

MIDLIFE WOMEN: THEMES OF INNER CHANGE  
AND DEVELOPMENT

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by

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### Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn what issues were important to women at midlife. In-depth interviews were conducted with 2 Manitoba women in their 50s. One woman was in a period of transition. She was developing a greater sense of inner authority and coming to appreciate and trust her knowledge and expertise. The other participant was enjoying a stable period after experiencing problematic marriages and illness earlier in her life. Themes which emerged included family and other personal relationships, employment, autonomy, creativity, contribution to society, and perspective on life. These stories demonstrated that psychosocial development continued in the 50s. Each woman's development was strongly influenced by the interaction of personal characteristics with her social, cultural, and historical context.



## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the process of inner change and development as understood by two women at midlife. The focus was on self-perceived internal shifts in personal beliefs, attitudes, values, world views, and goals. This study concentrated on discovering what changes occurred, how they occurred, and why (according to the women themselves) they occurred. For purposes of this study, midlife was defined as the 50s.

Developmental psychology, the study of the changes in physical, mental, and social functioning over the life span, began first with describing the changes occurring in childhood (Liebert & Wicks-Nelson, 1981). Traditional views of human development looked at extreme changes as occurring only in childhood, followed by a period of stability in adulthood, and then decline into old age (Santrock, 1985).

Alternative perspectives on conceptualizing developmental psychology appeared in the 1970s with the re-emergence of the lifespan development orientation. This approach assumes that changes can occur at any point in the life span (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980) and that these changes result from the interaction of biological determinants and the social and cultural context. Adult development, as opposed to mere decline, became a fruitful area of study.

Major theorists who shaped much of the study in the field of adult development included Erikson (1968), Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978), and Vaillant (1977). They developed

stage theories which focussed on the similarities of experience for men.

Erikson's work (1968) has long been considered a classic description of adulthood. He translated Freud's psychosexual stages of childhood to eight psychosocial stages encompassing the whole life span, with the last three stages occurring in adulthood. Each stage was represented as a crisis stemming from biological pressure and sociocultural expectations. These models are based on the epigenetic principle that there are inner laws governing the rate and sequence of growth and development. Vaillant (1977) developed a model of the adult life cycle which added two stages to Erikson's model. This model was also based on the study of men only.

Levinson et al. (1978) identified a midlife transition in men aged 40-45. One of the tasks of this period was to begin the process of individuation, the formation of clearer boundaries between self and environment. This view assumes the orthogenetic principle of growth, that is, there is a greater degree of individuation and differentiation from the environment over the course of a lifetime.

The growth of feminism over the past two decades with its focus on increasing awareness of women's roles in Western society has stimulated challenges to the theories, underlying assumptions, and methods of psychological research. In a summary of feminist charges against current approaches to psychological research, Riger (1992) pointed out the many ways in which gender bias has permeated the social sciences, with its resultant neglect and distortion of women's experience. For instance, areas relevant to

women, such as rape or housework, have been seen as either taboo or too trivial to research. As well, many studies suffer from such threats to validity as:

1. Using only male subjects and generalizing results to females.
2. Male researchers ignoring sex-of-experimenter effects and the implications of mutual shaping in the interactive process of the research.
3. Designating sex as an independent variable in studies on gender, thus assuming a priori that between-gender differences exist, and failing to pay sufficient attention to within-gender differences.
4. Conducting laboratory experiments rather than field studies, thereby tending to bring out gender-related expectations about behaviour. The implicit assumption that causes of behaviour are attributable to internal factors without reference to the social context increases reliance on biology as the cause of differences between males and females.

Theories developed from men's experiences failed to include what was unique about women's experiences. By using men's experiences as the reference point, the vision of women was restricted to "the same as" or "different from" the norm. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) pointed out that "Nowhere is the pattern of using male experience to define human experience seen more clearly than in models of intellectual development" (p. 7). In their study of women's intellectual development they described five perspectives from which women perceive the world: (a) silence,

(b) received knowledge, (c) subjective knowledge, (d) procedural knowledge, and (e) constructed knowledge (p. 15). These perspectives ranged from the position of experiencing the self as without mind or voice, governed by external experts, to seeing the self as "creators of knowledge" (p. 15).

Miller (1976) and Gilligan (1982) expanded the concept of human development by exploring different psychological characteristics. Miller concluded that women were more likely than men to identify themselves in terms of relationships and connections rather than in terms of autonomy and independence which were theorized to be the "normal" experience of mature adults.

Gilligan's (1982) studies of moral reasoning showed that, although the results were not gender-specific, females were more likely to value relationship and connection to others while males emphasized autonomy and separation. She pointed out that by using male-based models of a healthy life cycle women had been silenced.

Mercer, Nichols, and Doyle (1989) pointed out that it is important to bear in mind that women may follow considerably different developmental pathways from those of men because different societal expectations and social circumstances apply. Roles of daughter, sister, wife, or mother result in different life experiences which result in different developmental outcomes.

If women's perspectives in general are missing from the psychological literature, there is even less attention paid to women's development during midlife (Gergen, 1990). The relatively few studies which have been done do not adequately represent midlife

women. Most studies are quantitative and therefore do not examine development as a process over time. Subjects are examined at one moment in time, in terms of outcomes or products. Quantitative techniques can show that changes have occurred but they do not portray the rich details of the way in which these outcomes and products have come about. Much is left out that is important to the understanding of both women and men. In his studies of personality White (1952) pointed out that "lives cannot be adequately understood unless they are described at considerable length. The case histories are designed to constitute a groundwork of carefully observed facts on which to anchor the discussion of concepts and theories" (p. iii).

This study focussed on the experiences of two women as they reflected on their lives, with particular attention to the issues which they perceived as significant at the time or in the past. By using in-depth interviews and enlisting the participants as active partners in the research, some of the diversity and complexity of their lives was captured and an understanding of their experiences extended. By providing a detailed description of developmental processes which are not well-described in the literature, this data will contribute to the construction of knowledge about a particular segment of society, women at midlife. Because theories of adult development have been formulated without adequate reference to women's experiences, there is a need to learn more about the phenomenology of their experiences. A phenomenological approach allows the experts--the women themselves--to inform us what questions are important in

the development of large-scale studies. Hopefully this study will stimulate others to extend these findings using similar methodologies. Accurate, detailed information on midlife women's experience of on-going change and development will contribute to knowledge about life-long learning. This information can be taken into account in developing more effective counselling and educational practices.

This study begins with a review of the literature, which is examined in terms of (a) theories and methods of research, (b) tentative concepts to explain women's development, (c) personality variables, and (d) themes derived from women's lives. This is followed by a description of the methodology used in this study. In this section, details of the (a) design, (b) criteria for participant selection, (c) purposeful sampling strategies, (d) data collection procedures, (e) ethical issues, (f) procedures for data analysis, and (g) limitations of the study are outlined. The stories of Laura and Lillian, the two women who participated in this study, are found in the next two sections. Included here are biographical data, their roles in the conduct of the research, and the themes which emerged from the interviews. In conclusion, the descriptive material is summarized, major themes restated, and implications for further study are discussed.

## Literature Review

Literature regarding the development of women, especially women at midlife and beyond, is meager. Comprehensive theoretical and conceptual frameworks are, by and large, non-existent. What is evident in the literature is the continuing criticism of current theories and methods of psychological research as they are applied to women.

The implicit assumptions and inherent biases of positivism are restrictive by pre-determining which questions will be asked and what methods will be used to answer them (Bohan, 1990). By continuing to study women in relation to family and reproductive cycles, for example, women's lives continue to be framed in reference to their biology. In contrast, public spheres of endeavour are acknowledged to be significant to male psychological development (Gergen, 1990).

Methods of enquiry are not value-free (Bohan, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and therefore shape our understanding of behaviour. The "what" and the "how" of enquiry are inseparable. Qualitative research methods allow expansion of current concepts of knowledge in ways which differ from quantitative methods. The underlying assumptions and purposes differ from those of quantitative methods. According to Lincoln and Guba, one of the axioms of the naturalist paradigm is the assumption that "realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic" (p. 37). Methods arising from the naturalist paradigm encourage the discovery of those multiple realities, the many different ways of viewing the world. Although women at midlife

undoubtedly share many characteristics with men and other women, qualitative methods provide the individual with the opportunity to speak of her unique experiences. The purpose of the qualitative approach is to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspective, to learn how they give meaning to, and make sense out of, their lives. There is a focus on process rather than cause and effect relationships. This allows voices and stories, previously unheard, to be heard (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Eisner, 1991).

Another area of criticism revolves around the issue of social context. Although Erikson (1968) acknowledged the influence of culture and society, little attention was paid to context in subsequent research. By studying behaviour without regard to its context, by leaving out beliefs, values, history, and social status, critical determinants of behaviour for both women and men have been omitted (Riger, 1992).

To generate new theories of women's development at midlife, Gergen (1990) proposed that new dimensions of gender, emphasis on relational networks, and new stories which more accurately reflect the unpredictability of change are needed. Bohan (1990) observed that knowledge is not discovered but is socially constructed and therefore negotiable. A process of deconstruction to reveal underlying assumptions is necessary prior to re-construction of what is accepted as truth.

A review of studies on midlife women shows that most continue to be quantitative in design. These have the advantage of providing information on large numbers of women but at the same



time they share limitations. Because the focus is on the person at the moment, the effect of context is reduced (Riger, 1992). There is little opportunity for information which the women believe to be significant to be addressed. The research subjects are manipulated, controlled, and fragmented rather than looked at holistically. Some descriptive information is obtained but nothing is learned about how or why changes took place. In comparing different age-groups, there are threats to validity from cohort effects. These are effects on psychological functioning (e.g., performance on intelligence tests) and development produced by the fact of being born at a particular time in history. Unless otherwise indicated, no information was provided in the following research reports on racial or ethnic background, national origin, educational level, occupation, health status, or social class. All participants in these studies were from the United States except for those in the U.S.-Kenya study.

Although there is little in the way of theories of adult development based on women's experience, some tentative concepts have been offered as a way of bringing together the diverse experiences of midlife women. These include midlife crisis (Crow, 1987), prime of life (Mitchell & Helson, 1990), and a model of self-definition (Peck, 1986).

Crow (1987) identified the midlife crisis as occurring in five stages. The crisis may be precipitated by feeling trapped in life circumstances coupled with an awareness of mortality. The second stage is characterized by making the first change, often one that is irrational. This leads to the third stage of multiple changes where

there is change for the sake of change. Not all women will experience a crisis and not all who do will go through all the stages. Some women will avoid the second and third stages and go on directly to the fourth stage of rational planning. At that point reality-based options are explored. The course of the crisis is characterized by change, ending in the setting and implementing of personal goals in the final stage. In order to get on with the second half of life it is essential that the goals are their own (and not those of husbands, children, or parents), and that the plan be put into action. On the other hand, Chiriboga (1989), in a review of current research on North American men and women at midlife, provided evidence to support the conclusion that, at midlife, most people "are more in control of things, at both a personal and an occupational level, than they ever have been before or ever will be again. . . . For most people midlife is not a crisis but a challenge and a relief" (p. 141). This of course does not imply that all individuals would experience midlife in the same way. In a longitudinal study in which 168 women were interviewed over a 12-year period, Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) found that the general categories of stress experiences commonly associated with midlife (e.g., menopause, empty nest) did not trigger a crisis. The group whose average age was 58 years, however, reported most hassles involved with caring for aging parents.

Mitchell and Helson (1990) offer the "prime of life" as a useful concept in adult development. They defined this as a time when various forces converge to allow women opportunity for achievement

of their own goals. Based on a cross-sectional study of 700 women and a longitudinal study of 118 women in their 40s and 50s, they found that women in their 50s rated their quality of life higher than other age groups. Both autonomy and intimate relationships were priorities for these women. Fodor and Franks (1990) also speculated that midlife represents the prime of life for women. They pointed out that women who are at midlife now experienced role shifts in their 20s and 30s because of the women's movement. New opportunities in employment, education, and personal roles altered their lives. The life history study by Mercer et al. (1989) involved conducting interviews with 80 women aged 60 to 95 years. Almost all were Caucasian, living in Idaho, Indiana, and California. The participants reflected a wide diversity in regard to marital status, living arrangements, educational level, and occupational roles. The women were evenly divided between rural and urban backgrounds. The results revealed that half or fewer of the women found their 50s to be a major developmental time. Although this decade was relatively peaceful, there were transitions, most of which had to do with loss. Often the loss involved the death of a spouse, parents, or siblings.

Peck's (1986) proposed model assumes women create a self-definition as adults which is influenced by the social-historical time dimension in which they live and the relationships in which they are involved. There is a need to modulate personal growth against any negative effects on key relationships. Maddy (1985) also discussed the ambivalence some women feel at midlife trying to balance

pursuit of their own goals against fear of loss of approval from people important to them. In-depth interviews with women aged 37-45 attending Continuing Education for Women at the University of Minnesota revealed a similar dissonance between traditional expectations and new desires to explore careers or schooling (Lutter, 1982).

Other studies have examined a range of personality variables. Hyman (1988) found increases in both autonomy and time-competence (living in the present) in women between the ages of 19 and 55. In a longitudinal study Helson and Moane (1987) found significant increases in confidence, independence, ego development, self-discipline and commitment to duties, and coping skills between the ages of 21 and 43. These changes were most pronounced in women who were actively involved in seeking a place in society, either through family or an upwardly mobile career path. A cross-cultural study of 120 women in Kenya and the United States compared high- and low-status women, half of whom were under 35 years of age and half of whom were over 44. In the U. S. the high status women were Caucasian students, housewives, and secretaries; the low status women were African-American clerks, postal workers, and teacher's aides. In Kenya, the high status women were middle-class African secretaries and teachers; the low status women were African cleaners at hotels and universities who earned one tenth to one twentieth the middle-class salaries. The results showed an apparent increase of interpersonal power in favour of older women as long as they continued to enjoy the advantages of social status and

economic security (Todd, Friedman, & Kariuki, 1990).

The influence of paid employment on 38 women aged 40-59 was studied by Coleman and Antonucci (1981). In comparing working women with homemakers they found that working women had less psychological anxiety, higher self-esteem, better physical health, and higher marital satisfaction than homemakers. Hornstein (1986), however, found that women with low levels of involvement in employment remained positive about their traditional roles.

Measures of life satisfaction in 72 married midlife childless or empty nest men and women aged 45-59 revealed no differences between the two groups on issues related to social, political, and interpersonal concerns (Bell & Eisenberg, 1985). Although childless couples were not as pleased as empty nest couples about their decision regarding children, it seems that satisfaction in other areas of life (e.g., work, marital and other family relationships, friendships, or political and social involvements) were relatively unaffected by their family status. In a secondary analysis of the "Quality of American Life" study Carlson and Videka-Sherman (1990) found that there was little support for role reversal (increased femininity and/or decreased masculinity for men; decreased femininity and/or increased masculinity for women) at midlife and that the best predictor of life satisfaction was satisfaction with family life.

Other possible predictors of psychological well-being in 232 women aged 46-61 such as empty nest, employment, or educational level were found by Black and Hill (1984) to be not significant. More important was the ability to cope creatively with specific problems

and to learn from crisis. Brown's (1983) late bloomers were university scholarship winners over age 50, all of whom had a keen desire to learn and displayed unusual capacity for growth and development. Eleven of 17 participants were women, all of whom had been married and, except for one, had raised families, thus precluding academic life earlier. All had overcome great adversity, disappointment, and failure in their lives. Here again, positive, creative responses to crises were instrumental in achieving their goals.

Vaillant (1990) made a link between creativity and generativity as understood by Erikson's seventh stage which occurs in adulthood. This stage is characterized by an increasing commitment to take care of the persons, products, or ideas that one has already learned to care for (Erikson, 1982). In a review of a 65-year longitudinal study and interviews with 40 women, Vaillant found that creative women displayed more vigorous aging, a *joie de vivre*, in later life. He speculated on the link between creativity and the ability to play. There is mixed support for the hypothesis that generativity peaks at midlife and then declines. A study by McAdams, de St. Aubin, and Logan (1993) showed that there was a developmental increase in two generative features (commitments and narration, i.e., telling stories of personally important life experiences) from young adulthood (22-27 years) to middle adulthood (37-42) but there was no evidence of a decrease in older adults (67-72). Mercer et al. (1989) discovered an emergence of creativity in later life among their participants. Creative writing,

particularly autobiographies, appeared to be an attempt to achieve Erikson's final stage of Integrity where there is an acceptance of one's life as satisfying and meaningful. The creative activities were, for some women, a response to loss and loneliness; for others they were lifelong activities, and for yet others, they were new endeavours at an older age. In addition to writing, music, painting, drawing, career activity, and volunteerism were also mentioned.

These studies inform us that change does occur, and that for many midlife women it is ultimately a positive change. However, the "how and why" of change remains largely unexplored. Qualitative methods are a means of discovering rich sources of information on the interrelatedness of the social, psychosocial, and cultural dimensions of people's lives.

In one such study, England and Finch (1991) found that when married midlife rural women from South Dakota talked about their views of the world and how they saw themselves in it, the following themes emerged: (a) personal identity was closely tied to a traditional lifestyle, with affiliation and connectedness with family and friends being an important value; (b) the need for a personal sense of achievement and mastery for themselves as well as in relation to family; (c) the acceptance of the events of their lives; (d) a degree of separation for themselves along with interdependence within the family; and (e) the importance of church and religion.

In the life histories conducted by Mercer et al. (1989), many themes emerged as the women described their recollections of each decade of their lives. Among the themes identified were:

1. Achievement of Integrity, Erikson's eighth and final stage.

The majority (70%) had reached the stage of viewing their lives as satisfying and meaningful when interviewed. The role of wife had a greater influence than the role of mother on reaching this stage. The authors postulated that married women remained dependent on their husbands for identity and achieving goals and satisfactions.

2. View of and approach to life. Those with a worldview were autonomous early in life, propelled by internal drives. Other women exhibited a family view which reflected commitments to family. For these women, external forces were as likely as internal drives to precipitate changes. A third group seemed to respond passively with no inner force driving them. Life to them appeared to be formless, without much regularity. Many had been engaged in taking care of others throughout much of their lives.

3. Role models. Almost all the women reported having other people who taught them and helped them. Women who were mothers usually referred to older female relatives or friends; the nonmothers reported professionals (e.g., professors, judges, teachers) in addition to family members.

4. Interpersonal relationships. Family of origin (parents and siblings) were influential, whether the relationships were conflictual or not. The marital or nuclear family composed of husband and children was also an important influence in these women's lives. Husbands were more central to the lives of mothers than to the lives of nonmothers, one reason being their father role and sharing responsibility for children. Friends were also an important influence,



with many women maintaining these relationships throughout their lives. All of these relationships had provided the women with support in many ways over their lives.

Stewart and Gold-Steinberg (1990) conducted in-depth interviews with 3 participants in order to shed light on the development of midlife women's political consciousness. They found that, although none of the women defined their political activism in terms of formal politics, each one acted out her political beliefs and values in a way which was personally meaningful to her. For instance, one woman whose personal difficulties kept her from taking political action in young adulthood was helping to raise her adopted Asian niece as she struggled with cultural and identity issues. She saw this as an opportunity to correct some political wrongs emanating from the war in Vietnam. As was true for the other women in the study, this meaningful expression of beliefs and values was discovered to be a natural outgrowth and expansion of concerns and experiences earlier in her life, thus illustrating the roots of current behaviour and thinking.

In summary, the literature reveals the need for concepts and theories of midlife women's development. Methods which encourage a fuller exploration of the diversity and complexity of their experiences are required. Much more needs to be known about the influence of factors such as ethnic or cultural background and economic status. We know that women take risks, seek challenges, and continue to develop their capacities at midlife. More study is needed to understand the process by which this development occurs.

Questions such as "In what ways did you change?", "What were the circumstances at the time?", "What are the transitions you've made?", "What is important to you now?", "What contributed to that change?", "How do these changes show up in everyday life?", can be answered only by the women themselves in their own words. In this study the processes of change in two midlife women were explored in a way which allowed them to answer some of those questions; to tell their own stories in ways that give us a glimpse of the variety and complexity of their lives.

## Methodology

### Design

The theoretical orientation of this study is best described as a type of phenomenological perspective, that is, it is an attempt to understand the meaning of events in the lives of the participants "from their own point of view" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 34). I am aware that this is a research construct and therefore vulnerable to being criticized on the grounds that this frames the content according to the researcher's purposes. I believe, however, that it is impossible to erase the effects of the researcher and the best thing to do is to acknowledge that they exist and try to minimize them as much as possible. I did this by reflecting on my biases, assumptions, impressions, and conjectures as the study progressed. These reflections took into account and acknowledged my part as the primary instrument of data collection in the process of the research.

My goal was to learn about the participants' subjective experiences and the significance they ascribed to them. My assumptions were that (a) multiple realities exist, that is, any one event can be interpreted in many different ways depending on the viewpoint of the observer; (b) there is value in learning about the unique experience of each woman rather than focussing only on the commonalities; (c) development continues throughout the life span; (d) people learn from past experience and gain maturity by assimilating these past learnings into their thinking and behaviour; and (e) the participants are the experts on their own lives. This meant that the information had to originate within the participant

and not in my preconceived ideas about what midlife women should be concerned with.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the subjective experiences of the participants I used a case study design whereby one phenomenon is selected to be studied in depth. The phenomenon, or "case", chosen to be examined in detail was the experience of women at mid-adulthood. I began with questions which were not too specific except for those relating to demographic data (Appendix C). I did not know beforehand which topics, issues, or themes would emerge, and the open-ended questions allowed the participants to select material of personal significance.

#### Criteria for Selection of Participants

Two women were chosen to participate in this study. The selection was guided by the following criteria:

1. They were in their 50s at the time of the interviews. For purposes of this study I am defining the 50s as mid-adulthood. The age chosen reflected the fact that my 50th birthday had been a time of great personal significance for me and stimulated my curiosity about the experiences of other women who were about the same age.
2. They had reflected upon, and were willing to talk about, their life experiences.
3. They were unknown to me. I decided that attempting to interview friends, relatives, or anyone with whom I already had some sort of relationship might create complications which could interfere with the research process. For instance, a friend might not feel comfortable discussing a particular topic, knowing that we would

be seeing each other in different roles after the study was completed. On the other hand, I might react to some information in a less open manner, perhaps being biased by prior knowledge or opinions. As well, there would be the possibility that certain issues might be avoided altogether because of consequences at a later time.

