

WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO?

LIFELONG LEARNING AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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The purpose of the question is to refine the question. To discover the answer to a question is to deprive one of the pleasure of refining the question (Frye, 1960).

Nietzsche (in Kaufmann, 1968) asked in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “Free from what? As if that mattered to Zarathustra! But your eyes should tell me brightly: free for what?”

Introduction

My interviews in this study are a continuation of research into adult learning (Shirk, 1984, 1986, 1996, 1998). Based on personal interviews with 198 respondents, I attempted to portray the states of mind most adults face when learning something new. Now, in these twenty-nine interviews, I continue that process, focusing more intently, however, on the impact of consumer behavior on the adult learner. Why?

Adults as learners are frequently searching for meaning in their lives: the complexity of economics and the consumption of goods and services tend to be woven into their search. Since the context of all of life’s situations is fluid across time and space, actors cannot be assured that their states of being will remain constant and secure. They hope for meaningful opportunities that will enrich, reward, and uplift their states of being. They may scheme, strategize for what they intend, and be pleased at the intended or unintended outcomes. They may also scheme, strategize for what they intend, only to be surprised, angered, or saddened by unintended outcomes. “Price tags,” however, are frequently attached to their hopes.

It is in the context of these fluid, and sometimes turbulent situations that opportunities for lifelong learning emerge. It is also in the context of these situations that economic opportunities and constraints surface.

Organization of Findings

I will first present a condensed version of my thoughts on the adult learner from a sociopsychological perspective (Shirk, 1996). For the second part I will look at the adult learner through the principals and philosophies of consumer behavior (Shirk, 1998).

In the third section I will present situationally grounded interviews in narrative form. An analysis will accompany each narrative. In conclusion, questions will be raised for future consideration.

The Adult Learner from a Sociopsychological Perspective.

Every person exists in the context of relationships and environments that include age, family, health, culture, geographical location, economic climate, cohorts that Lewin identified as fields (Lewin, 1935; Lewin in Cartwright, 1951). Field elasticity over time and space is to be expected. As fields expand or contract throughout time and space, actors are influenced by visible and invisible positive and negative exterior forces to which they respond with positive and negative interior forces. The expansion/contraction of their life space creates what Lewin identified as space of free movement. Space of free movement can be influenced by age, employment, family, leisure, and retirement.

As actors migrate across time and space they assume a variety of roles that fit the occasions, roles such as sibling, parent, confidant, friend, teacher, student, employee, employer (Sarbin in Allen and Scheibe, 1982). Behaviors may have been previously conditioned and influenced by a reservoir of sub-conscious responses. Consciously or unconsciously actors, by doing, or learning something new, may weigh the costs versus benefits in their decision-making processes. When they do, they will pursue, delay, or avoid actions that could be life changing. If they deliberately choose to pursue change, their space of free movement may be modified, a factor that may or may not have been at first considered. Determination to migrate from one group to another will be influenced by the perceived cost-benefits options to the actors (Thibaut and Kelley, 1991).

Time perspective has its own contrary or pleasant way of intruding into actors' life space. Age, retirement, memory-reinforcing experiences can overwhelm or affirm actors. Time perspective can motivate and stimulate actors to creativity and active service, or it can impose fear, inaction, and isolation.

There are fateful situations in which actors have no choice but to act, but even then costs and benefits will be encountered. Acts of denial, dismissal, rejection will not eliminate chance occurrences, for to try to do so will produce their own consequences. Learning can and often does occur in threatening situations as the reader will observe in

the ensuing case studies.

Times of indecision occur when the actor is not sure that benefits will outweigh costs. Indecisiveness can lead to what Lewin (in Cartwright, 1951) termed “marginal man.” A conscious or unconscious decision-making process almost always goes through a state of marginality until the cost-benefit analysis leads to a choice. Seemingly instantaneous choices may be hatched out of latent desires whose times have come after having hibernated in marginality.

Learning something new or doing something new is not always a conscious choice. Chance can be a determining factor, and though consequences may be unintended, they can become windows of opportunity. We may move by chance; we may also affirm providence. Nietzsche said, “We dance on the feet of chance” (in Kaufmann, 1968).

Serendipity may also be present in the learning process. On any given day the mind is bombarded with many stimuli, most of which go unnoticed. On occasion, and only after the fact, some stimuli trigger acts that memory recalls as significant. They were unknowingly but situationally relevant.

For each identified learning activity I asked respondents if they approached others for assistance. Perinbanayagam (1985) noted that people generate social acts through participation with at least one other that result in the construction of stable meanings, relationships, and worlds which occur in situations. He defined “situation” as

An encompassing arrangement of space, objects, and persons designed to elicit determinate responses from actors and serves as the locus in which words are exchanged by participants in the social act, leading to further refinements and redefinitions, this time accomplished by manipulating the structures of the language being used.

Exchanges in a situation by actors in a social space were considered relative in intensity and duration as dictated by time and space. Acts were “produced and directed by the participants in order to aid each other in arriving at the relevant conceptualization of the situation so that each of them can proceed to the next step.” He added, “These social acts that occur in situations are usually, if not always, characterized by the presence of problematic events.”

Dervin (in Glazier and Powell, 1992; Dervin in Dervin and Foreman-Wernet,

2003) assumes that one's life-space is "potentially discontinuous from time to time and space to space;" that whatever "order" exists for the actor is not directly accessible to an observer. "It assumes that humans do not have available to them an external standard to which they can turn for an assessment of their truth, either in an absolute or even a relative sense." Set in the context of everyday existence, and in the assumption of discontinuity, it includes life's isolated peak experiences as well as its raw ambiguity. Yet, as Dervin notes, sense-making assumes that there is something systematic about the way an actor approaches gaps between what is and what is hoped for. Sense-making is that constant process of bridging life's pervasive discontinuities and information gaps; the actor maneuvers to appropriate information that will satisfy perceived solutions to perceived predicaments.

In conclusion, adult learners are products of their cultural, economic, and political environments. Life is not static, painless, unchanging. It is a day-to-day journey of achievements, discoveries, failures, and surprises that intentionally or unintentionally challenge actors to try to make sense out of their lives.

The Adult Learner from a Consumer Behavior Perspective (See Shirk, 1998)

It would be difficult to understand consumer behavior apart from actors' needs to make sense out of the complex situations in which they find themselves. Consumer behavior has been described as the decision-making process in which individuals evaluate, obtain, use, and dispose of goods and services in the belief that lives will be made happier (Engel and others, 1986; Ferguson in Hafstrom and Dunsing, 1972; Loudon and Della Bitta, 1988; and O'Shaughnessy, 1987). It is more than that. Consumer behavior is a subtle, if not an overtly complex pattern of conduct that is driven by an undercurrent of discontent. It is not, as Earl (1986) notes, driven by a pattern of predictable behaviors. The consumer is not able to ensure oneself against every possible eventuality and able simply to go through life. Life is unpredictable. Mapped-out plans do not always work.

Consumerism and consumption of good and services involve decision-making that can vary in length of time from minutes to lengthy deliberations (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1988; DeBruicker and Ward, 1980; and Harrell, 1986). It can be influenced by

internal and external variables such as attitudes, interpersonal influence, motivation, perception, persuasion, emotional disposition, class, sex, age, income, health, culture, and supply and demand market forces. Demographic variables such as education, income and assets, family size, family life cycle, and marital status act as constraints on consumer choice, and consumption patterns have ramifications not only for individual actors but for communities as well (Hafstrom and Dunsing, 1972; Ferber, 1962).

Some of the concepts in consumer behavior include life cycle theory, impact of unemployment, household production, compensatory consumption, consumer education, recreation and consumer consumption, education and income forgone, and purchaser decision process.

Consumer patterns change across the life span. Lesser and Kunkel (1991) listed four categories in an adult consumption-shopper model: Early adult shoppers (sensation and arousal seeking, creative expansion); young adult shoppers (new worlds to explore with a wish to conquer the unknown); middle-aged adult shoppers (high career and family time involvement); and older shoppers (recognition of the finiteness of their lives). Harrell (1986) identified ten stages in the life cycle, including allowance for single and divorced parents at various age levels. Sherman and Schiffman in Tongren (1988) listed male-female segments among older consumers: "Mature (55-64), Young-Old (65-74); and Old-Old (74 and older)." Additional "older" categories included Active Employed Affluents, Active Retirees, and Full-time Homemakers (Bartos in Tongren, 1988).

A major influence in the Life Cycle Theory is the introduction of children. Douthitt and Fedyk (1990) examined how children influenced not only consumption of market goods and service and participation in leisure activities, but decisions related to household production for adult males and females. A second key factor is family resources and assets. Gove and others (1973) reported that the family life cycle provided individual members with a pool of resources including skills, time, energy, and disposable income that might not be available to a single person.

Using the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center data, Ferber (1962) identified age and income stages in the family life cycle that contributed to consumption. Income increased from youth to about middle age, then declined; liquid assets rose from youth through middle age then declined; and differing purchase patterns occurred for

different age patterns. There was a strong tendency for younger families to dissave in order to purchase durable goods, while older families purchased fewer durable goods.

The family life cycle can be affected by fiscal disruption. Lown (1986) used the University of Michigan data to report that most families can expect to experience periods of financial difficulty; that prosperity throughout the family life cycle is uncommon for most families; and that few workers can expect uninterrupted full-time employment. Lown also noted that despite socioeconomic status, education, and employment,

...Marriage, divorce, death, and remarriage are the primary determinants of whether women and children are financially secure while employment status is the primary determinant for men. After divorce, the income of women and children drops dramatically while men experience little change or even an improvement in living standards. Essentially, divorce results in poverty for women and children while it can be a way out of poverty for men.

The life cycle and consumption habits of every generation are influenced by “powers of cohorts”(Meredith and Scheme,1994), and the “self-consistency concept” (Moschis, 1994). Developed early in life, the power of persistence follows actors throughout their lives. Four cohort categories include cohorts by date of birth, money motto, sex mind set, and favorite music. These influences determine how people see the world and ways they see themselves in the world. It will mean “that ‘similar’ events will impinge differently upon their perceived abilities to predict and control their lives (Earl, 1986).

Lown (1986) observed that few workers could expect uninterrupted full-time employment. The disruption of unemployment could set off frightening events over which the employee felt helpless. Earl (1986) commented,

Unemployment is not intrinsically the end of one’s world, but it seems that many workers find it difficult to construe it as anything other than this. People commonly find life on the dole very distressing because they find it impossible to anticipate what is going to happen to them in future months; they can neither construct theories that seem to match unfolding events that they do not presume to be able to control, nor can they see ways of determining themselves what will happen. In important respects, being unemployed is like nothing many workers have hitherto experienced. Unemployment is usually seen to offer a few new freedoms—such as when to get up—but these are swamped by a perceived loss of scope for control that the unemployed associate with lost access to material resources. Some people see themselves as so totally lacking the ability to predict and control events that they cease trying altogether and come to display the

symptoms of clinical depression....

Household production activity consists of unpaid services provided by individual or family member that could otherwise be delegated, at a market price, to someone outside the “household group” (Reid in Beutler and Owen, 1980; and Cheswick, 1982). Household production can be influenced by financial constraints, family size, education, age, well-being, or willfully performed as a self-satisfying activity. To assess the economic value of one’s efforts one would have to estimate time allotment (amount of time it takes to complete a project) and shadow wages (the cost of hiring a person to do the job).

Household production can produce rewards that are longer lasting and more valuable than the immediate economic benefits. As a learning opportunity, household production can not only produce immediate satisfaction, it can improve through repetition and improvisation, as well as lead to a self-sustaining life style.

Compensatory consumption is the purchase of goods and services that provide one with a sense of personal security or well-being. Real or imagined, this type of consumption can provide individuals, groups, or classes with a sense of accomplishment or self-worth that might not be found on the production line or in one’s tenuous status in life (Gronmo in Otnes, 1988). It can be a response to ambiguity, catastrophe, deprivation, inadequacy, misfortune, poverty, prosperity, scarcity, success, or uncertainty. Even at the cost of dissaving, consumers may try to satisfy their psychological voids with market purchases. Clothing styles, housing, computer technology, or automobiles readily lend themselves to compensatory consumption.

A pressure line is defined by the goods, services, and other conditions which a family feels it must have to maintain a particular lifestyle (Gove and others, 1973). It is a form of compensatory consumption. Lifestyle modification can propagate new learning activities through the purchase of major market items, upgrading educations, changing careers, migrating to more affluent communities.

Consumer education is the development and use of strategies designed to assist in the decision-making processes that result in evaluation of, or the intention to purchase or reject market goods. Consumer education may increase the amount of time an actor spends seeking information about a particular product. It may also improve the

efficiency with which information is used in the decision-making process (Fast, et. Al., 1989; Price, Et. Al., 1987).

The objective of recreation in a consumer society is the consumption of “surplus leisure time,” opportunities for escape, self-indulgence and pleasure, and status-seeking (Gardner and Marsh, 1978). Berger’s (1981) model of “Leisure Time Choice Behavior” analyzed adults’ willingness to budget discretionary resources to those ends that were perceived to enhance quality and interpersonal relationships, either as spectators or participants.

Schultz’s (1962) research in education and earnings forgone identified education as one of the most significant investments an individual and society could make. Ignoring “earnings foregone” (income forfeited while attending classes full time), and all other expenditures incurred in the pursuit of a degree, provide a much higher rate of return than if those funds had been invested elsewhere. Moore (1990) noted that investing in education was “Investing in the Capital Assets of Adults.” .

Regarding the actor and a consumer decision-making process, Olshavsky and Granbois in Earl (1986) reported that decision processes never occur for many purchases. They said:

For many purchasers a decision process never occurs, not even on first purchase....Purchases can occur out of necessity; they can be derived from culturally mandated lifestyles or from interlocked purchases; they can reflect preferences acquired in early childhood; they can result from simple conformity to group norms or from imitation of personal or non-personal sources; they can be made on the basis of surrogates of various types; or they can even occur on a random or superficial basis....

