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Meghann McNiff

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CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING REFLECTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE IN  
CAREER CHANGING

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

MEGHANN E. MCNIFF

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

June 2005

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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Approved as to style and content by:

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## ABSTRACT

### CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING REFLECTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE IN CAREER CHANGING

June 2005

Meghann E. McNiff, B.S., United States Air Force Academy  
M.A., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Associate Professor Nina Greenwald

I came to the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) program to figure out what I want to do when I grow up. I had been in the military for eight years and felt unhappy and unfulfilled. In the CCT program I found a safe place to speak from my heart. I found support to share my questions, inspiration to try new ideas, and the guidance and knowledge to formulate a product. Thinking critically has disciplined my creative process, and taught me how to make use of my creative thinking.

Through the application of reflective tools to think about my own thinking, I realized that the choice I made to enter the military was not as much mine as it was living up to the expectations of others. Tools such as drawing the problem, thinking in opposition and an awareness of cognitive psychology helped me to become conscious of more than what I want to do when I grow up, but who I want to be now. Such tools helped me to understand that I was not stuck in my job because of my commitment to the military, financial constraints, or any other external factor. Rather, I was trapped by perceived social expectations that I placed on myself.

In this personal narrative I describe the journey of getting out of my own way to first discover and then live according to my values, with creative integrity, as a person who aspires to

effectively put her talents and passions to use in the service of community. I share the lessons of my explorations in the hope that others will be inspired to think deeply about their own purpose in life and translate this into practice. I believe that we each have unique dreams, desires, goals, and values; some not realized, some not yet verbalized. Through strategic critical and creative thinking about who we are now, and wish to become, it is possible to transform one's self-understanding and life as I have experienced and wish to convey to others.

I have come to understand that to create lasting change one must first change the way one thinks. This synthesis is my story of changing the way I think in order to create lasting change in my career, and in my life.

## DEDICATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Peter Taylor: I heard you, I just didn't get it. Your words come back to me at the strangest times. Weeks and years after you said them. And sometimes, if I'm lucky, I get it. Thank you for that.

To Nina Greenwald: Thank you for investigating me with your Why-Why & *What* questioning, for helping me to get to the heart of matters, and to figure out why on Earth I am on the elephant.

To The CCT Program: Thank you for fighting to stay alive. It is amazing what you do.

This synthesis is dedicated to my parents, Tom and Sheila McNiff.

Mom, Thank you for always being a Superhero.

Dad, Thanks for the game plan, for the endless love, and for the wings...

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR AND CCT

The Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) graduate program at the University of Massachusetts in Boston trains its students to be reflective agents of change in their world. My reflective practice began three years ago when I entered the CCT program. As an officer in the Air Force it was highly encouraged that I get a master's degree. I chose CCT because it was by far the most intriguing graduate program I could find. I had recently been transferred to Boston from Italy after deciding not to be a pilot. I wanted to serve in the Peace Corps, but owed four more years on my active duty commitment to the Air Force. I set out instead to become a reflective agent of change! At the time I had not the slightest idea what that meant, but I was excited to find out.

Now, imagine if you will, twelve young officers sitting around a large oak table with a Colonel at the head. The Colonel is leading a mentoring session, sharing lessons from his career progression and guidance to further our development. He says that he wants to help us make all the right moves to ensure that we 'make rank'.

"Where are you with your educational development?" he asks.

I am filled with dread as we go around the room, "Sir, I am finishing my MBA, Sir, I am finishing my MBA, Sir, I have a masters in applied mathematics, Sir, I have recently started an MBA in engineering management, Sir, I am finishing my degree in electrical engineering management, Sir, I am starting my MA in Critical and Creative Thinking."

Screech!

The record playing in the background, "One of these kids is not like the others" (a song from the popular children's show "Sesame Street") comes to a halt. All eyes are on the Colonel

to see his reaction. He nods his head and remarks, “That’s interesting. I took a class in creativity once.” What I hear is, “McNiff is getting a degree in underwater basket-weaving. Who let that happen?”

In this culture anything other than management or engineering is considered fuzzy, and commonly labeled ‘underwater basket weaving.’ This environment is extremely competitive, and the pedigree of education is a distinguishing factor for promotion. Admitting that I am earning a degree in Critical and Creative Thinking felt like a risk because a Masters of Arts is so far outside of my expected career track. I was actually worried that once my commander knew what degree I was getting, he would make me stop or at the very least take away my military tuition assistance. This paper describes the evolution of my thinking from this first bashful announcement to taking my self seriously as a creative practitioner.

This synthesis is an occasion to think deeply and reflect on my practice. As such, this paper is told in my voice and I have chosen to tell stories. Some of the stories you will read are metaphorical and some personal accounts, but the purpose of each is to show my acquisition of CCT thinking skills. I believe that we can all benefit from thinking more critically and creatively and I will advocate for the power of integrating oppositional thinking, problem finding, and an awareness of self-talk.

The first moment my thinking began to change I was sitting on the front seat of a small jet on my way to New York for a meeting. As part of my job with the Air Force, I travel frequently. As a result, I have come to value my time on airplanes because by virtue of my distance from the earth, I am free of any and all responsibilities. Flying is my time to reflect and prepare. It was in this treasured time of solitude that I was exposed to my first graduate reading assignment for the CCT program, *Uncommon Genius* by Denise Shekerjian (1990). In *Uncommon Genius*, Shekerjian explores the creative impulse by investigating and reporting the story of forty MacArthur Award winners. There are no applications allowed and no strings attached to acceptance of this award. It is given completely by surprise in, “encouragement and recognition of your creative capabilities” (Shekerjian, 1990, p. xi). The winners are awarded

anywhere from thirty to seventy thousand dollars a year for five years (some for the rest of their lives), to afford the MacArthur Award winner the financial freedom to continue in their creative pursuits.

Thus began my introduction to an amazing new world of exploring creativity! With my hands on this unbelievable world where people are secretly awarded money for being amazingly creative, I rested my head back and stared out the window and allowed my most secret dreams to be free. I imagined myself living a career of my creative pursuits. Arriving back on earth, I got my bag and sleepily walked to my rental car. I found myself shaking my head and thinking, “Could that be for real, do people really do that? Just be really creative and get paid for it? Could I do that?”

During my time in the CCT program, I witnessed my classmates not only dancing to a different drummer, but creating their own rhythm. This experience was in direct contrast to my own life in the military. I realized that I have internalized an approved and unapproved list of what adults can and cannot do with their lives. Experiencing these paths in opposition made it clear to me that I am not doing what I want to do with my life. I realized that I do not have to continue marching to the prescribed beat of a drummer that is most surely not my own.

I am leaving the Air force in May. Chapter Two uses metaphorical stories to explain my decision to make a career move and, more importantly, to take my life and work seriously. This chapter includes narratives of crucial steps of this change and research that has given me the courage to do so. Readings used in the CCT coursework describe the process of creativity and harnessing the power to create. Such readings as: *Dialogue and The Art of Thinking Together* (Isaacs, 1999); *Barriers, Blocks, and Squelchers: Why we Are Not More Creative* (Davis, 1992); *Creativity Across Cultures* (Lubart, 1999); *How Social Conditions Affect Creativity* (Bond, 1990); and *Implications of a Systems Perspective for the Study of Creativity* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), helped prepare me for taking the risk to leave the Air Force, to practice non-judgment with my ideas for creating my future, and to be okay with the ambiguity of my situation as I

move forward. Understanding the elements of creativity has helped prepare me to accept the risk of making a major career change.

At UMass Boston I have been encouraged to take risks. I have practiced thinking on my own, rather than according to an authoritative model. I have developed skills to identify problems and now have resources to solve them. One such problem was the tension between my structured military life and my oppressed creative unction. It is said that, “Genuine knowledge of others (persons, objects, or events) requires self-knowledge, a state that can only arise as the result of self-reflection” (Phelan, Garrison p. 86). At this point in my integration of CCT thinking strategies, I was emotionally able to begin using my reflective skills to understand: What drew me to the Air Force? Why am I unhappy? What do I want to change? What do I want to take with me from this experience?

Such questioning led to my discovery that I had not yet begun to work on resolving the tensions in my thinking to reach resolution. Instead I was desperately looking to one day ‘lay’ something wonderful, a Golden Egg of the highest creative worth that would mystically change everything rather than doing the work to reach resolution and create my life as I would like it to be. This section of chapter two is supported by research I have come to value in the field of creating a life of one’s own: *The Artist’s Way* (Cameron, 2002); *What Should I Do With My Life?* (Bronson, 2002); and *The Secrets of the Young and Successful* (Kushell, 2003).

In thinking deeply about these tensions I also began to explore my relationship with my father as the guiding authority in my life finding my own voice and taking my voice seriously. Chapter Three is inspired by research related to and surrounding *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2000), and supported by Robert Fritz’s *Path of Least Resistance* (Fritz, 1989) and lessons from my CCT course work from “Creativity in Literature and the Arts.” In this chapter, I explain the unraveling tensions in my thinking and my realization that I am an expert at thinking according to an authoritative model, and a novice of metacognition: thinking about my own thinking. I will explain the elements of the creative process as I have come to understand it as well as my process of becoming conscious to the power of labels and self-talk. I will describe

how I discovered what I wanted to create, the elements of my product, and how I learned to apply this process to finding a career.

I will conclude this adventure in career change by describing my future directions and the tools and resources that helped me define my purpose. In Chapter Four, I will break down the tools that I have used along this journey. Chapter Four is supported by the seminars: “Increasing Human Effectiveness” (Moawad & Edge Learning Institute 2004); “How purpose Affects Motivation in Yourself and Others” (Leider & The Inventure Group 2004); “The Keirsey four Types Sorter” (Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, 1998); “Psychological Assessment Resources: A Guide to Educational and Career Planning” (Holland, 1994); “Whole Brain Thinking: What you don’t know CAN hurt you” (Hermann International, 2005).

Throughout these years of searching for a new career, I have discovered that many of us are unfulfilled in our careers. Many of us have secret desires, some not yet realized, and some not yet vocalized. At social gatherings rather than the obligatory, “So what do you do?” I find myself asking questions like, “What is your thing?” “Where do you lose time?” I adore such conversations, and in that spirit I have included addendum #4: A conversational literature review that is written in a manner as if we are talking about career change over a coffee or a beer.

In the past several years, I have also had the opportunity to experience the lives of amazing, inspiring, and life changing mentors and leaders. I was compelled to interview these people. Their presence in my life changed me in a way that I reflect on often and am grateful for. I interviewed them to learn more, explicitly, about who they are and why. Addendum #2 summarizes these interviews to share their story.

Entering the CCT program was a risk because I stepped out of my comfort zone. Through this program I have changed the way I think and have become the conscious agent of change in my life. I believe that the CCT program changes lives. I feel changed, and this is my story. I hope you like it. I hope you hear yourself in my words, and open yourself up to unlocking the tensions in your life. I hope that this is a story that changes lives, or at least your life.

Allow me to begin by explaining my interpretation of the CCT program, becoming a reflective agent of change, and attempt to identify what we CCT'ers do with this degree.

### **What is CCT?**

Have you ever had a really great idea or question? Have you ever shared an idea before it was fully worked out or formulated into a product? I have. One day I found myself stuck while deeply pondering a meaningful philosophical issue. I decided to share my thoughts on the subject with my roommate because he is a smart guy. I thought that perhaps together we could make some progress towards resolution! I walked to the kitchen where he was preparing to eat his dinner and strategically posed my question so as to best set up the discussion.

Sheepishly I asked, "Shaun, why do Spanish dogs say 'guaw guaw', while English dogs say 'woof woof'?"

Out of the corner of my eye I watched in horror, unable to react quickly enough, as he morphed into a three-foot tall daemon with red eyes and horns wearing black leather and a spiked collar. In one fell swoop he had jumped up onto the counter pulled a two foot tall mallet from behind his back and smashed my question, as it was still on my tongue. Perhaps it wasn't really that bad, but it felt like it. In reality, Shaun laughed so hard that rice actually came out of his nose.

I stood there, stunned, scared, and hurt. My thoughts had been crushed into a nearly unrecognizable form. Recovering as quickly as possible, I played along and pretended my question was a joke. We had a good laugh and finished our dinner. I am not sure why, but ever since then when I try to share novel and silly ideas at work, my tongue swells up.

For me, the Critical and Creative Thinking program has been a safe place to speak from my heart. In my first class as in the program an artist friend shared with me that when she shows her work, it feels as if she is naked. I have never lost the image of standing naked in a room full of people that are critiquing my body. At the time, I could not empathize with that feeling because before entering the CCT program I had never taken the risk to show my work.

In the CCT program, I have learned that by having a safe place to share my intimate

ideas, I can work them into a final product that is durable enough for the rest of the world to see. It feels as if we are in an invisible container in the CCT program. In this container I feel safe to think, to be, to learn, to grow; to be guided, led and inspired to face ambiguity safely. It is in this space that the CCT program trains its students to be reflective agents of change in their world. I believe my classmates in the CCT program genuinely want to make the world a better place. Furthermore, I believe we are drawn to CCT in search of a white canvas and a place to learn how to create our products towards that end. I believe that it is the ambiguity of 'What is CCT' that draws us because in that space there is room to create our own special change.

CCT course work is loosely divided into: a) classes with a creative focus and b) classes with a critical focus; and each offer a base of knowledge from which each student is required to produce a product that reflects both their critical appropriation of the material and their own personal niche or professional pursuits. For example, in "Biology in Society" students are presented with current social issues surrounding Biology. One student chose to research and understand the theory of intelligent design in its full context. Another student began research for fiction targeted at female seventh grade science students. I researched hormones in women's lives and attempted a holistic review of the current research surrounding hormones, their function and treatment, in the United States. Each of these final papers integrated the critical thinking skills necessary to produce a persuasive argument.

