

**The Experience of Completing a Midlife Career Change:  
A Phenomenological Study**

by

Janet Keefe Vitalis

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**Approved:**

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Marcie Boucouvalas, Chair

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William A. Bruck

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Neal E. Chalofsky

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Charles Humes

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Samuel D. Morgan

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Blacksburg, Virginia

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Janet Keefe Vitalis

Committee Chairperson: Marcie Boucouvalas  
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## **(ABSTRACT)**

The phenomenon addressed in this dissertation is the experience of completing a midlife career change. This experience is reported by many as they reach the ages between thirty-five and fifty-five. All research was conducted in response to the question: What is the meaning of the experience of completing a midlife career change?

The data collection process followed the model of Barritt, Beekman, Blecker, and Mulderij (1983). It is known as the descriptive phenomenological approach which uses in-depth personal interviews and includes participants as co-researchers. Ten men and women referred by family, friends, and colleagues who had completed a midlife career change participated in the study.

The phenomenological analysis of the protocols proceeded by first determining the elements and then establishing the themes into a structural whole--the individual description. These individual descriptions were reviewed and validated by the co-researchers. Following confirmation, the individual descriptions were integrated into a comprehensive Fundamental Description of the experience, again reviewed and validated by the co-researchers. The Fundamental Description identified six major themes which were common to each co-researcher's experience. The themes were: Preliminary Conditions for Change, Active Changing Process, Decision Making and Risk Taking, Outside-the-Self Assistance, Commitment to the Self, and Assessment of the Change.

The analysis suggests that midlife career change is part of the continuum of normal adult development. The pejorative nature of the term "midlife crisis" is seen as inaccurate in the context of the present study, and needs to be reframed to reflect the "opportunity plus danger" that the Chinese definition of crisis suggests. That midlife career change reflects a personal instability is not supported by this study. Rather, the midlife career change is found to be a time of becoming free of enmeshed values in order to complete a successful career change.

The implications of the disconfirmation of an instability model and the finding of an enmeshment-to-individuation process in the midlife career changer is discussed as it affects adult educators, counselors, and program planners.

## Acknowledgements

When I started my journey along the road to a career change, I had no idea that it would take me seventeen years! There have been those twists and turns and special markers along the way, and I have finally come to the realization that it has been worth the trip.

The past two years have been especially memorable. After receiving the green light from the committee for this project, I embarked on an intriguing part of the road. It was then that I had the opportunity to talk to and become a part of the lives of the people in the study. They are the heart of the work and I am more grateful to them than they will ever know.

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# **The Experience of Completing a Midlife Career Change: A Phenomenological Study**

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

The study of adult development indicates that continuing growth during adulthood is a process of becoming, of understanding the choices which are made available to every individual as they navigate the years. For many people the years between thirty-five and fifty-five (the mid-life period, for the purpose of this study) appear to be a time of crisis upon crisis as a condition for living! Many theorists (Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1971; Lowenthal, 1975; Neugarten, 1968; Sheehy, 1977, 1981 and others) seem in agreement that the tasks of midlife concern a reassessment of choices made at a younger time--the choice of mate, the choice of occupation, the choice of geographic location, as well as the choice of general lifestyle. According to Havighurst (1972), developmental tasks arise at or about a certain period in a person's life, the successful completion of which is necessary for happiness and success in later tasks. Similarly, Smelser and Erikson (1979) and Vaillant (1977) report that the fully functioning adult is the individual who integrates both the love aspects of life as well as the work aspects. When problems occur in either dimension, the process of reexamination often takes place. Such occurrences are described by Schlossberg (1978) and Aslanian (1981) as transitions, often preceded by "trigger" events. A "trigger" event may either be expected, such as the birth of a child, a promised promotion, or unexpected, such as being fired from a position, death of a

spouse, any or all of which may lead to a sense of instability in the activities of daily living. Transitions are considered to be those periods when a person may become introspective about the experiences of living. In times of reassessment the individual may begin to think about certain options that seem to be available versus options that seem to be elusive. Becoming aware of the options will promote a sense of stability which tend to consume the person's thinking--especially at a time when changes are rapid and the need to adapt is essential. Weathersby (1977) determines that the purpose of a transition is to terminate a "life structure" (Levinson's term) that has become inadequate and to initiate a new life structure. Such is the description of the midlife adult who changes the career of an earlier time period, whether the change is part of the reassessment process discussed above, or the result of a life event (a "trigger") which requires that the change take place.

The past ten years have witnessed the growth of many programs developed with the express purpose of helping midlife adults with career transitions. Programs dealing with career decision making, career/life planning and midlife transitions/crises are attended at many facilities such as Counseling Centers, Community Colleges, Universities, and in a variety of Adult Education settings.

For the most part, these programs are facilitated by persons familiar with adult life cycles and adult development. Interest in this particular group of adults for this investigator began with work as a counselor at a local Community College. Observation by this researcher over a period of five years finds that many adults, for whatever reasons, seem to be in the confusing process of finding out what they want to be "when they grow up."

Workshops and seminars in which the participants explore issues related to career change provide some measure of help for these individuals. For this researcher, however,

there continues to be a nagging concern that a base for program development would be more comprehensive is based upon a deeper, richer understanding of the experiences of those who have completed a midlife career change.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem of this study is to elicit and understand the nature of the experience of completing a midlife career change.

It seems difficult to develop programs that will facilitate the career development of midlife adults without the aid of those who have already completed this task. Discovering the meaning of the experience of a midlife career change from the person's own perspective provides important information for others who seek to make such a change as well as those professionals who assist them.

The experience of a career change, because of its scope, breadth and importance, may have many unidentified factors which are influential in the career change process but are not consciously focused on by the career changer. It is exactly these factors, which may be missed in a prestructured interview, that may be of central importance to the person or those assisting the person. Gaining that information is the focus of this study.

### **Purpose Statement**

Formally, therefore, it is the purpose of this study to elucidate facets of the completed midlife career change in order to provide information which will be of assistance to both the individuals undergoing this experience and the helping professionals who assist them.

## Research Question

In completing a midlife career change, what is the structure of the experience, as documented through the career changer's own words, of the lived world of a midlife career change?

## Significance of the Study

The research question asked is, in effect, a context of discovery question rather than a context of verification question. Three implications of the study present themselves.

1. With this broadened base from which to work, facilitating the development and implementation of programs dealing with the issues of careers at the midlife period will be enhanced. It seems reasonable to assume that this information may be of serious interest to all who counsel and provide programs for adult learning.

2. Context of verification studies can be done in the future which can investigate experimentally the conditions under which midlife career changes take place, the "success" of such changes, the types of people most likely to undergo them, and methods by which they can be helped.

3. From the base of information gathered from phenomenological research may come the opportunity to construct instruments which will accurately assess the process. Such instruments may be used for future program planning.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will provide a literature review in the areas of adult and career development, selected studies on midlife career change and an overview of phenomenology. Such a review will give the reader a logical sequencing of information which will enhance the readability of the study.

#### **Adult/Career Development**

It has been a span of twenty five years since Buehler (1962) presented the results of her study in which she postulated five basic life tendencies. These basic life tendencies are: a) need-satisfaction, b) adaptive self-limitation, c) creative expansion, d) establishment of inner order, and e) self-fulfillment. After collecting life histories from elderly people, Buehler saw that the tendencies she described were in force during all ages but that periods of dominance prevail at certain times. For instance, she saw that the time of "creative expansion" encompassed the years between twenty-five and forty-five. This is the time when determining an occupation, getting married and establishing a family outside the family of origin is accomplished.

In like manner, Erikson (1963) conceived of human growth as having eight psychosocial tasks which must be mastered at certain developmental periods of a person's life. These psychosocial tasks include trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy

versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair. The task of Middle Adulthood is the personal confrontation between generativity versus stagnation, in moving forward or staying placed. From Erikson's perspective if any of the tasks are not resolved, persistent problems occur. However, complete resolution seldom happens since new circumstances and experiences might unsettle a prior adjustment in any of the preceding tasks.

This initial research in human development led to additional study concerning adult development. Neugarten (1970) provides information about the functional events and timing during adulthood. Her research finds that life events occurring "on time" are not viewed as a crisis but as expected, "normal" situations. Even the loss of a loved one could be viewed in this manner if the death happened at a time that is consistent with social norms. In this way, life stages are often defined by society. There is the appropriate time to get married, have children, leave home, get a job, and retire. It is also timing that tends to determine career (often based on male career patterns) and family development in the post-industrial society in which we live.

Researchers such as Levinson (1978), Sheehy (1977), and Gould (1972) describe the transitional times of life. They report a general pattern that begins with the transition from adolescence to adulthood in which the first commitments are made to marriage, family, and work. These choices become subject to re-examination during the early thirties decade. It is from the middle thirties and into the fifties that the realization of "finite time" leads to another transitional re-examination. Some major questions about priorities and values of the prior lifestyle begin to arise. A marriage made at an earlier time is reviewed and may be upset and/or modified. It is at this time, they report, that the decision to change careers is contemplated. If the early career is reaffirmed there is

usually a change in expectations and motivation. If a career change choice is determined then new priorities and values are examined.

Lowenthal's (1975) research documents the significant differences in perspective of the life cycle by men and women. She found that at midlife (which she defined as age fifty) both men and women experience a general sense of effectiveness, efficiency, and overall competence. This is a time when competition is replaced by selective involvement with more rewarding activities. However, her study reports that women tend to place less value on self-assertion and achievement with a willingness to recognize shortcomings while men tend to deny shortcomings. It is also a time of life when the societal parameters accept women developing the more masculine components of their personality and men feel less inhibited in recognizing their more feminine components.

The developmental tasks of life which Havighurst (1972) describes are the biopsychosocial demands each individual must satisfy for healthy, satisfactory growth in society. Each task must be mastered at the appropriate time or difficulties will arise with each subsequent task, leading to personal unhappiness and/or social disapproval. The tasks of the "midlife re-examination" (ages 35-43) include the search for meaning, a reassessment of marriage, re-examination of work, relating to teen-age children, relating to aging parents, reassessing personal priorities and values, adjusting to single life, active problem solving, and managing stress accompanying change. During this period the outcomes which signify task completion include a satisfying marriage, appropriate career decisions, improved parent-child/child parent relationships, autonomous behavior, a fulfilled single state, successful problem solving, successful stress management with personal growth, and coping with existential anxiety.

It is clear that there is a sense of interwovenness between the process of adult development and the process of career development. In fact the two are inseparable. In

a world in which it is unlikely that one will live in the same place, work for the same company or even stay married to the same person, it is essential that the responsibility for planning one's life come from the individual. Because work in our society is viewed as a vehicle for a person's self-expression, personal fulfillment, self-esteem, and self-discovery, people need to define the meaning of work in their lives. Maslow (1968) indicated that work organizes life in a meaningful, need-fulfilling way. Super (1957), one of the original theorists in career development, considers career development the integral part of the continuous process of defining self-concept so that there is satisfaction to the self and benefit to society in general. Basseches (1984) suggests that there is a component of developmental growth in the work situation and that frustration of this potential is an ongoing deterrent to the individual in the worklife of the ordinary bureaucratic organization. He posits that the potential for developmental growth takes place in those democratically organized workplaces in which management recognizes and encourages facets of the adult developmental process. Although there is disagreement among theorists concerning the "stages" through which individuals progress in career development, there is agreement that career planning is an important aspect of human development. Jepsen (1974) bases his thinking on "decision" theory. In his research he finds that certain characteristics of making decisions persist over the life cycle in which persons develop strategies that present as "active planners" or "passive planners." Super (1957) is the major theorist in the "developmental" approach. He is the first to connect the developmental stages of Havighurst to the career development patterns of life. His "Life-Career Rainbow" closely follows the major life stages and the approximate ages which then relate to initial and subsequent occupational choices.

While other models of the career development process introduce a variety of theories (Ginzberg, 1972; Holland, 1973; Krumboltz, 1979; Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman,

1982; Osipow, 1983; and others) a major common theme in all concerns the decision making process. This process involves a series of steps which include: a) defining the task, b) gathering information, c) establishing a values priority, d) making a choice, and e) taking action. It is interesting to note that the same steps tend to occur over time in most areas of life that involve growth and development, from choosing a life partner to making a career choice.

Thus, the melding of adult and career development theories is providing the researcher with an increasingly rich body of knowledge from which to understand the human condition. This study will generate information which will add to our understanding of human experience, specifically in the area of midlife career change.

### **Selected Studies**

A search into the literature revealed that the topic of midlife career change is of interest to other researchers. Among the researchers, Neapolitan (1977) examined the topic from a mid-career viewpoint rather than from a mid-life perspective. He found that the two perspectives seemed to be related--that is, those who were at the mid-career point also tended to be at the mid-life period (between the ages of thirty-seven and fifty). Several findings were yielded from this study of both men and women who made a career change. For the most part the respondents were well-adjusted emotionally and had been in their prior occupation for at least eight years. The need to change career was usually due to boredom, stagnation, little challenge in the prior field, and general support for the change from the significant others in their lives. The method used was a variation of quasi-experimental combined with a variation of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) Grounded Theory. Control groups were not interviewed in the same way as the experimental groups in the hopes of determining the differences that might be

revealed in the two groups. Much overlap in responses between the experimental and control groups was reported. This overlap in responses suggests that a research method which looks at all the themes and patterns of respondents might be more powerful in determining reasons for the overlaps.

Thomas (1977) was interested in finding out why professional men would leave their fields at midlife. He interviewed a group of professional men who were in a wide range of managerial, professional, and technical occupations. He found also that the men were emotionally stable, had sufficient financial resources, and the support of family members who were peripherally as involved in the change as was the individual person. These men switched to fields such as art, social work, the clergy, counseling, and a variety of career fields that at a younger age might have been perceived to be more a "female" occupation. This finding might be of value since there is some evidence to suggest that men do allow the more expressive (feminine) factors in their personality to come forward more at midlife than earlier. The opposite seems also to be true--that women become more assertive and seek to refine the instrumental (masculine) aspects of their personality at the midlife period. These factors appear to be related to the overall reassessment of life during the middle years (Neugarten, 1968; Sargent, 1978; Schlossberg, 1981). His methodological approach used the grounded theory process which generated the themes and patterns of his study. While grounded theory methods have many strengths such as the development of, rather than a testing of, hypotheses and theory and the use of fieldwork to gather data (Merriam and Simpson, 1984), one limitation is observed. This is the absence of involvement of the individuals who are participating in the study as co-researchers. This limitation inhibits the use of dialogue between researcher and participant, thus putting the data gathering and analysis function solely on the investigator.

When Landau (1977) looked at the midlife adult from the career change perspective he focused on the career development process. He interviewed both men and women who were in the process of deciding about a career and who needed to determine their changed values, their priorities of work and leisure, and the amount of effort they were willing to invest in making the change from one occupational field to another. His study used many of the tools of the counseling practitioner: interest inventories, values clarification strategies, and personality/type tools to help the subjects better understand themselves. These are certainly accepted guides for concerned facilitators skilled in their use for such inquiry. The point to be made again, however, is that these tools are devised from researcher-made instruments. Researcher-designed instruments gain validity and reliability by channelling the subject's responses into avenues the researcher has foreseen. A needed complement, however, is letting the subject's experiences in the lived world be freely related.

Robbins (1978) studied "successful" career change made by 91 men between the ages of 33 and 54. The information was generated from a questionnaire given to all and from interviews with 67 of the men. The men were all in the middle and upper-middle class, with the educational and income levels associated with this group, and all were between 35 to 55 when they left their jobs. Women were precluded from the study on the basis that factors in their career patterns were difficult to assess, factors such as childbirth, moving in response to husband's transfer and restricted opportunities for women.

The study sought to learn more about midlife adults as career changers, their motivations, how they made the changes, and what the outcomes were. The specific aspects of career change examined in the study included age at career change, family and educational background, categories of changes, internal versus external pressures, reasons for changing, motivation, kinds of jobs entered and left, and the men who didn't leave.

Each aspect was generalized to the group as a whole and provided information about the group, such as age 40 being the age more of them were at the time of career change, all were about the norm in socioeconomic status as well as educational background. The categories divided the men into an assumption of the "radicalness" of the change, voluntary change was choosing to leave (internal) while involuntary change was being fired (external). The motivation factor was examined from the intrinsic/extrinsic perspective. By and large, the men left large, bureaucratic, profit-making organizations and entered smaller businesses or started their own business or profession to allow for personal autonomy. The men who didn't leave may have lacked financial resources, self-confidence, little support from family, or were unable to think of anything else they wanted to do.

The term "successful" was used in this study to denote those who had gone through a career change in spite of the conventional understanding that "successful" meant stability and upward mobility accompanied with all the external symbols of success in the first career. All the men in the study fit the conventional description for being "successful" in both their first and second careers.

Although the study included interviews with the men, there were no provisions for the participants to comment on the information they provided before the analysis was completed by the investigator. Once again, the concern for potential distortion from information so generated, without the added dimension of participant input, needs to be raised.

Another study of midlife career changers (Armstrong, 1980) looked at the decision behavior of the adult as a determinant of "successful" career change. She used two groups of adults who were enrolled at a large comprehensive Community College--one group currently attending and the other group no longer attending. The questionnaire

she developed, which was devised to explore the rational and incremental decision approaches, was used on both the in-school group and the Post-school group. She found that job dissatisfaction was the predominant factor associated with the career change activity, that the need for further or different education was what had brought them to the Community College. Two-thirds of the respondents used the incremental decision-making process which is "marked by remediality, that is, a move away from an unsatisfactory situation rather than toward an optimal situation" while the other third used the rational process which is "characterized by a wider range of alternatives, a broader information base, and selection of an optimal alternative that may reveal a goal of major change." There was a statistically significant association with marginal career change in the incremental group but no such association in the rational group. In fact, she found that most respondents used a habitual pattern of decision-making which closely resembled the incremental process. This knowledge could be very useful to those who counsel and do program planning for midlife career changers. How much more useful this information would be if the context from which it came was a study seeking to examine the experience of career change in addition to the responses given to a questionnaire.

In a study done by Perosa and Perosa (1983) concerning midcareer crisis an examination of the psychological dynamics of transition and adaptation revealed several factors. A sample group of 134 people responded to a structured questionnaire that included concept questions dealing with shock and immobilization, minimization and denial, self-doubt and depression, letting go, testing options, searching for meaning, and internalization and renewal. Responses to these concept questions were matrixed which classified the people into stages of transition/adaptation and categories of changed, changing and persists. They found that many people experienced an overlap of stages and some skipped steps. About one-quarter expressed feeling frustration, stagnation

and/or depression in their work life. As their crisis increased more than one-third of the sample experienced a sense of meaninglessness. Of the sample, 66% entered the letting go stage which seemed to be essential to making the career change. It was almost like a "life and death struggle" for many at this point. The behaviors necessary for the change emanate from these last stages resulting in "qualitative differences in self-concepts and interpersonal relations."

This study makes important beginnings into the experience of career change at midlife/midcareer. The researchers, however, make the point of stating that limitations to the study included observing the individuals at only one point in the transition process and relying on the individual's "memory" of the experience. This was especially true of those in the "changed" group who seemed more subject to this "distortion."

An important addition to the body of knowledge concerning midlife career change is the recent work by McQuaid (1986). Her study of midlife adults in career change uses the theory building model of Glaser and Strauss as method. Her study is concerned with the "ill-fit" between midlife career change and the theoretical bases of adult and career development under which it was being subsumed.

The researcher completed interviews with twenty midlife career changers and also interviewed confidants of eleven. After completing her analysis, she developed the constructs of theory which are consistent with two main components. The first component is named the Chronological, which includes four phases called predispositional, confrontational, action, and adjustment. The second component is the Descriptive model in which external and internal development is examined in relation to the first career, the transitional period, and the second career.

Her findings and resultant theory provide a new view of the midlife career changer. She employed a method which begins to understand the experience of career change.

However, a major problem is that the method does not include participants as co-researchers. Instead, validation is sought from confidants--people who know the individual, giving the sense that the participants are not quite sure of their own lived experience.

Thus, while much research work has been done in the area of midlife career change, based on this review of the literature, three shortcomings can be seen. One is the use of researcher-made instruments which can lead to researcher prejudgements being verified or non-verified. A second is the analysis of data by the investigator only thus leaving out the interpretations of the participants. The third concerns the use of quantitative methods in a study before the phenomenon is defined thus finding relationships between two things, neither one of which is completely understood.

