Living expressions: An initial understanding

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LIVING EXPRESSIONS: AN INITIAL
UNDERSTANDING

by

Martin Bennett Landa
Bachelor of Arts
Griffith University
1995

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Living Expressions: An Initial Understanding

by

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Living Expressions is a term that was created to describe a unique, formalized process of interpersonal communication, in which individuals share often unexpressed feelings of appreciation with one another. This qualitative study explored a single case, single process event, based on interviews with the participants. A constructivist paradigm guides the research with intentional avoidance of a priori theory, and institutes an emergent design with the human as instrument. The purpose of the study was to foster a greater understanding of a new and unusual formal process that holds numerous potentially positive implications in its widespread application. The review of the literature offered an overview of the most closely related, primary communication process of positive self-disclosure, operationalized the focus of the study, and identified similar processes. The discussion of the data took the narrative form of an impressionistic ethnography describing the meaning the event held for its participants, through their eyes.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One evening, on a visit to this researcher’s father-in-law’s home, the privilege of attending a very unique event was given. The effects of the experience of that event have reverberated throughout the last three years, and continue to do so. The goal of this research is to describe and explore the meaning that a similar event, attended by the members of the researcher’s own family and the researcher himself, holds for the individuals that participated in it.

When the father-in-law mentioned above, suggested on his birthday, that he would love to just sit around the living room and share with his family members the ways they had positively influenced his life, and have them do the same for him, this author thought it was a bit corny. The father-in-law’s wife and daughter were joined by the author in making silly jokes about his request. As a result of humoring him, the outcome of this kind of sharing has come to be viewed as nothing short of remarkable. It is proved so remarkable, in fact, that this author felt it warranted significant research.

In this author’s own life experience with family and friends, deep, heartfelt communication is rare. This lack of deeper communication is a problem that represents significant unfinished emotional business in the author’s life, particularly in the context of family. For many people perhaps the kind of deeper communication
represented by the type of event being explored in this research only takes place in
the context of a eulogy, after the person they are expressing their appreciation to is no
longer alive. The significance of sharing this kind of appreciation with those that are
loved is a focal point for exploring the meaning that this research case holds for its
participants. The term “meaning” is operationalized in the literature review.

With the help of a partner, the type of event being researched has come to be
called a "Living Expression" (hereafter referred to as a LE) because of the
compliments and praise that are expressed between the individuals who participate in
them while they are alive, instead of a one way eulogy to the dead. Schaeffer (1995)
accurately describes the power of traditional eulogies as playing “... a valuable part
in the healing process, ...” and its ability to “... serve as a catharsis, and become a
gift to the people at the memorial service. And of course, a eulogy is a way to express
your love publicly" (p. 6). The healing process that is referred to here is one that this
author has personally seen take place through a LE, and the phenomenon of catharsis
and expressing love publicly were both elements of the process. The fact that many
individuals find themselves sharing their deepest communication with the individuals
who are closest to them, after they are dead, points to the importance of studying LEs
as a means of determining their significance.

Although fiction, an example of the kind of healing and catharsis that are
possible through a LE is presented in an account of "Speaking" in Orson Scott Card's
(1986) Speaker For The Dead story:

For the first time, then, she caught a glimpse of what the power of
Speaking might be. It wasn't a matter of confession, penance, and
absolution, like the priests offered. It was something else entirely.
Telling the story of who she was, and then realizing that she was no
longer the same person. That she had made a mistake, and the mistake
had changed her, and now she would not make the mistake again
because she had become someone else, someone less afraid, someone more compassionate. (pp. 482-483)

The focus of this research does present certain limitations. There have been no specific studies on this kind of event to base research on. Additionally, participants’ willingness and depth of responses potentially restrict the amount and type of information that can be studied. This will undoubtedly be limited by the ability to elicit encompassing descriptions of meaning that allow for both clear representation, and give the participants the necessary latitude for its expression.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In approaching a review of the literature for a study that is exploratory and purely descriptive in nature, there is an inherent dilemma at the outset. Much of the naturalistic (constructivist) paradigm guides the research. The purposeful avoidance of a priori theory is mandated by the axioms that come from this paradigm. In addition, the intention of creating an impressionistic ethnography is to allow the readers to come to their own understandings of the multiple realities presented, without creating theoretical frameworks. As a result, an extensive discussion of theory and framing typical in traditional literature reviews is not presented, although the paradigm and axioms of constructivism that guides this research is presented in the methods section.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) raise an important issue that further addresses the dilemma mentioned above. Given the emergent design and mutually shaped outcomes of a naturalistic inquiry, "... a preoccupation with existing literature may introduce an unwanted bias" (p. 369). Simply put, this investigator has not, nor has anyone else ever researched or thoroughly described the significantly unique process of a LE event. It is important not to bring a huge amount of mental baggage derived from reviewing peripheral literature to a study that has not yet determined an encompassing picture of what its own process is, let alone what this process held for
the individuals involved. The potential inclination to hold preselected frameworks in mind, can definitely prevent an impartial judgment of both how data is collected, and how even a descriptive narrative is framed from that data. In attempting to remain somewhat neutral in approaching this study and selecting material appropriate for a literature review, the focus is on the closest primary communication process that the LE represents: self-disclosure. There is an emphasis on its positive aspect, since the appreciation shared in a LE has the specific intent of being positive. Reiterating the concern of bias and the need to present somewhat neutral information, there is not an excessive concern with the vast research on self-disclosure and the theories derived from these. As a result, a simple overview of the relevant aspects of self-disclosure that apply to the unique process being studied, an operationalization of the focus of the study, and an identification of other processes that are somewhat similar to a LE, are presented.

Overview of Self-disclosure

"Self-disclosure, loosely defined as what individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others (including thoughts, feelings, and experiences), plays a major role in close relationships" (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993, p. 1). Self-disclosure in its positive aspect represents the main communication process that takes place during a LE. There are many dimensions of the content of self-disclosure (Chelune, Skiffington, & Williams, 1981; Coupland et al., 1988; Derlega & Grezlak, 1979; Holtgraves, 1990). The one that is most applicable to this study is the evaluative expression of personal feelings. These are the types of appreciative communications that take place in a LE.

In regards to the focus of this study, the central issue here is the relationship of self-disclosure to close relationships. This is because a LE is specifically an event in
which individuals involved in close relationships participate. Early work suggested that self-disclosure and close relationships were synonymous. This included Levinger and Snoek's (1972) incremental exchange theory, Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory, Wheeless's (1976) interpersonal solidarity correlation, and the humanistic psychology of Jourard (1971), Carl Rogers (1970), and Graff (1970). Since then, Derlega et al. (1993) have shown that: "Self-disclosure can contribute to developing a close relationship... and may contribute to relationship maintenance... however, (it) is not equivalent to having a close relationship" (p. 2).

Potentially there is even the question of the importance of not only self-disclosure, but of close relationships themselves. Without diving deeply into an entirely separate treatment of this issue, suffice it to say that many researchers have shown that close relationships are important predictors of healthy psychological and physiological functioning (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Gove, 1973; Jacobs & Charles, 1980; Lynch, 1977; Medalie & Goldbourt, 1976; Thomas & Duszynski, 1974). In Duck's (1988) discussion of the role of relationships in life, he asserts that:

For the majority of people, the answer to the question, "What is it that makes your life meaningful?" is one that refers to close relationships with friends, kin, their children, or life partner. Recent work by Argyle (1987) confirms this and notes that, by contrast, money, career, and religion are relatively less important for people than are their personal relationships. (p. 1)

There are numerous, potentially important aspects of self-disclosure. Some psychology authorities believe that self-disclosure is a requirement for a healthy personality (Jourard, 1959; Rogers, 1959). Jourard (1971) further suggests that "... the capacity to disclose authentically, in response that is appropriate to the setting, to the authentic disclosure of the other person in a dyad, is probably one of the best indicants of healthy personality" (p. 231). Jourard's (1971) central hypothesis is that "... simple honesty with others... is likely to be an effective preventative of
both mental illness and certain kinds of physical sickness" (p.133). The work of a number of other early researchers echoed a positive, linear relationship of disclosure level to mental health (Culbert, 1968; Fromm, 1955; Mowrer, 1964).

All of the above discussion of self-disclosure and its positive correlation to the health of individuals gives the strong impression that it is reasonable to believe that there may well be a connection. Other investigators have gone so far as to create formalized theory about how processes representing this connection exist. An example is the work by Pennebaker (Pennebaker, 1989; Pennebaker & Hoover, 1985) who developed a theory of inhibition in which:

To actively inhibit one's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors requires psychological work... Over time, the work of inhibition serves as a cumulative stressor on the body, which increases the probability of illness and other stress-related physical and psychological problems (p. 231).

In his seminal work on self-disclosure, Jourard (1971) defined the dyadic effect in which "... disclosure begets disclosure." and described this reciprocity where individuals in dialogue "... disclose their thoughts, feelings, actions, etc., to the other and are disclosed to in return" (p. 66). A number of other researchers have also raised the issue of the dyadic effect, but none were able to conclusively establish its existence (Jourard & Landsman, 1960; Jourard & Resnick, 1970; Panyard, 1973). Several coorientation theorists found that the degree of an individual's disclosure was indeed related to the degree of disclosure by the reciprocating individual (Alsbrook, 1976; Levenger & Senn, 1967; Pearce, Wright, Sharp, & Slama, 1974). Johnson (1981) also echoed this by further asserting that disclosing leads to liking, and that liking leads to disclosing.

As a LE is an exchange between participants, it is important to note that self-disclosure is not something that a single individual does independently.
Holtgraves (1990) explicates this where he points out that "... the emphasis is on joint contributions of the interactants through the give and take of a conversation. In the end, both what is disclosed, and its significance, are to be viewed as a collective, emergent phenomenon" (p. 196). This is quite significant in the context of a LE since the process and its overall effect is a mutual group experience.

Derlega & Chaikin (1975) describe how "... a bond of trust develops between the two persons, as each steadily reveals more intimate and more guarded material" (p. 43). This is indeed the expressed intent of sharing appreciation in a LE. Because of the further intention to maintain and expand a close relationship via a LE, this is clearly about trust leading to enhancing the closeness of relationships. One group of researchers suggest that, "When we receive very personal disclosures from another, we may feel closer to that person because we know he or she trusts us and values our response" (Derlega et al., 1993, p. 2). Derlega et al. (1993) further point out that self-disclosure "... can be confirmation of one's own worth and one of the greatest rewards provided by intimate relationships" (p. 8). Other investigators assert that honest sharing is the basis of true friendship and love (Bach & Deutsch, 1970; Powell, 1969, 1974).

Sprecher (1987) has shown in a survey of close partners, that the important effects of self-disclosure come from not only the amount of information that a person discloses to a partner but also the amount that the person feels the partner discloses. If one feels that their partner is open and disclosing with them, their feelings of liking or love for them are increased. This is of course representative of the dyadic nature of the process itself.

The issue of increased love and intimacy related to self-disclosure is another significant aspect of the process, and there is evidence to suggest this correlation. In
a study by Chelune, Waring, Vosk, Sultan, and Ogden (1984) it was found that positive disclosure statements were positively associated with intimacy. Dillman (1994) found that knowledge of personal aspects of partners was significantly related to intimacy. Duck (1988) asserts that:

It is clear from a number of studies that the intimacy level of a relationship is often advanced by one of the partners’ strategically releasing more intimate information than is usual in the relationship and the other partner responding with equally (increased) intimate responses (see Miell, 1984, or Miell and Duck, 1986, for a summary). (p. 57)

It is important to note the distinction between self-disclosure and intimacy. It is all too often easy to extend positive correlations further than they reasonably can be. Also, the nature of the relationships between disclosers plays a significant role in the process. In line with this, other researchers assert that:

Although self-disclosure is not equivalent to and does not define the level of intimacy of a relationship, it is one major factor in the development, maintenance, and deterioration of a relationship. Conversely the level of closeness between relationship partners (whether the individuals are acquaintances, friends, lovers, or relatives) affects the meaning and impact of disclosure. (Derlega et al., 1993, p. ix)

There are other issues involved in seeing self-disclosure as important to relationships. It is often assumed in close relationships that people know how one feels about them, especially when that care is a well established fact. Research has shown otherwise. Duck and Miell (1986), in charting the development of friendships, found that “... a major element that directed actions was extreme uncertainty about the other person’s feelings towards oneself and the likely stability of those feelings” (p. 49).

This highly relative issue to a LE has unfortunately received very little attention, and is critical to an understanding of why positive self-disclosure in a LE can be of value. Duck (1988) points out that:
A clear but under-researched fact about human social life is that we are very often uncertain about others' feelings for us. (By contrast, researchers have devoted a great deal of time to unraveling our attributions about why other people do things rather than how they feel towards us). (p. 9)

It is empirically clear by simply asking most people, including oneself, that disclosing personal feelings is rather uncommon. It has been shown that unlike what one would assume about communication within most close relationships, personal disclosures are as uncommon there as anywhere else. Extensive research (Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991) has shown that:

Self-disclosure is much less frequent in everyday life than assumed on the basis of laboratory work, and the predominant form of communication in intimate relationships is not only nonintimate but not simply distinguishable from communication in other relationship types. (p. 228)

If this is indeed true, it follows that the issue of a lack of positive self-disclosure in society, and the ramifications inherently defined by the studies that have been mentioned, are indeed important things to look at. Further, if these things are significant, then processes that address the lack of positive expression of the feelings one has for another are not only worthy of research, but potentially significant to one's overall well-being.

