IMPROVISE, ADAPT, OVERCOME!

BACK-TO-THE-LAND WOMEN AND ADULT TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

by

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# Table of Contents

Dedication ........................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgments ............................................................................................... ii
Abstract ................................................................................................................ iii
Think Like a Weightlifter, Think Like a Woman .................................................. iv

## Chapter One
- Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1
- Participants ...................................................................................................... 2
- Purpose ............................................................................................................ 3
- Looking ahead .................................................................................................. 5

## Chapter Two
- A Recollection of the Social Context .............................................................. 7
- Summary .......................................................................................................... 22

## Chapter Three
- Review of the Literature .................................................................................. 24
  - Andragogy .................................................................................................... 27
  - Transformative Learning Theories ................................................................ 28
    - Mezirow ..................................................................................................... 28
      - Domains of learning .............................................................................. 28
      - Types of learners ................................................................................... 31
      - Meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. ...................................... 32
      - Premise distortions ............................................................................... 33
      - The transformation cycle .................................................................... 35
    - Other Adult Learning Theorists .............................................................. 37
      - Cognition, culture and context ........................................................... 37
      - Freire: Learning as social activism ...................................................... 38
      - Feminist epistemologies ..................................................................... 39
- Summary .......................................................................................................... 45

## Chapter Four
- Method .............................................................................................................. 47
  - Participants ................................................................................................... 48
  - The “invisible” participant ......................................................................... 49
  - Procedures ................................................................................................... 51
    - Artifact collection .................................................................................... 51
    - Personal narratives ............................................................................... 52
    - Unrealized data collection process ......................................................... 55
- Data Analysis ................................................................................................... 57
Dedication

To the women of all generations and all countries who dared to be adventuresses, and to my children, without whom the adventure would mean nothing.

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List of Tables

Table 1 Premise Distortions ...........................................34
Table 2 The transformation cycle ......................................36
Table 3 Finding themes through interactive reading ..............62
Table 4 Examples of Emergent Codes and Definitions ............65
Table 5 Relationship Between Epistemological Development and Learner Types 135

List of Figures

Figure 1 From silenced to fully voiced: women's epistemological development ........ 41
Figure 2 Analytical framework of epistemological development .........................43
Figure 3 The transformation cycle ....................................143
Figure 4 The transformation cycle embedded in a ground of self-reliance and self-confidence .... 145
Abstract

This study considers the implications of adult transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) in the real world context of a group of women back-to-the-landers who returned to mainstream society. All but one of the women returned to university to complete their interrupted post-secondary education. The other woman used skills and knowledge she had gained during her back-to-the-land time to become an instructor at a community college. This study examines the women’s stories with a view to uncovering the qualities and characteristics that led to their success in these educational institutions. Adult transformative learning theory failed to account for the women’s narrated views of their success. Epistemological development (Belenky et al. 1986) appeared to account for their intellectual ability to achieve their academic and career goals, but left the larger question of successful transitions unanswered. The women emphasized self-reliance and the resultant self-confidence as their central learning experiences during their back-to-the-land time, and highlighted the concept of agency, and “storying” one’s own life.
First day on the job and the foreman orders
in a voice like a chainsaw,
_Hoist those timbers_
_by hand to the second floor._
_Crane's broken down._

I keep my mouth shut
with difficulty, knowing
how much a six by six timber
twelve feet long and fresh
from the Fraser River, knowing
how much it weighs.

Lome, my partner, says nothing,
addresses the modest mountain of timbers
towering over our heads, smelling
sweetly nostalgic for forest.

Weighing with the wood he faces,
with a belly like a great swelling bole,
shakes off my motion to help and
bends as if to pick up a penny,
scoops up the timber and packs it, 50 feet,
to lean against the damp grey
sides of the concrete core.
When he doesn't look back,
it's my turn.

And now, because I need this job, and
because it's the first day and because
every eye is watching The Girl,
I bend my knees as the book says,
think like a weightlifter, take the beam
by its middle and order my body
to lift.

Reluctantly, the great tree, sweating pitch
parts with its peers with a sucking sound,
and the beam and I sway to the designated spot,
I drop it. Repeat.

Alone, I carry beams to Lome
who alone heaves them with the slightest grunt
to the laborer who bends from the second floor
with a hurry-up call,
_Faster! Faster!_

No, I will _never be a carpenter._ I think, _never able to work like these men._ Then
Lome falters.
Without thinking I reach up my two arms beside
him
and push with all my might.
The beam flies to the second floor and mindless,
I turn to fetch him another.

Without a word
Lome follows me back to the pile,
leads one end and helps me
carry the next timber to the wall.
Without a word we both push it up,
We continue this path together
find a rhythm, a pace
that feels more like dancing.

Lome says, _You walk different._ Yes.
For on this day I am suddenly
much, much stronger, a woman with the strength
of two.

___Kate Braid _Covering Rough Ground_ (reprinted by permission of the author)
Chapter One

Introduction

The sixties counterculture spawned a large back-to-the-land movement based on ideals of cooperation, subsistence living and a reduced attachment to mainstream, consumer society. The back-to-the-landers were mostly young adults from middle class and working class backgrounds. Armed with utopian ideals, a handful of books, and youthful energy, they made their way to rural environments to pursue their dreams. A new ideal of “earth mother” had emerged to counteract the previous decade’s suburban housewife, and the women back-to-the-landers embraced this model of womanhood. The earth mother could build a fence, milk a cow, raise an organic garden, give birth at home, and home school her children. She participated in a full partnership with her husband or boyfriend, or was capable of living on the land on her own, with the help of her broader community.