4. They lived in Winnipeg or within a short driving distance from that city.

### Sampling

In order to learn about the experiences of women in mid-adulthood I used a sampling strategy which purposefully sought out participants who were likely to have the information of interest to me. I began by asking friends, acquaintances, and colleagues if they knew of anyone who might be suitable and willing to take the time to be involved in the study. Because I asked people whose perceptions I trusted, I relied upon their judgement to identify potential participants.

I learned about Laura from a mutual friend who asked her if she would be interested in participating. I first contacted Laura by telephone in early September, 1993. I briefly explained the purpose of my study; described the data collection methods (including the interview process, sample questions, recording and transcribing procedures); plans to ensure anonymity and confidentiality; and my hope that her role in the research would be a collaborative one. She was interested but hesitant to commit herself until she had asked several questions about the study, the program I was enrolled in, and the extent of her commitment. She said she hadn't done

anything extraordinary or unusual and wondered if she'd be suitable. During the course of the conversation I kept in mind the criteria previously set out and intuitively assessed her remarks and responses accordingly. Laura was interested in the purpose of the study and spoke readily about herself and her situation. Her comments were related to the kind of information I was seeking so I was satisfied that she would contribute in a positive way to the study. We agreed to do one interview and then decide if we would do more. Again, prior to the interview itself, Laura was interested in knowing the details, asking questions as she had in our first conversation. After the interview she reiterated two or three times that if I felt she wasn't giving me the kind of material I wanted, she wouldn't be offended. My response was that my focus was learning about her world according to her point of view and that whatever her experiences had been would be valid for the study. Once she was reassured that I had no question as to her suitability as a participant, she decided to commit herself to at least four interviews.

My intention had been to use a snowball sampling strategy whereby Laura would refer the second participant. This did not happen as planned because Laura did not know of anyone in Winnipeg and I did not want to travel outside the city during the winter to conduct the interviews.

I therefore repeated the process of asking people I knew if they would get in touch with anyone they thought might be appropriate. A friend asked a relative, Lillian, who readily agreed to take part in the study. Lillian sounded enthusiastic and positive

when I first spoke to her by telephone in December, 1993. Through some misunderstanding she thought I was looking for more than one participant and had contacted a friend of hers who was also willing to be interviewed. I gave Lillian the choice to be interviewed herself or to let her friend do it. She chose to go ahead herself. I briefly explained the study and what her part would be, as I had with Laura. Lillian, too, volunteered personal information which indicated that she had reflected upon her life experiences. She didn't appear to have any hesitation about taking part and I was satisfied that her involvement in the study would be a fruitful one. When I called her in January, 1994 to schedule our first interview, she was noticeably more "business-like" and I had some concern that she may have changed her mind. This worry was heightened when I called the day before our first interview to confirm, only to find out that she had forgotten it. We did, however, reschedule with no difficulty.

#### Ethical Issues

The participants were made aware of ethical issues and plans to deal with them prior to being interviewed. I informed them verbally in our initial conversations on the telephone. In addition, they both received a letter (Appendix A) outlining the details of the study and a Consent Form (Appendix B). Because Laura preferred to do a preliminary interview before making a final decision, she read the letter and signed the Consent Form after the first interview. Lillian read the letter and signed the Consent Form before we began the first interview. Issues which were discussed included:

1. Anonymity and confidentiality. I assured the participants

that no one other than me would have access to the tape-recordings of the interviews or my fieldnotes. I had planned to be finished with the tapes within six weeks of the interviews, at which time they would be destroyed or erased. The transcribing was completed within this time frame. However, I thought that it would be helpful to listen to the tapes again as I was analyzing the transcripts. When I asked Laura if she would agree to my keeping the tapes for a longer period of time, she not only consented to this request, but also asked if she could listen to the tapes after I was done with them. I turned the tapes over to Laura. Lillian had no problem with my keeping the tapes for a longer period of time. Her tapes were erased September 6, 1994. Neither woman expressed much concern at all about the issue of confidentiality. Laura said that "there was nothing there that I would be worried about other people hearing." Lillian commented, with a laugh, that "I doubt anyone I know will get to read it."

I decided, however, to disguise their identities by changing their names and those of other people mentioned. I also described their homes in such a way as to make it more difficult to pinpoint the location. In general I tried to faithfully represent what I was told and what I observed, bearing in mind that there were third parties involved who had not given me permission to write about them. In those cases I tried to describe them in such a way as to reduce their risk of being recognized if this was at all possible.

2. Informed consent. Permission was obtained prior to the interviews to tape record the sessions. It was made clear to the



participants that they had the right to decide not to discuss any topic or to decline to further pursue any topic already under discussion. They were also aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

3. Follow-up support. A list of counselling resources was available if either participant experienced any distress during or after an interview. When I discussed my role in the study with Laura I explained that I would not act in a counselling capacity but that if she felt any distress during an interview I would attend to her in a supportive manner and we would discuss whether or not to continue. In the first interview, when speaking about her employment experience, she remarked that, "If I have counselling things to do, I, I, not in a formal sense, I think I want to learn from my experience." She repeated this observation the next time we met but did not show any signs of being distressed about this issue. Lillian, at our first meeting, reassured me that she wasn't concerned about things coming up that would be troublesome. She remarked that, "there have been hard times but they are resolved." To my knowledge, neither participant became upset as a result of taking part in this study and did not ask for any support.

#### Data Collection

Data was collected in the fall of 1993 and the winter of 1994. Interviews were the main source of data in the study. I met with the participants in their own homes, the rationale being that they would be most relaxed and comfortable in settings which were natural and familiar to them. Meeting them in their homes provided

me with a broader context in which to set the information obtained verbally. As well this allowed some characteristics which might not have otherwise surfaced to become visible. For example, meeting in her own home allowed Laura to display her sense of hospitality. There was always coffee, toast made from bread purchased at the local bakery, cinnamon buns dripping deliciously with butter, or home-made muffins. Small jars of jam, sugar in a Mason jar, flower-patterned plates, cups, and saucers produced an effect which was comfortable and welcoming. I came to see this as an important piece of information because it rounded out the picture of her which emerged during the interviews.

I found it easy to find common ground and thus establish a rapport with both Laura and Lillian. The interviews were relaxed and enjoyable. I started out by talking about my interest in this particular topic, what had stimulated it, and some details of the questions I had asked myself upon arriving at mid-adulthood. I also spoke of my course of studies and how a qualitative research method was an appropriate way to obtain the kind of information I was interested in. I began by asking Laura and Lillian the questions concerning demographic data (Appendix C). This served as a way of easing into the first interviews. I found this useful as well in providing an overview from which we could choose topics to focus on in more depth.

After the second interview I asked Laura if she would agree to more than the four sessions she had contracted to do. She agreed, and we met five times. The taped interviews averaged one to one-

and-one-half hours each. We usually visited casually for about a half hour before and after the formal interviews. I did not sense any pressure from her to rush away at those times. As the study progressed, the time I spent with Laura increased as we became more and more comfortable with each other. Conversations at those times centered around my activities and other events in her life which she didn't necessarily address at length in the taped interviews.

Lillian also agreed to four interviews. I did not think that there was a need to do more at that time but I did ask her if I could contact her in the future if I felt it necessary and she was willing to do that. My sessions with Lillian were more structured in that I arrived a few minutes before the appointed time, we began the formal interviews soon after I had set up the tape-recorder, and I left shortly after the conclusion of the taped session. The interviews were all about an hour in length. I lingered once when, after the first interview, I noticed the many photographs displayed on the mantelpiece in the charming alcove off the front foyer. Lillian was pleased to show me the pictures of her parents, children, and extended family.

My goal was to conduct the interviews in an "informal conversational style" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989, p. 405). This meant that the interviews were unstructured, beginning with exploratory, open-ended questions. Because I wanted to learn about the participants' experiences from their perspective, my primary role was that of listener. Rossiter (1988) referred to listening as "the real

work of interviewing" (p. 26). She went on to say that it is important "to understand listening as doing: listening so that we can hear, make sense of and understand the language of women's experience.

Listening is as active a task as talking" (p. 26). In order to listen well, I tried to set aside as much as possible any preconceived notions and judgements I had about the participants. It was helpful to remain alert to my own biases by addressing them in the form of reflections and memos to myself.

In keeping with the interview style I had chosen, questions arose naturally from the immediate context of the conversation. The interviews were interactive processes in which I had to remain open to new information and directions which emerged. Because I began with only a general area of interest in mind, I did not know what would emerge as a focus. As the participants told their stories in their own words, different aspects of their lives arose. We discussed these themes and mutually decided which of these we would explore more deeply.

It was important that the participants set the pace of the interview and that it was their agenda, not mine, which was followed. My responses were therefore tentative rather than directive. When I was unsure what they meant I asked for clarification. In many instances I also asked them to elaborate by giving more particulars and specific details. Recognizing that the purpose of the research was to learn about the participants, I kept the focus on their agenda. I was not seeking a relationship to fulfill any personal needs. I did, however, talk about myself to the extent

that it was helpful in providing background to the study and to respond in an empathic way to the material they were sharing.

The interviews were tape-recorded. The presence of the tape-recorder was not at all intrusive or inhibiting. We quickly got used to it's presence on the table, as close as possible to the participant, and carried on our conversation in a natural way. The only mechanical problem I encountered was with the recording of Laura's first interview which was done outdoors. The sounds of passing cars, planes, (and even a flock of geese!), caused a great deal of interference. I transcribed the tapes onto a computer disc as soon as possible after each interview.

Another important source of data consisted of descriptive and reflective fieldnotes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, chap. 4). The descriptive portion depicted concrete details of the setting and summarized our casual conversations. The reflective portions recounted my comments, observations, and reflections in regard to methods, analysis, ethical dilemmas, my own frame of mind, and points of clarification.

### Data Analysis

My goal was to identify, describe, and illustrate themes and patterns in the stories told by the participants, bearing in mind that

There is no such thing as pure or natural description. . . . Every step of the way--from setting a problem and selecting an appropriate place, person, or group for studying it; to selective focusing within that setting; to what gets recorded; to which elements of the recorded material make their way into the final account; to the style and authorial voice through which that is accomplished--reflects both conscious and unconscious

processes of focus and selection. (Wolcott, 1990, p. 28)

Issues identified in the literature, foreshadowed problems, personal experience, and early interview data provided a broad overview of the area to be researched. As the study proceeded I found that some of those issues were not important to these particular women; that they responded differently than subjects in other studies; or that they raised different concerns altogether. For instance, one might assume that menopause would be a significant topic in the lives of women of this age. Neither participant, however, mentioned it at all.

During the data collection phase I read the transcripts of each interview, looking for recurring themes. I discussed these informal interpretations with the participants at the beginning of the next interview. At that time we decided where to focus our attention. I focussed on the data itself as the source of information rather than trying to fit it into someone else's framework. There was a constant shifting back and forth in terms of allowing the interviews to flow freely and narrowing the focus.

Once the interviews were completed I began a more formal analysis. Using the computer program HyperQual2 (Padilla, 1993), I went through the transcripts line by line, coding each bit of data. Coding was an inductive process in that the code names were suggested by the data itself. The large number of coded bits of information were then collapsed into a more manageable number of categories. As I reflected and critically thought about these categories, I began to see themes, links, and patterns emerge. Once I

had established a theme, I checked the transcripts again to ensure that there was no contrary evidence.

I found the process of putting together the categories somewhat like looking through a kaleidoscope--the same bits of data could be rearranged in many ways to produce a different picture or pattern. It was very helpful to think aloud and discuss the dilemmas, conjectures, and possible meanings with colleagues. This allowed me to identify gaps in the data and clarify my thinking.

#### Limitations

This study shares those limitations which in general apply to all qualitative research, that is, it was conducted in a particular place, at a particular time, and under particular circumstances (Wolcott, 1990, p. 30). (It is worth noting that these limitations apply to other kinds of research as well.) In this study, two Caucasian women were interviewed in the fall of 1993 and winter of 1994. The data consists mainly of transcripts of interviews conducted in the participants' homes. One of the women had a university degree, was employed full-time in an administrative position, was living on her own in the city of Winnipeg, and was in a significant personal relationship. The other woman had left school at age 16, held a term position, and was writing on a free-lance basis. She was living with her husband in a rural area near Winnipeg. Both women had grown children who were no longer living at home.

Because this is a case study, generalization in the manner of a statistical study is not applicable. More appropriate is what Eisner (1991) referred to as a process of naturalistic generalization:

[This is] a ubiquitous aspect of our normal generalizing tendencies. We live and learn. We don't randomly select events in our lives in order to establish formal generalizations. We try to make sense of situations and to use what we learn as a guide to the future. The process of generalization is a pervasive feature of life and takes many forms. (p. 103)

In this way, what is learned from the women in this case study can alert us to both common and unique features in the lives of midlife women and thus point the way to further areas of research. Studying women of diverse backgrounds, for instance, would enrich our understanding of the many factors influencing women's development.

There are limitations in terms of the scope of this study. Although there were many possible areas of interest it was not possible to focus on all of them. Choices were made as the study proceeded--some issues were selected for further exploration while others were not. The next two chapters describe the participants, and selected themes which emerged are presented.

According to Eisner (1991), themes are "dominant features of person, place that define identity--like a pervasive quality" (p. 104). It is my hope that the unique qualities of each of the participants are revealed by the description which follows. I am aware that, because of the selection which occurs at every step of the way, the participants do not entirely speak for themselves. As the researcher I have perceived, heard, selected, and described according to my view of the world. The format for presentation of the themes is to make a brief analytical statement and then illustrate it with direct



quotes from the participants. The bulk of the material presented originates with the women themselves. In this way I hoped to avoid turning into the "chatty guide who becomes rather than gives the tour--and assumes that, without such a monologue we would not know what to think" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 29).

### Description and Analysis: Laura

This section contains an account of my first meeting with Laura, biographical data, our research relationship, and the themes identified in the interviews. The overall focus of the themes is one of change and development.

Laura was 55 years of age at the time I interviewed her in the fall of 1993. She and her husband lived in a bungalow in a small village which is located not far from the city of Winnipeg.

My first meeting with Laura took place on a warm, sunny September day. I found her house in the village with no trouble and pulled into the gravel driveway, went up the three wooden steps and knocked on the door. Any misgivings I might have had about meeting a stranger were quickly dispelled. Laura greeted me warmly and invited me in, explaining that she was just finishing up some writing.

We passed through the living-room which had a comfortable, lived-in look reflective of their busy, active lives. The brick wall running the length of the outside wall and easy chairs in front of the fireplace with swag lamps suspended above gave a welcoming ambiance. I commented on the view from her work-table in front of the large window. She said she enjoyed watching the variety of birds at the feeder just outside.

Because it was such a beautiful day we decided to sit outdoors for the interview. Laura carried a tray of coffee and home-made muffins to a small table set in front of the house, explaining that the mosquitoes were too horrendous to allow us to sit in the backyard.

We chatted informally for several minutes while I organized the tape recorder. Once that was set up we began with the background questions.

### Biographical Data

Laura was born in England in 1938 and lived there with her parents and siblings until she was 16 years old. At that time, her family emigrated to Canada, settling in Winnipeg.

Although Laura had attended a grammar school for girls in England which was preparatory to university, her formal education came to an end when she moved to Canada. Her family did not know a soul in this country and she felt obligated to go to work, explaining that "it wasn't unreasonable for people to leave school at that stage." Since then, her education had been an eclectic mix of university, community college, and adult education courses encompassing a wide variety of interest areas. In 1990 she obtained a diploma in Business Administration in Accounting, "a certificate I could hang on my wall. I was proud of that."

Laura met her husband-to-be in Winnipeg where her family had settled. They married and planned to remain in Winnipeg but a last-minute problem with the house they were buying resulted in their deciding to move to her husband's hometown. Laura and her husband had lived in their house for about 30 years, raising their children there. They were in the process of building a new house nearby. The children were by then all grown and living independently.

Laura's brother and his family lived in Winnipeg. Her sister

was the only one of her close family who resided out of the province. At the time of the interviews her parents lived in nearby rural community but Laura's father died shortly after we had concluded our series of interviews.

Laura worked full-time until her children were born. She continued to work part-time until her youngest child was eight years old. She then went to work full-time with the school division, ostensibly as a library clerk but in reality more as a full-fledged librarian. After several years in that position she applied for and got an administrative position at another school. Since losing her position at that school due to cutbacks in 1990 Laura had been writing as a free-lance journalist. She was also working part-time (until the end of the month) doing a variety of tasks including waiting on tables and looking after a gift shop.

#### Research Relationship

My first contact with Laura was by telephone. In retrospect, I think she interviewed me as much as I interviewed her. She asked questions about the study, my program, and her commitment so I spent time explaining the background to the study and what I proposed to do. She also wanted to know what area I was enrolled in, what specialty of counselling. She said she hadn't done anything unusual or extraordinary and wondered if she'd be suitable. I explained that I was interested in the world according to her view and whatever her experiences were would be valid. She said that after the first interview we could both decide if it would be suitable to continue.

Again, at the end of the first interview, Laura asked if she had given me any material which would be useful. She said it was "a good opportunity to call it quits. . . . You may not feel there's an awful lot." Once I assured her that she was giving me what I wanted, she was committed to doing her part. She took note of her thoughts between interviews; she initiated topics; she jotted down ideas and conjectures which I brought to her attention and made sure she addressed them all; and she responded thoughtfully to any questions I had. Although Laura had felt vulnerable in revealing herself at first, once I told her that I had experienced some of the same issues, she felt validated and more comfortable.

At the end, Laura asked if she could make some suggestions about the process of describing the data. It seemed to her to be similar to the process of cutting and pasting bits of information and looking for themes which she goes through in writing an article from an interview.

Laura said before we began that she would choose to keep certain parts of her story private and our understanding was that she was basically in charge of the content of the interviews and I would probe to the extent I felt necessary to achieve a clear picture of what she was telling me. At the conclusion of the final interview, she remarked that she thought I had done a good job in holding myself open to whatever she wanted to talk about, that I'd allowed the interview to flow, picking up on things she said.

When I thanked her for participating in the study Laura replied that she had derived a lot from it. She had given much

thought to many of the topics which had been raised and the process had helped her achieve clarity about some issues.

### Themes

The arrangement we made about how our interviews would proceed was that Laura would be in charge of the content; that I was interested in her view of her world. After dealing with the demographic questions (Appendix C) I asked her the broad lead-off question regarding inner changes she had perceived in herself now that she had arrived at midlife. This question cast a wide net and I wanted Laura to answer in her own way. The topics were of her own choosing so I ended up with material that was of significance to her. I will describe these topics as she related them to me. The data related to any one topic often appeared in several different interviews, that is, we didn't decide to focus on one topic and discuss it until it was done. Rather, the interviews had more of a rambling, conversational quality, with twists, turns, and changes in direction as one thought would trigger something else. There was often a quality of "thinking it through" as Laura spoke. As I went through the transcripts I gathered all the material related to each topic or theme, thus building the description bit by bit. I wanted to focus on development and change throughout these topics. Some of these changes were the result of choices she had made; others were forced upon her. The consequences of these changes led to further changes, both external (e.g., finding a different job) and internal (e.g., developing a different outlook). The remainder of this section presents the topics which emerged in my conversations with Laura.

The main themes were (a) employment, (b) development of talents and skills, (c) development of self-knowledge, (d) gender issues, (e) family, (f) status in the outside world, and (g) the wave.

### Employment

In this section Laura described some of her work experiences. She went on to examine the ways in which those experiences had caused changes for her.

Working outside the home had always been a significant part of Laura's life. At age 16 she came to Canada with her parents "as an immigrant and . . . went right into the work force." Laura described her earlier years at work:

My history of employment was to be employed until I was married and shortly thereafter and then to stop to have children and always, it sort of, ah, part-time, maybe a week here or something like that. But I went back to work fulltime I suppose when my daughter was, like 8, the youngest. So I went into school, divisional system and so I was always home, you know, at the time. So from then on I think, pretty well I consider myself to be fully employed.

It was characteristic of Laura to throw herself into her work in the school division with great enthusiasm:

I was a librarian in the school system. I always felt I was a teacher. I think I'm a frustrated educator (laugh). I was the librarian but I think again I took it to the ultimate, as far as I could go. Essentially, on the books, I was a library clerk. As a library clerk I was only expected to stand by the books and be in the room when the teacher took charge of the class. That wasn't reality. I developed programs, I worked with staff, and we had wonderful times. Built up libraries and did all the things a regular librarian would do.

In spite of her commitment and hard work Laura did not

always receive recognition for her contributions. She was paid the "very nominal wage" of a clerk when she was, in fact, performing the duties of a librarian. As well, she was sometimes undervalued by not being acknowledged as a full-fledged member of the team at the school. This was sometimes a painful experience:

I always figured myself to be part of a team . . . but there's always a time in the school where it comes down to the staff and the support staff. And while most of the time that was never evident because I became friends with . . . the teaching staff . . . sometimes the administrator would say, "Well, this is a meeting for just the staff." And then I would hurt, because I used to think, "Hm, I'm not support staff." . . . I've been in that role where I've often felt that to be a very meaningful existence . . . but somehow when it's pointed . . . out I used to think, "Well, you see, I'm not just as good as the staff" (laugh). And then my own inadequacies I suppose would come through and well why don't I have teaching degree or something like that?

In contrast, her next job provided Laura with a much more positive experience. In 1985, when she was in her late 40s, she was hired by \_\_\_\_ School as librarian and administrator of payroll and personnel. Overcoming the challenges at this school allowed Laura to appreciate her abilities:

It certainly brought a lot of challenges even in the, the administrative kind of things . . . Perhaps in other situations you might have said, "Well no, I don't do that," or "This isn't required of me normally," you just felt like you're always rising to the challenge because that was the aim of the school.

I took up physical challenges there that I was never thought I was capable of and they have changed my life in the way I could see things. . . . So that has always, I think, had a profound effect on, on sometimes the way I tackle things and my sticking power.



The personal satisfaction of achieving a high level of expertise in the snowshoeing program was coupled with monetary rewards as well. This position was the best paying one Laura had ever held and allowed her to contribute to the financial well-being of the family. Having her position terminated in 1990 was therefore a great shock:

That was a very traumatic experience because I put an awful lot of myself into that and I'd never been formerly out of work in that situation other than to quit to have children.