...Even when purchase behaviour is preceded by a choice process it is likely to be very limited. It typically involves the evaluation of few alternatives, little external search, few evaluative criteria, and simple evaluation models. There is very little evidence that consumers engage in the very extended type of search and evaluation a product testing organization like Consumers’ Union performs routinely.

In conclusion, adult learning and consumer behavior frequently occur in the context of complicated life situations, and in conjunction with each other. They are part of the stuff of life that challenges the actor to consciously or unconsciously ponder his or her current state of being, and to try to make sense out of what seems absurd, meaningless, or puzzling. Learning activities and consumer behavior can be tools the

actor uses to make sense out of his or her turbulent world. Sense-making, whether recognized or not, is an intricate part of consumer behavior and lifelong learning as the actor attempts to bridge the gap that exists between the now and the hoped for then.. Sense-making, consumer behavior, and lifelong learning are part and parcel of the complex human condition

The Respondents

Twenty-nine participated in the study. Unlike my earlier research, respondents **were not** randomly selected. Responses were hand recorded by the researcher. When possible, and for accuracy, transcribed interviews were returned to respondents for clarifying comments.

Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 84, completed from 12 to 20 years of formal education, pursued 107 projects in the past year for an average of 3.82 projects per actor, and spent an average of 91 hours on each activity (see Tables 1, 2, 3). Information resources reportedly owned by respondents are listed in Table 4. Rating, ranking, and frequency of use of 16 resources are listed in Table 5.

In the past twelve months, respondents reportedly spent a total of \$220,999 on their activities, or an average of \$2,065 per project, an average that includes purchase of a home, and a large medical expense. Total economic benefits to the respondents amounted to \$49,023 or an average of \$458 per project. Vocational learning activities accounted for the largest source of economic benefits for actors (see Table 6).

Case #1

I learned to cook for myself

A Somali male cooking for himself? His culture says no, yet this sixty-two year-old actor did just that. In his wife's extended absence he either ate out, too expensive and unhealthy; supped with friends, an imposition; did without, no; or cooked for himself, possibly. What lessons did he learn?

If I must admit, one of the things I did this year for which I must give myself a top grade is that I learned to cook. That is a big thing for a male Somali--cooking is for wives. But I learned how to cook! Why? Well, my wife was in Washington, D.C. on extended business so I either ate in restaurants or tried something else.

Since I hate going to restaurants because I have high blood pressure and have to eat healthy foods, I decided to try cooking for myself.

One thing I discovered is that when you start cooking you don't leave the kitchen to read the newspaper or watch television. I burned two pots doing that. One must be time cautious. It works, no more burned pots. Another thing is that it was a matter of trial and error. When I started cooking for myself I discovered I could make a meal last a whole week! I did that with some camel meat. At most I spent thirty dollars for the meat, spices, and all, and that is all it cost, for a whole week. Not only that, my friends gave me top grades for cooking.

His wife called to see if he was eating properly. It was a surprise to hear that he was cooking his own meals. He used to go along with what she cooked. Now he had a choice of what to eat, including camel meat.

A second activity for the joining with a group of African intellectual, he said

A friend invited me to meet with a group of African intellectuals, Channel Afrique, this past year. I have been with the Subsaharan group for a year. I spent approximately \$150 on group activities. Since I have been meeting with the group I have become more African, not just Somali.

Lessons learned from these experiences? In the cooking episode the respondent was forced to make choices, the most unfamiliar being learning how to cook. He weighed the social, psychological and economic costs and benefits to himself, family, and friends, and decided to try cooking for himself. But what would his friends think? How would it look for him to visit grocery stores to purchase ingredients for meals? What would he use for recipes?. Learning by trial and error with several burned pots as reminders, he knew that if he was going to do the cooking he would have to pay attention in the kitchen. Liking what he was doing, he started sharing meals with friends. He also discovered that the economics of home cooking was more cost effective than eating out. He could not only eat what he liked, share with friends, save money, he could also impress his wife.

Thibaut and Kelley's (1991) research shed light on the costs and benefits derived from group participation. They noted that cost/benefit factors such as choice and rewards, choice and costs, abilities, similarity of attitude, complementary needs, power, and status influenced relationship building and group participation. The respondent quickly identified with Channel Afrique, not only for ethnic identity, but for intellectual

stimulation. The few expenses incurred in group were overshadowed by the value he placed on involvement, camaraderie and intellectual stimulation.

Case #2

Learning How to Break Free

The search for the “missing” father takes different people down different paths. This particular twenty-four year-old respondent was the product of a divorce when he was two. He never developed a close father relationship, but a religious experience filled a void in his life. Shortly after his new experience he migrated across country the mid-west. People in his new environment supported his recent religious conversion.

Whether making major shifts in his life, accepting new responsibilities, learning new skills, or pursuing aesthetic interests such as poetry, the answer was the same. The actor encountered little or no difficulty. Yet for a two-month period in the past year he struggled, became mired in estrangement from his new-found faith in God. It was self-estrangement, and estrangement from God. He did not elaborate

His faith was being revived at a different church. New relationships were being formed; and more importantly, he was bonding with a spiritual mentor. Now he was “learning how to break free” from old behavioral patterns, taming old impulses and desires. He was learning how to put shortcomings into perspective. Now the long empty void left by a father with whom he could not talk was being filled by a spiritual father. He was part of a meaningful group. He was learning how to wait for God’s time. In the meantime he started working with a youth group, and was writing poetry. He hoped he could enroll in college in the near future.

One can interpret the shifts in the life of this respondent through the writings of Thibaut and Kelley, the field theory of Lewin, and Dervin’s sensemaking. The actor was searching for meaning. He had found it in religion, lost it, and found it again. He was attempting to embrace social, cultural, and religious values that offered a sense of “unconditional” acceptance.

Was it difficult for the actor to redirect his life? Yes and No. The inner and spiritual rewards and benefits exceeded psychological costs that may have been involved. His redirection seemed to fill a void his birth father could not satisfy. Now he found a

spiritual mentor who could provide counsel and support. His was being redirected toward service, and now sensed a need for furthering his education.

Case #3

IT'S BEEN A HELL-OF-A-YEAR

The fifty-four year-old commercial artist knew he was a “casualty” of the technological revolution; that his employability would diminish as major corporations increasingly relied on computer generated graphics. “I was pressured into making a career change.” He held on four years before admitting his situation was desperate. “Then came 9/11: it became the crisis of my life.” Taking a part-time data entry position at a bank did not meet his expectations. Deciding to make a career shift, he would conduct art classes at local community art centers, a shift that, were he to succeed, could be lucrative. That was one of his major activities in the past year. It did not work. As he became more desperate he decided to accept employment as a parking ramp security guard. At one point he said “It’s been a hell-of-a-year!” At the close of the interview he dejectedly said, “I’m just a generalist.” with no hint about being a successful artist.

Establishing teacher credibility was difficult. A friend who was familiar with computer graphics helped plan advertising for the venture. “I had a lot of self-doubt at first, and lack of self-assurance. Once I felt I could do it, I started fitting in to a new role.” Administrative difficulties occurred in several instances in which his agenda differed from those of the centers: he conducted classes one way while directors had other expectations. “I failed to achieve my goals but am confident I can do it.”

Starting a new job was “like I came out of a cave of the self-employed. It has been the biggest spiritual challenge I have had in thirty years. It is because of 9/11. Now I’m being forced to make a change.” Those who played a role in this process included a counselor at a work force center, use of the internet, and to a minor extent, librarians. When asked how he tried to make sense out of his current predicament, he said.

I’m trying to do it through philosophy, psychology. At the time I was somewhat accepting. Now I have to give it a closer look. I see that I cannot be stubborn, have to be more flexible. Now I’m going through a huge demotion. I have to see it through, rubbing elbows with people I never thought I would. No question

about it, I'm attempting this change. I may totally withdraw but I am going to try to give it a ride. If I can do it, it may enable me to refinance my home.

Recognizing that computing was "transforming the world," he said, "I either change or die. That is stubbornness at work. I have to let go and try to learn how to compute. It is hard for me because I'm a control freak." He thought people were impatient with him, which was frustrating, but suspected it could be worse. He tried using a computer lab at a public library technology center. The resource person at the technology center received a very high rating, but the respondent did not feel like he had sufficiently practiced to feel comfortable using it. He said, "I can now get on line, cruising, like running my first marathon."

The respondent was confronted with changes from, what seemed, every direction. Stretching the boundaries of his life into the unfamiliar, and watching his walls of independence crumbling was unnerving. While certain boundaries in his life were contracting, particularly in the area of employment, he was being forced to become vulnerable with art students he was teaching. What made these changes difficult was the way he relied on conditioned responses developed in his youth. He insulated himself from the world of relationships then, and was repeating it again. "And I don't know if it is over with yet. I don't know if I can keep it together. One thing that I did find out is that I have become more assured and have a better sense of who I am." Advertising expenditures for classes was \$1,000. Economic benefits amounted to approximately \$3,000, not enough to meet his day-to-day expenses.

Did introduction to computing change the respondent? Somewhat, "It feels good to navigate and connect, like running the marathon (second time he said this); I faced the music. I was not afraid to fail. Before this I refused to open myself to change; now I'm compromising myself by learning something I resisted for a long time."

Case #4

MEDIATION TRAINING

Interviewed in a local café, the unemployed thirty-four year-old respondent was in a period of transition, training as a family mediator. Although she had known about the concept for several years, it was a friend who told her about a local training project. A

visit to the site, and further exploration into the program, gave her a sense that her skills and abilities were compatible. “Perhaps,” she said, “this could be something I could do for a career.” With “a real sense of good feeling about it,” she enrolled.

Mediation training seemed to come naturally, and friends complemented her course progress. How did the training change her? “I feel like this is where I want to go as a career, now I’m doing it as a volunteer. I feel like this is part of my life’s calling, feel more comfortable in the contribution I can bring to people.” In addition to the six-week course, she spent approximately thirty hours preparing for the licensing exams. Tuition cost was \$300.00. She was now volunteering as a family mediator.

A second major learning activity was training to be a leader for an inner-city Girl Scout troop. She said, “A friend came up with the idea.” They both liked it: they had been girl scouts in their youth. So she said, “Why don’t we do this?” That is how it started. It got started with good memories

The training was intense. Part of the reason was that most young girls recruited by the parent organization were “in challenging situations, phones disconnected, transient populations, immigrants, language and cultural barriers, and barriers between the leaders and parents.” Complicating matters was her “unreliable and erratic” co-leader who had a tendency to make unilateral decisions. Even so, it had been a good experience, for it offered her an opportunity to perform community service.

She provided insights into her preferred learning styles, saying “When I do my prep work I like to do it independently. When I am in a learning mode, I like to do it in a group--it provides support. The group brings new ideas and perspectives, new and different concepts, and, ‘Oh, I never thought of it that way.’”

At most she spent \$40.00 for the troop in the past year. The benefits were more personal than economic.

As for pursuing new interests in the next twelve months, she wanted to focus on getting a paid position as a family mediator and pursuing advanced family mediation courses. She also wanted to expand her musical interests, “to improve my singing or take up an instrument, possibly the cello.”

Several things stood out in this interview. She was unemployed and knew she had to do something, preferably to her own liking, something service-oriented. It was a

friend who pointed her in the direction of family mediation. But she was not going to do something without carefully looking at how it fit in with her own skills. As for the Girl Scout leader experience, a friend came up with the idea. Time perspective played a part in this decision. Good memories between both motivated them to pursue the training required for leadership. For another, she knew which learning styles best suited her, but was not limited to any particular one.

From the perspective of consumer behavior, she wanted to invest her income into something that would not only bring meaning into her own life, but which would be an investment in her community. Volunteering was in itself an in-kind contribution that also provided an opportunity for her to become a more proficient mediator.

Case #5

Welfare, A Change of Heart

The young looking twenty-five year-old Hmong respondent was mother of two small children, and a University of Minnesota graduate. Being a college graduate made her different from most of her cultural peers. Why? She said, “It was a liberal home attitude about women and education that made it possible for me to attend college. My father did not oppose the idea.” Her father did not oppose the idea in spite of the fact that the family relied on welfare to make ends meet.

After a two-year absence the respondent returned to the Twin Cities to find work. Her search for employment, housing, and child care relied on family connections and a network of friends. She found a position as an employment counselor in a welfare agency program at a approximately \$2,000 a month.

One of her first responsibilities was to become familiar with a new data base program. Previous computing expertise, employer training, and a program manual helped her adjust to the new job. “The program answered all my initial questions, but I am still learning, hands-on training works best for me.”

The new position introduced the respondent to a side of welfare that was new to her. “It is more than just money. We used to be on welfare, could not make enough to pay the bills. I thought it was just about money, now I know it is much more.” Working for the government changed her world view about welfare.

To supplement her income the respondent took a part-time library position. “I always wanted to work in a library,” she said. Considering herself a quick adapter, she encountered little difficulty learning about her new position. “[It is] just a lot of stuff to remember, like remembering processes and procedures.” It took 25 hours to become familiar with her new job. She then said, “Taking the job did not change me in any way. I always wanted to do this.” There were no economic costs incurred in the search for this position.

The one thing she hoped to do in the next twelve months was to pursue an advanced degree in business administration.

Cultural values shape our world views. The respondent felt fortunate having a father who dared to sacrifice to ensure his daughter’s education. More than “earnings forgone,” he was looking out for his daughter’s future. A major values shift occurred in the respondent’s mind as she observed the purpose of welfare from the state’s point of view. Apart from her new position that would most likely not have been possible. She was now harboring thoughts of pursuing a graduate degree in business.

The propinquity factor also played a part in her job search. Finding a position was more than an individual matter; it was a family affair. Skilled as she was, the respondent still had to become familiar with her new responsibilities: co-workers and program manuals were necessary, but hands-on learning was critical.