In my creative classes, I did things I have always wanted to do! I took myself on dates, began practicing yoga and participating in outdoor adventure trips. I made a photograph and oil painting I had been thinking about for two years. I wrote an essay about 9/11 in response to a falling and forgotten "America Will Never Forget" sign I had driven by every day for a year. Participating with an invention group in creative class, I began to tackle a solution for females to go to the bathroom while flying the F-16 aircraft. My CCT instructor was able to connect me with a local invention group currently working on this issue, and I was able to connect the invention group with the Air Force Chief of flight medicine safety and human performance.

In "Creativity in the Arts and Literature," one of my classmates started an on-line literary

review, another produced a portfolio of photos capturing the essence of femininity, another planned for her dream of creating a camp for inner city kids on her family land in upstate New York, another created a place for women to commune and do crafts, and yet another interviewed her elderly parents and produced a book of their lives. I produced a fun book about food, my personal review of eating out in Boston. Each of these diverse and challenging products integrated the creative thinking skills necessary to take the risk of sharing from our deepest passions, being okay with the ambiguity along the process, knowing the elements of our product and mastering them into a novel and useful expression.

In each class of CCT we are challenged by different aspects of both critical and creative thought. Each class culminates in a product that is an expression of how this lesson expanded our thinking on an issue that matters to us. The change in thinking surrounding the issue is a product of change, and the product advocates for change.

In CCT, I found support to share my questions, inspiration to try new ideas, and the guidance and knowledge to formulate a product from my heart. In CCT, I found friends I will keep forever, and witnessed creative courage I will never forget. The experience is certainly different for each of us, but this is my personal snap shot of 'What is CCT'.

### **What is meant by Reflective Agent of Change?**

My work-in-progress definition of my reflective practice is “to admit where I am and know that it will change.” Admitting where I am requires the courage to share an unfinished, unpolished, uncensored thought. Sharing raw ideas is an emotional risk, but knowing that where I am now will change enables me to be okay with the ambiguity of how and when it will change. Knowing that it will change gives me the hope and purpose to continue moving forward. I have learned that I need to share where I am now, in order to get where I want to go.

Being a reflective practitioner requires an understanding of where I am beginning, where I am at each step of the journey, and most importantly, of where I want to go and what I want to create. It took me two years in the program to accept this process (explained in detail in chapter Two). It appears so simple, but when I tried this process out on my five-year-old niece I

understood why it had been so difficult for me to grasp.

We were creating Indian costumes by painting and decorating T-shirts. I suggested that we draw the shape of the T-shirt on a scrap piece of paper and then fill in what we want it to look like when we were done. Giving into my wishes, she tried it out. After a little bit, she turned to me, frowning in discomfort, and said, “There isn’t enough room for all of my ideas.”

I had never felt such empathy in my life. Nearing the end of my CCT journey I was having trouble defining my own questions, defining my scope, and turning my research projects into meaningful papers. I understand now that I am an existential thinker. As such, I like to think things through to the root, to consider the life and death consequences of everything, and I enjoy making connections to everything.

These connections are often novel, and I think very interesting, but useless unless I can rope them into a product. I actually felt guilty narrowing my focus to meet a deadline, as if I was somehow compromising my idea. I had not realized that this process of not producing a manageable and useful product I was forgoing purpose. In his article “Creativity Across Cultures,” Todd I. Lubart (1999) notes that, “Creativity from a Western perspective can be defined as the ability to produce work that is novel and appropriate” (p. 339) I was not recognizing my audience and sharing my ideas in appropriately. Like my niece, there was not enough room in the semester for all of my ideas. I felt like a tree falling in the woods, I kept trying to fall harder and louder, but no one could hear me.

By integrating critical thinking skills, I am learning to make use of my creative thoughts. By reflecting on my creative process, by admitting where I am, and by identifying what I want to change, I am a reflective agent of change. There is more, so much more (Addendum #1 REFLECTIVE PRACTICE) to be said of reflective practice, but my work-in-progress summation is that a reflective practice helps us know what we want to create, and to create it.

### **What does one *do* with a CCT degree?**

My classmates include: a cartoonist; a massage therapist; a philosopher; a cinematographer; a designer; musicians; teachers at all levels of education; nurses; mothers and

fathers. Each is a reflective agent of change. Whenever I am asked what I will do with my degree, I am not sure if I should answer “nothing” or if I should answer “everything.”

I did not set out to get a job with this degree. I wanted to be in the program to learn. So this is it. I am doing what we do with a degree in CCT. I feel unstuck. In my observation, an unspoken and immeasurable graduation requirement is to unstick oneself. For me, being unstuck means claiming my power to create, moving forward to live out my dreams and passions, to know and respect my talents, and to use my talents in the benefit of my community and my world. CCT graduates are trained to be conscious and reflective agents of change and to prevent the world around us from becoming stuck.

### **Summation**

I have claimed my power to create. I am making conscious and reflective changes in Meghann McNiff. These changes are exposing and aligning myself with my authentic purpose. I often ask questions like: Why are we here? What is the point? What will I have been most proud to have done at the end of my life? Likewise, I began this adventure in career changing because I believed, “We want to feel we were put here on Earth for some special purpose, to do some work that only we can accomplish” (Bolles, 2004, p. 309).

I do not believe we each have just one purpose in life, but I do believe that we should each have goals, and choose to live purposefully. In my studies in the CCT program, I found myself searching, and in the end purposefully, for a lifestyle and a career that allow me to live according to my values, to accomplish my life goals, and to fulfill my deepest desires. And this is my synthesized story of finding it.

It is my intention that this product, this paper synthesizing my development as a creative practitioner, be a reflection of my integration of CCT thinking skills. I will not reveal what I uncovered in this adventure in career changing until this thesis’ final conclusion because my future directions are secondary to how I discovered them. I want to lead you through my journey of finding my purpose, and in chapter four attempt to teach you how to do the same.

## Chapter 2

### COMING INTO ALIGNMENT WITH CCT THINKING

I realized a shift in my thinking was necessary after my fourth semester in CCT while studying the phases of research and development in Practicum class. I was extremely frustrated with my Practicum process and disappointed with my product. I felt as if I were zooming along the program at 60 miles per hour and my engine seized. In retrospect, I recognize that this was by far my most valuable semester in the program because I did the work to orient myself as a CCT student and began to take myself and my work seriously.

I began my Practicum project wanting to study American Indians and the loss of their culture. I had recently returned from a kayaking trip in North Bay, Ontario and was reading about fur trading and the French Indian wars. I was both interested and horrified how an entire culture could be transformed and/or lost by the introduction of foreign elements (lifestyles, food, mentality, etc.).

Shortly after beginning my research I realized how this topic relates to my culture at work. As an acquisition officer that works very closely with corporate America to acquire our war-fighting capabilities, I witness the loss of our military culture first hand. Compared to our fighter pilot peers we are at the low end of the totem pole. We aren't even the towel boy to the quarterback. We make the towels for the towel boy. The loss of culture and a general feeling of separateness from the military mission of war-fighting significantly contribute to the low morale and low retention rates of young officers in my career field (Reynolds, 2004). For these reasons I decided that while my American Indian study was interesting and applies to my aspirations of international development and service in the Peace Corps, studying the loss of culture and low morale in young officers in the acquisitions career field more directly served my current reality.

After my mid-semester work in-progress presentation on this topic, in which students present the status of their project and receive feedback from the class in the form of written notes with the topics: I Heard, I Appreciated, and Areas I See for Improvement, it became evident to me that I was not performing research or advocating for change. I was venting and looking to validate my feelings of anger and bitterness towards my working situation. This valuable feedback prompted me to question, yet again, “What do I really want to create with this project?”

In studying the phases of research and development, CCT students are encouraged to use their initial statement or question to drive the boat of their project, to use this question as the guiding force, to maintain track and purpose. Further, to always consider, “Where am I in this project? Why am I doing this research? How do I relate to this change I am advocating for?” Such questioning drove me to the heart of matters. My final guiding statement ended up as, “Jobs, careers and things that we do; how do these choices affect our creative contributions, self fulfillment and general life happiness? Evaluating the current situation of Meghann McNiff, how she got to where she is and how she can honor her talents, dreams, and desires to contribute to her world in a way that is satisfying to her spirit” (McNiff, 2004). In finally getting to the heart of the change I wanted to advocate for, I found I was just beginning to understand the creative process and reflective practice.

I began my research by interviewing influential people in my life, people whose lives had a major impact on me that I wanted to emulate to learn more about (Addendum #2), and I dug into career changing resource material (Addendum #3); but found advocating for change in my life and in my career was difficult. I just couldn’t seem to make sense of it all. Not until I accepted that I was stuck in tension with myself did I begin to make sincere progress in my reflective practice: I was in tension of living in the Air Force and not wanting to be in the Air Force; of wanting the influential power and social status that came with my career, and wanting to be jobless and free.

I was also experiencing tensions in my CCT process of wanting to produce a magnificent

creative product and not yet knowing how to do so. In *Enhancing Creativity*, Raymond S. Nickerson defines creativity as being, “typically defined in terms of the results of activity...novelty is often cited as one of [the] distinctive characteristics, and some form of utility – usefulness, appropriateness, or social value.” Thus far in my creative process, I find my most useful and appropriate ideas with social value by exploring the tensions in my voice.

For example, I began this adventure in career change filled with dread and a clear picture of what I did not want in a new career...

### **Story #1: The Interview**

*Welcome Captain McNiff, your resume is quite impressive! I see you have done a lot of things that our business deems to be worthy and certainly worth paying you oodles of square decimal dollars for. Yes, yes indeed! You have shined your shoes for, well yes that is impressive, nine years! Well done. Also I see that you stood at attention and yelled back and forth with people for a year and a half! And you marched to breakfast and lunch, and sometimes just for display on Saturdays. I'll be. While these actual skills will never, ever, ever, never be ever actually used in any form in our corporation, the key is that you learned to dismiss being miserable and continue to follow along with the group. Our company really values these skills. Oh, I'm sorry Captain McNiff. You look like you'd like to add something?*

“Well, please understand that what I value most from this experience was witnessing people—the men and women I experienced the Air Force Academy with—in their full context. I enjoyed the teamwork, and the adventure. I was drawn to the military for the adventure of traveling the world, learning to survive in the woods, and jumping out of airplanes. What I have taken from this experience is learning to push myself to my limit. The friendships that I formed in such an invigorating environment...”

*Yes, of course we understand. Yes of course, but what we are really impressed with is this beautiful piece of paper that we can hang on our wall. Also, it looks very good for our organization to have a female that has previous military experience and a degree from the Air Force Academy. You see, in these trying times following the war and with the threat of*

*terrorism, and not to mention the rise of women in leadership positions in the fortune 500 companies, your credentials will really boost our company numbers. So if you will just set your things in that little box over there, show up on time, look nice in that suit, answer and push along the five thousand emails we send you every day, all of this will work out just fine. We will pay you, invest in you, handle your retirement package, raise your children, and yes, we will also chew your food, twice a day.*

### **Narrative: Oppositional Thinking**

This interview story is an example of oppositional thinking as I have understood it by exploring the tensions in my voice. As my emotional reaction to my working environment and stressful lifestyle increased I wanted out of my cubicle immediately. My life felt too fast, like a runaway train, and I wanted off! I wanted to move on, but could not figure out where to move. My career in the Air Force felt void of my personality, as if I were a puppet. I developed a relationship with my job in which the act of putting on my uniform felt as if I were slipping into character, a character that I did not like. I was angry, uncomfortable and unhappy.

I feared that even getting out of the Air Force was not enough, if I didn't make a major change, I would get stuck. By allowing my creative nature to run free and express the extent of my bitterness of feeling constricted, I was able to see how extreme and reactive my feelings were and attempt to come into alignment with reality and CCT thinking.

The tool I used in the interview story is two-fold. I used my creative writing as an outlet to express and identify my feelings, and my critical thinking skills to begin resolving the tensions in my extreme thinking by viewing them in opposition. Viewing my tension between a) abandoning my current career as completely as possible and becoming a bum on the street or b) getting stuck forever in the military as cubicle dweller, helps me to find c) reality between these two extremes:

a) Bum on the Street-----c)Reality-----b) Military Cubicle Dweller

The reality is that I do have a great resume and being a female Captain in the Air Force is impressive. The reality is also that I do not want to work in a cubicle building PowerPoint presentations and feeding the machine of Big Business for the rest of my life. Okay. Breaking down this tension and viewing my feelings in opposition helped me to recognize a rational understanding of my situation. I have had a lot of great experiences, some that I loved and some that were less than pleasant, and all of these experiences can help me move in the direction I want to go professionally.

Oppositional thinking and exploring the tension between my reactive emotional response to my less than optimal working situation has helped me to not throw myself out with the bath water, or the career I have worked very hard at for the last nine years. Resolving this tension in my thinking was an unbelievable relief that propelled me towards an understanding of my creative process, to knowing what I want to create and claiming my power to create it. I was learning to rope my ideas into a useful product. It was at this point in my process that I realized, quite simply, that I had out-grown my current job. Okay. I was now ready to ask, ‘How do I get a new one?’

Richard Bolles (2004), author of the wildly successful ‘career changers Bible’ *What Color is Your Parachute* told me—his enthralled reader snuggled safely in my community coffee shop—to work in a job where I like the words they use. Staring at the wall and flashing in my mind the words used at work actually caused me to itch and squirm in my seat and made my stomach tighten. Instantly I realized, no wonder I do not like my job! I manage a sensor upgrade program to the Identification Friend or Foe radar interrogation system of the Airborne Early Warning and Control System (AWACS) of the E-3 aircraft. This job involves a lot of talking about sensors and I do not like sensors. I am not an engineer. Not only do I not understand sensors, but I do not even like talking about them.

I have always known that some of the business practices of the military acquisition process are extremely inefficient and frustrating, but I never had a language to express why it took so much energy for me to do my job. If I had to battle this same system using words like:

hiking, climbing, running, women, nature, adventure, humor, fun, food or countless other words that I love, perhaps I would have more energy to play the game of the system?