Laura's next two jobs suffered the similar fate of being on precarious grounds due to lack of funds. She worked part-time for an arts organization but "the writing was on the wall for that one too." She then started to try writing "for fun":

I got on a small newspaper that was just . . . it was actually like a meteorite, it took off. It was so well received in the region, it was, people really liked it. I was writing my heart out. . . . Again not very much money and again I could see the writing on the wall.

These experiences were a blow to Laura and resulted in changes in her thinking and attitude towards work:

You suddenly realize they have no obligation. It doesn't have any care for you. It doesn't really matter what you did as an individual. But the Board that runs things . . . decide[s] to shut down, the bottom line comes . . . and you as a person are suddenly left holding the bag.

So now I'm weighing the way I do things a little differently. . . . That has had a more of a profound impact on me than an awful lot of things.

It's a change because I was very naïve and I always used to think that one works very hard for one's employer or employment, puts everything you have into it. That's an obligation, a responsibility and that's what one does.

I'm very skeptical (laugh). . . . I want to learn from my experience. Don't put all your heart in your job. . . . I feel a sense of betrayal in that.

Long-standing habits of responsibility and commitment still remained, however, in spite of the feelings of betrayal:

There are times you simply have a job to do and you do it . . . but I . . . always try to balance it. . . . But there was still my own attitude that, you know, "Don't bother me now, I'm working." And that still applies in lots of ways. But I'm more conscious of it.

Although Laura was "quite successful in writing for the Free Press and The Co-Operator, some large, larger newspapers which have a good circulation," the difficulty in finding stable employment has had a significant effect:

I am employed on a part-time basis 2 days a week right now for the summer. . . . My task is to reorganize the records system. . . . [and] I'm a "gofer". After the end of September . . . my, like, employment situation again will probably be down to the writing again. Not exactly employed. Not a living wage.

I am a dependent. . . . [but] I have a need to contribute to the family income. . . . I was raised to be a self-sufficient person.

I felt very poor. As a woman, as an individual, . . . as a fairly functioning adult . . . who's relatively intelligent and has the will to work . . . I feel very, uh, upset that I cannot . . . support myself.

When did I start to think of myself as unemployed because, for the most part when you leave school, you got a job, then you got married, then had children. In my lifestyle, that's what it was. I never felt unemployed then. That was never a feeling of being unemployed (laugh).

If I'd never gone back to work, if I'd lived an older fashioned

type of life, and said I'd always stay home, you know, and be the primary homemaker, would I have felt unemployed.

It was clear that, at that time, Laura was seeking to clarify her goals about employment and career:

I suppose there is a certain degree of what you want to do with your life, a career. I'm not sure about that either. I'm drawn two ways. I can be a gypsy, but once I'm at home I'm quite happy to be at home. But just send me on the road and I'm happy (laugh).

I do have a project that's probably, could be important to my career if there's still a career to have but, and I find myself, like my daughter phoned, "Do you want to go out for lunch?" And yep. Like I would do that. I have to look at the other's vague enough and it's intangible enough at this point that I have to say, "This is here".

I have goals but I think they're smaller and, mind you, I never had long-term, big goals. I've taken advantage of opportunity, essentially. I think I've looked for it, I put myself in, position to be able to accept it.

My goal was to write for the Free Press. I just got my first cheque for the Free Press. At this stage it may or may not go farther but I achieved that goal.

It's interesting because I don't know that I have career goals anymore, I probably do. If the right thing came along I'd probably jump at it (laugh).

Laura's work experiences were both positive and negative. Some of the changes which occurred as a result of these experiences were external, for instance, choice of work. Other changes were internal, for instance, her attitudes about career and her views of herself.

The search for a new career, and the question as to whether or

not to even have one, was related to Laura's ongoing development in several different areas. The next section illustrates these developments.

### Development of Talents and Skills

The developments illustrated here are those which began later in Laura's life, mostly from her late 40s to the present. The following areas emerged as most significant: physical challenges, music, writing, and learning.

#### Physical challenges.

The last school at which Laura had been employed provided her with the opportunity to experience and overcome many obstacles. This was illustrated in her success in the snowshoeing program:

I did take up the snowshoeing program which no woman had really done to the degree I . . . attained there. It was very hard, and I cried a lot (laugh) but I persevered.

There came a time at \_\_\_\_ School when I was what they called "the last man." . . . and I could look on the back of the bush trail and there was nobody behind me. "I'm the last man."

And that was something. Because when I started off I definitely wasn't the last man, just one of the stumblers that needed all the help.

Laura commented on the changes within herself which resulted from this achievement:

I think the \_\_\_\_ School experience was something that . . . was sort of enabling me to be this different kind of more self-sufficient person.

It was a freeing thing . . . because I would always be the one at

home, sort of worrying. . . . And this time it was me being out. This time it was me being out all day (laugh). . . . It was something that I was able to experience. And so I think, so that was an enlightening thing.

One thing it means that we [my husband and I] were able to do things where I might have said, "Oh, I don't think so." It gave us greater dimension to do things, some of the canoeing things. I would, I, I am scared, I'm not saying I'm not scared, but I do go. . . . It's allowed us to do those things, if we choose. . . . even in the winter. . . . I know I have the capacity to be out and what to and how to keep myself warm.

### Music.

Music had always been a part of Laura's family life, from the time of her own childhood piano lessons, to the \$25 piano she and Tom purchased when they first married, to music lessons for the children. In 1987 she took the initiative to get some people together to share music:

We went to the [Winnipeg] Folk Festival. I thought, "I know an awful lot of people who are musical and they don't know each other but I know them. I don't see why we don't start our own folk festival idea." . . . And so we got together, it was an opportunity to share some music. . . . And then we had an opportunity to play, to perform.

This group ultimately had 10 members but came to a traumatic, emotional parting of the ways. Laura and others had difficulty coping with one of the members whose "allegiance was to the music" rather than to the other people in the group. As a result, "for various reasons some people pulled out." The "remnant group", of which Laura and Tom were a part, was beginning to gain attention both in live performances and the media:

We just made a tape-recording. CBC's picking us up tomorrow

and nationally on Saturday morning. . . . We'd always tossed around the idea of making a recording, decided let's go for it.

At that time of her life, Laura was continuing to expand and refine her musical capabilities:

I think that now is a function of this stage of life, is the fact that you start looking for "I'm going to do it." I mean, I just took up playing the mandolin 2 years ago. I never played it before, so becoming proficient at that. So these are relatively late-life kinds of things you know.

I think too as the group reduced it's size, we became more exposed. Again it was another learning experience, whereas in a whole group of people you can do your bit but it's more covered, now you become more exposed and now with being recorded you're exposed even more. You have to be really good at your own part.

I think there is more of a dedication: "I'm going to be a really productive full member of this group." You can't slide or hang on anybody else's coattails because they're good. There's a tendency to say, "They're good, let them do that." It's "No, no, I will work at this too." And that is part of the recording process because when you're in there by yourself, you do it, because they record us in track.

The break with the original group was an emotionally painful time. The realization that her new group had its own validity took some time:

It was always difficult to go watch them without somehow, I think you know, comparison. We always figured they were better than us.

We saw them on Friday, Saturday night and I came away feeling really good about our group. I realized that we don't have to compare all the time. . . . The particular mix of people that we now have in our group allows us to do some of the things that the other group can't.

So therefore I have to look and say, "I have a valuable contribution in some way." And you're not sure exactly how it is but the mix works. Whether it's choosing the music or the kinds of music that you bring to it or, or just getting in there and doing it. . . . That is an important part I think of this stage in my life anyway, is recognizing that.

I think I'm coming more to realize that the elements are very similar all around, you know. But it's what you bring as the individual to it. And, and that particular mix that makes it. So the same song can be sung in different ways and, and you suddenly realize that this is the way we do it. It's a choice of instruments and people and arrangements but it's our choice. And that validates it.

### Writing.

Although Laura began writing just "for fun", it took off in a big way. Laura contributed articles and stories on a free-lance basis to some larger newspapers. Her interests included "interviewing people, . . . preserving our history . . . and the environment." She was finding that creating a story was a difficult process:

Every story I write I always have this inner anxiety, "Can I do this, can I do this?" Em, I've been relatively successful in what I've done in terms of feedback from most people although I'm a beginning writer. But each time there is this, you know a real apprehension, "Is it going to be alright?"

This last month or so I've had . . . really guilt feelings because I haven't done as much. . . . I'm, I'm sort of think, "I'm losing it, I'm losing it."

I keep thinking, "Why am I having a hard time (laugh) getting back to this?" Simply because I've broken the pattern. Where before I was in the pattern, it was fine, I've broken it and I'm a little scared about breaking it.

Because I'm relatively new at this, each time when there's a, a hiatus or a break in it I feel, "Can I do this?" . . . It's not a full

confidence yet that I can do it.

In spite of this uncertainty Laura was aware that she had proven herself to be capable of writing stories when she had to:

You lose your contacts . . . Yet I keep thinking, "I did it before from nothing. I actually came from nothing and did it." . . . So it's a little sense in myself right now that says, "Trust me, that I can do the same again if I choose."

I'm a little scared about the writing business because . . . I've generated it . . . It's up to me to maintain it. . . . As a free-lance person it's only up to me. Nobody's on the other end saying "Oh yeah." So that's uh sort of scary but uh again having to work with the inner trust, you know.

The anxiety about being able to generate material when needed was beginning to be offset by a sense of the validity of her viewpoint:

I am able now to have a little more confidence in the fact that it's from my perspective. And somehow that makes a difference. And yes the topic may be somewhat similar . . . but it is in how I perceive it. And I perceive some things that perhaps others wouldn't. And I'm learning I think to go along with that.

I know when it's right. Like there's, you know, a really good gut feeling that says, "That's right for me." It's not right in the "right" sense but it's right for me. . . . [and it] is just as valid as somebody else's.

### Learning.

Seeking knowledge had long been an important aspect of Laura's life. Her eagerness to learn new things came from a joy in learning coupled with a sense of time running out:

I used to have catalogues come from the Extension of University of Manitoba. It was the most exciting day when



they came by mail, these books you know (laugh). Wonderful, actually.

That, I think, is a function of age. I don't feel I have as much time left. I go, "Whoa, there's so much to know. I want to know it all and how will I ever get it all in?" . . . There is such a lot I that think would be wonderful to know.

She was then at a point where she was differentiating between two kinds of knowledge:

There's a kind of knowledge, you know that one gets from, like I say, classic literature or something like that, it's self-knowledge. And then there's the other kind of knowledge, like I say, that's a fact-driven one, technological I guess.

Laura had come to a point where she was experiencing a change in her focus in terms of the kind of knowledge she wanted to acquire:

I would always be the person who would read . . . novels . . . or historical fiction. . . . so maybe there was always that growth to go through things.

I don't read as much for pleasure [anymore]. . . . It's mostly for research and knowledge. . . . So I suspect that what, the kind of knowledge I'm looking for is more factual-based. . . . But it's come more lately.

Laura's motivation for changing her focus from what she called self-knowledge to factual knowledge was related to the value she believed is placed on the factual kind of knowledge:

Because it seems important to know facts, right? That kind of knowledge. . . . Although while I would think the one is probably important for oneself, it's important to have knowledge of the other kinds of facts. And again, I don't know whether that's society-based, or em value judgements again. I'm not sure where it comes from.

I have to start looking at these, because who do you value or are valued in society? People that know the facts. . . . It's an authority of knowing about something. You can say, "Oh yes, I know about that."

Through her writing assignments Laura had been successful at acquiring the kind of factual knowledge she considered to be valued:

In journalism like I have all of these little things that I know about. . . . because I've researched those sort of things, . . . that the water table in, in Netley Marsh drains from Janice Lake.

Perhaps it's just maybe a getting to know the area in a . . . different dimension. . . . Maybe it's going into more depth. . . . I could equate it to the farmer . . . who seems to know about the land. . . . Em, there's a knowingness they have simply because they've dealt with it over the seasons. . . . And maybe this is my way of knowing (laugh). I don't know, in a different way it's em, I'm interested in knowing. . . . So perhaps I want to be able to parallel that in some, to some degree. . . . I'm not sure what it does to me to know that but it's a knowing.

In spite of the acquisition of some factual knowledge, Laura found that she had difficulty in forming her own opinions:

I think for myself I don't feel in control of the fact enough. . . . So should I be challenged on some issue . . . I would not have the wherewithall to be able to come back and reply. . . . Part of it is a lack of knowledge, and I'm not sure why I don't have that knowledge. Probably because I haven't sought it out.

I'm almost overwhelmed by people who can . . . quote stats and have those supportive kind of things and think, "Oh gosh, I, I couldn't tell you how many (laugh) thousands, or, or what those stats are." The numbers go by me. . . . Em there's a certain sense that numbers make a difference . . . [and] solidify people's arguments. Those details.

Not having the facts was not the only obstacle Laura encountered. Being able to see more than one side of the argument caused ambivalence in her thinking. She voiced concern about her

ambivalence:

To be able to debate. . . . on such an issue as abortion . . . I think I should be able to come up with some strong argument as a woman. . . . but I can't seem to put it in a succinct kind of way. And I'm still not sure because I can still see both ways. I can still see both sides.

And yet there's, again part of me that says that's a bit wishy-washy too because it doesn't say take a stand and I think that's a part of me I'm not too proud of. . . . I mean you have to take the potshots (laugh). . . . but there's a courage in that, that I don't think I have. You see, I'm not willing to stand up and say "I am this [label]."

Laura found that trying to marshall her own thoughts and, at the same time, attempting to keep up with the ideas someone else was putting forward in a discussion was a difficult task:

You're always trying to scramble where they were. . . . You're sort of scrambling to catch up. . . . You're really not really in control of your own area. You're sort of somewhere knowing a little bit about this topic but not fully.

Right now I'm having to look and say, "OK, have to be confident in my own rightness." Because when you are scrambling for somebody else's, you [sic] always behind.

When faced with a situation where a choice must be made, Laura realized that having her own valid opinion was necessary in order to assess someone else's argument:

There's the two rights . . . that you have to decide between. . . . It's those two things that both have validity and yet one must choose, you know. And how do you choose.

You do realize they are opinions. . . . You don't have to agree with it. I guess you choose the one that's closest to the way you feel. But again that means that you need to be firm in what you believe. Or at least have a stand in some way.

Laura would have liked to form her own opinions and believe in the validity of those opinions, particularly in regard to political issues:

I'm finding myself at the stage in my life when I feel I should be somewhat political. And I have a really difficult time with that. "Laura, you have some thinking capacity. How come you can't come up with a strong political leaning?"

I've always bounced [in my opinions] but . . . I see some people who have strong political leanings and think, "Whoa, how do they come to that?" you know. But I don't feel as strongly. . . . So, so yes, I feel strange in that. . . . And guilt is a word I would attach I think. . . . It's really strange not to be able to tack some label. And yet I don't know if I have that much will or desire to get into it that strongly.

I must admit I'm lazy about this thinking thing, things go through my head and then, you know, doing other things.

Maybe that is part of the function of feeling em right in one's statements or opinions. Like I think if you can sort of stand up on the soap-box and say, "I am a political person with this label", you must have a certain sense of rightness of how it feels or, or that you can support your argument.

I wish that now I could sort of really come to terms with my rightness. Em my opinion has a validity. It may not be in the accepted way.

So I think in terms of personal development that's something that I would want to probably solidify a little bit more for myself so I don't feel like I'm dithering around.

[The] difficult part is if you feel that you're not right . . . you can't validate your rightness em then there's a degree of . . . not using your voice.

Laura expressed the idea that acting out one's beliefs is perhaps an alternative to debating them:

OK, this is the way you believe; this is the way you act. . . . Hopefully people see that. Maybe there's no necessity to put a label on it (laugh).

Maybe again that's why I see it as action. . . . that says, "OK, so you can't always stand up and proclaim it." . . . If you can't always do that then at least you can live it to the best you can.

Laura was continuing to change and develop greater expertise in four areas of her life. Some of those developments (e.g., physical challenges, music, and writing) were at a point where she felt a sense of achievement, confidence, and validity. Others (e.g., maintaining her excitement about learning and developing her ability to form valid opinions) were still in progress.

#### Development of Self-Knowledge

The development of skills and talents illustrated in the previous section both results from, and contributes to, Laura's self-awareness. The causes and effects are intertwined. Being an organizer and searching for role models are two areas in which Laura has made discoveries, come to some realizations, and attained personal insights.

##### The Organizer.

Laura was aware of her tendency to take over in some situations because, as she remarked, "there's that real sense that if I don't do it, nobody else will." Furthermore, once having taken on a task Laura believed it was important to do it very well:

Give me a job and I want to see it through to the end and do it now. . . . There's always that sense that when you take on something you, you see it through.

I have a high degree of accountability too. Whatever I'm doing, you know, I always want to, I guess I don't know who it is that I expect to come and look at these things and but it's gotta be right inside (laugh). It's not to be just on the surface, it's got to be all the way through. Sometimes you think, "Oh, I could let this mistake go," but nah, nah (laugh) you correct it.

As a self-described organizer, Laura had experienced some hard times because "people don't like to be organized and they fight that":

We were at the cottage and I put my sister's pork chops on the grill (laugh). She didn't like it and I didn't know why. I guess, I think that just symbolizes it in a sense that I looked at the time and . . . the occasion and said, "Oh, the pork chops should be on. I'll do it." She didn't see it in the same light, or the same way.

Experiences such as this have caused her to look at the consequences of her actions and to try a different approach:

Now I'm looking at the people involved. A lot of it has been inadvertant em hurt. If hurt has happened, it's been always inadvertant but it's because you only saw what has to be done.

I am an organizational person and that has a lot of good but it can also have a detrimental effect. . . . So now I'm sort of trying to learn some things. . . . Just sit back and not do that very hard.

On the other hand, when she has decided to allow other people the freedom to make their own choices, this has sometimes backfired:

In our music group. . . . for various reasons some people pulled out and. . . . I said, "OK, fair enough. You want to quit, that's it." . . . When we talked about it years later, people found that to be really difficult. That wasn't the Laura style. Usually I would have been on, the nurturing kind of thing, "How can we fix it?" But that didn't happen . . . and they didn't understand

why. They just looked at that as being lax, . . . not caring. To me in a sense I was trying to be more caring in another way but it wasn't seen that way so there was just as much pain (laugh).

Another aspect of this struggle was the recognition that other people also have the desire and abilities to do the job:

With our music group. . . . I've now handed over the organization of the money to somebody else and. . . . we have different ways of doing it. . . . [I'm] realizing that there are other people too with that real strong sense of organization. That they want to do it.

The process of trying to change her thinking and actions in these situations was not an easy one:

I think that's more of a conscious struggle right now. At this stage of my life, I don't know if it's my stage or my age or just finally the light dawns.

[I am] battling my innate personality that says, "Hey, this is the way you do it." . . . It's difficult to not do it, or not want to do it, if one thinks he can do it.

An example of the difficulty in changing her pattern occurred during one of our interviews. Laura suggested turning off the tape recorder while she was taking some time to think so that the batteries wouldn't be wasted. She immediately realized what had happened:

Although you have approached me . . . to interview me, . . . I want to somehow make it easier for you. . . . I won't ramble because of your tape. . . . And that's the part of me I want to get away from. . . . because . . . I'm learning now that . . . doesn't give . . . a credibility to the other person, who is entirely capable of saying, "Stop now. I have to change the tape now."

And I'm recognizing now that that is a fault, you know, that I

would like to correct in my life at this stage of the game. . . . So there is that certain sense, "Fine, you're capable of doing that. I don't have to worry. Sorry, but it's your problem I guess if I talk too long (laugh).

There was a growing awareness that letting go of some of the organizational responsibilities would free her up to develop her other interests. Here again, Laura had to consciously choose:

I had to become the president [of the music group] simply because I was the first person but, "No, no I don't want this." I learned from before, "Don't be in an organizational capacity, be musical." I'm trying now, actually to focus on music because I found I was doing more of the organizational, making the tea again. Others were playing and I was making the tea. The old-fashioned wife (laugh). Although it's hard to get away from that. The business things have to be done.

We haven't got big enough to have a business manager (laugh). I don't want it. I do it because I can do it, and because I have a responsibility to the group to do my part in that capacity but I don't want to do it.

Laura recognized that there comes a time when it feels right to leave something, even though others may have expected her to carry on:

I used to be . . . superintendent of Sunday School. My friend and I we, we ran the Sunday School. . . . and it was a . . . creative outlet for me at the time. That's when I was home with my kids and it allowed all of that organizational part of me to be able to flourish and the educational side. . . . But there became a time when I sort of knew it had ended, but you carry on anyway. "Gee, well, nobody else can do it, there's nobody else to do it" (laugh). So, although I was very much aware at the time, you still give it that extra year you know, before you could say, "No, this is finally it." Because in a small community it's hard to stop, stop something that's there. Em, people see it as going on.



I'm sort of conscious of that in other areas now. I'm conscious of the gut feeling that says, "Em, this phase has come to an end." . . . I'm getting more em able now to say, "This is an end. Let's quit it now." Let's not (laugh), you know, carry on this thing on for another year or something just because you're scared to say no you won't be part of it. More willing to say "No" to organizations.

What I'm more conscious of now is the endings, that things have cycles. . . . Whereas before you tend to look at things as, like forever (laugh). . . . Now I think I can see things that they're more cyclic, you know, they're cyclical in nature and em it's alright to quit. Somebody else will (laugh) take it up in that cycle. It's OK sometimes and, and probably wise.

Laura recognized that when a situation is no longer personally rewarding it was time to leave it:

I really do believe that people mostly only do things so long as they get some, something out of it. If it's not monetary, then it's a personal sense of satisfaction. . . . Once. . . . you start feeling, "Hmm, you know, the gains not coming back", either financially or . . . some emotional investment. . . . At that point I don't think that anybody can really make up. They could say, "I'll double your wages or, or whatever." I think it's gone. And now I think I recognize that and say, "OK, so it's gone. So you move and you change."

I think ah I think I've probably been aware of it . . . a long, long time ago with the Sunday School thing. . . . I just think I'm more able to be secure enough to act on it.

Laura firmly believed that "being a quitter, for instance, it's never been a part of one's life, like one doesn't quit (laugh) you know. You don't give up." She was coming to realize, however, that other factors have altered her way of thinking about that:

I think there's still that element that says what you do is important but there's also that element that says. . . if I quit in something, somebody else will take it over. The organization,

the situation . . . will adapt. I mean, that's not always easy to do because . . . your habits die hard (laugh).