"What is the meaning of the experience of completing a midlife career change?" Based on the review of the literature, the significance of the research question in Chapter One becomes obvious. The answer to this question will provide the research that will undergird future studies of the type previously reviewed. The approach and method most suitable to answer this type of question is the phenomenological method which asks the general type of question "what is the phenomenon under investigation?" As this method is less common, it will prove fruitful to review the general assumptions, goals, and techniques used in the phenomenological method for the reader.

### **Phenomenology (The Study of Experience)**

In this section discussion will concern the approach (assumptions and goals) and the method (techniques) of phenomenological inquiry. The general assumptions of phenomenology are presented in the works of such theorists as Edmund Husserl, the pure phenomenologist who supplied the basis for the later existential phenomenologists Martin

Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the existential phenomenological psychology of Amedeo Giorgi. For this study and for readability, the term "phenomenology" will refer to existential phenomenology.

Pure phenomenology has its historical roots in the philosophy of Husserl (1927). This philosophy embraced the concept of studying experience by going to the things themselves--"Zu den Sachen selbst." By putting aside both preconceptions and any other "known facts," direct experience--as it appears to consciousness--could be examined using imagination and intuition. For Husserl, this was possible by "bracketing out" one's preconceived ideas in order to eventually illuminate pure consciousness, e.g., consciousness separate from any of its contexts. In this way, he assumed, one might reduce essence (roots) from experience and reach a transcendental level of understanding.

Heidegger (1962), a follower of Husserl, expanded on the more theoretical approach of Husserl with the term he used for human existence--"Dasein"--(literally meaning Being there). The fact that human existence is always existence in a world led Heidegger to differ with the notion that a pure consciousness is possible. Rather, Heidegger emphasized the fundamental structures of our Being-in-the-world such as the relationship of death, temporality, spaciality and other fundamental aspects in the human condition. Heidegger introduced the concept of authentic versus inauthentic living which was later popularized by other existentialists.

The existential phenomenological assumptions of Merleau-Ponty (1962) brought to light that our relationship with the world is not only intellectual but also a relationship that is lived out in the body (the body subject). It is the pre-reflective bodily use of objects in the world that creates many of the structures and meanings which constitute our world, particularly the pre-reflective structures of the world. In this way what the Freudians might call the "unconscious" is described in phenomenological terms as literally

pre-reflective, before the act of conscious reflection, or what our body does before we think. For Merleau-Ponty, the life-world (which is the world in which we live) is the only world about which we can know. A "real" world, existing objectively and independently of us, is nothing we can ever know so the only world we can study is the world we know, the life-world.

For Giorgi (1970), the lived world is the sum of the structures by which we make sense of our world. The structures are thus the meanings we uncover in the world. When we say we are finding a fundamental structure, the meaning of the experience, or the existential significance of an experience, it means the same thing. The structure of the world is both discovered and created--it is co-constituted. We both discover the already existing meanings in the world (i.e., a Bic pen is meant to be written with) and we create meanings in the world (i.e., we use a rock for a chair). Co-constitution of the world is carried out reflectively as we consciously re-cognize a meaning (writing with the pen) and pre-reflectively as we automatically do something (sitting in the chair).

Based on these assumptions, then, the goal of phenomenology is to understand the meanings of phenomena. As we live in the world we make sense of the world through the variety of experiences we have. Because a variety of experiences leads to a variety of viewpoints and meanings, phenomenological studies employ two major strategies--bracketing one's natural attitude and imaginative variation.

Bruck (1977) explains that persons constantly conceptualize about the world, especially about individual experiences of the world. These attitudes, beliefs, and intellectual constructs are known as our "natural attitude." "Natural" is used in the sense that we habitually approach the world with a set construct. There are certain problems with this natural attitude in that it hides phenomena from our scrutiny and covers up our experience of the world with our thoughts (our natural attitude). The phenomenologist, in

the attempt to understand phenomena as they are in themselves, "brackets" this natural attitude. This involves taking those attitudes, beliefs and intellectual constructs and putting them aside, so that the phenomena can be viewed from a fresh and unbiased perspective. There is some discussion from other phenomenologists, notably Merleau-Ponty and Giorgi, that it is not possible to completely "bracket" the natural attitude but we can make explicit as many of our biases as possible and "bracket" the others. The goal of "bracketing the natural attitude" is to have the phenomenon under investigation be open to a fresh understanding, not having a priori constructs or categories assigned.

*Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes imaginative variation in this way:*

This intuition of essences, like induction, as we have seen, is based on facts. The difference is that this intuition of essences is based on the imaginative free variation of certain facts. In order to grasp an essence, we consider concrete experience, and then we make it change our thought, trying to imagine it as effectively modified in all respects. That which remains invariable through these changes is the essence of the phenomenon in question.

So, as the phenomenologist reflects on the experience under investigation, it is necessary to use imaginative variation. In this way the experience is thought about and viewed from as many perspectives as possible. This means that the phenomenologist must mentally vary the situations of the experience so that different parts are put into different contexts. This activity will help to refine the essence of the experience so that the factors which emerge as invariable are identified.

Along these lines, Bruck (1977) points out that another important element in the phenomenological approach is the attitude of the researcher. For many who are familiar with the well-used experimental technique, one must approach the situation with a certain analytical style of thinking. This style of thinking involves hypotheses, variables, linear cause and effect relationships, replicability, generalizability and the like. The phenomenologist thinks in terms of structure, of empathic understanding and a holistic

(Gestalt) approach to the problem without having any clearly defined boundaries or solutions. This style of thinking is an important key to do phenomenology for, without it, no set of operations will guide the researcher to the structures of the phenomena under investigation.

Spielgelberg (1975) summarizes three minimum requirements for the phenomenological approach:

1. A phenomenological approach must start from a direct exploration of the experienced phenomena as they present themselves in our own consciousness--without committing itself to belief in their reality.
2. It must attempt to grasp the existential structures of these experienced phenomena and their essential interrelations.
3. It should also explore the constitution of these phenomena in our consciousness, i.e., the way these phenomena take shape in our experience.

In any research project one is concerned that the method is the "best fit" for studying the question posed. To answer a context of discovery question such as "what is the meaning of the experience of a midlife career change?" the phenomenological method contains that "goodness of fit." A number of people have developed variants on the "phenomenological method" all of which stem from these philosophers, among whom are Barritt et al., (1983), Collaizzi (1973), Giorgi (1975), and Spiegelberg (1975). With minor differences the methods employ the same steps. The best elucidation of method (and for reader understanding) comes in Barritt. This model employs four sequenced procedures in the method:

**Procedure 1.** Informants are asked to give a description of an experience they have had. Each co-researcher gives the description independently of all others. Co-researchers are asked to stick to descriptive language without interpretations and/or

attributes of causality or factual details. The co-researcher then examines the transcript/protocol for accuracy in the reporting of the experience and is encouraged to make changes or comments as they desire. The researcher examines the descriptions for the emerging themes and possible variations.

**Procedure 2.** The descriptions are read by the researcher and analyzed for common themes. The analysis begins by going to the descriptions and taking from each, in the co-researchers own language, what seem to be important elements of the experience. In doing the thematic analysis it is important to use imaginative variation and employ bracketing (discussed previously) of one's natural attitude. In this way the researcher will be seeing the material from a fresh perspective and with a sense of awareness of bias. Tables/charts of the common themes, element statements, and variations are generated to make the writing of the individual description as accurate as possible.

**Procedure 3.** The individual descriptions are submitted to the co-researchers to see if they accurately capture the intended meanings of the experience. The description is written in language which will let the co-researcher know that the essence of the experience is reflected and the context is an accurate portrayal. The co-researcher is encouraged to make comments and to change what may not be accurate. The researcher will make note of any changes but will reserve the right not to change the description based on researcher insights. However, in such a case, mention needs to be made in the individual description that the co-researcher did not second the insight of the researcher.

**Procedure 4.** A fundamental description is written by the researcher based on the themes. This comprehensive description is a composite of all the individual descriptions incorporating the common themes from each. The variations which may have emerged are woven into the context of the fundamental description in the manner in which they seem to make the most sense. The language of each co-researcher is included to

emphasize the importance of their contribution to the understanding of the experience. Again, the fundamental description is submitted to the co-researcher for comments on the accuracy of the description and an assessment of where they "fit" into the fundamental structure of the experience. These comments are noted by the researcher but do not have veto power over the insight of the fundamental description.

### **Summary**

These procedural steps will serve as the methodological guide in this study. In addition, this review provides the reader with the background necessary for a comprehensive overview of the terms found throughout the study, especially in the following chapter which deals with the phenomenological method.

## Chapter III

### Method

#### Introduction - Part I

This chapter will take the reader through what is done in the process of phenomenological inquiry. As discussed in Chapter Two, the guide will be Barritt's four step model. These steps will also serve as the reader's guide to a fuller understanding of the material as it is presented in detail.

#### Sample Selection

At the beginning of the study academic colleagues, friends, family and business associates were informed of the need for people who had completed a midlife career change. "Completed" is underlined for many knew of men and women who were in the process of changing careers but it was a little more difficult to find those who had completed the change. However, the suggestions for participants did come and each person who subsequently interviewed proved to meet the required parameters. For the purpose of this study the people needed to be in the age range of thirty-five to fifty-five. They went into one career as a young adult with employment of at least five years in the first career. Each then went through the process of making a career change into a totally different field in which they have been employed at least five years. A demographic chart of the co-researchers is included in the Appendix. It is interesting to note how the co-researchers came to the study. One came to the study via a chance meeting at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon, another through my secretary, while my

husband's car pool conversation provided another. In a routine visit to my physician's office contact was made with another co-researcher while a chance viewing of a television documentary led to contacting a co-researcher through the reporter. My former career in nursing provided the networking to another person, just as one of my current *colleague's contact with their financial advisor led to including another person. My son's* business contacts channeled a co-researcher while a social gathering provided another. Academic networking referred another of the co-researchers. Of the ten individuals in the study (one woman, not included in the ten, withdrew from the study for personal reasons), all walks of life are represented. There is a mix of both "blue collar" and "white collar" people that tends to provide depth to the study and also a combination of five men and five women, without emphasis on either, which provides a balance factor.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

As each person was contacted, either in person or by telephone, the study was explained to them. After providing them with information and determining their willingness to be a participant, each individual was told that there would be a commitment of at least two one hour taped interviews. In no instance was taping a hindrance as each person recognized that even though they may not be as comfortable with taping as they would like to be, they knew it was the preferred method of data collection for this study. It was at the first interview that written permission from each person was received. A copy of the Letter of Consent is part of the Appendix. In addition, each co-researcher was informed about their continuing contribution to the study in the form of reading and editing the descriptions of their career change and also reading and editing the final Fundamental Description of the results. In this way each person

contributed to the validity of the study by acknowledging that the analysis was indeed a true rendition of the experience of a midlife career change for that individual.

During the first interview a trusting relationship was fostered by allowing each individual the freedom to describe, in detail, the experience of completing a midlife career change. The conversation started with an open ended question about choosing the first career. This evolved into conversation concerning what happened to them as they made changes in their lives and eventually in their careers. Care was taken not to lead the discussions into particular areas that might bias the information but instead, any direct questioning was aimed at keeping the conversation as focused as possible on the career change process. A basic guide to the interview questions is a part of the Appendix. The first interview was usually longer than one hour, not because of intent but because the discussion usually became involved. These conversations were often the first time the individual had had an opportunity to talk about the process they had completed and they were reluctant to stop talking at the end of the hour. Most of the interviews were conducted at the co-researcher's home or place of business at a time and date of their choosing in order to provide convenience to the person. In all interviews, after the initial setting up of the tape recorder, a process in which the co-researcher was encouraged to help by placing the tape recorder in a comfortable position, there were no problems associated with taping. The interviews ended with an accounting of the next step. Each would have forwarded to them a transcribed copy of the tape which they read, made notes, comments, and changed anything they felt needed to be changed. This would be their opportunity to ensure that what they said was indeed the way it had happened for them. A note enclosed with the transcript instructed that contact would be made at the end of the following week to ask for their comments and to schedule the

next interview. In this way the opportunity for follow-up on a schedule that was consistent with our pre-arrangements was encouraged.

The second interview continued the discussion of their experience in completing a midlife career change. The information tended to be very free flowing with much reiteration of what had been said previously. It was found that these two in-depth interviews did expose the basic themes of the experience. Again, at the end of the interview the person was told that the transcript would be sent to them with the intent that they would edit and make changes that they felt were important. It needs to be noted that each of the co-researchers did make changes in both transcripts, all for the sake of clarity of experience, emphasizing the importance of the co-researchers involvement in this research approach. A week after the transcript was sent, phone contact was again initiated with the individual. At this point the discussion of the transcript was concerned that an accurate description of the career change experience was assured. In all cases the answer was affirmative so the next step in analyzing the data could begin.

## **Data Analysis**

The goal of the analysis is to find the common themes in the protocols, using the language that captures the elements of the experience of completing a midlife career change.

The first step began after reading the unedited transcripts, followed by the process of editing each transcript. This amounted to much cutting of repetitive phrases and shortening of unnecessary and dragged out sentences. As the condensed edited transcript was compiled, the reading for elements that seemed to make up the common themes was

searched, while at the same time employing imaginative variation and bracketing of natural attitude (discussed in Chapter II) to the emerging themes.

Each time a statement emerged that was related to the meaning of the experience for the individual, it was noted. These statements were underlined in the protocol so they would make up the table of underlined element statements. This process also involved several readings of the transcript in the condensed form and returning to the original to make sure that meaning statements had not been missed. The table of underlined statements could then be formulated. This made it easier to assemble in some logical order the statements that appeared to make up the common themes.

The next step involved reading the element statements for their emerging commonalities. In this way a table depicting the common themes was formulated. Overall there appeared several common themes that covered the experience for each of the co-researchers. There were statements that indicated some preliminary conditions for the change, the active changing process, the decision-making procedure that each followed, the assessment of themselves as individuals, and what each saw as future prospects.

The step following involved thinking about the totality of the experience for each person. In this thinking certain factors emerged as salient to the experience. In this way the process could be written in an individual description of the experience of completing a midlife career change. The individual description was compiled and then sent to the co-researcher for reading. The letter sent with the individual description (included in the Appendix) asked that the co-researcher be very sure that what was written was an accurate portrayal of the experience. Each person wrote on the description any information that needed to be changed or any comments they felt would be helpful for further clarification.

After receiving the descriptions back from each person, logging their comments and changing any language which they thought was necessary, the next phase of compiling the information and insights into the comprehensive fundamental description started. The fundamental description integrates the information from the individual description and provides the larger picture of the meaning of the experience of completing a midlife career change.

## **Introduction - Part II**

This section will provide the reader with a discussion of how the analysis of the protocols was done in this study using phenomenological inquiry. The discussion will use a hallmark of qualitative research in providing readability and potential replicability in the form of the less formal first person style.

## **Data Analysis of Protocols**

### **1. Elements/Element Statements**

After receiving the protocols from the second interview and making the requested changes, I was ready to read and re-read the transcripts as I edited and condensed the two interviews into one transcript. While doing this I was again searching for single elements and element statements that seemed to capture the experience. I underlined these elements and statements as they appeared. If I felt that I needed to go back to the original transcript, I would, always keeping in mind that I needed to take the element statement and subject it to imaginative variation. For example, Sarge's statement about "bad vibes in the office" could be thought of as "bad vibes" in other parts of his life. Upon reflection, however, the situation at home and/or play did not produce these bad vibes and so it is determined that the office (his work environment) was solely

the place he was experiencing such discomfort. This statement, then, can be thought of as a part of his awakening process and a precondition for change. Each protocol was examined in much the same way as I constantly searched for commonalities in and between all the protocols. As the element statements generated the common themes, I formulated the first of the tables (an example appears in chapter IV). These tables included not only the elements but also the element statements which supported the common themes.

I found that this immersion in the protocols provided the basis for future insights into the experience of completing a midlife career change. After reading and re-reading and underlining element statements from seven of the protocols, I realized that I was reaching saturation in the information that was given in the protocols. The element statements were similar and the common themes more obvious. In fact, I found that many of the co-researchers not only voiced similar experiences, they also used the same words and/or phrases. This was surprising to me in that none of the co-researchers know or have ever met one another.

## **2. Common Themes**

The underlined element statements were compiled into a table. The table is presented as not more than a listing at the end of each transcript. The element statements are listed as they appeared in the protocol. By bringing them together in one place it is then easier to grasp the significance they hold. Having them in one place also facilitates reading and re-reading of the element statements for emerging common themes.

It was by going back and forth over the element statements of each of the protocols that the common themes emerged. These themes classified themselves into what seemed to be distinct portions of the experience. This was a form of bracketing in which I read

the first protocol and thought about the possible themes. However, with reading the second protocol I not only thought about the themes from the first but also held myself open to the new possibilities of different themes. In this way I did not prejudge the emerging material but allowed themes to appear to me in a dialectical relationship. In reading each of the subsequent protocols the themes were the themes gained from the information of the protocols and also, secondarily, themes gained from dialogue with previous protocols.

The developing common themes are assessed and "tried on" for justification from the material in the protocols. I thought of words that would encompass not only the diversity in the protocols but would make them seem congruent to the experience as a whole. This exercise of discovery is intense. Any variation in the element statements which might lead to a different sense of the common themes, or present as a separate common theme is noted. As an example, the variation I consider most salient is the more successful/less successful facet of the career change. I recognized that although some persons did change their careers and did follow the parameters I set for the study, there were those who still were searching for the "right place for me." This topic will be discussed in the next chapter. The exercise of discovery is then made concrete by the development of a table in which the common themes and the element statements are listed side-by-side (an example is provided in Chapter IV) to provide the reader (and the researcher) with clarity of conclusion.

### **Individual Description**

The next phase was construction of the individual description from the element statements and the common themes. I read the transcript once again for the flavor of the person's life in the context of their individual career change. Using the common

themes as a guide in my thinking, I integrated in my writing of the description how I felt the essential structure of the career change formed a whole--a Gestalt--which gave me insight into the process of change for that person.

After the individual description was written it was sent to the co-researcher for comment. I enclosed a letter asking for written comments on the description and return of that description. I did send two copies of the individual description with the idea that each person would want a copy of their own. I felt that this small gesture would make it clear to each person that I appreciated their efforts in determining the accuracy of the information they continued to provide.

The comments were duly noted but there is no power of veto over the insights I have had in the writing of the individual description. If a co-researcher does not agree with my conclusion I acknowledge that fact but do not change my insight. I make note of this but did not have any co-researcher disagree with my writing.

## **Fundamental Description**

In order to write the fundamental description of completing a midlife career change, I re-read the individual description. I particularly thought about the themes that presented themselves in each protocol and how each individual worked through the life process of the change. It was as though the relationship of dialogue between the individual descriptions actually wrote the fundamental description. After the first seven individual descriptions were written it was more a building process writing the following descriptions. By the time the tenth individual description was written, I had, in fact, written the fundamental description. It was after writing the first seven individual descriptions that I came to realize that I was gaining no new insights, even after looking for uniqueness of material, and that the saturation feature of the work was obvious.

Once again each co-researcher was sent a copy of the fundamental description and asked to make comments directly on the written description and return this copy to me. I noted the comments from each but retain power over my insights. I have found it necessary to call some of the co-researchers to ask for return of the description. As is the case in collaborative inquiry, some follow-up is needed. All responded that it was an oversight and returned the descriptions within the following two weeks.

## **Summary**

This chapter provides the reader with a detailed description of the process of the phenomenological method used in this study. The following chapter will examine how this process facilitates the development of results when using the phenomenological method.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results of Protocol Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will provide narrative information on the process of deriving results from protocol analysis and an individual description, culminating in a Fundamental Description of the experience of completing a midlife career change. To enhance this understanding, the chapter will present the experience of completing a midlife career change using the protocol, analysis and individual description of one co-researcher as a model. For readability, the less formal first person style will be used.

#### **Model Protocol**

Choosing Carrie's experience of completing a midlife career change as a model has the advantage of her being fourth in the interview order. The ordering becomes important because of the expectation that new elements and themes would still appear and build on the prior protocols and analysis.