The five women I interviewed for this study are adventurers, idealist and dreamers. I met four of them when we all lived in the “Lakeside” area of central interior British Columbia. I met the fifth woman, who settled in the “Riverside” area, years after each of us had left the land. Like me, these women followed their minds and hearts out of the city into the country, then back to mainstream society. In that time they underwent physical and emotional challenges, and by their own disclosure, learned that they are strong and capable. This study traces aspects of their journeys for a dual purpose: first, to bring to the public gaze the “heroic” nature of these women, and second to explore Mezirow’s (1991, 1995; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) transformative learning theory in a real-world setting.
Adult transformative learning theory provides the theoretical underpinnings of this study. The theory elaborates on the psychological processes by which individuals experience a change in their systems of habitual expectation of the world. Mezirow distinguishes between the “formative learning” of childhood, by which he means the ways children’s views are formed by culture and experience, and the “transformative learning” of adulthood. The latter is dependent upon critical reflection on meaning schemes and meaning perspectives, based upon a critical review of inhibitory assumptions which he characterizes as “premise distortions” (Mezirow, 1991). Meaning schemes are the specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute experience. These meaning schemes, in conjunction with meaning perspectives (sets of habitual expectations that govern perception, comprehension, and remembering), are the fundamental cognitive elements affected by the transformative experience. According to theory, a disorienting dilemma that leads to critical self-reflection is the trigger for personal transformation. This process is a series of non-stage steps dependent upon internal processing by the individual. Supplementary to Mezirow’s theory, Cranton (1994) asserts that personal empowerment is essential before the individual’s experience can lead to the transformative process.

Participants

The women who participated in this study made two major transformations in their lives. The first was the conscious decision to leave their middle-class homes. Abandoning mainstream society, these women and their partners chose a subsistence lifestyle in a remote, isolated environment in the B.C. interior. However, after extensive experience as back-to-the-landers,
each woman returned to participate again in mainstream culture. In this study, I explore the personal transformations of these women as they returned to mainstream society.

Purpose

My interest in transformative learning theory began to emerge during my years of teaching Adult Basic Education courses. In the classroom, I observed that students who had enrolled solely for the purpose of completing program prerequisites for a specific course of study, such as dental hygiene or computer-assisted design, appeared to succeed at a greater rate than students who had not graduated from secondary education and were completing secondary requirements. I wondered what factors accounted for success in the former group, and postulated a fundamental way of viewing educational institutions and themselves as learners that “permitted” their academic success. I began reviewing educational literature for explanations of this apparent disparity in experience.

Much of the literature on adult student retention suggests that social and personal factors have the greatest impact upon students’ completion and success in furthering their education (Malicky & Norman, 1996). Those findings compounded my confusion. I wondered if any instructional strategies promote learning and retention, or whether the teaching act is largely irrelevant to student success. I could do little about the social or personal factors governing students’ academic success, but I could study the factors that influenced what went on in my classroom. One of my observations was that those who needed only prerequisites previously had been successful within academic environments. They had internal motivation and the institutional and academic skills that allowed them to succeed. By contrast, those students who were completing high school either had not graduated or had “scraped by” in alternative,
modified programs. Some students' education had been interrupted by parenting demands, while others had been in the workforce or perhaps in penal custody. In order to succeed in a college setting, and especially to go on to further education in trades, technical, or university careers, it appeared to me that they all needed to transform something—perhaps a view of the institution, of themselves as learners, or of the educators—in order to succeed in their goals. I did not know whether I was seeking changes in attitudes toward the institutions, maturity and personal responsibility, development of skills (e.g., reading comprehension), or something else altogether. I speculated that their world view had not included success in educational institutions. If that were the case, only a metamorphosis, a transformation, would help them to succeed.

My students came to Adult Basic Education classes with preconceived notions of learning, but I realized that in colleges and universities, too, certain ideas about learning and knowledge acquisition are assumed by instructors and administrators. Regardless of the theoretical stance from which these assumptions are derived, they influence instructional strategies and teaching activities in the classroom, creating a learning environment that may favor particular learning styles and abilities at the expense of others. For instance, institutions seek to maximize learning by creating large lecture classes. In such a class, the instructor is responsible for describing and explaining course content, but this assumes a narrow definition of teaching and instruction in which the instructor is the expert who passes on his or her knowledge

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1I chose not to explore institutional change, which would come slowly, if at all. A social activist, I had spent years hoping to change institutions. In my classroom, I was attempting to do what I had tried as a back-to-the-lander: make changes in personal practice that were consistent with my beliefs. Those, I hoped, would assist the students who were already enrolled in traditional coursework.
verbally. The student is responsible for processing and learning the material outside of class time.

Because of my observations about the paradoxes inherent in institutional education, I chose to examine adult transformative learning theory on the ground, outside of educational institutions. Studying non-institutional learning in a “natural” setting removes the context of structured learning. Some of the views and experiences of learning on the ground may then be examined with a view toward supplementing, replacing, or improving institutional learning.

Through the course of this project, the women’s voices insisted upon being heard, and I came to view this project as more than an examination of a particular educational theory that would illuminate an area of my teaching practice. This insistent chorus demanded that I also make an effort to “valorize” these women’s lives (Heilbrun, 1988). This was not a deliberate decision arising out of my feminist convictions; instead, their narrative voices emerged as a counterpoint to the constriction of external expectations imposed by the rigors of academia. Ironically, I had to be reminded that they did not exist only as subjects for my educational magnifying lens. These women, friends of decades, taught me to listen, truly listen, to their lives.