She had come to the point of being able to refuse to take on more responsibilities, or to take them on under her own conditions:

I'm learning to say no. That's certainly something I've learned to in the last little while. Quite hard to, because at one time you always said yes, you know, particularly in a small community but I'm learning to say no.

Perhaps our music is the, that thing we can offer. And that while I have the ability to bake pies and to do those other kinds of things that are sort of expected and, and wanted in a small community that maybe our music now is, is a mutual trade-off. It could give somebody else some pleasure, it would give us some pleasure, and it could contribute to a good cause such as . . . the building fund. . . . It was a more of a partnership.

I've gone to the local school and I've done sessions on writing for the class because. . . . that's a learning experience for me and for them and it's a, a partnership.

Your community is important too but it's where you can have input into that community. . . . It meshes somewhat with your own needs. . . . And that's part of developing and feeling a little more secure too in the fact that the world isn't going to come to an end if I don't do that, you know (laugh).

### Role models.

This section traces the search for role models and changes in Laura's thoughts about the role models which were instrumental in providing guidance to her:

One of the things I'm looking for in my life right now is, or are, role models that can also model my life on too, because I am in this period of transition or, or change and em sometimes the acceptable role models haven't served me well.

I was a young mother who relied totally on Dr. Spock (laugh). . . . You took your parents and your mother-in-laws advice into, but after all it was another generation.

When I look back in retrospect I sometimes think I didn't give enough credence to some of my own internal knowledge. . . . It was what Dr. Spock said. . . . I've always looked to, to books or the outside authority I suppose.

At that point, however, Laura was beginning to look to people rather than books as sources of information:

The ordinary person, quote ordinary, nobody is really ordinary. To look at their lives and see . . . how they have brought a truth and a beauty to it.

I go to the interviews and I come away much richer (laugh) I think than they do. . . . I think, "Wow, I hadn't looked at it that way!" As I go about ordinary day-to-day tasks, these people's voices play through my head and I think about what they said.

Again I look probably at my parents. I think one always looks at parents as a role model, I think all one's life. All my life anyway (laugh). Well, even in fact in having children I used to think, "Well, I was born, wasn't I? Like my Mum is all right." You know in those initial fears that one has about childbirth and things like that you look at the positive aspect of your parents and say, "Hey, like that was all right. You survived it. You can do it too."

I have to look at my mother-in-law who lives across the way, who's in her 80s who gets out there with her wheelbarrow (laugh) and who really cooks with butter and sugar like you wouldn't probably believe and you have to start . . . thinking, "Well, all right, this is a person who's living, who's lived through all these various kinds of situations and . . . it's sometimes all right to do these things."

I looked at, again, my parents and my mother-in-law who were much older . . . and were taking off on these adventures and I used to think, "Wow, again, she did it. So right, she survived. One can go to England (laugh) you know."

I presume I look at other women, because being a woman. But there are men in my life too, whom I would look at too as a role model. Some of those came out of \_\_\_\_ School. . . . So it's when I came across some people there and I looked at things and said, "Oh right. So this was just another way of doing things."

Those role models were not necessarily exhibiting different ways of thinking so much as an extension of her own way of thinking:

Probably it's a certain . . . continuity I suppose of my own thinking but when you see that in another setting it was interesting to see . . . One of those would be em my former principal. . . . He was always an example-setter. He didn't ask of anybody what he couldn't do himself. Both Tom and I have always been conscious of that in our own lives, with our own kids. I guess it was reinforced to me to see that outside again.

So I look at those things and I'm more prepared to apply things, because I see they've been done by other people. . . . It's giving a real credence to those people because I was always a book oriented person. . . . But I think right now I look at people.

At that stage in her life Laura realized that there was a validity that came from her own and other people's life experiences:

Yes, I have a . . . credible life, other people have a credible life. And that's actually what we are doing is living that life (laugh). Not to say that things cannot be found in books, you know, or the media or experts or those things.

Some uncertainty, however, still remained as to the degree of confidence she could place in this sense of validity:

I'm not sure you see whether it's my personality, my upbringing . . . where one gets the idea of this outside authority. Em, that they are the ones that know. I suspect for myself it's never quite 100% secure in what I know, that that is

in fact right, can I come out and say, "This is right for me." . . .  
It's always been somebody else's knowledge.

The movement from relying upon an external authority to seeing herself as a credible authority is shown in the following example:

It was only last year, I formally decided within myself that I wasn't going to go to school, anymore. I've always gone. . . . And that's always been great but this year . . . I've looked and said, "I think at this stage in my life I must have enough to draw on that I can start looking at some of my own things." If I need to take a course in word processing or something as a tool, I will take it.

And again when, as coordinator of the snowshoe run at \_\_\_\_\_ School she ultimately made the correct decision in spite of another staff member disagreeing with her choice of route:

So that was a real feeling I think of being on a, on an equal footing with somebody but that was because I had the training and I was in the same position and em so and I felt that I grew out of that. [It] lent more credence to my own feelings. . . . Here are some things I do know and speak with experience.

Laura had come to realize that she did not have to do everything herself. In allowing others to also take some responsibility she gained advantages as well. In her search for role models Laura was moving from reliance on outside experts to reliance on self as authority.

### Gender Issues

Laura did not address this theme directly as a separate topic and it was not clear that her thinking about these issues was undergoing a change. I decided, however, to include the data on this topic because her frequent references to gender led me to believe

that this was significant to her. Even though she did not make explicit links between her general comments and her personal experiences, Laura often juxtaposed the two, leading me to believe that there were connections present. Laura's views on the ways women and men experience the world differently were based partly on personal experiences and partly on observations of other people. Sub-topics which emerged were employment, caregivers, role, and power.

### Employment.

Laura's comments on women in the workplace revealed her belief that they have no authority or presence there:

I think employment again is, is women as invisible. . . . In the employment aspect . . . many women, . . . not that men aren't, are . . . in those "pink ghettos." . . . But there's a real invisibility there. . . . You don't have that same em function in society. . . . I guess it's prestige.

Essentially you are sort of a number you know, you are a person on a payroll and. . . doing a lot of those . . . functional kind of jobs and I think there's a real sense of invisibility there. . . . You see some women just fade into the woodwork (laugh) you know in job situations.

### Caregivers.

Women are often seen as the caregivers in society, not only for children but also for other adults. Laura's perceptions were in agreement with this view:

That is part of the maternal role I suppose that, there's a certain sense when this helpless infant becomes your care (laugh). You do everything for that.

You can still fall into that pattern, "I'll do this for you." . . . I

mean there's always the sense that the women carry the purse (laugh). It's got everything in it. That you need. . . . Perhaps there is that sense of em preparedness.

Women [are] . . . used to stepping in and helping out (laugh). When you get to the man's world. . . . and that's perhaps why I see \_\_\_\_ School as kind of a watershed. . . . you didn't need to step in and help quite so much.

### Role.

Laura contrasted the role of women in society as she had experienced and observed it with the role of women as she believed it might have been in other places and times:

[Being a woman is] being the one who waits. . . . I would always be the one at home, sort of worrying. He would go out and. . . . ice sail for instance which he came home once with a dislocated shoulder 'cause the thing tipped over. So there's always a degree of concern when they go out in those situations. So there was always the sense that you did the inside things to come home to, you know, the fire, the meal, whatever. . . . And I think by and large this is a male-female kind of thing.

There's always that invisible sector in society. It's more surprising today because we're sort of brought up not to be invisible. But . . . suddenly you've got this certain age and you see some women just fade into the woodwork (laugh) you know in job situations perhaps.

I'm sure that one hundred years ago. . . . there would be a different sense of purpose [for women]. . . . In some cultures or in . . . small communities as an older person or as a matriarch or as an elder in the society, you probably had some function that was a visible function (laugh) and I think now for the older woman in society it's, you're left invisible.

Laura perceived that men, on the other hand, played a more active role than women in society:

Males seem to get on with it. You saw something that needed

to be done, you did it. . . . And the same with Tom, . . . the males in my house too . . . They do stuff. You don't go and talk to my Dad and talk about all the neighbours.

And again, when speaking of her music group she said, "We give it thought, but we move on it. And em, so that's, that's different, that's . . . really very much out of the male experience."

### Interpersonal power.

The role or function of women in society is inseparable from the issue of interpersonal power, the ability to get on's way, to make decisions. These are some of Laura's comments on women's interpersonal power:

There's a certain sense of being brought up to have a sense of personal power. The whole idea that we go to school to be educated, we take training, all of those things are to give you a sense of personal power in some way. I would think it empowers you. . . . Then somewhere along the line it just seems that some people become more empowered than (laugh) others. . . . You may start out to have this feeling that . . . you are . . . part of the power structure of the world. Then there's a certain sense that one is more diverted.

One of the areas where Laura perceived that women do not usually have power is that of making decisions about where to live:

By and large it is women that do the moving not necessarily of their own volition. . . . I would hunch that by and large it's where the male goes in society and women are . . . always making new lives. . . . and always adapting. . . . I do see . . . people in a community who've come and gone and the reasons they've come and gone. . . . It's because it's a husband has moved his employment.

Laura had personally experienced moving and adapting to new situations as a result of other people's wishes and decisions:

I came with my husband here you know. . . . It was his home



town. . . . I'm not sure how I felt about it. I think I probably was just young enough, well we just knew we'd buy some land or something but it wasn't my dream I don't suppose.

More recently, the final decision to build a new house was taken while Laura was away:

We'd sort of talked about it for years and years. . . . I was in London and you know, "I started to dig the basement." And I just cried, "Oh no, (laugh) I'm here again. . . . We're in [this place] for the rest of our lives."

Since I've been more at home I'm , I think I'm more happy with that. And see it differently. . . . Now I'm coming to appreciate being in this particular location. . . . I guess because you take on this history in a sense, although it's not my own personal one, I think there's an acceptance.

Laura speculated that women's lack of power comes from both external sources and from within:

What is it that . . . sets you in this situation where you do feel inadequate in many ways? . . . Perhaps many women don't have what I consider to be the \_\_\_\_ School opportunity. There must be opportunities in other directions. . . . That's just one way and it just happened to be mine. . . . Perhaps some women do but I think maybe a lot of them don't. . . . It has to be a bit of a two-way where you accept it too, because I could have turned around and said, "Well, I'm the librarian. . . . I don't do those things." So part of it is, is an individual thing.

[At a conference] all the men were able to palm their business card off so easily. Where was mine--in my bag full of stuff. . . . [It] puts me in an inferior position, to be scrambling in my bag (laugh) for something that is always at the bottom. . . . It's in a very small arena of, of life. . . . and yet we accept it.

These are outside influences. . . . we go along with to a degree because we haven't as a . . . sector of society says, "We will not do this anymore." But there's a subtleties I think that sort of make that difference. . . . When it comes down to it I have to

start looking at it if there is an empowerment somewhere in that.

From the foregoing comments it seemed Laura had concluded that women generally play a somewhat passive role in society. She believed that, to some extent, this was because women continue to accept their situation.

### Family

The importance of family in Laura's account was evident by the many references throughout her interviews. Although Laura did not always speak directly of family, it was clear that she was firmly embedded within that context. She remarked that, "What you do has an effect on other members of the family. . . . So yes, I think I would say . . . for myself in terms of development, that's probably been a prime motivator of how I've developed." This section describes the changing relationships, influences, and roles within the family.

#### Family of origin.

Laura's parents and brother lived not far from the community in which she resided. Of her siblings Laura said, "There's that sense of family too that becomes important to you. Even should they move that there is still that connection, hopefully you'll maintain, it won't be sort of lost." It was evident as well that Laura's parents were still an important part of her life. She talked about the connection:

It's very interesting that it's something I'm finding out now more, that incredible . . . bond . . . between parents and children. But it just never goes away, it doesn't matter how old you are. Seeing that very, very strong connection with a parent, in my situation. . . . it's still there and I think it's perhaps discounted a little bit.

I have been in some . . . dangerous circumstances . . . like canoe (laugh) and . . . what goes through my mind is . . . if my Mum and

Dad could see me now. . . . and that's always a surprise. . . . I'd like to be able to show my parents that or tell my parents, even though they're not around anymore.

### Husband.

Laura spoke about the closeness of the relationship and the growing independence she experienced within that relationship:

We're so close in so many ways it's hard to separate yourself in some ways, like what he thinks and what I think and our ways of doing things and our broad outlook. . . . I think we work off each other. . . . so there is that sense again it's very hard to know what you're own you know.

Laura described the significance of the experience at \_\_\_\_ School in developing independence, strength, and confidence within her marriage:

My husband . . . always wanted to be sort of the protector I think. . . . So while . . . we always did things outside, we always went tobogganing . . . there was always the sense that he looked after me.

I had always been em covered in the outdoors, in Canada particularly because my husband was always there, he knew what to do. So there was always a man behind me and I never really ventured on my own.

The \_\_\_\_ School experience taught me that I could go out without him. . . . but it wasn't . . . an antagonistic kind of thing. . . . It allowed me to grow . . . and yet it wasn't at the expense of that key relationship. . . . There was no em how can I put it, ahh, no conflict within the idea of my marriage and what I did.

Sometimes within the relationship it could have a really negative effect. . . . if you were going to say, "Now we're gonna go out in the bush and I'm gonna be a leader." . . . So I was able

to learn those skills at an outside level and I could fail and I could win . . . but it wasn't at, at that other expense.

If we ever went on trips, mostly Tom would do the driving. And part of that is history because when you had children . . . one drove and the other looked after the kids. . . . There did become the time when I used to think I couldn't do it, . . . [but at \_\_\_\_ School] I was asked to drive a vanload, a van yet, a van, (laugh), of students in winter to em north of Edmonton for a race in February. . . . And then I thought, "I drove a whole van of little kids at, at 40 below out."

Those kind of things enabled me . . . and so the next time . . . Tom and I went on our holidays . . . I took shared driving. . . . I'm sure that it's different for Tom to be the passenger. It has not been his role to sort of sit there. . . . So it was one of those things . . . where I don't think I would have been able to do it without that \_\_\_\_ School experience. How else would I have sort of, sort of asserted myself to say, "I want to drive, I want to do this." Em because then I would have still been learning, in a sense under his tutelage . . . then, the slightest little thing then you say, "You do it" (laugh). So I think to me that, having that opportunity to have learned and become enabled through quite a few dimensions of my life that didn't threaten that other part of [my] life.

### Children.

Being a parent was a role Laura took very seriously. About the parenting part of her life she said:

There was always the weight of responsibility of raising a family. I took that very seriously. . . . so by and large while we had fun you know within the family structure I would still think that overall there was a real responsibility to do this right (laugh). One didn't slough off your responsibilities.

My goal . . . was to be. . . . a good mother and I think I've achieved by and large by what people say.

Setting examples themselves was one of the ways in which Laura and Tom put their beliefs into practice in raising their

children:

There's also a strong sense of the kind of role model I would be. . . . and that has driven me a lot, too. . . . If you had even . . . simple choices. . . . [such as] turning on the TV or reading a book. . . . lots of times I would choose to read the book . . . because that's a modelling thing that you hope someday your kids will pick up. . . . But conscious always of being . . . a role model, because . . . this is . . . the closest relationship of a family and for children that's what they're going to see, . . . the values. . . . So choosing those activities that would give a positive role model, so they could look, as I have looked, and say, "Well, my Mum can do that. Oh yeah, (laugh), my Mum can do that."

Both Tom and I have always been conscious of [being role models] in our own lives, with our own kids. Like if we didn't want our kids to come home drunk then we didn't go out and drink. . . . We were really strong in that way.

Settling in a rural location involved sometimes making choices in favour of the children's interests at the cost of her own:

When I was a kid I took music lessons, I walked down the street. That's one of those things. I came from an urban environment and things were closer and you could get about on your own. You just simply can't here as a kid. . . . We choose to live here but that's something you choose also.

Driving your kids to music lessons. . . . you ask how many hours and how many miles and you never begrudge it but . . . I used to think, "Too bad somehow I couldn't sit in on those lessons and gain a little."

I would never want to give the impression that this was ever meant em in any sort of regretful way but I do recall, 'cause I used to build it in. I went grocery shopping, or that sort of thing. But . . . you realize there's a lot of back and forth doing this sort of thing. And it's not only music. And you sometimes think, "Well, I'm the driver." . . . You're very busy but you're not active. . . . You come home from work . . . and you're doing this but you haven't really done anything active em in some way or creative for yourself.

There's creativity in the sense of how you choose the activities. . . . I spend a fair amount of time, em making the right environment. . . . [but] there's a certain sense of your own creativity as submerged with it.

Laura commented on how quickly the parenting part of her life had passed and the experience of launching her children into the world:

At this stage in life, now, you start looking and you think, "It does go by fast." I mean, there are times when you have little kids and you think, "My stars, it's going to last forever!"

I am conscious of course of children growing and becoming independent, which is what one would hope for for your kids. There's a sense of joy and delight in that but also a sense of loss. . . . So if anything it's maximize, make the most of. I will drop anything now for my parents and my kids.

I don't think one can ever leave one's kids in that sense. I think you're always aware. I think it's more difficult now because you have to sit back and let them do their thing and you can't interfere.

Each one is different and you tend to think, "How will you ever adapt without that person in the house?" you know, because you're so used to revolving around each other and each other's lives.

We went through some trying times, I mean it's the whole issue of control. . . . house rule issues. . . . But em by and large I think it was a good transition for us all. It wasn't, in the short

haul it was the ups and downs, but em I've always been pleased with the transition in some way. They come home, we have good times together.

### Freedom.

Because all her children were by then grown and living on

their own, Laura was experiencing a sense of freedom:

One thing I would be more aware of is that I have em the real freedom in the sense of being like a child. . . . child-like, not childish. . . . I've always had a certain joy in discovery. . . . I think I feel it more now. . . . With my kids grown I think there's even more of a chance to have a child-like look at things.

The sense of greater freedom was as much experienced internally as manifested externally:

Well essentially not too much different on the outside I don't think. I think it's more of a conscious awareness. . . . Little girls bring me feathers (laugh) 'cause I'm a feather person and I think it's neat. . . . I like this other stage where you can go ride your bike and look at flowers, try to identify them, look at birds. It's always been a part of me. I did it with my own family and my own kids. But there was more of a responsibility in that sense, em, so this way it's I can get on my bike and go (laugh).

Along with this sense of freedom, because of lessened responsibilities to children, came an awareness of not being needed in the same way anymore:

When I had children . . . I felt I must uh I must always watch for myself. I mean I'd be around with my kids and I didn't take chances with my life. . . . simply because they needed me at that point. There's a certain sense that when they grew up I could start to take more chances, I'm more expendable.

Laura continued to miss and to be drawn to the life processes which are part of family life. At the same time she was guarding her freedom:

My brother and his wife, now they've got teen-aged kids, you know, and I think there's that sense of life in that . . . They came from the hospital, dropped by us and they're on their way to their kids.

The biggest thing that I would notice, being home more now . . . and not having children em in a house [is] . . . you realize that there's a lot of life in that. And I think you miss [it even though] . . . you have your own life.

There are some times I think, "Well it would be nice to have a dog or a cat." (laugh). Yet part of me knows that I don't want that because it's a responsibility and it's (laugh) 10 years you know. . . . It's a very hard thing to resist. They come to the door, "Do you want a kitten, Mrs. Larson?" (laugh). Of course I want a kitten. . . . I want a puppy, I want everything. But . . . the hardnosed side of me that says. . . . do I really want to go to the foodstore again and start thinking, "Oh, I have to buy dog food and it'll cost 10 bucks." It's so nice to have this total freedom to walk out of the house and not to have to make arrangements for an animal, or a child (laugh). . . . So I appreciate that but there's a gut part that is drawn always to the life process and to look for it in, in other ways.

At that point she was making choices about how to fill her time now that she no longer had the responsibility of raising children:

That is the biggest thing, you look at there isn't that other [children at home] . . . because I'm home most of the day . . . myself when Tom is away.

[When you have children] you're motivated to do things on their behalf. And there's a certain sense of em selfishness I suppose that one now is motivated to do things on your own behalf (laugh). And that's alright but you know, again after being, years of being a parent, that is sometimes hard to, to justify.

What I want as much as anything is knowledge (laugh) and that doesn't go away (laugh). . . . You can always learn something. . . . I've always been a learner and I think that is a sort of a, a thing that says, "That's my substitute, is to learn new things and get excited by that."

This time of life. . . . [is] more like a child-like stage. And I think [I've] pinned that down . . . to the idea of creativity. . . .



I'm sewing by hand. . . . without a pattern. . . . It's the music.  
Back to the writing again.

My house. . . . [is] not as tidy as it, I would perhaps like it to be in some ways, because I'm making conscious choices. I think, "Clean the cupboards or write or sew or play." And that's what I'm choosing. Whereas before I was in more of a maintenance mode. . . . The creativity part of it is becoming more paramount.

This time of life for me in my situation right now is allowing that kind of creativity to emerge. Slow . . . and it's probably no great masterpieces or anything but they are my efforts at creativity.

### Limits.

In spite of the greater degree of freedom Laura enjoyed once her children were launched, she was aware of the continuing "obligation to one's parents and to one's children." Although the children were living away from home, there were no guarantees that they could always continue to make it on their own:

It's not as if it's, "Well, you know, you're gone for good." . . . So it's always this keeping this open door sort of thing and say, "Well, you know, you feel if you're, if you're stuck, rather than walk the streets or something, (laugh) then you have a home here."

Although Laura was excited about involving herself in writing, she was aware that other family responsibilities remained:

I look at limits, I look at, you know, family obligations . . . And the other side of the coin is that Tom is, is quite flexible in that sort of thing. . . . I try to, to maintain things [at home] so that's it's not, you know, (laugh), not a disaster.

Well of course em economically it would be . . . very nice to justify it [writing] with pay (laugh). The knowledge that I acquire, not that I have a lot, but whatever it is that I acquire is probably very em, how can I put it, it's not crucial to the

element of living (laugh). . . . feeding oneself, clothing and, and shelter. So the knowledge thing is kind of a little like a self-indulgence (laugh). Who really cares if you know this stuff (laugh)? It's important to me perhaps. . . . If you could think of maybe applying it to some direction where it could be recognized and valued in, in a dollar value.