Case #6

The adventurer

Being licensed as a small aircraft pilot did not satisfy the adventuresome spirit of this 40 year-old actor. Acquiring scuba certification during a Philippines vacation and achieving white-water rafting certification was gratifying. He had a need to see how far he could push his “predisposition for adventure and exploration.”

Scuba dive certification pitted the actor against the sea. It proved to be a “laborious task of remembering critical training until it becomes second nature.” Equipment failure was a possibility any time a descent was made, so simulated training was essential. On one occasion an equipment break down did occur; a defective “O” ring created an air leak. Called to the surface, he and the instructor reviewed safety and

repair procedures that could be useful in future failures. Twenty-five hours with his teacher and his own persistence paid off. Library books, though cost free, were useful but not as highly rated as the paid teacher. “Content-wise the books were eighty percent applicable to what I was doing.”

Did this experience, though not monumental, change the actor? He said, “Doing this resulted in my discovery of a whole different world and a desire for further training, possibly advanced open water scuba diving.” The training cost \$300.00. Were there economic benefits? “No, but the potential for teaching others is pending.”

Certification in white water rafting differed from scuba training in that diving focused on the individual while rafting was a group effort. A friend suggested that he try it, after all, for \$30.00 it was economically inexpensive. Once they hired a trained teacher and preliminary instruction conducted, the informal group quickly learned how to coordinate their efforts. “Reinforcement,” he said, as they trained with each other. The experience was not necessarily life-changing, but it instilled confidence in the actor. It was a stepping stone to something more risky. It was sheer fun.

Two things came to mind as the 40 year-old actor considered new adventures “next year.” First, “a top of the forest canopy walk in the Philippines.” Why? “For the challenge, I don’t like heights.” Second, float plane certification. He would like to train with a certified flight instructor for open sea flying and island hopping. Certification would require 10-15 hours flight time that would include 10-15 take-offs and landings at sea. Why? It just might provide employment opportunities.

Four learning styles emerged in this interview: self-directed, instructor-directed, student-solo directed, instructor-group directed. Preliminary self-directed learning relied on perusing personal and public library books. It was useful. Instructor- directed learning relied on the student’s trust in the instructor and demanded careful attention. It required repetition to the point of instinctive responding. In emergencies instructor and student could review safety procedures. Instructor-group directed learning depended on confidence in the instructor and the willingness of the group to work together as a team. As he shared his experiences, he was thinking, “How can I use this in the future? Can I make money training other people?”

Case #7

Training Facilitator

This particular sixty-six year-old respondent recently moved into an apartment in an upper-lower income neighborhood that had seen its share of violence in the past fifteen years, ten killings in a six month period. He was affiliated with AARP, Friends for a Non-violent World, Alternatives for Violence Project, and service on a Committee for Affordable Housing. In the past year he made a conscious effort to increase his effectiveness as, public speaker to support his interest in community non-violence. For several months he was also recreation director for a nursing home. He was an activist for the less fortunate. In addition, as holder of a FAA Airframe and Power Plant license, he was required to upgrade his certification.

Involvement with the Committee for Affordable Housing was the result of a chance encounter at a state fair Affordable Housing booth.. His own sense for the needs of the less fortunate sparked his interest in the program. He liked what he saw, heard, and read, including a “Housing Minnesota” informational sheet. “I’m a doer; I’ve always been a doer,” he said. The next step in the decision-making process was to attend one of the group’s meetings. The message he heard “reassured what I thought, reaffirmed my views--things I was questioning.” He knew that “a lot of the homeless were working but homeless.” Now he started doing something about it. Using his photography skills, he began documenting what he saw. “For instance, while watching a marathon I saw portopotties, so I took shots and sent photos to people at the legislature. I wrote, ‘This is affordable housing for some people.’” Not sure where his new interest would lead, the respondent continued attending meetings, reading literature, and listening to people share their views. He was unexpectedly introduced influential leaders who held similar concerns.

Did this experience change the way he thought about the homeless? Not necessarily, though it did reaffirm some of his assumptions.

For a short period the actor accepted a temporary position as a nursing home recreation director. It was a new experience so he tried to rely on his own skills at developing a program that among other things included photography. Since he was personally physically fit, he used that regime as a model for the residents. “For a nursing

home it was the classiest place I had ever worked. A great place to work. I was amazed at how it was run.” The staff urged him to remain with the home when he resigned to take a position with the “Alternatives to Violence Project.”

The two year part-time workshop planner position with the Department of Labor was intended for people empathetic to non-violence as a way of managing anger and violence. His role in the organization was to assist in the planning of two-phase, basic and advanced, workshops. The workshops were conducted for two diverse populations, inmates on the one hand, and on the other hand, intellectually refined citizens. Both groups were to be trained in a two-way communication process. Both groups were to be trained to be effective communication receivers and senders, talkers and listeners. As a trainer he had to employ a basic message for the uninitiated and an advanced one for the training of trainers. The position demanded that he know himself and his audience. Sharpening his ability to hear what his audience was sharing was on-going

Even though the position was part-time, intensity of the process demanded much of his energy. “I get tired at times, just stay away from it. I just don’t want to talk to others. Then my house becomes my limbo, my ‘Hernando’s hideaway.’” He said, “When I first started the job, I thought I would have all the answers. Maybe I was missing something.”

Working with upscale people and other important persons empathetic toward the peace movement did provide a sense of satisfaction. It made up for some of the intensity he experienced in the workshops.

Upgrading his FAA Airframe and Power Plant License was less overwhelming than it was a necessity. His primary source for preparing for the licensing examination was the “FAM Eighteen Manual.” “If you can read, you can fix,” he said. He then displayed a photograph of Confederate Air Force P-51 that he worked on at a 2002 air show.

Having empathy for the needy, this actor knew what he wanted. Homeless literature eventually directed him to contacts and meetings that introduced him to people who shared similar concerns. He also found himself surrounded by well-named people who, and which gave him a sense of satisfaction and meaning.

His temporary position as a nursing home recreation director provided an

opportunity to develop a program modeled on his personal approach to fitness and aging. When offered a full-time position, his answer was no.

As a workshop planner/conductor for an “Alternatives to Violence Project,” the respondent found his communicating skills being tested. Was he correctly hearing and interpreting what people were saying? Were his moods interfering with the communication process? Was his audience hearing and correctly interpreting his message? It was also a matter of listening to him self, particularly during times in which he was struggling with issues related to his own unresolved anger. If he could distinguish between the message he wanted to convey and the message couched in his inner feelings, he could become a better communicator. “I improve myself by getting information from participants which is an alternative to my own way of thinking.” This was an on-going situational learning activity that demanded tiring alertness.

Case #8

It Gets Pretty Hectic When Thirteen Kids Are Around

As we sat eating at a Mexican restaurant, this particular respondent recalled an event in the past twelve months that had been initiated five years earlier. It all started with her sister-in-law sending a book that looked ok but ended up under a pile of other books. It was out of sight for five years. This past March she decided to clean house, and there was the book about health, stress, and food.

She had been experiencing quite a bit of stress and high cholesterol lately, so when she found the book she had a good reason to read it. After all, she said, “It gets pretty hectic when thirteen kids are around.” (Seven were her own, the others nieces and nephews.). She had been trying to follow an ordered diet but could not afford some things. That was when she decided to sit down and read it over an eight hour period of time. She recalled this as one of her learning episodes.

The whole family watched changes take place in her life as she tried to follow the author’s advice. For one thing, the grocery basket was now loaded with fruits, vegetables, healthy foods, no longer junk. She even bought papaya, yogurt, and olive oil, some for the first time. She then exclaimed, “My kids eat anything.”

Then she started exercising. “I used to take my kids swimming at the ‘Y,’ just

watched, now I exercise with them.” She was so impressed with herself she read parts of the book to her sister. “And,” she continued, “My cholesterol started coming down. But I’m not a good walker. It does make me feel good about myself. Now I want to quit smoking.”

“That is another thing. I tried to quit smoking for three weeks. It started when I discovered I had a rapid heart beat. This not the first time I decided to quit, but it was the first time I worked so hard at it.” The results were deplorable. “I was stretched, screamed, hollered, I was a mess. It was so bad. The thirteen kids and my husband in the house on weekends all said I was mean. Then I had to take a drag. The cigarette is your best friend, you take a puff and you feel a release.”

She tried coffee as an alternative to smoking during this three week period. “I had to try something that would release me so I tried coffee, hot coffee, not just warm coffee. And I had to be moving all the time. I even drove to Brooklyn Center (approximately twenty miles round trip) for Krispy Kremes and hot coffee. It helped somewhat. Then I would go three days, and on the fourth day take a drag.”

The economic costs of trying to quit cigarette smoking during this period were not that great, just coffee and the cost of gas to Krispy Kremes. Mental costs were greater. One of her goals for the next year was to quit smoking, for good

Trying to make sense out of our lives can take us down different paths, some practical, tried and true, and others based on hearsay. The respondent in this case approached her needs from several directions. One was reading a dietary book that addressed the need for weight control and dietary programs. Family members were surprised when she applied its principles to her life.

Finding a solution to her nicotine habit was physical, mental, and a struggle with addiction. She wanted to quit, knew she had to quit, but could not. She was ready to follow most any remedy, homemade or professional. Financial constraints were the main limitation. Hearing that hot coffee worked, she decided to give it a try. She took a twenty mile round trip to Krispy Kreems for donuts and scalding hot coffee, but it did not work.

From a consumer behavior perspective, each purchase was initiated by a need. Purchases for groceries and exercise programs resulted in supportive accolades from her family. Following the home remedy to quit smoking only added to her frustration, and

having to” take another drag.”

Case #9

The No Television School Teacher

“Why did you pursue a career in Education?” I asked this twenty-six year-old respondent. “I originally planned to pursue a career in community development in order to eliminate institutional racism. Then I discovered I had a lot of interest in kids so I sort of drifted toward education as a career. I’m happy with the decision for I can combine my interest in kids while working in an urban school.” After completing student teaching, she moved to the Twin Cities in search of employment. Renting a small U-Haul trailer for the move created an unintended consequence, no room for her television set! She found a way to live without. Accepting a teaching position in an after-school literacy program for high school students proved to be a challenge. Reading every Newberry Award book was a goal she recently set for herself. Health wise, she started an exercise program and tried her hand at indoor rock-climbing.

Student teaching was an all-consuming activity. “It took up most of my life to do it and people were satisfied with my performance. I put a lot into it and got a lot out of it.” Her supervising teacher was the best she had ever seen, in part because the teacher was very good at giving feedback and carefully used constructive criticism at the appropriate times. “She even let me try a lot of things and make mistakes,” she said.

It was more than just the supervisory teacher that made student teaching a meaningful experience. The students were also helpful. “The fifth graders knew why I was there,” she said. It was a difficult but fun challenge. If she did experience classroom difficulties, she felt free to discuss them with her advising teacher who gave advice that she could accept or ignore. “I usually took it.”

Did student teaching change her? “I don’t think it changed me as a person. I thought I’d be very nervous with others watching me teach. Then I found myself feeling comfortable with it.” The cost of the program was approximately \$5000.00. She had yet to earn an income from the experience.

Her second goal was to read the classic children’s books. “I’m on a mission to read all the Newberry Award books. I have read about half of the books so far. It takes

about five hours per book. I'm determined to read all of them, even the ones that look boring, for there are surprises in them. "Why am I doing this? No particular reason. Even though librarians have been wonderful, helpful, older books were usually in storage, but I will figure out some way to find the ones that are not available." Most titles were library copies; a few were purchased. .

The television episode started from the west coast move to Minneapolis. The 4'x6' U-Haul trailer too small so choices had to be made about what to discard. The television set was suddenly not a priority. "I'm not on a mission not to watch television" she said, "space was simply was issue." Did the decision change her? Not really. "I used to feel like I was wasting my life away as I was sitting in front of the tube. I have not felt like that for some time. I am also out with people more often. I substitute reading for watching television. At the same time, however, I sometimes want to invite people over but don't know what we will do." It was not as though she eliminated television entirely. She arranged her laundry schedule based on favorite programs. Other times she accepted invitations from friends to watch appealing listings.

Indoor rock climbing was a difficult and scary experience. A male friend introduced her to it. She liked it.. "I just had to do it," she said. "I had to trust people and believe them. The more you do it the less scary it is. It added some excitement to my life for a while. It was fun, but my friend was not safe."

She had been physically active in high school and college, but "Since then I stopped doing everything and noticed a change in my weight." A friend's YWCA guest pass eventually led to the purchase of her own membership. "I was impressed that I was going to the "Y" every day, putting in a fair amount of time. I knew I could do better if I had a reason for doing what I was doing." Determined not to let getting a routine become difficult, she kept telling herself, "Doing something is better than doing nothing". The decision to join the "Y" physically changed her as she lost weight and gained muscle. "When I first started I'd be very tired in the morning, not any more."

Her goals for the next twelve months included living alone (her room mate was moving out); developing and maintaining a budget, and learning more about contra dancing. Her sister recently introduced her to contra dancing, one thing holding her back is lack of a partner. She hoped to find somebody having a similar recreational interest.

What we do is not necessarily what was intended. The move east created an unexpected dilemma, abandon a television set or another item. The television set seemed less important--until she missed her favorite programs--her solution? Coordinate Laundromat visits at those times. She was adjusting to living without it.

The challenge of student teaching eased as the respondent learned to model her teacher. Modeling, copying, replicating another's best qualities until they became her own was part of the learning process. When those qualities became her own, she could be modified them to fit her own character and situation.

Oral hygiene was mentioned in passing as one of her new activities in the past year. After having worn braces several years, she was instructed to learn how to floss properly. Getting into a routine was not difficult; it had to become a habit.

Consumerism was evidenced in the respondent's schooling, renting a trailer, television in her life, recreational activities, book purchases and preventive health care.

Case #10

Open Tuning Guitar

The forty-nine year-old band member and librarian identified two activities in the past year that he considered to be learning opportunities. One activity was not considered a learning episode until the recall (flashbulb memory) of a New Orleans-Mississippi trip. That surprised him. The other activity was learning how to play the guitar using a concept known as open tuning, which was a deliberate attempt to learn a new technique.