#### **Carrie**

Carrie is a woman in her late forties, unmarried by choice who is an educational administrator at a Community College. She came to the study on referral from a colleague. When approached, she was very enthused about the project and quickly agreed to take part. The two interviews were both conducted at her office. After receiving from her the transcripts from the interviews, I set about condensing and editing the two

interviews into one protocol. In the process of doing this, I read and re-read the transcripts. In this way I became immersed in what had transpired during the taping and subsequent transcribing of the information. I began to underline elements and element statements that seemed to emerge as factors in her experience. Some statements reflected material already gleaned from previous protocols and I noted that mentally. As I thought about Carrie's experience from Carrie's perspective, I realized that she was providing some different and new elements as well as confirming some factors that had emerged from the previous three protocols.

So that the reader may easily follow this thinking, the edited underlined transcript follows. "R" stands for researcher and "C" stands for Co-researcher.

#### Edited Underlined Protocol

R. Okay, I would like you to talk a little bit about the way that you happened to get into your first career and it can be from any perspective that is perhaps helpful for us to get talking about changing careers.

C. My first career was nursing and there were a number of factors that contributed to that decision, I think. One very strong factor, in retrospect a stronger factor than I realized at the time, was that I followed a brother who was exactly thirteen months older than I which placed him one year ahead of me all the way through school. We were very close. I have another brother four years younger, but I was very close to my older brother. Admired him a great deal. He was an overachiever, straight "A" student, involved in a lot of extracurricular activities at school and was probably a role model to me in a very positive sense. As a matter of fact, I don't think I felt any rivalry. I felt some competition to do as well or better. Following him at school meant, you know the old story, those things were expected of you, too. That was okay for me, I was willing to produce and I didn't mind having those high expectations, so that was not a problem.

R. Are you the only girl?

C. I'm the only girl, right in the middle. So, when I think he decided 'to go to med school, I just automatically started thinking about nursing.

R. Why automatically?

C. Automatically meaning that because he was a role model I looked at, now, as a very interesting observation, I looked at an allied field, but not the acceptability of nursing for "women" when I was thinking about this and not only so much the nonacceptability, simply the lack of consciousness about women also going into med school. Alright, I had as high grades as he did, probably I graduated in a higher place in the class than he, was in the extracurricular activities, but not one counselor said to me why don't you think about med school. They also accepted his choice of going to med school and when I looked at that I said to myself "I think nursing would be fun." I never said to myself "med school". That obviously I think of as a socialization process of the time, not of my family interestingly enough, because my family would have been very supportive of that. Nobody mentioned med school to me but then, as I said, no counselor at the high school mentioned med school to me either.

R. And your brother didn't either?

C. No, he didn't either. Of course by that time he was first year in med school and was a panic case. But no, he did not, no one did and for all of those reasons we probably now understand. I didn't think about it this way then, but the closest allied field was nursing. I think also it was the 50's, my church and I think also there were, as we know there were, those female professions that were acceptable for a woman and we can all tick them off - - nursing and teaching being among them. I knew I didn't want to do that but the closest thing to leadership kinds of positions or academically oriented, would be the nursing or teaching. So, I went into nursing but interestingly enough, and I'm not sure why, but maybe because the proximity was easier. I went to the diploma program in Ohio. I knew almost immediately that I wanted College. I did know that. Enjoyed the nursing, enjoyed it thoroughly, but I felt there was something missing.

I wasn't sure what - - I guess I felt it may be college, so I finished the diploma program and then went to Duquesne for a degree in nursing. At Duquesne I remember feeling a bit disillusioned by the nursing program in that I had different expectations. I thought it would be more intense and that it would be broader with a more interdisciplinary approach but it wasn't. I was somewhat disappointed in the program but loved the liberal arts courses that I was taking because of the degree, absolutely loved them.

R. What about the discipline that we all had to go through with the nursing program, did that bother you?

C. I can't say that it bothered me a lot. I see myself as a fairly disciplined person. The regimentation from time to time bothered me enough to gripe along with the rest of the students, but it never bothered me so much that I would have dropped out or would have said I didn't want it for that reason. It was a Catholic nursing school so the rules were just incredible and the discipline was only intensified because of that. Anyhow, at Duquesne, I became interested in the English courses I was having but I did finish the degree in nursing. I remember having a lot of misgivings at the time.

R. Like how, like what?

C. About thinking this wasn't really what I wanted to do the rest of my life. Why was I continuing with the degree--probably the answer to that, the most candid answer, was that in fact I considered med school but no one encouraged me so I dismissed it. I finished the degree probably because there was something in me that said you just don't quit. I looked on that as being a quitter. You finish whatever you start. So whether you know or not that this is what you want to do forever, you finish it. So I did, which meant two and a half years after the diploma.

R. Did you work as a nurse?

C. I did, I worked as campus nurse because I got to know everybody and it gave me free room and board and tuition. It was wonderful. I had worked a year before I had gone on to Duquesne in pediatric nursing and then I worked as a PRN float as well as in Psyc and in Pediatric Intensive Care while I was going to Duquesne. Actually, I did the PRN mostly on weekends because you wouldn't be very busy with the campus nursing. Then I remember finishing the nursing program and I had to decide what I really wanted to do because I'd had some misgivings about the nursing, yet I didn't know what I exactly wanted to do. I had loved the English, but that meant really starting over. Since I already had the diploma, I was not the traditional eighteen year old. I wasn't old, I wasn't middle-aged, but I was not the traditional eighteen year old either! At that point, because I was at the university and maybe because I was at Duquesne, there were a lot of young students there, not adult students. I even looked into the child growth and development concentration, talked to some people at Pitt and at Children's and then I decided--all of a sudden it hit me that I had really become very myopic--most of my friends were either nurses or other medical people. What I knew was nursing, my concentration up to that point had been that but at Duquesne I found that there was just a lot of things outside my field to learn and I thought "I really don't have anything to lose here." I really and truly had loved the English and I had done well. I thought "well, maybe I should try this for a while." I have to say it was not a crisis time to make that decision, it was not. I didn't think about it too long, I couldn't, because I finished the nursing in January of that year and I knew that in order to get into the master's program in English in the fall, I would have to make up some credits in English. I had to decide right away so that I could take the spring offerings and then the summer courses in order to have a minor. I also knew there was an assistantship in English and I wanted to apply. I knew I would have to have more English under my belt in order to do that and so as I said the decision making was not laborious, it was not a crisis time for me, I didn't feel that I went through anything Duquesne terms "the dark night of the soul" to come to this or what ever one goes through. I followed Virginia Wolff's comment "the intelligence of the heart." I knew I loved English and that's what I wanted to do. It wasn't a practical decision because I had this educational background in nursing, I had an investment in it thus far, an educational investment and I had a career investment in it at that point. So it wasn't a practical decision because I knew I would be starting from scratch and I didn't know if there would be any jobs even tho teaching jobs were more plentiful

then. I even decided when I finished where I wanted to teach. I've always liked Washington, why not there. All these things, I have to say, have been self-fulfilling prophecies.

R. Tell me about self-fulfilling prophecies?

C. Well, I really was very lucky in having parents that were from the very beginning very supportive. They let me feel and believe that I could do anything that I put my mind to and I believed that. I still believe it. I was willing, I guess to take that risk of career and it wasn't so much career change, I guess, as it was at that point an academic emphasis that was changing. While I had worked part time while at Duquesne, I had really only worked full time in a given career a year. I knew in the last of the nursing program that it was certain I would take a different direction as a career.

R. How did you know that you would not be in nursing for the rest of your life? What was going on with you that you knew that?

C. There was something in me that was not fulfilled by nursing and I have to say the part that I felt was not fulfilled was the intellectual part. I felt that I was a good bedside nurse but what was interesting was that the more education I was getting in nursing the further I was being pushed from the bedside. I knew that I liked nursing, but nursing wasn't, at that time, the kind of nursing that I was doing. It wasn't even that English was more challenging but I've done some thinking about this since and maybe it was an attempt to do something different from my brother. Just a kind of declaration of independence in a way or something like that may have been involved. How else did I know-- there was just something that was very satisfying about it.

R. Tell me about staying in the collegiate environment at Duquesne.

C. It was much more stimulating because it was my introduction in any depth to other disciplines. And I have to say that when I decided to go into nursing I didn't have a hard time saying that I would enjoy nursing but I did have a hard time closing doors on other choices. I have always had a hard time closing doors, which may be why I haven't stayed in one profession. I loved art, I had done some theatre and speech and I had thought about that for a while. I felt much less provincial in the university setting and being introduced to all kinds of people who had made different choices than mine. It was a much broader exposure that was terribly exciting. Just terribly exciting! Maybe part of my reason to go on to school was that I wanted to perpetuate that environment.

R. Okay, now let's talk about changing careers and sliding into English.

C. How I slid into English, and probably sliding is a good word, because I finished enough courses that spring and summer to apply for the assistantship and get it. It was wonderful!

R. Did you work at all in nursing while you were in the assistantship?

C. I worked one summer but not the whole summer. I just worked a few weekends here and there, mostly as a PRN but for the most part I didn't. I was teaching and grading papers and taking graduate courses but I do remember having the uniform on, isn't that funny, coming into the English Office--that's what I remember!

R. When did you close the door on nursing?

C. Two years ago, would you believe! Well, it's been a little longer than that. I'll tell you exactly when I closed the door--it was when I started thinking about doctoral programs. I thought about a nurse practitioner. I even went to Johns Hopkins to look at their Public Health programs and at their doctorates in the sciences. That has to be in '78 when I started the doctorate program.

R. What was it like to close that door?

C. The first reaction was the generic one of having a hard time closing the doors. It was in making the choice that was the doctorate. You have a devil of a big investment financially and emotionally not to mention physically. I knew this was going to be a serious commitment that I had to think long and hard about. Just closing the doors on other options made me feel like this was a more serious decision that I had ever made before in career decisions or academic decisions. I was aware that I was making that choice for different reasons than I made the choice from nursing to the masters in English. That was done, as I said, purely with the intelligence of the heart. I knew I loved it and I wanted to try it. I loved literature and why shouldn't one love one's vocation, I mean avocation, it was that impractical! My choice to do the doctorate was much more practical, much more pragmatic and therefore much more difficult to make. Probably because I don't usually make pragmatic decisions, I don't because I guess that's not the first value of making that decision. So, that was harder and the pragmatism that went into that decision included the next job. I had to decide if I wanted to teach for the rest of my life and if I wanted to teach for the rest of my life then it made more sense to do a doctorate in English. If I didn't, what was it I wanted to do? Even then, when I decided that "no, I didn't want to do that (teach) for the rest of my life" what was it that I wanted to do? I had done what would be considered "quasi-administrative" things as much as faculty can do at the college and I had enjoyed them. I also knew at this point that I had more years invested in education and to do a complete about face and say "well, now I want to go into-whatever" would not seem all that practical since I had more years, more money and I like and am certainly committed to education.

R. The environment is still right then?

C. Yes, I think that's true. Sometimes I have questions about the work that I do now in administration. The fruits of your labor are much more difficult to see because in administration there is not a definitive beginning, middle and end and in teaching there is, more so. Also, you can work long and hard toward a given end that may not come or may be taken over by other people so it doesn't become yours anyhow. Or the fruits of your labor do not indicate that kind of

investment. You work very hard for just a little adjustment, not a big implementation, just a little adjustment. Yes, I've had some questions about that and also because I find the schedule is very different, 8:30 to 5 or 6 whatever, you are locked in, and that is difficult for me to adjust to and sometimes I think about that. I did not think about these things so much when I moved from nursing to teaching but not as much as I would think about them for a possible next job.

R. Since you have stayed single you have been able to traverse this whole road without other kinds of impediments and you have been clear to do a lot of things that other women have not done. Tell me about that part of your life?

C. It's true that I have been cleared. Someone else pointed out the other side of that spectrum or other side of the coin when asked about not marrying. I said it really was with me a conscious choice. I knew I wanted to do a lot of things in my life. I knew if I were to get married I would want to be the best wife and mother and I knew the kind of energy and commitment that would take. Very frankly, I didn't think I could keep going, I felt I couldn't be the perfect wife and mother and have the kind of career I wanted with the intellectual stimulation and the growth opportunities, I really didn't feel I could do both. I might still have the choice. If I don't, or decide that I don't, I will certainly not ever be unhappy. I mean that for me, I made the right decision. Now, the other side of that coin, as my friend pointed out to me, was that "boy, that was an expensive decision to do these things and be without a support system" and at it's best operation a marriage can be a support system that I didn't have. But I have to say in fairness to my life, that I have very, very good and supportive friends, both men and women, as well as a family that has been extremely supportive. I felt that was crucial. I also think that may be in any kind of progress in a career or in finding one's own in a career. I think self-confidence is important, but I think if you are going to make some changes, you've got to be confident that you're not going to fall flat on your face, you're just not.

You may find that eventually you're not as successful as you wanted to be in that choice of a career. I just think that's important and I also think that you have to be a risk taker. If the support system is there, if you feel fairly self-confident and you are somebody who enjoys the challenge and the change, then I think you have to be a risk taker.

R. When you went to Duquesne and were introduced to the "mind expanding" courses and other things, can you remember the kinds of emotions that were associated with that experience?

C. Yes, as a matter of fact, I can remember very vividly. One was sheer, unadulterated excitement. It was a whole new world, or individual worlds that I knew so little about. There was so much to learn and be introduced to and so I can remember the sheer excitement! There was also something else, and maybe I came to this later, as far as being aware of it, that I had been socialized into the helping professions and that is why nursing was okay. Interestingly enough, in my own head, acting would not be. What I found, which was a delight, was many ethical issues in literature probably more than I was introduced to in

nursing. Not to make the choice sound more virtuous than it was, it simply offered a new glimpse at human nature than at myself and at life. So for that reason, it was an eye-opener for me. Also, it was important to me because I could then participate in another kind of peer group, those who weren't nurses. You know, I could talk to graduate students who were chemists but also who were Lit majors, who were also Math majors and I felt then that I could begin to anticipate and that was important, that was very important. Other feelings, It was the notion of the challenge, I knew I could do nursing but I wasn't sure of any other, and that challenge was important. There was a new discipline introduced and that was the discipline of writing. I had always enjoyed writing, but had never had the rudiments of the mechanics of really knowing what goes into that, which was interesting and a brutal lesson.

R. You haven't mentioned anything about the years you spent teaching English, why is that door closed?

C. I didn't mention that because we got off on a different tangent. I loved my years of teaching--absolutely loved them. And, in fact want, will insist in teaching a course while I do what I am doing. I think that part of my change at that point, when I think about a change from full time teaching, was that in the teaching job, not just in the teaching profession, but in the teaching job, finally you have taught English 111 for how many years. I know I taught fourteen years here and I taught six years at Marymount before that. Finally, when you rev off one more time and one more time, it is a bit much. I was teaching a course at Georgetown that was just a fluke when I took this job on and so I would like now to go back there or here, I would just like to teach a course. I think first of all looking from another perspective that it's important for anyone who is in an administrative job that has academic responsibilities, that it is imperative that you stay close to the classroom, certainly with this job that is tied to curriculum.

R. Tell me about this job.

C. I have a grandmother who would say Divine Providence, I suppose. The timing, I guess I need to say something about the timing. I would never be the one to say "oh, it was just luck that I got the grad assistantship in English and that I got the job in teaching English at Marymount when I first graduated school and didn't have to move very far for that and that then I got the job at NVCC." However, luck is a factor because I tie that in with however we define luck. I tie that in with timing, but also with some preparation. I think that you have to make some career plans. I didn't just fall into each step, I did do some planning. How did this job happen? I had been thinking, obviously about an administrative job even when I made the choice of the doctorate which was an interdisciplinary doctorate, but with a degree in education policy. I had obviously thought about administrative positions while I was in the degree program. Of course, the college reorganized, which meant I knew there might be some new jobs or some pieces of revisions of old jobs that might open up and mean an opportunity for me. So I was kind of excited about that, I certainly did not think that just because I was in-house that the job would be mine. I certainly did not, but at the same time I also realize that if an oppor-

tunity comes and it's an opportunity through which you're going to grow and gain another, a different perspective on life, you take it. I did and I have and I have never regretted it. Sometimes there were smaller things, sometimes larger things, the fluke, but, nevertheless, when we began the computer assisted instruction, I sat down and said to myself "would you be interested in going to the provost to work on this project and uprooting for 8 or 9 months and going to a very different way with different people and I said, sure!" Well, it is just having that kind of background in computer, although it certainly is a great help to me in a consulting job I did in grad school. All of these things have really helped in, I guess, developing the background or the resume to say, I'm going to try for this job. I was just finishing the dissertation, well, middle of dissertation, when I knew about the reorganization and I knew that this particular job would be open. I thought it might help, that I had been acting, at that point, instructional dean, so when it came open, I was on the last chapter of my paper. Just right for the job, so I applied and had the interview and waited a long time, so I had some doubts about whether I had really gotten the job but I did and so here I am. Finished the defense and was a week into my new job before I had the dissertation done and that was a heavy load but it was fun at that point, the bulk of it was behind me so you don't mind.

R. Never regretted the move from nursing to education?

C. Never, no. I have to say that I regret not having the time to keep up with both. I really would like to read the New England Journal of Medicine or the Times, I really would like to know what's happening in the field of nursing and medicine, but I don't have time to do that and keep up with the literature that is directed more toward administration than faculty. Having the time to keep up with my own disciplines and so forth is enough, but regret the choice and the move, no, I don't. I have never regretted moving from nursing to English and I, so far, have not regretted moving out of teaching into administration.

R. As you think back, can you remember any event or happening or experience that you might label as a "landmark" in changing your career direction?

C. I think I have a sense or feeling that I know pushed me in that direction. I alluded to it when I said that I felt after I had changed directions and had moved into some English courses, I could talk in other groups. I remember because I was campus nurse I was invited to all the social occasions that the graduate club had. I do remember distinctly, I remember going to those initially, I was still in nursing at the point, and I can remember feeling that I hadn't had any exposure to any other areas. The first guy I dated at Duquesne, he is still a very close friend of mine, lives in New York, was a journalism and English major and I can remember his trying a somewhat pedantic role with me. We would go to art exhibits and he would kind of give me the mini-speech and being so furious with me so I decided that by gosh, I was going to learn about art myself, I was not going to be lectured at. So that's not a landmark situation but there are sensations that one remembers that are important to you either because you feel you can't hit the mark that you want in that setting or that situation or you realize you have a lot to learn, so I remember that. I can remember the girl who was the wife of another friend and we double dated a

lot. She was a political activist and she probably was my first introduction to the real liberated woman, the doing. I also remember that I knew nothing about politics and so I felt that I had to raise up--to catch up.

R. Coming out from the cloister--.

C. Yeah, sure, it really was. Oh, yeah, and a cloister read not of a criticism of, because there are a great many strengths I still take from that but, nevertheless, cloister read in terms of Catholic upbringing, strong home base environment, very close and warm support at home. I was raised in the country, I mean I lived on twenty eight acres. The closest, biggest city nearby was Canton, Ohio. They didn't even have a roller rink, which was the big thing then. So, that was part of the cloister and then moving from there to a nursing school which they still required you to leave the building, no matter where you would be going, you could be going to play tennis, I remember this, you would have to have on hose and never pants, always skirts. So, that was a cloister. My first introduction to the big city was Pittsburgh at Duquesne. Probably why I still love it so! It was freedom. It was growth. It was opportunity and it was finding out who I was.

R. Who are you--what makes you tick?

C. I think I have a lot of drive. I do have a lot of drive. I think there is also a lot of competitiveness in me, too, and I think that from the beginning, I absolutely wanted to do not only as well as but better than the brother that I was following. There is a lot of competitiveness in me. I have to be continually challenged and in that challenge I continually redefine myself. I have come a little later in life to understand that I need a lot of variety in my life. I have found that in maybe the same job for awhile, but I do always look for another challenge that will tell me that I can "do it." Sometimes there is something somewhat sad about that if you feel that you always have to keep proving yourself. Some of it is gender, some of it is personality, some of it is early programming.

R. How do you make a decision?

C. I would like to say the decisions I make are more studied than what this is going to sound like, but my most honest answer is to say that most of my life I have followed, I have made decisions based on things that I have liked to do, things that are fed into a certain ideology or a particular value system and that had to be there, but, I weigh only a certain few steps into the future in making a decision. I've never been one who has her whole life mapped out before I make that first decision. Given my patchwork quilt of decision making I didn't. I do weigh more so now than when I was younger--I weigh the pluses and minuses and think now, what do I want to do with this. So, I look at the pluses and minuses and am I excited about it and am I challenged by it and then I decide. I listen to my gut about 75% of the time and have not made any bad big decisions.