This lack of positive expression is addressed by Tucker-Ladd (1996) where he explains that, "Even expressing a positive feeling or a compliment is difficult for some people. . . . Some families just don't talk about personal feelings, so self-disclosure is for some a scary new way of interacting" (p. 766).

Operationalization of Focus

This begs the introduction of what is actually being studied in looking at the LE appreciation event. Rather than specifically looking at the effects that the process
had on the participants, the focus is on the broad meaning it held for those involved. A brief operationalizing of this focus is helpful in clarifying the intentions of this research.

The difficulty of clearly defining the focus is illuminated by Bowers & Bradac (1982), where they point out that, "The meaning of 'meaning' is multi-faceted and perhaps confused... The problem of agreeing on what 'meaning' means is a perennial one (Black, 1949; Brown, 1958; Goodman, 1951; Ogden & Richards, 1930; Quine, 1960)" (p. 2).

Given the diverse multiple realities that are represented by the respondents in this study, the need for precise operationalization is unnecessary. For the purpose of this study, it is more than sufficient to use the operational definition of meaning provided by the American Heritage Dictionary (1983) as the guiding holy grail for LE research. It is simply, "inner significance."

Similar Processes

It is of value for historical and contrasting purposes to discuss other processes that are similar to the LE event being researched. This allows an initial insight into the event and some of its aspects. It is more than a little surprising just how few such similar processes exist. But in light of how relatively uncommon the process of self-disclosure is, it seems only natural that there would be few examples of its social presence published or promoted.

When attempting to unearth similar processes to a LE, it is initially surprising that there is almost a total absence of appreciation material related to anything within the vast realm of psychology. For example, in a 429 page psychology dictionary there are only two listings that have any correlation to appreciation at all. One intervention called "compliment," whose purpose is to "... build a yes set for a family... consists of some positive statement with which all members of the family can agree" (Sauber,
L'Abate, Weeks, & Buchanan, 1993, p. 70). Another definition for “marital enrichment group” says that it is “... designed to increase awareness and communication of the positive aspects in a marital relationship ...” (Sauber et al., 1993, p. 243). The first of these is hardly appreciation. The second is at least closer to the mark as only one of several thousand definitions.

There are a number of techniques used in therapy that assist self-disclosure in a positive, appreciative manner. Within the realm of therapy for relational repair previously presented in the definition of a marital enrichment group, Bandura (1977) mentions “... techniques [that] involve the complainer in listing the positive and pleasing qualities of the partner, or having the person keep a diary recording the nice things the partner does” (p. 133). Neimeyer and Hudson (1985) have developed some “living laboratory” methods for couples that help to improve their intimate interactions with one another, while Miell (1984) has indicated the ways in which self-disclosure in pairs may be strategically enhanced in order to increase the couple’s intimacy. R. A. Lewis (1978) also showed how intimacy training can be used to improve a couple’s experiences of one another, in research focused on intimacy between pairs of male friends. One of the relational maintenance strategies found in a study of fifty couples by Dindia and Baxter (1987) was expressing compliments. A technique used in brief marital therapy called “meaningful praise” uses the power of appreciation to help reinforce positive behavior patterns. Each person is asked to specify what he or she liked about what the other person did in the past (Hudson & O’hanlon, 1991).

On an altogether divergent note, Kaslow (1993) describes a therapeutic/healing divorce ceremony in which the husband is asked to thank the wife for the good years and happy times he remembers. The wife is then asked to tell the
husband about the good things she will always cherish about the marriage. Friends are asked to say how they are prepared to help during the transition and what their friendship means to them. Both the husband and wife are then asked to tell their children how they were conceived (or adopted) in love, and what each child has meant to them. Finally, anyone else at the ceremony is asked to tell the husband and wife what is in their hearts that may help them to feel some inner peace and healing. Here the appreciation is possibly a little bit too late to have an intended effect in the present tense of a close relationship.

In gestalt therapy there are several versions of appreciation exercises. In one called "appreciations," couples are asked to state their appreciation specifically and in detail, using examples. The basis for this exercise is that the:

... assumption that we often make is that others know when we appreciate them. We take it for granted that they know when we are pleased, so we don't bother to express our approval directly. Even if I know that you appreciate me, I like to hear you say it now and then. (Stevens, 1971, p. 191)

In a very similar vein, one other gestalt exercise used in groups of six to eight people sitting in a circle, called "giving and receiving appreciation," asks one person at a time to sit in the center and remain silent while each person in the circle tells three or four things he/she appreciates about the person in the center. The participants are asked not to be phony or use "... vague, general statements of praise, compliments, reassurance, etc." (Stevens, 1971, p. 210). Instead they are asked to be very specific, detailed and honest. The idea here is to develop good feelings and trust.

It is interesting to note that all of these processes take place in the context of formal therapy. Perhaps the explanation for this is inherent in the rarity of positive self-disclosure itself, as mentioned earlier in reference to research by Duck et al., 1991.
This is potentially supported by the fact that this researcher was only able to find a few examples of socially available and promoted methods of direct appreciation expression. Since a LE is also a socially available method, and is soon to be promoted, an extended treatment of these other methods is warranted.

One is contained within a commercially available board game called *Life Stories*. The creators describe it as "A fun game of telling tales and sharing smiles with family and friends" (Bockelman, Johnson, & Howell, 1992, game box cover). It has players move along paths of colored squares with symbols, by the role of dice. When they land on a square, they pick a card from the "memory, etchings, or valuables" pile. Each card instructs them to tell different kinds of stories. If they do not like what the card asks them to do, they can choose another from an alternatives pile. None of the choices of cards specifically asks for an expression of appreciation, but that can certainly be incorporated if desired, given the nature of the cards’ requests for personal stories that are likely to involve the other players. It is the end of the game for each player that potentially contains the element of appreciation. As each player reaches the Grand Celebration square in the middle of the board, the player pauses while each of the other players celebrate with this winner by telling a story, sharing an experience, or saying something positive about the person. The games continues until each and every player finishes and is celebrated by all of the other players.

It is interesting to note that this game contains an extensive essay of sorts, written by one of the game’s creators, on the back side of the instruction sheet. It is here that descriptions of peoples’ experiences of playing the game reveal just how appreciation oriented it often is. Bockelman (1992) says that:

When families have played the game, parents have been surprised not only at the affirmative things their children have said about them but
also the positive things they have said about each other. More than that, it has given parents the opportunity to affirm each other as well as their children. (Reverse side of instruction sheet)

Another example of socially available and promoted methods of direct appreciation expression is a process called the “Blue Ribbon Award.” It was developed by a woman named Helice Bridges, who ambitiously intends to have one million awards given out by the year 2000. The process involves selecting someone who means a lot to an individual, and describing what this person has done to make a difference in that person’s life.

Helice has created several web pages that facilitate the entire process of giving a Blue Ribbon Award at no charge to those giving them, and also contains a “Blue Ribbon Hall Of Fame,” with copies of the awards that have been given. The expressions of appreciation are emailed to her with the recipient’s name and email address, and she incorporates it into a personalized email that is then sent to the recipient. Included in the email are a notification that the person has been nominated for the award, the expressions of appreciation, and a graphic of the blue ribbon award.

The web pages created for the award giving begin with an opening page with Bridges’ (1996) preamble called "The Story Behind This Award: Who You Are Makes A Difference" (Web page). This story is significant because it shows the power of appreciation. A teacher in New York gave a blue ribbon imprinted with gold letters reading “Who I Am Makes A Difference” to each of her high school seniors. They were presented in front of the class with the teacher telling them how they had made a difference to her and the class. As a follow-up, a project was initiated in which she gave each student three more ribbons to go out and spread this acknowledgment ceremony, with the request that they come back to class to share how this affected the community.
One student gave a ribbon to a junior executive who had helped him with career planning, then shared his appreciation, and asked him to take the other two ribbons and find someone else to honor, and to ask that person to do the same with the third ribbon. The junior executive gave it to his rather grumpy boss who was so surprised that he allowed it to be pinned on his jacket above his heart, and then gladly accepted the last ribbon to be given to someone of his choosing as part of the original students' class project.

The boss went home to his 14-year-old son and told him about the incredible experience he had of receiving the ribbon and the appreciation he was given. He said he was driving home thinking about who he would honor, and he thought of him. He proceeded to tell his son how hectic his days usually were, and that he realized he did not pay enough attention to him, complained about his grades and his messy room, but wanted him to know that he did make a difference to him, and that besides his wife, he was the most important person in his life. He ended by telling him that he was a great kid and that he loved him. The boy could not stop crying, and said that he was planning to commit suicide tomorrow because he did not think his dad loved him, but now he did not need to (Bridges, 1996).

An additional inspiring public process of appreciation was found in a letter to the editor of a Christian Science newspaper. Ann Tyson (1997) says “The idea behind letter of appreciation week is simple: to encourage everyone to take a few minutes to write a note thanking someone who has gone out of his or her way to be kind or helpful” (p. 3). The county she lives in, McHenry County, Illinois, is the birthplace of “National Write a Letter of Appreciation Week,” held from March first through seventh each year. During this event:

... schoolchildren and other thoughtful McHenry people sent a
seven-day flurry of unexpected “thank-you” notes to everyone from grandparents to the local mailman . . . The response was enthusiastic. Grandmothers burst into tears of joy. Phone calls and letters poured in. Local reporters wrote columns, McHenry Mayor Steve Cuda proclaimed the week official. (Tyson, 1997, p. 3)

It is not only heart-warming to see that there are indeed some very public expressions of appreciation, and processes that facilitate it, but it is also indicative of a greater need. When the few examples that this researcher was able to find show just how strong this need is, and how powerfully it affects those that have a part in the processes involved, one can only wonder what kind of world we might live in if appreciation were an integral part of everyday life.

Other Related Discussions And Methods

There are a number of related discussions and methods in publications, centered around themes of thankfulness, gratitude, recognition, validation, sharing, encouragement and appreciative inquiry. A discussion of each of these references follows.

In an article in Prevention magazine, Ardath Rodale (1998), the CEO of Rodale Press, asks the question, “Can we instill into our own children the exhilarating joy of being thankful?” (p. 204). Her reference here is a reflection on the need to express thankfulness to others more often. She begins by mentioning a discussion group about appreciation in which one member talked about her high motivation to go the extra mile in her work because of the thanks she always gets from her boss. At the same time another woman in the group broke down and cried because her boss had never once thanked her for doing a good job, and this had left her feeling extremely inadequate.

Rodale (1998) asserts that “Appreciation tears down our negative barriers and has strong power to affect our lives for good” (p. 204). She concludes by saying

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that expressing gratitude is "... like looking up at life with a smile. It soon becomes a habit!" (p. 204).

Even the President of the United States, Bill Clinton (1996), talks about his gratitude to his mother in an article about Mother's Day. Although much of the article is focused on reflections from the past, the most significant commentary in relationship to LEs is in regards to his satisfaction that although he did not get to say goodbye to his mother, he "... knew in his heart that we had said all we needed to say. There were no accounts to settle, no words or emotions left unsaid" (p. 27).

The appreciation that takes place within the context of a LE is very allied with recognition. Examples of literature about the value and importance of personal recognition can be found in articles about human resources in corporations. In one such article in HRFocus, Rosalind Jeffries (1997), a "recognition consultant," talks about the extreme importance and value of recognition in the workplace. There are a couple of very interesting things to note about the discussion. First, in a survey conducted by her Performance Enhancement Group of over 10,000 employees, it was found that "... they prefer specific day-to-day recognition of their contributions over a raise or bonus" (p. 9). Second, in a list of ten recognition ideas is the suggestion of managers writing letters of praise to employees. These are both notable activities in that the social need for appreciation in the workplace, as well as in the family context of a LE, is highlighted.

In an article by Sally Valentine Kiester (1993) called "Best Ways to Say 'I Love You'," she refers to a statement by psychologist Leo Buscaglia, that "Candy gets stale and flowers wither. Words and deeds that say 'You enrich my life' go on forever" (p. 185-186). Here, intimate personal expressions of appreciation are seen as more valuable than material giving. Kiester (1993) herself asserts that "... the
most appreciated expressions of love are simple, everyday things” (p. 186). She also refers to professor of psychology Sarah Catron’s “...romance of the unromantic” (p. 186). These are both important issues that relate to LEs. The appreciative expressions that take place in a LE are often statements of how others have positively enriched one’s life. They are also often not huge, but rather simple expressions.

Another interesting article in Prevention magazine also mentions the far more significant value of appreciative statements over buying things or doing things for a loved one. The article is titled “Take 5 To Make Love Last.” The authors, Harold Bloomfield, MD, and Robert K. Cooper (1995), echo the notion that it is the little things that show appreciation. They recommend a number of techniques to nurture an enduring relationship. A number of these recommended processes represent elements present in a LE. “Use generous listening” (p. 93) is one in which “One of the reasons that love wanes is neglect, and one of the principal kinds of neglect is the inability to listen well” (Bloomfield & Cooper, 1995, p. 93). This is an extremely important point to note in relationship to a LE. Listening is a core component that creates the specific intended environment in which the focused sharing of appreciation is fostered.