Further exploring the power of words in creating realities I began reflecting on the term “chunking” that I learned about in Cognitive Psychology. According to the textbook *Cognition* (Matlin, 2002), chunking is defined as, “a memory organizational strategy in which several small units are combined into larger units” (p. 166). Often, ‘chunks’ of information are stored in the form of a labels or titles. Likewise when some ‘thing’ is given a title, the ‘thing’ is changed. We can observe this as simply as we observe a cloud formation. The form is meaningless until someone points out the clouds remarkable resemblance to a cow. Suddenly a cow appears, and we can no longer see the ambiguous blob we had observed earlier, and have a store house of units of data that explain the label of cow.

Similarly, my thinking about why I am unhappy in my job is less ambiguous now that I have a title for it and a language to describe it. As many CCT students are teachers, we often discuss in class that labeling can have both negative and positive results in the behavior and performance of students. Once labeled ‘smart’ or ‘stupid’ a student tends to take on the actions of their label.

I have begun to search out my labels, to become conscious of them, in order to transcend and control their effects. The words we use are the tools with which we create our reality, in *What is Literacy* James Paul Gee (1987) describes discourse as, “an identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act and talk so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize”. I believe that once I am conscious of the process and act of labeling and the power of words and language in creating and translating realities, I have the ability to transcend the limitations and enhance the benefits.

Once I am conscious of a label I can choose to accept or reject it. I can change my thinking about this label and move beyond the comfort zone of this label. The term comfort zone is perhaps misleading as it relates to my label of ‘military officer.’ I have been associated

with the military my entire life and the Air Force is what I know and what I am familiar with, but increasingly I realize that I do not want to be there and that in fact I am very uncomfortable.

This reflection of my labels was largely inspired by concepts I was introduced to by research related to and surrounding Paulo Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Specifically, the concept of cultural capital triggered my reflection; the idea that inherent to every culture is a set of ideas, concepts, knowledge, language, and cognitive styles that are held in the highest regard by the culture. For example, I grew up in a wealthy neighborhood near a large hospital. Many of the adults in my neighborhood were physicians. Medicine was a language and concept held in high regard in the culture in which I was raised. Two of my siblings are physicians one is a nurse and the other a social worker.

Exploring labels by thinking in opposition, and conscious of the concept of cultural capital I began to question if, throughout my lifetime, I had internalized approved and unapproved labels for myself. Curious, I laid them out and viewed them in opposition. The absurdity of some of the information I had stored in a few of my labels caused me to laugh out loud. Seeing them written down in black and white helped me to resolve the tension and come into reality. I develop a third column: Reality.

a) Approved Labels-----c)Reality-----b) Unapproved Labels

Before recognizing that I was trapping myself and labeling myself this way, I was constantly searching out new and better labels. I was searching for a solution, a golden label that would solve my career problems. This connection between looking beyond labels with regard to my career change, led me to a major discovery regarding my final CCT project...

### **Story #2: My Golden Egg**

It is early morning, full of possibility. The air is fresh and crisp, my mind rested and vibrant. I am peering, intently, excitedly, onto a beautiful flowing river—a river of creativity. I am awaiting my golden egg, which I know will float down the river toward me. Everyone in the

CCT program seems to have found one. Surely mine will show up here...soon. I can see them, my classmates, floating down the river, smiling and hugging their golden eggs. I watch them as they exit the river, high-five, hug, exchange solid pats on the back, and walk towards the sunset.

I begin to wonder, this is how it happens right? You come to the CCT program, move from semester to semester, do the work, and poof! You find your golden egg and live happily ever after with it, your egg, the golden one. Yet I am stuck on the river bank of creativity, peering, peering, peering, anxiously now because what do I do if I don't birth this thing, this idea, the golden one?

Product: Show change and growth

Product: Show change and growth

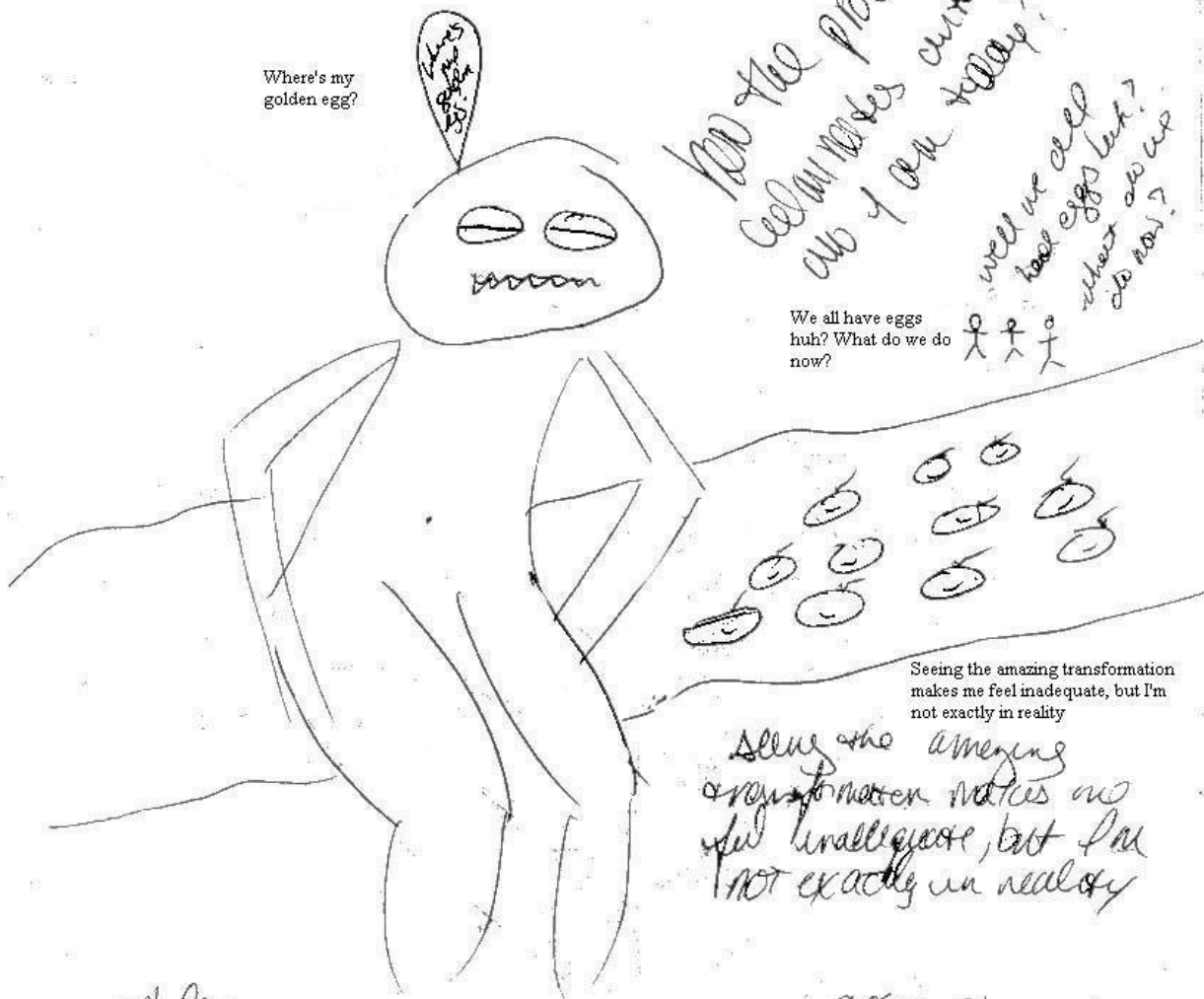
How the process culminates into who I am today?

Where's my golden egg?

How the process  
culminates into  
who I am today?

well we all  
have eggs but?  
what are we  
doing now?

We all have eggs  
huh? What do we do  
now?



Seeing the amazing transformation  
makes me feel inadequate, but I'm  
not exactly in reality

Seeing the amazing  
transformation makes me  
feel inadequate, but I'm  
not exactly in reality

problem

- Where's my egg
- How do I bring this together
- Not sure I've gathered as much info as others
- Have to put in the time to earn it [no end point]

Problem:

- Where's my egg
- How do I bring this together
- Not sure I've gathered as much info as others
- Have to put in the time to earn it [no end point]

assumptions

- I have one, ~~it~~
- Other's golden egg changed their life
- They felt like the best one
- They knew what they were doing
- I have a secret or a facade

not true!

Assumptions:

- I have one
- Other's golden egg changed their life
- They felt like they had one
- They knew what they were doing
- I have a secret or a facade
- Not True!

## **Narrative: Draw the Problem**

As I began my synthesis I employed a creative problem solving technique called “Draw the Problem” (Adams, 1979). As I drew my problem, ‘why don’t I have a final project’, I realized that I should be asking myself, ‘what is a golden egg anyway and why am I looking so intently for one?’ The purpose of this problem solving method is to define and clarify the issue. This tool helped me to get out of my head and see my problem in a still life scenario. I drew myself sitting above a river, creatively constipated, trying to birth my golden egg: a creative product that would be so magnificent it would change my life and define my future career.

I did not realize until I represented my feelings visually, shown on page 21, that I was waiting to birth a product and was completely forgoing the process of creativity. Further, I drew myself on the bank of the river and all of my classmates floating down the river and on their way into the sunset. Notice I drew them to say, “So we’ve all got eggs, huh? What do we do now?” Startled by this revelation I asked myself, “What is changed now that they have their project? So what? What is so different about them now that they have graduated?” This drawing forced me to realize that I was imagining that a ‘golden egg’ had made my classmates lives perfect. “Wow. That’s not true!” I thought to myself. Drawing my problem, drawing this silly representation of my emotions, helped me to get out of my head and see my situation more rationally.

When I began CCT, I was “interested to see where this degree leads my ambitions” (McNiff, 2002). Upon completion of my practicum I had resigned to, “honor my pull to my unique saturation point [of my unique talents and authentic values] and feel at equilibrium in my lifestyle” (McNiff, 2004). I couldn’t help but feel that I had entered into the program hoping to discover a new fantastic approved label for myself. I was disappointed with what I had discovered, but I was really disappointed with what I had not discovered.

I viewed my classmates with awe and inspiration. I felt like the blocked creative described in *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 2002) that surrounds themselves with creative writers by becoming an editor, yet hasn't found an authentic expression of their creative talent or the courage to express it. Drawing the problem helped me to recognize this situation and begin to move forward.

I felt on the brink of becoming a reflective practitioner of my world. I was becoming conscious of labels and tensions in my own thinking, but I still did not know what my end product would look like: in my career change or in my synthesis. Inspired by Peter Elbow, "A person who can live with contradiction and exploit it—who can use conflicting models—can simply see and think more" (as cited in Walters, 1994), and Emerson, "With consistency a great soul simply has nothing to do" (as cited in Walters, 1994), I continued with my adventure. I celebrated the resolutions and accepted the ambiguities.

#### **Summation:** Guiding Principles I Learned Along the Way

##### *Stay true to what is important.*

*I can do everything, and anything, but not all at once. A good friend said to me that she is a one thing at a time kind of a person. This friend has always been a role model to me because of the quality and character with which she lives her life. Saying yes to the right thing, inherently means saying no to a lot of the almost right or even the wrong things. By identifying what it is that I really want, I can set my mind to it, and prioritize my time and limited energy to getting it. Accepting this means that I will have to say no and miss out sometimes, but I can do everything. I just can not do everything at the same time. I believe that the act of consciously choosing how I spend my time and energy is extremely empowering and gives great return on developing my creative energy and lifestyle.*

##### *Live consciously.*

*To identify what is important I am working at being meta-conscious of my life. I try to regularly consciously consider how I am prioritizing my life, where I am spending my energy, and time. I have found this habit to help me consciously consider if how I am spending my time and energy matches up with my values. My lifestyle is the compilation of how I spend each hour of my day. I will never forget a preacher that used to say he makes a point to pray more hours a week than he spends golfing. Likewise, I have found my time and energy to be my most precious and valuable resources. I define myself by how I spend my time.*

##### *Use your talent wisely.*

*I believe that strength can also be a weakness. I have found that my talents can sometimes be a hindrance to spending my time on what is important. I have a talent with people and I often feel guilty not spending time with others, even when I need to take care of myself. It is imperative for me to understand my talents in order to use them as I would like to, and to protect my talents as valuable resources so that I can use them to reach my potential. When I find myself using talents in the wrong way, it does not feel good, it requires work and I am left drained and depleted. When using my talents in line with my values and interests I can feel a positive return of energy.*

*~McNiff, 2004*

## Chapter 3

### FROM SAFE LABELS TO USEFUL PRODUCTS

My father died in June of 2004, two months after I submitted my application to the Peace Corps, one year before my active duty commitment to the Air Force expired, and the day that I was promoted to the rank of Captain. My father's last gift to me, to reward my promotion, was a suitcase. On the inside he had pinned his captain's bars, his McNiff name tag, and a shiny new Peace Corps pin. To my surprise, he had taken my desire to serve in the Peace Corps seriously. This unspoken gesture felt like a gift of freedom and approval to follow my heart. This gesture spoke to me, "Go get 'em, I believe in you."

My father had plans for all of us. I catch him correcting me as I write—that he did not just have plans for all of us, he also had plans for *each* of us. I can only imagine how happy it made him that I went to the Air Force Academy and was stationed at Aviano Air Base Italy as a student pilot learning to fly an F-16. My father flew the F-4 in Vietnam and retired as a Colonel at the Pentagon where he was an acquisitions officer. Some time ago, I realized that I am living my father's career on fast forward. I have been trying to figure out who I want to be and what I want to do, but I was living my father's life. I felt tricked.

I am commonly asked, "How did you end up in the military?" My being in the military has never felt right, or apparently looked right to others that know me. After a physical training session in the summer of 2004, my boss supplied beers and snacks as a morale building event. While cleaning up, I volunteered to take the cans to be recycled. Someone piped up "don't bother, they don't give you money for them anymore." My face crumpled as I quickly retorted, "Who cares, I'm not doing it for the nickel. Do they still recycle them?" My buddy chuckled

and said, “I’m Meghann, I can be in the military,” as he enacted hammering a square peg in a round hole. This simple joke gave me validation of my suspicion that ‘This just isn’t me. I just don’t fit here.’