R. You trust yourself?

C. Yes, absolutely. In fact, I have had to have people say to me on certain decisions, maybe you want to talk to so and so. But innately, I am not one who generally goes to other people for advice, recommendations or counsel. I counsel myself and I am a risk taker.

R. Where do you see yourself going? Are you going to be the president of a college someday?

C. Yes. For the first time I have come onto a job giving myself some time limitations. I knew that if I wanted to be the president of a college someday then I would have to look very carefully, not only at the steps, but at the time that I allowed for those steps. Now some of that is going to mean that the marketplace has to be there and ready and open. When I came into this job I told myself that I would give it three years. Then the next logical step, not necessarily in this college, would be to Dean or Provost or VP if the college reorganized. I do know that in certain states and in certain systems being a woman is going to be an advantage. In others it will be a straight disadvantage, and I would have to prove myself every day.

R. You have done so much. What do you think we could do to help others to be able to do what you have done?

C. I think one thing that the individual has to do and that is realize the decisions and the action has to come from that individual alone. In any organization the person has to become aware of the pipeline. You are on your own then, you have to prove yourself. The person has to be willing to unlock himself/herself from the notion that they are attached to a job in a given parameter with an established milieu and look for lines that cross. You rarely say no to an offer, an opportunity or an invitation, even if at the time you are not sure that you can do it. You can do it just a little more slowly, you just think about it more, but you do it. But, there is nothing you can't do if you want to. I may have a lot to learn, I may have to ask a lot of questions, seek a lot of advice, ask for a lot of help, read a lot, and study a lot, but, there is nothing I can't do if I put my mind to it, within reason, of course. Then you have to be willing to disconnect and I think so many times we see ourselves as stuck but we don't realize that we are the ones who have established the tentacles that really set us down in that soil and won't let go. I mean, what is really the risk? I think I would have risked more by staying in teaching and saying ho-hum, another day of 111, I don't know if I can rev up for 111 one more time and teach the fundamentals of the thesis statement. I think there is a lot of fear in changing, its uprooting, its disorienting and so we are afraid to make the changes. I don't leap into things without any thought at all but I don't overthink the occasion because if you do then you never ever take the step. You just never do. So, I think in some cases, you simply say yes to the opportunity when its there and in other cases, I think you establish the opportunities.

R. What are your personal assets?

C. I think I have a fair amount of self-confidence. I think I can do jobs, I can do jobs that I undertake to do. I have a sense of humor. It's interesting, I never thought of the ways in which a sense of humor can get you through, I have always known personally that it helps because you can turn things around and build bridges. I am positive about life.

R. Thank you for helping me with all this information.

The following statements merely repeat all of the underlined statements from the previous pages as they appeared so the reader will be able to get a sense of the important statements in the protocol.

### **Underlined Element Statements**

My first career was nursing.

I followed a brother who was exactly thirteen months older than I which placed him one year ahead of me all the way through school.

Admired him a great deal. He was an overachiever, a straight "A" student and was probably a role model for me.

I don't think I felt any rivalry, I felt competition to do as well or better.

He decided to go to med school, I just automatically started thinking about nursing.

Note the acceptability of nursing for women when I was thinking about this.

The lack of consciousness about women also going to med school.

Not one counselor said to me why don't you go to med school.

I think of it as a socialization process of the time.

I didn't think of it this way then, but the closest allied field was nursing.

I went into nursing but interestingly enough, and I'm not sure why, but maybe the proximity was easier, I went to the diploma program in Ohio. I knew almost immediately that I wanted to be in college.

I felt there was something missing.

I finished the diploma program and then went to Duquesne for a degree in nursing.

Loved the liberal arts courses that I was taking.

I see myself as a fairly disciplined person.

Thinking this wasn't really what I wanted to do the rest of my life.

Because there was something in me that said you just don't quit. I looked on that as being a quitter.

You finish what you start.

Finishing the nursing program I had of decide what I really wanted to do because I'd had some misgivings about the nursing, yet I didn't know what I exactly wanted to do. I had loved the English, but that meant really starting over.

But at Duquesne I found that there was just a lot of things outside my field to learn.

I thought that I really don't have anything to lose here.

It was not a crisis time to make that decision.

I didn't feel that I went through anything Duquesne terms "the dark night of the soul."

I knew I loved English and that's what I wanted to do.

I didn't think about it too long, I couldn't, because I finished the nursing in January of that year and I knew that in order to get into the masters program in English in the fall, I would have to make up some credits in English.

I also knew there was an assistantship in English and I wanted to apply.

I even decided when I finished where I wanted to teach.

All these things, I have to say, have been self-fulfilling prophecies.

I really have been lucky in having parents that were from the very beginning very supportive. They let me feel and believe that I could do anything that I put my mind to and I believed that. I still do.

I knew in that last of the nursing program that it was certain I would take a different direction as a career.

There was seething in me that was not fulfilled by nursing and I have to say the part that I felt was not fulfilled was the intellectual part.

I've done some thinking about this since ad maybe it was an attempt to do something different from my brother.

Just a kind of declaration of independence.

I have always had a hard time closing doors.

I'll tell you exactly when I closed the door--it was when I started thinking about doctoral programs.

I knew this was going to be a serious commitment that I had to think long and hard about.

Just closing the doors on other options make me feel like this was a more serious decisions than I had ever made before.

I don't usually make pragmatic decisions, I don't because I guess that's not the first value in making that decision.

I said with me it was a conscious choice. I wanted to do a lot of things in my life. I knew if I were to get married I would want to be the best wife and mother and I knew the kind of energy and commitment that would take.

If I don't, or decide that I don't want to get married, I will certainly not ever be unhappy.

For me, I made the right decision.

But I think if you are going to make some changes, you've got to be confident that you're not going to fall flat on your face, you're just not.

I also think you have to be a risk taker.

It was the notion of challenge, I knew I could do nursing but I wasn't sure of any other, and that challenge was important.

The timing, I guess I need to say something about the timing.

Luck is a factor because I tie that in with however we define luck, I tie that in with timing, but also with some preparation, I think you have to make some career plans. I didn't just fall into each step, I did do some planning.

I also realize that if an opportunity comes and it's an opportunity through which you are going to grow and gain another, a different perspective on life, you take it.

But regret the choice and the move, no, I don't.

It was freedom, it was growth, and it was opportunity and it was finding out who I was.

I think I have a lot of drive. I do have a lot of drive, I think there is a competitiveness in me, too, and I think that from the beginning, I absolutely wanted not only to do as well but better than the brother I was following.

I have to be continually challenged and in that challenge I continually redefine myself.

I need a lot of variety in my life.

I weigh only a certain few steps into the future in making a decision.

I've never been one who has her whole life mapped out before I make that first decision.

I weigh the pluses and minuses and think, now, what do I finally want to do with this.

I listen to my gut about 75% of the time and I've not make any bad large decisions.

Innately, I am not one who generally goes to other people for advice, recommendations or counsel. I counsel myself and I am a risk taker.

Realize the decisions and the action has to come from the individual alone.

You rarely say no to an offer, an opportunity or an invitation, even if at the time you are not sure that you can do it.

There is nothing you can't do if you want to.

We don't realize that we are the ones who have established the tentacles that really set us down in that soil and won't let go.

I think there is a lot of fear in changing, it's uprooting, it's disorienting and so we are afraid to make the changes.

I don't overthink the occasion because if you do then you never ever take the step. You just never do.

I have a sense of humor.

I am positive about life.

## **Development of the Individual Description**

As I thought about Carrie's experience, I found myself thinking of her place in her family. She followed a brother who was influential on her attitudes about herself and

her capabilities. She accepted, as did her family, that she follow the brother--not into medicine, but into the more socially (family) accepted nursing. The emphasis that her speech had on family, over and over again, drew me to the realization of the importance of her family to Carrie. I thought of this as an element called "family order" with statements which supported the label. The first career was entered and used for gainful employment, so that statements supported the element labeled "first career choice."

As her talking began to reflect her growing discontent with her choice of nursing, the element I called "frustration" was thought of as her statements began to include a sense of dissatisfaction, not only with the occupation but also with the lifestyle and the self. Other protocols offered similar elements but I held them in abeyance (bracketing) while I thought about Carrie. As I thought about what she told me, it seemed to me that her "frustration" manifested itself in element statements such as "not one counselor said to me why don't you go to med school" and "I think of it as the socialization process of the times."

These are some examples of how I developed elements as I read the transcript. I then realized I had elements that were interrelated throughout the protocol. It was never a case of "guessing" what she said or meant since I could go back and forth from the tape to the transcript for the original statements she provided. It was after I developed a sense of what she was telling me that I grouped the elements into a structure that would provide a process to understand how they fit together and would go on to make up the common themes.

The structure I developed was the following table of the elements and the supporting element statements. The statements are no longer as they first appeared in the protocol but are now grouped according to element relevance.

## Development of Elements/Element Statements

<u>Elements</u>	<u>Element Statements</u>
Family order	<p>I followed a brother who was exactly thirteen months older than I which placed him one year ahead of me all the way through school.</p> <p>I don't think I felt any rivalry, I felt some competition to do as well or better.</p> <p>He decided to go to med school and I just automatically started thinking about nursing.</p> <p>I admired him a great deal. He was an overachiever, a straight "A" student and was probably a role model for me.</p>
First career choice	<p>My first career was nursing.</p> <p>Note the acceptability of nursing for women when I was thinking about this.</p>
Sex-stereotyping	<p>I went into nursing but, interestingly enough, and I'm not sure why, but maybe the proximity was easier, I went to the diploma program near my home. I knew almost immediately that I wanted to be in college.</p> <p>I finished the diploma program and then went to Duquesne for a degree in nursing.</p>
Frustration	<p>I felt there was something missing.</p> <p>Thinking this wasn't really what I wanted to do the rest of my life.</p> <p>There was something in me that was not fulfilled by nursing and I have to say the part that I felt was not fulfilled was the intellectual part.</p>
Discontent	<p>I knew in the last of the nursing program that it was certain I would take a different direction as a career.</p>
"Chance"	<p>But at Duquesne I found that there was just a lot of things outside my field to learn.</p> <p>I didn't think about it too long, I couldn't. I finished the nursing in January and I knew that in order to get into the masters program in English for fall, I would have to make up some credits in English.</p> <p>But I think if you are going to make some changes, you've got to be confident you're not going to fall on your face.</p>

- Risking            It was a notion of challenge, I knew I could do nursing but I wasn't sure of any other, and that challenge was important.
- I also think you have to be a risk taker.
- Timing            I also knew there was an assistantship in English and I wanted to apply.
- All these things, I have to say, have been self-fulfilling prophecies.
- Luck                Luck is a factor because I tie that in with however we define luck, I tie that in with timing, but also with some preparation.
- You rarely say no to an offer, an opportunity, or an invitation, even if at the time you are not sure you can do it.
- Making decisions    I listen to my gut about 75% of the time and I've not made any bad large decisions.
- I don't overthink the occasion because if you do then you never, ever take the step.
- I weigh the pluses and minuses and think, now what do I finally want to do with this.
- I weigh only a certain few steps into the future in making a decision.
- Choosing options    Just closing doors on other options made me feel like this was a more serious decision than I ever made before.
- Because there was something in me that said you just don't quit. You finish what you start.
- I thought, I really don't have anything to lose here.
- I have always had a hard time closing doors.
- Listening to self    I've done some thinking about this since and maybe it was an attempt to do something different from my brother.
- Just a kind of declaration of independence.
- I knew this was going to be a serious commitment that I had to think long and hard about.
- It was freedom, it was growth, it was opportunity, and it was finding out who I was.
- Planning            I said with me it was a conscious choice. I wanted to do a lot of things in my life. I knew if I were to get married I would want to be the best

wife and mother and I knew the kind of energy and commitment that would take.

Innately, I am not one who generally goes to other people for advice, recommendations or counsel. I counsel myself.

I think I have a lot of drive.

Changing      Realize that the decisions and the action has to come from that individual alone.

We don't realize that we are the ones who have established the tentacles that really set us down in that soil and won't let go.

I think there is a lot of fear in changing, it's uprooting, it's disorienting and so we are afraid to make changes.

After further thinking about Carrie's experience, I saw that I could designate certain elements as a grouping that encompassed portions of the experience. It was then that I began to see the emerging common themes. For instance, the common theme of "preconditions for change" included elements such as family, career choice, and frustration. I came to label the theme as I thought about how the construct of the experience happened. The same was true of the label of "active changing process" in which the elements of luck, timing and chance seemed to play an important role. I used such thinking for developing the common themes for the total protocol as the element statements provided the insights as I read and re-read the material. In this way I felt as though I were "walking in her boots" in my grasp of what had happened to Carrie as she navigated her career change.

As I thought about the elements and the experience that they represented, I formulated another table which would further explain the process. This table now encompasses the elements from the first table into a sense of the common themes and the supporting element statements. In this way the reader may follow the thinking that

was used to develop the insights that would subsequently lead to writing the individual description. That table follows:

<u>Common Themes</u>	<u>Element Statements</u>	
Preliminary Conditions for Change	I felt there was something missing.	
	I knew almost immediately that I wanted college. I did know that.  Thinking this wasn't what I wanted to do the rest of my life.  I had loved the English, but that meant really starting over.  There was something in me that was not fulfilled by nursing, and I have to say the part I felt was not fulfilled was the intellectual part.  I've done some thinking about this since and maybe it was an attempt to do something different from my brother. He decided to go to med school, I just automatically started thinking about nursing. Not one counselor said to me why don't you go to med school. I think of this as a socialization of the times.  Just a kind of declaration of independence.  I knew in the last of the nursing program that it was certain I would take a different direction as a career.	
	Active Changing Process	But at Duquesne I found that there was a lot to learn outside my field. I thought I really don't have anything to lose here.  I knew I loved English and that's what I wanted to do.  I see myself as a fairly disciplined person.  There was something in me that said you just don't quit. You finish whatever you start.  I didn't think about it too long, I couldn't. I finished the nursing in January and I knew that in order to get into the masters program in English for fall, I would have to make up some credits in English.  I really was very lucky in having parents that were from the beginning very supportive. They let me feel and believe that I could do anything I put my mind to and I believe that. I still believe it.

But I think if you are going to make some changes, you've got to be confident that you're not going to fall flat on your face. You're just not.

I also think you have to be a risk taker.

It was the notion of challenge, I knew I could do nursing but I wasn't sure of any other, and that challenge was important.

There is nothing you can't do if you want to.

#### Decision-making

I have always had a hard time closing doors.

I knew this was going to be a serious commitment that I had to think long and hard about.

Just closing the doors on other options made me feel like this was a more serious decision than I had ever made before.

I don't usually make pragmatic decisions. I don't because I guess that's not the first value of making the decision.

I also realize that if an opportunity comes and it's an opportunity to grow and gain another, a different perspective on life, you take it.

I weigh the pluses and minuses and think, now what do I finally want to do with this.

I've never been one who had her whole life mapped out before I make that first decision.

I listen to my gut about 75% of the time and I've not made any bad large decisions.

I weigh only a certain few steps into the future in making a decision.

I don't overthink the occasion because if you do then you never ever take the step. You just never do.

The timing. I guess I need to say something about timing.

Luck is a factor because I tie that in with however we define luck, I tie that in with timing, but also with some preparation. I think you have to make some career plans.

#### Commitment to Self

I knew I wanted to do a lot of things in my life. I knew if I were to get married I would want to be the best wife and mother and I knew the kind of energy and commitment that would take.

If I don't, or decide I don't, I will certainly not be unhappy. For me, I made the right choice.

It was freedom, it was growth, it was opportunity, and it was finding out who I was.

I think I have a lot of drive.

I think there is a lot of competitiveness in me and I think that from the beginning, I absolutely wanted to do as well or better than the brother I followed.

I need a lot of variety in my life.

Innately, I am not one who generally goes to other people for advice, recommendations or counsel. I counsel myself.

I have a sense of humor and I am positive about life.

Reflections      Realize that the decisions and the action has to come from that      on Change individual alone.

The person has to be willing to unlock from the notion they are attached to a job in a given parameter and look for lines that cross.

We don't realize that we are the ones who have established the tentacles that really set us down in that soil and won't let go.

I think there is a lot of fear in changing, it's uprooting, it's disorienting and so we are afraid to make the changes.

## Individual Description

After the common themes were identified and the sense of empathy, of really being in Carrie's shoes was realized, the individual description was written. For example, as I read and re-read the material there came to mind several events that made Carrie's experience unique to her but which might also turn up, perhaps with a different twist, in another transcript. She was enmeshed in her family and stayed that way until she went away to college. This turning point in her life opened other options for her. She felt herself opening up to a whole different world that would not have been available to her

if she had not gone on to college. What made her choose to do this? It was the sense that all was not right with her first choice--it was not really her choice. College was an "acceptable" option, especially since she paid for all of her expenses from her work as a nurse. She had also found an area of study at college that she "loved." It was the feeling of being in the right environment that made the extra work worth it. She could be said to have moved from inauthentic (pre-reflective) to authentic (conscious) living, much as Heidegger explains in his work.

I sent the following description to Carrie for her to edit and to make any changes she thought important. Her message back to me said, "you capture the 'organic' stuff of what I have said and add you own valid assessment."

#### **From Nurse to Educator**

The relationship between Carrie and her older brother influenced her first choice of career. He was the role model for her all through her school years, especially since he excelled academically and in other extracurricular activities, so was always a hard act to follow. Follow she did but when it came time to choose a program for a career pattern, the older brother went to med school and Carrie went to nursing school, because "not one counselor said to me why don't you go to med school--there was a lack of consciousness about women also going to med school." So Carrie did the "next best thing" and went to the allied field even though she didn't think of it this way at the time. For her it was the appropriate course to follow, never thinking that she really did have other options. It was also acceptable to go to a diploma program then and Carrie's choice was a school that was in her home town. Even though the program was intense and she did live away from home, it was not the right environment since she "knew almost immediately that I wanted to be in college." It was the internal knowing that "something was missing" that prompted her to finish the diploma program for "you finish what you start." So it was over three years later that she did go to college to get a degree in nursing. It is as though the "socialization of the time" is a very important part of choosing a first career. For Carrie, even growing up in a family that encouraged her to "be whatever she wanted to be" the thought of a woman becoming a physician was not readily acknowledged. In fact, the whole idea of a woman taking a professional role and finding life satisfaction in a career is a post-feminist societal change.

It was in college that her whole new world opened, "I found that there was just a lot of things outside my field to learn." It was freedom, it was growth, and it was an opportunity to find out who she was. She knew in that last part of the nursing program that it was certain she would take a different direction as a career for the pull of other areas was very strong. Carrie recognized that

"there was something in me that was not fulfilled by the nursing and I have to say the part that was not fulfilled was the intellectual part." "I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do but I had loved the English and I had done well, but that meant starting over" in order to make up the necessary courses in English and take other requirements for the graduate program in English. However, the "disciplined person" she feels herself to be allowed to think that "I really don't have anything to lose here" and Carrie applied for the graduate program and a graduate assistantship for the following Fall. At the same time she was working as a nurse and, in fact, had been working in nursing since finishing the diploma program.

The 'timing' was right and "luck is a factor because I tie that in with however we define luck, I tie that in with timing, but also with some preparation. I think you have to make some plans. I didn't just fall into each step. I did do some planning." Carrie took advantage of what she calls her "self-fulfilling prophecies" since she believed then and she believes now that she can be or do anything she sets her mind to. Changing careers for Carrie involved the "notion of a challenge, I knew I could do nursing but I wasn't sure of any other and that challenge was very important to me." The nature of decision making takes the form of "weighing the pluses and the minuses and thinking, now what do I finally want to do with this for I weight only a certain few steps into the future in making a decision." This process has allowed Carrie to "listen to my gut about 75% of the time and I've not made any bad large decisions especially since I've never been one who had her whole life mapped out before making that first decision." Through the years she has developed her own thinking patterns and realizes that she "innately is not one who goes to other people for advice, recommendations or counsel. I counsel myself and I am a risk taker."