Another technique the authors of the aforementioned article suggest is to “Strengthen your love with five-second validations” (Bloomfield & Cooper, 1995, p. 94). Here, using a quote from Gottman (1995), they make an assertion similar to the one referred to earlier in the article by Kiester (1993):

Worry a bit less about what you think is important--money problems, career track, the annual vacation--and pay more attention to the little things... Letting your spouse know in so many little ways that you understand him or her is one of the most powerful tools for healing your relationship. (p. 94)
They go on to suggest that “Validations—some requiring as little as five seconds—can lead to genuine empathy and understanding. Few things make a person feel more valued and loved” (Bloomfield & Cooper, 1995, p. 96).

In respect to a LE, validation is of course one of the core elements of the appreciation process. It is illuminating to see how a little bit of validation can have a very powerful effect, and that the content need not necessarily be anything beyond simple communications. The reason this may be important to consider is that it lends credence to the possibility that LEs could be extremely potent forms of validation because of their concentrated format.

The final suggestion that Bloomfield & Cooper (1995) make in their article is the most important to the research of LEs, as well as being the most important to the article’s intent. They suggest that people can “Grow closer by expressing five seconds to five minutes of appreciation” (p. 96). Their directions closely parallel the actual communication that takes place during an event:

... tell your partner many of the specific reasons you appreciate him or her. What meaning and inspiration can you and your spouse find in the detailed history of your relationship? Make a list ahead of time so you can “bathe” your loved one in appreciation. Some suggestions: What attracted you to your lover in the first place? What specific qualities about him or her do you admire the most? What were some of the highlights—and moments of laughter and fun—when you first began dating? How did your partnership help the two of you overcome any differences or obstacles along the way? Once you’ve made a list of specific experiences and qualities that you appreciate in your loved one, share the results. (Bloomfield & Cooper, 1995, p. 96)

Pointing up the importance of expressing feelings before it is too late, and echoing a sentiment that has been seen in other references, is another article by Ardath Rodale (1996), of Rodale Press. She briefly describes an experience with some neighborhood children in which she is reminded of her own childhood adventures. The perception she shares is one common to the rational for those that participate in a LE:
There is often so much that is left unsaid between people who are close to us. We can't go back for answers, but sharing and encouragement are valued gifts we can give each other NOW. To verbalize our thoughts is not always easy, but it is so much better to take that risk instead of keeping it all bottled up.

(p. 160)

In popular personal growth literature, Stephen Covey (1989), author of *Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People*, talks about the expression of love and appreciation of his students for their parents. The context is interesting to note because of what inspired the students to write to their parents. Covey had given them the assignment of imagining that they only have one semester to live, and that they are to stay in school as good students. They were asked to visualize how they would spend their time, and keep a diary for a week. The main common thing that many of the students did was to write letters of love and appreciation to their parents. This is telling in relationship to LEs because it shows just how important sharing appreciation is to these people, yet how their recognition of this, and doing something about it, does not happen until it is thought about in terms of having a limited amount of time left to live.

Based on his own research, Covey (1989) asserts that "Next to physical survival, the greatest need of a human being is psychological survival -- to be understood, to be affirmed, to be validated, to be appreciated" (p. 241). Although taken from popular literature, this does give some indication about perspectives on the importance of the core element of LEs, and stimulates thought about its potentially provable value.

A fascinating, more socially theoretical appreciation process, called "appreciative inquiry," is presented by Srivasta, Cooperrider & Associates (1990) in their book called *Appreciative Management And Leadership*. In calling on executives to incorporate appreciative ways of knowing, and processes of appreciative
interchange and action, they delve deeply into a discussion of theoretical affirmative
systems that they believe need to be implemented in the work environment:

...appreciative inquiry refers to a process of knowing that draws one to
inquire beyond superficial appearances to the deeper life-enhancing
essentials and potentials of organizational existence (like Harman’s
compassionate consciousness). A key point here is that appreciation is
not merely a synonym for admiration: It represents the creation of new
values and new ways of seeing the world through the very act of
valuing. (p. 14)

These authors are referring to a reflective social appreciation of individual differences
in the workplace, where “Appreciation is, in this sense, an antidote to both arrogance
and ignorance; it fights our tendency to ‘see our way as superior’” (Srivasta,

As far as actual action, they describe four dimensions:

(1) It is action that is guided by the positive intent to produce enduring
change for the betterment of self and others; (2) it is inspired by the art
of seeing the invisible; (3) it is guided by, and contributes to, new vision
and practice for the collective good of the organization and society; and
(4) it empowers others to reach toward their highest potential.

Here it becomes clear that this highly theoretical construction of appreciation in action
does indeed parallel the appreciative aspects of a LE in some respects. The highly
divergent intention of these processes is that they are completely within the context of
improving the organization of a business environment, rather than for the expressed
purpose of emotionally fulfilling communication. This is clarified when the authors
state that “Our final proposition or premise for exploring executive appreciation is
that, in sum, it is the stance toward knowing, relating, and acting by the executive that
results in good organizing” (Srivasta, Cooperrider & Associates, 1990, p. 32).

Again it is reiterated just how surprising it is to find so few processes related
to sharing appreciation present in our world’s social and personal reality. Some of the
processes identified do hold hope for the expansion of appreciation in our world.
Although most were not from the world of academia and its research realms, their validity in terms of illuminating an initial understanding of LEs and its appreciative processes, is obviated by the direct relatedness of their content. Ultimately, this value is interpreted by those who evaluate the unusual process of LEs as they unfold through this research.

In concluding this review of the literature, it is valuable to briefly summarize what has been presented. In order to narrow the focus of the review, an overview of the relevant positive aspects of the communication process most closely related to this research, self-disclosure, has been presented. In addition, the focus of the study has been operationalized. Finally, in order to illustrate the dynamics present in the research, other processes that have similarities to elements in a LE have been discussed.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The event that is the focus of this research, the LE that took place with the researcher’s family in January 1996, represented an informal positive feedback session. It began with the loose suggestion that everyone in the family would share back and forth, ways that they appreciated each other, but there was no clearly defined agenda of how that would take place. Because of that, after several hours of social chit-chat, an impromptu process finally began of just saying what was going on in each person’s life at the moment, as a way of orienting members of a family, some of whom were a bit estranged. This then led to an open-ended exchange of appreciation, where one person at a time was selected to be the recipient, and everyone else took turns expressing their appreciation to that person and having that person express reciprocal appreciation.

Because the experience of this LE was significantly beneficial for this investigator, in many different personal ways, it has inspired the consideration of what meaning it may have had to the other members of the family that were involved, and what inner significance it could hold for other individuals that would be interested in participating in a similar event. It is the strong belief of this researcher that many people could potentially be interested in this type of event, for a variety of reasons that may or may not be similar to the researcher’s own. For some, simply the
uniqueness of such an event might hold enough interest to inspire participation, solely out of curiosity. One would assume that for most, the probability of personal benefits associated with the phenomena would be the enticement. But since the phenomena is just now being researched, a clear descriptive picture of what it is actually about, and what benefits it holds begins to emerge. In describing the event with this investigator's family in detail, and exploring the meaning it held for most of its participants through their eyes, a greater understanding is now publicly available to those individuals who may feel that it would be of potential benefit in their lives.

There have been no specific studies of this kind of event to base research on. Since the methods used are well suited for discovering unexplored territory, and the approach intentionally avoids theory altogether, this research is a purely descriptive study.

The data for this research is derived from conversational, unstructured interviews with six of the seven participants that took part in the LE with the researcher's family. One participant was overseas and was unavailable to interview. The real names of the participants, other than the researcher's, were changed in order to provide anonymity. To frame the event, additional data was excerpted from letters written prior to the LE by the researcher to these family members. The interviews were conducted in person and by telephone, and were audio taped. The reasons for choosing these and other methods, as well as a variety of selected techniques, rather than others, follow.

The author's journey into qualitative methods was quite an odyssey. The experience evolved from one of being initially excited by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, to finding the thick description and narrative styles of Geertz (1988) and Van Maanen (1988) far more interesting and significant. Eventually the
use and development of theory and most interpretation were essentially rejected altogether in favor of a purely descriptive, impressionistic ethnography.

Paradigm

There are numerous paradigms that are available to an investigator as a foundation upon which to base how he/she will conduct research. It is worth some discussion of the axioms of Lincoln & Guba's (1985) naturalistic paradigm that highlight why qualitative methods instead of quantitative were chosen for this study. Before doing that, it is important to state that as a starting point, the most basic and fitting, practical reason for choosing qualitative research for this particular study is embodied in Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) statement that "... qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2). They go on to point out a fundamental element that is at the core of this study: "Qualitative researchers self-consciously draw upon their own experiences as a resource in their inquiries" (p. 199).

Without delving deeply into their arguments for why its axioms hold true, much of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) naturalistic paradigm is in sync with the basic beliefs of this investigator, and are somewhat explanatory of many of the methodological choices that have been made. They present five axioms in order to contrast the basic differences between the positivist and their own postpositivist era positions. This contrast is helpful in showing why very different operational methods are used instead of other traditional ones often allied with quantitative research. Briefly summarized, the axioms are:

1) The nature of reality (ontology): Convergence upon a single reality for prediction and control ... vs .... multiple constructed realities ...
2) The relationship of knower to known (epistemology): Independent discreet dualism... vs... inseparable mutually shaped...
3) The possibility of generalization: Nomothetic... vs... idiographic...
4) The possibility of causal linkages: ... Every action the cause of a real effect... vs... mutual simultaneous shaping;... cause and effect indistinguishable...
5) The roles of values in inquiry (axiology): Objective methodology guarantees value-free inquiry... vs... value-bound inquiry... because of choice/framing,... paradigm,... inherent context,... [and the]... absolute necessity for resonance between these to produce meaningful results.
(pp. 37-38)

To a great extent, the extreme imbalance of quantitative research over qualitative research since the beginning of the Newtonian-based positivist era still continues today even with the advent of the postpositivist era a few decades ago. This is due greatly to the philosophical positions that have reigned supreme for so long. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out a number of contrasting concerns between these long standing positions and those of their new paradigm:

Where positivism is concerned with surface events or appearances, the new paradigm takes a deeper look. Where positivism is atomistic, the new paradigm is structural. Where positivism establishes meaning operationally, the new paradigm establishes meaning inferentially. Where positivism sees its central purpose to be prediction, the new paradigm is concerned with understanding. (p. 30)

The intention of this study is to take a deeper look and to foster greater understanding of LEs. The described meaning by respondents is inferred through narrative presentation. In these ways, as described in the above contrasting concerns, the postpositivist paradigm fits.

Operational Characteristics

Based on the positivist/postpositivist differences, Lincoln and Guba (1985) present a number of operational characteristics of naturalistic inquiry, of which several are fit for this study:
1) Natural setting: Based on the ontology of multiple constructed realities ... [LEs are indeed a holistic reality inseparable from context]
2) Human instrument: The ontology, and the epistemology of mutual shaping require adaptability to the emergent realities, ... less intrusiveness in the shaping of other elements, ... ability to adjust to value biases ...
3) Utilization of tacit (intuitive, felt) knowledge: Only through non-propositional knowledge can the nuances of multiple realities be appreciated, ... based on investigator/respondent interaction occurring at this level, ... [and] ... accurate mirroring of investigator value patterns ...
4) Qualitative methods: ... more adaptable to multiple realities and mutually shaped influences.
5) Purposive sampling: ... avoids suppressing deviant cases ... [and] ... promotes uncovering of multiple realities ...
6) Emergent design: ... avoids a priori bias ... [and] ... allows mutual shaping to direct inquiry ...
7) Negotiated outcomes: ... respondent verification of their descriptions of meaning ...
8) Idiographic interpretation [For LEs, each individual's descriptive interpretation of meaning will be case specific.] (pp. 39-43)

Before delving into more description and justification of methods that emerge from these characteristics, it is important to recognize that many of these operational characteristics are based on the premise of mutual shaping. Because of the way in which the research of LEs is implemented and how the data is presented, this concept of mutual shaping only partially applies, and with regard to interpretation, only to the context of the researcher's own descriptions of meaning as simply one of several respondents. Nevertheless there is valuable insight here into the impropriety of quantitative techniques for the purposes of this research, and elements that have aided in developing an encompassing understanding. The part of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) formulation that applies, is that in mutual shaping:

... the inquirer arrives at explanations through an interaction of his investigatory purposes and styles with the unique characteristics of the situation and the respondents in context. ... The requirement of recurrent regularity disappears. No statistical imputations are needed; the concept of mutual shaping does away with the requirement that some elements must inevitably be accompanied by others. The necessity for human judgments is not only not an embarrassment, but is
elevated to the level of a precondition. . . . The need to take account of as many conditions as one feasibly can, rather than to identify just some few that can be characterized as necessary and sufficient, is manifest. (pp. 155-156)

Further support of the position of quantitative impropriety is provided by Macnaughton (1996), whose views are in sync with the naturalistic paradigm and the intentions of this research. He says that "... the results of qualitative research cannot satisfactorily be quantified, because of the nature of the subjects under consideration, because the research is context specific, and because of researcher influence on the measurement process" (p. 1100).