I think there is lots of jobs to be done, the volunteer section (laugh), I mean, no two ways about it, the world is crying out for those things. But again, that is difficult in a dependent situation is how do you determine how much of somebody else's income, when they are working for it, that I will say, "Well, I'm gonna just volunteer for all this stuff," you see. It has to be a joint. Because there's a cost to those things.

I have to say the cost is (laugh) I sometimes think I'm not a very good wife (laugh). I heard the sewing machine going this morning at 5:30, quarter to 6 (laugh) and says, "What are you doing?" He says, "I'm mending my pants." I was embarrassed because I thought, "Here I am at home . . . and given the fact that he is the primary wage-earner at least I should be able to mend his pants (laugh) so he didn't have to go himself to do that." . . . I'm not coming back with the dollars and I'm still not mending the pants (laugh) but I'm still writing.

Living in a rural location posed limits as well in terms of possible employment opportunities. Laura commented, "Given my present circumstances, I mean if I were to turn around and leave and go to Winnipeg . . . maybe I could [find work]. No, geography and those kinds of things."

### Influence.

Laura discussed her influence, or power, within the family and how that had changed:

I'd have to say that, then your power as a family member, then as a woman perhaps if you are the traditional homemaker uh that's where your power lies perhaps. Because . . . you need to express that sense of personal power.

You're maintaining a sense of community, family, whatever by the shared kinds of things that you do. But in that somebody's sort of calling the rules, you know.

I'd have to think there's a certain sense of power as, as a parent. I mean you have that multiple control really. . . . That's what all the battles are about . . . and the kid things translate into, you know, their sense of identity and power. . . . That is the thing that you miss em, I shouldn't say miss 'cause you don't miss the power, but I think you recognize it.

That's something one gives up, willingly really because you want your kids to be independent, that's what you raised them to be. . . . You have to sort of step back from that and say, "I have no control (laugh) in there anymore," . . . unless they came to ask you something, for an opinion. So that's a shift of power, . . . hoping that they are personally empowered now but at the same time you lose a little of that.

At a later point Laura realized that the word "power" wasn't quite what she meant:

I'm using power when I probably should be using the word "influence" because, well, power has so many ramifications. . . . So please substitute influence for power (laugh) in a lot of these things.

#### Role.

When the children were young Laura felt it was "of prime importance to be home for them." She explained that, "When I first went back to the work force . . . I went back to the school system, because I wanted to . . . be around with my kids and my family came first." Laura commented further on her function in the family structure and the importance of the role of making the home:

By and large when the children were small and there were the things to do outside and he naturally did those and the kids

would go out and do the, the straw in the farm things and you're inside getting the meal prepared and those kind of things.

I don't think I ever valued them [inside things] as much as I did when I was at \_\_\_\_ School because I was the one outside doing the quote male things. I was out all day. . . . I valued them at home here when I came in after a long day and Tom had the supper on. "I'm in this golden bubble, it's gonna burst (laugh)." Like I'm home and the supper's there.

When you came in [from snowshoe trips], you knew you came in to hot chocolate and supper. You suddenly realized the value of that and the difficulty of that. That is the whole focus for all those snowshoe trips. . . . and there's nothing quite like that homecoming and that's what it's about.

It's always happened and so that's the role in your life is that you do the stuff when you come back and then there's the supper ready. . . . I won't say only meal but it's that function of making . . . the home. . . . And it doesn't happen unless you make it happen. But it's putting value on that happening. . . . You know it intrinsically that it's valuable.

In spite of the value she placed on making the home, one thing Laura had not yet come to terms with was to take on that role of being the one who waits at home, as her parents were able to do:

They always seem to have an ability to be there, to me. So you go there and it's always comfortable to be there. I'm still at the stage, I sort of want to do that but I want to go. I don't necessarily want to sit here all day just so I can have the supper on. I know it must be nice to come home to that, say, because I've appreciated both sides. I've come home from work and the dishes are still there from, from the morning when you didn't do them and the house is cold. You make it happen.

It's coming to terms with that as being a function, a very important function, of life, is being the person that sort of keeps the home fires burning in that sense. And being

comfortable with that role and saying it's important, because it is.

I find it very hard . . . just to be here, for the sake that somebody might come, . . . yet I know that that's important. So there's lots of times where there's a note on my door to say, "Hi! Sorry, gone to (laugh) the beach." . . . "Sorry I missed you." . . . But there's . . . a part of me would always like to be home just in case they did but I'm not at that stage yet. And don't necessarily always want to.

In terms of family, Laura was undergoing a time of transition. The achievement of her parenting goals and the development of a sense of independence within her marriage allowed her more freedom to pursue her own interests. Laura was in the process of determining a new role for herself.

#### Status in the Outside World

In this section Laura moved the focus of her reflections from the world of family to the world outside. The segments on recognition and categorization deal with the reasons for, and consequences arising from, her position in society as she perceived it. She went on to wonder where the judgements about her value originated. In conclusion Laura shared her thoughts about how she was taking action and finding her own way.

#### Recognition.

The lack of external recognition was an issue with which Laura was still struggling: "There's still that very strong need and desire in me to be, you know, recognized from the outside for the work one does." And again: "While you can recognize the value in yourself or whatever, there's still that certain sense of being recognized by the outside world."

She identified the employment sector as one which is often used as a significant measure of worth:

I think we evaluate ourselves by the salary we get paid often. So therefore if one is paid a low salary (laugh) then one obviously isn't worth too much in the hierarchy of things.

I think that that internalizes somehow to saying, "Well, I cannot say that this is the way it is because I make [only] \$7 an hour (laugh) or whatever." . . . There's an evaluation made somewhere about the level of skill.

If a kid has a sore throat (laugh) or whatever, I'd know exactly what to do. . . . I can say with some degree of authority now what one does, how one copes. . . . But there are work situations where they're not the kind of issues that come up.

Laura was looking at the job sector as a place where she could be recognized and rewarded. She had experienced a difficult time finding suitable employment: "I have lots to offer. I don't see always the places that I can offer it, with remuneration." She wasn't sure where the difficulty originated:

There was a time too when people would phone for jobs. . . . I think there's a little bit more of . . . an urgency to say, "Well it may not come about again." . . . That may be because of, of the em the recession. . . . It may also be a stage in life too so it's hard to know. . . . I was feeling old because I think, "Nobody's sort of phoning me anymore and saying, 'Hey, let's do this or . . . would you like to do this?'"

Then there's that other side of the coin that sort of says we are either educated or expected . . . to keep that drive [to achieve]. And when there is no real opportunity for that drive to be met . . . in some way in society, then you start questioning and wondering, "Hey, well what is it all about?" . . . I [don't] . . . want to become an invisible woman either.

### Categorization.

Laura saw herself as being categorized by external forces beyond her control; of not being "ready for what society has sort of thrust upon me":

There's a certain sense that you, you are moved along in your life. There are some things you do but an awful lot of situations you find yourself it's because of somebody else's actions. You become a mother-in-law; people become grandmothers. . . . They sort of put you in another category and you didn't do it but somehow now you are viewed differently in society.

I'm begin to think that employment is one of those movers too, or the lack of. And I think that that's why I feel particularly vulnerable. . . . I won't say I'm not employed . . . but it's not the kind of employment I saw in terms of career. . . . I am now moved into a category of em, see I could be technically early retirement, right, I'm 55. "Freedom 55" is all the rage. . . . But I'm not ready to do that. . . . So I feel like I have been moved into a category before I am ready to be there. Em, and that is difficult to deal with, you know, because I'm not ready.

### Who judges?

Laura speculated about where the evaluation of her worth originated: "It's so hard to know really, . . . you can't divorce yourself from you [sic] society, your location, all of those things." She wondered if it was coming from "out there" in society or was it coming from within herself:

Where is it coming from. . . . I tend to be a generalist. . . . I do not have a degree . . . that says, you see, I'm a master of something. So I think those kind of things internalize.

I am guilty of it myself. . . . I'm just as guilty . . . for the stereotyping . . . I let that happen . . . I say, "You are worth more than me because you [are worth] more dollars than I am."

. . . The [other] person . . . doesn't do that consciously. It's in myself that sees that way.

Then you have to look at who's society and who really says that. Is, is it really society or is it the other half of me . . . . So what are those subtleties that make the difference. . . . Sometimes the shift just happens. It just happens. And again it's a powerlessness I suppose. It's a, a loss of control.

I have to sort of fight and struggle a little bit with whether that perception is an inner perception or if it really is true. A lot has to do with a person's personality. . . . I just talked to somebody at the local tea the other day who's 92, who's . . . a real go-getter (laugh). . . . I mean she's out there, she's 92, somehow she got there. . . . So trying to recognize where . . . I lay the blame on society when I should be laying the blame, if it's blame, at my own doorstep. . . . And again that is probably needing to fight the images that have sort of come to control or influence one's life, whether from outside or inside.

So it's coming to terms with those things. And how you're viewed in, in the society. It is still the outside view is still important to me. . . . I'm not sure what kind of developments it would take to be able to get to the point where you don't care so much about what the outside [thinks].

#### Taking action.

Laura had made decisions about the kind of people and activities she wished to align herself with: "I've sort of tried to orient myself to action and people and women who are involved in action. So we don't sit around dissecting things or whatever." She explained why she preferred this different way of doing things:

Not that I don't like getting together . . . chatting or whatever. But . . . so much of it seemed to be sort of a, a negative in a sense. It was energy expended in a sort of a negative way because it would discuss situations or people situations em but nothing would really get done.



When you set yourself in certain situations you become . . . powerless. Because when you become part of . . . the group that either is calling somebody down [or] . . . just sort of discussing things. . . . you operate more isolated.

It's been one of the reasons that I've chosen to look at things where you work together, to keep friendships by working . . . towards a common goal that. . . . you've chosen, say a music group. . . . By doing that you're working together in tandem, in partnership to make something come about. You may analyze your mistakes but you're not just sitting around not doing anything.

The volunteer association that I belong to I feel is female-driven as a Board and accomplishes marvellous things 'cause it . . . takes its mistakes and . . . says, "Well, guess we tried that and we shouldn't have." . . . but it doesn't stop. It doesn't say, "We can't do that."

Now this is a sort of a relatively new awakening or a new experience because of situations I would find myself in before were often sitting around talking about somebody. . . . so it doesn't feel as powerful. . . . The other has a sense of power as it you're, you're at least working on your own destiny of your organization.

I used to work along with a friend [running the Sunday School] and we, we did that sort of thing. So I suspect that has been happening all along but I think I've solidified it more a little bit right now.

It's very fuzzy (laugh). . . . I have a feeling that it's, it's a gut thing . . . I'm trying to choose things that give a sense of empowerment.

There were some consequences of choosing to align herself with a different group of people:

Now the other side of the coin is you don't get privy to that . . . informal exchange of what's going on. . . . That's also removed me from that . . . group of, of females. . . . However . . . if it's something that's important that I need to know about . . . I will

know.

Finding her own way.

Laura moved from wondering how it was that she was placed into categories and by whom to contemplating her own choices:

Maybe you have this sense [of] . . . where you should be at certain stages. . . . Now I hate the word "should" (laugh). . . . Maybe it's balancing those things, the shoulds in your life and, you know, it's hard to know where the shoulds come from. They can be valid in some ways but it's maybe looking at them and . . . assessing them all the time for your own position.

Laura provided examples of choices she had made that went counter to the prevailing norm and her wish to honour her own preferences:

When I was thirty . . . I lived in a time when it was not exactly right for women to have long hair (laugh) in their thirties you see. Thirty was the time for, you should have your hair short by that time. And I think I sort of consciously made . . . choices, "Oh, who says?" . . . It was still part of that background . . . that had all of these shoulds, you know, the correctness for women. . . . Rather than looking at the individual and saying, "I can wear my hair longer or shorter, whatever, but it's my choice."

I'm toying with the idea of making my own clothes (laugh). . . . Trying to design something that would more reflect me. . . . I don't know if I've got the courage (laugh). . . . I don't think I'd dress outlandishly, it's not me. But to sort of look again and saying, "OK, these are things that I like in clothing." . . . I've often been in the bush . . . and thought, "I'd love to design something that fits today's woman, like from an aboriginal perspective of the kinds of clothing they wore."

As Laura was trying to find the place and role that best suited her in the world, she tentatively concluded that perhaps she had already found it:

I drive down Main Street and I think, "I should be there at that soup kitchen, I should be taking soup, I should be helping." . . . And then you have to think of how possible it is and plausible just to be able to spread yourself those ways. And then I feel badly because you think of these people in history who've made it possible, you know, and done these marvellous things. And you think, "Well come on Laura, (laugh) do something." . . . But ultimately I think that I have made that as sort of a conscious decision. Say, if in my small sphere I do what I can there. . . . maybe that is what I'm needing to do in life.

I'm always trying to balance things against this family sort of circle. . . . There's some times in my life I've been drawn to say really big causes like CUSO and I, I'd love to go, or to really be immersed in, in a cause, you know, that you think to be valid for the world. . . . I'm coming to realize. . . . if there has to be a hierarchy of action between two equally good things, I somehow have to come in my own mind to this hierarchy of family. And . . . I have said, "My kids first."

Sometimes I think that maybe my best cause is my own family and to do for them what I would do for others. . . . and say, "My family, right now, if I can do by them what I would do in the world, then perhaps that's what my aim or goal is." And if everybody perhaps did this in a very small way (laugh), you know, then maybe it would eliminate some of the other kinds of problems that we feel drawn to.

Laura's reflections on how other people's views of her had influenced her opportunities, particularly in the employment area, indicated that, in some ways, she was governed by external forces beyond her control. At the same time she was resisting these forces by refusing to see herself as others might. She recognized and was attempting to come to terms with the internalization of external messages. Laura was also making decisions which showed an increasing degree of control over her own life. She ended with the

thought that perhaps her best cause in the world is her family.

### The Wave

From the vantage point of midlife Laura realized that her perspective on the ups and downs of life had changed: "The idea of life being in waves . . . I've realized that more in the last little while. That this is more a cycle or, not so much a cycle but a wave." She was aware that change and adaptation are significant elements:

It's not necessary [sic] going to last but it's em you make the most of it when it does. . . . It's been a freeing thing to see that. Because I think there was a time in my life that I would only ever see things staying forever (laugh) in a certain situation. . . . I think now I've got to that stage, from observation of other people and their wave, you know, and their ups and downs. And I think that's a wonderful part of this time of life is that you have that ability to see that.

You don't have as many waves in the background (laugh) when you're younger. And em to be able to see how people have met personal crises in their life and overcome them and, and gone on to some stability and adapted to it so that there's, there's that period of em adaptability but then a stability. And then another wave sort of comes again, you know.

Another aspect of this ability to take a longer view of life was the realization that one must take the opportunities as they arise:

I look at those and think, "All right, it's not forever, whatever this is right now, it's not forever." . . . So I think I'm able to look now at the good things and sort of say, "Wow, this is marvellous. Just enjoy it. . . . It may never be like this again."

This may be as good as it gets in some ways. I remember sewing [dresses] for my daughter. . . . I was conscious at the time that this was the time to do it.

With our former music group . . . we played for Rainbow Stage one time and we were in the dressing room and (laugh) . . . we

said, "All right, you guys, this may never happen again, this particular set of circumstances. . . ." We enjoyed it. And it was true, it never happened again.

I'm conscious of [making the most of it] to a degree, although I don't always operate in my daily life as if I would. I mean that, that's a little like em being perfect at every level and never having an argument (laugh).

The wave thing too doesn't take away from striving for that pinnacle because you can reach that but recognizing that . . . it generates . . . some choices and options and then you can either go into . . . a period of stability or ride (laugh) the wave again.

Laura had come to see life as a process of continual change. An important element in her approach to change in her life was simply to "just enjoy it and make the most of it."

In this section Laura covered many aspects of her life. She recounted her work experiences and the inner changes engendered by them. In speaking of the ways in which she had developed her physical talents, music, writing, and intellectual abilities Laura revealed achievements gained and hopes for those still to come. Her understanding of the role of women in society was in the process of becoming more clear. In terms of family, there were goals already attained and freedom to search for new roles. Laura was consciously resisting being stereotyped and taking more control over her own actions. Her sense of place in the world was in transition and along with this was an awareness that life is a continual process of change.

### Description and Analysis: Lillian

This section contains an account of my first meeting with Lillian, biographical data, our research relationship, and themes identified in the interviews. As with Laura, the overall focus of the themes is change and development.

Lillian was 57 years of age when we first met in February, 1994. She celebrated her 58th birthday during the period of the interviews.

I felt somewhat apprehensive at the thought of starting interviews again with a stranger but I recalled that Laura had been a stranger too and that that had worked out well. At our first meeting Lillian greeted me in a very friendly way and I felt comfortable from the beginning. Lillian's house is large, in an older part of the city, and well-suited to the bed-and-breakfast business she operates. The paintings, works of art, and piano gave evidence of some of Lillian's interests. We sat at a large, wooden table in the dining-room and launched into the interview shortly after I arrived. It was easy to talk with one another and the conversation was relaxed.

#### Biographical Data

Lillian was born in a small town in Manitoba in 1936. She lived in two different rural towns with her parents and siblings. Lillian's father died when she was 16 years old, leaving her mother to raise four children with very little money.

At age 17 Lillian went to university, where she took 2 years of Arts. She met Grant and married him when she was 19. She taught school on permit for 3 months in another small town before having

her first baby. At the insistence of her mother-in-law, who supported both Lillian and Grant, she returned to university to complete her teacher training, receiving a B. Paedagogy degree. Over the next 10 years Lillian had three more children and was at home with them most of that time.

Lillian left her husband, Grant, in 1968, taking the four children with her. She supported them by getting a job teaching. She remained in the teaching profession until 1975.

By that time she had met and married Graeme. His children did not live with them except on week-ends but Lillian developed close relationships with them. After 17 years of marriage, Lillian left Graeme.

After she quit teaching in 1975, Lillian was employed in a variety of situations. Following a short period of unemployment she got a job as a researcher and speech-writer for a national women's lobby organization. She became involved with the family law lobby and found it to be "a very exciting time really in politics for women. . . That was a most wonderful experience." Following that she did accounting for several years in her husband's business as well as at another business. This was not a career which she enjoyed very much so she left that field. Except for a 2-year period when she was Director of a school, the remainder of her positions have been with organizations which focus on women's issues. Lillian worked for a year as a policy analyst in a government department. She then got a job as a trainer in a program for women reentering the work force. That was "a really rewarding job. It was really hard work, but it was

great." She then had a chance to work for a provincial women's organization as the Executive Director. Even though she was not rehired when her term expired, Lillian remarked, "It turned out to be not such a tragedy because I was immediately able to get another job back at [the government department] as a policy analyst. And I am still there." Lillian hoped to remain in that job until retirement.

Lillian lived alone in her own home. Her friend, Edward, spent a good deal of time there and they shared many enjoyable activities.

#### Research Relationship

Lillian's comment after our last interview captures well the nature of our relationship in this study. When I thanked her for being a participant, she extended her hand to me and said that she believed "women should help each other." Although there was no question that she had obviously set aside the time for, and gave her full attention to, the interviews, I felt that the process was mainly for my benefit. This showed up in our discussions about focus in the second and third interviews. I explained that I wanted her views; that I didn't want to impose my agenda on her material. Lillian said there wasn't anything in particular that was preoccupying or troubling her. She said she was comfortable talking about anything so it was more or less my choice. It seemed therefore that it was a case of giving me what I wanted to know rather than telling me what she wanted me to know. Even so, I believe that Lillian was essentially in charge of the content. In choosing broad topic areas, I hoped that Lillian would feel free to include any material she believed was relevant.



Once the topic had been chosen Lillian talked with very little prompting or probing from me. She spoke fluently and easily, rarely pausing to gather thoughts or ponder as she went along. The following section describes the main topics which emerged in my conversations with Lillian.

### Themes

Although I chose the areas of discussion, I hoped they would be broad enough to encompass any material Lillian wished to include. She maintained the focus on the topic chosen, with little tangential material included. Lillian's way of telling her story was a factual report style, rather than an introspective, "thinking aloud" style. We began with the goal of describing how she got to be where she was at that point. Several topics arose and I focussed particularly on change and development within those topics. The rest of this section presents the topics, or themes, which emerged: (a) good times, (b) hard times, (c) lessons learned, (d) hard times: part 2, (e) wisdom gained, and (f) the future.

### Good Times

After many years of major changes, Lillian stated that there was "much more . . . equanimity about my life now than there used to be." She summed up her situation in general:

I'd like to . . . start by saying that I, I'm really happy with where I am now, . . . I'm very comfortable, not to say that everything in my life is perfect, but I feel confident in myself and my ability to survive and I've come through some ups and downs and managed to come out them with a smile on the other end. . . . Sometimes lots of tears in between but . . . I'm basically an optimistic person and have managed to remain so despite whatever has happened.

Lillian described the elements which provided interest and meaning to this relatively calm time in her life. Included here were (a) leisure activities, (b) career, (c) children, (d) siblings, and (e) friends.

#### Leisure activities.

Of her busy life Lillian said, "I really can't remember the last time I was bored. . . . and I'm not usually lonely." She enjoyed a variety of interests:

I'm so busy. . . . As I got older. . . . I thought I'd have more time. And I never have enough time to do all the things I want to (laugh). . . . I have season tickets with a friend to go to the symphony and my daughter and I go the the Theater Center and we try to go to uh a few things at the West End Cultural Center and we do the Folk Festival. . . . I just . . . seem to be busy (laugh) all the time. . . . But uh it's a different kind, I mean I can opt out of these things if I want to.

We're quite busy with the bed-and-breakfast, in the summer time. . . . [My sister and brother-in-law] have a cottage and we have a trailer parked on their property so we go out there when we can. . . . There is certainly never a lack of things to do (laugh). I'll never get all the books read that I want to (laugh). If I live to be a hundred, I'm sure I won't.

#### Career.

Lillian stated she had "done a lot of different things," and that she had "one of those kinds of resumes that they say you're not supposed to have when you're looking for work (laugh)." This kind of employment experience had been positive for her:

But um looking back I think . . . I would probably say that I've had the great good fortune of being able to choose what I was going to do. . . . I don't look at it as a negative thing at all. . . . I think uh career-wise I had a good time, better than most (laugh) perhaps.

It's been an interesting and a, an exciting and a very uh open kind of career history in that I've had the opportunity to learn a lot of things and do different things and all of them have been useful.