While finishing the graduate program in English, Carrie did some thinking about where she wanted to find a position in teaching. It again was taking one step at a time but thinking ahead to what was before her. At the time she was to graduate, positions were fairly abundant so she had to make up her mind where to locate. Since all her family ties were to Ohio, she had to decide where her "need for variety in her life" would take her. She had thought about the Washington area and looked for available teaching positions in that location. She accepted her first teaching position in the English department at Marymount College in Virginia. After staying there for about six years, she moved to the English department at Northern Virginia Community College where she has stayed since that time. She has not married for "I said for me it was a conscious choice. I wanted to do a lot of things in my life. I knew if I was married I would want to be the very best wife and mother and I knew the kind of energy and commitment that could take." At the same time, Carrie has not ruled out the possibility that she might change her mind in this area. It may be that she has been successful in so many areas that this one open spot in her life is one she would like to change. However, she says, "if I don't, or decide that I don't want to get married, I will certainly not ever be unhappy." Carrie has enjoyed a close relationship with her family and with both men and women friends over the years and feels that she has had full support at all times.

The years have brought opportunities for Carrie to be active in many affairs of the college and she has discovered that she "has a lot of drive, and competitiveness and from the beginning I wanted not only to do as well as but better than the brother I followed." She understood that "you rarely say no to an offer, an opportunity or an invitation, even if at the time you are not sure you can do it." If that is the case, you only need to find the people who can help you and you learn from them. She has done just that for she has moved into a position with the college that she wanted before she decided on the doctoral program to follow. It was just such planning that preceded her choice of doctoral work which made it possible for her to compete for the position she now holds. A difficulty "in closing doors" that has bothered her over the years was resolved when she started the doctoral work and it was at this time that she finally closed the doors on nursing and made the commitment to education.

As she reflects on what has happened in her life to get her where she is today she says "we don't realize that we are the ones who have established the tentacles that really set us down in that soil and won't let go for the decisions and the action has to come from the individual alone." She understands that there is "a lot of fear in changing, it's uprooting, it's disorienting and we are afraid to make the changes, however, I don't overthink the occasion because if you do then you never ever take the first step--you just never do." Carrie has found that a sense of humor and a positive outlook on life to be an integral part of the foundation upon which to build a happy life.

For Carrie, a child of the forties, understanding her successful midlife career change begins with understanding her first career. We see her in a sex-stereotypical bind and it is important to recognize that she herself did not realize this stereotype. It was the dawning recognition of her societal stuckness that led her to review her choice of careers. She then began to allow herself to be more open to other career choices, especially when the opportunity to explore was provided when she was in the college environment. Her emerging sense of what she wanted from life made it possible for her to discriminate between options and to use her inner resources for moving forward with a sense of purpose.

## **Development of the Fundamental Description**

The following summaries of each protocol analysis and inclusion of the full individual description is presented to aid the reader in understanding how the Fundamental Description developed.

### **Sada**

The first person I interviewed was Sada. She is a woman in her late forties who first went into the secretarial field, progressed to the personnel area and then went on to her real "love," which was nursing. She is currently in community nursing, a program

she initiated and is directing. She is the wife of a government executive and is the mother of two teen-age children, a son and an adopted daughter.

Since Sada was first in the sequence of co-researchers, I was looking for elements in her protocol that would give me a sense of her experience. I read and re-read the protocol with the idea of "trying on" some of the statements for I had, as yet, no feel for where I would be going. I realized I was searching for a wholeness inherent in the intuitive understanding of her experience to help me begin. It was in using her words from the protocol and hearing her voice from the tape that I began to underline what seemed to be some of the salient elements and supporting element statements. Some of the first elements that came out of the protocol included family involvement, dissatisfaction, discontent, and coping with discontent. These elements were followed by risking, making decisions, rearranging schedules, and commitment.

Because this was the first protocol, I was intrigued by what would emerge in the subsequent transcripts. However, it turned out that Sada's experience in making her career change was not very different from the other co-researchers and in many ways, very similar. As were all the others, she was directed to her first career by her family enmeshment. She made the best of her environment in office work by changing her attitude in a positive way and coping in other self-preserving ways. She was married, had a son and went back to work. After losing a second child and discovering she had a blood incompatibility she and her husband elected to adopt a second child. It was while she was "on sabbatical" taking care of her infant that she met someone who told her about a nursing program at the local community college. She became tenacious in her follow-through to get into the program. She made the commitment to herself to get into the field she had always wanted and nothing stopped her.

When the analysis was completed and the common themes examined, Sada's individual description was written and sent to her for edit and comment. She sent back a note that said "I think this is very good" and noted that she had made some editorial changes. I made those changes and Sada's individual description follows.

### **From Secretary to Nurse**

Even though Sada "always wanted to be a nurse," it was not until she reached midlife that the wanted career was hers. Family conditions (divorced parents, mother very ill) made it necessary for her to take a job right after high school in the secretarial field. She had asked her father to support her efforts toward being a nurse but he refused her because he thought nursing to be "dirty work." Her high school courses in the secretarial field made her employable and her uncle was influential in her obtaining a position in the insurance field. Even though Sada was not happy in the job, she realized that she needed the money (she provided the financial support to make sure her sister graduated from high school) and so set about changing the circumstances of her daily work. Instead of building up resentment about her fate, she decided to make the best of it by making friends with as many of the coworkers as possible which diverted her mental energies from the never-ending typing. In this way she found strategies for enduring a situation over which she felt she had little control at the time. When her father refused to help her financially in nursing, she vowed to herself that "someday I'm going to do it."

Sada stayed with the insurance company for seven years, eventually being promoted to the personnel department where she had more contact with people and developed other administrative skills because "as a secretary I always knew something was missing." It was during this time that she met and then married her husband who was working in the government and who traveled extensively. Once again Sada worked to help put her husband through school and it was not until the birth of her first child that she took a "vacation" from outside work for three months and then returned to work part time as a secretary. However, it was not for a long period because the family was transferred to Texas where she then volunteered as a worker at her son's preschool so that his tuition was covered.

It was not until a move to the midwest and "just happening" to meet another woman that began the events which led Sada to nursing. The park across from her home was a haven for other mothers as they took care of their young children. It was in this park that Sada met a woman who was going to the local Community College to study nursing. The conversation changed Sada's life, "it was like a light coming on in my life." It was a time for her to discover that women with children, women with no prior college background and women with little financial resources could actually get into the program. It was a time for her to understand that "maybe this isn't something that is a dream

after all, maybe there is not any reason that I can't do it." For Sada this chance meeting and the opportunity to follow her dream opened up her options as she came to realize that many of the barriers which had seemed to prevent her from getting into nursing were now removed.

This was also a most vulnerable time. Before the transfer to the midwest, Sada had lost a baby and was still grieving over the loss. She found herself going through the motions of living and "did everything I was supposed to do but I guess I didn't have a purpose, I was still recovering from the loss of the baby." However, by following through with the information that she received, Sada was able to begin the nursing program because she believed that "it's up to me to decide if I'm going to be happy or if I'm going to do what I want or not." "I think I felt that this was my chance and wonder if it wasn't one of the first times in my life that I said this is something for me and maybe for once I'm going to be selfish and do something for me" which led her to rearrange her life to accommodate her commitment to the nursing program. It was difficult to fit all the roles that her life involved since she "was still trying to be the model wife and mother doing everything that was expected of me at home." However, Sada says, "I guess probably my husband was real good at that time. I had worked and put him through school and now it was my turn." Her determination to succeed at the nursing program emanated from a strong belief that "if I make up my mind to do something, then I will persevere until the last thing is done" which in turn provided the impetus to stick with the goals she had made for herself.

Sada's career change seemed to result from much hard work and a "can do" attitude. She always knew that she could make the change and that it "was just something I had to prove to myself that I could do it." It has now been many years since she finished the program and has been active in nursing, "I really loved doing what I did."

In summary, we can see that for Sada her midlife career change began when she understood that she could take advantage of the fortuitous meeting which set her career change in motion. Her ability to develop strategies to endure in order to be open and prepared to her move into nursing was as though she always knew that the opportunity would come. Her persistence and determination to do what she had always wanted to do made the change a reality.

### Sarge

While I was thinking about the elements that would make up the common themes as they emerged in Sada's protocol, I interviewed Sarge. Sarge is a financial advisor in his late thirties. We met for the interview at his office where he is currently one of the vice-presidents. He is married to a teacher and they have no children. He happens to be an only child influenced by his parents to follow an engineering career.

As I read his protocol, underlining what appeared as significant elements, I also thought about Sada's experience. It was now that I could view Sarge's experience as his own but also related in many ways to what Sada had gone through. In thinking of Sarge, I could immerse myself in what he was saying and understand that his feelings of dissatisfaction were not unlike the feelings of discontent that Sada related. I could now realize that it did not matter what sex a person was, the elements, supported by element statements, just confirmed that the experience was the same. The elements of family, dissatisfaction, fear and for Sarge, going back, were underlined. This going back to what had been his work before was to be encountered in later protocols but it was first seen with Sarge.

The further analysis and development of the common themes proceeded. It was when the common themes emerged that I wrote the individual description of Sarge's experience. As was true of all co-researchers, I sent the individual description to Sarge for his comments and changes, if any. His response was that the description "was right on target, captures it all in a nutshell."

### **From Engineer to Financial Planner**

Sarge's first career involved marketing technical systems. While in college in the early 70's, he saw that many of his fraternity brothers with engineering degrees were pumping gas and working as moving van drivers so Sarge switched majors to Business Administration. This provided him with the marketing background as he had the science knowledge he needed for the technical systems. In the first five years post graduation he worked for three companies with essentially the same position. It was in the last company that he made up his mind to change careers. "A person is a number and their benefits package wasn't very good" was the start of the dissatisfaction with the company. It soon degenerated into serious repercussions which made him feel "I've got these negative vibes in the office, management by fear, writing memos to cover my butt and not knowing where I was going to spend the night." In other salaried positions he had been able to "walk out the door and slam it and that was it" but when he could feel that the company and its management system started "bugging me and I started taking it home, I think, this management by fear, even though I knew it was a bunch of garbage, was beginning to prey on me." It became common for Sarge to have a packed suitcase in his car and "the travel was the last straw."

Even on vacation with his wife, the feelings of desperation about his career followed him. It was as though he was in a maze and did not see any way out of it. He finally began to let his thinking become part of problem solving and asked himself, "gee, what am I going to do--I've got to make a decision about my career." From that point the decision making process became logical and he wrote down the pros and the cons--when one column was larger than the other, "you go with it." The "pro" list included his avid interest in financial planning, which he considered his avocation. He made an appointment with the broker who helped him and asked "do you have a few minutes to talk to me about a career in doing what you are doing?" It was a fortuitous meeting for "six months from the time I was brought on, I was licensed and registered." However, Sarge did have some moments of doubt about his decision. "To be honest with you, it was a scary thing. Then I started thinking, Jesus, if I blow this one, that's it--there goes three months of your life." These feelings of doubt were countered by knowing that he "had money in the bank and was employable and if it didn't work out I'd have gone back to what I did before."

Sarge now feels that he has the greatest job in the world and states that the best part of the work is his "total independence." This need for control of one's work life and the entrepreneurial spirit appear to go hand in hand. Understanding that need in oneself tends to let one reflect on what has happened, as Sarge says, "I should have done it sooner, you are a little less inhibited when you are younger." His introspection leads him to think in terms of happiness for, "it's like I said, here are the reasons to do it and you can't show me enough not to do it. Personal happiness is right, you know, being content and being able to sleep at night and all the rest of it: and not in deep analysis of decisions. Change is part of life and to be afraid of change just does not make sense--"it makes no sense to sit there and suffer."

It was not until Sarge had completed his career change that the full realization of his entrepreneurial spirit became known to him. The very nature of the organization with the structure of bureaucracy was anathema to him. However, it was not until he was in his new career exercising his talents of being his own boss, making his own decisions, doing what he felt he needed to do that the characteristics of entrepreneurship became fully operational. It was with the career change that he became a fully functioning person, in charge of his life and his future.

### **Legra**

The next co-researcher I interviewed is currently the director of human resources for a major hotel chain. We taped both interviews at her office, one took place late in the evening and the other early in the afternoon. It seemed that she was always on duty! She is in her early forties, the separated mother of two children and of Hispanic background. Legra's experience of midlife career change introduced some new elements.

Like Sada and Sarge before her, Legra had pressure from her family, her beloved grandfather who raised her, to go into whatever she wanted which was medicine. When he died, she chose another route for there was no money and medical school took eight years. So she chose to go into occupational therapy. The only courses she enjoyed were ones that were medically related. She knew in college she was in the wrong program but finished anyway.

When I immersed myself in Legra's protocol, I found myself seeing words that expressed deep sorrow at the turn of events in her life. So, in addition to the sense of dissatisfaction was the added element of "despair" not seen in the previous protocols. The despair was not only in her work but also in her marriage to a person from another culture and also from the experience of living in a foreign land for twelve years. She had the two children there and even started the OF department at the major medical institution in the capitol city but was unhappy all the time. At this point, let me draw the reader's attention to this example of the process I went through in all the protocols in building on what came before but also allowing myself to be open to that which was new.

From the time she made the decision to leave her husband and children (when the oldest was twelve) she endured her situation. Her husband and children still live in his country and she did not see her children for a year and a half after she first left. It was this ability to endure that got her through that period. I thought about Sada as she, too, endured her job, only the circumstances were different. Legra coped differently, by making her decision to leave, not as Sada had done in fashioning her day-to-day work to ease the discomfort of the job. So, I added the element of endurance, supported by element statements to the first table. This turned out to be an element in several of the protocols.

As I progressed through Legra's protocol, I recognized that as I prepared the transition from elements to common themes, I was sensing another important variation. In the other protocols I realized that the turning point for making the commitment to oneself included choosing the career path that was right for that person, no matter what the consequences. There was no going back, no impediment too overwhelming to prevent the development of the self and the freeing from all other enmeshment. Legra drifted into her next career on the advice of a friend. It was as though she still was looking for others to tell her what to do with her life. I called this element "drifting" and was to see it in several more of the protocols. This eventually led to the development of a new sense of the meaning of "success" for the midlife career changer.

After the elements and element statements blended into the common themes of her protocol, I prepared the individual description for Legra's career change and sent it to her for comment and any changes. Her comments were that "the script was just perfect, thanks for sharing."

### **From Occupational Therapy to Hotel Management**

When Legra entered her first career she knew that "was not what she wanted" that indeed, she was "doing it to have a job." Her first thoughts about a career when she was a girl growing up in Puerto Rico were about medicine. She was raised by her grandfather who had substantial influence on her. He urged her to be anything she wanted to be but did not live to help her financially as she came of college age. She did go to college but chose to study occupational therapy as a major instead of medicine because "medicine takes eight years," loving all the courses that pertained to science but only tolerating the courses which dealt with the OF program. In the long run, Legra was frustrated by OF and this frustration can be thought of as stemming from her taking "second best" as a choice instead of going for what she really wanted to do.

It was immediately after graduation from college that Legra married. Again, circumstances were at work which Legra had not thought about in detail. She married a man from the Middle East and went to live in Amman, Jordan. The total difference in cultures was made more aware to her after only a short time, since "women aren't treated like professionals, they cannot, they shouldn't

be equal to men, so they shouldn't be out there working." However, while she was in Jordan she instituted the first OF program in the major hospital in Amman. This happened due to her husband's family who happened to be wealthy and influential, and to Legra's need to do something with her life and her time. In the twelve years that she was there and after having two children, she had a decision to make about her future. She was always wanting "to be away from there" because "I wasn't getting the satisfaction that I need." The one reason that kept her from leaving any sooner was that her children were too young to understand her misery and they are Jordanian citizens which requires them to stay in that country until they are eighteen.

The summer that her daughter turned twelve was the time of her decision to leave. Legra planned ahead to tell the child of her decision for she felt that "my children would grow, would grow up to understand and at one point they would understand" so carried out the plan. Her daughter did not fully understand at the time but Legra felt she could not stay any longer in the situation because "I felt dead in that country." She knew that her children would be well taken care of by her husband and his family. Her life was dramatically changing from what it had been, especially since she had asked herself "why should I miss the rest of my life?" Her answer was that she had to satisfy the need for personal growth and to "set the atmosphere and the setting that I want." It was just by "chance" that she met a person who helped her get a job with a large hotel chain while she was still in Jordan, so when a new position with the hotel became available, she took it and moved to the United States. She did not see her children for the next year and a half.

Since then, "it has been a series of things that have happened to me" and "I think it had to happen." This is almost as if "fate" had a hand in the workings of her life, even though she had to take the steps that transformed "fate" into action. "You are the only person who can help yourself, believing in yourself, that's it" was the philosophy that got her through some of the rough times after her decision was made. When making a decision Legra always says to herself, "what is the worst thing that can happen to me" for she realized that "you can't be afraid, you've got to take the risk and go for it" if you are going to be true to yourself and get what you want from life for "I've always said it's only one life and I've got to be satisfied and content with what I'm doing with my life." Legra has been promoted several times since she made her move and is now director of personnel with the hotel. She enjoys the pace of her life and working with people she finds stimulating and challenging. Her children are with her each summer but she is finding it difficult to have them only such a short time. Some of the changes for the future include work that allows for foreign travel so that she might be with them more often. "Whatever it is for my life, I want to make it myself and one day if there are consequences, I will sleep with them."

#### Eha

Carrie, the fourth co-researcher, has been discussed previously and as I have presented her information in detail, I will follow with Eha, who was the next person inter-

viewed. Eha has just turned forty and to celebrate, he started his own construction business. He is married to a teacher and has one daughter, who manages to keep him involved in the sports he loves in a vicarious way with her participation in many activities. She left for college this year so Eha has had to do extra traveling to keep up with her games.

Eha, too, followed his father into teaching as a first career because he didn't know what else to do, especially since he didn't want to go to Vietnam. His talk brought to mind the enmeshment in the family that the other co-researchers experienced. This element was beginning to be supported in all the protocols thus far and now I thought of this enmeshment with family as an underlying common theme. Eha was the first of the co-researchers who presented a crisis event as the trigger for him to move into action on the career he had been contemplating for seven years. Sarge had just gotten "fed up" with some of the events preceding commitment to his career change. Sada and Carrie had really made their decision based on other facets in their lives, just as Legra had.

Before the event, in which he was sued for a quarter of a million dollars, Eha was content to be the principal of an elementary school, working at his construction business as somewhat of a hobby, even though he made several thousand dollars each year at his "hobby." In my realization of his experience in changing careers, I encountered his talk of "security" and the fear he had of making the move. It seems that it was essential for him to resolve his need for this security so that he could go out on his own. This "security" element was noted by element statements and I went back to the prior protocols to see if I had missed elements that might infer a similar situation. I did not find this to be true. By now I was beginning to realize that the elements and element

statements could be structured into the common themes and these common themes were beginning to be encountered in all the protocols.

As the common themes developed, I composed Eha's individual description. As was true of all the others, I sent a copy to Eha for his editing and comments. His only comment back to me was "perfect."

### **From Grade School Principal to Construction Contractor**

When Eha entered his first career as a teacher, it was almost by default simply because he didn't know what else to do. He knew he wanted to avoid Vietnam and going to college seemed to be one way to accomplish that. However, he drifted toward education after changing majors six times while in college perhaps because "my first career was what my father wanted me to do." His family background provided a "very, very happy childhood" and supportive parents who have influenced Eha throughout his life. Sports of all kinds were a particular love and the opportunity to be a coach at the high school level was an immensely enjoyable way to make a living because "there was nothing else I really wanted to do and I loved every minute of coaching."

It was not too long into his teaching career that Eha began to think about economic considerations and to come to understand that he might need to go back to college for a graduate degree in order to change paths into administration. With the support of his wife and working several part time jobs in addition to coaching, he did finish a masters program in educational administration. It seems as though he has taken cues from his environment in order to prepare himself for an economically improved lifestyle. This can be thought of as being in tune with oneself and having the willingness to do what is necessary to move forward. For Eha, getting the masters preparation was tantamount to promotion to a principalship at the high school where he had been teaching. His planning for promotion was rudely interrupted when he was forced to recognize that societal events were changing long standing practices and the promotion he felt he deserved was given to someone else, (he said you are our number one choice, "but you are not black.") Once again the inner resources that seemed to guide him before led him to prepare to move on. It was the following summer that he and his wife left the home area to take new positions several hundred miles from their origins, she as a teacher and he as a principal.