Before my father’s death, he resisted my desires to separate from the military. Ever the angry teenager at heart, I wanted to quit and live on the streets, out of spite of course. You know, to prove a point. ‘I’ll show him,’ I fumed. But I also wanted to live out my dream to become someone that makes a difference in our world. I really wanted to show my father that I was not just goofing off, and ruining the life he had set up for me. I wasn’t trying to take him for granted, or disrespect his advice. I desperately wanted him to believe in me, like my CCT classmates did. I was not trying to be a rebel or be different by not getting an MBA like my peers; I just did not want one. I was not trying to hurt my parents by not believing in the military, by not wanting to fly planes and drop bombs. I was not trying to tell my father that I did not respect his service in Vietnam. I was trying to make a life for myself.

Sitting in my cubicle with action items to complete, PowerPoint presentations to build, and form dd-250’s to sign, I felt lost and helpless to create such a life. Using the third party problem solving method, I attempted to gain perspective on my situation by picturing myself from the perspective of an objective observer. This plan back fired, my third party image was of sitting at my desk with a large chain around my neck, attached to a fifty pound weight, resting on the floor at such an angle that it hurts just enough to be bearable. This image reminded me of a satirical funny E-mail describing a journal of a cat. The cat began, “day 1,460 of captivity...” In opposition, my journal from a six-day kayaking trip in North Bay, Ontario, in June of 2003 read, “I felt free of my shackles today.”

Feeling angered, stuck, frustrated, and tired of being a prisoner to my commitment in the military my journal began, “day 2,920 of captivity. I hate it!! I don’t want to be here! I don’t want to do this! I shouldn’t have to! Someone else could do this job, someone that wants to. This is a great job, but it is not for me. I am here, and I want to be there. Why do I have to be stuck here for another year!” In this moment of utter powerlessness and frustration, sitting

uncomfortably in my cubicle, empty heartedly staring at my computer, I reached for my wallet to donate money to Women for Women International an international organization that, “provides women survivors of war, civil strife, and other conflicts with tools and resources to move from crisis and poverty into a civil society that promotes and protects peace, stability, and self-sufficiency.” The action of giving money to this worthwhile organization would give me the feeling that I am doing something, ANYTHING, towards what I want to do with my life. I craved the power of taking action.

It is in this moment that my reflective practice came to me, “admit where you are now and know that it will change.” I put away my wallet and accepted that I feel floundering in frustrating helplessness, and accepted that this will change. I began to celebrate that I found such a wonderful organization and that there are women making such an impact on the world. I am jealous of them, I glorify and dream about their jobs, but getting there will require work and dedication. Sitting with the knowledge that this work is out there and I cannot do it feels extremely uncomfortable. Because of my CCT practice I am able to tell myself, “Meghann you are just not there yet. Slow down, be where you are, research, learn, work, incubate, and through this effort you can and will create the change in your life to bring your authentic contributions to the world.”

I had done it! This was it. I had moved beyond my label of reactive and acted on my reflective practice. I was okay with the temporary ambiguity of my end product as I consciously and strategically moved towards it.

### **Taking My Voice Seriously & Identifying a Product**

As I was researching how to create this life, I stumbled upon a line that struck me. Richard Bolles in *What Color is your Parachute* describes simply, “an ‘all-paths’ approach...ends up being a ‘no-paths’ approach” (2004, p. 308). This line helped me to realize that if I never say no, I can never really say yes. This phrase became my mantra while developing as a creative practitioner. Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way* (2002), coupled with sincere support and role modeling from my CCT classmates and instructors, helped me to realize

that by saying no, I am honoring my project and being emotionally honest, authentic, and strategic. I am saying yes to my project. My actions say, “I really am committed to creating you!”

I have acted out on this lesson while completing this synthesis project. Saying no to dinner with friends and family, and setting aside time for my project was unbelievably difficult. This saying yes to me, to my project, has been a step towards what I love and creates space for my creative impulse.

I feel my creative passion most surely, most strongly in nature. Sometimes the spring feels like awaking from a long slumber. I have grown to love the winters, they feel rejuvenating and dreamlike. I love to get out into the wilderness and hike. I never feel more alive or filled with wonder and peace than on a snowshoe hike in the White Mountains. I love all forms of nature, but I am particularly attracted to winter hiking. I love the safety of hiking on the snow padded trails. It feels as if the earth is covered by a warm feather blanket, and anywhere that I fall will be fine, and cozy. I love the crispness of the air, the smell of nothing but clean, and the sound protection created by the blanket of snow.

I took my first snowshoe hike with the Wild Women Outfitters in December of 2003 after my first semester in the CCT program. I looked at this hike as an artist date as described in *The Artist's Way* (Cameron, 2002) and it opened my world-view to...my world. The entire experience felt like meeting an old friend, ‘welcome world, I recognize you.’ Growing up an athlete and into a cubicle dweller has been a difficult transition. My childhood was spent adventuring in the woods of my neighborhood playing everything from pickle to endless hours of sledding. As I became an adolescent my talents in sports and leading teams took over my waking hours and I loved every minute of it. It didn’t matter what I was doing so long as I was laughing and sweating. The experience of adventuring in the woods with other women was perhaps reminiscent of my youth, or perhaps my calling, my mission in life?

“Flow,” “losing time,” “in the zone” are all popular terms for a feeling of being in one’s element. Novelist and Theologian Frederick Buechner, describes a vocation as “The place

where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet...a life mission is comprised of not only doing the activity where we lose time, but in the arena where we feel we are needed" (as cited in Bolles, 2004). In a culture of increasingly sedentary and technological based life-styles, I would love to provide adventure to women in the hope that this adventure would bring confidence, health, and laughter, causing them to be invigorated in their lives. When I first recognized this passion, I dismissed it thinking, "Wouldn't everyone rather be out in the woods than sitting in their cubicle?"

Robert Fritz, in his book *Path of Least Resistance*, instructs that in order to create something we only have to have a clear enough picture of "it" to know "it" when we have it. My experience with women-owned outdoor adventure companies seemed like a pretty good model for "it" but was not a perfect fit. The mission of such an organization and the activity level seemed just right, but the full time commitment too much. I want a life integrated in my community. I want to have a family and commit to raising my children. One of Fritz's main points is that the creative process creates a tension between the idea and the product that is resolved when 'it' is created. In fact, according to Fritz (1989) the energy created in the tension is energy towards its resolution. When I first read this theory, I actually experienced anger before accepting Fritz's theory. I now recognize that this anger stemmed from my frustration to resolve and create a job of least resistance and to have control over the creative force in my life.

In many of my CCT classes I have learned that once you have an idea of what you want to create, a good place to start is by researching what others have done and by knowing the elements of your product. For example, in Creativity in the Arts and Literature I created a food guide. My elements were such things as meals and their ingredients, time of day, price, quality, location, environment, and mood. I used food guides I admired i.e. Where to Eat (Spire, 2001) and restaurant reviews that I did not i.e. Zagat (2001), to get an idea of what others have done and to further clarify my product.

At this point in my process, I had identified a fuzzy image of what I wanted to create in my career change. I had identified model organizations and was researching to find more

organizations to find out what others have done and are doing in my field of interest. The next step was work on identifying my elements such as my love of nature and empowerment of women. CCT taught me that it is more than okay to not know every step of the creative journey. I was moving forward, but I didn't know exactly where.

### **Retaining Creative Energy**

Reading Julia Cameron's (2002) *The Artist Way*, I learned the value of my protecting a new idea or creation. In a dialogue class we were taught to speak from our heart, a process that requires suspending judgment of our thoughts and of others, to listen and to speak with out judgment. I now understand that by letting people into my project, my thoughts, or my ideas before they can withstand criticism, I risk injuring them, perhaps fatally. Lately when asked by others (or even myself), "What will you do when you get out of the Air Force?" I have begun to consciously retain my creative energy and protect my product by saying, "I'm working on it" and leaving it at that.

My first step was admitting that I am trying to create something. I am trying to create a life that feels authentic to me, within a career that uses my talents to give back to my community in a meaningful way. The second step was to take my product seriously enough to only share my work with people that are able to help, and whom I sincerely believe want to help. Sometimes the only person that fits this description is me. This is my life and my project. While this seems like common sense, becoming the authority responsible for creating this project was a monumental step on which I am still working.

Integrating a consciousness of my self-talk has helped me to take this lesson one step further. I sometimes have to look myself in the mirror and say, "It is okay to not know...keep going, you'll figure it out." I have found this process much more fruitful than my old process of sharing my frustrations about my project with any random stranger that asks me. I realized that such a person was just trying to make small talk. This stranger does not really care about my project, but I do.

### **Awareness of Self-Talk**

In taking my voice seriously, I have worked towards awareness of how I talk to myself. Such awareness has generally improved how I coach myself through my creative process and deepened my level of understanding of my role in creating reality. Also, I have begun to genuinely enjoy conversations with myself! A model I have found useful in monitoring my self-talk is taken from Albert Ellis's (1994) ABC model:

Activating Event	Belief & Self-talk	Consequences
"Something Happens"	"I tell myself something"	"I feel and do something"
The phone rings	<b>Alarming Belief:</b> Oh no! I'm in trouble! Big Trouble!	<b>Unhealthy Consequence:</b> My heart rate goes up, my mind is racing, my palms are sweating, I have a terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, I want to cry and crawl under a rock. I do crawl under a rock, or answer the phone timid and feeling sick.
The phone rings	<b>Reassuring Beliefs:</b> Cool! Who's on the phone! I bet it a friend or family member that loves me! I wonder if they have great news! Even if it is bad news, everything will be OK.	<b>Healthy Consequences:</b> I answer the phone calm and energetic. I am my best self.

I chose this example because it is silly yet very real to me. As a child I spent a lot of time visiting with friends. Often times when my mother called I would be in trouble for something and have to go home. This pattern was further reinforced at the Air Force Academy. The rules were very strict and time off base was limited. Often we were notified that we were in trouble by a ringing phone. I also chose this example because it is silly, and seems absurd to most people. I believe we all have activating events like this, that seem silly, and that being aware of our self-talk and alarming beliefs can help us move beyond them.

I have learned that I often create my reality with my self-talk. If I walk into a room confidently, it is almost always because I am telling myself nice things that make me feel great.

Conversely, if I crouch into a room embarrassed and insecure it is almost always because I am telling myself I have something to feel embarrassed about. I have learned to take the time to reflect on this process by writing it out, and by talking to myself out loud. Awareness of my self-talk has been invaluable in my creative process to create my life as I would like it to be.

### **Taking a Step**

A dear friend, understanding my project and genuinely interested in supporting it, gave me a book by an American Buddhist nun titled *When Things Fall Apart*. One particular passage that spoke to me explains, “The trick is to keep exploring and not bail out, even when we find out that something is not what we thought. That’s what we are going to discover again and again. Nothing is as we thought” (Chodron, 1997, p. 5).

As I have moved forward in my career change, I was surprised to find myself scared. *When Things Fall Apart* (Chodron, 1997) helped me to understand that fear is a part of the process of change, and perfection beyond a single moment of joy is a myth. And to that I say, “Do it anyway! It’s worth it.” My process of resolving my tensions, becoming conscious of my self-talk, becoming the authority of my project to create my life, and making a major career change has not been as I thought it would be. In fact, it was extraordinarily difficult, but well worth every bit of effort.

I am an explorer, adventurous by nature. In a particularly valuable conversation with a CCT professor regarding an action research project I was trying to perform on the health status of people in my office, she pushed me to answer, “What is the point? What change are you advocating for here?” I sat dumbfounded and frustrated, with the familiar feeling of creative constipation. To help me along, she encouraged, “You are adventurous and spirited, but what are you doing? It’s as if you are off riding an elephant in the Amazon before you figure out why or what you are there for.”

Making use of my adventurous spirit, to create a product that is both novel and useful, has been my greatest challenge in the CCT program. Integrating the critical thinking skills of a reflective practitioner has helped me overcome this challenge. I have identified my purpose and

a career change that I am very pleased with. However, what I feel most proud of in this final CCT project is that I have used my own process to create tools for you, my reader, to create such a change in your life!

Once I identified my elements of *what* career I wanted and *what* lifestyle I wanted my career change to support, generating a plan for the actual career came very quickly. In relation to creating positive change in ones career I have found that the problem often is not generating a plan to get a better job, but *what* job to get. I hear this over and over again from career changers, specifically my friends in the Air Force, and it fueled me to create a product that will help them discover what they want to do.

When I began this adventure I did not know what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted something more, but I did not have the language or the tools to describe it. According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his article “Implications of a Systems Perspective for the Study of Creativity,” “Creativity occurs when a person makes a change in a domain, a change that will be transmitted through time” (p. 315). He goes on to mention that, “It has been said that Einstein explained why he spent so much time developing a new physics by saying that he could not understand the old physics” (p.332) I believe this is what fuels each of us to drive towards our greatest purpose. Like Einstein, we feel an inner drive to something more, as if the way things are in our present situation do not make sense and we can make them better. In Chapter Four, I will guide you through a process that I believe can help you do just that.