In elaborating further on some of the operational characteristics previously presented, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain the unique characteristics that qualify the human-as-instrument as "... responsiveness ... adaptability ... holistic emphasis ... knowledge base expansion ... simultaneously in the domains of propositional and tacit ... processual immediacy ... opportunities for clarification and summarization ... opportunities to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses ..." (pp. 193-194). These all represent appropriate rationales for using oneself as the instrument in this study, rather than paper-and-pencil or brass instruments that do not have these preferred characteristics in dealing with human social research.

In regards to the use of tacit knowledge, Athleide and Johnson (1994) make it clear that not only is it needed in the paradigm approach to inquiry, but it is an essential part of the evocative understanding that is developed in the research. They assert that "Capturing members' words alone is not enough for ethnography. If it were, ethnographies would be replaced by interviews. Good ethnographies reflect tacit knowledge, the largely unarticulated, contextual understanding that is often manifested in nods, silences, humor, and naughty nuances" (p. 492).
In a similar vein, Geertz (1988), in support of his thick description, talks about “evoking” rather than “representing” as a means to create deeper understanding using tacit knowledge and exploring things beneath the surface such as “... chance fragments of landscape, momentary snatches of life, reflections caught on the wing...” (p. 43). He explains that it:

... frees ethnography from mimesis and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails “objects,” “facts,” “descriptions,” “inductions,” “generalizations,” “verification,” “experiment,” “truth,” and like concepts.... In ethnography there are no “things” there... there is rather discourse, and that too, no thing. (p. 136)

Agreement with this condemnation of rhetoric for ethnographical purposes will be addressed later. In this study, many of these modes are also inappropriate.

As far as employing purposive sampling in the study, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) discussion explains that it:

... most often includes as much information as possible, in all of its various ramifications and constructions.... The object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor. (pp. 200-202)

Simply put, in relationship to this study, a specific group of individuals has been consciously chosen that represents the specific culture (case) which an ethnographic description is intended to produce.

The operational characteristic of negotiated outcomes is also important to the study. Through respondent verification in the member checking process discussed in the next section, the participants' own interpretations of meaning have been validated. This brings us to the issue of the trustworthiness of the research and its data.

**Trustworthiness**

Although there is reasonable interest in buying into the concepts of demonstrable trustworthiness and authenticity in this research, the decision was
made to mostly eschew their more detailed attention as Hammersley's (1992) postmodernist position described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) does: "...the character of qualitative research implies that there can be no criteria for judging its products" (p. 480). Nevertheless, some of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) measures have been worth taking. They insist:

...it is essential that certain measures be employed during the implementation of the inquiry that either increase the probability that a judgment of trustworthiness will eventually be achieved or that provide the data that will subsequently be needed to reach that judgment. (p. 281)

The measures that were determined to be applicable were: maintaining a journal as a personal log type diary (aids in organization and as referential notes); doing debriefing with a non-involved professional peer (because it is something that is done in the course of study as an aid to clarification); and member checking of data (as an aid to validation mentioned previously).

It was decided that the other numerous measures Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest implementing were not applicable for the following reasons: The use of a methodological log is unnecessary because of the clarity about the chosen methods, and any changes that occurred were noted in a diary; a log of day-to-day activities is for team usage; mounting safeguards are practices for avoiding distortions in studies of formal institutions; gathering referential adequacy materials is irrelevant when theoretical constructions are not used; developing and maintaining an audit trail is geared toward satisfying organizational sponsors of a study using an auditor, and were done only in the form of review as part of the peer debriefing using only the records chosen to be kept as part of the study; triangulation of data from another source such as an observation or a second interview is overly formal given that the
respondents were all trustworthy family members, and was instead replaced by crystallization.

Richardson's (1994) use of crystallization, instead of triangulation and explanation, was determined to be optimum as a foundation for the presentation of this purely descriptive study. She explains that:

... we do not triangulate; we crystallize. We recognize that there are far more than "three sides" from which to approach the world. ... Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity" (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves); and crystallization provides us with a deepened complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. (p. 522)

There is a growing agreement with this idea that fractional comprehensions can be nonetheless profound. Marcus (1994) echoes this in what he calls messy texts that "... insist on an open-endedness, and incompleteness...a concern with an ethics of dialogue and partial knowledge that a work is incomplete without critical, and differently positioned, responses to it by its (one hopes) varied readers" (p. 567).

The main method used to enhance validity, at least in the naturalistic sense of trustworthiness, or Adler and Adler's (1994) reference to authenticity (Atkinson, 1990), is verisimilitude. They describe this as "... a style of writing that draws the reader so closely into subjects' worlds that these can be palpably felt" (p. 381). They further state that "... it is the most powerful source of validation" (p. 389).

Verisimilitude is a direct product of Geertz's (1973) thick description that is used for the narrative. Denzin (1994) gives a concise summary, and states its connection to trustworthiness. He says it "... gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process. Out of this process arises a text's claims for truth, or its
The importance of its use in description, evocation, and trustworthiness validation is clear.

Case Study Mode

It was briefly mentioned previously that this study is essentially an ethnography, yet it borrows certain methodologies that are characteristic of the case study reporting mode. Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe it as the one of choice for naturalistic inquiry, and delve into extensive considerations as to its appropriateness, case study was seen to be overly formal and clinical, and much more suited for organizational study. They explain that it is by no means a clearly defined entity, but indicate that it can be written with different purposes in mind, at different analytical levels, and therefore result in very different products. Metaphoric definitions such as "a slice of life" and "depth examination of an instance" are offered, as well as a more formal commentary that: "The range of information that has been included within a case study has varied from a few test scores for an individual to volumes of demographic, social, industrial, and cultural information for an entire society" (pp. 360-361). They delineate the case report as containing an explanation of the occasion for the study, a thorough description of the context or setting, and of the relevant transactions and processes observed, a discussion of the saliences identified, and the outcomes or "lessons to be learned" from the study (p. 362). These contents are indeed part of this study, some of which only appear in the researcher's own descriptions as a respondent, because they are common sense descriptions of an event that are important to clearly establish context and significances.

The core problem with using cases as a method is because of its roots in analytical induction. Vidich & Lyman's (1994) reference to Manning's (1982) seminal work describes it as "...a nonexperimental qualitative sociological method that
employs an exhaustive examination of cases in order to prove universal, causal generalizations" (p.39). This is not entirely in sync with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) perspectives, and it is of course inappropriate for a single case, single process study that does not include causal or other universal generalizations. It follows that to "let the data speak for itself" is reasonable. This is supported by Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) statement that: "The researcher assumes that readers will be able, as Robert Stake argues, to generalize subjectively from the case in question to their own personal experiences" (p. 202). Additionally, although this study does not specifically take a postculturalist stand, in which a morally informed social criticism is the focus, one extremely agreeable aspect that further supports this study’s position based on a multiple reality ontology is summarized by Denzin (1994): "Postculturalists celebrate uncertainty and attempt to construct texts that do not impose theoretical frameworks on the world. They seek to let the prose of the world speak for itself" (p. 511).

Causality and Theory

As far as further reasoning in arguing against causal or researcher based generalizations, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) internal critique of causality is sufficiently convincing without summarizing their extensive chapters on its death:

... human behavior is impossible to generalize precisely because it is so intimately bound to particular times and contexts. Hence the hope that "clean" causal statements might be developed about human behavior seems to be largely vain. ... Overdeterminism seems to be the overriding condition of humans, in the sense that there is always a multitude of factors impinging on and interacting with them. To select one or a subset of these factors as the cause or causes of some particular human behavior is fatuous. (pp. 142-143)

To a great extent, causality is inherently tied to theory. Most of the work of social scientists studied in this exploration of qualitative methods, including Strauss, Lincoln & Guba, and Denzin, shows that it is essential to speculate through
theorizing and interpreting research data. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out, historically, speculation in positivist terms has been closely allied to prediction and control, something that is clearly antithetical to the naturalistic inquiry paradigms they present. In insisting on speculation and abstraction to create understanding, a researcher potentially denies the readers ability to come to their own understandings via presentation of purely descriptive data.

Van Maanen (1988) clarifies an issue that explains why so much of academia pushes the theory side of research. He says "...fieldworkers represent, at best, marginal contributors to a discipline interested in grand matters....as a rule status flows toward the theorists of the field, not toward the workers of the field" (p. 21). He goes on to accurately describe the limitations of theory that have led to the choice not to use it:

Theoretical abstractions will not allow a fieldworker to get to the so-called heart of a culture any more quickly or better than natives do. Culture is not to be found in some discrete set of observations that can somehow be summed up numerically and organized narratively to provide full understanding....Impressionist tales, with their silent disavowal of grand theorizing, their radical grasping for the particular, eventful, contextual, and unusual, contain an important message. They protest the ultimate superficiality of much of the published research in social science-ethnographic or otherwise. (p. 118-119)

Even Strauss (the ultimate proponent of theory and interpretation), years after writing his book *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*, along with his collaborator Corbin (1994), make an interesting admission that is much less "theory-natical," and more supportive of the intentions of this study:

...neither does one have to insist that all social inquiry, or even qualitative research, must lead to the development or utilization of theory. Qualitative modes of interpretation run the gamut from "Let the informant speak and don't get in the way," on through....All these modes are certainly useful for some purposes and not so useful for others. So we do not argue that creating theory is more important that any other mode of interpretation, or that it produces more useful or significant results. (p. 278)
But Strauss (1987) was not always so generous. He made it clear that he judges description to be a lowly form of abstraction, and that complex, systematic interpretation is the be all and end all of research. He said that "... grounded theory style of analysis is based on the premise that theory at various levels of generality is indispensable for deeper knowledge of social phenomena" (p. 6). He further extends his judgment:

... while most sociologists seem not to be personally interested in creating these higher-level theories, being content either to develop substantive theories about particular topical areas or just to describe ethnographically behavior in those areas, nevertheless the writing of formal theories is, from the grounded theory perspective, viewed as being ultimately of the greatest importance. (p. 241)

Strauss (1987) continuously makes highly authoritative assumptions about the essential value of theory, particularly his grounded theory. His initial core assumption is that: "... without grounding in data, that theory will be speculative, hence ineffective" (p. 1). This is contradictory, in that the very definition of theory is abstract reasoning; speculation. There are additional reasons for not using grounded theory. Strauss's method is based on conceptually dense theory, and the method of this research will be focused instead on the polyvocal thick descriptions of the respondents, free of interpretive theory.

Denzin (1994) mentions further criticisms of Strauss's grounded theory method: "The perspective's affinities with positivism have also been criticized (Roman, 1992). There is also a textual style that frequently subordinates lived experience and its interpretations to the grounded theorist's reading of the situation" (p. 508). This takes us back to the conflict of this study's relativist epistemology position.

The foundational use of induction, deduction, and verification in Strauss's (1987) method begins with "... having a hunch or an idea, then converting it into an
hypothesis and assessing whether it might provisionally work as at least a partial condition for a type of event, act, relationship, strategy, etc., . . ." (p. 12). His method of grounded theory is clearly centered around prediction, something that is very far from the constructivist/postmodern intentions of this research, interested solely in creating thick description.

It is also made clear that illustrative description is merely supplemental in grounded theory. Strauss (1987) says that: "The tendency sometimes is to overload the case with too much descriptive material because it is so colorful or interesting. . . . Remember that these data should function mainly in the service of your theory" (p. 220). It is obvious that description as the entire intent of this study is quite antithetical to this perspective.

Strauss (1987) also points out that grounded theorists "... write about phenomena more generally rather than about one hospital, one trade union, one science laboratory, . . ." (p. 219). He goes on to say that: "We are interested, after all, not in the viewpoints of specific individuals but in the general patterns evinced by classes of individuals" (p. 268). Because this research is based on a single case, single process event, and intentionally founded on the personal viewpoints of specific individuals, as well as what has previously been presented, grounded theory is clearly not a good fit.

**Ethnography**

In support of using ethnography as the main methodological vehicle, reference is made to Van Maanen's (1988) perspective, which describes the intentions perfectly. He says that the value of ethnography "... is found not in its analysis and interpretation of culture, but in its decision to examine culture in the first place; to
conceptualize it, reflect on it, narrate it..." (p. 140). Given this researcher's passion to narratively describe LEs as a culture, ethnography is well suited.

In arguing that a LE is an event that represents a unique culture, ethnography fits like a glove in light of Van Maanen's (1988) statement that: "Ethnographies are looked to for facts surrounding low-visibility, little understood, deviant, or otherwise out-of-the-ordinary cultures" (p. 31).