For the first two years of this new venture everything seemed to be going well. "After moving to Northern Virginia, I saw where my administrator's salary was not what I wanted to live on" and, once again, Eha reached back into childhood experiences as a helper to his carpenter grandfather and to the experiences of college summers when he worked as a helper to a house builder for a way to obtain extra funds. The first project he completed was for a relative, the second was one which he bid on and did by himself. Although the

bid was too low, the experience convinced him that he really could make good money at his avocation. It seems that it was at this point he was beginning to let his entrepreneurial spirit come forward and for the next seven years he was involved in both worlds--one world dealt with the administration of education, and the other of making his way in the world of business.

It was not until an event occurred in his world of education that he made his avocation his vocation. "I got sued for a quarter of a million dollars and my boss wouldn't speak to me" as the result of an incident with a child he paddled who had thrown a baseball through a school bus window which resulted in a wreck. The incident took two years to be settled but it changed the way Eha would relate to people forever. For him, this incident started some serious thinking about his life and where he saw himself moving in the next few years because as Eha says, "I guess up 'til then I had never been screwed by anyone." He began to understand that he couldn't count on others the way that he encouraged others to depend on him, especially as a pattern of management style that he had valued over the years since "I say you couldn't always count on someone the way you thought you could." It was a rude awakening for Eha when he lived through this event because up 'til then he "had faith in my boss to back me 100% and when he did not, that was when I joined the real world." It was once again necessary to reach into his inner resources and he turned to his avocation, "mainly to keep from going crazy with that suit."

Although, as Eha says, "I didn't have near the frustrations that what I call a professional educator would have because I had been planning this move for seven years," he reached a point of no return in his own frustration level when "they named one of the principals who I had done battle with for nine years as the new superintendent. They named him on a Tuesday and I resigned on Wednesday morning." For Eha, the need to respect the person in a position of authority was a value so deeply a part of him that it was absolutely impossible for him to stay associated since "I knew I could not work with the man, we had totally different philosophies of education." This event, coupled with the prior problem over the lawsuit, brought into sharp focus the need to stop the "seven years of procrastination" and to change his avocation into his vocation. Even though the potential feelings of fear of the unknown might enter conscious thought, especially "once you live on a salary for eighteen years, one of the hardest things to do is to give up that check and go out on your own," the known feelings of the work situation were greater and resulted in prompt action. Eha has never regretted taking action ("the day I walked out of the school, I felt great and I haven't regretted a day of it") and, in fact, one may think that it was going to take a major event to dislodge him from a certain complacency with the status quo.

The change has brought a new dimension to Eha's life. He has become aware of his entrepreneurial self and how realizes that he is not comfortable working for anyone else. He has come to "trust myself and my gut feelings' and not to let himself worry--"it's never in my mind that I wouldn't make it for more than fifteen seconds, I just wouldn't let myself, I just won't." The sense of personal happiness that has come with the career change has enabled him to assess aspects of his life and come to a deeper understanding of what makes him

"tick." His decision making process is determined by "weighing the advantages and disadvantages and which ever one you feel is the way to do, you go" and by "quitting looking for ways not to do it." He does not spend much time thinking and analyzing a situation because he says, "the biggest mistake so many people make, I think, is that they think too much." This process of "don't analyze it, just do it" may lead one to think that when one is in tune with the inner self, concern over external sources of information is minimal.

At present, Eha puts many hours into work but is looking forward to a slower pace even though he says "I don't think I'll ever retire." A career change has meant control of his daily time and his life--"never been happier in my life, I love what I'm doing."

### Sasie

At the time I was finishing the interviews with Eha, I began the process with Sasie as the next co-researcher. Sasie is in her late thirties and is currently in a junior administrative position with the federal government. She is married to another government worker and has one child, a daughter.

Sasie, too, was encouraged by her family to pursue becoming the teacher that she had "played" at all her young years. When she finally did get into teaching she found it to be extremely draining. Her talk in this direction led me to consider that she experienced, as an element in her frustration, the deep disappointment of a dream gone sour. This variation, for I did not find this from any other co-researcher, led me to include in her element/element statement table the element "disappointment." In the development of common themes, I subsumed this element into the area dealing with the preconditions for change. In talking with Sasie I noticed that she seemed to analyze everything, even as she said, her grocery list. This characteristic provided another element which would describe her need to investigate all avenues which might allow her to make a detailed determination if she was doing the "right thing." She was the only one who sought outside help in the form of an organized program. Sarge had done some informational interviewing (though he did not know that what he did had a name) but had not gotten involved in anything organized. This variation seemed important to me,

especially in light of the fact that Carrie had told me that she did not feel the need for outside help, that she counseled herself, Eha said he talked informally with some friends but made all decision for himself, Sada did not mention the need for any programs. However, Legra was searching for someone to tell her what to do and, at this point in her life, depended on friends to guide her. This element and the element statements from Sasie's protocol as well as the statements from the other co-researchers information led me to the conclusion that I needed to include these elements in a common theme "outside help."

After Sasie left teaching and took her first job with the government, she started on her serial job search. As I reflected on the serial job search, I was reminded of what constitutes "successful" career change in most academic writing, a definition of five years. Upon reflecting on that I realized that was an operational, a priori, from the outside definition. Reflecting that, I started thinking, what about a person who goes about a job only six months but learns something that is very important to their continued growth as a human being, they are certainly a success. Then suddenly it struck me from reading Sasie's protocol that a new definition of success may need to be examined. This thinking leads me to believe that the successful career changer will be aware of the familial enmeshment which has influenced the lifestyle and will make discriminatory choices about values previously accepted without contemplation. This awareness will lead the individual toward living authentically as their own person. In like thinking, the person who is less successful is the person who stays enmeshed and continues living inauthentically by taking as legitimate the direction provided by others. This area is thought of in the overall common theme of "commitment to the self" which is supported in all of the protocols.

After writing the individual description for Sasie, I sent her a copy so that she could make her comments and do any editing she felt necessary. She did make editorial changes and said that "it took me a little while to ponder over your synopsis. After six years, it's still hard to think about it. Anyway, you have amazing insight and overall the synopsis is very accurate."

### **From Teacher to Government Service**

Even as a child Sasie played "pretend teacher" which her parents have told her was on her own. This extended to being a tutor for the neighborhood children, done for fun and not for money. When it came time for Sasie to go to college she fully expected to fulfill her childhood ambition to become a teacher. It was not until she was in college that she began to have some doubts about that long expected vocation even though she "always had teaching in the back of my mind" she found that she "kind of didn't want to do it." This internal doubting led her to evaluate her options and it was in college that she looked around for something that might be the "next best thing." The next best thing turned out to be a major in Sociology with plans to become a social worker. However, the college had just developed the program in this area and it was not strong so Sasie again thought out her options and turned to a major in History and Social Science with a "minimum of Psychology and education courses." She completed the degree and did a practicum in teaching almost as though she wanted to be prepared for teaching just in case the opportunity came to her.

Much to her chagrin, Sasie got caught in the teacher surplus after graduation and did not find a position. She and her husband came to the Northern Virginia area where her first employment was in a department store. Her degree did come in handy since she was offered a higher pay rate simply because she was a college graduate. In less than two months after taking the job she became aware of a position in her former high school as a Social Studies teacher. This came about "as fate would have it" for a person mentioned to Sasie's mother that the position was open and since Sasie was known to the school, it would be appropriate for her to apply. It was almost as though "fate" was giving her the opportunity to try on her teaching degree. Little did Sasie know the drama that was to unfold in her first teaching position. The children turned out to be extremely difficult to handle and the administration gave little support. In fact, the children let her know on her first day that they had contributed to the nervous breakdown of the former teacher and they intended to do the same to her. It became the norm for her to suffer verbal abuse, threats of physical violence, chaos in the classroom and locker fires set close to her classroom. The rewards for Sasie were few and came at infrequent intervals.

The joy she expected to find in teaching never fully materialized. Although there were a few students that were "gems" there weren't enough to compensate for the constant drain from the others. Instead, she found herself thinking "is

this really what you want to do?" This thinking became more acute when Sasie was given a new class because she could "handle the bad ones." She felt she had been given this group without extra compensation, not even verbal compensation. Situations became more difficult and emotionally draining so finally Sasie knew that she "didn't want to be there anymore." This was especially true for her when she found herself driving into the parking lot everyday and immediately wanting to vomit. It was as though the mental torture she was enduring became a physical problem in order to push her toward the realization that she was in a rough situation. After her situation finally became obvious to her through her usual mode of analysis, ("I even analyze my grocery list") she spent her summer vacation looking for another job. The government seemed like a good place to start, especially since her husband had recently made a career change in that direction and knew people on the "inside." She also became involved with the Wider Opportunities for Women career development program almost as though she was determined to alleviate her distress by seeking and using "outside" help. In this way she could assure herself that her options were examined fully.

Once again, "as fate would have it," Sasie took advantage of the "kin network" where her husband knew someone who needed a secretary. Although this was not the professional position that Sasie was seeking, she followed the advice she received about getting into the government by way of the secretarial field and then moving up the ladder. The work was not that difficult for Sasie but the interpersonal relationships with the staff caused her much distress. Most of the people in the office were not only younger than she, but also they did not appreciate the level of her ability. Now Sasie felt that she was looked down on as "secretaries are prone to have happen to them" when in fact, she was doing much of the writing and editing of the work. This proved to be an "awful experience" for Sasie because she had gone from being "fairly autonomous" and having to make her way as a teacher responsible for over one hundred people to suddenly answering to people that were not "dry behind the ears and that was hard to take." It was as though she might have exchanged one "can of worms" for another in her need to be out of teaching. Her feelings of frustration and depression once again prompted her to analyze the situation and take action so she began to look for the professional position for which she felt amply qualified. It had been a shock for Sasie when she applied for the Civil Service positions and had been told that she would not qualify for having experience as a teacher because the government did not recognize teaching as a profession. In fact, she was told that anyone could be a teacher for all they did was read a book a chapter ahead and teach what they had read. She found such insensitivity intolerable but knew of no way to change the perception, a perception she found was acknowledged by other teachers she knew who had gotten their jobs in the government the same way she had. Sasie's anger at such insensitivity ultimately proved to be a motivating force as she became more determined to gain a professional position within the government.

For she found, once more, that it seemed as though "fate" intervened and "lo and behold, someone I had spoken to months before mentioned that there was going to be an opening in their office which was not "wired" and would be a professional position." She applied, came up on the certification list, got an

interview and was hired. It proved to be a position in which Sasie finally found that the feelings of self-doubt that had begun to plague her began to go away. She once again felt herself to be an intelligent, capable person. She has since moved on to another position at a higher rating and now feels challenged and interested in her work.

Sasie's decision to leave teaching happened over a long period of time. She weighed the rewards against what to her were the "bad things, the emotional drain" when she felt that her person, her very self was being "chipped away" and in danger of being destroyed. She "could not let that happen" for time was now a factor and she feared that if she did not take action that it "might be too late to change." Her decisions are not impulsive and made on the spur of the moment but are thought out analytically, even though she does do a "lot of stuff intuitively." She says that "even if I'm not thinking about a decision I need to make consciously, I'm thinking about it unconsciously and my mind seems to be on 'sort' a lot of the time." For Sasie the "decision to change came out of the subconscious mode and into the conscious mode and that is when I finally made my decision to leave teaching." It was the inner knowing that she was spinning her wheels, hating her work each day so that she was having physical problems and then finally asking herself "how much longer are you going to do this to yourself?"

Sasie's decision to leave teaching did not involve an internal need to move toward any deep-felt second choice of career. Rather, it was more like a movement away from teaching. In this respect, Sasie used her analytical inner resources to guide her in using the tools she discovered in her environment. The focusing Sasie attained came after she involved herself in a program which gave her a sense of where her skills were and helped her understand the transferability of her strengths into a variety of possible employment fields. She senses that many people are not equipped to look at their future and make conscious decisions about their path for they seem to just let it happen, rather than planning. Her experience with others in the same career change situation prompts the observation that many people have lots of skills, not only from their jobs but from their lives and they need help to sort out and find what is important to them so they can become focused and not wait to change careers for the "longer one waits, the harder it is to do it."

Sasie is in the process of determining her long range goal. An important part of the goal involves having enough time to be available to her only child. Although the vital decision to have more children is still to be made, Sasie feels that it would be "stepping back to have more kids" and she doesn't feel that she can do that. Her commitment to having her own life and the career she has built does have significant constraints, of which she is fully aware, still happy, however, that she made the change.

In making her career change, Sasie used her inner analytical resources which freed her from many of the fears of taking a risk and limited her time of debilitating inaction. Her thinking through the inherent problems with a situation have allowed her to take action with the understanding of what may

result. This analytical response to the changes in her life have given her much inner strength and a strong determination to do what she wants to do.

### **Ted**

At about the same time that I was involved with the interviews with Legra, I attended a Chamber of Commerce luncheon. As we introduced ourselves to others at our table I started a conversation with the man seated next to me. Ted was interested in my project (I let everyone I met know about the study) and said he would volunteer as a co-researcher and tell about his career change. I arranged for the interview to take place within a few days at his home-based office. He is in his middle forties, married to his co-worker in the business and the father of one son, now old enough to be out on his own. Ted and his wife came to the United States from England almost twenty years ago and this year made the commitment to this country by becoming citizens.

Ted grew up in a family that expected to be always in the working class. He was expected to learn a trade or vocation which would last him all his life. With this in mind, he took courses mainly in commerce and accounting. He was sent on a job interview which, by chance, started him in the lumber business. As he talked I thought "here again is the element of family enmeshment that I've seen before." It did not matter that he came from another country with strong class lines, the element appeared and was supported by element statements.

It was by chance that Ted answered an ad in the paper in England for personnel needed in the US in the lumber business. Here again, he was open to opportunities, much like the other co-researchers, and took advantage of them. As his dissatisfaction with the company became acute, Ted was open to the approach an acquaintance made to join the life insurance business. He was to stay eleven years with the company before he assessed his situation with any thought of changing. Sometimes it can take a long time for the discontent to manifest itself and the self-talking to come to the conscious

level so it can be dealt with, as was the case with Ted. His talk of "risking" and going out on his own was similar to both Sarge and Eha. When he resolved his fears, as had all the other co-researchers, with planning and action, he made the commitment to himself to go out on his own and has been happy in his choice. Again, as I immersed myself in Ted's protocol I found that I was seeing many of the same elements and element statements from the previous protocols, perhaps from different world-view contexts, but still presenting with the same meaning and in several cases, with the same words.

From this seventh protocol forward I continued to see no new elements emerging. I continued to hold myself open but sensed that I had reached saturation.

The common themes for Ted were developed and constituted the base for writing his individual description. His comments on the returned description let me know that "this seems to me to be okay, except for a couple of editorial changes I've made."

#### **From Lumber Dealer to Insurance Business**

Ted's entry into his first career came as a result of chance and the school system in England. Since he was in the academic track which precluded the university, he went to the technical school where he learned accounting, typing, shorthand, geography and commerce. By the time he was sixteen years old he was in the labor force in the lumber business, a position that was chosen for him by the employment exchange, an agency of the state. He started at the bottom of the ladder but did go on to study about timber and wood products by taking courses at night school. As we will see in the events chronicled below, a seeming inner need for control over the activities of his life surfaced early in life, even after entry into a field that he had not chosen, and is typical of Ted's responses to his subsequent career change.

For English children, the school system is set up to allow passage into either grammar school or the technical school after exams taken at age eleven. If one passes these exams then the progression is to the grammar school, if not, then the alternative is the technical school. There is general acceptance of this system in which there is an inherent class distinction. As a child of this schooling, Ted did not question his place and this seemed to allow him the flexibility to make what might have been a confining position into one in which he found a measure of satisfaction. He progressed in the lumber business to the point that he felt very comfortable going to the Chairman of the Board with his accomplishments and asking directly for a raise in salary. He felt that "it didn't

matter who you go to, if you can prove what you are saying. If I had kept quiet, I would never have gotten that raise." For Ted, it was going beyond what everyone else would do in a similar situation because it seemed clear to him that what action he took was the appropriate thing to do. It was the development of this sense of self that enabled him to project a confidence in his own abilities at a very young age.

Hard times fell on the lumber business and when Ted left on vacation he found "when I came back the company had been disbanded." He began to do some serious thinking about his future. Both he and his wife had come to a "stage in England when we had to make a move." In this period he answered an ad in the newspaper about a lumber firm in the United States that was in need of personnel quickly. Of the over one hundred people who applied for the position, Ted was one of four selected to begin training in the US right away. He did not hesitate to accept the position in the US. It is as though adventure and diversity have a deep meaning for him for he brought his family to a new country with only short notice and a month of leave-taking of family and friends. However, the company turned out to be one in which there was strict autocratic management. Ted had "an arrogance about me" that made it difficult for him to do work in a situation where he felt that he was "going backwards." So after only a six month stay in that position, he was very open and receptive when approached by a representative from Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Even though he knew little about the insurance business he was willing to learn. It was as though his dissatisfaction with the work in the lumber business had made him more aware of his need to once again be in control of the events of his life and to respond to the possibility of change to another field. The training by the company was the beginning of Ted's new career. After eleven years of working for the company, Ted found himself "floundering about and then decided that I wanted to get into my own business." It may appear that all the time of "apprenticeship" at the large company was just preparation for such a move. He recognized that he knew the business well and that he wanted to control how he lived and conducted his affairs. This need for autonomy and to do things the way he wanted to do them made it easier for him to overcome some of the fears associated with starting an entrepreneurial adventure. For Ted, the small business market has just taken off because, he says, "this is where I want to be." He conducts his business with the idea that if he takes care of others and puts back into the community some of what is given to him, then it will follow that he will be successful. This inner code of behavior is a guiding force in the way he lives and deals with others for "if you want to build a business you must be very honest and keep honest."

Ted and his wife have a strong, close relationship. They both work out of their home and Ted has encouraged his wife to study for the insurance exams. Their arrangement is such that Ted is the boss in the office and they "are equals in our home." Their only child is now on his own and totally Americanized. Their commitment to the United States will result, after all these years, in becoming citizens for "we felt that we wanted to put that behind us, we are ready to make the change." It is as though a long period of time must pass before the hold of their native land is loosened and they become free to make

another choice. For Ted and his wife it is the realization that "we are part of this community--this is our life--this is our place" that made it possible to make such a choice. It is also the realization that after all the years that have gone by they are different people than they were when they first came here. It is the cultural difference that has become more obvious to them for they acknowledge that their outlook has changed immensely. One such cultural difference is that "in this country a little person can become a big person if they want to work, you don't have to be born to that kind of life. You can get out and do it if you really want to."

Although the decision on citizenship took a long time to make, Ted feels that making decisions in other areas of his life must be done with a time factor in place. For him, making a decision is a logical progression, "you take a sheet of paper, or do it in you mind, and put down the good stuff on one side and the negative stuff on the other and if the positive outweighs the negative and it fits in with your plans, you do it." For about 90% of the decision that Ted makes he uses this practice but the other 10%, he takes risks. In risking instances "you don't know why, but it is the thing to do and it will work." It is such knowing of oneself that makes it possible for action to take place with trust in yourself that it is the "right thing to do."

The years ahead will probably be spent in building the base of clients. In no case will Ted retire for "it scares me to retire--I mean too many people die when they retire." It is more a selective process of slowing down and deciding how high he wants to go especially since he "doesn't want to be the richest man in the graveyard." For now the possibility of bringing his son into the business when he is older is a thought, almost as though this would provide the continuity he seeks as he comes to the time of life when he thinks about his own mortality. In the meantime, he still gets a sense of enjoyment over putting together good programs and saving people money all in a career field that he "hast happened" to find and which gives him the autonomy that he needs.

### **Misty**

Misty was the next person to become a co-researcher. She is currently functioning as a nurse practitioner to a physician who specializes in oncology and hematology. She is in her early forties, married to a government executive and has two children, a son and a daughter.

