-1998 North Central University, Minneapolis, MN, Director of libraries  
 1984-1987 Alice Independent School District, Alice, TX, Director of libraries  
 1979-1983 Doctoral studies, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX  
 1973-1980 Houston Public Library, Houston, TX: Branch manager  
 1968-1972 United Methodist Church, Seattle, WA, Local clergy  
 1958-1966 U.S. Navy, YN2, USS Intrepid CVA-11; EOD school staff; NRTC, NYC, NY

Education:

1979-1983 Texas A&M University, College Station, TX: EdD  
 1972-1973 Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY: MSLS  
 1966-1968 Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX: BD (MDiv)  
 1962-1965 New York University, New York, NY: MA  
 1953-1957 Central Bible Institute, Springfield, MO: BA

Selected Publications:

Why do people do what they do? Lifelong learning and consumer behavior, VISTA, 2004  
 The costs and benefits of lifelong learning: Consumer behavior, ERIC, 1998  
 The adult learner: A sociopsychological perspective, ERIC, 1996  
 Lifelong learning in Livingston, Montana in Center for Adult Learning Research, Montana State University, Bozeman MT, June 1990  
 Lifelong learning and public library use, four case studies, RQ, 1986  
 The invisible network of learning in a small community, ERIC, 1984  
 The relevance of urban libraries to adult learners, Southeastern Librarian, 1984  
 Relevance attributed to urban public libraries by adult learners, UMI Microfilm, 1984  
 Public librarians look at Community Education, School Media Quarterly Vol. 7 No. 1 Fall 1978  
 Introduction to strategy for change: The librarian as change agent, Public Libraries, V 17, No. 1, 1978

Community Training Programs

2005 Houston Area Women's Center Volunteer Training Course

Volunteer

2005-2009 Shearn Elementary School, HISD 13 Classes, Mondays-Tuesdays, 200 students  
 2005-2009 Houston Area Women's Center Hotline, 3 hrs per week

Personal Interests: U.S. and World Religions; Artist (watercolors, oils, lithographs)

References:

Roy Woodstrom, Community Librarian, 347 E. 36<sup>th</sup> St., Minneapolis, MN 55408, Tel. 612 6306951  
 Stephen L. Stark, PhD, Texas A&M University, e-mail address: [sstark@tamu.edu](mailto:sstark@tamu.edu)  
 Robert Fellenz, PhD, 8006 Indian Paintbrush Tr., Bozeman, MT 59715

## **AN ADULT LEARNER INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT**

### **PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT**

**I want to tell you more about the interview. I am trying to develop a profile of what and how adults have been learning in \_\_\_\_\_ and the economic costs/benefits related to what has been learned.**

**All information shared by you will be held in strictest confidence—names and addresses will not be asked.**

**You will be asked a series of questions related to recalling any projects, events, or experiences that occurred in your life in the past twelve months that were new to you and that resulted in your learning something new. Did you try to do or make something that you never tried before?**

**I do set some conditions on learning something new:**

- a. It should be a deliberate attempt to learn or try to accomplish something new even if it was unplanned or unexpected;**
- b. It must involve a minimum of seven hours of your time;**
- c. It may include anything from making sense out of your life, building or repairing something, personal development, related to your employment, hobby, religion, family, sports, health, travel, formal education, etc.**

- d. It may have been started for and by yourself and you may have had help from others.

**Do you understand what I mean when I talk about learning something new?**

**Yes \_\_\_.** Proceed to question #1

**No \_\_\_.** Simplify concepts to the level of the respondent's understanding. If NO persists proceed to Question #3 and complete the interview.

### **QUESTION #1**

**From what I have said about learning something new can you think of anything in which you made an effort to do or learn something new in the past twelve months?**

**Yes \_\_\_.** Proceed to question #2

**No \_\_\_.** Proceed to question #3

### **QUESTION #2**

**A. Estimate the number of hours spent working on each new activity.**

**B. What was the name of that project or activity?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_.

**C. Identify resources you used while working on your projects (select from the following):**

- |                                   |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| a. Myself                         | j. Physician      |
| b. Family                         | k. Employer       |
| c. Books, magazines (your own)    | l. Paid teacher   |
| d. Books, magazines from a friend | m. Librarian      |
| e. Books, magazines (library)     | n. Businessperson |
| f. Radio, TV, newspapers          | o. Politician     |
| g. Friend                         | p. Internet       |
| h. Informal group                 | q. Other          |
| i. Clergyperson                   |                   |

**D. Rate your satisfaction with each resource using a scale from 1-5:**

**Rate (1) No satisfaction (2) (3) (4) (5) Major satisfaction**

**Example:**

1. Build a cabinet (a – 3)\_\_\_\_\_.
2. New job (a – 3) (k – 4) (g – 4) (l – 5)\_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_.

**E. Why did you try to learn something new in the past twelve months?**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5

**F. Degree of difficulty: How difficult was this project for you?**

**Rate from (1) No difficulty 2) (3) (4) (5) Major difficulty**

**Project 1, explain**

**Project 2**

**Project 3**

**Project 4**

**G. If you had problems doing something new how did you try to solve them?**

**Project 1**

**Project 2**

**Project 3**

**Project 4**

**H. Life change. Did this project change anything about you?**

**Rate the impact this project had on your life using a scale from 1 – 5**

**Rate (1) No change (2) (3) (4) (5) Major change**

**Project 1**

**Project 2**

**Project 3**

**Project 4**

**I. Economic costs/benefits**

**Did you incur any financial expenses or benefits while learning something new in the past twelve months? Estimate your economic costs including materials, travel, etc. Estimate your economic bebenefits, i.e., pay raises, selling something, saving money by doing something yourself, etc**

**Project 1      Economic costs      Economic benefits**

**Project 2      Costs      Benefits**





**QUESTION #6**

How many information resources do you own or subscribe to?

Books    Radios    TVs    Computers    Magazines    Newspapers

\_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION #7**

How many years of formal education have you completed? \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION #8**

What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION #9**

What is your housing status? Own \_\_\_\_\_ Rent \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION #10**

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION #11**

What is your family status?

Single \_\_\_\_\_ Married \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_\_ Significant other \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for participating in this Lifelong Learning Assessment.**