**Summation:** Guiding Principles I Learned Along the Way

*Take yourself seriously.*

*I have asked myself, “what are my talents, which ones make me feel good, and how do I feel best using them?” Sometimes I actually feel guilty about being happy doing what I like. I have somehow developed a habit that hard work should feel difficult. I have misunderstood hard work to mean that it is only valuable if it isn’t fun. I internalized an idea that play is fun, work is hard. I have become conscious to the realization that I have been ignoring the only measure I have to know what is right for me as a unique individual. In identifying activities and relationships that are a good fit for me, I have begun to pay attention to my energy, both physical and mental. I pay attention and notice what gives, sustains, and inspires my energy and what drains, depletes, and sends my energy running for bed. By listening to my desires, and*

*respecting my passions, I can begin to take my authentic talents seriously.*

### *Maintain Equilibrium*

*I have found that I am most fulfilled when I use my talents, but I have to retain equilibrium in my lifestyle. My lifestyle encompasses all aspects of my life, especially the people and relationships. Maintaining equilibrium is a balance that requires compromise. But, I believe this compromise can and should be a welcome compromise made with conscious consideration for the greatest good at each stage of my life. At this point in my life I don't have control over a major contributing factor to maintaining this equilibrium and I feel the effects of this imbalance. At this point I am working towards controlling the imbalance of my work life, with special attention to its affect on my values.*

### *Listen to the pull towards your greatest purpose*

*I believe that we each have a purpose, and that my talents, desires, and passions try to pull me to this purpose. As I see it, from a macro perspective, things happen in an order that is greater than each of us, but we are each part of a greater whole. My contribution to this whole is my choice. I can contribute with every action, thought, feeling and intention, not just those for which I am paid. I can drown out my desires with a busy lifestyle, ignore my passions by following my perceived social norm; or believe in my call, know that I can do whatever I set my mind to, and continue towards my greatest purpose. Regardless of my situation, reality as I see it is that by default I am always living my purpose, even if it is not my best and greatest purpose. I believe in my unsettled feeling with my career as a draw towards a more authentic purpose.*

*~McNiff, 2004*

## Chapter 4

### UNDERSTANDING CHANGE AS IT RELATES TO CAREER

The first step of my process was admitting that I am in control of creating my life. Seeking to identify the change I wanted to create, I sought the advice of experts and attended every seminar I could find. Each of these explorations has given me the opportunity for deep reflection, a language to name change and tools to create lasting change. I would like to share these lessons with you, to help you find your purpose. I hope that hearing my story has helped you understand that you are not alone in yearning for a more meaningful career. This chapter is aimed at sharing the lessons of my explorations so that you too can be equipped with a language and tools to create lasting change, and find purpose in your career and in your life: to live out your mission. I have identified two common ground rules in creating change. 1) There is power in writing down goals. 2) There is power in consciously working to make these goals vivid and to believe that they can be achieved.

Common terms used in each of these seminars listed above are: goals, purpose, values, motivation, passions, and talents. For example, the Keirsey Four Types Sorter (1998) and the Holland indicator (1994) give a test or template to fill out to determine our personal traits and characteristics and give a label of “personal style.” Such as with the Keirsey Four Types Sorter: artisan, guardian, idealist, and rational; or with the Holland indicator: realistic, investigative, conventional, artistic, enterprising, and social. Each label is representative of personality types that correlate to suggested occupations.

For example, according to the Keirsey Four Types sorter, I am an idealist. I am abstract in communicating (as opposed to concrete) and cooperative in implementing goals (as opposed to utilitarian). My most practiced roles are diplomatic (as opposed to tactical, logistical or

strategic). Idealists tend to be teachers, counselors, champions, or healers. Educationally I am drawn to humanities (as opposed to arts and crafts, commerce, or sciences) and vocationally I am drawn to personnel work (as opposed to equipment, materiel, or systems).

According to the Holland indicator I am social, a helper. Under this label of social is a list of personalities, skills, interests, hobbies, and career possibilities. Careers such as: city manager, college professor, community planner, counselor/therapist, dietician, teacher of family and consumer science, historian, homemaker, nurse/midwife, park naturalist, or public health educator.

Generally, I have found that such tools give a label and a language to describe personality as it fits into a career, an existing career. I find it interesting how well I fit into these indicator types, and that the results are useful in giving a language to discuss ambiguous topics. However, and I will refer back to my earlier section on labeling, we must be careful of putting these labels on too tightly. The results are interesting and fun. They give concrete answers to the intangible question, “What should I do?” I recommend exploring such tools, but please keep in mind that a person is more than labels. These exercises, and others like them, are a great place to start, an interesting avenue to try, but certainly not the final answer.

I noticed that none of these resources attempted to design tools aimed at giving language to identifying desires or values. Additionally, I realized that the tools used by the “experts,” described above, gave generic labels for my talents and possible careers, rather than self-generated answers based on living models. For these reasons, I have expanded on these exercises and developed my own tool to recognize goals, values, and desires.

I find that these three categories together comprise the elements of my career change. “Never do work that causes you to be outside of your values,” a line from a seminar titled “How Purpose Effects Motivation” (Leider & The Inventure Group, 2004), has stuck with me. I took this idea well beyond not stealing, cheating, or lying on the job and realized that a job that allows for my desired pace of life, responsibility level, and time and energy to spend on leisurely activities will keep me within my values. Identifying my goals, what I want to accomplish with

my life, is critical to determining if a given job will support my accomplishing these goals. And my favorite, the intangible: desires. What do I really want to do? What drives me? What attracts me? What gets me going? What job supports these desires? Goals, values, and desires are the elements of a career change that I would like to make.

### **Creating Lasting Change**

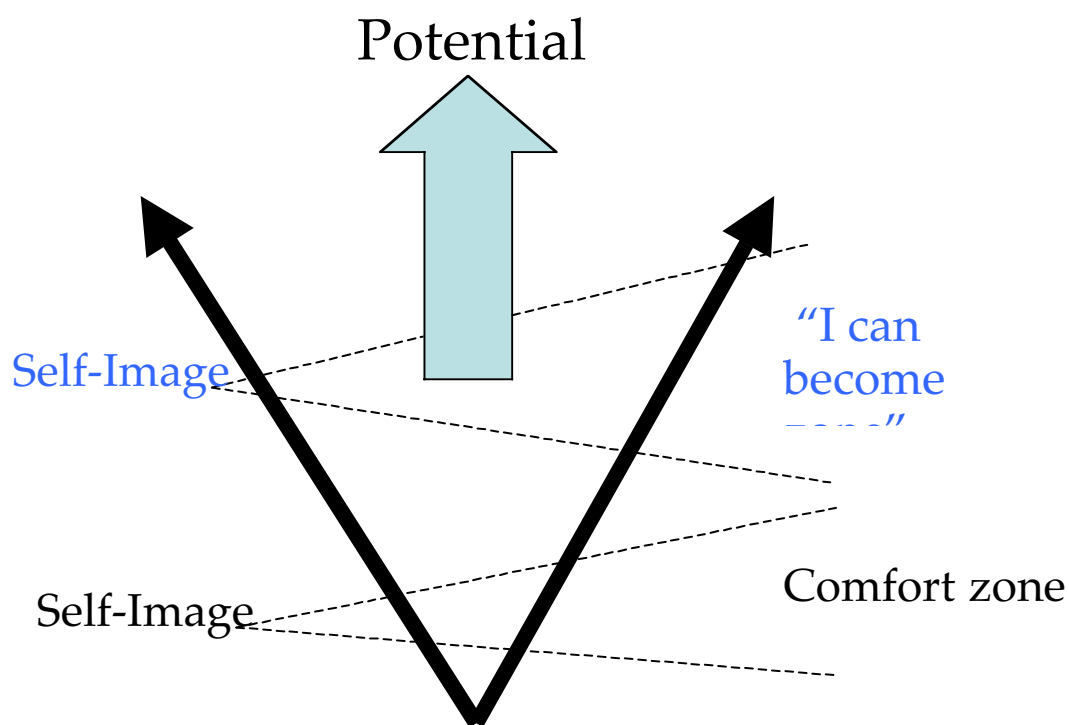
According to Bob Moawad, president and co-founder of Edge Learning Institute (2004), “you will perform consistently in alignment with your dominant belief about yourself and others and how the world works”. For example, I grew up in a family that was always late. My dad used to joke that we would never leave until it was time to be there. As an adult I exhibit this behavior and my self-image is that I am someone who is late. That is the world as I see it.

Integrating a consciousness of self-talk, I believe, is integral to consciously affecting our self-image. For example, I have slowly over time begun to effect positive change by altering my self-image of being late. When I go to a meeting I show up early, and just sit there. My self-talk is, “I am just the kind of person that likes to be early. It makes me feel great! I love being settled and ready to go before the meeting even starts!” When someone walks in the room and comments on my being early I respond, “I’m always early, I just love being ready to go. I don’t mind sitting around and waiting because it gives me time to reflect and get settled, especially before important meetings.” This has been a powerful and empowering exercise to begin altering my dominant belief system, and a lot of fun!

Consider your self-image. Pick an area of your life that you would like to begin consciously effecting lasting change. Also, consider an area where you are doing this well and commend yourself. For example, I am the kind of person that works out regularly and eats healthy. Even on days when I am eating junk food all day and sitting around feeling lazy my self-image is such that this behavior is temporary. I will consistently perform in alignment with my dominant belief of myself, and get back to the gym and eating healthy. Find an aspect of your life where your self-image is working for you and thank yourself. I believe that in observing an experiment we are changing and/or creating that which we observe; and that even

the simple act of reflecting on and observing our self-image can be creating positive, conscious strides of change to our self-image.

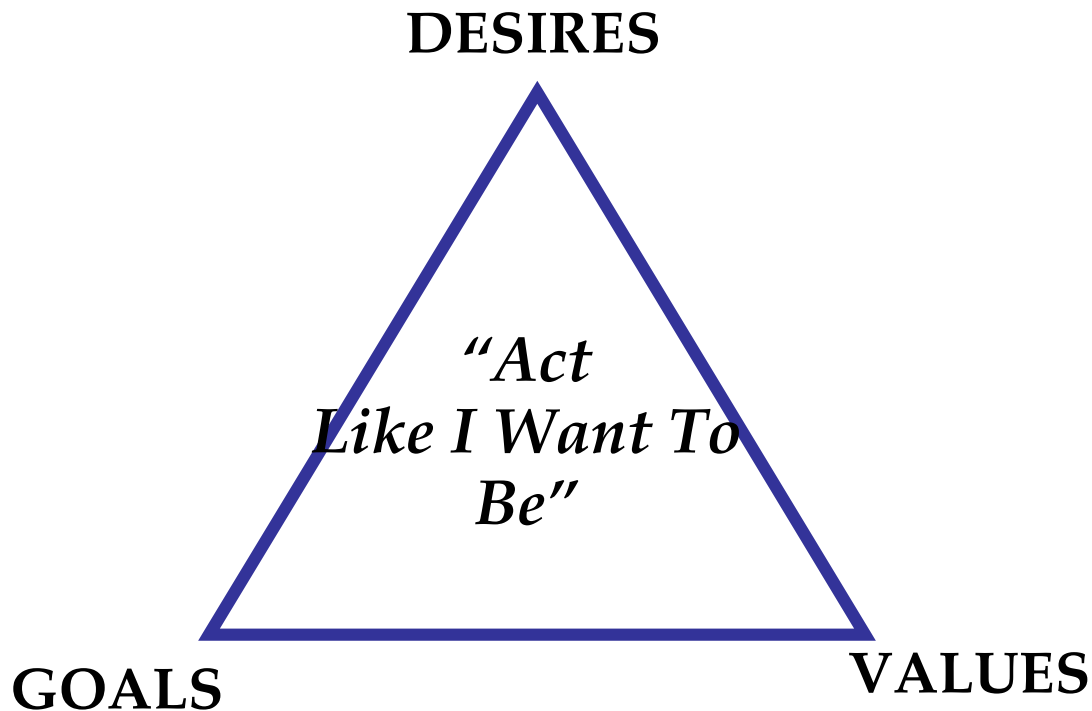
As we begin this reflective practice let us admit where we are now. Using the model below, spend sometime considering your self-image. What does, “act like me” mean to you? The following model is taken from The Edge Learning Institute and a Seminar titled, “Increasing Human Effectiveness” (Moawad & Edge Learning Institute 2004). Consider also that your potential is unlimited, and as such the arrow in the diagram below on page 40 extends to infinity:



Notice the elevated self-image and the, “I can become zone.” This is the area where, “I love being early to meetings!” Also, notice the word “can.” Recognize that such change is within your power. I have developed a simplified model of the, “I can become zone” and titled it, “act like I want to be.”

In an attempt to give language and tools to positively affect our self-image from, “act like

me” to, “act like I want to be” I have developed the following model:



The triangle is designed to correspond with the, “I can become zone” and to break it down further in to manageable steps. This model is intended for use in reflection to identify goals, values, and desires. Just as important to separate each term, is to realize how they influence each other.

Below is my list from December 2004 of my top ten goals, values, and desires I have from examples I have witnessed in others. The columns are interwoven, especially the living model example column, *but they do not correlate across the columns numerically*. Each is an area of positive growth I want to attain culminating in performance in my “act like I want to be” zone. Glance over my list, and then I will lead you through an exercise to generate your own!

<u>Goals</u>	<u>Values</u>	<u>Desires/Examples</u>
1. Ice Climb	1. Be Kind	1. Bill Cashmann
2. Walk the Great Wall of China	2. Be Honest	2. Ted Georgian

3. Learn French	3. Wisdom/Reflection Time	3. WWE Beth
4. Snowshoe at night	4. People first	4. Bud and Carolyn
5. Knit	5. Family & Community	5. Mary Frangie
6. Interactive outdoor day care	6. Time to help	6. Ben Schwendenner
7. Buy a house	7. Faith, Hope, Love	7. Yoga Instructor
8. Have a summer house on a lake	8. Non-judgement	8. Michele McNiff
9. Women for Women Intl group	9. Bold & Meek	9. Robin Myers
10. Learn to write lefty	10. Only give advice when asked	10. Jen Nicol

Some of these goals came from thinking, ‘I wish I could do that!’ and realizing that I can. I generated my values column by thinking about what I respect most about myself and others, what bothers me that I do not do and wish I did, and by considering how I spend my time and how I wished I spent my time. The examples/desires column is a list of people I have experienced that I am either jealous of, respect very much, or both. Either way I want to bring into my life something I have seen in them.