At the time of the interviews, Lillian was working as a policy analyst in a department of government. She described her position:

My responsibility is to analyze programs and policies and legislation for their effect on women, to advise the government of the concerns of women when they're doing legislation and . . . to provide an information service . . . [for women] about government programs and services and to oh, educate them about issues. . . . It is a really interesting job.

I'm very interested in my job. It has it's frustrations but I mean every job does. . . . I have basically come to terms with the fact that this is my job and by and large I love the job. . . . I'm feeling it's a job that I would write for myself if I had the opportunity.

Lillian explained what it was about her present job that she found so rewarding:

Every once in awhile you get to make a little step forward and uh I want to be in on it when it happens. You know I get to the point where I could just take every politician and drown them in the Bay of Fundy or something, you know, they're just so ohh hypocritical (laugh). . . . I guess I hang in there thinking that I'll get another chance some day.

I've become small "p" politically very astute. . . . I know you have to play that game and I, I can get along with that all right. . . . Sometimes it's hard to be in my position. We're very close to the political arena in [this government department] . . . so you're very much more exposed to the political end of things.

You keep the ideal . . . out there in front of you somewhere but if you only get to take a small step towards it then you take that. It'll be interesting to see what they'll do with all the

training stuff. . . . I believe that that's the key to . . . women's uh independence is the training and education. . . . and to be economically self-sufficient. But we're not there yet. It's got a long way to go.

I feel I'm in a position where if anybody gets a chance to do anything, I can, so what more can you ask. . . . Not many people get to have that sense of having done something.

### Children.

Two of Lillian's children and all her step-children still lived in the same city she did. They remained in close contact even though they didn't get together as often as they used to:

I adore my kids. They're the light of my life, all of them, including the stepchildren. We're all very close. And uh they've stayed very close even after the divorce . . . so that's been quite a joy. . . . [My stepchildren] would be very upset if they got left out of the family gatherings. Like my mother is grandma to them and my sisters and brother are aunts and uncle.

There's so many now. There's about 30 if they all come because they've got kids and partners. . . . Some assortment of them come for dinners . . . [but] I don't have all of . . . them at once as often, I used to have them more often. But it's just too much.

Not to be bragging about them but I, what I'm so proud of is that they're wonderful people. . . . and good to me so I must have done something right (laugh) somewhere along the line. They're really great and I do enjoy them and we have such fun together you know when they're all together, it's great.

I care . . . passionately about my children and I have . . . gone out of my way to make sure that they have had what they need, not always what they wanted. . . . I think that my kids recognize that I've done everything that I could to help them. . . . and uh emotional and moral support. . . . That has been unstinting I believe and I think that's showing now in the way

they feel about me. . . . You can't buy those kinds of rewards and (laugh) satisfactions . . . I've worked hard to establish the relationship with my family. I didn't think about it in those terms when I was doing it but in retrospect I could see how it's turned out. And uh, I think that they've always known even when they were mad at me that I cared.

"Doing Christmas" continued to be a significant family gathering. Christmas Eve had always been at Lillian's place, with singing and playing music being an important component:

Then they got to the stage when they were in their teens where "Oh, I'm not gonna do that," you know but that was fine. . . . They just did it if they wanted to. But now you can't get them away from the piano. It was 1:30 in the morning this last Christmas when . . . the last ones finally left and it was all the kids. The parents were all sitting around on the couch (laugh) and the kids are all singing.

#### Siblings.

Lillian maintained close relationships with her siblings, all of whom lived in the same city as she did:

I just would be devastated if my sisters left, or my brother. Although I guess my sisters and I are closer. . . . We have a brother and . . . he and his wife are very much a part of the family and we love them dearly but [my sisters] and I (laugh) get together more.

I don't know what I'd do if they left (laugh). Well I don't think any of us would now, you know, at this stage. We might have earlier on in, in our lives but uh I don't think so now.

#### Friends.

Lillian described the friendships which had been a part of her life for a long time:

Through the work that I did in my uh um women's issues stuff (laugh) I have acquired some wonderful friends. . . . The ones

that know all about you, you don't have to explain everything, you know (laugh). That kind of friendship. . . . We have sort of a women's circle.

We've been very close. . . . We continue to see each other on quite a regular basis ever since. We have this little group (laugh). We get together, we have dinners together or we go out for dinner or whatever. . . . I'm a very lucky person I think, having been able to keep those friends for such a long time.

And I have two friends from college days, one in [Manitoba] and one in . . . Ontario. . . . We just get together and we can take off just where we left off the last time we were there (laugh) and uh we've kept in contact over all these years.

At the time of our conversations Lillian was enjoying a period of relative stability. She enjoyed her job very much and hoped to continue in her position. Lillian maintained close contacts with her children, mother, siblings, and good friends with whom she shared many activities.

### Hard Times

This peaceful period in Lillian's life was preceded by many years of "ups and downs" in two marriages. The following account describes the relationships with her first husband Grant and her second husband Graeme.

#### Marriage to Grant.

Lillian met Grant when she was "very young and naïve and very nervous and so on going off to university." She described the initial attraction and her role within the marriage:

I met him at university and it was sort of a, this mutual connection, you know. And uh he was very bright, very smart, and that attracted me. And he had kind of a wry sense of humour which I liked. And um I liked his family. And they

took me in as one of their own. . . . I was only 19 when I got married. . . . I was really naïve um I had gone from university to marriage. . . . I had my children right away and uh was really inexperienced and you know hadn't been out in the world all that much, so to speak. . . . I think it was probably secure and the family was very acceptable to my family.

I uh grew up of course in a very traditional um town and social life and everything and . . . my first marriage I guess was fairly traditional. . . . Our families were very similar so behaving appropriately really wasn't a big problem because . . . I don't think he objected to what I was doing, with the kids. . . . His family would come and stay with us and, you know, I did all of those things of which he approved. He would never have been able to do them on his own but he, he liked them happening. So those things weren't an issue.

I did all of the personal relationship kind of stuff that was connected. I mean, I was the one that invited people over . . . and had his family over for dinner and . . . all that sort of stuff. And he just floated along on the periphery. And I think he liked it but he didn't do it.

I was happy doing that. I wasn't a perfect mother by any stretch of the imagination but I really did like having my kids. . . . and had a lot of fun with them, I enjoyed them. So I didn't feel hard done by, you know, in those ways in, in being at home and being the hostess and I liked that. So that was. . . . more than OK; it was good. It was . . . fine.

I was married in the 50s, you know, the Betty Friedan book (laugh) time and I was just like every other young housewife, you know, there was all these things that you had to do, like have your windows cleaned every so often and your sheets out on the line and wash every wall in sight every time you turned around. . . . I did all that and I, and I guess I felt the pressures just like everyone else did and . . . I didn't even think of rebelling against it or not doing it . . . until later.

There were other parts of the relationship, however, which became more troubling:

I was very much an extroverted person so I made friends and you know did this and that and the other thing that he couldn't control. . . . When we were in a social situation, I mean I was comfortable and at home with it and I guess probably in his eyes I was in control. . . . I was having a good time (laugh).

[Money] was the one thing that he could control. The one big thing, an effective thing that he did control. . . . I never had any money. . . . He was better paid than nine-tenths of the population. . . . but there was never enough money for me to do anything. . . . But he could belong to the golf club and all that sort of thing.

We had a joint bank account but I had to tell him every time I wrote a cheque. . . . One thing that I can remember was that I couldn't even buy him a birthday or Christmas present 'cause I didn't have any money. . . . I just had to write a cheque and tell him what it was. And [my sister] now says . . . it was a disgrace the clothes that I had, you know, so I mean it isn't just my, my warped memory that's doing this.

By then I knew that there was money. If he . . . didn't have any then that would be fine, you know. But I knew that there was money. . . . I'm not talking that I wanted to have big money in my hands but it was uh that I couldn't do anything without sort of asking permission. That was the issue really.

I think it was abusive. I think it was quite abusive. . . . I don't by any stretch of the imagination compare that to being beaten up. . . . [but] it's a psychological devastation. . . . It played on, on the poverty that we had lived in as children too, you know, so it, it was a very powerful message that was being given there.

When I turned 30 . . . I was terribly depressed. . . . I don't know whether I was clinically depressed but I certainly was depressed. And I just felt that I had done nothing but have four children and I would never do anything, I would never get anywhere. . . . I just felt I was sort of in the pit somewhere and that I was going to stay there. . . . [There was] an overwhelming feeling of . . . just feeling really down, . . . no zip and no energy and, and feeling that I was in this . . . repetitious cycle that was just gonna go on and on . . . forever and ever.



I was like that for about 6 months and uh I finally, I guess, realized that . . . one of the problems was that my marriage was nowhere.

Not that my husband was a, an abuser in the ordinary sense of the word, but he was a controller. . . . His job required that he travel a lot but he did more than was necessary. Like he was never there. I had no assistance with the kids, no companionship from him. The job came first, always and ever.

I thought there was something wrong with me. I thought it was, you know, that I was, I ought to be satisfied. . . . He did do that [provide for me], you know. There's no question about it. And so why should I not be happy.

#### Leaving Grant.

The decision to leave her first marriage was a difficult one.

Lillian described the process of coming to this decision:

I was a prime candidate for Betty Friedan's [The] Feminine Mystique because . . . I was that book (laugh), you know, "Why am I so unhappy. I mean I've got these nice kids, I've got a nice house, I've got a good husband, you know. Why am I feeling so terrible? I, I shouldn't be this way. Obviously there's something wrong with me," (laugh) which is the whole thing of Betty Friedan. So I was just ripe for it. I was so relieved when I found out that I wasn't the only one. . . . Chatelaine magazines and Redbook . . . were filled with articles on how to have a happy home and how to keep your husband happy and brush your teeth and put on fresh lipstick before he comes home and be sure the toys are picked up and for Heaven's sake keep the kids quiet. . . . So I was trying to do all that and I was Mrs. Perfect. I cleaned the windows and baked bread and you know, had four kids and scrubbed and waxed. . . . Where was your ego in all this? Obviously women didn't have one.

I can remember the day I decided I was leaving. . . . He was supposed to come home from work . . . and we were gonna to take the kids on a picnic. And he phoned and said he couldn't

come home, couldn't go on the picnic because the guy that he worked with had invited him to play golf and he was going to play golf. And I decided [she hit table firmly with her hand at this point] right then that that was that. . . . It ain't gonna get any better (laugh). . . . I knew there was no future in that marriage. . . . It was like a, you know, Paul on the road to Damascus (laugh). A blinding flash.

I never told him, I just left. I didn't have the capability of, at that time, of talking to him about it. I didn't have any sense of how to tell him what I needed or wanted. And I guess no feeling that I had the right, I think. I'm . . . kinda guessing on that one. But uh I guess there was a sense too that if I told him uh that I wasn't sure what would happen, that I would be able to get away. . . . I don't know what I thought but . . . for whatever . . . combination of those reasons I never told him.

Even though she was convinced that the best choice was to leave her marriage, Lillian did not find it easy to justify her decision to others:

It was really hard because he wasn't, you know most people could not see a reason for my leaving him. He was making more money than average for the time and uh he didn't drink and he didn't beat me and, you know, why in the world was I thinking about leaving him. And at that time it was not very common for women to leave their husbands.

It was scary at the time because um in those days women didn't leave their husbands. I mean I was a bit of a renegade I guess. That was 1968 and uh I had people, neighbours and friends and relatives and so on that said, "Well, you know, he doesn't drink and he doesn't beat you. Why are you leaving?" I couldn't really explain it then. . . . I just figured if I was doing all this by myself I'd rather be by myself (laugh), you know. . . . That was the impetus for it. . . . But you know in those days, people did not accept that as a reason for leaving.

I left in October. . . . and took the kids with me and had a pretty struggling time. . . . I was fortunate that I was able to teach because I was earning more money than most women

could earn at that time and uh so I could afford to rent a house. . . . I didn't have any money in the bank . . . but at least I had a paycheque.

Part of the struggle Lillian endured centered around the reactions of other people after she had left her husband:

You see, Betty Friedan had just written The Feminine Mystique and so on. I mean this was the very beginning of these changes. . . . so I was not well accepted. . . . People that I really figured had no business commenting on it because they didn't really know anything about it were, felt quite free to express their opinion.

Well as I said, there were people who were very disapproving, so when I left I automatically just lost quite a few people that had been a part of my life.

Another consequence which Lillian faced was the threat of losing custody of her children:

He harassed me for a year about taking me to court to get custody of the kids because I had left. . . . The divorce laws hadn't changed then either so it was, it was kinda scary. But finally he just, he did it so many times that I finally said, "Just go to court. Go to court." . . . He quit then, quit harassing me.

There were consequences involving the children's reactions to the changes as well:

You know, kids are self-centered, . . . in the best sense of that word and you screw up their lives when you take them away . . . . They had to change schools and they had to move and they didn't have near as much attention. . . . A lot of things changed.

The two youngest ones were really, I think kids kind of accept what is. . . . The [oldest] boy was quite rebellious. He, he didn't like it. He didn't like the fact that I'd left his Dad. . . . He was very angry with me for having left, for awhile and he talked a lot more than I really wanted to hear, but I guess it was better that he talked. And he's the one of all of them that's most like

me. He now understands completely why I couldn't stay with his father. . . . And [my daughter] never said anything. . . . but she wasn't very happy with it.

After a very short time . . . [my husband] was not exercising the access that he had according to the agreement we had made. . . . Kids are pretty aware. It didn't take them long to figure out what was going on with their Dad and how much he let them down. . . . I think they, they probably didn't really get all over with it until they were like be about 17 or 18.

#### Marriage to Graeme.

Two years after leaving Grant, Lillian had met Graeme and had married again. They were married for 17 years. She described what it was like at the beginning:

My second husband, um was, what shall I say, I guess a total contrast to my first one. He was a musician, he was um artistic, he was um outgoing, he was exciting and I guess I would say he was the love of my life. I was madly and passionately in love with him and uh our courting days were exciting. . . . My second husband had certainly been around, more than one way and uh I was, I guess I was taken by his uh probably superficial, cosmopolitan airs. And I didn't know any better. . . . Romantically we were good together, you know. . . . I enjoyed his love of music because I love music too. . . . We did interesting and different things. And uh I, I guess probably I was drawn by the excitement part of it, which I had lacked almost totally in my first marriage (laugh).

When he came to be introduced into the family he was great with the kids and you know, we had a lot of fun together. . . . Of course he really sucked me in with the way he treated the kids. . . . My youngest one was 5 and he'd have him sitting on his knee and tell him stories and sing him songs and you know just be a really nice person with him. . . . That was a real selling job, that was.

Lillian's four children lived with Lillian and Graeme but his children lived with their mother. She talked about the positive parts

of their family life:

I was a really good mother in his eyes and he wanted that for his children and I was more than willing to give it. I knew his kids and liked them and, and uh he wanted that and . . . we have a great sense of family and are very family-oriented and always have been.

They stayed with us on week-ends. I would have had them. I, in a way I would rather have had them living with us than not but um their mother wanted to keep them and, and I certainly could understand that. . . . We were close to them so we saw a lot of them and did all the extra-curricular stuff with them . . . so um they had our support as well. And he was good . . . with the kids in, in a lot of ways. He um he was very much into music and was very supportive of the kids in band and all that sort of stuff.

We were very determined that we would not take sides against um kids or against each other with the kids or against our ex-partners. And so that was one of the things that we did reasonably well.

Very soon, however, problems in regard to the children began to arise:

He was jealous of me too and the time I spent with [the kids] 'cause . . . if [my youngest son] would come and sit beside me on the chesterfield, you know he's 5 years old so he'd come and sit and want to snuggle up, you know, and we're great snugglers in our family anyway, and uh he thought this was somebody who was just being a suck. And he was far too old for that sort of nonsense. . . . He was mean to [my youngest son]. More so to him than the others.

I think he turned out to be kind of difficult in a way with the kids because this old power thing came into it again you know and as the kids got to be teen-agers he set up power struggles that didn't need to be there. . . . He had to have control. He just was a control freak. And he had to control the kids, which when they were little wasn't such a problem, you know, but as they hit their teenage years he never knew when to quit.

I don't think the kids suffered a lot in the long run. My youngest son did. He, he was quite mean to him. So that was part of his power thing too, . . . it was sad 'cause he was very bright and musical. We had a family band and had a wonderful time with that. There was so much that was positive and good but he just could not get by that, couldn't get past it.

Sometimes I used to say, you know, give it a rest. It's not going to work. But he didn't like that and uh basically with my kids I would say, "Well, you know, it's not going to work. . . ." But when it was with his own kids, when they weren't living with us, I didn't really have much um input, you know. I couldn't really cross him on that. So it um it was a source of difficulty and a source of a lot of resentment from time to time with my kids, who were living with us.

My kids now say that they understand that he was trying to do well by them. I think he thought this was the right thing to do. And he wouldn't believe me when I tried to say that there were other ways, you know, to consider. . . . I tried discussing 'til I was blue in the face.

Not only was the situation between them deteriorating in regard to the children, it was also deteriorating in other ways. Lillian described some of those ways and how she was affected:

I was working at [a national women's organization] and doing a lot of public speaking and uh appearing on TV and radio and and you know, getting recognized in my own right. I wasn't just Mrs. [his wife]. And uh I think that bothered him. . . . He was a successful uh businessman . . . and had all kinds of kudos in his own right and I think he thought very um uh vulnerable because he didn't have a university degree and I did. I mean, I didn't give a rip whether he had one or not. . . . but I think it was a sensitivity for him.

His . . . method of operation was to, if I seemed to be getting just riding a little too high, you know, in feeling good about what was happening and so on, he would somehow create a

scenario whereby I could be taken down a peg or two, you know, brought down a size. [So] my self-esteem had taken quite a beating.

It was just one thing after another. It, you know, talk about the Chinese water torture. That's exactly what it was, . . . a myriad of things . . . just one thing after another. You never knew. You couldn't predict. . . . I would get home from work, I was teaching and working in this other job and I was usually home . . . by 4:30 or so, . . . and uh head out to the kitchen to make dinner. . . . I always kind of enjoyed that time of the day because I'd be putzing around the kitchen and the kids would be coming in from school and that's when we talked. So we'd be having a great time, you know, and finding out what they did and um they always sort of helped. . . . It was just a good . . . connecting time. And uh Graeme would come in the front door and within seconds you would know whether he was in a good mood or a bad mood because there would just be a pall set all over the house. And you never knew why. You would say, "What's the matter?" "Nothing." So you didn't know whether you'd done or not done something, whether the kids had done or not done something, like they might have not shovelled out the corner in the garage for all you know and uh it could have been something wrong at work, you know.

His mother's family name was Gilbert and there were several sisters in that family and they were pretty tough old broads for want of a better description and uh he kept saying he would make me into a Gilbert girl yet, as if this was going to be some kind of major positive accomplishment. Well as far as I could see the last thing in the world I wanted to be was a Gilbert girl. . . . They were hard people and . . . their way of getting along together was by the insulting jest procedure. . . . That's how he'd been brought up and that's how his own siblings got along together and uh of course I didn't deal all that well with that. I wasn't good at accepting that kind of humour. . . . He used that kind of humour on me and around me and it was not acceptable with me or my family and it just caused no end of problems. It was . . . a very cruel um manipulative tool.

I was getting more and more and more unhappy. . . . I couldn't seem to win. . . . It is a form of abuse, it's, it's emotional abuse

and, and there, it's a no-win game because it doesn't matter how hard you try or how much you think ahead and plan . . . there's always something that can be wrong, you know (laugh), if someone's looking for a reason. . . . In 1982 uh my very good friend had gone to live in England and she invited me to come over in the summer and visit. . . . I was very excited and I wanted him to come. . . . He would have no part of it. And when I came home he wouldn't look at the pictures, he did not want to know what I had done, where I had been, what I had seen, anything.

I kept thinking if I just loved him long enough and hard enough this would pass but it, it didn't.

### Leaving Graeme.

After many years of hoping the situation would improve, Lillian began to consider ending the marriage:

When I first began to think it over with Graeme, there was uh all the considerations of doing this a second time and um having to get over thinking that I was a terrible failure if I left. . . . It was really hard to decide whether it was better or worse for the kids to go. And uh so then of course by the time I did go, they had already left the home so . . . that part wasn't as difficult. And um then I guess um there were financial considerations. . . . I also had to have some sense of um whether and how I could manage on my own, you know, to work that out in my mind.

We came close to separating 3 years before I left. . . . We were both still living in the house and um I guess for about 6 weeks it was, I was leaving and the house was selling and we were splitting. And he literally begged me not to go and that we would stay together and that he would . . . go for counselling and . . . would work at this. And uh so I agreed that we would give it another go 'cause we had been together 13 years I guess at that time, or 14.

For about a year and a half he was quite a bit better. . . . [but] he never did. . . . go for counselling. . . . He didn't believe that what he was doing was wrong. He believed that there was



something wrong with me. . . . He knew what I needed to have in order to stay there 'cause I'm not inarticulate and I did try to tell him and try to talk to him and try to explain to him how he was hurtful and all those things you know, but it never sank in. . . . I guess we all believe that our way is right to a certain extent but he absolutely was adamant that he wasn't going to change and that there was a problem with me and not with him.

Finally in 1986, while they were on a trip to England together, Lillian realized that the marriage was over:

We had decided this day, with his agreement, that . . . we would go to St. Pauls and . . . to the Tower Bridge and see this old part of London. And he was very interested in buildings, in the construction business, but he was also very artistic, so I thought, silly me, that all this architecture in that area (laugh) would be just the cat's pyjamas as far as he was concerned. . . . We get to uh the . . . Christopher Wren monument. . . . and I say, "And here's the monument to the Great Fire of London. The shadow falls on Pudding Lane where the fire started." Like, I really believed that this would be very interesting to him. . . . He looked at me and he says, "So." And I, at that very moment I knew I was coming home and leaving him. I just turned on my heel and I walked about a hundred miles an hour to the Tower Bridge. . . . I knew that nothing was ever going to change. It was just like a gong sounding.

I came home and found a place to go. . . . and left.

There were, again, the negative consequences of leaving a marriage:

You give up a lot when you leave. . . . There's a certain portion of, circle of your friends that you lose 'cause they don't know how to deal with it and. . . . a lot of changes.