“I had been playing guitar with standard tuning for more than a quarter of a century. I knew about open tuning for a long time but never got around to messing around with it...I can't read music so always play by ear.” It was a friend who motivated him to try fingering the new chords. Since “messing around with it,” the actor said “it is nice to have new doors open to you. I feel good about that, why not, what the heck. Maybe sometime I will make use of this in the band I play in.”

He experienced some difficulty getting used to the new chords for they were “formed in a completely different framework of notes.” It got easier the more he practiced. He reminded himself, “If somebody else can do it I can too. It's not rocket science....Sometimes you are just blocked. Sometimes you have a feel for it and other

times you have to put it down and within a few minutes pick it up again.”

The one way this changed the actor was that it taught him more about the instrument itself, that it became a nice way, a different way for making music and sound. He added, “There are more ways to express yourself than you think.”

No economic costs were incurred, but the benefits were a sense of personal satisfaction. He was expanding his personal limits. In the past year he spent approximately 100 hours becoming familiar with open tuning.

What was expected to be an uneventful trip to New Orleans to visit friends, after the fact, surprised the actor. He was reminded of that during the interview. A segment of the trip included motoring through the state of Mississippi. On the trip home he and his wife elected taking an alternative route: they wanted to view Mississippi from tourists’ perspectives. They started comparing what they heard about the state with what they were actually experiencing. He said, “It makes me think more about race in this country. While we were down there we kept asking people where to eat and felt that we were being steered toward places, night clubs, that would be acceptable not only to tourists but to whites.” He and wife continued discussing the trip at home, questioned colleagues at work about Mississippi, and purchased books about the state. “Most of the people at my wife’s work are Black, some from Mississippi. That helped us see Mississippi from their point of view.”

Did the trip and following discussions change him? He said, “It makes me think about my own things about life. Do I steer people toward my own views about life? Do I need to worry about it because it is a sort of editing of reality?” Cost of the trip, including the purchase of books was approximately \$700.

Four possible learning projects for the next twelve months were: getting a driver’s license; learning to speak Spanish; taking up drawing; and writing poetry. The first step in learning to drive would be applying for a driving permit.

Whitehead (1949) identified a progression of stages in the educational process: introductory, romantic, disciplinary, and freedom. The respondent knew about the open tuning method, but ignored it. A friend suggested he try it. The respondent accepted his advice, and cautiously approached the new technique. The longer he worked at fingering the chords the more he was determined to master it--others did it, why not him? He was

convinced open tuning guitar could be used in the band, he just had to reach that stage where fingering the chords became second nature.

Neither he nor his wife intended that the New Orleans trip be a learning event. They wanted to visit family and friends. On their return though the state of Mississippi it became apparent that they were experiencing something significant--what is Mississippi? Who are Mississippians? Intrigued by this, and out of curiosity, they deliberately redirected their return rout. Their curiosity did not stop at the end of the trip. To learn more about what they had seen, they talked to workplace friends, purchased and read books about the state, questioned their own interpretations of reality. What started as a family trip became a value changing learning opportunity.

Case #11

I Am So Sick and Tired of Being Exacerbated by Retirement

Retirement was not easy nor pleasant for this seventy-five year-old accountant. It was proving to be a time of ambiguity, insecurity, uncertainty, and withdrawal from life. Low level depression was jading her life. Pursuing several new activities in the past year seemed to provide relief from her anxiety. Activities included participating in a newly formed library book club, getting self-connected through Tibetan meditation, learning more about Middle East geopolitics, modifying her literary and reading genre, and, from a hygiene perspective, consciously reducing a sixty-year nicotine habit.

Three people formed the Library Book Club initiated by one of the librarians. The respondent said, "I thought it would be boring, but it was really interesting, even when a person disagreed. It was meaningful because of the interaction occurring in the group--people with ideas made it happen." At one point she said, "this hasn't really changed me except as making a commitment. I have been afraid about commitments, like I was in jail. Now I can do it."

Why Tibetan meditation? Her sister, a Jungian therapist introduced her to Tich Naht Hahn, a meditative practice. "Basically, the bottom line is emotional health. It has not been fantastic, but I can remember coming out of my shell, gradual lessening fear of other people." Listening to tapes and "practicing stop light meditation which is your friend. You use it while stopped in traffic, cooking, dish washing and things like that."

She spent approximately \$600.00 on this activity. “But,” she said, “emotional benefits far out weight the economic costs.”

About her nicotine addiction she said:

I retired in 2000; shortly after that my mother died. Then my health deteriorated-- not life-threatening, but one thing after another. I tried to eliminate my dependence on cigarettes. I reduced my habit down to ten then two a day but continued to struggle with that persistent reaction to reach for a cigarette. It was that automatic taking the cigarette out then consciously putting it back. NO! I took a piece of gum instead, sugar free bubble gum, nicotine gum, just gum, things to break the habit. When I get nervous I try to remember the present moment, breath in, breath out, and try to learn to be compassionate with myself.

She spent approximately \$350.00 in the past year trying to break her habit. She felt that amount was offset by what she saved reducing the nicotine habit.

Current events in the Middle East challenged the respondent to familiarize herself with its regional history. Library books were her primary source of information, even though they sometimes lacked credibility. “I kind of gave up on a number of them: they just didn’t keep my attention. But I didn’t totally give up on them. That is why I thought a course taught by a human being with human beings would be more interesting.” The readings did quicken her anger, particularly against the colonial powers “for messing up borders in the region. She estimated spending 40 hours reading about the region...

Reading mysteries with a southwest aura was becoming a disappointment to the respondent. She said, “I read them for their background, for there is a story involved. Those kinds of mysteries have been a form of escape for me. I also learned from them. Now they are a disappointment: few good mysteries are being published in that genre today.” She was now focusing her attention on books about the Pueblos and other native communal groups in that region. She estimated spending at least 180 hours reading about her new interest

She hoped to purchase a new computer; enroll in an Elder Hostel geology program; become involved in a local aerobic class; join “Path ways,” an active drop-in meditation group; explore local church offerings; and begin writing an autobiography. Those were some of the things she would like to do in the next year.

Since retiring, the respondent’s life space had been slowly collapsing around her. The public library did play an important part in her return to community life. Though

hesitant about joining a newly formed library book club, she now found it stimulating.

Her approach to breaking a nicotine addiction differed from the addict with seven children. One lived in a stress-filled house with as many as thirteen people, this person lived alone. She tried to take a more realistic approach toward withdrawal. Her method was meditation and trying to develop a more situationally tranquil mindset. The conditioned response to reach for a cigarette at unexpected times was met with a “No!” She was winning a battle within herself.

Borrowing resources from the public library eliminated an expense and provided the respondent with stimulating reading materials. Major expenses related to doing something new were Tibetan meditation, and trying to eliminate her nicotine addiction.

Case #13

The World Traveler

A dominating concern for the thirty-six year-old respondent was his mother’s debilitating illness. Otherwise he was a successful business person and world traveler.

His mother’s struggle with chemical sensitivity in the past year became an overriding concern to every family member. A major question was “to whom could the family turn who might possibly interact with and gain her confidence?” He said, “Her perspective is that we think her condition is in her head, but that is not the case....We are trying to help her find her life again, remedy her situation for the long haul. How to do that is really difficult.” He said, “Mother lives in a perfectionist world, but mine is to “be strong.” Watching his resilient father struggling, betrayed the respondent’s coping skills. “It is sobering for me to see my indestructible parents become so vulnerable. It is scary.”

Attending an international wedding was a memorable event. One consequence was a chance meeting with a guest that developed into an e-mail friendship. The World Trade Center attack became an opportunity for him to discuss the event in an international setting. He said, “The international setting helped me reaffirm my faith in humanity. I interacted so easily, it was almost like a family event, just having that kind of time.” Although the visit cost \$400 for the hotel alone, fond memories continued in his mind.

The actor’s most significant business adventure was a two-day business trip to

Mexico. He said, “An opportunity stumbled my way to make a two-day auditing business trip to Mexico City.” He knew about the project, still “a surprise phone call came filled with questions for which the manager did not have answers. They just came popping out of his head.” His halting command of Spanish did not deter him from asking to be assigned to the project. Its most daunting aspect was his perception that the organization’s logistical preparation for the project was insufficient. To make up for that, he took it upon himself to be prepared for the task. “Even so, he said, procedures articulated by his CEO to on-site interpreters were beyond their comprehension. They spoke excellent English--it was company jargon they could not understand. In spite of that gap, they held our hands and watched out for us. We were part of a family. They took care of us and made us feel comfortable.” He considered the business exposure a great experience saying, “It was a challenge I will throw into my resume. It helped me realize the importance of advanced planning.”

The actor’s first visit to Las Vegas cost \$300.00. “It was never high on my priority. It was more out of curiosity than a burning desire. I liked it, had a good time. What shocked me was the egalitarian atmosphere in Vegas. Be who you are! I have a different perspective on the place after the trip.” Until then, he considered it to be “tacky cheery.” It was more than that, people treated well.

Looking to the future, the respondent’s first concern was making some kind of a career change, possibly forming a business with friends. There was little room for a hasty decision. South America was one continent the actor never visited. If he booked a trip to that part of the world, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile would be included in the itinerary. Continuing his Christian journey would be a dominant theme over the next twelve months. “It is a reconciling divine decree for which I am striving. I want to reconcile my humanity with Christ’s commandments to bridge the gap between whom I am and who I want to be.”

How does one make sense out of a situation that is filled with ambiguity? That question weighed heavily on the actor as he watched his parents succumb to uncertainty. It placed him in a situation over which he had little control.

The respondent was aware that a work-related international project was in the making. Being an international traveler, the prospect appealed to him. He voiced his

interest. Poor corporate planning and organizing was lacking. He took it upon himself to peruse company procedures and policies, and surf the internet to become more familiar Mexico City and its people.

His major economic expenditures related to doing something new were the international wedding trip and a Las Vegas visit.

Case #14

Swedish Swimming Lessons

Grandparents instilled an early interest in anthropology and race in the life of the 43 year-old respondent, when they gave her Bronowski's The Ascent of Man. Her other interests included photography, and a vocation in a public libraries.

“Anthropology,” she said, “is a big thing in my family.”

When my grandparents gave me The Ascent of Man, they found in me a little sponge. That introduced me to American racism. Why? If I could see in anthropology proof of a common beginning of the human race, perhaps I could help eradicate racism. That became an issue when we moved from a white neighborhood to one that was racially mixed. But as I was sorting out my meaning of race and anthropology I sensed that people were not comfortable about talking about the topic with a white woman.”

Her approach to resolving inner conflict was to immerse herself with information about the subject. She said, “If I see a need of some self-correction, or there is some plain old ignorance about things, I don't immediately look for the resources to help me. The information just seems to come to me accidentally. As for lifelong learning, I'm a sponge. So were my grandparents. I think I have decided that if there is a problem, it can be resolved.” She added, “Be one on whom nothing is lost.”

When photography became a passion in her life, she turned to juvenile books for information. “They seem to get right to the point. I rate them very high. But I like hands-on experience as well. It was a kind of play at first, now it is a more refined quest.” She accidentally developed a particular method she called “rotated symmetry.” It started with a duplicate set of prints that she played around with, moving them this way and that, until she got what she wanted. “I did this with dud, goof photos at first, accidentally, then this new form, and wasted many rolls of film, and experienced a high

level of difficulty. Now I get some compelling shots that I would feel comfortable hanging.” Failure was not a problem. She was trying to see if she could come up with convincing photographs without trying to manipulate the results.

Was photography a life changing experience? No, but it was helping her take risks, take more shots that in the past would have made her self-conscious. “But I do have a propensity for doing this kind of stuff,” she said. She estimated spending \$600.00 since she started out. The main benefit was personal satisfaction. The next step was to enroll in a photography course at the university.

As the respondent became more proficient with her work, she decided to upgrade her equipment. “My old camera was not doing what I wanted it to do, so in anticipation of the up-coming university class, I decided to purchase something more to my expectations.” A reputable sales person assisted in the selection of a camera. She was pleased with her decision, for the camera came with “a very good lens.” She did experience a moderate level of difficulty and uncertainty as she tried to become familiar with the new purchase.

I’m still scared to go out with an expensive piece of equipment although I have taken two rolls of photographs so far. I didn’t get the results I had hoped for. Some of the shots were blurry and poor composition didn’t help. Trial and error is how I am trying to resolve my uncertainty. It is like Swedish Swimming Lessons, get thrown in and sink or swim. I’m getting to the step where I should keep a notebook and start analyzing my duds.

How did the purchase of the new camera change the respondent? “It’s changing me because it is a chunk of money, \$600.00. I don’t want it setting on the shelf, but I’m still apprehensive about getting out in the world. In time I think it will have a big impact on what I’m trying to do. Taking the course will teach me how to be a photographer.”

Similarities exist between becoming familiar with a new piece of equipment and developing a friendship. Both are learning episodes that, as they mature, evolve into intimacy. The respondent was at the introductory stage, feeling her way with the new camera. Self-directed learning, exploring, testing, flying-by-the-seat-of-her-pants, would take her only so far in her desire to know what the instrument could do. She knew her limits. She would need a sophisticated facilitator to move to the next step and beyond. A university course was her answer. Beyond that she would have to intuitively become one

with the equipment, experience a higher level of intimacy and freedom with the camera. As a consumer, she was learning how to make wise choices, particularly with the help of a sales person. She was satisfied with her purchases, and even felt comfortable with failure. She had a sense of what she wanted to do with her developing interest.

Case #15

Ever Since I Got Sick in '78 I Felt Like the Odd One Out

Dialectical Behavior Therapy was by far the overwhelming influence on this actor's life in the past twelve months. It affected nearly every aspect of her life including getting a part-time job, traveling to visit siblings, and participation in group activities. Single, she continued to struggle with personal isolation tendencies but was now hoping to expand her collective life by participating in fitness and group activities and possibly move into a condominium.