In many ways the type of fieldwork and presentation of this study is very much like Van Maanen's (1988) statement that "...a new school of fieldwork practice is emerging in sociology under the existentialist banner ('become the phenomenon') in order to personally experience emotion and meaning in the life world studied" (p. 98). Since LEs are being looked at from the perspective of the researcher himself having been a highly affected participant deeply involved in their creation, this total immersion in the process is a great asset in being able to explore the phenomenon, and the most appropriate rationale for choosing the ethnographic method. Geertz (1988) echoes this value: "One grasps the exotic not by drawing back from the immediacies of encounter into the symmetries of thought... One grasps it by losing oneself, one's soul maybe, in those immediacies" (p. 77). Van Maanen (1988) provides excellent, and fitting, further description of immersion, which asks the researcher:

...to share firsthand the environment, problems, background, language, rituals, and social relations of a more-or-less bounded and specified group of people. The belief is that by means of such sharing, a rich, concrete, complex, and hence truthful account of the social world being studied is possible. (p. 3)

In presenting an ethnographic study of LEs, the attempt has been made to avoid the interpretation of their meaning to participants, although there is the clear awareness that inevitably the narrative is still a homemade picture of their
descriptions, regardless of how carefully member checking has been done. Yet, as

Geertz's (1988) points out, this is still sufficient to provide a deeper understanding:

The moral asymmetries across which ethnography works and the
discursive complexity within which it works make any attempt to
portray it as anything more than the representation of one sort of life in
the categories of another impossible to defend. That may be enough. I,
myself, think that it is. (pp. 144-145)

Interviews

The main method of data collection that has been used is unstructured
interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a description that addresses the
appropriateness criteria of the choice, given the centrality of respondent perspectives
in this study:

In an unstructured interview, the format is non-standardized, and the
interviewer does not seek normative responses. Rather, the problem of
interest is expected to arise from the respondent's reaction to the broad
issue raised by the inquirer. As Dexter (1970) defines this form of
interviewing, it involves: stressing the interviewee's definition of the
situation; encouraging the interviewee to structure the account of the
situation; and letting the interviewee introduce to a considerable extent
his notions of what he regards as relevant, instead of relying upon the
investigator's notion of relevance. Thus, unlike a structured, focused, or
standardized interview, the unstructured or “elite” interview is
concerned with the unique, the idiosyncratic, and the wholly individual
viewpoint. (pp. 268-269)

The clear reason for not using structured interviewing, and finding unstructured
interviewing more appropriate, is expressed by Fontana and Frey (1994):

The former aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to
explain behavior within preestablished categories, whereas the latter is
used in an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of
society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the
field of inquiry. (p. 366)

Since the intention was to sift out the mutually shaped, inner significance that the LE
had for the participants after the interviews were completed, without any
presuppositions beforehand, there was no introduction of any categorical, a priori line of questioning. This made unstructured interviews well suited.

Ultimately the interviewing method is itself a representative indicator of the trustworthiness of the data, and differs greatly from traditional techniques. Fontana and Frey (1994) describe precisely the intentions:

... the researcher may ... “come down” to the level of the respondent and engage in a “real” conversation with “give and take” and empathic understanding (see Daniels, 1983). This makes the interview more honest, morally sound, and reliable, because it treats the respondent as an equal, allows him or her to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more “realistic” picture. (p. 371)

Audio tape recordings of these interview sessions were made. The advantages of doing so are pointed out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in that it has created a data source “... assuring completeness; providing an opportunity to review as often as necessary to assure that full understanding has been achieved ...” (pp. 271-272).

In regards to the polyphony that these interviews of multiple respondents present in the text, this researcher has borrowed heavily from Fontana and Frey's (1994) description of “... polyphonic interviewing, in which the voices of the subjects are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher and are not collapsed together and reported as one, through the interpretation of the researcher” (p. 368). This is copacetic for a text that avoids interpretation and allows the symphony of crystallized respondent voices to narrate the tale. Denzin (1994) also argues in favor of polyphonic presentation: “... when 'we' allow the Other to speak, when we talk about or to them, we are taking over their voice. A multivoiced as opposed to single-voiced text can partially overcome this issue” (p. 503).
Organization

Once the interviews were completed, specific techniques were used to help organize the data. Stake's (1994) questions that he suggests qualitative researchers ask as a starting point were addressed: "Which issues bring out our initial concerns, the dominant theme? To maximize understanding of the case, they ask, Which issues seek out compelling uniquenesses?" (p. 239)

Typical in qualitative research data analysis and organization is the myriad of categorization methods based on an array of coding schemes. Because there was no intention, nor need to perform any vast data analysis, the more evocative and salient data was simply organized into a compelling narrative. Since there were only six total respondents in the study, and because the amount of data was very manageable, due to the respondents' busy schedules and the resulting limited length and number of interviews possible, a coding scheme was unnecessary. Instead, diary notes and time code location notes were made during the review of the recordings in deciding which data to transcribe and use in the final narrative, which did not require significant categorization. This method is supported in statements from other researchers as mentioned in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) operational refinements, where they quote from Judi Marshall (1981) who finds the task of unitizing categories absurdly easy. She says that "... the units are really fairly obvious—you get chunks of meaning that come out of the data itself" (p. 345). This was indeed this researcher's experience.

Narrative

Turning to the importance of the writing itself, with its attendant style and associated devices, it is seen as central to presenting an entirely new understanding. The descriptive narrative that has emerged from the research has allowed the creation of an encompassing picture of the LE. Van Maanen (1988) points out that "... a
culture or a cultural practice is as much created by the writing (i.e., it is intangible and can only be put into words) as it determines the writing itself (Wagner, 1981). To suggest otherwise reduces ethnography to method" (p. 6).

With the text representing this investigator's own personal descriptions of inner significance as one of several participants, it is intentionally highly impressionistic, with enough literary color present to create an enjoyable tale woven around the other responses of family members. The author has attempted to embody Richardson's (1994) highly personalized narrative of the self which promotes the telling of plot based lived experience, with interpretation held back, using numerous narrative devices, where "...coherence, verisimilitude, and interest..." are the issues, not "...accuracy... and tedious documentation,..." allowing the researcher to "...say what might be unsayable in other situations..." and be "...somewhat relieved of the problems of speaking for the 'Other,' because they are the Other in their texts" (p. 521).

As has been reiterated, in attempting to allow the respondents' views of the inner significance of the LE to create a thick description that is woven into a narrative ethnography, their dialogue "speaks for itself," without any interpretation by the researcher. Geertz's (1988) references to Dwyer's (1982) methods specify a similar approach. He says that Dwyer combines "...a radically factualist approach to the reporting of his 'dialogues'--the words, the whole words, and nothing but the words--with a radically introversive approach to his role in them" (p. 96). This is an essential form of ideal, ethical ethnography, especially since the trouble has been taken to get extensive respondent verification throughout the study.

The choice was made to tell a tale of sorts as an interesting way of presenting the data. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) lend strong support for the use of the
narrative story as the personal experience method of choice: "... the narrative form of the research text is crucial to the texts' finding a place in public discourse" (p. 425).

And it is precisely this desire to create something interesting enough to extend beyond the ivory tower of academia that is responsible for this choice. Van Maanen (1988) further clarifies this issue when he says that:

... many sociological fieldworkers produce texts that seem, compared to their anthropological counterparts, restricted in range, full of jargon, and stuffed with remote facts, as if to satisfy some fetish of documentation or legitimation (p.23).... Jargon can become an exclusionary tool and can operate as an ideology as colleagues emulate one another to differentiate themselves from the rest of the crowd (Becker, 1986). To those left out, such writing is chilly, masturbatory, restricted by design, and directed only to the already-tenured of a special-interest club. (p. 28)

It is extremely important to this researcher that this study have wide appeal and not be written as an academic, straight-jacketed piece. Obviously the basic parameters of a thesis need to be adhered to, but most importantly, the essence of the presentation subscribes to the less limited realm of literary tales described by Van Maanen (1988):

Writers of literary tales present their topical concerns on the basis of personal appeal and curiosity. These are unfettered by disciplinary logics or academic career aspirations. Involvement, receptivity, and what seems to be an openness to experience are the means of getting a story rather than the means to shape-up a theory or satisfy the dictates of received traditions. (p. 134)

For this reason, with the topic being of passionate personal interest, the chosen style is what Van Maanen (1988) calls an impressionist tale:

Self-understanding is not the endpoint of fieldwork as confessionalists sometimes suggest. Nor is the brilliant, but necessarily objectified, representation of another culture the endpoint. Impressionist tales dance around both poles and inform, educate, amuse, and evoke in useful ways. Their open-endedness is their strength. (p. 138-139)

Certainly the unique quality of the LE event fits Van Maanen's (1988) description of the impressionist tale: "What makes the story worth telling is its
presumably out of the ordinary or unique character. Impressionist tales are not about what usually happens but about what rarely happens" (p. 102). Here the intended use of narrative devices, because of their ability to evoke understanding, is supported in a manner indicative of the intended crystallized, messy text. Van Maanen (1988) echoes this, explaining that "they illustrate, rather than claim" (p. 122).

The confessional tale, which Van Maanen (1988) refers to as a component of the impressionist tale, contains important elements that are present throughout the text of this research. He describes the confessional tale as: "Emotional reactions, new ways of seeing things, new things to see, and various mundane but unexpected occurrences that spark insight are all conventional confessional materials that suggest how the fieldworker came to understand a studied scene" (p. 76).

Because of its ability to provide illustration for the above mentioned reactions, perspectives, and occurrences that are common in the text, one of the main devices used is metaphor. Janesick (1994) addresses the issue of its use that fits the difficult to describe nature of LEs:

What is ironic is that in the professional socialization of educational researchers, the use of metaphor is regarded as a sign of imprecision; yet, for making public the ineffable, nothing is more precise than the artistic use of language. Metaphoric precision is the central vehicle for revealing the qualitative aspects of life. (p. 209)

This style is used to place the expressions of meaning as unifying juxtapositions amongst those of the other respondents. This placement of the author's particular perceptions creates a certain voice and signature in the tale that is the primary vehicle that necessarily supplants interpretation, much needed in purely descriptive material. Geertz (1988) emphasizes the importance of putting oneself in the text with this important angle: "To place the reach of your sensibility--rather than, say, that of your analytical powers or of your social code--at the center of your
ethnography. . . . To be a convincing 'I-witness,' one must, so it seems, first become a convincing 'I'' (p. 79).

In defense of choosing to put oneself in the text, Richardson (1994) says that:
"Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of 'science writing' on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche. Writing is validated as a method of knowing" (p. 518). This placing of voice and its resulting signature at the center of a text has all too often been silenced. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) stress their importance and validity as coming:

. . . out of the stories they live and tell . . . one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experience and represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices. (p. 423)

It has been important to find a balance appropriate for this study. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe voice as Geertz's "being there in the text," and his reference to the dilemma of: "Too vivid a signature runs the risk of obscuring the field and its participants; too subtle a signature runs the risk of the deception that the research text speaks from the point of view of the participant" (p. 424).

It is the belief of this researcher that in the end, the struggle with the needed balances, and the attempt to present a compelling narrative that truly expresses an understanding of the meaning of LEs, is justified and has been well worth the effort. Geertz's (1988) opinion reflects this position when he says:

. . . there is, as always when style is attended to and genre underlined, the risk of aestheticism, the possibility that both ethnographers and their audience may come to believe that the value of writing about tattooing or witchcraft exhausts itself in the pleasures of the text. . . . The risks are worth running because running them leads to a thoroughgoing revision of our understanding of what it is to open (a bit) the consciousness of one group of people to (something of) the life-form of another, and in that way to (something of) their own. (pp. 142-143)
CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

After holding my family at an emotional arm's length for twenty years, the time was ripe for reaching out to them in an effort to come to some level of reconciliation. Call it a mid-life crisis at 39 years old, or perhaps simply something whose time had come. Either way, there was a festering need to make a deeper connection, to strive for greater understanding, and to be understood. I began the process of reaching out with letters written to each of my siblings and parents.

[March 9, 1995]
Dear Mary,

... I have been thinking about writing to each of my sisters for a long time. Unfortunately these kind of things take a long time to come to fruition for me. Especially when I haven’t done much letter writing of any kind for many years. The idea I had was to write a letter to everyone in our family, and really try to express things that have not been shared in the past, for one reason or another, and then send a copy of all the letters to each one, so that they could share in my perspectives. This could well be taken as either self-centered or just plain weird, but either way I'm sure it will be seen as befitting of my character by all.

... My time left here is much shorter than I believe I realize, even if I do live a long and healthy life. I think that is because time has the illusion that days, months and years are reasonably long periods of time, when it has become very obvious to me that they are absolutely not. So I am taking this time to do something different.

... Mary, you are a beautiful and intelligent woman. I have all too often judged you as my J.A.P., yuppie sister, with her dog psychologists and surrogate children chows. But as I have come to realize how different we all are, and have come to respect the relative perspectives that we all have, (although I must say I think that is a life long work in progress for me), I see how much I do love you very much and hope that through all the thick and thins of your life you are able to
still hang in there and appreciate it all. This is of course my own wish that I hope for myself and of course everyone else, although at times I find it very hard to wish it for absolutely everybody. At least I can start with sharing it as a wish for those I love and care about personally.

Your One And Only Loving Brother.

[March 16, 1995]

Dear Mindy,

It was pretty special that you called today. It's not just because it's nice to feel loved and remembered by my sister, but also because I have recently been going through a lot lately in terms of re-evaluating where I am at in terms of my life experience, and asking the all important question of whether or not I am producing the [enjoyable experience] product that I am after. I find myself constantly remembering the words of the first song on the tape I am sending you, "Caught In The Magic Again." I feel like time goes by so quick and I so easily slip into a sort of status-quo experience that quickly becomes so normal. I have recently been remembering the magic that I have experienced so many times during my life. . . . Where it feels like things are so incredibly beautiful, and the appreciation for life is overpowering.