I never looked back. Not to say that there wasn't mourning. The period of grief. It's, it's not unlike a death I think in that . . . we grieve the marriage that might have been, you know, you wish that it could have been right and uh uh a certain amount

of anger that, that this person that you really did care about wouldn't care enough to work things out with you. And I guess that would be alike to or akin to the anger that one feels after death, that you are the one that's abandoned.

People don't understand that with divorce. They expect you to grieve when there's been a death but . . . they just think, "Oh well, you're relieved and it's over." . . . Well, the day I moved out I was, I was elated and I had a party (laugh). . . . [but] the euphoria goes after awhile. . . . They don't understand that uh even though I wouldn't for an instant have gone back, and I didn't regret my decision, you still have the grieving process. . . . I finally had to tell a few people that uh they'd have to just be a little careful for awhile 'cause it's not all jubilation.

I had done so much counselling and reading and so I wasn't all that surprised . . . I read a lot of the grief and loss things and . . . I wasn't totally unprepared. I wasn't nearly as naïve as I was the first time (laugh).

It took me I guess oh couple of years before I got over that pretty much. And I can still have pangs at times, of things shared you know, where there'll be something happens that strikes a, a memory, that was one of the good ones, you know. And uh that still happens from time to time.

### Support.

Not everything was negative during those hard times. Lillian found her family and friends to be very supportive in both emotional and practical ways:

My family has always been very, very supportive. . . . When I left Grant I went to [my sister's]. I just arrived on her doorstep with my four kids and she and her husband opened the door and made a bed for the kids and asked no questions.

My cousin loaned me a car for 6 months. . . . All it cost me was to put the gas in it, you know, which was a very generous thing to do (laugh).

And I had a few friends that were hanging in there for me (laugh), you know. . . . The ones that didn't . . . take sides or chose my side, so to speak, uh kinda kept me feeling as if I was an OK person, you know. And uh, they'll help me move and, you know, the practical things in life and had me over and you know kept me in the world so to speak (laugh).

The way they supported me was nothing um obvious but everything they did was telling that I was a good person, an OK person, that I was managing well, that you know, it was all that kind of very subtle but very, very supportive and very strong, positive support. . . . Edward was very helpful I guess in um helping me reestablish my identity as a valued person.

Between the ages of 30 and 50 Lillian went through several major life-changes. She was in two marriages which she experienced as emotionally and psychologically abusive. In both cases she had the strength to come to, and follow through on, a decision to leave the relationship. Even though she suffered unfavourable effects both times she also found a lot of support in recovering her self-esteem.

### Lessons Learned

Lillian talked about what she had learned and was putting into practice as a result of her experiences in her two marriages. This was illustrated by her relationship with Edward, her ability to survive on her own, and becoming comfortable with the decisions she had made.

#### Keeping her power.

Lillian met Edward about a year after she had left Graeme. At the time of the interviews they had been together about 6 1/2 years. In this relationship Lillian was in control, setting the ground rules:

When I left Graeme um I decided that never again would any man (laugh) have that kind of power over me. I would never

give it away 'cause that, you have to do that or they can't have it. It's hard to take it back once you've done it, as I certainly found out. . . . I would never again uh live with or, or be around someone who did things that upset me. So when I met poor Edward (laugh) I said, I told him that right up front, I said, "This is what I've decided and uh it may not be fair or right or anything else but it's how it is."

I'm being the autocrat now. . . . I don't hate men or anything but um I will not be subject to the whims of anybody. . . . I don't expect life to be perfect, or anybody to be perfect. . . . but I just decided that never again would I put up with that kind of treatment, from anybody that wanted to hang around me had better know it right upfront (laugh). . . . I know it was an unfair thing in a way to uh have that baggage hanging there, but it was there and I knew it, so anyone who came on the scene had to know that that . . . was my baggage and I was working on it but (laugh) it was there.

Lillian gave some examples of the way in which she was setting the rules in this relationship:

He's of a generation that, you know, told sexist jokes . . . and Paki jokes and all that kind of thing and um it just isn't done in my family. . . . I says, "Look, you can't do that. If you want to do that then that's it. And if you want to tell those jokes then you go and tell your buddies at work or go the the Legion or whatever and get it out of your system but don't tell them around me or my family because we don't like them and I won't have it." And you know, he has not done it. So obviously he wanted to stay enough to do that.

When I first met him he drank more than I liked and when he drinks I don't really like him all that much. . . . so I just said, "I don't like it. If you want to drink, don't do it with me." . . . So he agreed and he never drinks too much when he's around me 'cause he wants to stay I guess ( laugh).

On the question of their living arrangements Lillian was clear about her wishes:

I enjoy his company but I don't want to be married and I don't want to live together. And I think he'd move in in a minute if I asked him. . . . I feel kind of sorry about that in a way because I wish I could feel that way about him but I don't so there's no use being dishonest about it and I would be irritated with him in no time.

He's . . . slow-moving, slow-deciding, slow-getting-around-to-things and I'm not. . . . We're opposite ends of the scale there. And when we don't live together that doesn't bother me too much. . . . I don't have to accomodate to him all of the time. . . . If he were living here all the time I think I'd have the screaming meemies. . . . and it would spoil it. I, I feel pretty sure about that. And uh so I think we're better off the way we are. But he is a fine person, he really is.

He stays here when we feel like it and goes home when he, when I don't (laugh). I guess that's more honest (laugh). . . . He would stay, any day, yes. Well then he was changing apartments and he wanted to know if I'd rent him a room and I said no I thought it would be a big mistake, to do it.

He's around a lot, when he's in the city. . . . Every so often I say, "Now, I need some time alone." So he comes over here in the daytime while I'm at work and he putters around. . . . [but] when I say I need time alone, he's supposed to be gone by the time I get home from work. Well, that's a real strain for him to make that (laugh). But uh he putters off then after awhile and goes home for supper but then I just have the evening so that's hardly any time.

He was here over the whole Christmas holiday time for . . . 2 weeks or something, and when everybody left after Christmas he said, "Well, I see kind of a wild look in your eye, I'll just be packing up (laugh) my stuff." . . . He's usually here on week-ends. Comes and stays over on the week-ends.

Lillian described how she told Edward that she didn't want him to live with her:

I knew I had to do it so I just went ahead and he was . . . great about it. . . . I don't think he wanted to go at all but he knew

that this was what he better do if he wanted to be coming back. . . . He never makes me feel badly about it. . . . Well, I mean it's my place. If I tell him to go home then (laugh) he really doesn't have much choice. But he doesn't pout or doesn't make me feel guilty.

In addition to believing she would find the day-to-day living together too difficult, Lillian had other reasons for not wanting to marry Edward:

I don't have anything about being married. I would marry if I thought it was, if we'd be OK together. . . . I really don't believe that I love him enough to marry him either. . . . It would be unfair to him as well as to myself. He's too good a person to do that to. And I think he understands that. We don't discuss that particular point because I do love him but just not that way.

There was a point where if he'd asked me I probably would have married him. But uh there were a couple of incidents that happened that um sort of threw up the old guard again and I think it's been wise that we didn't marry 'cause I, I think it would have ruined a good relationship.

One of the incidents revolved around the wedding of her step-daughter, not long after Lillian had left Graeme:

I was very nervous about this because this was going to be the first social occasion where I would be in the same company with Graeme and he had been just a real miserable boob. . . . I was really worried about it. . . . Edward knew all this . . . and he was coming with me to the wedding. . . . It never entered my mind that he would be anything but there to be my support. . . . He drank far too much and he was anything but supportive and uh left in a huff and left me at the wedding. . . . [He] went to my place and took everything that he owned that was in my house out of it (laugh). . . . I was mad, I was really pissed off because not only had he not been supportive, he had been embarrassing, which was the last thing in the world I needed--another man doing this, you know! So I phoned him and. . . . he started to laugh and I said, "This is not funny. This is game

over, you know. You're done." . . . So I figured well that's that. . . He didn't give up though. He came over and apologized and . . . wanted another chance and . . . he never, ever, ever did a thing like that again.

But something happened, that night, you know, that it, it changed how I felt about him. . . . I think up until that point I was pretty in love with him and after that I wasn't you know. And that's a weak way of describing it but I don't really know how else to say it. I, I love him dearly but I'm not in love with him. . . . That was really I think the deciding factor.

To me love is, is, is many-faceted and for me to want to live with somebody I have to be passionately involved with them as well as intellectually and get along on the day-to-day basis and all of those things. And I'm not passionately in love with him and I don't think it would be fair or right to marry him, given that. . . . I don't want to say I would never marry him because you never know how things are going to turn out but I really don't think I would marry him. . . . And that's too bad. First time I've ever had a man in my life that loves me to pieces and I, and I don't have the same feeling. And I just think it would be unfair to him as much as anything.

I don't think Edward feels diminished. . . . He just sort of seems to think the way I do things is fine, which is kind of nice, you know. It's (laugh) a bit of a treat (laugh).

Lillian and Edward did, however, spend a lot of time together and enjoyed each other's company:

He is a lovely man, he's a wonderful man and we have a good time together. . . . We do the bed-and-breakfast together, we cook together, we like each others' kids, you know, we have a lot of fun together. . . . He's a lovely, caring, gentle, man, you know. . . . He is a sweetie-pie, there's no doubt about it.

#### Surviving on her own.

For most of her life money, or more precisely, the lack of it,

figured prominently for Lillian. Her narrative had frequent references to the shortage of money:

My Dad died when I was only 16 and uh [my mother] was living on what was then called Mother's Allowance which was hardly enough to keep a cat and a dog alive, never mind herself and four kids. And we depended on charity for food.

For many years after that her financial situation did not improve. When it came time for her to attend university on scholarship, she had no extra resources: "I didn't have any [money] literally. By the time I paid my books and tuition I had nothing left." During her marriage to Grant Lillian still had no access to, or control of, any financial resources: "Like not even \$10 a month (laugh), you know. I never had a cent. . . . I did not dare to write a cheque without OKing with him first."

When Lillian decided to leave Grant, she realized that she had to make sure that she had a way of supporting herself and her children:

I very deliberately set out to make sure that I was independent. . . . I had a teaching certificate but that was right when new math had come in and I was a math teacher so I went to summer school and took a course in teaching new math and applied for a job and got it and went to work. . . . Not that a teacher's wage at that point was enough to. . . . live the high life (laugh) you know. But it was better than a lot of women do I guess (laugh).

When thinking about leaving her second marriage Lillian took into consideration her financial position. She knew that she "couldn't afford to move out again." Lillian decided that she "wasn't going again without a proper settlement." When she left Lillian took what she thought she was entitled to:



I booked a truck and waited 'til he went to work and took half the furniture. . . . [Otherwise] I'd a been fighting 'til now to get a stick of furniture outta there. . . . I figured I could always give it back if I'd taken too much (laugh) but if I went out the door I wouldn't be getting back in.

Since leaving Grant in 1968 Lillian had been employed most of the time, although there were two periods of unemployment:

I don't think I really had too much doubt . . . about my ability to earn a living. . . . [but] not too long after I left Graeme . . . I was unemployed for nearly a year. And uh that was, that was pretty upsetting 'cause I'd bought this stupid condominium but anyway um I finally did get a job . . . and managed to survive.

I had never lived alone before I left him [Graeme] and I found out that I could live alone quite successfully, that I wasn't totally dependent on somebody being there and um I managed the money and I survived unemployment and I, I uh had a good time, enjoyed myself.

She realized that, although from a financial point of view she might have been better off staying in the marriages, it had worked out better to be on her own. In regard to Grant she said, "I think I'm a lot more comfortable. Poorer but comfortable. I may end up in the poor house . . . but um I think I'm a happier person and more satisfied." And in reference to her second husband she stated, "I mean I'd certainly be a lot better off than I am now if I had stayed with Graeme but I . . . might be in jail too, for murder."

At the time of the interviews Lillian was working at a job she enjoyed and running a bed-and-breakfast operation from her house. Although she was not making a lot of money she was supporting herself:

I have to [work full-time] to live. . . . I don't have enough money but then who does. . . . I'm not in immediate danger of losing my home. [There's not] an overwhelming kind of [worry] other than the fact that I think, "Oh God, am I never going to have enough money to go to England just when I want to."

Thinking for herself.

As a child Lillian learned that in order to survive she had to be good; she had to conform to other people's expectations:

What we did learn very, very well was that we had to be good, at all costs. And what the neighbours thought and what people thought was all-important because if we did not, if we were not well-thought of, then we would not get this charity. . . . It was very, made very clear that it was important to what the neighbours thought. And what people thought of us.

Well then of course there was no money and so when I went to university I had to be good, i.e., get good grades or so on or I wouldn't get the scholarship the next year so I had a long time of that having to be good or the consequences would be dire. . . . So I was very conditioned into that, you know, "What will people think?" and not making a decision for myself.

Lillian did, however, make two major decisions when she chose to leave her marriages. She reflected on the way she makes decisions:

I think in both cases, you know, there'd been a lot of mulling gone on beforehand and I, I think I decision-make that way. I mull and mull . . . and then all of a sudden something just says "OK, now it's time," (laugh) and I act. . . . Especially with Graeme, I mulled a lot. With uh Grant not so much because it wasn't as acceptable to talk about it then.

Looking back over various things that have happened in my life, I think I, that's how I make decisions. Sort of big and small. They kind of mull around in my head for awhile and then all of a sudden something comes clear and then that's it.

Lillian believed that she had experienced some important

developments in regard to her ability to make choices. She said, "I'm happy to be at a point in my life where I'm not afraid um to make a decision or to say what I need or to refuse to accept things that I don't like." She described her current thinking:

I'm a fairly conscientious person and God knows I've made mistakes, that's for sure (laugh). . . . You do the best you can on any given day. And you can't go back and do that day over again. So all you can do is fix up the one you've got right now.

I don't look back and say, "Oh if only I'd . . . " And I don't do that about anything. . . . 'Cause you can't go back and change it anyway so, you did the best you could at the time.

It was after I left Grant, . . . I'd a been mid-30s, before I got that philosophy firmly established. It finally came clear to me that . . . it didn't really matter what people said . . . as long as you were clear that you'd done what you thought was the best. . . . It doesn't always turn out to be right but it was the best you could do. . . . Allowing yourself to not be perfect. And I think that's a really hard lesson to learn.

I feel that where I am now today is a big accomplishment in that I'm confident and sort of "The hell with what everybody thinks. I'll do what I feel is right." Not that I'm, you know, all that (laugh) violently different anyway but when I am conforming it's because I choose to, darn it (laugh), you know. . . . It's quite a different angle.

I'm very, very happy that I've been able to get to that point. And it's only recently that I've actually um realized that I was there, you know, (laugh). . . . So that's one of the bonuses of being 50, to me.

Lillian realized the importance of maintaining independence in a close relationship with a man. She had proven to herself that she could support herself (and, earlier on, her children too). Over the years Lillian achieved a sense of confidence and acceptance about

her choices in life.

Hard Times: Part 2

In this section Lillian recounted the experience of becoming very ill after returning from England in the fall of 1990:

I got really, really, really sick and um ended up in the observation ward at St. Boniface [Hospital] for a week and they couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. . . . They did all kinds of tests, I had ultrasound. . . . and a CAT scan and they finally decided that. . . . I had had diverticulitis and so I was to go on this high-fiber diet. . . . I got sick again in January and I took antibiotics and I got better. . . . Then I got sick again in February and I took antibiotics and I didn't get better and I ended up back in the hospital. And um uh again the same thing of them not knowing what was wrong with me.

I was there nearly a week I guess and they finally decided that I had an ovarian cyst. . . . And of course as soon as it's ovarian cyst then, the doctor I had was an oncologist, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that cancer is a possibility. And uh so there was a period of anxiety there. . . . The doctor was very encouraging. He said that he was 90% certain that it wasn't cancerous. . . . but you know they can never give you an iron-clad. . . . guarantee. . . . I had the surgery and it wasn't cancer. . . . I was only home about 3 days and I had to go back in and I was in for another week because I'd infection in the incision (laugh) so I had uh almost 3 weeks in hospital. And the threat of cancer. . . . [I] had a hell of an experience actually.

[Dying] was very much a possibility to me. . . . I didn't get in a flap about it. . . . I was almost fatalistic about it. I mean either it was or it wasn't, you know and, and I didn't cry and rant and rave. . . . I might have done that had it turned out to be cancer and I really was dying, I don't know that but um during that period of waiting till I found out for sure, I didn't do that. It was just that, you know, either I was going to have another 20 or 25 or 30 years to live or I wasn't.

Over a period of several months Lillian had endured a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety. The possibility of dying was very

real to her at that time. The next section describes what Lillian learned from that experience.

### Wisdom Gained

Lillian talked about the effect of confronting the possibility of her own death:

I felt very different. . . . It was quite, profound is really the only word I can think of, in that um you know sometimes you worry oh you're too fat or you don't have enough money or you should do this or you shouldn't do that or all of these kind of self-imposed um demands that you make. . . . I realized then that the only things that were really important were your friends and your family. . . . It really made a difference to how I approached things.

I'd kind of been moving towards that I think anyway but this . . . really emphasized it. . . . I think it had been coming along you know through my other experiences but I think that hastened it. . . . When you realize that in a short time you may not ever see these people again . . . it really is quite an eye-opener on how you live your life.

In our society money's important because that's how you get along you know and you can enjoy your friends and family but . . . money's only as good as what it can do for you. So I think it gives you a different perspective and God knows I don't want to be poor. I've done that (laugh). I don't want to do that again. But . . . it really did change the things that were important.

I don't get upset about things very easily and and it's because of that I'm sure. . . . Oh I get surface irritated with this that and the other thing but I'm not deeply disturbed by very much anymore.

It also emphasized uh the importance of not doing what you don't want to do, you know. Make your choices and stick to them. Don't be pushed around.

That experience made me savour life more, . . . that it was really important to take your enjoyment from each day. . . . If you don't get the house cleaned, so what. . . . If you die, somebody's going to have to clean it up for you anyways (laugh). . . . I say that flippantly but I'm not flippant. . . . It really is true that you need to do the things that are important first.

I'm very much aware that, that life is fleeting, you know (laugh). And not in a . . . macabre way or something that I dwell on all the time but just uh to say to myself, "Now Lillian, is this really important?" . . . It's a very much part of my thinking.

I don't feel filled with gloom and doom. . . . I feel that it was a very positive thing to . . . stop and smell the flowers . . . and to enjoy things as they come along. You know I was very prone to saying, "Well, you know, I can't do that because I have to clean the house," or all these things we lay on ourselves. . . . I don't fuss about those things.

I think that's a major part of [why] I'm very seldom feel down in the dumps. I can get irritated . . . [and] get in a great snark over [my boss]. . . . but basically I don't let it drag me down. I don't come home and sit and cry or sit and frown. . . . [But] I'm not exactly a passive person so I haven't lost that part . . . (laugh) of my nature.

Believing that she might really die caused Lillian to see clearly that family and friends were her top priority. Focussing on the important things allowed her to enjoy life more.

### Future

When thinking about what might come next in her life Lillian remarked, "Well, I'm looking to enjoy myself really. I've worked really hard most of my life. . . . I don't, you know, have any great yearning ambitions." One of the reasons she was able to look forward to enjoying herself was because of having fewer

responsibilities:

[I've had] a lot of people to look after and care for and uh I still have a lot of people that I do care for but they're kind of once removed now. You know, my kids are at the point where I'll do what I can you know but I'm not looking after them so to speak.

I'd like to see my kids get finished and established and so on. And they're all getting there (laugh). . . . [My youngest has] . . . a couple of years to go and. . . I'd like to know (laugh) that he's got something.

Lillian predicted that more time would be required to attend to her mother as she ages but the responsibilities would be shared with siblings:

I guess uh I do more looking after of my mother than anybody else and she's not dependent yet, she's still quite independent in lots of ways. She is getting more and more reliant on us . . . but there's four of us you know so we're lucky.

Lillian wanted very much to see family traditions maintained but was at a point where she wanted to pass on some of the responsibility to her children:

I want one of them to buy a big house (laugh) and start doing Christmas (laugh). I'll bring the sausage rolls (laugh) or whatever. They can do all this. But none of them have a place big enough. . . . There's so many of us now that uh it takes a pretty big place.

I'd like to keep it in the family and, and the kids love it you know, the kids all love it so it has to be kept on, one way or the other. . . . It's always been my thing and I kind of (laugh) hoard it you know. And I'd like my kids to be able to keep doing it. So, we'll see. We certainly won't let it go anyway. It's too much a part of the family now.

Continuing to work was still a necessity for Lillian in order to

do some of the things she enjoyed:

I guess what I'm looking for now is keeping my job (laugh), working for the government. . . . I'll have to work until I'm 65. Unless I had the money, I wouldn't want to retire now. I don't have enough money to retire now. I mean I don't want to retire and be poor. . . . But if I, if I quit now, I couldn't live. I, I don't have enough pension. . . . And I [sigh] you know I'm not that unhappy with working. So I, I, I'm quite happy with that.

I won't be rich (laugh) if I work 'til 65 but at least I'll have enough to, to stay alive and maybe have one trip a year. . . . I would uh like to have enough money to be able to travel as long as I'm able to. . . . Now how realistic this is I don't know.

I want to, I think I can keep my house until I retire. I'll never have it paid off by then so I'll probably have to sell it. That's fine. I'll have had it for these years and enjoyed it.

Lillian also recognized that there were some things she didn't want to do anymore at that time of her life:

I don't want to go back to school. I never want to write another paper or have another exam that I have to study for. If I go back to university . . . I'm going to go as a senior citizen and I can just audit the courses (laugh). . . . [I] could participate in the discussion and drive the professors crazy, then I could just go out and leave it. At one point I thought I might go back but I've got to the point now where I just don't want to. For one thing, in my job I'm doing that kind of thing all the time, that's what I do. I'm writing papers virtually. And I don't want to do that in my spare time.

Lillian commented on the possibility of a passionate relationship in her future:

If I could find it, if it happened to me again, I would snap it up in a minute. . . . I still believe in marriage. . . . I don't necessarily have to sign the paper anymore but I would . . . certainly live with somebody if I could feel that way again. But my standards now are probably impossibly (laugh) high



(laugh). I haven't seen this paragon walking (laugh) around.

Oh there are times . . . when I think it's a missing facet. Something [like a movie] will move me to think of that. . . . If you could ever have that connection with somebody, I don't think there's anything better in this world than that and I would . . . walk across hot coals to have that. But I don't see it happening to me.