Looking ahead

As a consequence of hearing these voices, I realized that the women’s stories must be set within the social context of the time in which they made their decisions. In Chapter Two, “Social Context,” I describe some highlights of the 1960s, both to make my own biases and perspectives clear and to highlight the times that shaped the women and the back-to-the-land experience. Next, in Chapter Three, “Review of the Literature,” I review relevant literature with emphasis on adult learning theory and feminist epistemologies. Chapter Four, “Methods,”
describes the participants, the interview process, methods of analysis, and other methodological decisions. In Chapter Five, “Personal Narratives,” I trace each woman’s history as expressed by her during the interview and allow her narrative to tell about her experiences and learning. The interviews were coded to assist in analyzing factors that relate (or not) to transformative learning. This analysis is presented in Chapter Six, “Beyond Transformative Learning: The Role of Gumption, Perseverance and Self-Reliance in Academic Achievement.” The final chapter, “Re-visioning” reviews the findings and looks forward to implications for further research.
Chapter Two

A Recollection of the Social Context

There's something happening here
What it is ain't exactly clear
There's a man with a gun over there
Telling me I got to beware.

There's battle lines being drawn
Nobody's right if everybody's wrong
Young people speaking their minds
Getting so much resistance from behind.

What a field-day for the heat
A thousand people in the street
Singing songs and carrying signs
Mostly say, hooray for our side.

Paranoia strikes deep
Into your life it will creep
It starts when you're always afraid
You step out of line, the man comes and take you away.

—Stephen Stills, “For What It's Worth” 1967

It is important to review the American social context of the 1960s and the early 1970s, exploring why they were so meaningful, how they shaped our consciousness, and how they influenced our decisions to go back to the land. The participants and I were all born and raised in the U.S.A., and the counterculture that developed in the 60s was the context in which we decided to return to the land. Some of this discussion is from my own perspective, and the rest from a variety of texts I consulted to refresh my memory and to provide a wider view of that time.

Although the initial impetus for my study emerged out of my need to examine why some students succeeded and some failed, the choice of whom to study arose from a desire to explore
my personal history. I wanted to understand the disjuncture and mismatch between the ideals I carried back to the land in 1972 and the society I rejoined in 1987. I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s and was formed by, but not active in, the events of the sixties. I grew up in a backwater community in northern California, protected from the north and south by mountain ranges. Culture was slow to change in the fifties, and the sixties hardly reached my home town. However, conflicts and contradictions within my home reflected those of the larger society. The values my parents instilled included equality of all citizens and women’s strength and equality. They believed in the United States in a way I did not question until my friends and brother faced the draft. It was not until I reached college in 1968 that I began seriously to reflect on the meaning of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the burgeoning feminist movement. Then “Mac,” a good-natured, bearish classmate who wanted to be a pilot when he grew up, was shot down in his helicopter over Vietnam. His death jarred me into a visceral understanding of my generation’s collective fears and disenchantment with the democratic rhetoric of the United States.

The events of the fifties and sixties shaped my way of thinking, but I was not an active participant in any of the public events. I wrote a child’s letter of condolence and personal loss to newly-widowed Jacqueline Kennedy in 1963. Aside from that single action, the Civil Rights Movement washed through me like the air I breathed: invisible, but life giving. By the time I reached campus in the fall of 1968, civil rights were deemed entrenched, and equality of African-Americans (then called Blacks) seemed assured. The Vietnam War was peaking, and there was already a downward trajectory to the anti-war movement. Protests continued, and draft resistance was organized. My brother, my boyfriend and all my male friends were under threat of
death-by-draft, and my friends talked about the modern underground to Canada. Student protests escalated, but I felt less able to affect the direction of culture and society than I was able to take effective action in my own life. What action could that be? I was young and idealistic. I believed in equality and personal responsibility. The Boston Tea Party and the American Revolution formed my cultural understanding, and I thought that civil disobedience was a responsibility, not a discrete moment in history leading to a “climax state.”

World War II and the Cold War had deeply influenced my parents’ understanding of their world, engendering in them an almost filial piety toward government. Their generation “saved the world for democracy.” It was little wonder that their children’s rejection of suburban security – to say nothing of the rejection of their duty to the country and government – caused dissension and misunderstanding between the generations. Furthermore, most of our parents had been born just before or during the Great Depression; this made inexplicable our desire to go back to the land, eschewing the comfort and modern conveniences they had worked hard to achieve.

One of the first signs of a sea change in popular culture was the song, “Little Boxes” (Reynolds, 1962). The first verse summarizes the emerging discontent with the American way of life:

And the people in the houses
All went to the university
Where they were put in little boxes,
And they all came out the same.
And there’s doctors, and there’s lawyers,
And business executives,
And they’re all made out of ticky-tacky,
And they all look just the same. (Reynolds, 1962)

The song’s massive popularity mocked white, middle-class conformity, and provoked some to reassess their lives. Television shows like *The Donna Reed Show*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Andy Griffith Show*, showed “ideal” American families. Films made for classroom consumption provided teenagers, in particular, with advice on how to be a good son or daughter (keep your troubles to yourself when Dad comes home from work) or how to be a good wife (selflessly cook and clean for your family). On the edge of awareness, like an emotional peripheral vision, some of the middle class were beginning to feel stifled. Betty Friedan’s “Problem that has no name” was not yet identified as housewife’s ennui, and the previous decade’s Beatniks still influenced a minority of youth. “Little Boxes” put words to both women’s boredom and Beatniks’ ironic disaffection. In a nation proud of its citizens’ independence and individualism, the suggestion of unthinking compliance was horrifying, especially since it unleashed subconscious Cold War fears of communist conformity. And there were other signs. Beats like Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg had torn up the cultural page in the 1950s. James Dean’s *Rebel Without a Cause* and Brando’s *On the Waterfront* ignited the imaginations of many young people, but “Little Boxes” was one of the first signs that middle-America wanted more than a house in the suburbs, two cars, a permanent job for Dad, a washing machine for Mom, four children, and a dog.