A devastating emotional struggle ruled the actor's social and personal behavior for twenty-five years. Consultations with psychiatrists and therapists over that period would eventually introduce her to DBT. "I heard about it from a former psychiatrist who suggested it several years ago then I became angry and uneasy. I thought I might try it and do it" she said. She read DBT literature and sampled group experiences before deciding to participate in the program.

Making the decision to get involved in the program raised several difficulties including commitment to a year-long process that could interfere with a part-time job she had recently accepted. She also felt sensitive about hurting a therapist's feelings if she entered the program saying, "I felt uneasy about that because I thought I would have to quit the other therapist and didn't want to hurt his feelings." She then said "I tried to engage the other therapist in the decision-making. He actually said we are going to try this for a year to see how it would help me."

Dialectical Behavior Therapy helped several ways. "It has given me a lot of hope for feeling for the future as well as get a handle on my impulsive buying." She compared two recent family trips, one pre-DBT, the other while she was in the program. The pre-DBT trip was a disaster and the other, "I again got angry with my mother and other brother but this time I got out the (DBT) papers and read. It calmed me down, it was like

having a friend in my pocket.”

After not working for years, the actor volunteered as a program assistant at an intergenerational day care center. It was a way of getting out of bed in the morning, and she thought the little kids would get her going during the day. She also did it because Social Security Disability, though good, did not satisfy her need to be doing something. “When I started I didn’t think I would succeed” she said.

After three years of volunteering she decided to terminate. A short time later the center called asking if she would work part time. “Getting a job was not my intention” she said. “I’m struggling with excessive doubt and wondering if I am as good as the rest of the employees, and am also struggling with obsessive compulsive disorder.” She talked with her doctor who said, “You get in the driver’s seat.” That is one of her reasons for taking the job. “He is one of my biggest cheerleaders.”

Was the decision difficult? “Within myself, deciding to take it” she said. “I haven’t worked since 1983 and I got panicky, thinking I would have to work for the rest of my life. What have I done?” Trying to resolve her dilemma she consulted with a work retention specialist--that and DBT helped. “It can help anybody” she said. .

Was this a life-changing experience? “I had jobs before but nobody ever came calling for me. I felt thrilled, honored. And yes, you really like me. It validated me.” She received a salary of \$10.50 an hour plus free lunches. A short time later she received a \$1.00 raise. The center also paid for all state-mandated training.

Filing a harassment charge was troubling. Being personally harassed in person, and by telephone, was something she would not have had the courage to do prior to Dialectical Behavior Therapy. “The group was working on the relationship thing, self-respect, and finding my own self-respect related to verbal abuse. When I filed the court order, I felt a sense of self-respect.” Making the decision to go to court could have been devastating for she was accusing a long-time friend, a member of the DBT group. Group supported, research at the public library, and consulting with family and friends helped. “So in a way I lost a friend—he supported me during my dad’s death.” Court costs were minimal, less than \$10.00, but the process took approximately 40 hours.. Emotional and psychological benefits outweighed her sense of sadness over losing a friend.

A big step in the past year was family visits. Anxiety was high. Her mental

health worker encouraged her, saying, “You have nothing to lose.” “I don’t think that was her intention, to get me to do it, but that’s the effect it had on me.” Her recently deceased father would have wanted her to go. “I used to say ‘when I am ninety I’ll do it.’” Looking back, she said, “I feel more a part of the family now. Since I got sick in ’78, I felt like the odd one out. Now I can do what they do. Now I can talk about the family, picture them. Until now I could not. I didn’t come home with a lot of money, but returned with a lot of neat experiences.” The trip cost approximately \$800.00. “But the family took us out to dinner, shows, and paid for a lot of things.”

An ad in a community newspaper led the respondent to an arts and crafts group, something she had been looking for. It was self-directed, self-paced. She liked that, except she felt like an intruder. To overcome her feelings she said, “I tried to sit and work on my stuff and listen, and ask questions to see how much they wanted to share with me, and include me in the group. After some months I talked with the leader about the group. I felt more belonging after that. I was also doing quilting, and the group was curious about that.” The activity gave her a place to go Wednesday nights, a place to belong, and not feel like it was a waste of time. Other than materials, it was cost free.

The respondent hoped to move to a condominium in the next year. That would be a major decision requiring much financial planning.

Making sense out of one’s life is difficult when chemical imbalances and mental disturbances deflect hope. The respondent’s learning episode was overcoming self-doubt. She was slowly learning to accept and integrate affirmation therapy into her life. Succeeding as a volunteer at a day care center was a step in the right direction. Then she quit. An offer to a paid position at the same center triggered old fears. Rational or not, she saw it as a black or white lifetime decision. Her doctor helped her divert doubts as he monitored her progress, saying “Go for it“. She did. “I felt thrilled, honored. And yes, you really like me.” She needed affirmation and received it in the form of a pay raise. She seemed to be reaching a turning point in her life. Events piggy backed one upon the other. She was reaching out to family, a craft group, and with hesitancy filed a harassment charge. She was learning to reconstruct and expand a life space that had been constricted by emotional illness. Controlling her compulsive behavior would be another step to take on her road to recovery.

Case #16

Attention Deficit Disorder Class

What did the sixty-six year-old respondent learn in the past year? Her thoughts went back to a recent experience as an assistant in an elementary school attention deficit disorder program. She said:

When I got into the class I felt I had more experience than the class needed but soon discovered it was not enough. I saw things happening that made me begin to listen. I started observing the teacher. That is how I began to learn how to relate to children with ADD. Listening, watching the teacher is what I did, and little by little I began picking up on learning how to deal with behavior problems. I had to learn how to observe the teacher, emulate her. One of the ways I changed is that instead of being overbearing I had to learn about my own ways of dealing with my feelings about rejection. I learned to put a positive spin on things. I was also exposed to Harry Potter books. I would have never have elected to read them had I not been in that class.

The respondent was also beset with bewildering feelings that stemmed from childhood, and recent burglaries. Saying “loss, loss, loss,” she felt compelled to seek help. “My first therapist hit the nail on the head when he asked me to write about myself, family, and history. It seemed that I was able to more easily put things together, more of a flow, more structured. What came out that I didn’t expect was that thoughts were jumping around in my mind, maybe I was ADD.” She started to “write, write, write,” saying, “Now I have all my experiences I want and will write about my family history. I’m tying strings together, making sense out of a lot of it.”

The respondent was intrigued by a newspaper article about St. Paul’s “Swede Hollow.” “I have to see this place” she told a friend. They both went. Ignoring the friend’s apathy, she invited her sister for a return visit. One thing led to another, including the purchase of Moberg’s “The Settlers” followed by “On to the Good Land,” then trips to Taylor’s Falls, and Center City. She said,

The most striking thing about the connected activities was my new admiration and profound appreciation for my ‘very old-fashioned father’ and how the early settlers survived under the harshest conditions. It has given me more of an appreciation for my family. My therapist even had me write letters to family who died. It helped me take care of unfinished business.

Home projects dominated the respondent's thinking about activities for the next twelve months. Just getting the bathroom faucets replaced, building a concrete patio and pathway to a steel shed were projects that had to be done. The faucets would be the most difficult. She never did anything like that. She also hoped to write a children's story based on her family's history. "The hardest part would be starting out. My fear is that there may not be somebody around to appreciate what I'm doing. I'll be doing it for myself." Finally, she wanted to learn how to use a computer she purchased at the 2002 State Fair: she needed to find somebody to teach her how to use it.

The respondent's overconfidence in her first classroom days quickly gave way to observing and modeling the lead teacher. It proved to be a useful learning style, for it not only helped her become a better classroom tutor, she learned more about herself. She acted as curious observer with the "Swede Hollow" episode that led to book purchases, sharing with her sibling, and making the effort to take trips to learn more about her Swedish heritage in Minnesota. Finally, she dared to risk therapeutic counseling to learn more about who she was. She spent approximately \$75.00 on her activities, money considered well spent. She also made a quick decision to purchase a computer, now she wanted to learn how to use it.

Case #17

A New Home, Getting Connected

The thirty-nine year-old returned Peace Corps Volunteer (1999-2001) decided it was time to settle down and experience community life. A music teacher, job location determined where he would live. Though not a small town person, the actor accepted a teaching contract in a small community. He took for granted that one way to settle into a community life would be to purchase a home, saying: "Most people in my age group are home owners." Three visits to a realtor sealed his decision. He said,

I chose what I could afford and what I liked. I have a different sense of myself, sense of pride. This is my space. I could have stayed in apartments for less than what I am paying now but would have lived there for a short time then moved on. I'm staying now, for I own a home here. I'm part of the community. I can also host social events.

The actor's next decision was to remodel the house. Should he install carpets or wood floors? He decided on a tiled kitchen, wood floors in one room, and carpets in the rest of the house. Finding a flooring sale changed that. Installing wood floors throughout the house met his expectations. "It is an expression," he said, "even though more expensive. "I'm proud of it. The house now has a certain style, taste, and character, even if it (the flooring) did cost \$7,000.00."

The actor tried two other activities to satisfy his getting-connected strategies: One was to observe clerk name tags and personally address the clerks.

I wasn't trying to trample on anybody but was just trying to connect with people. I saw their name tags, spoke to the cashiers and just smiled. I didn't want anything, just wanted to connect with people. It wasn't difficult, just something different. I felt connected with people, it gave me a sense of warmth.

His second strategy was participating in his first eight kilometer race. He finished.

The actor had been searching for opportunities to meet local gays. After finding a web site that announced a gay lesbian church pot luck, he said:

I attended with a friend. I had to be responsible for my own socialization. It was connecting. I live in a small town and was infatuated with somebody. I needed to get out and stretch myself, not just sit home alone. I had never socialized with gays other than in bars. It was good to be with people who were comfortable with themselves. It was a conscious attempt to reach people, enjoy others, just talking with people as people. This is just life and I am part of it, even with the conflict. I am no longer fearful.

His expenses were limited to a five dollar cover charge. Self-affirmation outweighed that.

Teaching music in a small town Catholic school was more challenging than expected. "I'm a city slicker. I wanted to be in a city with people who wanted to be taught. Supervisors could have helped more but didn't." Students not up to his challenge were a disappointment and challenge. . He even discovered a streak of childishness in himself, adding:

Well, that's how kids are. We did do a successful version of Handel's Messiah for young voices. It was a year of worthwhile experiences, not always pleasant, but could lead to a better job. A planned choir trip to the Vatican was favorably received by the administration. This was ambitious for us, a big thing, trying to accomplish something big. It could be profound for the students."

The actor accepted a teaching position in a summer music camp, saying, “Many talented students were enrolled. It was like revisiting me past, for I had been a talented kid. Teaching and planting seeds in their minds, and receiving positive feedback was meaningful. I liked their opinions.” He received \$3,000.00 for teaching three weeks.

Why do people do what they do? They are trying to make sense out of complex situations. The respondent remembered childhood experiences of always being picked last, being an outsider. Would he experience more of the same in this community? .

His major learning activities in the past year were vocational, domestic, economic, and cultural. A common theme in each was “getting connected.” His vocational career was secure, in that sense he was connected. Purchasing a big ticket item, his home, was about getting connected. Remodeling his home was about getting connected. Entering an 8K community race was about getting connected. Acknowledging grocery clerks by name was about getting connected. He wanted to fit in with his age cohorts, peers, and the community. He wanted to be accepted and connected. Earl, (1986) might consider this as a consumer control tactic, self-testing to achieve desired results.

His sexual orientation could have been a source of anxiety about being accepted. He was who he was, but living in a small town was not the same as the large city. One could be anonymous in a large city, but less likely in a small town

In terms of consumer behavior perceived cohort influence and a sense of compensatory consumption influenced his purchases. True or not, he now had a sense of place. He was beginning to feel like he belonged.

Case #18

I Want to Find a Cure for My Particular Ailment

An obvious scar, from ear to ear, crossed the respondent’s head. It was not a recent operation, but the effects of the surgery went unabated. Seemingly lucid yet disconnected, he found focusing difficult during the interview. He said “the pursuit of lifelong learning keeps my mind off my pain.” He placed emphasis on an early childhood experience that had an influence on his approach to lifelong learning and having a questioning mind.

I did not learn to read by Christmas in first grade at the Blake School so my teacher made me stay after school an hour a day until I could read. She worked with me for forty-five minutes the first day then let me go home. The next day it was thirty minutes and soon it was twenty. Before long she said I had another problem; I was reading at the fourth grade level so she sent me to the library to read anything I wanted, Norse mythology or anything else, so I had a free education. It absolutely ruined me for schooling.

Severe medical problems restricted his ability to work. He was also restricted to living in public housing, relying on public health care, and surviving on a bare subsistence income. His primary sources of mental stimulation were found at several branch libraries.

Two major interests dominated his thinking in the past year: finding a cure for his chronic illness, and the history of Mesopotamia. The latter was influenced by attacks on the World Trade Centers. A chronic intestinal fungal infection and widespread use of antibiotics compelled him to search for available information relevant to its possible cure. The public health system did not satisfy his curiosity, though it did help him know how to treat some of the effects of the infection..

His interest in the Middle East stemmed from the events of “9/11.” He said, “Since we are bound to conquer it (Mesopotamia), that is why I have been reading about it. The British wanted it, the Dutch wanted it, and we want it.”

The major goals for the actor in the next twelve months were keeping libraries open, and finding a cure for his particular ailment. Not confident about public libraries in the current political climate he said, “People don’t realize it but this is not an accident about libraries.”

The respondent’s primary lifeline to making some kind of meaning out of his life was the public library. Pursuing information was his saving hope; it diverted attention away from himself and his chronic illness. “I’d kill to keep libraries open. Rarely am I too busy to go to the nearest one. The public library is where to go if a person wants to know something. Once in a while I run into things I can’t get, since some books are in storage; that is when I go through interlibrary loan. I usually get what I want.”