I'm not pining. . . . Every once in awhile I think, "Oh dear . . . it's a 'would-be-nice' thing to have," but I don't, I don't really believe it will happen. For one thing, you could count on your 10 fingers all the men I meet in a year doing the work I do (laugh) so I mean where am I going to meet anybody? And most social occasions I'm out with Edward so that kind of scares people off and I'm certainly not throwing him over on the off chance that I am going to meet this wonderful person who's just going to float into my life from God knows where. In the meantime, Edward is, is a really great person. And I, I don't mean that I'm just using him. I think we'll probably be together for a long time, you know. We do share a lot.

In summing up her approach to life, both at that time and in the future, Lillian commented: "I've learned to 'seize the day' (laugh), carpe diem, and not to worry about the things I can't really do anything about." She concluded with these thoughts:

I guess I try to live each day as it comes. . . . It doesn't mean that I don't think about the future at all and don't try to make plans . . . Essentially I'm . . . grateful for what I've got. . . . I've got a wonderful family and . . . I just think I'm pretty lucky. . . . Things are pretty good for me.

Lillian was satisfied with her life as it was at the time. Her wishes for the future were mostly a desire to keep things as they were. She had come to realize the importance of making the most of each day.

In this section Lillian told a story of a life defined by large-

scale changes. The experiences of marrying twice and leaving both marriages led to changes in the way she thought about her independence and her choices. Lillian learned that she could be self-sufficient and in charge of her life and that many difficult issues had been resolved. A serious illness made clear to her the prime importance of family and friends. The future appeared to be untroubled and Lillian's philosophy was to "seize the day."

## Conclusion

Well--I made you take time to look at what I saw and when you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower--and I don't.

Georgia O'Keefe

In this study I have described and analyzed the experiences of two women who are at midlife (defined as the 50s), with the focus on self-perceived inner change and development. My goal was to learn what had brought these two women to where they were in their lives at that time; to obtain a glimpse of the factors which influenced their life paths. I wanted to come to some understanding of the participants' subjective experiences, that is, the life story they themselves had produced. It is my hope that these stories will add to the new narratives of women's lives suggested by Gergen (1990) in her call for a new developmental theory for women at midlife. She pointed out that the linear, sequential theories of (male) adult development are being challenged by the fact that women's lives are organized in many different ways. Grandmothers in graduate school, 40-year-old mothers, and women with multiple career or relationship histories don't fit into traditional forms. New ones, therefore, need to be created; forms which can accommodate the reality of unpredictable, undefined change. I believe that the method employed in this study, that is, in-depth interviews with a broad focus, was sensitive to the concerns and interests of the participants. They talked about topics which were important to them

and told their stories in their own way.

In summary, Laura's story revealed that changes and developments were occurring on many levels. Her work experiences had produced both positive and negative effects. In some instances she gained expertise and was rewarded; in others she felt undervalued and betrayed. Those experiences caused changes in her attitude towards work, that is, she became more cautious about putting everything into her job. Laura was also feeling a degree of ambivalence about pursuing any career at all.

Laura was continuing to acquire greater competence in several areas. In some of these (e.g., physical challenges, music, and writing) she had achieved a level of confidence and validity. In others (e.g., seeking knowledge and becoming more confident in her opinions) the developments were still in progress.

Laura had gained some insights into herself and was consciously trying to do some things differently. For instance, by giving up some control and allowing others to share or take over responsibility she discovered that there were benefits for herself as well. In her search for role models Laura was aware that she was moving from reliance on outside experts to reliance on herself as the authority.

When she turned her thoughts to the situation of women in general it appeared that Laura had concluded that women play a relatively passive role in society. She believed that, to some extent, this was because women continued to accept their situation.

Family remained as a significant foundation and context for

Laura. With dependent children no longer at home Laura was in a time of transition. She had more freedom to pursue her own interests and determine a new role for herself.

Defining that role was complicated by the difficulty in finding a way of expressing herself which would be recognized and valued by the outside world. Although she was subject to external evaluation Laura was becoming more sure of the validity of her own perspective. She was making decisions which showed an increasing degree of control over her own life. Laura tentatively concluded that perhaps the most valuable contribution she could offer to society would be to focus her efforts at that time on caring for her own family, doing for them what she might otherwise do for others.

The interviews with Laura took place at a time when she was in a period of transition; many aspects of her life were in flux. It appeared to me that Laura was developing a stronger sense of inner authority; of learning to appreciate and trust her own strength, knowledge, and expertise. Laura herself had come to see life as a process of continual change which she described in terms of crests and downsides of waves, but always with the ability to adapt.

If Laura's analogy can be applied to Lillian, it would seem that Lillian was riding the crest of the wave when we met. She worked at a satisfying, rewarding job and enjoyed the closeness of family and very good friends.

The support of family and friends was of great importance earlier in Lillian's life when, between the ages of 30 and 50, she underwent several major life-changes. During that time Lillian

married twice and experienced both relationships as emotionally and psychologically abusive. In both cases she had the strength to come to, and follow through on, a decision to leave the relationship. As a result of those experiences Lillian was ensuring that her independence and freedom of choice were maintained. Part of the ability to remain independent came from knowing that she was capable of managing on her own. Over the years Lillian had achieved a sense of confidence and acceptance about the decisions she had made, and was continuing to make, in her life.

Only 3 years ago, significant changes again occurred when Lillian endured, over a period of several months, a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety due to a serious illness. The possibility of dying was very real to her at that time. Believing that she might die caused Lillian to see clearly that family and friends were the most important elements of her life.

At the time of the interviews, Lillian was enjoying a period of relative stability and was satisfied with her life. Her wishes for the future were mostly a desire to keep things as they were. She had come to appreciate even more the essentials in life and realized the importance of making the most of each day.

Before moving from the realm of the particular to that of the general, I believe it is appropriate to acknowledge that there are many components that make up the lives of Laura and Lillian. Only some of them are presented here. One of the reasons for this is that the research instruments in qualitative studies are the researchers themselves. They play an integral part in determining the particular

data which emerges. Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out that "the inquirer and the 'object' of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable" (p. 37). Upon re-reading the transcripts it was evident that there were times when my agenda had directed the course of the conversation, thus influencing the information revealed. Another researcher would certainly have elicited different parts of the story because, as Rossiter (1988) explained, "each participant in a particular relationship unfolds as an audience to the other" (p. 25). The process is interactive and evolves from the unique characteristics of the particular people involved.

In relating the findings in this study to those of other studies I am aware of the difficulties inherent in comparing results obtained by very different methods. The two participants in this study revealed themes which were important to both of them and which have been identified in the literature. These include:

1. Relationships. Included here are family, friendships, and partners. These kinds of relationships figured prominently for both Laura and Lillian.

The family of origin continued to be an important element in Laura's life at midlife. She maintained close connections with her parents and siblings. She spoke especially of the very strong bond with parents, one that never goes away. They continued to be a source of emotional support for her in adulthood. The relationship with her husband was also a very close one. Laura talked of the similarities in their ways of doing and thinking. They had fairly traditional roles in that Laura performed the inside tasks and Tom

the outside ones. At the time of the interviews he was providing financial support for Laura, something she did not feel comfortable about. They were strong partners in raising their children and conscious of being role models for them. Parenting was a responsibility Laura took seriously. She was prepared to have her grown children return home if they needed to, offering support to them as her parents had to her. Although she didn't regret it, she noted that she had often set aside her own interests in favour of those of the children when they were young. Her career, too, was fashioned around the demands of family which she saw as her most important priority. Relationships with the members of her music group were very important for Laura, as significant for her as the music itself.

Children and siblings formed a large, close-knit circle of relationships for Lillian. She maintained very close ties with her sisters in particular. She remarked that she would feel devastated if they moved away. Lillian's mother was also still very much a part of her life. She saw her as requiring more care in the future but the caregiving would be shared with siblings. Lillian spoke of having enjoyed the parenting years and was deriving much pleasure from the company of her children, including step-children, now that they were grown. Lillian felt she was lucky to have been able to maintain several close friendships with other women over a long period of time. The relationship with Edward was characterized by ambivalence. She did not experience it as entirely satisfactory yet did not foresee anyone else in her future. The issue of maintaining



personal power in regard to Edward was important to Lillian. It was clear that he had to adjust to what was acceptable to her and her family if he wanted to remain in the relationship. At the same time they enjoyed many aspects of their lives with each other and planned to remain together for a long time.

Several studies cited earlier (Bell & Eisenberg, 1985; England & Finch, 1991; Mercer et al., 1989; Peck, 1986) also found relationships to be a significant element in the lives of midlife women. These findings lend support to Gilligan's (1982) and Miller's (1976) conclusions that relationships and connections with others are important to women's sense of identity.

2. Work. Although their employment histories were dissimilar, work was significant to both Laura and Lillian. Other studies have given a less clear picture. Some concluded that employed women were more satisfied than homemakers (Coleman & Antonucci, 1981) while others found women to be positive about staying at home (Hornstein, 1986).

Laura had been employed for a significant portion of her adult life. Without clear-cut aspirations and goals her career path was more opportunistic than planned. Once her children were born, she chose the more traditional role of staying home to raise them until they were of school-age. Although her rural location provided fewer and less varied opportunities for paid employment than an urban center might have, Laura was able to find jobs that did not interfere with her parental responsibilities. Only recently had she experienced difficulty in finding paid work, perhaps due to lack of education,

training or experience, age, rural location, or the recession. As a result she was ambivalent about pursuing a career. On one hand she was content to be at home; on the other she realized she would be very happy to be working. Employment for Laura represented a way of achieving a sense of independence, of contributing her share to the family income, and of attaining a recognized status.

At her mother-in-law's insistence, Lillian went to university to complete her teaching degree. That training allowed her to obtain a better position than most women had at that time and provided her with the means to get out of an unsatisfactory marriage. After leaving the teaching profession her work history was governed more by job availability than a specific career path. Because she was self-supporting job security was an important issue for Lillian, particularly at a time when her position was as vulnerable as any to cut-backs. She would have to work until retirement age in order to keep her house and maintain her lifestyle. The bed-and-breakfast business she operated contributed to her economic security. Earning an income had been, and continued to be, a necessity for Lillian.

3. Autonomy. Laura and Lillian were at different phases of dealing with issues of independence. Laura was actively engaged in thinking through, and acting on, these issues; Lillian, because of circumstances earlier in her life, had begun to confront these issues in her 30s. In becoming more autonomous, both women were taking risks. Laura, for instance, took on challenges in the realm of physical activities, music, and writing. Both she and Lillian took risks in their close relationships by exerting more control and independence.

Several studies (Helson & Moane, 1987; Hyman, 1988; Todd et al., 1990) showed that, as they became older, women experienced increased autonomy, confidence, and interpersonal power. The midlife women interviewed by England and Finch (1991) identified a need for a degree of separation from family for themselves.

Being a self-sufficient person was an important value for Laura. She was becoming more assertive and independent within her marriage but felt guilty at being financially dependent on her husband. The movement to greater trust in her own abilities was shown in many facets of her life. She was exercising more control in choosing to join with action-oriented people and activities, which she saw as more powerful and influential than her previous social relationships. Laura was questioning and rebelling against expectations for women, and looking more to other people and herself as sources of guidance. Gaining a sense of achievement in many areas of her life contributed to an increased appreciation of the validity of her own thoughts, beliefs, and values.

In her 50s, Lillian had come to fully realize that she was in control of her actions and that she felt very good about that. She saw that she had given away her power to her husbands and was determined that she would not let that happen again. The cost of achieving her independence was high--giving up a familiar home environment, changing her lifestyle, losing some of her friends, and dealing with reactions of her children to the new circumstances of their lives. On the plus side, she learned that she could survive, both financially and emotionally, on her own. Her financial independence

was an important factor in allowing her to attain a level of autonomy. In her first marriage she had been controlled by limited access to money; in the second by psychological means. Lillian was happy to realize that she had moved from a position of conforming to the expectations of others to achieving, by midlife, a sense of self-confidence and control.

4. Creativity. At midlife Laura was in a situation which allowed her creativity to emerge after years of deferring these interests to raise her family. She was actively involved in writing, sewing and designing, and her music group. Lillian remained enthusiastic and invested in her career, still looking for ways to improve the lot of women in spite of the frustrations of the political process. Vaillant (1990) found that women who were creative displayed more vigorous aging. It was clear that Laura and Lillian were engaged in their various activities in vital ways. The women in the Mercer et al. study (1989) also displayed an emergence of creativity in later life, as expressed through writing, music, and career activity.

5. Contribution to society. At midlife Laura was grappling with the idea that she should become more political, take a stronger stand on social issues. Although drawn to big causes she had decided that, for the time being at least, doing what she could in the smaller sphere of caring for her family was a manageable goal. Laura also felt a sense of responsibility to her own community and had found ways to contribute to it that were compatible with her personal interests.

Much of Lillian's employment was devoted to improving

conditions for women in society. She viewed her current job as providing her with an opportunity to contribute to women's welfare and felt fortunate to have had the chance to make a difference at an exciting stage of women's struggle to achieve equal rights.

The desire expressed and manifested by Laura and Lillian to commit themselves in some way to the betterment of their society is akin to Erikson's (1982) stage of Generativity in which there is a commitment to contribute to the next generation and institutions of society. Because of their individual circumstances and history this was shown in different ways. Lillian's commitment was a continuing involvement in women's issues and is linked to her own economic needs. Laura was searching for a way to express that commitment that would not drain her own resources; that would allow her to continue to care for her own family as well. Unlike Erikson's theory, however, there was no evidence of an increase in generativity in midlife. Instead, there appeared to be a change in focus over time, that is, from child-rearing to a different level of support for children and parents in Laura's case. For Lillian there was also a change in that child-rearing was no longer her responsibility but her earlier involvement in women's issues remained strong. As with Laura and Lillian, the women studied by Stewart and Gold-Steinberg (1990) had a desire to contribute to society. Their ability to do so, as was the case with Laura and Lillian, was influenced by their experiences as parents as well as access to time, energy, and resources.

6. Life perspective. Both Laura and Lillian had achieved an outlook on life that arose from the richness and depth of their life

experiences. For Laura, midlife was a wonderful time. She found it freeing to realize that there is a constant flux in people's lives and that life goes on, that people adapt, in spite of the ups and downs. Lillian's illness made it clear to her that family and friends were the most important elements in her life. Along with this was a realization that it was important to "seize the day." For both women, there was a conviction that the present is all there is and that one should make the most of it. This outlook was similar to that of the women interviewed by England and Finch (1991). Themes of acceptance of the stages and events of one's life emerged, with life being seen as a forward-moving process.

In general, the lives of these two women did not fit neatly into a stage theory of adult development (Erikson, 1982) where stages occur in a fixed order and changes are sudden and clear. For instance, Laura was actively exploring issues of role, autonomy, and competence at midlife. These tasks had not been accomplished once and for all in childhood and early adulthood. Lillian, too, talked about having only recently realized that she had arrived at a point where she felt self-confident. For her, issues of Intimacy were still salient, illustrating that these are not tasks settled in early adulthood. Tasks of Generativity, Erikson's seventh stage, were not restricted to middle adulthood for these two women. Raising children and caring for their own parents had been long-term involvements. If anything, there was a turning towards development and care of the self.

Other concepts, such as the midlife crisis (Crow, 1987), which

attempt to describe some aspects of adult development, do not adequately capture the complexity of the lives of Laura and Lillian in their 50s. The empty nest (defined as the home environment after children have reached maturity and left home) has often been identified as a stressor which could trigger a midlife crisis, especially in women who believed their usefulness and source of power to be restricted to the parenting role. The experience of launching her last child was a fairly recent one for Laura. She found that while she was still drawn to the vitality of family life with children she was, at the same time, enjoying the opportunity to allow her creativity to emerge and had no desire to give up her freedom. The empty nest, rather than triggering a crisis, provided an opportunity to explore and develop. Lillian, on the other hand, did not make any reference to the period of launching her children.

Midlife, for Laura, was a time of becoming more aware of her strengths as well as a time of recognizing that there were aspects of herself she wanted to change. Rather than experiencing this time as a crisis period in which she felt trapped, without enough time or resources to escape, Laura was meeting the challenge of finding a new role for herself, both in the family and in the outer world.

For Lillian, midlife was a time of significant change when she left her second marriage and was challenged to re-establish herself in a new way of life. This was a challenge she met successfully. The difficulties she experienced arose from the particular circumstances at that time rather than from the fact of arriving at midlife per se. Lillian had come to a point where she felt confident in choosing to do

what she felt was right for her. She realized that she no longer had to conform to the wishes and expectations of others--a bonus of being 50.

The experiences of Laura and Lillian resonate more closely with the concept of prime of life (Mitchell & Helson, 1990), defined as a time of fruition, fulfillment, and high quality of life. They shared many of the conditions found to be significant in the study: empty nest; secure relationship with a partner; good health; increased sense of autonomy; active involvement in the present; and commitment to other people, career, and community. The degree to which these elements were present or evolving differed for each woman. Laura, for instance, was exploring the idea of career while Lillian had a long history of satisfying work; Laura was in a long-term, stable marriage while Lillian and her partner, together for less than 7 years, were not living together and had no plans to do so, or to marry.

Peck's (1986) model posits that a woman's self-definition in adulthood depends on the social-historical time dimension in which she lives plus her sphere of influence in relation to family, friends, and work. One of the central dynamics is the modulating of personal growth in order to minimize negative effects on key relationships. Upon reading about the model Laura was excited to discover that it described her accurately. She saw herself as becoming more competent, self-sufficient, and assertive outside her marriage in a way which allowed her to develop but not at the expense of that key relationship. In fact, she saw that growth as a positive addition to



her marriage. In Lillian's case, the social context in 1968 was a factor which made her decision to leave her first marriage more difficult. Along with the emotional turmoil of such a decision, she was burdened with the knowledge that many people did not understand or approve of her actions. In neither her first nor second marriage did she find her sphere of influence and degree of control acceptable. Rather than complying with old definitions of her role she chose greater independence and control in a new relationship. For both Laura and Lillian there was a need to find a balance between attachment to others and, at the same time, separation from them. The ways in which they found that balance was a reflection of their unique circumstances and personalities.

Generally, it can be stated that:

1. These women did not follow a linear, sequential path of development. The process was more cyclical in nature where tasks or issues continued to arise at different times in their lives, in response to particular circumstances.
2. Psychosocial growth and development continued to occur in the decade of their 50s. Both women were actively engaged in life with no indication of winding down.
3. Choices made earlier on produced widely divergent life paths. Although they both came from traditional backgrounds in terms of roles and expectations for women at that time, they became more different over time.
4. These two women of approximately the same age and social and cultural backgrounds were engaged in different developmental

tasks.

5. Both autonomy and connectedness were important elements of their lives. Each had negotiated the balance between these two needs in a way which reflected her particular circumstances.

6. Change, both expected and unpredictable, produced by the interaction of internal and cultural-historical forces, was characteristic of the lives of these two women.

It is my hope that these stories will shed light on some of the issues of concern to women at midlife. Eisner (1991) described the process of accumulation of knowledge in qualitative research as occurring more horizontally than vertically. Readers rather than the researcher determine whether the findings are meaningful for themselves. They make connections by analogy and extrapolation. By going beyond the information provided they interpret, make inferences, refine perception, and, ultimately, come to a more profound understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The portrayal of the uniqueness of these two individuals--their particular realities--can in this way add to and deepen the understanding of women at midlife.

The portraits of Laura and Lillian show that these women were leading productive, effective lives; that growth and evolution continued to add new dimensions to their lives during their 50s. These stories are unique, reflecting the experiences of these particular women. Together with stories of many other women of different racial, ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds, a broader understanding of the processes of development and integration can

be achieved. Further research on women in their midlife years, using methods which foster the emergence of new dimensions of life experience, is needed in order to expand the vision of what women are and can become. Rather than trying to force their lives into traditional forms, new forms can be created by hearing what women themselves have to tell us.

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## Appendices

The following documents are appended to this account:

- A. Letter to Participants
- B. Consent Form
- C. Interview Questions

Appendix A  
Letter to Participants

Dear

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba doing a Master's thesis on midlife women who have experienced significant inner change and development in their lives. I believe this is an important area of study because there is a lack of detailed information about this age group and the ways in which they have changed. Because of your personal experience and ability to communicate your reflections and insights, I expect to learn a great deal from you about this topic.

The study will be conducted in the form of interviews of approximately one hour each. We will meet for at least four sessions, with additional interviews as necessary until "the story is told". This will allow us to explore in depth your view of the changes you experienced. You will have opportunities as we go along to suggest new directions, point out gaps, make corrections, and discuss interpretations. Because of the nature of the interviews, it is possible that some distressing issues will be raised. You may refuse to answer any question or pursue any topic. The questions will be very broad in nature, for example, "How was it that you decided to go back to school?" A copy of the interview questions is attached to this letter. You will be free to answer in any way which makes sense to you. You also have the right to leave the study at any time.

With your permission, the interviews will be tape-recorded. As well, I will make brief notes during the sessions and more

substantial notes afterwards. The tapes will be transcribed and then destroyed within six weeks of the session. No one else will have access to the tapes.

The results will be provided to thesis committee members and, upon completion of the study, will be available as a public document. You will be provided with results of the study if you wish to have them.

In order to ensure your anonymity and confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym. Results will be written so that identifying information is not revealed. Access to transcripts and field notes will be limited to me and thesis committee members as required.

There is a Consent Form attached to this letter. Please read, sign, and return it to me before the first interview.

I am looking forward to working with you in this study. I hope that it will be a rewarding experience for both of us. If you have any questions or concerns at any time during the process, please call me at 255-7374.

Yours sincerely,

Arlene Mak

Appendix B  
Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to take part in the study on inner change and development in midlife women for at least four interview sessions of approximately one hour each. I give my permission to tape-record the interviews and to have fieldnotes taken.

I understand that

- the interviewer will be the only person to have access to the tapes.
- I can refuse to answer any question or pursue any topic.
- I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Appendix C  
Interview Questions

A. Background Information

1. What is your age?
2. Where were you born?
3. What is your education?
4. What are your living arrangements?
5. Do you have children? If so, how many and what are their ages?
6. Are you presently employed?

B. Lead-Off Question

1. In this study, I am interested in learning about inner growth and personal development in women of your age. What kind of changes are you aware of within yourself now that you are at midlife?