I believe that the election of John F. Kennedy revealed an essential schizophrenia in America. Widely heralded as the man who would create a modern-day Camelot, he spoke passionately of the importance of freedom of man, and invigorated pride in America when he
told the population "we do these things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard" (Boyd, 1991). However, faced with African-American demands for civil rights, he refused any substantive aid to the move for equality, fearing loss of support from wealthy, powerful Southern Democrats. No money, no National Guard, and no civil rights bill came from Kennedy’s administration. For all Kennedy promised Utopia, he focused his political efforts on the Communist threat, bringing the world to the brink of a nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

In the meantime, the Civil Rights Movement swept the South. I was dimly aware of it, knowing in my childish way only that it was right for black people to have equality. There must have been some dinner table conversations about it, or maybe it was my understanding of the Civil War a hundred years earlier that made me believe that, at least in America, everyone should be treated the same. Being an avid reader, I had read Uncle Tom's Cabin along with school textbooks about the Civil War. Regardless of where my understanding came from, equality was part of my air. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech to 200,000 freedom marchers on August 28, 1963, may have been discussed in our home, but I do not remember it. I had little knowledge of the Summer of Freedom, nor of the efforts of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee’s efforts to register black voters in the South. I somehow became aware of desegregation, and I knew that black students were being bused to previously white-only schools. I suspect that this level of consciousness was similar to that of the women I interviewed. We were too young to be real consumers of news; we were trying to decide whether to continue playing with dolls (in my case cowboys and Indians!), or to start wearing makeup. Although my contemporaries and I had televisions in our homes, I do not recall that my friends
and I watched the nightly news. What we learned was still filtered through our parents’ consciousness, and we made few autonomous decisions.

I will not catalogue all the movements and actions of the sixties, for my purpose here is only to make you aware of the cultural influences that shaped our later decision making. As a child, I was protected from the contradictions and inherent conflict between socio-political rhetoric and reality. To me, the Civil Rights Movement was nothing more than the logical extension of the US constitution; it made me proud to live where people were truly free and equal. I didn’t notice the grinding poverty that went with being black in America. I did not realize how deep segregation runs. Hundreds of years of oppression could not be wiped out by forcing white children to share schools, nor by encouraging black people to vote. Had I been more mature, maybe I would have understood better the limitations imposed upon the Civil Rights Movement by tradition, custom, and belief. Cleveland Sellers (Chepesiuk, 1995) convicted of and later pardoned for inciting the 1968 Orangeburg riot\(^2\) that left three black students dead and thirty wounded, reflected, “during the period that Orangeburg occurred, the appeal to the moral conscience of America had reached its zenith. The sympathizers and empathizers were no longer concerned with individual civil right events” (p. 47). Student concerns began to shift from civil rights to the Vietnam War. As I begin to understand it now,

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\(^2\)Sellers was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an African-American civil rights organization, was organized in 1960. Among their many activities, they trained student protesters in non-violent resistance (Hoffman, 1991), and canvassed Black neighborhoods to register voters. In February, 1968, he was among a group of students from South Carolina State College tried to integrate a bowling alley. In the resulting stand off with police, 30 students were shot, and three died (Chepesiuk, 1995).
that explains what happened to the movements of the sixties: The nation suffered from moral exhaustion.

As a response to the Civil Rights Movement, Lyndon Johnson passed the Civil Rights Amendment and declared a full-scale War on Poverty. (It is a measure of my continued naivete that I was surprised to learn that this particular “war” had been declared more than 30 years ago, because it is another war that is being lost with devastating impact on the front lines, that is, the undereducated, the poor and the homeless.) Johnson’s heart, it seems to me, was in the right place morally and politically. As I see it now, Americans were then still innocent, still bathed in a moral light from World War II and the prosperous 1950s. Looking back, I believe that Johnson’s Waterloo was the “action” in Vietnam. Cold War mentality had bred an irrational fear of Communism. A decade earlier we had practiced hiding under our desks in the event of a nuclear attack. It seems now that the sole purpose of such an exercise could only be to breed fear, for Hiroshima had proven that no school child’s desk could provide protection in the event of a nuclear strike. In breeding fear, the exercise was successful, for when the Communists sought to take over Vietnam, the American public was willing to believe that the next, immediate target, continents away, would be the US. American soldiers were drafted to save the free world. There were few ways to escape: move to Canada, go to jail, or go to college. Many young men opted for college and a student deferral. This had the effect of making campuses a focal point for war resistance. Over the next few years, the protests escalated, and by 1968, when I went to college, an entirely different mood prevailed than had even been felt on college campuses before (Anderson, 1995).
In February, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, followed within months by the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Two outspoken champions of democracy and freedom were silenced. Were their deaths part of a conspiracy? I will never know. What I do know is that my conscientization came on the campus, and my sense of that time is that our mood was somber and surly rather than hopeful. The nightly news was filled with footage from the front lines, where people watched in horror as the sons of the nation were wounded and killed. The contradiction between the official outlook on the war and what Americans saw on the news raised questions about our role in Vietnam. The resistance to the war was peaking. By now, half the population was against the war (Anderson, 1995) and vocal about their reasons:

One, two, three,
What are we fighting for?
Now don’t ask me
I don’t give a damn
Next stop is Vietnam
Five, six seven
Open up the pearly gates
Ain’t no time to wonder why
(Whoopee) We’re all goin’ to die (Country Joe and the Fish, 1965)

Students and other activists said it was time to get out of Vietnam. Johnson, blamed for the escalation of the war, dropped out of the presidential race, giving way to Richard Nixon in November, 1968.
Nixon slowly started to bring the troops home, but his 1970 invasion of Cambodia re-ignited protests, and led to strikes on 80% of the college campuses of America (Hoffman, 1991). At Kent State University in May, 1970, the National Guard turned its guns on protesting students, killing four. At Jackson State, an all-black campus, two more students were killed by state troopers. America was murdering its own children, and the violence escalated. The Black Panthers and the Weathermen were now on the nightly news. The Weathermen, it appeared, were as great a danger to themselves as to the administration. Three were killed when a bomb went off in their make-shift bomb factory. Their bombings increased the appearance of threat by the well-organized Black Panthers, and the power of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and local law enforcement was unleashed upon the Black Panthers. By the end of 1971, 26 Black Panthers had been killed and 750 jailed (Anderson, 1995). Now the American public saw a poorly understood war in the jungles of Vietnam and another war in the streets and on the campuses of America, and began to demand an end to the war.