Case #19

Priceless, I Cannot Put a Price on It

The thirty-three year-old mother was completing a library science degree, and, was a former AmeriCorps volunteer at a Native American Cultural Center. Significant events in her life included parenting, modifying a family book club, mentoring a young Native American girl, hip hop dance classes, and accepting a part-time library position.

Observing her seven year-old daughter, was a priceless challenge. She said,

It demands a balancing act between all the other irons I have in the fire. I couldn't do it without help from my really great significant other, mother, and sisters. My daughter energizes me. This was my daughter's first year in school, and that was a big challenge. I enrolled her in an open classroom which meant getting involved in numerous class activities. If I got too stressed, we would do things that fit both our personalities. Did I experience any changes in myself? O god, a ton. I probably spent \$20.00 a week for expenses.

From home production perspective, the cost of parenting, after-school activities, and summer home schooling would have added considerably to her expenses.

The school book club she helped organize a year earlier was successful, but needed to be revised. That is when she, and a group of parents thought about meeting in a coffee shop. It worked. Families came, and the kids got to socialize in an informal group. "I think it really built a lot of connection with other parents. The way it was done this year, having it in a neutral location. It was more relaxed, and parents and children did not feel as pressured in the informal setting." At most, she spent \$50.00 for expenses during the year. She was not reimbursed for her efforts. What really counted was the intergenerational interaction that occurred in the new setting.

The respondent started mentoring a twelve year-old girl she had met while working at a Native American Center. A common bond of empathy developed between the two as the respondent realized she and the twelve year-old were first birth siblings in their families: "I felt like she was like me in that we both assumed responsibilities in our families at a young age. I could see she needed to be "spoiled." One difficulty in the relationship was accepting the fact that the child had her own family, dysfunctional though it might be. The child spent some evenings and week-ends at the respondent's home. Her daughter gradually adjusted to those visits.

The respondent noticed the young girl had an undeveloped gift for writing poetry. Networking with a friend who was connected with a poetry group, they invited the girl to a poetry reading. At a reading, the child read a poem to the group, then cried. She

realized she was writing about her father. The respondent said, “I have been opening little doors for her that she has had to walk through. That changed me immensely. It was humbling to see how much people can bear yet come through.” Costs incurred amounted to approximately \$30.00 a month, including clothes and incidentals.

As for the Hip Hop dance class, the respondent said,

My two sisters, a friend, and I started looking for a class like this. We saw one listed at the Center for the Performing Arts....I’m always interested in doing things that challenge and push me into doing things I’m not great at. Hip Hop was more difficult than it looked, but the teachers were skilled choreographers. Yoga warm-ups were particularly difficult. At a cost of \$10.00 for two hours a week for five months, it’s the biggest bargain ever. It’s a fun thing, relaxes me, and a good source of exercise. I gained from it. It has given me the opportunity to bond with my sisters and friend.

With her library education nearing completion, the respondent started a job search. A description for a part-time position seemed just right, She said:

It sounded like a dream job, so with my teckie skills and interest in people, I applied. The interviewer said, ‘We want somebody who wants to break librarian stereotypes.’ I was hired. My job was to coordinate activities between public libraries and schools. Since then, I have been working with teachers and media specialists to find what they need on their plates instead of giving them what I think they need. It has been wonderful. I’m optimistic about my new job. I am working in a community library, and am also getting a systems perspective.

What about the future? “I want to take a short course in Italian, and combine it with a trip to Rome. I have been craving to travel, but my studies have limited me. Money is the big obstacle. Hopefully I will get a full-time position in the near future.” Publishing an “e-zine” was another project she had in mind.

The respondent stated learning style was: “I’m always interested in doing things that challenge and push me into doing what I’m not great at.” It influenced her relationship with her daughter, adopted Native American daughter, after school reading club, and her new library position. She was a flexible, self-confident opportunist, an idea person who had the ability to “see outside the box.” Her library supervisor saw those qualities in the interview. She was hired. “Earnings forgone” while pursuing her education meant delaying the lure of travel. That would come later.

Case #20

I Moved Out of My House to Get on My Own

Leaving home can be a stressful experience. The nineteen year-old respondent in this interview struggled to make that choice. Her family was close-knit. Even though family events were frequently held, hidden tensions existed. She said, “My mother and I have been friends, but not with my dad. My mother understood and supported me. She was lenient. Not my father. He had his own problems with depression, and I felt like his tension was directed at me. It got worse and worse until he got help. Tension with my dad was huge, a big thing.”

The decision to move out was quick, decisive, but not the struggle leading up to it. Consequent surprises were positive and negative. The relationship with her father improved. Economic turbulence was the biggest surprise. She was learning how to live and share with someone outside her family.

How did she adjust? “I just stopped spending unnecessarily, stopped spending money on alcohol, worked more at my jobs, and found other ways to entertain myself than by spending money and going out to eat a lot. Now I cook more. I like doing that. I find myself having just enough money at the end of the month to pay the bills. There isn’t anything extra to attend concerts, I miss that.” Living away from home costs were at least \$700.00 a month.

An all-preparations-made trip to England was offered to high school students by a high school teacher. Five students signed up. They visited historical sites and talked with people in London, Stratford, and Oxford. She said, “The trip offered insights not found in high school history books. We also learned how to appreciate one another. Tensions existed between one school mate and myself; now we are best friends.” The cost of the trip was \$1,200.00. No economic benefits were incurred, but the benefits stemming from new friendships were important. The trip made her realize that traveling was something she wanted to do again, if she had the opportunity and money to do it.

She hoped she could attend a technical college next year, start taking general courses. Her parents would help if she decided to do that. A second possibility was

moving to another city such as Austin, Texas or San Diego. Wherever she moved she would have to know somebody who lived there, otherwise it could be too daunting.

The respondent's struggle to be independent eventually motivated her to move from home. It was a difficult decision, but once made, the move was sudden. Just as suddenly, she was confronted with the reality of fiscal responsibility.. She was not saving anything but neither was she going into debt (dissaving). As she matured, relations with her father improved, and she became a wiser consumer.

Case #21

I'm Like a Colloid

The sixty year-old consultant was involved in several personal and professional projects in the past year. They were about losing weight, writing a paper on chaos theory, conducting a "Job Shift" workshop, designing a "Google course," and, learning how to use a palm-held computer.

The actor knew he was overweight, a borderline diabetic, had high blood pressure, and faced the possibility of a knee replacement. They were related to being overweight. Wanting to design his personal weight control program, he perused the internet, read library books, and had conversations with physicians. From what he could tell, stomach stapling as a form of weight control was a "dud." He then said,

I started off at 3000 calories a day. I'm now down to about 1500. But calories are not the true barometer for losing weight. Weight loss is about daily decisions. I eat one meal a day. When hungry, a glass of milk will satisfy my craving to eat. I have lost approximately fifty pounds since starting. I did notice that weight loss regimens reach plateaus, after that nothing seems to change. When the plateau signal comes in, you have to change your behavior. It is a matter of observing the data on a regular basis, time of day, what was eaten, and how much.

Cost of books and other incidentals was approximately \$100.00. Savings amounted to about \$50.00 a month. He said, "I want to achieve my high school weight." He was satisfied with his program but did not feel like his life had significantly changed.

Ten years earlier, a friend introduced the actor to non-competitive allocation of resources. He experienced mental blocks when he wrote about it. Nothing seemed to work until he found a book that made sense. "That was it. The time for bumbling through and reconstructing my thoughts came to an end. I finally focused on writing

about chaos theory and submitted it for publication. It was a matter of putting in order five to six years of thought. How do you reconstruct what you have been doing, put order to it? Ideas do not cost anything, you must reconstruct them.” It took over a year to write the paper. He did not estimate how much his time was worth, but did spend about fifteen dollars for supplies. Other than using his thoughts in workshops, he did not benefit economically from his ideas.

The actor developed a “Job Shift” workshop based on changes in the world economy, including downsizing and outsourcing. The project was designed to target fifty year-old workers who would never again earn \$25.00 an hour. His challenge was to market his ideas. He said, “I have to figure out a strategy, tornado marketing, to sell the product to community and business organizations. Business is changing.” He spent about \$100.00 designing the course.

“When I go into a bookstore I open my mind. When I into a Dallas bookstore I saw Google Hacks, bought it and read it cover to cover. It triggered an idea for a course. I spent \$25.00 for the book and \$1,000.00 to hire a person to design a web page for a community education course. I have a contract to teach the course in October, 2003.

The actor purchased a second-hand palm-held computer from a friend for \$40.00 saying, “Mechanically it is easy to use, but making it work for me is difficult. If I am going to work for me, I will carry it everywhere. I’m always taking notes, if I can’t use it that way it will do me no good. I read library books about the instrument, but the internet was the best resource. It led me to a copy of the manual which I downloaded and printed. I hope to use it as a tax reporting, time managing, and note taking tool. There is a real learning curve to it—when you get to a certain point, it begins to work for you I will save money with it, I don’t know how much.”

Looking to the future, he said, “I want to learn how to work a four hour a week. I am getting closer to that goal.” I want to be financially independent, make my money work for me.” A concern would be family health issues. To make his plan work he would have to move to a warmer climate during winter months, and live in live in Minnesota in the summer. “If I could do that, I could patch together 3-4 more projects in the coming year.”

He was an entrepreneur, teacher, and keen observer. A compulsive note taker, he

tried to make ideas work for him. When good ideas came along, he found ways to incorporate them in his thinking. That was his learning style. He applied this style to nearly every area of his life. Until he acquired the palm-held computer, he was constantly jotting down ideas and analyzing them at the end of the day. Now he found a way to electronically classify and store his notes.

Case #22

Mother's "Sunday School" Booklet

Limited to a wheel chair, the eighty-two year-old African-American was highly respected in the Twin Cities. She had recently been honored by an influential university publication.

While reorganizing her home, she found her mother's "Sunday School" booklet. Wanting to learn more about it, she "buttonholed" friends and family to discover more about both it and her mother. The earliest the booklet could be dated was 1908. Her mother would have been eight. "I was surprised at the degree of mother's intelligence at eight years old. She wrote the Gettysburg address in long hand,. My grandparents must have had a big influence on my mother. The book has kind of taken over my thoughts." It contained several mysteries, including an unidentifiable language, and names of unfamiliar children. Who were they? The only recognizable name was "Bond," who she thought was related to Julius Bond.

Trying to confirm historical records in Corbin, Kentucky, was minimal at best. A major flood ravished the area. Even so, she hoped to visit the state history center to look for information about her family. "I feel like I am keeping family stories alive. It has brought the stories back to the fore again."

A local newspaper notice about a children's literature symposium caught the attention of the respondent. It was one of her interests. Surprisingly, few African-American educators attended. Why? She was well-known in the Black community, frequently wrote literary columns, had been honored for supporting book discussions groups, and reading to children, but could not answer why did so few African-Americans attend the conference? One topic in the symposium was the "accidental racist." She remembered being taught how to critically analyze literature, so when the concept was

presented she understood what the presenter was saying. . Entrance fee to the symposium was \$10.00. The event renewed her strong desire to attract more people of color to reading clubs.

A photographer friend told her about an event commemorating the Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. She attended both the event and a Smithsonian art show. Having been present at the original march, she was surprised by many people she knew from the Washington march who were attending the commemoration. More surprising was the number of young people in attendance. She said, “My friend gave me a book containing differing points of view about the march, refreshing differences, particularly those written by foreigners. Foreign points of view seemed to have an honesty that was lacking in American writings. One particular friend was impressive. He had a depth and honesty about going to the march that differed from most who went with us.”

Two projects dominated the respondent’s wish list for the coming year. The first was to collect her published columns into a book. If she did that she would need financial backing and an editor to assist in the selection process. The second was work in a library. If she did that she would organize book discussions for young people and serve as a historian in residence at a library.

One’s life space can contract with time and age. Combine time and age with a disability and one has ingredients for loneliness, meaninglessness, and purposelessness. Not for this respondent. Finding the “Sunday School” booklet became one more project to pursue, one more opportunity for discovery. “I feel like I am keeping family stories alive,” she said. Time and age were allies when she found the Sunday school booklet. Time and age were allies when she was invited to event commemorating the Civil Rights March on Washington, D. C. She had been there. She remembered the events of that day and could provide a critical analysis from differing points of view.

I visited the respondent six months later. Her dining room table was covered with photographs from her past. Public television was filming a documentary of her life.

Case #23

I Have a New Job and Am Getting Paid for it

Two activities came to mind when the thirty-eight year-old Ecuadoran native thought

about what he did that was new and from which he learned something. He accepted a position with the public library and was trying to resolve personality conflicts with a roommate. As for the library position, he said, "Usually I am curious, grab anything to read. I saw an announcement in a magazine rack advertising a library position for somebody with Spanish-speaking skills. Since I had been volunteering as an interpreter for a county youth program, I gave the position some thought." Not sure whether a paid position would differ from volunteering, he decided to talk with several librarians. With lingering misgivings, he asked for a job application. "It was then that I developed a plan for the interview. I wrote and rewrote what I wanted to say, started reading kids books, and acted out the stories in case they wanted to see me in action." He spent approximately twelve hours organizing for the interview. Afterward, he wrote a thank you letter to the interviewers. "I tried to do everything in a professional way." Within a week he was hired. His only expense was \$12.00 for new guitar strings. He received a salary of \$15.65 an hour.

He had to work through a difficult interpersonal situation when his amenable landlord moved to another location. Negative feelings developed toward the new roommate. "Physically I just don't like him, we are too different." Conversations with the landlord did not relieve his growing animosity, and He was giving thought to moving to another location. How did this affect the actor? "There was no change, I just kind of live, my body seems to tell me what to do."

As he thought about what he would like to do next year, he said "I have been thinking about advantages of a two-year degree versus a four-year degree. I met people in Bolivia and want to make an impact while I can. I want to be connected with people who are in that field. Studying geological engineering is one way of preparing for international service."