Misty, at first, wanted to go into medicine, but when her college courses in the sciences proved more difficult than she expected, she changed majors. Once again, she chose to follow her father's lead into business school and finished a degree in accounting, since she didn't know what else to do. I found that as she talked, her work

situation was different from the other co-researchers, but the end result was that she, too, was enmeshed in family values and followed them. She stayed in an accounting position with the government for seven years before she finally left. She was like Sarge and Eha in her determination to "never go back." As was true of several others in the study, her dissatisfaction and discontent was brought to the conscious level as she got "fed up" so that when a situation came up in which she was effectively demoted, the final decision to change careers was made. She had already been listening to that "small voice inside" and had the support of her husband in her career change. She went back to college to a nursing program, and even with the long-awaited birth of her first child somewhat delaying her program, she was like Sada in her determination and like all the others, once the commitment to the self was made, carried the desired goal through to completion.

After completing the analysis of the common themes in Misty's protocol I wrote the individual description and sent it to her for comment. Her response to me was that "it was really very interesting reading about myself."

#### **From Accounting to Nursing**

When Misty got to college she had every intention of being a pre-med major. It was not until she felt that she did not do well in the science courses that some doubt about her first choice entered her mind. In her search for another career she followed her father's choice "since I didn't know what else to do" and went into the business school and majored in accounting. This was at a period in time that a woman in the business school was something unusual. Although Misty did well in college and enjoyed the theory and working through things that are required of the accounting major, she began to have doubts about her choice when she got her first position with the government. She found that it was "just really not what I wanted."

This dissatisfaction manifested itself by her inner knowing that she would not be willing to invest the energy to be "110%" committed to her work. In fact, she felt that "the reward I got from it just wasn't commensurate with what I felt I put into it." It would seem that without this inner commitment to be really good at the job, Misty was not living up to her own set of standards. This need to be really good at what she did could be thought of as a condition for her happiness in life. In that respect the other conditions for continued

employment in the government, such as arranging carpools and the long hours spent in travel time, weighed heavily on her. Just such factors became integral nuisances in the thoughts of spending her life in a job and field that she found unbearable.

It was very difficult for Misty to make the break from her GAO position for stability and security has always been important to her. However, when a man was put into a supervisory position for which his main qualification was that no one knew where else to put him, in effect, demoting Misty to subordinate position, she recognized that such an incident only reinforced the "rightness" of her decision to change her future direction. She had already voiced her need to change her career path with her husband and knew that she wanted to go into nursing, so this incident only further convinced her to take action. The decision was made gradually with her husband's full support but some people at the GAO thought Misty was "crazy" for wanting to give up a good job and lots of money for a field known for its hard work and low pay. Some people even indicated that if her career change did not work out she could always come back. For Misty however, she knew that "when I walked out that door that was it, I would not be back, that was it." It was as though the torture was over and never would be repeated. After weighing the pros and cons with her husband, the decision was made for her to quit her position in the government. For someone who is comfortable with an established routine and finds change a difficult adjustment to make, Misty was embarking on a road that would be made easier only by the inner need to find her place in her chosen field.

Going back to school was not as difficult as she had anticipated. "It was something I really badly wanted and I threw myself into it and really tried hard" so it would appear that the commitment that she never felt for her former work was now the guiding force in her quest toward her new vocation. It was also at this time that the longed for children came along. This made it necessary to make some adjustments in the timing of her program but the joy of finally having a family was so great that it didn't matter. In fact, it may have been because Misty was now on a track that was enjoyable that she had her children, since before going back to nursing school she had not been successful at becoming pregnant. "I was finally doing something I enjoyed and along came my kids" almost as though the inner barriers to happiness were gone and the release from unwanted pressures made it possible for her to have a child.

After graduating and passing Boards, Misty worked in a maternity division until the birth of her second child. It was after this that she realized that some of the difficulties of nursing as a career involve the different shifts that one needs to work. It became necessary for her to do evening work on weekends so that she would have time for her children. This was difficult and she found herself feeling "depressed because I was staying home all the time and I was frustrated." However, this feeling of illness did lead to a visit to the family physician who in turn referred Misty to another specialist. It may have been just "luck" or it may have been "fate" but it was at this time that she came to know the doctor for whom she still works. She took advantage of his offer for an office nurse and has been as entrepreneurial as any businessperson

for she "started this job and built it into whatever it is for there was no one before me. Good or bad, it's mine." It has been through this position that Misty has found herself. She felt she would not be very good at nursing which was quickly overcome after experience in the field. It was this dedication to herself that helps her understand that she "can't imagine going back before nursing and I have never regretted making the change."

### **Drew**

Drew was the next co-researcher in the study, referred by my former secretary after she was in her new job. He is the part owner (with two other hairdressers) of a beauty salon and is a practicing hairdresser. He is married to a secretary and they have no children.

Drew came to the United States from England about ten years ago. He, too, like Ted, came from a family in England where they were expected to go into a trade. His family encouraged him in the welding trade and he worked, off and on, in this line for over ten years in England, Scotland, and Canada. Unlike Ted and his wife, Drew and his wife fully intended to return to England some day to have a small business there. As I immersed myself in what Drew told me of his experience of career change, I felt that I had read all this before in so many of the protocols. The elements and element statements reflected the family involvement, the dissatisfaction within the self, the daring to change and taking the risk, especially in starting the business. The striking element was Drew's continued, even long distance, involvement with his family. This leads me to believe that he has still not determined who he is in an authentic way even though he would be considered a success by society's measure. It is only when one considers that he is not free of enmeshment in many areas of his life that one can interject the notion that he is less successful in his career change. Even as Sasie and Legra are on serial job searches, so does Drew consider the business to be an impediment to "going on to other things."

With the completion of the analysis of the common themes, the individual description of Drew's experience of midlife career change was written and sent to him. He responded by phone saying, "it was the first time he had thought about his life" and asked that he have a copy of the tape to send to his folks in England.

### **From Welder to Hairdresser**

In Drew's family it was expected that he would follow in his father's footsteps and get into a trade. It was as though the family did not expect him to pass the grammar school exams. No one in the family had before him so the pressure for the trades was applied, especially by his father. Drew was intrigued by his brother's stories about his welding trade and, on the basis of these stories, he decided that he would be a welder. After an apprenticeship of five years Drew got his certificate and started his first job. He couldn't wait to get out of the shipyards and convinced some of his friends that they could get jobs anywhere they wished. He satisfied his longing for "traveling about and seeing things" for the first three years. After this period of trying on his trade and exploring many of the areas around London and then on to Scotland and Wales he came to a point when he realized that there "was something missing" and that there "was nothing more I wanted out of the life I was leading." A realization that he didn't know what he wanted to do with his life grew out of his-increasing awareness that he was "fed up with welding and traveling about." It was at this time that he melded into his family once again and went to work for his brother in the tarmac business.

This job only lasted a few months. It was time for Drew to think about his options and almost seemed as though he needed a sabbatical from all work. This was possible because he had enough money to live on, especially since he was able to stay with his family. It was seemingly "by chance" that he was in a hotel bar with a few friends at Christmas time when he met a former classmate who was working as a welder in Canada. Again he was convinced that the grass was greener somewhere else so he accepted a welding position in Canada. He knew the arrangements were that if he liked the job and he liked Canada he would be able to receive a green card as a permanent resident. Once again the job did not last very long and the working conditions were not what they had been represented to be. Drew found himself thinking that "welding was not my life." Even the wanderlust that was a pulling force for him began to fade and he again reflected on what he was doing with his life, especially with knowing that he was damaging his health and that he did not want to do welding until he retired at sixty-five.

After quitting his first Canadian job he did take on one more in welding. It was in this job that he finally made his decision to leave welding completely. After suffering a near fatal accident in which he fell from 400 feet, he made up his mind "not to return to welding, I was finished with welding" but it took a serious incident to finalize this decision. It is as if Drew were stuck in his being drawn to welding until he was faced with a near calamity. It was this

incident which stimulated him enough to make up his mind to leave welding and then to take action on his decision.

After the accident Drew went back home to England. He recuperated for a short time and then went back to Canada. He did odd jobs just to have money but was still seeking to understand what it was that he wanted to do. Again he turned to his family. His sister was in the United States so he decided to visit her for a time. It was during this visit that he began to try out other options for developing a career. His sister had been a hairdresser and she talked Drew into going to a school that would teach hairdressing. He was not at all enthused at first but after visiting the school and finding himself drawn to the creativity of the work, he entered the school. It was not long after attending the school that Drew knew that he wanted to make a career out of hairdressing. This was work that allowed his artistic ability to come forth and his need for variety in his everyday world to be satisfied. He "knew" that he was doing what he wanted to do and is now a successful entrepreneur with one shop of his own and the possibility of more shops as growth takes shape. It is as though Drew has been able to "work, search and build" with the help and support of his family.

Being so far from his folks in England is of some concern to him as they are getting older. His frequent calls and visits are a way of keeping in touch but he recognizes that time is moving on and as he sees their slowing down he comes to more fully understand his own mortality. He has been married only five years but this state is one that he never believed possible for himself as he was too much of a "gypsy." In fact he has a very different view of life since his marriage and wants to enjoy getting to know his wife in many different ways before they have children. He says that he has a different view of children in that he wants to have his fun while he is young enough to enjoy it and would feel cheated to have children now for there is still much that he wants to do before "you bring your kids into the world and dedicate your life to them." The decision to wait to have children is typical of his process of making choices and then coming to action. He generally "figures it out, figures it done and then I do it." To Drew what this means is two things. First, he figures things out ahead of time, but second, after he figures it out, he does it. It is a "what have you got to lose" attitude that makes it possible for him to assess and reassess his situation and take appropriate action whenever the need appears.

The autonomy of having his own shop is necessary for him to feel that he has control over his life. He knows that he "can't work for someone else again" and have no control over the money and the creative process. His sense that the business is sometimes a rock that ties him down is expressed as a feeling of regret that he is tied down but his sense of commitment to his two partners would not allow him to leave them at this point. Both he and his wife see themselves as going back to England someday and have their own small, business-even working short months so they can travel and do whatever strikes their fancy.

### Ace

Ace had appeared on television in a special program about people who had made midlife career changes. I felt that he would be a candidate for the study so contacted the television station to talk with the person who had done the interview with the idea that she would be able to give me a sense of willingness to participate on Ace's part. She thought he would be very interested and so contact was made. He was willing to become a co-researcher and so a time and date was set for our interviews at his automotive garage, amid the often noisy atmosphere. Ace, the proud owner of a Porche repair shop, is in his mid forties, married with no children (just prior to the interviews, their first child died at two months of age).

Ace started out to be an engineer and to follow his grandfather into a manufacturing business. All this changed his third year in engineering school when he was persuaded by a friend to go to law school. I listened and read what Ace was saying and it seemed that he, too, was influenced easily. The enmeshment came from friends and was as influential as any that came from family. I thought of this variation on family involvement but with still the same ramifications. Ace hated law school but finished the degree. Even after practicing law and feeling more and more dissatisfaction and a certain amount of "disgust" with himself, he waited until a friend told him that he needed to get out of law and why didn't he open and run a repair shop for Porches, that he made the change.

Like several of the other co-researchers, Ace had not made that leap that frees him from enmeshment and into becoming his unique self. Although his self-talk was beginning to take him to that point, i.e., "I really don't see my friends so much anymore--I don't have the time," he was still in a business, operationally "successful," that his friends had chosen for him.

Once again the individual description of Ace's career change was composed and sent to him for comment and editing. His response, by phone and by writing on the description, indicated that he was "going to be very interested in the outcome of the future analysis" and that he had never gone into such depth about his life as he had in these interviews.

### **From Lawyer to Auto Mechanic**

As a youngster Ace would see a mechanical thing and, after disassembling it, it would be "totally obvious" to him how it worked. With this love and knack for the scientific it was an expected progression for him to go into engineering and then on to business school as his career. This is what he planned to do before he met "a guy in my third year of engineering school whose father was a patent attorney." This meeting changed the plans Ace had for graduate school and for his life's work. This friend persuaded him to go to law school with him. He finished the undergraduate program in engineering and instead of choosing his original route of an MBA he did apply and was accepted at law school. The lure of being a "lawyer and hot stuff and making all that money" was so strong that he was caught up in his friend's description and with the expectation of what that life style would be that he gave up his original dream.

It was only after he was working in the field at the Patent Office and going to law school at night that he began to realize he didn't enjoy it "but I made a commitment and I'm very pigheaded so I went through with it." It is this sense of commitment that wouldn't allow Ace to reconsider his decision to go to law school even when "it was hell to go through." He started to realize that he "had a problem" when he didn't want to get up in the morning and go to work. In fact, he "didn't want to go to work at all." After a period of time in which he moved from the Patent Office to a law office and then to a position at Navy, he felt that he "was rotting" and he needed to get out of that and do something that "would keep me growing."

Once again Ace listened to a friend when he told him that he didn't seem happy and that he should "just get out of it." It was at this time that Ace and another friend got involved with cars. They would challenge each other with getting things to work, like taking apart and putting together again the transmissions and brakes and engines of the Porches they acquired. For Ace it was joy to work on his car and take it apart just "because I wanted to know what goes on inside." It was as though one thing led to another and it wasn't long before Ace was "pressured" by his friend to start an automotive repair shop. It seems that at each point when there was an imminent change, Ace "just happened" to have the support of a wide circle of friends, many of whom were as dissatisfied as he and also making changes in their lives. He now acknowledges that his friends were "too influential" on him but at the time he would not have made the change for he was "so hung up on being a lawyer and hot stuff" that

he would not have done for himself that which was done by the pressure from his friends.

Even after he started his automotive repair business he had doubts, especially when he got the "crazy idea that I was better than this business would ever be" and was thinking of selling it and walking away from it to some other business with "more growth potential." It was a time of much "teeth grinding and agonizing" but once again, with the help of his manager, he stopped and thought where he was and what he wanted to be, and together they reached some goals for the business. After that the business "opened up again, plus we are doing a lot of creative work." It was at this point that he reconciled his "clean" work as a lawyer with the "dirty" work of car repairs and made his commitment to the business he now owns.

Making a decision on his own is something Ace will avoid for he feels that he is a "procrastinator, really terrible when it comes to making a decision." If he has what he calls "a gut reaction, a decision made when I see the facts and the answers are obvious" then he goes with that and doesn't think about it again. It is only when the gut reaction does not happen that he "avoids making a decision and fumbles into the consequences, which is a decision." This process works out about "50/50" in most cases, even though he avoids making decisions as much as possible. However, he is a perfectionist and wants "everything I do to be just the way I like it and done very well." To these ends he will be very careful and finds that the way he achieves this is "by thinking my way through things." It is as though he will be uncompromising and decisive in areas that he wants to control and quixotic in areas of lesser interest.

The business is "doing well and meeting its projected growth" with side ventures into racing and manufacturing. Ace satisfies his creative needs with the development and manufacturing of parts for the Porche that cannot be found elsewhere. He also satisfies his need for risking by racing one of the cars. He found that racing helps him with his "fear of speed" by challenging him to overcome the fear. He likes testing himself and taking risks "just to keep me going." It is as though he has found the work and life style that has the right "synergistic effect" and he is free to "bloom and grown."

Over time Ace has come to understand that he made a mistake in going to law school and should have gone for his MBA. He doesn't feel the time was wasted for he did learn how to communicate, only that it was frustrating. He is now waiting for a Porche dealership to open up and will move in that direction as his next expansion. His commitment now is to his growing sense of control and autonomy for he has not kept up with the friends that were so influential in the past and although he "sometimes gets lonely and misses the old days" he doesn't take the time to maintain contact. His midlife career change has brought him the realization that "one thing I know is that I can stand on my feet."

## The Fundamental Description

After writing the individual description for each of the ten co-researchers, sending it to each and receiving back their comments and changes, I was ready to read and re-read all ten descriptions.

It became clear to me that from the sixth protocol on to the tenth, I was adding no new elements that built into further common themes. This I sensed as an evolutionary feature of the study. As I thought about the common themes that were pertinent to each protocol, I found that all could be focused into areas that would clarify the experience. These areas include preconditions for change, the active changing process, decision-making and risk-taking, outside-the-self assistance, commitment to the self and the assessment of the experience.

Within the preconditions for change theme I included such elements as family enmeshment, dissatisfaction, discontent, stuckness, ambiguity of thought, and frustration. In all cases the co-researchers choice of first career was the result of family influence, in one way or another. For each, manifested in a variety of forms, the other elements appeared in their experience. In beginning to write the Fundamental Description, I started with these factors as the primary thrust to the understanding of the career change.

The active changing process theme incorporates the elements of self-talk, "chance," luck, and openness. For each of the co-researchers, this period was an awakening time. The self-talk became more focused and re-cognized, each became more open to opportunities that were not seen before and each took advantage of what luck came along to speed up the changing process for them. This active changing time lasted for variable periods for each of the co-researchers, but it was a time when the "possibilities" for change were actively contemplated.

The decision-making and risk-taking theme came as a result of thinking about the elements that the co-researchers revealed in these areas. These included the how, what, where, when, and why of making a decision, no matter in what area of their lives. The element of jumping into the void was dissipated in risk-taking when each person came to the point of "no turning back," resolving the procrastination that might have been evident and holding them back.

Although seeking outside-the-self assistance can be thought of as a component of risk-taking, it seemed also to stand on its own as an important theme. Each of the co-researchers either sought out help or was using what could be thought of as help, even though they did not know there was a name for what they did (i.e., informational interviewing). For some, the conscious thinking that they neither sought nor needed anyone other than themselves to make a decision was a significant point in determining this as a theme.

The commitment to the self theme subsumed the elements of personal values, "trigger" events, confirmation of self, fear resolution, timing, and success/less success of the change. The work of this period was in resolving the enmeshment from familial values and coming to recognize their own set of values, which may or may not include some familial values. It is as though the individual must make these contemplated choices before they come to be their unique self with their own individuated values and be able, at a different level, to look at and relate to the previously unquestioned familial values.

Events of both a "crisis" nature and evolutionary nature tended to precipitate the thinking which resulted in confirming each of the co-researchers as individuals. Fear of change no longer was intimidating when self-talk challenged the person. The more successful/less successful issue also became a part of this theme as each co-researcher told their story.

The reflection of the career change brought elements such as autonomy, joy, love, freedom, growth, and confidence under the theme of assessment of change. These elements tell their own story for each co-researcher experienced them in varying degrees as the career change unfolded. The success/less success issue again becomes a factor as each person goes forward, either with a deep sense of integrity or with the change representing only a step on the ladder.

After thinking about the individual descriptions and how each was interrelated, I used the information to compose the Fundamental Description.

### **A Fundamental Description of the Experience of Completing a Midlife Career Change**

The experience of completing a midlife career change is composed of interconnected elements which function over time to provide unique patterns of living. For the individual these elements represent the growth and development of their lives along a continuum which starts long before they recognize that the elements are there. For the purpose of this description and for readability, these elements will be focused into specific areas that will provide an understanding of the experience. These areas include the preliminary conditions for change, active changing process, decision-making and risk-taking, outside-the-self assistance, commitment of the self, and assessment of the experience.

#### **Preliminary Conditions for Change**

Entrance to the first career flows from family influences in which the individual is enmeshed. This enmeshment comes about for the person as an unquestioning acceptance of the world view, the perceptions and the values of the family. It may be a confluent need to "follow my father," or go to college to avoid the draft, or in making an oppositional choice, such as becoming a secretary instead of the nurse you want to be because "my father will not pay for nursing, it's dirty work," but the choices are responses to circumstances surrounding family values.

When the enmeshed values conceal from the individual their own emerging values, the lived out midlife style may be perceived as confining and inauthentic. At this point the ambiguous sense of dissatisfaction manifests itself in many forms. For some it is the "vibes in the office" or the dread of "going to work in the morning" or the loss of trust in "the administration" as well as the disillusionment of "how teachers are treated--just like garbage." This awakened sense of frustration provides the basis for bringing thoughts that had been vaguely bothering them into clearer focus. We can call these ever more languaged thoughts, for simplicity, self-talk--the conversation we all experience

holding with ourselves. While the self-talk may or may not deal with the sense of enmeshment trapping the person in this situation in the beginning, what it does do is turn the self-talk from an increasingly clarifying sense of dissatisfaction towards action.

### **Active Changing Process**

As the thinking and self-talk comes into focus, active changing begins. For many this process starts by making changes in their lives. This could be discerned from one person who starts a construction business on the side, from another who is more interested in the co-workers than in the routine boredom of the job, in another person who acquires a sports car and takes it apart. For each individual these changes take on a special meaning and significance in the ultimate search to find what it is that they really want to do, something that is missing in the primary occupation. Along with these activities is a heightened awareness of the possibilities that might "just happen" and taking advantage of situations that at first glance might not seem opportunistic but may later turn out to be significant. For one person it is a "chance" meeting that put the opportunities of a community college program within reach, for another it is networking at the new job that eventually landed the position that is sought, for another it is going to college to discover that the liberating atmosphere of the college encourages growth and a subsequent change to an entirely different degree program. For each person it is being more open and receptive to possibilities that might have been overlooked at another time.