Where was I during all this shouting and protesting? Where were the majority of students? The protest organizers were always an active minority; most students showed up only for demonstrations and skipped classes during any moratorium called by local leaders. We could be counted on to sit in the Student Union Building and rail against the atrocities, but most of us were going on with our lives just like the rest of Americans. Though many of us believed that the war was wrong, we simultaneously were being buffeted by many other moral and political challenges. The Gay Liberation Front was organized, and homosexuals, mostly men, as I recall, (there was little awareness yet of lesbians) demanded human rights. The American Indian Movement started in South Dakota. The Environmental Movement was gaining recognition with
the celebration of the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, the same month as the Cambodia
invasion. Women were beginning to recognize their economic and cultural oppression and to
claim equal rights as citizens. I, like so many other young people, was torn in too many
directions. The smooth surface of 1950-style American culture had fractured into a million
shards. My response, like that of an increasing number of students, was to retreat from public
action and try to make a difference through personal action (Anderson, 1995).

The threat of the Vietnam War was diminishing, and in June, 1972 Nixon’s Watergate
scandal led to public disillusionment with politicians. Many students adopted the popular
statement that no one over 30 could be trusted. Although the majority of the population
continued to marry, get jobs, and live in the suburbs, a number of people, students in particular,
began to look inward for a way to pursue the ideals that were inculcated in the 50s and 60s. We
wanted to live lives that were consonant with our beliefs. The counter-culture, closely linked to
the drug scene, was flourishing, and a new wave of protest, less public, emerged.

During this time of transition, I felt a palpable sense of possibility, of potential, and of
personal power. Many young people believed that cultural change could be effected by
individuals acting both in concert and independently. The dark underbelly of our sense of power
and potential lay in the oppression, imperialism, and rampant consumption that had led to social
unrest. For example, the Civil Rights Movement had been a response to the culture of fear and
economic repression that trapped African-Americans in the lowest classes. Similarly the
Vietnam War, a product of the Cold War, international muscle flexing, and imperialism, was
being stopped by student action. Women, legally oppressed with little control over finances,
property, their children or their bodies, were fighting for equal rights. On the environmental side,
books like *The Population Bomb* and *Silent Spring* raised awareness of the devastating environmental consequences of consumer culture. Based on cultural changes they had witnessed, this generation believed that we could change the world. We also believed it was a dangerous world. The response of many of us was to try to take personal responsibility for cultural change. “Flower Power” was the desperate desire of a generation of young people both to find a safe haven, a paradise, and it was the urge to “Get ourselves/Back to the Garden”:

I'm going to camp out on the land
And try and get my soul free
We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden
Then can I walk beside you
I have come here to lose the smog
I feel just like a cog
In something turning
Well maybe it's the time of year
Or maybe it's the time of man
I don't know who I am
But life is for learning ...
I dreamed I saw the bombers
Riding shotgun in the sky
Turning into butterflies above our nation. (Mitchell, 1969)
You’ll have noticed by now that I make at least passing reference to a number of songs. That is no coincidence. Music was remarkably important in the sixties, fanning the flames of dissent. Most revolutions throughout history had songs that crystallized the essence of the struggles and protest. The only real difference in the sixties was that millions of Americans were affluent enough to have phonographs, radios, and television sets. Popular culture was more popular than ever before, and rock music provided a link between people widely dispersed throughout the country, creating an almost seamless web of cultural content amongst listeners. Rock music was despised by our parents and drove a real, audible wedge between the generations. Those who embraced rock and roll took pride in identifying with its sounds and with the free and rebellious attitude that came with it. The music we listened to became part of our self-definition; it conveyed our value systems, both figuratively and literally, in the case of civil rights and anti-war songs.

My views, then, were formed through the rhetoric of democracy and family values and through a rapidly changing cultural lens expressed through media and music. The effects were not what my parents expected. I came to understand the difference between the Vietnam War and World War II, which had shaped my parents’ understanding of social responsibility. Since my mother, a nurse, had always worked outside the home, I was raised with an incipient feminist consciousness. The slow success of the anti-war movement was little more than a backdrop to my political consciousness, and I drifted closer toward the “flower power” consciousness than toward the front lines of resistance. In college, I was required to read Paul Erhlich’s *The Population Bomb*. While Erhlich’s analysis may not longer stand up in terms of unequal distribution of population and resources, it was the most compelling book I had yet read.
Population pressures on the environment and the clear dangers of over-consumption were ideas I could understand, and more important, were areas in which I could take direct action that I believed could have an impact on society as a whole. Perhaps my moral commitment came from the lingering effects of a great-grandfather and an uncle who were preachers. Maybe my desire to effect change, not just accept the status quo and the received (and hitherto unquestioned) wisdom of government, came from a different great-grandfather who sat in the Michigan legislature. Whatever the reasons, I wanted to make a difference. I drifted to the fringe of the drug culture, talked all night with communally minded individuals, read alternative magazines, and threw away my bra. I was aware of the progress of the Vietnam War, and disgusted, though not surprised by, the Watergate scandal.