For example, my yoga instructor (#7) is beautiful, calm, and unbelievably fit. She travels to Hawaii and Costa Rica regularly to teach Yoga. She has made this life for herself, and I would have never known such a life existed had I not experienced her. Her life is certainly closer to my “act like I want to be,” than my comfort zone. I do not want to trade lives with her. I do not believe for one second that her life is perfect. The point of this column is to list things (values, traits, lifestyles, activities, etc.) that I might not have thought of on my own, that for whatever reason caught my eye and stirred something in me. I love using a living model because it is proof positive that it can be done. From my yoga instructor I appreciate that I am fit, and realize that I have the desire to be more peaceful and calm. Also, that I have a desire to set up my lifestyle to do more yoga and to retreat in Costa Rica.

I encourage you to make this tool your own and play with it. Add them up in different ways. Try a suggested tool on an apposing model. Make it your own! How to use this model to

move from your comfort zone to your chosen “act like I want to be” zone:

- 1) Take some time to reflect
- 2) Make a list of 10 goals you would like to achieve in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead. Start small. Think about tomorrow, next week, next summer, next year. Think about things other people have done that really got your fires burning! Then move onto really sky’s-the-limit type of goals, like hiking the Great Wall of China. (I included my list as a reference and to help you get started.)

NOTE: Be very aware of your sensor piping up, pay attention to what it is saying, “that’s not like you...you can’t do that...you can’t afford that...” Use this as another opportunity to become conscious of your self-image. Do not let your sensor stop you from wanting your goal, or from writing it down.

- 3) Make a list of your top 10 values. How do you want to act while executing your goals and living out your mission. Consider questions like: What character traits do I most respect in others? How do I want to be remembered when I die? How am I acting when I feel good about myself? Where do I spend my time? How do I want to spend my time?
- 4) Make a list of 10 people you want to emulate. (Use this column if you get stuck with the other two.) Who makes you green with envy? Who do you most want to be like?

NOTE: When considering people you want to be like, you can pick and choose the very specific and best things about this person, it certainly does not have to be the whole package. I like this column because in others we are exposed to wonderful characteristics we may not have thought of on our own or been exposed to in our ‘world view’.

Pick a goal and a desire and a corresponding value. Close your eyes and vividly imagine yourself living out this fantasy. Give it color and emotion! Feel the sweat on your brow as you walk the Great Wall of China, imagine taking the time to help a

stranger along the way, and how great it feels to be as fit and healthy as your yoga instructor! Feel the joy and appreciation of accomplishing this life goal.

Realize that it is every bit within your power to create this fantasy in reality.

Stay open to opportunities.

**8) Repeat from step one as often as you like.**

NOTE: This process is not magical. Blinking and twitching your nose like the popular 1960's television show "I Dream of Genie" will not bring about these changes. But do it anyway! I dare you! You may begin to see that over time opportunities will become available for you to do the work and create these changes.

**Naming Change & Saying It With Meaning**

Another common thread I found in each seminar was to write out my goals with meaning as if it has already happened and to visualize myself performing this goal, feeling all of the pride, gratitude, and joy that goes along with achieving it. For this reason I include step five in the "I can become zone model" of vividly imagining living it. The science behind such an exercise lies in a part of our limbic system called the reticular activating system. This principle was discussed in each of the seminars I attended and in *Write it Down, Make it Happen: Knowing what you want and getting it!* by Henrietta Anne Klauser. The idea is that by coloring our goals with vivid images and emotions, and by writing them down, we are setting up a 'filter' by which we give attention to our goals.

According to Klauser, "The reticular activating system is like a filtering system of the brain. Writing it down sets up the filter. Things start to appear-it's a matter of your filtering system" (Klauser, 2005). This principle is also supported by the availability concept of social psychology, a concept commonly exploited by advertisers. I like to explain the availability concept by asking, "What is the number one killer of women in America?" Most people will answer breast cancer, when in reality heart disease is the number one killer of women in America. Breast cancer is well advertised in the news and magazines, and the first thing that comes to mind, because this information is readily available.

Consider what comes to mind while perusing the grocery store? Do you recall a television commercial advertising a certain product? Or after a discussion of green as the popular spring color, do you notice green everywhere? My father had a very rare form of cancer, but I seemed to find that it was discussed quite often. Similarly by giving conscious attention to a goal by writing it down, one begins to notice opportunities to accomplish this goal. Coloring a goal with vivid emotion imprints the image of an experience in our mind. I like to think of it as self advertising our goal. According to Bob Moawad (2004), as presented in his “Increasing Human Effectiveness” educational series:

Your subconscious mind...cannot differentiate between a real experience and a vividly imagined experience accompanied by emotion. To the degree that you vividly imagine an event, it will be stored in your subconscious as “truth and reality” and will later be used as true information. You can become mentally experienced in a situation before it takes place!

As I was compiling my resources for this section on goal setting I stumbled upon a 3x5 note card from an Increasing Human Effectiveness seminar from September of 2004. The seminar was facilitated by the Air Force organization development center director where I work. The card read:

Goal: “Work in the Organizational Development Center (ODC)”

Benefit: “I really want to, and this is the direction I want to move in the future with outdoor adventure trips, I’ll be great at it, I’ll be helping people, and learn the skills to do it. I’ll be able to work on the problems I hated (in my old job) and help people in the places I was.”

Goal Affirmative Reminder: “I’m so happy in the ODC. I love working here, I love the people and interacting with people on base. I love knowing that I am increasing quality of life, and serving my community. I am so happy to be taking actions towards where I want to move with my life, personal and professional.”

Supportive Affirmative Reminders: “It was so great talking with my boss about moving to the ODC, he was so understanding and supportive. He really understood how much this move means to me. My replacement is

doing great is my old job, the team loves him, we all keep in touch, they are happy and doing great!”

I stumbled upon this note card in April of 2005. I had been working in the ODC since January 2005, and had facilitated the March 2005 “Increasing Human Effectiveness” seminar. It gave me chills down my spine to realize that not only had I gotten the job and made a change that I had work so hard for, but had taught others how to do the same.

### **Your Purpose and How to Know It**

I have led you through tools to develop a language to effect positive change. I have offered exercises to vividly imagine yourself living in your, “act like I want to be zone.” All of this reflection is aimed at effecting change and giving positive conscious energy to creating your life on purpose, to living with purpose, and to exercising your choice to live your life as you think it should be lived.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book *Finding Flow* states, “One can not live a life that is truly excellent with out feeling that one belongs to something greater and more permanent than oneself” (p. 62). I believe that we are all working together in a system, contributing to the world. I find such beauty in our differences, and that we can contribute to our world in both tiny and magnificent ways. Einstein changed the world, but he did not even have the mental energy left over to pick out his clothes in the morning. I believe that we each have our own unique talents, gifts, desires, values and goals; I hope that my tools help you to know yours and inspire you to live them out to your greatest satisfaction.

In interviewing one of my great mentors, Jimmy Covey, my Bible study teacher from college, he offered three steps to confirming a career. The first step is to feel drawn or called to a career. Jimmy described this as, “a desire in my heart that stirred.” The second step is the opportunity to try out this career, and the third is the feeling of being settled in the success, as Jimmy describes simply, “An undivided heart and feeling that this is what I want to do” (Addendum #2).

I have offered tools to take conscious control over your contribution to your world, to

reflect on how, and to take your contribution seriously. In the end, I believe that is what life is all about, living every day with conscious purpose, and setting up our lives in such a way that we are proud of our contribution.

### **Summation: My Purpose**

I am creating a lifestyle for myself that is in line with my values, desires, and goals. I am creating a lifestyle that supports my creative impulse to improve the quality of life of women, children and our community. I have done the work to understand the work/life balance and quality of life that I want, the stress levels I do best with, the change that I want to influence and the careers that fit these descriptions. Additionally, I have accepted that such change will take time, and that further change is certain and welcome throughout this living process. In seeking out my life's mission I have discovered the elements of my mission to be: women, health, and adventure.

Bolles' (2004) words exercise was pivotal in this breakthrough. Reflecting on this exercise, I realized that where I really find joy in my current career is in talking with my co-workers about their health. I feel human having shared their fear and burden towards attaining, in my opinion, our most basic human right and most significant contributor of joy: living with good health. It fills me with joy to realize that I can use the fantastic management, communication and advocacy skills I have gained in the military and apply them to a field I am passionate about. I have moved from feeling tricked by my father to being grateful for the advantages he set me up for in my career. I am now moving towards a career of serving vulnerable populations and inequalities in health.

I am taking myself seriously. On May 28<sup>th</sup> 2005 I will be a civilian for the first time since I was eighteen years old. My goals are to be educated in Public Health and serve in the Peace Corps. In the fall I will start at Boston University pursuing a Masters of Public Health, specializing in International Maternal and Child Health. I have applied with Masters International, which means that my cap-stone requirement will be two years of service with the Peace Corps.

In the next ten years I hope to work in international development and public health as an active participant in my community and a leader of outdoor adventure trips for women. I desire to eventually own my own day care that is integrated into the community and the outdoors. As Pema Chodron (1997) so eloquently puts it in *When Things Fall Apart*, “Nothing is as we thought” (p. 5). I understand that my plan doesn’t really matter as much as going through process to figure it out. As Bud Ritzmann, a friend and a great life mentor, said in our interview, “what you end up doing in life isn’t nearly as important as what you become” (Addendum #2), and I have become a reflective agent of change and a creative practitioner.

In interviewing another one of my great mentors, Beth, the founder of Wild Women Expeditions she stated easily that she believes she is doing what she is meant to do. She believes that if she had expressed herself as an artist she could have gone in different directions than following women’s studies, and believes that, “it would have come down to the same thing in the end.” In her words, “I had to trust and realize that...what I am doing is important and it is what I am supposed to be doing and it is meant to be done” (Addendum #2). In this process I learned that my life’s mission is to serve children, women and mothers, and to be in nature; and there are many, many ways for me live out this mission.

## Addendum #1: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE (Schmuck, 1997)

This is included because my definition in Chapter One was my personal interpretation. I feel that this hand-out gives an accurate and simple description of the process:

### TEN CATEGORIES FOR REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

**Category 1:** Set clear goals (What do I want to accomplish? For whom? Why? How?)

**Category 2:** Assess the situation: mature educators focus on the current assessment of students' capabilities in relation to goals in category 1

**Category 3:** Create action strategies: these may come in many different forms (e.g., lesson plans, curriculum changes, training sessions) They grow out of creative thought processes that call for reflecting on the past and conducting problem solving discussions with colleagues and consultants in the present.

**Category 4:** Implement Action plans (a plan for improving a situation is instituted)

**Category 5:** Monitor one's own actions: this involves reflecting on the present; mature educators strive to make moment-to-moment shifts between doing and thinking and thinking and doing

**Category 6:** Assess other's reactions: collect systematic data about people's perceptions and attitudes towards an action plan (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, journals, observations)

**Category 7:** Evaluate what others have learned: mature educators focus on whether they have reached their goals: have participants developed the sought qualities? Are the outcomes or results desirable? What unexpected findings emerged?

**Category 8:** Confront oneself with the results. Compare the goals in category 1 and the assessment data of category 7

**Category 9:** Reflect on what to do next: virtually a repeat of category 3 -- once more, the creation of an action strategy.

**Category 10:** Set new goals! The reflection, inquiry and problem solving cycle begins anew --ongoing, never-ending processes.

## Addendum #2: INTERVIEWING MENTORS

Being in the military for the last nine years, I have experienced many lessons in leadership. Time and time again, I have found that it does not matter what you say, but rather, what you do, that people follow. In the past several years I have had the opportunity to experience the lives of amazing, inspiring, and life changing mentors and leaders. I felt compelled to interview several of these great mentors whose presence in my life changed me in a way that I reflect on often and am grateful for. I interviewed them to learn more, explicitly, about who they are and why. I would like to share their story by identifying a major lesson they each taught me.

In each of my interviews I began with: “Tell me your story,” and depending on the answer, I adjusted the order of questioning, but asked in each interview:

*Knowing what you know now, how would you change?  
How did you guide yourself through challenges and make decisions?  
Do you feel content with you life and what would you change if you could?  
How do you measure success?  
Do you have a life quote or a guiding principle you tried to live you life by?  
What brings you the most pleasure?  
Is this where you think you saw yourself?  
What is your favorite movie?*

### Carolyn and Bud Ritzmann: Faithful fulfillment in Wisdom

Carolyn and Bud Ritzmann are the parents of a good friend from college. I was fortunate enough to spend quality time with their family. Bud and Carolyn have explicitly and by example shared their wisdom with each of their children. There is an aura around the Ritzmann’s of faith, hope, and love. Their example was like nothing I had experienced before: the way they treat each other with respect and adoration, their career’s, their involvement in their community and the sheer joy with which they live their life as a result of living within their values. My life has

been forever changed having had the opportunity to know them. Carolyn and Bud regularly counsel young married couples, and give back to their community. According to Carolyn, “Love is a need, and they meet them.”

Bud Ritzmann: It isn't what you do, but who you become

Bud's parents both passed away at an early age. Bud learned from the time he was a small child that if something was going to get done, he was going to do it. This developed strength in Bud's character, but he shared with me that a major transition in his life was learning to trust. In his words he, “had to recognize that his way is not the only way, sit back, and trust others to participate.” In my opinion, much of Bud's greatness is in this balance of strength of character and meekness in being open to others. Bud has great respect for people that are, “continually growing, evolving, and learning.” I have great respect for how Bud applies lessons he respects in others in his own life. Bud believes that the thing that has changed him more than anything has been reading the Bible every day. Bud takes the time every day to read the Bible and asks God for his leadership and guidance to, “continually learning how to act more Christ-like.”