In this way we can understand that the active process involves thinking about the change in the here and now and not as a dim possibility that might or might not happen at another point in time. It is interesting that what we naively think of as chance, we see here as having existential significance. "Chance" is what happens when the proper context has been laid so that a person can give significance and meaning to an event that previously might have gone unremarked. There is a time at which each individual will reinforce the need for change by the self-talk which is done, this is noted by several co-researchers as the time in which they know it is "my turn" and "go for it."

### **Decision Making and Risk Taking**

Through the awareness that change is possible, brought about by the increasingly coherent self-talk, decisions can be reached. Before this time it would have been literally impossible for decisions to be made for they had not been re-cognized. For some the decision making process is "putting down the pros and cons and going with the one that feels the best" while another will go "with the gut reaction about 95% of the time: while still another will delay decision making until no decision is still a decision. It is the person who combines the attitude of "go for it" with the considered option that "you can always go back to what you did before" that is willing to take the risk. For each individual the worst possible scenario of going back to what was done before is a known entity. For many it is a time of "letting go" of prior enmeshment with familial values and acknowledging to themselves a newly found freedom to explore themselves.

A spirit of "can do" and "what have I got to lose" are common phrases in the protocols of people at this stage. What is the meaning of this "what have I got to lose" thinking? At this point the person is ready to leap the existential void, they are willing to take the risk, to jump into the nothingness. It is the feeling that there is no turning back for that is "not living a life." For some the risk-taking involves leaving their native country, for others the risking experience tests a developing inner competence. Overcoming obstacles which might delay or detour the career change are directed toward the intensified decision to "take advantage of every opportunity" and to "do it now and not procrastinate any longer."

### **Outside-the-Self Assistance**

Another aspect in taking a risk involves seeking outside help in the career change. For one person this is seen as taking part in a commercially organized program for women which provides career development information. For another, it is turning to friends for support and justification for instituting and completing the change. For some others, however, it is the growing awareness of their feeling of trust in their own judgement that manifests itself as not needing advice or counseling from anyone else. These individuals express this as trust in their own "gut" that they are doing the right thing without outside assistance.

### **Commitment to the Self**

Many of the individuals in the study found that the anticipated career change came to fruition as they made a commitment to their own set of values, ones they could see were counter distinct to familial values or other values they had been unquestioningly believing all their lives. For some persons that is recognized as the need to have control over life by owning a business, in several instances it matters little what kind of business. This is manifested in the willingness to "starve a little" and "put in the time and energy" it takes to get a business profitable. For another it is an understanding of the discrimination of sex stereotyping of some occupations and the limitations of choice that are inherent in such discrimination. The commitment is often preceded by an event or series of events that confirm the change process for the individual. For one it is doing what is necessary to rearrange schedules and child care so that there may be some feelings of "trying to do it all" but not enough to back out of the program that will complete the career change. For another it is always being on the road and "not knowing where I will spend the night" and for another it is being faced with a lawsuit and the sudden knowing that there is "no backup, no trust" for the loyal administrator, and for another it is having to bear the humiliation of being downgraded in a position where you have earned the superior spot, while for another it is the near calamity of death from a fall from a scaffold. It is the self-talk which is saying that "this job is making me sick" and "it was a big mistake to go to law school" as well as "I can't do this anymore" that focus on the pervasive negative quality of life until the commitment is made to change.

With the commitment to oneself also comes a dissipation of the fear of change. What is thought of as fearfulness turns to self-talk that challenges the person to move beyond the fear and begin thinking about what life will be like after the change is accomplished. For one person it is giving up a job "that gave me a salary for eighteen years, my security." For another, it is passing the exams that will qualify that individual for the career change even though "the fear of not passing was always there."

There is a growing sense of time as a factor in the change process. Where once the ambiguity of change is not locked to time, after the self-talk progresses to the point of commitment there is an urgency to "get on with it." It is at this point that there is no turning back. Plans will be altered, concessions to others made but there is a directedness to this commitment that will not falter. One person will experience "closing doors" as time and energy constraints will no longer allow exploration of other options, while another will experience a renewed feeling of "being in control of my life" and not wasting any time in "doing what I need to do." It is as though it takes a long time to go through the process but when the commitment is recognized and awareness is an everyday phenomenon, the career changer is directed toward the overall goal with a determination and persistence that does not allow deviation.

This is a fundamental finding because we begin to realize that this is a variation in the experience of midlife career change. Some people have a realization that they are coming into tune with their own personal values, while others have career changes where that is not the case.

Perhaps this can lead us to a new definition of a successful career change. This definition would not be one that is based on staying five years in a career that you might come to hate, which is the operational definition used in this study, but now we can see that another definition of "successful" is possible. The "successful" midlife career change is one in which the individual is aware of the enmeshment and begins to develop areas of freedom from the enmeshment. So do we call career changes that are in line with these increasingly individual values more successful. This freedom comes as a feeling of uniqueness about themselves as authentic, directed individuals. For one person it is the unclinking of familial values in a scientific education to the joy of work in financial planning, for another it is leaving the stereotyped sex occupation accepted by family and society for the intellectual world of education, while for another it is finally doing what one wanted to do at an early age. It is, for another, having the "still, quiet voice inside" listened to and having the support to complete the change.

For those who stay enmeshed there is a difference in the career change. Their career change is locked into a set of values that are not necessarily their own, but have been accepted as legitimate by them. These persons see themselves as having completed a midlife career change but they also will take on serial careers without the awareness of their enmeshment with others values and not their own. One person will demonstrate this by accepting a position "because it was offered and seemed right at the time" but will still be searching for "the one place that is good for me." Another person will follow friends'

advice and go to law school and then start a business away from law when the real desire was to be in manufacturing.

### **Assessment of the Experience**

It is a source of wonderment for each individual that they actually endured the former occupation and lifestyle for as long as they did. The joy of doing "what I want to do" and the autonomy that comes with taking the responsibilities and choices to be able to control the everyday activities is like "loving to go to work in the morning." For those who choose to start their own business there is the release from pressure of being the subordinate and each that made this choice now says that they "could never go back to work for someone else again." For one it is the "challenge to do it my way" while for another it is "making the decisions and knowing that I have no one else to blame if it doesn't go right." It is in finding their choices are the best for them that they find an awareness of joy they didn't have before the career change.

In this frame of reference it is more clearly understood who is more successful in the career change and who is not. It is as though those who work through the periods of enmeshment with family and friends or other support groups are the career changers who become their own persons. It is not that they are now in the final career, especially because there are many years in which to grow in other areas, but that there is an awareness that they can seek and find the resources within themselves that will provide the stamina to "stand on my own feet" and do whatever needs to be done if the need to change the career path arises again.

Upon reflection, each individual is certain that a career change is possible if the desire is strong enough and the person is willing to go through the often agonizing process of finding out who they are and what they really want. The process is often painful and seems very long but when successfully navigated, the individual will possess an understanding of the self that will be a guide along the life path to growth and development.

### **Validation of the Fundamental Description**

As was done with each of the individual description, this description, too, was sent of each co-researcher for their comments. From Sada came the comment, "your information looks great. I can tell you have put a lot of time and thought into the 'putting it together.'" From Sarge came a big "smiling face" and the words "looks okey-dokey to me--good luck." The reaction that Sasie gave made me realize how important the "success" issue is. She wrote a page of comments with excerpts such as, "but many

people have that self-knowledge, have drive and ambition and believe in themselves, but are still unable to make that 'successful' career change. However, they may be wise enough to realize as the Rolling Stones put it: 'you can't always get what you want, but if you try, sometimes you get what you need.'"

Then consider the comments I received back from Misty which say, "I've read and re-read your paper and I think it is excellent. With each reading I see myself more and more--not so much the specific quotes, but in the general text of your paper. I think it very accurately describes what I went through to make the change I did."

## Chapter V

### Conclusions and Implications of the Study

#### Conclusions

One of the definitions of "career" stems from the Medieval Latin "carraria" which means "road." Let us go back to the fundamental notion that a career is a road and then ask, where is the road going? This research shows that the road leads to a sense of greater individuation in a Jungian sense, to greater self-actualization in a Maslovian sense, and, in short, from enmeshment within the familial context to a sense of one's personal uniqueness.

Along the road to career change there are certain road signs. Just as with an ordinary road sign these markers give information to the potential career changer that affect how the individual goes about the career change process. The markers on the metaphorical career change path are beliefs and attitudes about the process itself.

As an individual integrates life experiences, beliefs and attitudes are formed. One such attitude is that crisis is calamity. As the selected studies in the literature review suggest, a popular concept is that career change starts with a triggering event, usually thought of as unpleasant and/or disrupting in some manner, which is a necessary precursor for a "midlife crisis" and then tied to thoughts of career change. (Perosa and Perosa, 1983; Landau, 1977; Thomas and Robbins, 1979).

When we reframe our consciousness and think of crisis as meaning "opportunity plus danger," as do the Chinese, then we can see that the popular definition can be changed

to one of potential for growth and development. It is this context of crisis that the study found to be accurate. Some people in the study referred to this reframed definition of crisis in saying "go for it," "never say no to an opportunity, even if you are not sure you can do it," and "sure you don't know if you'll make it, but it is worth the try."

Another marker on our metaphorical road is the concept that people who change occupations are somehow unstable (Robbins, 1978; Armstrong, 1980; McQuaid, 1986). Given the operational definition that a successful career is a long term first career entered as a young adult, with concomitant upward mobility, then it follows logically that someone who changes their career is thought of as unstable. However, the results of this research indicate that "successful" has to be redefined. In fact, the successful career changer is not one who becomes stable, e. g., possibly stuck in a new career, but one whose new career more accurately reflects developing individuation. The individuals who revealed their experiences were responding to changes that were occurring in themselves over a long period of time. There were no changes made on whim or without due consideration of the consequences. As each person awakened to possibilities that change could be made, each experienced a new sense of direction and an awareness that they could make the possibilities come true.

The process of growth, development, and change in midlife is not an aberration but is imbedded in the personhood of each individual. This study presents the process in the emerged common themes which evolved into the Fundamental Description. As in the Neopolitan (1977) study of midlife career changers, the findings of boredom, stagnation, and loss of challenge may be thought of as elements in the emerged common themes of this study. McQuaid (1986) developed constructs of theory which have two components, the four phases of the Chronological and the internal/external development in the Descriptive. This construct resembles the common themes of this study as presented in

the Fundamental Description so it is possible the constructs might provide guidelines for future research.

The process of change in the midlife adult may be stunted in some and we can view this as "stuckness," but even then it does not preclude the notion that at some time in life the "stuckness" will be overcome and the person will move along the continuum to discover their unique self. On the other hand, there are those who will be moving inexorable toward significant change without aid of any kind except their emerging sense of who they are and what they want and are willing to go after. The process of a successful midlife career change, as reported in the study, tells us that far from indicating instability, it is characteristic of the most self-directed of individuals, willing to commit themselves to a new direction with persistence and determination.

### **Implications for Adult Educators and Program Planning**

Adult educators who arrange programs on careers, transitions, the midlife period, and general adult development need to consider the information generated from this study. It is of particular interest that there was only one person out of the ten who chose to attend an organized program on career development, and only three who used the informational interview technique (even though they did not know the name) for researching a prospective career field.

It seems reasonable to assume that some midlife career changers do not need or are not aware of the help that is available to them. Conventional wisdom says that this lack of awareness is most likely due to an advertising problem or in offering the programs at inappropriate times, days, and locations. This attitude is one with which readers who are adult educators probably resonate. Let us look at the assumptions behind this and an alternative hypothesis. The tenor of this type of statement implies that the population is

there to be reached and if they are not responding we have not reached them effectively. Their role, in effect, is that of passive recipient of information. One of the facets that comes from this study, however, is that career changing is an active process. If we see career changers as active entities, then why might they not be coming to present programs? Universally, existentialists state that with freedom comes anxiety (Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 1974). This existential anxiety, angst, is the feeling we experience when we let go of the security of what we know from within our familial enmeshment and when we face an uncertain future where we are responsible for what we choose to be. One implication of this study is that since the co-researchers were moving from a stance of familial enmeshment to an increasing sense of freedom and responsibility, it would make sense that a certain amount of pre-reflective anxiety would accompany this move. That anxiety would provide one motivation against seeking explicit help, for to seek that help is a reflective, conscious statement of a movement from the old to the new, a movement which is anxiety producing. Thus, the programs need to help people get "unstuck" and moving along the road of discovery to become aware of themselves and their "place." The focus for the programs needs to be on the aspects which help the person develop their map in order to sort out where the road is and where it needs to go.

Therefore, program planners have the opportunity to use this information in the context of other adult learning behaviors in order to guide each individual participant enrolled in career development programs. Facilitators need to recognize that the needs of this population will be diverse. They need programs that are discovery oriented to ensure that each individual will have the freedom to examine their unique position along their road as they participate in the program and beyond.

## Implications for Career Counselors and Other Professionals

It seems that the term "midlife crisis" is interpreted quite often by many as a calamity. Part of what can help turn a calamity into the true crisis, opportunity plus danger, is seeking the opportunity in danger. It is necessary to help people see that there is opportunity in danger. There are two ways this can be done.

The first way is by reframing the negative myths with information. Information which explains that a career is a process--a process that is like a journey on a road that has a beginning and also many twists and turns, all of which provide options as it is traveled. The second way is in focusing career change not on identifying a new potentially interesting job, but bringing the "carrarios" back in tune with the path of the individual's development. This implies that the focus of career counseling, for the midlife career changer, should be less on the identification of interests, or on the elements of personality style and more on identifying and assessing what stage of individuation the person has reached.

In order to do this it is necessary to find out the anomaly in the present career, what are the values being expressed in that anomaly, and what are the emerging individuated values. It is of the highest importance to be aware of the dimensions of the individual's enmeshed or introjected values versus emerging individualistic values. The awareness by the helper of these potentially conflicting values will provide the framework of guidance for each person as they move toward becoming "unstuck" and able to go forward on the journey.

## **Implications for Future Studies**

### **A. Context of Verification Studies**

It is now time to move from a context of discovery into a context of verification. Now that the experience has been explicated in depth and understood in its intricacies, one can now ask the context of verification questions that naturally follow. Questions include: Who undergoes this experience, and are there racial, ethnic, or other societal differences associated with midlife career change. These are all context of verification questions that could be investigated based on this research.

### **B. Refinement of Existing Career Counseling Practices**

It is appropriate to think of careers as being an inseparable ingredient in normal adult development. Those professionals who practice as career counselors, using the adult development model, will be able to focus the help given to the midlife career changer in relation to the enmeshment/individuation level rather than on interest inventories and personality tests. Within this same context, the emphasis would not be on helping the person to select a new job (using conventional standardized tools), but would focus on exploring emerging career values in relation to the enmeshment/individuation status. Therefore, the research from this study suggests that a test might be developed that would actually assess the levels of enmeshment and individuation.

In addition, after defining the continuum of enmeshment as the unaware and unexamined acceptance of family and societal values and individuation as the examined, responsible choices which a person makes in living as a unique individual, then the possibility of quantifying areas of enmeshment and individuation could be done. Further research could be conducted in areas of felt satisfaction with the career among more enmeshed versus less enmeshed, average length of new career among more enmeshed

verses less enmeshed, in other words, there are many areas to be investigated among the more/less enmeshed theme the more/less individuated theme.

### **C. Development of an Existential Career Counseling Model**

All of the foregoing is really the basis for a new model of existential career counseling. The major features of this model would be clearly refined series of steps, stages, and phases that would ascertain the progress of the person in their individuation journey. The description of the model would be written so that any counselor would be able to use the model in practice with the midlife career changer.

Such a new model would hold fidelity to the view of adult development, not as a mere wandering from one path to another, but as a true unfolding of the individual along the road to self-fulfillment.

### **Summary**

The metaphorical road for the midlife career changer is one which is not usually smooth and straight. It is a road which provides opportunities for the individual to make choices at each turn, rut, bump, and fork in the path. These choices reflect the growth and development of the individual along the enmeshment-to-individuation continuum. This study provides information about the experience of completing a midlife career change which may serve as a guide to those who help other midlife career changers who are traveling along the road to discovery.

The road now has a path to follow in which new questions that are raised may be researched using other methods. The answers so generated may lead to an even greater understanding of the growth and development that takes place in adulthood.

The opportunities for understanding the fertile complexities of life, especially for the midlife adult moving along the career change path, are illuminated by the knowledge from this study.

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## Appendix

### Letter of Consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the study on the experience of completing a midlife career change. The purpose of the study is to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the experience and to utilize one alternative way to do research.

I understand that the study will consist of taped interviews, conducted by the researcher and myself as co-researcher, at mutually agreed upon times, where I will be asked to report and explore with the researcher my experiences while making and completing a midlife career change.

I further understand that I will receive a transcribed copy of the tapes which I will be requested to read and comment on before the next interview meeting. All names will be removed from the transcriptions by the researcher before data is given to members of the Dissertation Committee.

I also understand that my name will not appear anywhere in the study, that my name will be replaced by a code symbol on all data that could identify me. Taped interviews will be left intact and kept in confidence by the researcher unless I specifically request that my tapes be destroyed.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

## Demographic Chart of Co-researchers

Person	Age	Sex/ Race	Career #1 / years	Career #2 / years
Sada	late forties	Female Cauc.	Secretary / 11	Nurse, R. N./12
Sarge	late thirties	Male Cauc.	Engineer / 7	Financial Planner / 9
Legra	early forties	Female Hispanic	Occupational Therapist / 12	Hotel management / 6
Carrie	late forties	Female Cauc.	Nurse, R. N. / 9	Educational Admin. / 17
Eha	early forties	Male Cauc.	Grade School Principal / 11	Construction Contractor / 7
Sasie	mid thirties	Female Cauc.	Teacher / 6	Government Service / 6
Ted	mid forties	Male Cauc.	Lumber Dealer / 11	Insurance Business / 10
Misty	early forties	Female Cauc.	Accountant / 7	Nurse, R. N. / 7
Drew	mid forties	Male Cauc.	Welder / 11	Hairdresser / 9
Ace	mid forties	Male Cauc.	Lawyer / 10	Auto Mechanic / 10

## **Basic Questions Guiding the Interview**

How did you happen to get into your first career?

What was the "landmark" decision or event that made you change your career?

How do you make a decision?

What were the risks that were involved for you as you made your career change?

Tell me the meaning of this experience for you in relation to what you are doing now.

What is the lifestyle you envision for yourself?

## Individual Description Letter to Co-researchers

Dear

Thanks again for helping me with my dissertation! It has been a year of much learning for me as I have talked with all of you. I appreciate your willingness to participate in the two interviews we taped and then the editing you did on the transcripts. I am now at the stage where I have analyzed your transcript and have written a description of your experience. If you think I have missed something or have emphasized a wrong area, please let me know. I would like to talk with you either on the phone or in person after you have finished reading it. I am enclosing two copies, one you may keep and the other is for marking up and generally making comments as you see fit. The envelope is for your return of the marked copy. After reading what you have to say, I will call you and we can make the determination about further conversation.

If you have any suggestions for the description please feel free to tell me about it. I want these few pages to encapsulize and accurately portray your experience as you completed your career change.

When all co-researchers have given the okay on their descriptions, I will develop and write a general description of the experience of completing a midlife career change. At that point I will again ask for your comments. After that I will write up the results, finish the other parts of the dissertation and defend my work. I feel that I am on my way and I am very grateful for your continued help.

Sincerely,

## Fundamental Description Letter to Co-researchers

Dear

I have come to the time when I have written a composite description of all the information you have given me. I now ask that, once again, you read this description and in it look for those areas where you feel you fit.

Please look for accuracy in the description as it applies to you and your career change. I ask that you make your comments directly on the paper and then return the paper to me in the envelope that I am enclosing.

I cannot begin to thank all of you enough for your help - please know that it is deeply appreciated. The next phase of the dissertation process is to put all the chapters together and then on to defend the work.

Sincerely,

**The vita has been removed from  
the scanned document**