In 1971, my boyfriend, who was to become my husband, and I decided that we would make a commitment to a different way of life. He believed that social collapse was imminent. I was more optimistic, but wanted my life to be congruent with my principles. That would mean respect for the finite nature of the environment, rejection of capitalism and materialism, and development of community-based, cooperative living. We would drop out of consumer society and live a modest life respectful of the environment. We decided to save our money and move back to the land. We worked for a year and moved to Canada. I truly believed, then, that every individual could make a difference, and that if everyone reduced their demands on the environment and cooperated with their neighbors, we could change the deadly, destructive trajectory we were on. Although I was naive, I was not alone in that belief. Thousands of young people were going as draft dodgers, as war resisters, and as idealists with a vision of a happier, safer world.
Although individual responses to socio-cultural events of the late 1960s varied, they had a common genesis. The US government, which in theory and history applauded revolution and the rights of citizen protest, was turning its guns on dissenter. One woman I interviewed explained how she felt about the government’s actions:

When we escaped the San Francisco Bay area, it was kind of a turmoil time. I remember as we were driving north, we were hearing about the Kent State riots on the radio. Students were being shot and the war was going, you know, and it just seemed like a really good time to be getting out. (Zerbina)

Another described her motivation in terms of the Cold War and personal safety, a bunker mentality left over from the 1950s:

We were probably both sort of worried about nuclear war, and we thought that living in the middle of nowhere we could be self-sufficient because there wouldn’t be so many people around. You had the land, you had the resources. It was a safer place to be...[There was] the physical safety, you could just go out. The rat race wasn’t there. (Gloria)

The back-to-the-land movement appealed to a radicalized population, who were influenced by the American pastoral ideal. In the words of one woman,

I guess we wanted to simplify. I read Thoreau when I was in high school and I think that really was a strong influence. I think I always wanted to do that, you know – to have my own little acre, my own little piece of paradise. (Zerbina)

Thoreau’s experiment lasted only a year, a fact we ignored or were ignorant of. We decided to recreate ourselves and society in the image of a vague, unreal time that had never existed. We
read *The Mother Earth News* and *Organic Gardening*. We listened to music that exhorted us to escape:

I'm goin' up the country, baby don't you wanna go?
I'm goin' to some place where I've never been before.
Well, I'm goin' where the water tastes like wine.
You can jump in the water and stay drunk all the time.
I'm gonna leave this city, got to get away.
I'm gonna leave this city, got to get away.
All this fussin' and fightin' man you know I sure can't stay.
Now Baby, packin' up the truck you know I got to leave today,
Just exactly where I'm goin' I can not say but, we might even leave the USA. (Canned Heat)

Not all of the back-to-the-landers were directly motivated by the political events of the 1960s and 70s. Some simply wanted to live in a way that was congruent with their ways of walking through life. “Audre” described her reasons for moving to “Riverside”:

I think that I had not established any sort of a foothold in any other world yet. Having gotten out of school, I had no career, nor any firm notion of what a career might look like for me. And it wasn’t important to me, and I did not feel guilty for not having one. I guess I did not care about money enough to want [one] badly enough. So I was, in a sense, free to make the decision [to go back to the land]. It wasn’t a political decision.

The foregoing discussion is a bare outline of what I felt and experienced, and of what my friends/participants described, as we left mainstream society for a different, better way of life.

During my time on the land, my husband and I built our log home with hand tools and
chainsaws. For fifteen years we produced our own meat, milk, eggs, and vegetables. I cooked on a wood stove most of those years (moving up to a combination propane and wood cook stove), had no hydroelectricity, lived seven years with no running water. We made a valiant effort at communal, then cooperative living. Finally I gave up, returning to mainstream society by increments, then totally when my marriage broke down and I went back to college. Upon my return to mainstream society, I was worse than disappointed by the lack of change. Today, consumerism is rampant. Racism, though no longer entrenched in law, remains visible and deeply troubling. The backlash against feminist values diminishes my hope for my daughter’s and son’s ability to live a completely whole and equal life. The pollution and environmental destruction endorsed, even pursued by our governments in the name of economic growth, devastates me and destroys my dream that we can somehow, someday live in a harmonious relationship with the land.

Summary

I have been part of mainstream society for an additional ten years after leaving my wilderness home, and I need to reconcile my dreams with today’s lived reality. To do so, I explore who we, the “hippie women,” were, why we went back to the land, what happened to us there, and why we returned to mainstream society. I examine the implications our histories have for education in its broadest sense of responding to and transmitting culture. In support of these goals, I interviewed five women, all close friends, asking why they chose to go back to the land. I asked them to describe their experiences there, what was important to them about those experiences, and the effects their back-to-the-land time had on them individually and on society as a whole. I explore the issues they raised and share my surmises about the linkages between
these women’s ideas and the implications for education. I fervently hope that in doing so, I will learn what I need in order to carry on as an educator and as a social activist. In the following chapter, “Review of the Literature,” I examine educational theory, especially adult transformative learning theory, with a view to applying it to the narratives of the back-to-the-land women who shared their stories with me.
Chapter Three

Review of the Literature

Woman and man were made for each other, but their mutual dependence is not the same. . . . We could subsist better without them than they without us. For this reason the education of the women should be always relative to the men.”
—Rousseau (qtd in Wollstonecraft p. 175)

In the earliest years of formal adult education, class bias existed, and educators explicitly stated the dangers of teaching the lower classes writing for fear it would give them notions above their station. Reading the Bible was deemed sufficient learning, for it reinforced values that employers and gentry encouraged, including the idea of a natural hierarchy (Pole, 1969). Today, we believe that everyone should learn to read and write. In my work as an Adult Basic Education instructor, I wanted to assist students in a transformation of their lives that would help them to achieve the goals they had set for themselves, including new careers that might move them upward across class boundaries. To pursue this goal, I chose to study real-world examples of learning through interviews with back-to-the-landers. The women I chose for interview had returned to their interrupted education. Although I saw no direct educational links between ABE classrooms and the back-to-the-landers, I hoped that within the narratives I would find keys to how the women “transformed” their lives that may apply to assisting in ABE students’ transformations.