Bud has done many things, from supporting President Nixon's staff to attending seminary, but according to Bud, “what you end up doing in life isn't nearly as important as what you become.” Bud became a Christian his last year in college and, “God began to change his life and change his desires.” Today Bud's greatest pleasures come from, “doing well when faced with the inevitable that life can deliver, to be able to live in such away that you can reach out and touch and help people.” Growing up Bud never was exposed to “the ability to help or stand in peoples lives when they needed it.” He believes the wisdom and guidance that he regularly seeks from the Lord is the reason for the blessings added to his life. According to Bud, what holds us back is our self. He has learned less of self, meaning he spends more time giving and less time worrying about meeting his own needs. According to Bud, this practice has enhanced and increased his greatest pleasure in life of, “right relationships.” Bud lives on a beautiful ranch in Texas. He loves to enjoy sports and nature, but passionately professes that nothing

compares to the pleasure of his relationship with the Lord, his wife, and his family. A guiding principle in the life of Bud Ritzmann is that, “when we die all we take with us is on the inside and how we lived by God’s guiding principles.”

Carolyn Ritzmann: Do what is asked of you during each Season with hope for the next

Similarly Carolyn believes that the greatest success in her life “is how much she allows the Lord to do through her.” Both Bud and Carolyn are widowers. Carolyn’s first husband Oscar was a minister and Carolyn used the sum of all her talents to support the pastoral ministries. Carolyn was asked to carry on Oscar’s mission after his death. Carolyn believes that the highest calling a woman can have is to womanhood because we, “will be raising the future of America.” Carolyn has allowed the Lord to guide her to finish Oscar’s book, and to do promotional speaking at the Southern Baptist convention (maybe as the first woman to speak in that type of forum) to 11,000 people. According to Carolyn “God had a purpose in what he put in her heart and what she wanted. It was time for her to use the gifts and talents He had given her, and He opened the door.” Carolyn shared with me the guidance that the Lord has given her throughout her life. One year before Oscar was diagnosed with multiple-myeloma he awoke in the middle of the night and told her, “I don’t want to scare you, but God revealed to me that I am going to die soon. You and Demaris (their daughter) will be Okay.” Carolyn goes on to add, “God prepared us even for that. The grace God has given me has been wonderful.” I can feel the warmth in her voice over the phone and picture the warmth and love in her eyes as she is speaking.

The Lord also shared with her that He had something specific that He wanted her to do for a season, and that after that season He would give her a family again. After her speaking tour and shortly before she moved home, Bud moved to attend seminary. According to Carolyn, “God brought a man all the way across the country to her.” Carolyn has realized that when she looks back on her life, “I can see it like a book, and at the time I had no idea that all of that was going on.” Carolyn believes that, “God had a plan for my life before I was even born.”

Ben Schwendener: Create it because you want it to be; being the creative force in your own life

Ben leads a creative seminar at UMass Boston. I was fortunate enough to take his class in the fall of 2003. More than anything I could have learned in the classroom was experiencing Ben and the way he lives his life. I was not surprised to learn in my interview that Ben has a strong Buddhist faith that he practices daily. He has a passion for life and peacefulness that allows his students to reach new heights in their creativity. He inspires his students to believe in themselves and to take their work seriously. His method is beyond any teaching style, but is a lifestyle. The last class of the semester Ben invites his students to his home for their final presentations. Seeing him interact with his family was the icing on the cake of experiencing Ben. There was no separation from the classroom to his kitchen.

Ben is a Jazz musician, teacher, husband, and father. Early on he thought international business, “would be just thing to do, he would make everyone happy and make himself happy and rich.” In High School he was afforded the opportunity to ride around Europe on a bike he had made himself. After High School he took a year off and found himself doing a lot of music. When he entered Michigan State he was primed for business school, but again found himself doing all music, passionately involved in large scale compositions and winning awards. He realized that the music environment was unified around the lifestyle he was living at the time. A major influence in Jazz, George Russell, noticed Ben and became his mentor. At this point in his life Ben decided music was all he was going to do. He very carefully chose the people he studied with, continued his own style of music.

Ben, “never doubted his talent and ability to create or, at the very least, entertain himself.” When he graduated George Russell asked him to continue on with his studies and help out. Ben went with this offer because he has always, “had a tendency to go along with something that seemed to work.” Ben made a natural shift from what he was doing to what he was enjoying. To Ben this decision made sense and felt right. For now Ben is, “doing what he is doing.” According to Ben, “everything happens for a reason. I’m not content and I think that is a good thing.”

At many points in my interview with Ben I gained insight into his teaching his students to, “create something because you want it to be.” Through his faith Ben, “has understood that life’s energy flows from within one’s heart and to let it free from ones fundamental essence can we reach our creative potential.” From Ben I learned that tapping into life’s energy, its’ pull and flow, work’s out and feels right.

#### Jimmy and Vicky Covey: Walk the walk

Jimmy and Vicky lead Bible study to cadets at the Air Force Academy. I was introduced to them my senior year at the Academy and experienced a life changing growth in my knowledge and faith. What has impressed me the most about Jimmy and Vicky over the years is their complete and total lack of hypocrisy. From my experience with them, their primary focus is on their relationship and their faith. And their resultant focus is on their ministry of sharing their faith with others. They are constantly learning and growing in their faith and their relationship with one another and sharing this relationship with their Cadets. I feel very fortunate to have experienced Jimmy and Vicky and to have observed their life’s mission of living by faith, every minute of every day.

#### Vicky Covey: Living by faith is an every day event

A big theme I understood from listening to Vicky tell me her story is that she has spent time in introspection and, much like Carolyn, has understood meaning in her path by reflecting back on her life. Reflecting back she realized that her senior year in High School she committed herself to fulltime Christian work. Years later when reflecting back together, Jimmy and Vicky realized that they had committed their lives to Christian work the same year, but years before they met. Vicky explained to me that living by faith is an everyday event. In their ministry Jimmy and Vicky rely on financial support given by personally supporters of their ministry. Vicky vividly recalled one month they made thirteen dollars. At the time they had two kids, a house, and bills. That month they received a letter in the mail from someone they had never met. A third party connection that had struck oil sent them his proceeds for that month. The check

took care of their bills and they never heard from the man again. As Vicky looks over her shoulder she sees clearly that, “It was God, He provides. It was a crossroad, but we are continually learning to live by faith, you don’t graduate from the faith issue.”

Vicky shared with me their motto of protecting the picture. She and Jimmy believe that, “if their relationship is representative of Christ’s relationship to the church then by all means they have to protect the picture.” Vicky regularly reflects on what her relationship with Jimmy is telling people about Christ to the Church, and asks herself “is it distorted or conducive?”

Vicky explained that in ministry what is a road block is not dying to self and loving God with all of your heart soul and mind. She believes that, “we can work at these things, but if we are not willing to die to self, to put our needs aside for the needs of others, our ministry won’t bear fruit.” Vicky is constantly conscious of being other focused instead of self focused, she admits that, “I wouldn’t trade our lives for anything, but that doesn’t mean I don’t get tired or want to break. Sometimes I need a break from the very thing I love the most.” Having met with Vicky weekly my senior year of college, and lived in her home for a month after graduating college, I can say with confidence that I am a different and better person because she took the time to invest in my life.

#### Jimmy Covey: Stages of blessing a calling

Jimmy explained to me that, “All work matters to God. All work is sacred as long as it is legitimate, but it is different by divine providence. Being in ministry is unique. It is a significant theological call, divinely intervened.” According to Jimmy there were three steps to confirming his call. First was the belief that he was providentially called, “desire in my heart that stirred, second was the consensus of leadership and people that knew him, the opportunity to try, and third was the feeling of a settled and undivided heart in the success and feeling that this is what I want to do.” As Vicky had explained, the success and ability to fund their ministry was a clear confirmation. Jimmy believes that, “A person’s calling is never really cemented in their soul until he has had failure, or until finances have failed.” Jimmy recalled a time that he only had seventeen dollars and owed one hundred and seventy dollars for his house payment.

Jimmy's reflection is that, "God showed strong that you trust me and I'll get you through."

Today Jimmy's main concern is that their ministry will grow too large.

In reflecting on difficulties in his life Jimmy explained to me his desire to, "figure out the will of God" in his life. According to Jimmy, "when things get tough you have to get into the Bible and look into the face of God and say, 'I am here because you brought me here, now let's talk.'" Jimmy lives in all confidence that, "God wants to reveal his will: He is more interested in getting me where he wants me and He doesn't hide it. He lays it out in front of me. For those of us that are willing to follow it, God puts it on our heart and it fits together." Jimmy Covey is "willing to do the will of God, whatever that is." He and Vicky committed their lives to Christian work separately and are living out their commitment together.

Beth: It is hard work accepting the role as caretaker of an amazing gift

I met Beth through her company, Wild Women Expeditions, which she runs out of North Bay Ontario. She offers a gamete of activities for woman seeking adventure, or relaxation. Being around Beth felt like being with Mother Earth. She has an amazing gift of laughter, and seems to emit comfort and inspiration. Beth has given the amazing immeasurable gift to every woman who has participated in her expeditions. The adventure of using our physical body, the serenity of being in nature, and the sharing and learning from the sisters of the trip.

In my interview with Beth, whose mission to serve women through her outdoor expedition company I admire very much, she admitted that she feels like a vessel. And that she is meant to be doing what she is doing. More so, that it is meant to be done and that it would have been done even if she didn't do it. Beth explained that when she was eighteen she worked at a summer camp and had visions of owning a summer camp. She then shifted this idea to a Christian spiritual camp at her mother's house in Moonstone, just outside of Toronto. At University her idea shifted, once again, to community for women on the land: something along the lines of survivors of domestic violence. The final vision became Wild Women Expeditions. She envisioned leading canoe trips for women with a base in the wilderness where she would

live and that it would evolve many other trips full time. Beth's vision came together when she was thirty.

Beth admits that, "having work you enjoy is a big part of who you are." Beth began her career in social service to women as a social worker. In her words, "from burning out in that field, I needed it to be different, to get away from the soul-sucking. Wild Women is a reaction from social work, but it is also a reflection of what I learned from that experience." The transition and process of procuring the land and setting up the camp was not easy. Beth refers to this process as, "spiritual purification." As she experienced trial and tribulation to make her dream a reality, "I became painfully aware that I was meant to do this, but that I had to really trust, and realize that I wasn't in charge." Beth believes that ultimately, "it wasn't up to me to make it happen, the terms are that I am a steward of the land, not the owner. What I am doing is important and it is what I am supposed to be doing and it is meant to be done. It is a reflection of me, but it is larger than me and it can be taken away at any time." Through this process Beth explains that she learned to trust, to be patient, and to know that everything was going to be O.K. Beth never doubted her vision and, "gained a sense that I am here for a reason. I am supposed to be doing this, and I had to believe that. I had to believe that it was going to happen. "

Beth's character is a gift to the women on her trips. In my experience each woman carries away from the experience a lasting memory of the acknowledgement that comes from being seen and appreciated in their full context. Beth reports that, "She believes she is doing what she is meant to do." She could have followed other artistic or creative paths. She believes that if she had expressed her self as an artist she could have gone in different directions than following women's studies at University, but she believes that, "it would have come down to the same thing even if she had gone in another direction."

#### Tom McNiff: Reach for the Moon and grab as many stars as you can along the way

My father was diagnosed with Multiple-Myeloma on February 18<sup>th</sup> of 1999. After a tremendous five years in remission, I got the call on May 18th of 2004 that it was time to fly

home to Virginia. Speaking with my best friend before my flight she said, “Is there anything that you know you want to do with him or say to him before...” And after a brief pause she said with conviction, “This will be your last chance.” I wanted to interview him.

I had been performing interviews for my practicum paper and knew this was something I wanted to share with my father. My opportunity came two weeks before his death. It was less than an hour after I arrived and my mother had left me to stay with him while she made another trip to the airport. He was lying in his hospital bed for what would be the last time. It was the evening before we took him home for good.

I have a suspicion my father prepared mentally for our interview because according to him what brought him the most pleasure was, “Affections from children and satisfaction that they have learned something from me that helps them with their lives and their careers.” In the final days before his death his five children and his seven grandchildren gathered around him every evening to give him affection and pray together before bed.

He was sure to add that, looking back, what brought him great pleasure was, “having flown the best fighter in the world in combat coupled with having the best wife imaginable to take care of the family and be loyal on the home front.” My father shared with me the difficulty of keeping it all together early on in his career, “Every time I changed squadrons I had to earn my stripes and there was always fierce competition. At home it was a challenge to juggle five kids and a wife and pay attention to their needs, demands and their wants and still keep track of your day job responsibilities and keep up yard work and house chores.”

Asking him what he learned from this he explained, “Early on as a fighter pilot I just slugged it out. Later on at the pentagon I had to tell my Colonel 730 is as early I can come in and I had to leave at six.

“The Colonel asked , ‘Do you think you are more efficient than everyone else? I don’t see anyone else keeping those hours.’

“I said, ‘Yes, I do think I am more efficient.’ And that went over ok.”

I was not surprised to learn that my father's favorite movies were those involving combat

situations that showed, “high integrity and no vulgarity” despite the vicious situations. When I asked my father what guided him through he softened as he said, “I tried to find God’s plan and let it lead me. And I try not to interfere with God’s plan. And that is a tricky, tricky deal so I try to listen, and be guided by what he’s telling me and it’s always seem like the easiest way, and I’ve been fairly successful.”

My father was naturally reflective. The moment we were finished with the interview he began, “How was that, I got a B? ‘Prolly tells you a lot about me. But that’s the way it was traveling west. Is that the way you see it? Am I fabricating? Am I getting better with time away from the target?”

“Yeah I guess we all do.” He mumbled to himself and continued, “But I want it to be factual for you. That’s the way I think it happened. You guys wouldn’t recognize everything when you were young. You were too young to see everything that was going on. I make it sound so calm cool and collected actually we were pulling out hair out moving every year, well before you...”

I am the youngest of five. My father retired when I was very young and I never had to move. My parents attended every sporting event I ever had, even when I was a freshman on the varsity team and sat on the bench.

I am so grateful that I was in performing interviews at the time of my father’s death. I am so grateful for my CCT reflective skills that I can synthesize these lessons and share them in a meaningful and appropriate manner.