Marriage was on hold. "I would like to have companionship, somebody to talk to when I come home. Sometimes it is chance that things happen. Sometimes it is faith in God."

The respondent made a favorable impression on the library staff, but expressed a sense of fatalism about life. "Sometimes it is chance that things happen." Was fatalism part of his cultural identity? Did it make it difficult for him to try to resolve differences in interpersonal relationships? He spent about eight hours trying to reconcile differences with a roommate. At the time of the interview differences were not resolved.

Case #24

I Need a Ticket to Work

An avid reader, the forty-nine year-old respondent was a self-educated, self-

proclaimed children's and youth literature specialist. Her undergraduate nursing degree prepared her for an occupation that did not meet her expectations. Working with children and youth gave her that sense of satisfaction. A preliminary diagnosis of Parkinson's disease and ensuing bouts with depression severely restricted her hopes to pursue a career in her preferred field. Inadequate finances, mobility reduced to public transportation, or help from friends, added to her quandary. She said,

There are lots of negative energy sources in my life, much negative feedback. I used my skills at a Friends School, helping kids to read but the dilemma is, where do I use my knowledge of young adults and young adult literature? I have big gaps; how do I bridge them? Unless a thunderbolt hits and I have a case of good luck, I just don't know. Yet when I read Kozol's Ordinary Resurrections, I get new hope. So I have been looking without success for grants to support me.

Trying to pinpoint the state of her Parkinson's disease was debilitating and frustrating. Participation in support groups, surfing the internet, and conversations with doctors led to some state-of-the-art information, but was not as specific as she had hoped. She said, "The internet has the cutting edge stuff; books are not as current. I don't have the classic features of Parkinson's, which is frustrating. My doctor says things will unfold. I want more."

One approach to resolving her dilemma was to try to focus on things other than health issues, included continuing exploring interests in children's and youth literature, and finding meaningful employment. "I need a ticket to work."

Life did not seem fair to this medically disabled respondent. She not only received an education for which she was unsuited, nursing, pursuing academic credentials as a youth specialist was impossible. To make up for the mismatch, she took it upon herself to bridge the gap between what she had, a nursing degree, to what she wanted to be, a youth specialist. Pursuing academic credentials to achieve her goal was out of the question, so an alternative route was self-directed learning. She was determined not to let the Parkinson's diagnosis derail her intentions. What was derailing her was fiscal liability: she needed "a ticket to work." Prospects for that ticket looked dim. Fortunately she did not need a ticket to use the public library; her library card gave her free access to a world of information.

Case #25

You are Ruining a Perfectly Good Weekend!

As a community library manager, the actor labored to create services relevant to the library's diversified community. His unorthodox style frequently created tension at the administrative level; it evolved into one of the actor's major learning activities.. The central focus in his life was family. Nothing could compare with his son's near death experience. Other religious and domestic interests included teaching a church school confirmation class, house remodeling, landscaping, and traveling.

Referring to his son's near-death automobile accident, he said:

Even in the darkest moments there are times of enrichment. It helps me understand Lamentations, wrestling with God. I definitely believe in miracles; it is much more personal to me now. Clergy, colleagues, friends, medical staff, neighbors, total strangers, and even televised religious meditations offered moral and spiritual support during long nights and cold lonely mornings. The hospital cleaning lady said, "I'll tell you what, I've seen a lot of people come in and your son looks like he's filled with vinegar and piss and I think he's going to make it."

He constantly asked doctors for information, saying, "At one point I got news I didn't want or like. The doctor said 'His brain stem snapped. He won't get better.' He was not angry, it was an honest opinion. Two days later his son woke and put his thumbs up. The actor said, "From then on, I watched my son being reborn, step-by-step, day-by-day." Cost of the ordeal was over \$30,000.

When invited by his pastor to teach about prayer to a confirmation class, the most difficult thing was finding information to keep the minds of twenty-five youth engaged for sixty minutes. Resources included Luther's writings, The Interpreter's Bible, and readings from world religions. On the morning of the class he said a prayer and entered. He said, "The spiritual stuff took over. It was emotional, embarrassing, and rewarding. I was not afraid to witness about my own religious belief. It was important for me personally, but may have been insignificant for the kids." The only expense was the purchase of a sixteen dollar book about Luther.

"Incompetent?" The accusation against the actor was repeated by library administrators. He said, "As major as the accusations were, they were small potatoes compared to my son's accident." At the height of the accusations he was told, with three days notice, to vacate his office. Three days later he was told to return.

The surprise was the unscrupulousness of it. Administrators were not following their own procedures, then calling me unscrupulous. The union said that I won, but what did I win? I learned a lot about people, about myself. I decided I had to be deliberate in the way I responded to the administration. I had to be logical in my approach, have facts in order, have support from the community, and have control of myself. I had to rely on my allies and friends in the community to do their part.

To offset the accusations he decided to be above board, put everything in writing. “I was deliberate in the way I approached it, in my communication with the library director. I learned to be logical in my approach, have facts in order, have support from the community, have control of myself, and I had to rely on my allies and friends in the community to do their part.” He also prayed for wisdom and guidance and accept the consequences. The economic cost of the ordeal was the use of several sick days.

The actor’s domestic side surfaced as he talked about projects around the house. “I am a lawn person but never even remotely cared about it before this. It started bit by bit. I’m still doing it. How ridiculous does it look picking crab grass?” He read library books and talked with friends, but in the end did it “by the seat of my pants.” The project had a price tag of \$400.00 but more importantly, he said, “After the events of the past year, it was therapeutic. It was an escape from everything else, a time to reflect. It got me thinking about the Bible and some of the parables of Jesus.”

Four home window frames and casings were rotted, needed repairing. Before the actor starting on the project, he consulted with friends and read home improvement books. Major obstacles were lack of confidence and lack of power saws. “I planned on replacing several pieces in each window but the job got bigger. I had to rebuild the entire frames. I cursed and just did it using a plain old saw, hammer, and a battery-powered drill. I made mistakes, but each window got easier. It was a rewarding experience; my wife and neighbors were wowed. I’m more of a survivalist than I used to be.” He spent approximately \$250.00 on the project but probably saved \$1,000.00.

When the actor decided to replace a door frame, his neighbor offered to help. This time power tools were available. One of the first things the neighbor negotiated was, “We’re not going to get angry. We’re going to stay in control of ourselves.” The overzealous neighbor quickly started swearing and cursing as complications arose. “But he really got into it, did a good job. I was like his assistant.” The experience continued

to raise the actor's self-esteem: "It was a goal that I wanted to do that nobody thought possible. It got me into a domesticated mode." Only his impatient wife complained, saying "You are making a big mess. You're killing a perfectly good weekend." (When I asked his wife to read the narrative she said, "I didn't say that." They laughed.)

Materials cost approximately \$200.00. To hire a contractor would have cost \$800.00.

Family trips were designed to be learning experiences. Once they started; they would veer off onto the blue roads. He said,

All our trips are mind expanders. I am usually well-prepared. It is very enriching as well as a major family experience. I love going through those great expanses of nothing but great night skies! Not only were we taking or bringing back our daughter from Gonzaga, we visited a lot of things we would have never seen. Difficulties? Yes. When you have five people in a car you have to negotiate, compromise. There are four options on roads taken, roads not taken, and we can only take one. At least some in our family are skilled at negotiating. That helped. Accumulating family stories and memories was as important as the trips."

The family spent approximately \$2,500.00 on a western trip.

A trip to Atlanta was planned as thoroughly as the first. The focus of the trip was on India for the actor's daughter married an Indian, and since the son-in-law's parents were visiting Atlanta, he made it a point for the two families to meet. He said, "I read a lot about the history of India, watched Hindu movies, and read Bombay newspapers. But I was not prepared to listen to discussions about arranged marriages, and the Muslim political situation in India. I have a greater appreciation for where my son-in-law comes from. They take great stock in prayer and have a deep appreciation for religion and faith." The cost of the Atlanta trip was \$1,500. The benefits were immeasurable.

Several projects came to mind for next year: Learn more about Italy by visiting his daughter who was studying there; learn more about Indian culture from his son-in-law; replace a driveway to his home; and consider the possibility of obtaining a real estate license.

The actor looked death in the face--his faith sustained him. He learned by observing, listening, pursuing ideas, and flying by the seat of his pants. He was unabashed about approaching community leaders for funds to support his ideas. His office may have been untidy, but he stood up for his staff, and was less interested in solving problems than looking for opportunities to provide library services to a

diversified community. Not the typical “library type,” he was earthy and unassuming, yet sure of himself without being cocky. He was an “innovator/early adopter” type (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1972). He sustained his lifestyle with an eclectic interest in people that he carried over from everyday life into library service.

Case #26

If You Knew Who I Was You Couldn't Stand Me

The respondent was a community organizer, political activist, library promoter, and three year VISTA at a public library. Through community network building, she procured over \$300,000.00 for library services and resources. Although she had been honored for the support she raised for libraries, she harbored a hidden sense of inadequacy. It was something she tried to understand about her self. To not change, she feared, would result in the loss of a sub-apartment housemate who was a necessary source of income and friendship.

I think the biggest thing I did in the past year, and it took a year, was opening myself to my housemate and our friendship. I was in the third year of the “Peace Project,” and I was a ‘reluctant dragon.’ I didn’t want to change. I had been clinically depressed for most of my life, thinking I was a lazy slob. When I got on a more even keel in third year in the Peace Project I could begin to focus on my relationship with him. I think it is that rock bed belief that if you knew who I was you couldn’t stand me.

Challenging herself to become more open to others, she focused on the following: listening to what people were saying, listening for tone, and listening without a ready judgment. She was consciously trying to bridge whatever communication gaps there may have been between herself and her housemate. “And I don’t achieve it every day, especially if people are baiting me.”

She noticed four changes taking place in her life over the past twelve months: “I have a softer and more relaxed demeanor, I ask more questions, I am slow to quick judgments, and I’m caring and liking myself more.”

After her VISTA position ended, she saw the need to focus on a library system approach to fund-raising. “Up until January 2003 all my focus was on a branch library. I now want to focus on linking system wide services. I have been participating in an e-

democracy forum; it has been one way to become better informed about current issues.

The forum consists of more than 900 people from all walks of life.” She said:

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

The respondent spent approximately twenty hours a week and \$200.00 for the year researching issues and preparing for group and organization appearances. She received VISTA stipends for her services.

She set four goals for herself in the coming year: first, continue to serve as a member of a local advisory committee on a transportation project. “It is something I’ve worked on since 1973. It needs to get it started. We need to see the shovels working.” A second project was to remodel her home, necessity demanded it. The third was “How do I get to Ireland. I want to figure that out.” A fourth was library funding. She wanted to concentrate her efforts on targeting the legislature for additional support. She would have to learn how to use legislators to achieve her goal.

The respondent was connected to community leaders. People listened when she spoke. Yet she struggled with trying to make sense out of her inner life. She always had a ready smile, was keenly observant, but there was a side of herself with which she was troubled. Knowing how to bridge that gap between how she felt about herself and what she wanted to be was more difficult than raising money for community programs. She found a community program that advocated what she was looking for. The South Minneapolis Peace Project was a University program that focused on enabling participants to find inner peace as a step toward promoting peace in the community. She completed the program and was now a spokesperson for it.

Case #27

A Whole Year Without Being Hospitalized

It started years earlier with an injury: that was how the actor was introduced to opiate drugs. His addiction followed him through a PhD in eastern philosophy, and more than ten years living in India and Tibet. An assortment of drug habits left his body

severely damaged. Returning home he was diagnosed to be suffering from Hepatitis C (now in remission three years), and massive bone deterioration from his pelvis to his leg.

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

Periods of black depression, exacerbated by interferon treatments, overwhelmed him with pain. Yet when confined to hospitals, psychiatric wards, nursing homes, he failed to follow prescribed regimens. Ignoring medication in favor of drug binges was tantamount to a death sentence. After the sixteen decimating operations, the bone infection was cleansed. When other bodily symptoms developed, he said:

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

In the past year, doctors, orthopedists, psychiatrists, and a personal belief in Karma, helped bring some order to his life. He started swimming and doing physical therapy exercises. "I'll probably never get back a big chunk of muscle. As for medications, there are a variety of tradeoffs. They affect the endocrine system so much that I feel like I'm walking around in somebody else's body." Summing events of the past year, he said:

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

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

Paying medical expenses was out of the question. "I don't have a pot to piss in any more. I get SSI, county money, Medicaid, and work in a library to help pay the bills.

I am a library homework helper and I don't even know how I came across the job. I think somebody saw it on the internet and told me. It has been my first time to work in seven and one-half years." Being a library homework helper provided positive reinforcement, but was exhausting. He said:

I couldn't fight the exhaustion. I would be a mess when I got home--sleep! And I still seem to need more sleep than I'm accustomed to. But I learned so much from the kids; they keep you alive. This summer is the first time in years that I have not been spending days in the hospital. My family is really proud of me! My therapist wanted me to back off, but I felt committed to doing it. I earned \$800.00 since starting. It has helped pay some of my expenses. Next year I want to see my youngest kids in California. I need a vacation.

The fifty-six year-old respondent had his share of regrets. The stranglehold drugs had on his life reduced him to a prison house of addiction. What he faced and heard from his children was: "Until you get better, daddy, we can't live with you."

He heard about my study while working as a homework helper. He said, "I can tell you about learning: I am recovering from my sixteenth operation and I have been a whole year without being hospitalized." He was reduced to walking with a cane when he shared his story. He sensed he was on the road to a limited recovery and knew there was no turning back to old habits if he was to be reconciled with family. It was a day-at-a-time recovery. Working as a homework helper was a far cry from the halls of academia and philosophical discussions. He was now involved in one-to-one tutoring with junior and senior high school students for whom English was a second language. It was also a far cry from hospital beds, psychiatric wards, and nursing homes; it gave him the courage to take one step at a time.