. . . I had been thinking about you and wanted to write a letter . . . The reason why is because I have always felt like I have played the role of the greater than thou brother who knows where it's at and treats you in a condescending way. The truth is that I have done that with just about everybody for most of my life. But I have become more and more painfully aware of it in relationship to you, and wanted not to continue doing that . . .

It was nice to hear you talk about re-evaluating the need for time for yourself. I can sure relate to that one. That's why I have given up selling computers after ten years, and am now doing nothing else except school and focusing on taking time to get to know my heart better . . . I don't have any idea of how much longer I have left. None of us really do.

[March 22, 1995]

Dear Kelly,

. . . I find it kind of absurd that I have never written much to any of you guys considering that I have been living on and off in Australia for seven years now . . . It all started with wanting to write letters to each of you expressing things that I have not really taken the time to say over the years. It is a nice idea, but hard to make the effort to do. You know, vulnerability and all that stuff.

. . . When I saw you last and met Rajeal for the first time, I realized that I hadn't seen you for a long time, and that feelings had changed a lot. You were now with your new partner, and accommodating that into your space. I guess I felt like I didn't really know you in the same way I felt like I had begun to when I visited you in the past. I felt like you were somehow very different. I am sure that had a lot to do with the circumstance of the rather unusual gathering that was taking place at the time. It didn't feel like there was much of a chance to relate to you one to one, and when Dana and I were there.
briefly with just you and Rajeal cleaning up one night, I felt like you had a new, different kind of "couple" personality. I am sure you have gone through one hell of a lot of stuff since then in your relationship. Like myself, you don't seem to be the type to let things stagnate.

I enjoyed talking to you the last time on the phone. It always seems like I am able to make a loving connection with you pretty easily in our conversations over the years... I think of how wonderful it was when I came and visited you... I felt like you were so open. I remember you telling me how you had come to the realization that there just weren't any emotionally available men around, so you had pretty much given up, and were learning to enjoy being with you... I guess I have such good memories about that time I visited you alone because it felt so good to share with you about real things of the heart. Our telephone conversations are also nice in that way. I feel like I want to get to deeper things here, but I am at a loss to find anything more than what I have already shared.

[March 24, 1995]
Dear Della,

... Like everything else in my life, I've left the most difficult for last. Why writing a letter to you should seem so difficult is strange in itself. I think it has a lot to do with a series of different events that have left lingering hurt feelings, and made it hard for me to loosen up as time has gone on.

... With you there is a stigma that maybe starts from being tied to a door. Yes we all know that it was entirely "harmless" since I requested it. But still it is amazing at how it is one of the few strong traumatic memories I have from childhood. The powerlessness of being forced to be humiliated by what I asked for in the first place. The powerlessness of being forced to be humiliated by what I asked for in the first place. The issue of powerlessness comes to my mind whenever I think about my relationship with you. It seems to me, and this of course could well be purely projection on my part, that you always tried to get the same kind of attention and approval that came so easily for me being the only boy. But try as you might, no amount of effort could bring it.

... I didn't want to write a letter out of anger in response to my hurt feelings. Nor did I want to be judgmental in response to having feelings of always being judged by you. I wanted to try and share some of my perceptions honestly with you, and to try and communicate how I do actually feel a lot of love for you, and that I am glad that you have been able to accomplish so much of what you have been pursuing for so many years... I have done a lot of things without malicious intent with regards to the family situation, and yet have left many feeling hurt and angry at my apparent lack of expressed love and care. I think to a certain extent it is all really a matter of tact and carefulness in how I go about acting. It has only been in the last year or so that I have become acutely aware of my previous almost total lack of diplomacy in much of my contact with family. I still feel a lot of pain from the way I've tried to break out of the only son syndrome. Hell, my lifestyle is clearly a statement of that. And certainly my way of acting has reflected that pain over the years as a way of protecting my own feelings of
vulnerability to the entire family. The family has represented a sort
demon I have been trying to exorcise from within myself, and I guess I
have treated it's members in cold, demon-like ways often times. It is
strange how trying to free myself from my own self-created chains of
familial emotional bondage have led to equal or greater poor treatment
of my family members than what I imagine was perpetrated upon me.

... Somehow I can't help but think that maybe you feel a certain
amount of the same kinds of judgment and criticism from me as I feel
from you. The main times that come to mind are when you told me
"jokingly" that you were going to give me 'till I was thirty, and then
were going to write me off if I hadn't amounted to more than I had up to
that point. Well, thirty came and went, and I could only assume that I
was written off, because I certainly don't think I fulfilled your
expectations. I think when you said that, you were already making an
assumption that I probably wouldn't be much different, and passing
judgment well in advance, just to be safe. I also think about the times I
called you when I passed through Phoenix airport several times a few
years ago. I enjoyed talking to you even though there always seemed
to be such little common ground for us to talk about. I think I have
always felt a little hurt that you never once made the effort to call me in
all the years I have known you.

... maybe human beings of such very different tribes can relate
to each other in unexpected ways. After all, I believe we all want the
same thing anyway, you can call it happiness, fulfillment or any of a
number of different names, but it all seems to be about the same state.
It takes a lot of understanding though to allow each one of us to go
about achieving it in whatever apparently convoluted ways that we
judge each other to be doing so. I guess one (wo)man's ceiling is
another (wo)man's floor.

[March 29, 1995]
Dear Mom,

... I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the change I have
seen take place for you in the last couple of years in particular. It's
funny how parallel it has been to some major changes for me too. I feel
like the Jeckyl and Hyde syndrome has greatly receded for both of us.
Could simple maturity be the explanation? I'm not sure, but I do know
how impressed I was by your acceptance and loving treatment the last
time we saw you. It's as if some part of you has woken from a long
slumber, suppressed somehow by a lot of hurt maybe. I see how much
effort you have made, and are still making, to see that this change
happens. ... I am so proud of you for this Mom.

... I am sure it has taken a very long time for you to recover
from the shock of me leaving behind the U.S.C. dreams, but I feel like
that has been pretty much let go of finally. Whatever wounds I still feel
from that breaking free, are finally healing too.

[March 31, 1995]
Dear Dad,

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...Where do I start with you, Dad? There is always this duality
I feel of gun-shyness when it comes to honestly and deeply expressing
myself to you. It is because I feel such a magic inside of me sometimes,
and somehow I sense it is very hard for you to hear any direct
expression of that, because of your feeling that it is all "imagined."
... For me there is no question of whether they are imagined or not.
They are as "real" as anything else I have experienced in my life. ... 
... I guess all I am trying to say is that I hope that we can all
come to a deeper appreciation of our remaining time here. I feel like
your time is somehow more unusual than mine, in that it is kind of
"borrowed" time [because of a previous potentially terminal illness].
But when I really think about it, it's that way for all of us.

... I want you to never forget that your generosity, although
often unappreciated, is probably the most significant thing that you have
passed on to me. It has made a powerful loving relationship between
Dana and I, possible. It has allowed me to freely give myself to
others. It has made me the personality that I am. And I feel like I have
you to thank for that.

... So I want you to know Dad, that if you work at King's till
your dying day, that is probably the best thing for you to do, because it
is what you may really want or feel to do, and that is the most important
thing. And if you do retire and have some time to go back to mandolin
playing, painting, picture developing, and any of the other hobbies that
suit your fancy, I will be there rooting for your enjoyment of that as well.
I just hope that whatever you do choose to do during the tale part of
your journey, that there will be time for you to consider what you
really want to do with it.

[September 19, 1995]
An Invitation To Appreciation
Dear Mom, Dad, Della, Kelly, Mindy, and Mary,

I just want to invite everyone to a gathering that I think we will
all enjoy. I hope it will make possible something that we have never
done as a family, and that is get together and specifically share some
loving feelings of appreciation for each other while we are alive, instead
of waiting until each of us goes. From my little experience of such
gatherings I can honestly say that I am absolutely sure that it would be
special for all of us to take part in. There is no particular way that it has
to happen. I would just like to get together for at least an afternoon
with just the original Landa seven, and sit around and see if we can't
have our own "living eulogy." Now I know that this is more than a little
unusual, but that's par for the course with any idea that I might propose,
and I think this one is a really positive, win-win for all of us. I don't see
how it could be anything but truly profitable for all. I certainly need it in
my life, and am ready and willing to take the risk, instead of waiting to
see each of you, or you see me, in a more restful repose before taking
the time to do so.

So whoever can make it to this first, and hopefully not last,
gathering, please let me know when, and if it might be possible for you
to spend a day, or maybe even a whole weekend together in December.
...I look forward to appreciating you in person!
Love, Marty

My partner and I already had plans to come back to the United States for Christmas, without confirmation of a specific date for this intended event. There was lots of uncertainty about when and if everyone could make it, and questionable miscommunications about what would or would not be acceptable dates along the way. My trepidation that accompanied the lead up to the event was indicative of the build up of years of protectiveness of my own vulnerability in relationship to my family members. At one point, when one of my sisters indicated that she suddenly had other unalterable plans for a weekend in December, that was otherwise agreeable to everyone else, I was ready to can the entire idea rather than extending my visit by two additional weeks to accommodate her.

In the end, it was as if some bird of wisdom came and landed on my shoulder and whispered in my ear its sagacious advice to extend the stay. I had come this far, and it seemed absurd not to follow through, even though I was frustrated and struggling with it. I heard a call that overrode my long standing insecurities and made the choice to participate in a weekend long “Living Eulogy,” as my partner and I had tentatively named this kind of event, in January of 1996.

[Mindy said] I really didn’t have any expectations at all [about the event]. Oh, immediately I was interested [in attending]. I was very excited about being with everybody. It was something that I wanted to be involved in and would have helped in coordinating or doing whatever I had to do to make it happen. In fact I felt like I was kind of instrumental in a way because Kelly was a bit reluctant because she didn’t want it to be a love fest because she didn’t have those kind of feelings for the family in it’s entirety. She said she wanted it to be real, whatever it was, was what it was. She didn’t want to like go there and have Della, or Dad, or anybody else have these expectations about how great and wonderful it was going to be if that’s not what it was going to be. Like if it was going to be us yelling at each other, then that’s what it was going to be. But, when I told her that I thought that it was going
to be whatever it was going to be, whatever we made it, and we really talked about it, I thought that she was pretty receptive to it.

[Mary said] I thought it was a little odd, but I'm pretty open to these things. I thought, wow this is an amazing chance to say the things you would like someone to know, that you don't say in everyday life to them. Life just flies by and you don't pay attention to the things that are so important to you, and it's only when you have something really horrible happen to someone, or you lose someone, that you reflect on those things. I thought it was a great opportunity to try to feel that, and then I guess open myself to hearing things from other people, be that positive or frightening.

[Della said] To take an opportunity to share with your family more deeply than you normally would. I was certainly agreeable to that, it sounded good to me.

[Dad said] I had no concept of where we were going. I thought it was to better understand somebody else, my children and my wife. Talk about things you don't ordinarily talk about, get out some feelings you don't ordinarily get out, get a better understanding, and to interact, and because of that, bind the vines even stronger. . . . You're always concerned about when you get into private things. At first I had apprehension of what would come on, that there would be any head-butting or something of this sort. I was a little concerned about that.

[Mom said] I was not as apprehensive as Dad about it, but I did have some concerns. I was really looking forward to a chance to speak openly and hear freely what my children thought of each other and us, meaning as parents, and to be able to express the way I feel about all of them, and to accept whatever they felt they want to say about us. I expected to be confronted a little, and grilled.

Throughout the letter writing and organizing of the event I thought about the difficulties of certain relationships and how I felt about my oldest sister Della, and about some of my other sisters. I thought about how hard it was to bridge what felt like a huge, huge chasm, from years of emotional distance. I had not really considered specifically what I would say because I am pretty much a fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants kind of guy. For me the purpose was to be able to confront difficult feelings between myself and some of my family members, particularly my older sister. I also wanted the chance to share in a way that I was previously too protected and not vulnerable.
enough to feel comfortable doing. I had really beautiful feelings of appreciation and love for each of them that I wanted to express. I think the common feeling was that the event would help deepen our feelings for each other and our relationships.

[Mary said] I tried to reflect on the feeling of how I felt about everyone [prior to the event] and kind of reflected on very special things, and tried to bring them to mind. What I expected it to be was not what it turned out to be. I thought it would be more staged, like kind of rehearsed. Like “OK this is what I want to say and these are the sort of things I want to get across, and really thought hard on all those things, you know you only have this certain amount of time to say it and that the floor is passed around and everybody has the opportunity to say something”. But it wasn’t really like that, it was much more spontaneous than I thought, once I was into it. Initially it was kind of uncomfortable because I associated saying those things with feelings of sorrow and grief and loss and started thinking in those terms, and then it turned into something full of life instead of retrospective.

[Della said] I didn’t think about what I was going to say beforehand at all. . . . I think I tend to say those [positive] things anyway, but there are [ordinarily] fewer of them and more spread out. I think it was easy for me.