At my fathers funeral I chose to give one of my father’s Eulogies. The other two spoke of my father’s phenomenal career and leadership ability, about the tremendous friend that he was, and the affect he had on the lives of everyone he met. I wanted to share my father’s special gifts as a father. It read:

*It seems to me that God uses death to teach us of the preciousness and beauty of life. I know that I can’t understand now how much I will miss him, but I am certain that the biggest blessing of my life is to appreciate my father, to*

*appreciate my family, the life he gave us and to appreciate my mother. They say that behind every great man is an even greater woman. Mom I love you. You are both the reflection and the source of Dads insurmountable courage, his unreasonable class and his unwavering strength.*

*I grew up with a father that came home with candy in his pockets. I woke up to a father that hugged me and blessed me with our guardian angel every day. He taught me to reach for the moon and grab as many stars as I could on my way, and to take care of his baby. My father made reaching for the moon easy. In fact he arranged the tickets for me. And I knew, he would always be there to help me with my wings.*

*It would not be possible to ever fill the void left by Tom McNiff. The shoes are too big, the laces too specialized and let's face it, he probably had some special secret way of tying them. He will walk with each of us always, keeping step, leading the way, and giving us a nudge on the seat of the pants when we need it.*

*He brought the term Daddy's little girl to a whole new level. He did it with class, with foresight, with selfless courage and most importantly with love. Thank you Dad. We will always love you. Go easy on St Peter. It may take him awhile to understand your plans.*

### Addendum #3: A CONVERSATIONAL LITERATURE REVIEW

I have found during these years of searching out a new career that many of us are unfulfilled in our careers. Many of us have secret desires, some not yet realized, and some not yet vocalized. At social gatherings rather than the obligatory, “So what do you do?” I found myself asking questions like, “What is your thing?” “Where do you lose time?” And without fail the facial expression of my new friend changes, as if they feel seen for who they really are, and more importantly for who they could become. We begin a journey filled conversation and our passions fuel the conversation. Many of us give such little time in our busy weeks to our loves, our passions. I have found that in our unique passions we feel real and realized. I adore such conversations, and in that spirit this literature review is written in such a manner, as if we are talking over a coffee or a beer...

#### **If you want to clarify what being successful means to you...**

Secrets Of The Young & Successful How to get everything You Want Without Waiting a Lifetime. Jennifer Kushell with Scott M. Kaufman. A Fireside Book, Published by Simon and Schuster. New York 2003

In my opinion the title alone preys on the weakness of us desperate twenty-some-things who want everything now, and more than anything, do not want to have to wait an appropriate amount of time to get it. We grew up with microwaves and didn't have to wait an hour to get Mac and cheese. Easy Mac is better and only takes five minutes. I'm a desperate 20 something. I have been miserable in a cubicle for three years. I would like it if Kushell could help me get what I want, now.

According to Kushell, I am among the Young and Successful. Most likely she wants us

all to feel this way, and buy her sequel. Kushell introduces the Young and Successful as, “action-oriented and proactive. They have an exhilarating aura of freedom and independence. They do what most of us just talk and dream about. They create a stir-make the world sit up and take notice.” I have done a lot of things that I know others talk and dream about. I’ve skied in the Alps, jumped out of airplanes, flown in the back seat of an F-16, dog sledded in the bush of Canada, golfed on St Andrews, and more. My oldest sister always says that when I walk into a room there is instantly more energy in it. The pinch is that Kushell goes on to describe the success portion of her equation, “They always seem to land the best jobs, get the most coveted opportunities, and make money doing things they love. They make the biggest impact on the lives of others.” I do not feel like I am making money doing what I love. Kushell's definition of Young and Successful has prompted me to reflect on my measure of success in my own life. If I am ever going to measure up to my own idea of success I want to know what my success looks like.

Kushell helped me picture and describe for myself what I want. Her recommended exercises gave a means to play with these images. She offers success stories from her life and others she has met along her way to being young and successful, and challenged me to know my story. My favorite challenge is from a scenario she sets up in which I am instantly rich! My wise old loving uncle left me his fortune, but to get the money I have to make a list of twenty goals I want to accomplish in my life, and bring at least one a year to fruition. I particularly enjoy this section because it went beyond monetary success, corporate advances, and tied success to life contributions. I found great value in imagining twenty things I would like to accomplish.

In summary, I believe there is value in Kushell’s exercises, especially for the young and confused. I found value in picturing my ideal life, learning to dream, and developing goals. Reflecting on Kushell’s advice, I realized the importance of balancing living my life now, and having visions of my future. There is a difference between having hope and expecting my future to be ideal. I do not want to get everything I want out of life today, because as I learn, grow, and

experience life my desires change. Kushell gave me tools to think about what I want in my life-time. I would recommend this resource to anyone stuck in knowing their story and stuck in their story. Kushell writes in a voice from a world where anything is possible.

**If you have no idea where to start, but know that you want a career change...**

What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers. 2004 Edition Revised & Updated. Richard N. Bolles. Ten Speed Press. Berkley 2004.

I like Bolles because I respect and admire his mission. In my opinion, his desire to help people find direction and fulfillment in their life shines through in his work.

On the companion web site, Bolles declares that *What Color Is Your Parachute* is, “the job hunters Bible.” The plethora of advice, resources, tools and mind opening ideas offered in the book, and its companion web site are borderline overwhelming. Much like Kushell’s advice, I found the greatest value of this resource to be the inspiration I felt while reading it. Bolles gave me a sense that he believes in me and understands what I am going through. Perhaps what I respect the most is that Bolles admits, “Job-hunting always involves luck, to some degree. But with a little bit of luck, and a lot of hard work, plus determination, these instructions about how to get hired, should work for you, even as they have worked for so many hundreds of thousands before you.” This statement validated for the insecure predicament I feel myself in and I respect that he didn’t attempt to offer a miracle solution. His sound advice feels reassuring, as though he was saying, “it will be okay Meghann, we can do this, I’ll help you.”

Bolles’ Parachute, I assume, is a metaphor for safety in jumping from the ‘aircraft’ of a steady income, and is meant to be used as a resource to land safely and secure another job. Bolles divides job-hunting into the traditional get a job, job-hunt and the life changing job-hunt. I divided the chapters into: A) How to discover what I want to do, and B) How to get, or get paid for, what I want to do. Job-hunting is an extremely scary situation, and I think because Bolles understands this situation so well that we job-hunters cling to his text as if it were our Bible. As

a good complement to providing safety in his understanding of this scary predicament, I felt inspired to continue on my path to discover and take off on my mission. Bolles offers advice to get a job that meets the career hunters' needs, and much more. This book also speaks to that desire to do something more with a career than to pay the bills.

In reading this book I discovered that I wasn't just looking for a career. I am looking for a mission. As a special addendum to the 2004 edition, Bolles added a section about his faith and how he views a life mission from a spiritual perspective. As a spiritual person, I found this section particularly enlightening and clear. I have an instinct that we all have a purposed life, and that we all want purpose in our life. The basic idea goes back to doing that thing, whatever it is that we are particularly talented at in a setting where we are particularly needed. Minus the pay check, I think this is what we are all looking for. I really think Bolles hits the nail on the head, we all want to be good at something and we want to be needed and appreciated for doing it.

Bolles offers concrete tools to uncover our personal desires, strengths, needs, and talents. Why we need a book to do this for us is beyond me, but Bolles offers a formula and a language to figure it out. I literally woke up one day and realized I am going to my father's job. I enjoyed the validation that it is okay to want a job that is fun, and the support to finding that job. One exercise is to list words that you enjoy. The text points out that choosing a job where we like the lingo is important because we'll be surrounded with these words.

Probably the most well known exercise from Bolles is the flower exercise. The flower exercise is a culmination of exercises designed to identify talents and preferences in one's career. Each petal of the flower represents a different aspect of a career: Where & Geography, Favorite Interest and Fields of Fascinations, My Favorite People & Environments, My Favorite Values, Purposes & Goals, My Favorite Working Conditions, Salary and Level of Responsibility, and at the center My Favorite Skills. The idea is to go through an exercise to flush out ideas for each petal and then bring them together on one flower, post it up and brainstorm possible jobs that combine our elements. Both the Bolles and Kushell advocate posting some visual representation

of career aspirations and personal goals or affirmations. I put up some sticky notes and forgetting they were their, a friend came over and read them. An unexpected benefit of this embarrassing moment, was that I realized I am on this search and it is something I am doing, but it is not who I am. I have found great joy in accomplishing the goals I put pen to ink. There is a very powerful connection in writing something down and accomplishing it. Take for example a simple grocery list? I would recommend keeping this list in a safe place. In doing so, remember that life goes on despite this major change in yours.

In summary, I found the job hunters' 'Bible' to be a great resource to broaden my resources, language and tools, to learn about the process of changing careers. Most important to me was that Bolles inspired and validated my search for not just a job, but a mission. There are so many parts to this book it can be intimidating, so go easy with it, but definitely check it out.

**If you need a break from self-help and want to read about how other people have done it...**

What Should I Do With My Life? The True Story of People Who Answered the Ultimate Question. Po Bronson. Random House. New York. 2002.

I loved this book. I loved reading about people and how they have lived their lives. There is a strange security in learning about other people's mistakes. I underlined a section on the sleeve cover, "people who made mistakes before getting it right." The whole book feels like an intimate conversation with a friend who is sharing their secrets. Bronson's stories are divided into sections about destiny vs. self-created meaning, struggles of social classes, temptation and aspirations, destiny vs. journey, lessons on knowing ourselves, location, relationships and family, and the appropriate time frame (to make a change). Bronson, like all of us, made mistakes along the way. He made major career changes, and was intrigued with the process and, "how other people have done it." He tells the stories with the ear of empathy. He captures the important elements of the process, having dealt with them intimately. I found Bronson to be a nice break from self-help. Rather than giving advice to fix myself, Bronson captures and tells

the story of real people. I found the stories to be generally fun and inspiring.

I believe there are many lessons to be learned from a compilation of a few common denominators of our/my generation. A few I learned from Bronson's book are: 1) It won't be perfect, but do it any way. 2) My new favorite policy: If I find myself saying, "I'd love to do that!" I do. 3) It is not about the money.

**If you want to consider a systems approach of personal change and the creative process...**

The Path of Least Resistance. Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life. Robert Fritz. Fawcett Columbine. New York. 1989.

Fritz offers an analogy that our lives, like a river, follow the path of least resistance. In order to change the flow of energy the river bed must change. Assuming the energy of our lives is like that of a river, I can see how my structure is formed by my parents, my environment, and various other social impacts. However, as I was reading I found myself saying, "I'm not a river, I can pick up and move any time I want. I can quit, I can run, I can throw a temper tantrum. I am not a river."

At this point on my journey I screamed, "I abhor self-help books!"

I even came up with a theory that there is an inherent element to self-help books that promote in our psyche the idea that we are broken, and need a book to tell us how to be creative and innovative in our own lives (or whatever it may be that we are labeling ourselves to be broken about). As I continued to reflect on my reaction to this analogy I realized that my professional river bed, my job as an officer in the military, comes with the threat of jail and yes I do feel trapped.

Ironically enough one of Fritz's main points is that the creative process creates a tension between what one wants to create and is resolved when it is created. In fact, according to Fritz the energy created in the tension is energy towards its resolution. Admittedly, I believe that my tension in accepting Fritz's theory was created by my frustration to resolve and create a job of

least resistance and to have control over the creative force in my life. I have witnessed powerful affects of Fritz's ideas on my classmates. Since reading this book I have been working very hard to become conscious of the path I am setting for myself, and of choosing the flow of my energy. I will certainly reread this book. I believe Fritz's philosophy has great value.

Additionally Fritz has some very cool and simple ideas about the creative process. One, mentioned earlier in my text, is that in order to create something we only have to know it well enough to recognize it when we have it. So as to not micromanage our creative work, whether it be a quilt, a home, a family, a novel, whatever it is, it will take on a life of its own as it grows and matures. But, to me, it seems that the birth of every creative work is in our articulating in our own language what it will look, feel, and smell like when it is done just enough to know, "hey I recognize you!" It is elusive, but I think that is the point. It is entirely personal.

### **If you just need some help....**

#### Considering a Career Resource Advisor?

My career resource advisor was a great tool, and very expensive. I did not have clear cut goals for her and wasted a bit of time. She helped me write my resume for the Peace Corps and that was an important step in finally turning in my application and taking the move seriously. She validated my reasons for not feeling fulfilled in my job, and that validation was very important in taking my situation seriously. She also expressed concern with having a plan for my future rather than going to the Peace Corps and coming back without a plan for a job. Like most of the career resource materials, she gave me tools to discover my options.

The most valuable lesson from my time with her was to make an action plan to:

A) make changes to enjoy my job now B) identify a bridge job between my job now and my ideal job and C) identify my ideal job. To enjoy my job now I made a keep, add, drop list of my current tasks and did my best to implement it. The bridge job is a derivative of my job now and my ideal job, as it turns out this will be graduate school and the Peace Corps. I never made it to the final step of narrowing down specific jobs, but she gave me three double sided, double

columned, list of skills and tasks. I reviewed it for ten skills that I think I am good at, and ten skills that I would like to do. We then sat together and reviewed each skill and brainstormed possible camps or career fields. She called them my pillars: Women, Health, and Environment. At our next meeting we narrowed it down to Health first, Women second and Environment as a periphery interest. I applied to BU to get a master's of Public Health in International Maternal and Child Health. This program is partnered with the Peace Corps. I did not even know such programs existed before meeting with her. Ideal is a tough word, and I am still working on my ideal job, but I know the elements are health, women, adventure, and some form of public service. I would recommend finding a credible career resource advisor to anyone that can afford it and is serious about making a career change. If I were to do it over again I would ask for a free consultation and I would not show up and give my money to someone on faith that she is good and credible. I definitely got lucky, and she definitely changed my life direction. It was so nice to talk to a human being and get feedback throughout the process. If you are like me and would rather push zero and talk to a customer service representative than use the automated service, a career resource advisor is a wonderful relief!

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