The two main purposes of this paper are to describe women’s back-to-the-land experiences and to explore those experiences through the lens of transformative learning. In the discussion of transformative learning theory, I focus on three theoretical stances on learning:
andragogy, transformative learning, and feminist epistemology. In focusing on these learning theories, I am acknowledging my own epistemic beliefs, rejecting a strict positivist view of learning in favour of a constructivist perspective. Implicit in my position is the belief that individuals construct reality from their own experience and perceptions. Following Kitchener and King (1990), I believe that “knowing is uncertain and that knowledge must be understood in relationship to the context from which it was derived” (p. 165). Though I recognize that behaviorism, information processing, and related theories have made contributions to learning theory, this paper focuses on some women’s lived experience and learning in the real world. Thus, Knowles’ (1980) emphasis on autonomy and self-directedness and Mezirow’s (1991; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) emphasis on internal psychological processes are more relevant to this analysis. Although perhaps not always linked as they are here, Freire (1970/ 1993) and the feminist epistemologists cited share a focus on dialogue, self-empowerment, and praxis that merits their inclusion in this review.

This complex of theories provides a useful lens from which to examine non-institutional learning as well as institutional practices in education. My interest in learning, both within and outside of institutions, is grounded in questions that arose in my classroom practices. My observation of Adult Basic Education students, supported by classroom experience rather than by research, led me to wonder if the students’ sociolinguistic and epistemic premises (though I didn’t have these words at the time) predisposed them toward success or failure. I suspected that students who previously had had negative experiences with educational institutions – which in some cases were supplemented by negative experiences with judicial or social support institutions – were not equipped to deal with institutional expectations implicit within formal
educational programs. Institutional structures create a pre-determined set of conditions which may not be suitable to all learners. Structures may include abstractions such as who “owns” knowledge, the nature of knowledge, locations of learning, and the purpose of learning. More concrete conditions include the practices and strategies adopted to promote the aims arising from theoretical assumptions. For example, reading from texts and writing essays is normally privileged in academic settings. Kinesthetic and auditory learners may be disadvantaged unless special efforts are made to provide a wider range of learning experiences. In the real world of work and home, people learn through engaged activity, and often rely on action directed by an interested other. For example, someone may learn to make bread through observation of and instruction by a family member or friend. This apprenticeship form of teaching and learning assumes a model that is different from the predominantly verbal, transmissive, lecture-based methods of academia. I chose to study the way people learn and make choices to learn on their own outside of mainstream academic institutions.

This review of literature on theories of learning anticipates my analysis of the women’s narratives. Their narratives are based on “lived lives,” and their learning occurred, almost by definition, outside of institutions – after all, they had philosophically rejected social institutions in their move back to the land. I begin with a brief description of andragogy, move into theories of transformation as social change and personal change, and finally explore feminist views of learning.
Andragogy

The study of adult learning as a separate discipline got much of its impetus from the work of Malcolm Knowles (1980), whose concept of “andragogy” has become a widely accepted articulation of the differences between adults and children as learners. Knowles’ greatest contribution was, perhaps, in differentiating the adult from the child as an autonomous being, not an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge. Arguably, children are not empty vessels, either; however, making the adult/child distinction allowed him to develop a set of characteristics of adult learners. He postulates these characteristics: Adults have a reservoir of experience from which to draw meaning and which functions as a rich resource for learning. Their self-concept moves from dependency to self-direction, and adults are oriented to the developmental tasks of their social roles. He further theorizes that adults emphasize immediacy of application of learning tasks; thus they are motivated to learn those tasks that apply to bettering their position in the world. From this set of characteristics, Knowles developed a set of conditions of learning and a corresponding set of principles of teaching. These include accepting learners’ autonomy, providing for self-direction, acknowledging and building upon learners’ prior experiences, and designing curricula that have clear and obvious applications to their lives and work.

Andragogy is not without its critics. Pratt (1993) criticized Knowles for privileging the goals of the learner: “The needs and experience of the learner take precedence over the expertise of the instructor” (p. 19). In fact, “privileging the learner” is precisely what I aim to do in examining the learning experiences of this group of women, for it subverts the notion that institutions know better than individuals how, what, where, when, and why they should learn.
The andragogical notion that adults are autonomous and perform best when they are self-directed and internally motivated rather externally directed and motivated, underlies this examination.

Transformative Learning Theories

Mezirow

Like Knowles, Mezirow (1991; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) accepts the centrality of the learner’s experience and lifeworld in the development of new learning, and he privileges the individual’s understanding of the world in the social construction of knowledge: “We produce facts rather than discover them; the ‘facts’ that an adult learns thus are grounded in the orientation and frame of reference of the learner” (1991, p. 25). Mezirow asserts that making meaning, defined as interpreting and understanding our experience, is the central action of all learning. This view underlies all aspects of adult transformative learning theory. Key concepts of the theory, discussed further below, include domains of learning, types of learner, meaning schemes and perspectives, premise distortions, and the transformation cycle. It is not essential to understand Mezirow’s types of learning and types of learners to comprehend adult transformative learning theory. However, these concepts are integral to examination and analysis of real-world transformative learning.