Case #28

Co-directing "Art on the Line" Sale

The major event in the life of the sixty-six year-old retiree was an "Art on the Line" sale for her watercolor society. She suggested the project during a brain-storming session. "I brought up the idea because I had a passion to give all our members to sell their works. That became part of our mission statement." The president strongly embraced the idea. The respondent then said:

She assigned two of us to be co-directors of the project. We were to make

inquiries about the logistics for conducting a happening like this. My co-director did great. She runs her every-day family activities like a business, a firm. She did the same here. She did research for using credit card charge machines, state tax procedures, and developed a spreadsheet that accounted for every possible aspect of the venture. Members were invited to volunteer for four sub-committees: finances, advertising, sale management, and set-up and take-down. We also wrote a mission statement for the event. We then explored the possibility of renting the State Fair arts building. We looked at the building in the fall. In April we took as many members possible of the sales management committee to again look at the site and made our decision. For two thousand dollars we signed a contract for use of facility. It was like setting up a business that would last two days.

Even though the group lost \$1,500.00 for the event, it was considered an enormous success.

A major challenge was hanging paintings according fairgrounds guidelines. Since every member could bring five pieces of art to the sale, every piece had to be accounted for, entered into the spreadsheet, and hung in “its proper place.” A total of 2,468 paintings were submitted by seventy-eight artists.

The event affected the respondent several ways. Her strengths in networking, materials procurement, and report writing were affirmed; and her membership survey confirmed the feasibility of the event. Important to her was the opportunity to observe the outstanding organizational skills of her co-director; she also met new and potentially new members, and observed current members participate and blossom. “It was worth spending \$100.00 of my money on the project for it gave our group an all-around boost. I did not regret doing it.”

Learning about Unitarians was unintended. She unexpectedly met a high school classmate: as they talked, the respondent shared photographs of her art. The chance meeting led to an invitation to hang her paintings in a Unitarian church. She knew nothing about Unitarian doctrines and was not expecting to, but agreed to hang a show. Rather than asking questions about the church and its doctrines, while hanging her art she unobtrusively observed the church’s interior and read several pieces of available literature. One statement that stood out was “We believe in a Unitarian God. We are not Trinitarian.” As she thought about it she said: “That does not seem to be Bible based, rather more on the basic goodness of humans, humanitarian, and a good code of ethics. It

seems to be based on feelings.” An added coincidence to her introduction to the Unitarian Church occurred when she was informed that a forty-four year-old Unitarian friend of her nephew died. She attended the funeral and noted that the clergy person made no references to God during the service. The combined events of the art show and death of her nephew’s friend did nothing to persuade her to want to learn more about Unitarian doctrines.

The respondent spent \$450.00 preparing for the show, and received \$550 from the sale of her paintings. A surprise was the request for a formal evaluation of the event. Meeting new friends and renewing old acquaintances was as meaningful as the sales.

The respondent’s most significant learning activity in the past year was the “Art on the Line” sale. One of the most impressive aspects of the event was observing the business demeanor of her co-chairperson. She spent more than 400 hours helping to organize the event.

Serendipity played a part in the respondent’s introduction to the Unitarian church. She was a devout Catholic who, through a chance encounter with a high school class mate, had her first introduction to the Unitarian Church. It was more of a novelty than a serious encounter with a belief system.

Case #29

The sixty-one year-old educator was struggling with her degree plan at a local university. She said:

I used to have a passion in the way I worked: I was concerned about the quality of my performance. Since I turned sixty I have been turning my passion toward living. I am trying to free myself up to live a more simplified lifestyle. My mantra has been to simplify. ‘Tis a gift to be simple....’ I think I am really comfortable with the idea that I am making some risky decisions because I know what I’m doing, and feel comfortable with the ambiguity that goes with it.

Complicating her life space was raising her fifteen year-old granddaughter; her mother’s deteriorating health; and her former husband’s terminal illness that came at a time of reconciliation between father and children. She said

B__’s near death is not difficult for me; I learned to let go of him. What has been difficult is watching my children suffer. They had begun a slow return to a meaningful relationship with him in the past ten years; now it is coming to an end

In a space of two weeks I have seen him go down hill. It has been a time of tremendous complexities. As for my mother, I'm doing home health care. Now I must step back and let my children go their own way.

I must still decide whether I want to continue my program next year. I will be talking with my instructors, but part of the difficulty is concern for my family. Another is 'jumping through the hoops,' like I have to prove I know what I know.

The respondent recognized that time was a commodity she could ill-afford to squander, even for lofty goals such as pursuing a doctoral degree. Life really was closing in on her. What really was important to her? Complexity upon complexity was leaving her in a quandary out of which she thought she could find hope. Perhaps simplicity was an answer. Hope was fast fading, particularly for her former husband. Would he die before the children were reconciled to him? Death would have its final say; the children would come to terms with it on their own. She had to make sense out of her own turbulence; did she want to spend the time and energy it took to "jump through the hoops" of a doctoral program? She had to weigh the pros and cons of that decision.

Conclusion

Themes coursing through the twenty-nine interviews included plight of the unemployed; personal turbulence as triggers for learning; propinquity and interpersonal influences in decision-making; the need to belong and the need to be independent; costs and benefits of group participation; survival techniques used to control addictive behavior; rational and irrational decision making in the consumption of goods and services, rational and irrational behavior related to learning something new; and finally, the need to know and the fear of knowing. Adult learning and consumer behavior were part and parcel of the struggle to make sense of life's taunting and haunting situations, and for which there were few reliable road maps. What road maps there were welled up from within as the actors dared to embrace their futures with ambiguous hope and vision.

It would be difficult separate learning across the life span from the need to bridge gaps between where one is to where one would like to be. Ambiguity is not the culprit, it is the challenger that begs one to dare, make the leap of faith. Making that leap is a situational challenge that only the actor can determine the quality of meaning in his or her

life space. One leap may trigger another and another. Pleasure, mystery, surprise, suspense, and tragedy add to the mix. As much as one would like to control outcomes, chance, fate, and providence color attitudes, faith, and spirituality. Even so, lifelong learning can contribute to one's economic, psychological, and social well-being. That does not necessarily point to having more; it can point to being more.

The consequences of creating a population of lifelong learners can contribute to the cultural, economic, and political well-being of communities. Families, the work place, libraries, museums, schools, recreational arenas, religious institutions, and social agencies can cooperate in the creation of an on-going learning society. There are risks to be taken. Although McWhinney (1990) in his "Education for the Third Quarter of Life" was addressing older adults, his insights have implications for society at large. He said,

...Mature learning may be a subversive undertaking. In the initial stages it may separate an individual from the main thrust of this producer-oriented society. As people begin to develop a mature viewpoint; their values shift from a societal base to an introspective one. This reorientation extracts one from an intensive focus on social participation to a self-reflexive engagement. From such a vantage point one may see alternatives to hidden and unquestioned values that support our society's foundations, revealing choices one had avoided while the agenda of family, productivity, and social compliance dominated one's attention. To the mature learner, improving one's lifestyle is not likely to imply material enrichment, so a program supporting this form of maturation may be at odds with a society organized around economic achievement. The reigning societal viewpoint requires high consumption for continuing economic growth, so it finds it better to keep people in a survival mode. Support for values that arise from mature learning may challenge this social order as well as its social priorities.

Refinement of the question

A major limitation in my studies has been the problem of recollection. When I asked respondents "What did you do in the past year that was new to you" I had to depend on their answers, knowing that at the time the question was asked, their response(s) would be influenced by events of the moment. Events of the moment can either trigger, color, or impede recollection. A one year longitudinal study with monthly updates with respondents could reduce recollection contamination.

Addendum

When approaching retirement from library service in 1998, I asked myself, "What

is in my future?" The "answer" was a Moroccan Peace Corps assignment (1998-2001). During a memorable conversation with my Arabic tutor, thoughts drifted toward "lifelong learning." He said, "I am a nomad of the mind." That stayed with me. My current venture is a two-year tour with AmeriCorps, an assignment that has allowed me to further refine my concept of lifelong learning.

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TABLE 1

Lifelong learning in Minneapolis by Average, Education, Projects, Hours, Cost, Benefit

		Average	Std
Age	N=28	48.61	15.71
Education		15.82	1.74
Projects	107	3.82	0.27
Hours	9694	90.60	134.91
Economic cost	\$220999	\$2065	\$15060
Economic benefit	\$49023	\$458	\$1472

TABLE 2

Respondents by Age

Age	19-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70+
N=28	4	5	5	6	6	2

TABLE 3

Respondents by Education

Education	12	13-15	16	17+
N=28	2	8	7	11

TABLE 4

Information Resources Owned by 28 Respondents

	Books	Radios	Television	Computers	Magazines	Newspaper
Total	19379	86	38	18	43	23
Average	668.24	2.97	1.41	.72	1.65	.89
STD	1021.18	2.19	1.02	.67	1.75	.91

TABLE 5

Rating and Ranking of Resources Used in Learning Projects

Resource	N=	Rank	Rating	Rank
Self	68	1	3.01	15
Family	19	5	4.05	10
Books , own	14	7	4.57	2
Books, Library	24	4	4.08	9
Media	7	16	3.71	14
Friend	27	3	4.15	4
Informal Group	11	10	4.00	13
Clergy	1	17	3.00	16
Physician	9	12	4.22	3
Employer	11	10	4.00	13
Paid Teacher	8	14	4.63	1
Librarian	7	16	4.14	5
Business Person	13	8	4.08	9
Formal Group	8	14	4.13	6
Internet	16	6	3.94	13
Other	29	2	4.10	7

TABLE 6

Type of Learning by Economic Cost/Benefit

Type of learning	# of Activities	Total Cost	Average Cost	STD	Total Benefit	Average Benefit	STD
Vocational	29	\$7387	\$255	\$921	\$38450	\$1326	\$2491
Cultural	29	12660	437	763	7833	270	815
Medical	14	30384	2170	7719	350	25	90
Recreational	8	1735	217	244	0	0	0
Domestic	8	164685	20586	50476	1840	230	390
Religious	5	1083	217	255	550	110	220
Interpersonal	8	2855	357	416	0	0	0
Political	3	200	67	94	0	0	0
Other	3	10	3.33	4.71	0	0	0
Total	107	220999	2065	15060	49023	458	1472

SOUTH MINNEAPOLIS LIFELONG LEARNING ASSESSMENT

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

I want to tell you more about the interview. I am trying to develop a profile of what and how adults have been learning in South Minneapolis, the economic costs/benefits related to what has been learned, and what they would like to learn in the next twelve months..

All information shared by you will be held in strictest confidence, your name nor your address will not be asked.

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

I do set some conditions on learning something new:

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

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

Yes. _____. Proceed to question #1

No. _____. Simplify concepts to the level of the respondent's understanding.

QUESTION #1

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

Yes. _____. Proceed to question #2

No. _____. Proceed to question #3

QUESTION #2

- A. Estimate the number of hours you spent working** on each new activity.
- B. What was the name of that project or activity.**
- C. Identify resources** you used while working on your projects (select resources from the following:
 - A. Myself
 - B. Family
 - C. Books, magazines (your own)
 - D. Books, magazines (from a friend)
 - E. Books, magazines (library)
 - F. Radio, TV, Newspapers
 - G. Friend
 - H. Informal group
 - I. Clergyperson
 - J. Physician
 - K. Employer
 - L. Paid teacher
 - M. Librarian
 - N. Businessperson
 - O. Formal group
 - P. Internet
 - Q. Other
- D. Rate your satisfaction with each resource using a scale from 1 - 5:**
Rate (1) **No satisfaction** (2) (3) (4) (5) **Major satisfaction**
- E. Why did you try to learn something new in the past twelve months?**

F. Degree of difficulty: how difficult was this project for you
Rate from (1) **No difficulty** (2) (3) (4) (5) **Major difficulty**

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

H. Life change. Did this project change anything about you?
Rate the impact this project had on your life using a scale from 1 - 5:
Rate from (1) **No change** (2) (3) (4) (5) **Major change**

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

Economic cost: _____ **Economic benefit:** _____

PROJECT # _____.

Hours _____ **Name of Project** _____

Resources: ____/____. ____/____. ____/____. ____/____. ____/____. ____/____. ____/____. ____/____.

Remarks: _____

Why? _____

Degree of Difficulty: _____

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

Remarks: _____

If you experienced problems, how did you try to solve them?

Life change:

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

Remarks: _____

Economic costs/Benefits

Economic cost: _____ **Economic benefit:** _____

QUESTION #3

Would you like to learn something new in the next twelve months?

Yes. _____. Proceed to question #4

No. _____. Proceed to question #5

QUESTION #4

What would you like to learn during the next twelve months? List the possible resources you would use (select from the following list)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| A. Myself | J. Physician |
| B. Family | K. Employer |
| C. Books, magazines (your own) | L. Paid teacher |
| D. Books, magazines (from a friend) | M. Librarian |
| E. Books, magazines (library) | N. Businessperson |
| F. Radio, TV, Newspapers | O. Formal group |
| G. Friend | P. Internet |
| H. Informal group | Q. Other |
| I. Clergyperson | |

EXAMPLE

1. Cook Mediterranean cuisine _____ . **Remarks:** *Because I watched a tv program about Mediterranean cooking.* **Resources:** *A/4 G/3 K/3*

Project: _____

Resources: _____ / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / /

Remarks: _____

QUESTION #5

Name organizations to which you belong or use. Organizations can include community groups, parks and recreation centers, community education, k-12 education programs, libraries, health or senior citizen organizations, clubs, churches, neighborhood associations, etc., and how frequently you use them.

Name of organization or group

QUESTION #6

How many information resources do you have in your home or subscribe to:

Books **Radios** **TVs** **Computers** **Magazines** **Newspapers**

QUESTION #7

How many years of formal education have you completed? _____

QUESTION #8

What is your occupation? _____

QUESTION #9

What is your housing status? **Own**_____ **Rent** _____ **Other** _____

QUESTION #10

What is your age? _____ Sex _____

QUESTION #11

What is your family status?

Single **Married** **Divorced** **Significant other**