[When asked if he had thought about what he was going to say, Dad said] No, not at all. Just whatever was there, that was it; off the cuff, not prearranged. . . . As we got into it, it [the appreciating] became more acceptable, and finally I thought it was very good.

At first it was frustrating. I felt a contradiction. It was my idea and my suggestion that made the event even happen, and I felt responsible for trying to get it into a flow, to get it happening. At the same time, I did not want to make it my trip. I wanted to let my family be initiators as well. I did not want to be in sole control of the event. So, that led to it taking a long time to get off the ground and I was very frustrated with that. At the beginning it had the appearance, particularly because of my dad’s statements of trepidation, that it was going to be like “let’s just sit around and talk.” So instead of making it a formalized process and suggesting that we get into it, it ended up initially having serious potential for decay into endless social bantering. Luckily, after several hours of that, Mindy finally said, “Well, let’s get
started. Marty tried to arrange this thing, so let's try to do this now.” So then everybody said, “OK, what do we do Marty?” So I expressed what had been done before, and it was like, “OK, well we can try that.” At first my dad was still saying, “Oh well, you know, we don’t have to do that, etc.,” but we started doing it anyway. And that began a process of each person sharing about what was going on for them in their lives, where they were headed and what they were feeling right now. Then we began a process of going back and forth, with one person listening and the other speaking, without any time limits, sharing feelings they had about each other. And that was really heartwarming at different moments, and by the second day it was really revealing to see how strongly it affected my father. It was like a revelation to him, the power of it. It was beautiful to see him taking it in and experiencing the power of the event, and it made me see it too.

[Mom said] Kelly had been kind of estranged from the family for some time. We didn’t really feel that she felt part of it. During the experience [of the event] I felt like I was just knowing her for the first time, because she was very open about feelings, without being judgmental, and that was wonderful... It was really great for me because I was not privy to a lot of what was kept at arm’s length... Mostly the feeling [of what was shared] was like “yeah, you didn’t do things exactly as we would have liked them to be done, but it was OK, you were great parents and we love you.” That was really very good for me to be able to feel that, that it was OK for me to have screwed up... I think I was always harder on myself than I needed to be, and I think I still am to an extent, but I’ve learned to ease off and not expect perfection from myself, and I think the experience [of the event] was a big part of that.

[Mary said] When people told me the positive things they thought about me, I had mixed feelings. It felt happy, it felt good. It was sometimes maybe a little hard to swallow. Maybe like “Wow really, do you really appreciate that?” Not necessarily disbelief, but maybe surprise, and appreciation, feeling validated, a little bit of uncomfortableness, very emotional, no different than if someone stood up in front of a group and said all these wonderful things about you. For me it made me feel good, but it was also a little uncomfortable because it was a group setting. I don’t think I would feel that way if it was one on one. Plus because it was planned, staged so to speak, the atmosphere was set that this is what were going to do in the focused.
time. The expectation was building anticipation, then you hear someone say something and it really touches you.

[Mindy said] It was very interesting for me because it was the first time I was with all of you guys straight [not stoned]. So it was very easy for me to be me, cause I had finally found me, after a very long time. . . . On Saturday when we finally all got together and we went around and kind of went from oldest to youngest as far as appreciation levels, and being the fourth of five children, by the time it got to me, we were doing one-way [one person speaking], like check in [update about what's happening in your life]. By the time it got to me on Saturday evening or whatever, we were ordering pizza for dinner. And I enjoyed the whole day, the whole day was wonderful. I was excited about it. I was thinking the whole time about things that I wanted to express. You know, the way people were talking. The way that everyone was talking about their lives. The whole check in process, which I had not experienced in a group situation before. . . . I was excited about mine, and when it came time for mine, I was cut off as I started, because the pizza showed up. Then to get back into it, I just felt like everybody was full and really weren't paying attention. I didn't feel like it was the same. And that cemented the place that I've been in all of my life in our family, which is, I'm just not the same. I'm not worthy of the kind of attention that everyone else is. I'm not smart enough. I'm not articulate enough. I can't hold people's interest the way that everyone else in the family can. . . . That part of it I didn't like at all. I didn't like being cut off. . . . It wasn't even like the being cut off stuff, it was feeling like it was OK to cut me off. And I felt like it wasn't, it wasn't OK. So the fucking pizza's here, let it sit on the table. Let it get cold. Maybe we'll have to warm it up. . . . Because it [the event] was so loose and open, and because we had never done it before, we didn't know what to do. . . . So I kind of did what I always do, which is to blow it off and go “Oh, no problem,” you know, and went with it, and went and ate and whatever.

Then for the appreciation, again it was oldest to youngest kind of thing, and at first it was Dad going around. One person went around and appreciated everybody in the group. Because there was seven of us, that's a lot, so each person appreciated. And you didn't appreciate back when someone was appreciating you. OK, so I loved that. I loved hearing the stuff that people had to say to me, about me, and about how I was appreciated, and as well about how they appreciated other members of the family. I mean really, I get a warm feeling about that. That was really wonderful listening to all that. But then again, when it was my turn to be appreciated by Della, we had to stop because we had to drive her to the airport. So I got appreciated in the car, on the way to the airport. She was doing her appreciation, and the whole time, I mean, I don't even remember. I remember very little of what she said because I was annoyed by the fact that this was happening. And it really detracted from the experience itself. You know, like, “OK, uhhh, really great that you came, bye!” . . . Then when we got back and we were trying to get back into it . . . It was my turn to appreciate each one
of the people that were there, and it was like, "Oop, no, we gotta do Della's first. Everybody has to appreciate Della first and Della has to appreciate everyone else because she's leaving on the eleven o'clock flight. Oop, we gotta have Mary appreciate everyone and everyone appreciate Mary because she has to go home to her baby. Oop, Kelly's leaving for the afternoon, we have to go around [appreciating and being appreciated by her]." Do you know what I mean? It was just kind of like, so jarred in that way, I didn't like that at all.

OK, but I also felt like, it was a really cool thing. It was really unique. It was something that I don't think that a lot of families would have been, in many ways, willing to do, or would have been willing to invest any of their time or emotions in anything like that, which we all were, and that was very cool. I really loved the idea of being with our family, even if we were just talking over pizza, you know, over having a pizza. I love the idea of being with our family, nuclear family as it was, for the first time in 25 years. And it was out of choice. That part of it was awesome for me. You know, it was the first time that I had ever been with all of our siblings and our parents, without our significant others or our children, in 25 years. That is an awesome thing. You know, out of choice, instead of you know, "Oh we're all getting together for Christmas," or "We're all getting together for this," or, "Oop, it's somebody's wedding," or whatever, "Bar mitzvah," or whatever it was. This was just us, and it was just for us. And that whole feeling I think, carried me through and made it all OK. All the things that happened. OK, because the idea that we all wanted to do that was so empowering for me.

The event got cut a bit short for some, and it did not allow enough time. There was not enough planning, so we spent too much time going out to lunches and dinners and doing that kind of stuff. It could have been more focused so that we made sure everyone had a chance with each other. Some of us did not get a chance to share back and forth with the other person. Two sisters in particular, because they both had flights that were in the early afternoon on the second day of that weekend. It really needed a full weekend to be planned with enough time so that it would allow everyone to share equally with everyone.

[Mom said] We had an eye opening and heart opening thing happen when we were talking to each other. Hearing from each other how early lives had been steered, marked, by the ways the adults in the family had interacted with each other and the children. I didn't think it was confrontational at all, which was what I was afraid of. I don't like confrontation. It was an experience I wouldn't have missed. I think it was something that every family could gain from experiencing. I think all of us had gained an understanding of each
other that wasn’t there before, or at least not fully. We could have had a little more structure... and perhaps planned the meal times a little better so that we didn’t have to scramble to go out to eat, or bring things in, and break up the momentum of what was happening.

[Dad said] It just gave me a reminder, and a look into the thinking of my children on different events and different things, which was good... I think it gave me a better understanding of where you were coming from. Which I knew, but at the same time, what’s always revealing is that how the same event is viewed differently, and not always the way you have viewed it... It reinforced what I’ve always thought, that when my children get together, the basic love that they have for each other shows up. You can see in the interaction between themselves, even when it’s things that are somewhat negative, it’s there, and it makes those negative things not seen as such a negative thing as to drive you apart... I thought the relationships were better after, because you get a better view of how everyone thought of it, how they looked at things. It just brought us closer together... I got to say things that I was glad that I did say, probably would not have said them except in this type of a situation.

As I watched my oldest sister Della share with others back and forth a little bit, I really got to feel a sense of her that I never had before. I saw that she was a real person, not just some image that I had of her. But that she had grown and changed in probably equally as many ways as I had over the years, and in my lack of contact with her I had failed to see that. It made me feel really open and vulnerable towards her in ways that I did not expect to. I began to trust her because she was sharing a lot and talking about herself, and openly expressing a lot of caring in ways that I had not seen her do before. That made me feel a lot of love for her. So when it came time to share my feelings with her, it did not take long before I basically found myself talking about how painful it was to feel judged by her at different times. Then I burst into tears and sobbingly talked about how it is not OK for men to share their feelings, and how that it is so silly. It was just nice to get her validation that that was OK. It was a wonderful, huge relief, a catharsis. It felt really good, like a weight being lifted.

In the moment I found myself just accepting what was said for face value and taking it as the truth of how they really felt. It was surprising because there were
expressions of admiration that I did not expect about both my lifestyle and other aspects of myself. I had thought that they were things that they thought very little of. It was not just lifestyle either, but also equally important, personal traits and personal qualities. They actually praised my perseverance, my idealism, and really going for and pursuing my heart. And I always thought that represented the black sheep elements of myself in relationship to the family and to them. So that was wonderful to hear, and to get affirmed in that way.

I also had mixed feelings of loss. I felt on the one hand that the event was kind of clumsy in terms of organization and not everybody was having a chance to share with each other. But each time that I thought about that, I just had to look at my other mixed feeling about how incredible it was that the event could have happened at all, and how much catharsis, healing, wonderful feelings, expressions and sharing of appreciation was taking place between everyone. There was a lot of tears and a lot of wonderful feelings, and that overrode my perceptions of it not living up to what my projections were of what it could be.

[Della said] I think you spend your whole lifetime building a relationship and refining it, and it was just another refinement, another piece of the experience. Since I've gotten older, I'm more open to that kind of stuff. Earlier in my life I didn't have a lot of use for a lot of that.

[Mom said] I felt it was a wonderful, wonderful experience. I think it gave all of us a chance to kind of air things that had bothered us for a long time and we'd never expressed, and to thank members of the family for the way that we perceive their relationship with us, and for being who they were and for giving us a better understanding of who everybody was. I think I felt closer to my children and my husband than any other time I can remember.... It felt really good to have a chance to tell my children the positive ways I felt about them. Because I tend to be nit-picky sometimes, and kind of harp on my kids about themselves, and how they can be better, instead of paying attention to what's going on. Some of the positive things that were said about me were surprising. I didn't think my children had as good of an opinion about me as they did. So that was kind of nice to hear. Nothing sticks out particularly, just more the feeling, than any one specific thing.
[Mary said] My sisters said things that surprised me, but I couldn’t tell you what they said, I don’t remember. I only remember an overall feeling, feeling good, a feeling of affirmation and belonging, and like “wow they actually feel that way?” I don’t know if I could say more peaceful, but a warm feeling that there was real stuff, feelings underneath the protective kind of covenant of family. The high level of emotions came back to a normal level, but the impression was lasting. The one thing that has lasted is that feeling of reaffirmation of what that tie is to family, and that feeling of being loved and being part of, for who, instead of what I am. It definitely gave me a connection to all the people who participated.

... There were good feelings listening to the other people in my family’s experience and kind of their take on what was really huge for them or monumental, and what stood out, what was, I guess, important about the other people in the family. That was really interesting, and it was nice to here. It was very positive, that was one thing that I really liked about it. Even in the positives there was an “even though” kind of thing. There was negative along with the positive, but it was definitely a healing opportunity.

My catharsis of having the chance to express my feelings of inadequacy in relationship to my oldest sister Della, and my feeling hurt by perceptions that I had of her judgment of me in the past, were a bit of the holy grail I had sought through this event. It was surprising just how comfortable it was, and how it was done in such a respectful, non-hurtful or nasty kind of way, for my second oldest sister Kelley to be able to directly confront Della and tell her that she had really hated her while she was growing up. The example she set made it equally comfortable for the rest of my siblings and myself to join in respectful, almost humorous chorus, that we had really hated her, too. It felt like some kind of miracle that in the midst of this event it was safe to express past hurt and resentment in the present moment, in a kind and caring way. I experienced it as a group catharsis. It seemed that my parents were amazed in watching the interactions, and all of us could see how much healing was taking place, just in terms of the pent up things that were being expressed.

[Dad said] I thought it was very positive. The feelings that came out, the way they were accepted by the others. The clearing up of some things in the way that other people see them. That they saw there was another view to an event that they had a view of, and somebody had a
different view of. Just an expression that I always thought my children reciprocated the love that I feel for them, and what I thought of them always. Simple as that. Just a question of accepting that they have differences of opinions about different things that are entirely different than mine.

[Mindy said] ... Della was telling me about how I was her baby, her little toy to play with, and she just loved me to pieces. I mean I don’t remember any of it, but it was interesting to find out that that was how she felt about me when I was little. ... I was really special to her, and just knowing that gave it an interesting skew for me to understand how she really wanted me to live up to certain expectations from a Mom’s point of view. ... It kind of gave me some insight to how she’s felt about me all these years, and why she’s always been so hard on me.

... Dad said we were more important to him than his grandchildren, which blew me away. I did not think that at all. It took a long time for me to even believe that was true. ... Because I always thought that my kids were his life, I mean we lived with them and they were just the most important thing, but he was like no, you guys are the most important thing in my life. You’re my children.

... Being able to convey to you [Marty], how I felt about you, I don’t think that I’ve ever told you in as many words as I had that weekend, how awesome of a force you are in my life. ... I got to also tell you how hurt I was by some of the things that you still talked about from when I was a kid and things that I would appreciate that you never, ever mention again because they were very hurtful. ... That felt really good to be able to say.

... Another revelation was the fact that Dad, is who he is, and he’s never going to change. ... When it came to him appreciating us, he recapped our lives for us, as if we didn’t’ know them. ... Not that I didn’t feel that he appreciated me, but I felt that he didn’t know what that is, or how to say it.

[Della said] It’s a lot more difficult [to share] when you see your own styles reflected in other people, the things that you don’t like, that you react fairly negatively to and that are like your own personality. ... Like I see lot’s of my daughter in Mindy, and it makes me more critical as opposed to more supportive.

[Mom said] I think that Mindy and Mary had a chance, being the youngest, and Mary particularly so much younger than the other kids, to really get to know their older siblings. More so than growing up in the family where they were already becoming very independent by the time Mary had gotten to be old enough to make relationships. This really gave a chance for each of them to express their feelings about each other, which were surprising to the younger kids, and maybe to the older ones too. I think I feel closer to all of my children because of it. I’ve often thought that listening to eulogies at funerals, that it was too bad that the people that died didn’t hear those things. That they hadn’t been said in their lifetime.
I think it’s a wonderful thing that you can, as long as you set the
ground rules ahead of time, that you’re looking for positive input, to be
able to talk on that level with your children... The negative stuff was
presented in such a way that it was more the reaction of the person,
than “you did this,” or being judgmental. So it was how they felt about
whatever they were describing, and their own feelings. So it was not
really [negative], it was eye opening sometimes and tearful for all of us,
but it wasn’t hurtful. It’s very important that the ground rules be laid
down ahead of time, and that there is to be no judgment. It’s, “How do
I feel about these things?”, rather than, “You did this to me.” That’s
vital to the experience being a positive one.

[Mary said] I saw the more tender sides of everyone that was there,
and that’s something you see at special moments, not as a group, you
see kind of their very individual sort of personal moments, and this was
more of a shared opportunity, a shared time. I walked away feeling like
wow there’s an acknowledgment that there’s really a lot of love, with
all the differences, with all the day to day shit that you live, underneath
that there was a lot of love. Having an opportunity to acknowledge
that, and see that, is really healthy. Seeing the softer side, seeing the
loving, caring emotional side, without all the sort of personality traits
that sometimes mask those. It was almost like a baseline of this level
of caring and love and emotion, and the personalities didn’t come into
play much.

... As a result of the event, I feel closer to one of my sisters
more than I ever did. Seeing her in a different light, hearing really real
feelings not like they would normally show through the personality, and
more on a raw kind of a level. It made me realize that there were
definitely common threads that I thought were quite different, and
actually tying everyone in the family... I think that comes from having
been raised in the same environment, by the same people, and even
though we were so different, in so many ways, there are still really core
things that are the same. I was able to realize that underneath all
those different themes we’re really not all that different.

The biggest things that happened for me that were extraordinary, were with my
father and my oldest sister. There was a feeling that suddenly I could let down my
wall. I could be vulnerable and open with both of them. I respected Della and loved
her and saw her as a person who had a kind of maturity that I did not think was even
in an area of interest to her, as far as feelings and interpersonal communication. I did
not think she had it in her. That was really powerful, and I found myself really liking
her as a person. She was OK. That was mostly because I felt approved of, and that
allowed me to open up and be approving of her and my father. For the first time in my
life I saw him as a person, in a way that I never had before. He was always just

"Dad," with all my projections and perceptions of him that kept him in a box. He was

"Dad that couldn’t share," and "Dad that couldn’t understand the ways of my tribe,"

so to speak. Then suddenly he was this open-hearted, caring person that had a really
tender side, aside from the logic and the other sides of him, and that was wonderful.

[Mindy said] As Dad says, "there are veils to relationships and you can uncover certain veils to certain people." I think that’s how it was for some of the people in our family. It [the event] unveiled one or two more sheets in the relationship level. Especially for you [Marty] and I, I felt that. I felt like it did for Mom and I, and I think that it definitely did for Della... I had some intense revelations about you through the whole thing because wow, I mean, I never knew that you were so torn up by the choices that you made in your life. I thought that you made those choices, and always because of your flippant attitude about them all of our lives, I felt that you had made them and you were fine with them. And to find out that the choices that you made weren’t maybe the ones that you would make now, was kind of eye opening for me. Or that you were as vulnerable as you were, or could be as vulnerable as you could be... Not that I thought any less of you... I think it’s like I have something to offer too, you’re not always the one with the answers. You’re not always the superior one.

... Like I said, it kind of cemented my feelings about where I stand in this family. Not that I’m not important, not that I’m not loved, not that I’m not cared for, but that somehow or another, in some way, I’m just not at the same level. And that, that part of it is something that I’ve been working on in therapy for a really long time. Is this my victim, is this my sense of self-worth? What is this about for me? But I look at it and just go, how could this, how could it just be me looking at it. I mean, I’m not looking at it and saying, I mean, looking and waiting for it to happen, it just happens. You know and... I don’t think that I anticipated that the pizza guy would cut me off, you know what I mean? I, it’s just, that’s just the way it happened, and it just seemed so OK to do it. And that part of it really bothers me. It’s not like... I’m never going to get over it, it’s just that... I feel like maybe I need to take more control in my life. And when things like that happen, really say, "You know what, I would just rather that the pizza got cold." Or, "Why don’t we not order pizza." Or, "Why don’t we stop this, and all go tomorrow morning when everybody’s fresh, and we’ll just play for the rest of the evening."

[Dad said] I don’t think anything like this could have been applicable at all with my own parents. I don’t think it could have been done. I think it would have been probably somewhat destructive if my parents had done that. Because they came from a point of view where your feelings were inside. You just didn’t really express the things, especially in
public, and to express things even with your children was a no no. Everything was good, and that's all there was to it. There were no negatives. They could never have discussed negatives. I never had a problem, I knew my parents loved me, period. They would do anything for me, which they did in many cases, and I accepted them and loved them as they were. There were no negatives. That was them, and I loved them completely and totally. There was never a doubt in my mind that when the crunch came they would be there. There was never I think a doubt in their mind that if something happened vice versa, that I would be there. It was an accepted thing. I don't think that in light of the way they were brought up, and the way I was brought up in our situation, we could have communicated as I communicated with my children in my later life.

[Mindy said] . . . Grandpa Joe... I never had a problem telling him how incredible I thought he was [when he was alive]. You know, what a great guy he was, how much I really loved him living in our house. . . . I didn't feel at the end there was anything said at the eulogy that wasn't said before. And I felt like, within our nuclear family, that there was a lot, that if one of us died, didn't get said. And there was an opportunity for that [during the event]. . . . I've always kind of felt like we're really lucky to have the family we do, but I've never felt as close to Mom and Dad and you, and Mary especially, until we had that weekend. It was just a real connection for me. I feel like we could do it again, and that would be just fine with me. Only this time I'll go first [laughter].

[Della said] I think there is value in taking the time for making conscious effort to share on that level, because there's usually not enough time to do what you want to do. When you feel like doing it the time and the place are not always appropriate. So this was just an opportunity to gather up those things. If I had spent a lot of times taking notes previously, from all those times I didn't say anything, then I might have had more things to say.

. . . I would participate in another one with our family or friends, but I'm probably more comfortable with our family at that level, but it might be a different level with friends. . . . For the most part I spend an awful lot of time telling my friends the things I like about them, and I don't know if "cheer them up" are the right words, but support them. I think I've done less so with our family. . . in terms of supporting them and telling them how great they are and stuff.

[Mom said] I would absolutely participate in another one. Tell me when. I think it would be nice if we could all get together at least once a year and do the same kind of thing. It's kind of tough because when we do all get together, the in-laws are always around, and we don't want to cut them out and [have them] feel unwanted, but this is something that really we need to do as parents and children by ourselves. There are parts of your growing up that you may or may not have shared with your significant others, and it has a more open feeling if it's just dealing with each other, and your parents, than it does if the other half of each of you
is there too. People I’ve described it to and talked about it with, have all said “God, what a great idea.” ... Some have said “I don’t know if I could get husband, children, whatever, to participate in something like that, but it sounds wonderful and I envy you having done that.” ... I think it’s something that might catch on like Marriage Encounter did. ... It would seem to me that there isn’t a family that I know of that couldn’t benefit from this kind of event.

[Dad said] I would have no problem participating in another event, mainly with family or very, very close friends. When you’re friends or acquaintances with people that you know that are not really exceptionally close to you, I don’t think you’re as open as you would be with your own family. An event with friends would have to be on a much smaller scale, if you want to call it that. You wouldn’t get into what you get into with family. ... I think from time to time it’s [a family event] something that would be good to do. It reinforces the bonds that put us together, and we realize that. Also I think it helps straighten out some things that happen from time to time that everybody has a different view on.

[Mary said] I think it would be beneficial to repeat it, especially since I think each time you do it it’s like a growth in which you get a closer connection to someone. The expectation is more reality based of what the potential is, and you could take it into another level. I think the first time was touching, kind of painful, because it was touching and highly emotion. Maybe you could be more relaxed and in tune with what’s deeper, less surface, and be able to express more deeply the emotions that are really there.

I have been wanting to do another LE with my family ever since our first event. I would love to do it once a year, and even that seems like not that much to me. It is undoubtedly because of so many years of not having that kind of exchange with my family. It is more about wanting to have emotional exchange on a deeper level with my family, on a regular basis. So maybe it is not about a specific appreciation event, like a once in a lifetime, or once in a great while kind of thing, but maybe where we are reminded of our appreciation of each other just by virtue of getting together.

A few days after the event was over, as I prepared to go back to Australia, I had the strongest feelings at the airport of realizing I had a father. A father that was not like “father in a box.” He was like “father as friend,” and someone who really cared, and that I loved deeply. As I reached out to hug him, we were both on the
verge of tears and choked up. I think it was the first time that both of us really felt the
depths of mutual acceptance, love and care. I felt like for the first time in my life
leaving my parents home, that I had a family, not just a father, but a family, and that it
was wholesome and that it was something that I did really care about, and they really
cared about me. That is definitely the most significant thing that came from the whole
event for me. It was a real turning point after many years of not really feeling any of
those things.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore the meaning that a single case Living Expression event holds for the individuals that participated in it, through their eyes. The goal was to foster a greater understanding of a new and unusual process that holds numerous potentially positive implications in its widespread application. An intentional non-interpretive, atheoretical framework, based on a cross-pollination of mostly constructivist and some postmodernist/postculturalist positions, was used. A methodological hybrid, typical of qualitative research, was implemented with its focus entirely on ethnographic description.

Conclusions

Because the core presentation of this study was rooted in purely descriptive material, and was presented unfettered by disciplinary logics, it would be an oxymoron to present a conclusion that participates in a process of exegesis, and fatuous to do so. Hence the only important "conclusion" of this research is that rich fertile ground of experience has indeed been found, as exemplified by the methods employed.

Using the thick description and impressionistic narrative styles of Geertz (1988) and Van Maanen (1988) allowed the highly graphic perspectives of the
respondents to be adduced in describing the event with this investigator’s family in
detail, and exploring the meaning it held for them. There was indeed more than
adequate, vivid interview material gleaned for the implementation of Richardson’s
(1994) use of crystallization to create a fractional comprehension. The intentional
creation of a “messy text,” a la Marcus (1994), verily provided the open-endedness
and incompleteness of dialogue and partial knowledge he suggested was possible.

Ultimately, whether or not this research actually succeeded in its purpose and
goal will be determined by the interpretive faculties of the individuals who review it.
This is clearly the only valid measurement possible precisely because of its
non-hermeneutic nature. As Richardson (1994) believes, it is this researcher’s
consummate credence that a deepened, though thoroughly partial, understanding of the
topic was the intention, and paradoxically, that we are now aware of more and very
possibly doubt what we know.

Recommendations for Further Research

Now that an initial, potentially greater understanding of Living Expressions is
being made publicly available to those individuals who may feel that it would be of
potential benefit or interest in their lives, there are a number of new avenues of
exploration that can be pursued by those so inclined. These could include qualitative
research on any of the aspects of meaning presented, as well as specific quantitative
research measuring specific types of meaning.

The content of this study can be made widely available in order to inspire
others to experiment with the process described, and generate further data from those
experiences, as well as from their impressions of this study. It is the hope of this
researcher that other interested parties, be they academic or otherwise, use this work
as the launching pad for boldly taking this process where it has never gone before.
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