Domains of learning. Mezirow (1991) describes three broad areas of human learning: instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory. Each plays a different, but important role in shaping people’s views of themselves and their world, and further, each assists in the critical task of making meaning.
Instrumental learning is essentially concrete and concerns the ways we control and manipulate our environment, including other people. Instrumental learning uses empirically gained knowledge to make predictions about observable events. Task-oriented problem solving and understanding the nature of cause-and-effect relationships are at the heart of instrumental learning. This may be thought of as real-world applications of the scientific method: generating a hypothesis from observable events, acting on that hypothesis, and evaluating the results.

The domain of communicative learning involves understanding others and making ourselves understood; it includes sharing ideas about the world and our place in it. As such, communicative learning encompasses values and ideals, as well as social, political and philosophical ideas. It includes also feelings and reasons. Because it is based upon a desire for mutual understanding, consensual validation is sought by the participants. However, such consensus is not always possible. When no consensus is reached, the learner must accept the other's perspective or reject parts of the communicative message in favor of his or her own interpretation of the communicative act. It is important to recognize that communicative events take place both between individuals and within the society and culture at large. For example, radio, television, movies, plays, print media, and the arts convey a communicative message that may be accepted (consensually validated) or partially or wholly rejected by the learner.

Metaphor, rather than hypothesis, is the fundamental tool of communicative learning. The learner makes associations with prior knowledge, compares incidents and concepts to previously adopted views on the subject, then creates new metaphors or explanations that “fit” the new learning into pre-existing schemas, belief systems, theories, or self-concepts. Communicative
learning is more abstract than concrete and relies more on openness to different perspectives than on the cause and effect of instrumental learning.

Emancipatory learning is a reflective, internal process by which we examine our experience. This is the area of reflective learning that may lead to changes in premises and meaning perspectives. The goal of emancipatory learning is:

emancipation from libidinal, linguistic, epistemic, institutional, or environmental forces that limit our options and our rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted or seen as beyond human control. These forces include the misconceptions, ideologies, and psychological distortions in prior learning that produce or perpetuate unexamined relations of dependence. (Mezirow, 1991; p. 87)

Emancipatory learning is neither the hypothesis testing of the instrumental domain nor the generation of metaphor as in the communicative domain. Instead, the individual is faced with alternative interpretations of events and experience or contradictions and conflict within her or his social world. Critical reflection on basic premises may lead to negation of old meaning schemes or perspectives, and thus to transformation.

These domains of learning are played out in varying degrees in most of our lives every day. The absolute impact of each domain varies between individuals and is dependent upon environmental and intrapersonal factors. Both career and inclination influence the kinds of circumstances one faces. Further, a particular task may be addressed through any or all of the different domains. For example, a mechanic probably will face many instrumental learning experiences during any given day: Why doesn’t the car start? He or she may solve the problem alone, an instrumental task. If the mechanic consults with someone else to solve the problem, he
or she has engaged in a communicative action. Finally, if the mechanic asks the question, "Why does a car have to start at all?" he or she has moved into the emancipatory (and probably unemployed) domain. A learner's preference for a particular domain of learning may influence the type of learner he or she becomes.

**Types of learners.** In his 1975 study of women re-entering college, Mezirow describes six "patterns of re-entry" and discusses them in terms of several learner types: conventional, threshold, emancipated, and transformation. The conventional learner is still fully assimilated within the traditional culture, whereas a threshold learner has experienced a disorienting dilemma and is seeking to make sense of the experience. Within this group, he distinguishes the housewife learner, with little or no previous work or educational experience; the self-awareness learner who has recently participated in psychotherapy or consciousness-raising groups; the work-wise learners and study-wise learners who have, respectively, successful employment or adult or higher education experiences. Also subsumed within the threshold learners are career-wise learners who have studied alternative career possibilities. These distinctions were useful in evaluating the effectiveness of college re-entry programs and may account for many ABE learners, but they have little application to women back-to-the-landers.

Of more direct interest to this study are the final two categories, emancipated learners and transformation learners. The former is a woman who has "never fully accepted the inferior roles traditionally assigned to women and as a result [has] always felt alienated" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 15). In the early 1970s, the "second wave of feminism" was nearing its tidal peak. The women back-to-the-landers I interviewed all were aware of emerging feminist thought, whether each embraced it or not. Thus, this learner type may have direct implications
for analysis of the narratives. Finally, the transformation learner recognizes the culturally imposed definitions of and limits on her self-conception, her lifestyle, and her options. She perceives the constraints of the rules by which she has been living. This new awareness initiates critical reflection about her life and her role(s) in the world. Thus, this category may be especially pertinent to this study. Each of these learners types acts with a different kind of awareness, each arising from her own internalized views of the world, and her personal meaning schemes and meaning perspectives.

Meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Mezirow’s (1991, 1992, 1995; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) transformation theory is rooted in a constructivist understanding of how people create meaning. He argues that adult knowledge is based upon “the individual’s acquired frame of reference, through which meaning is construed and all learning takes place” (1991, p. 4). “Meaning perspectives” (sets of habitual expectations) are tacit agreements framed by society that remain largely unexamined. These meaning perspectives influence our desire and ability to accept new information, and changing contexts allow for new interpretations of old knowledge. Transformation (thus learning) occurs when the learner uncovers and replaces distorted meaning perspectives:

meaning perspectives are the psychological structures within which we locate and define ourselves and our relationships. By recognizing the social, economic, political, psychological, and religious assumptions that shape these structures – presuppositions inherited but rarely examined critically – we can reconstruct our personal frame of reference, our self-concept, goals and criteria for evaluating change. New priorities for action are likely to result. (1991, p. 10)
Our meaning perspectives, shaped as they are by the interplay of our culture and environment with our personal psychology and experience, are based on assumptions, or premises, on which we make decisions and take action. Given the broad range of socio-cultural beliefs in any society, broad variation in the premises that underlie those beliefs is the norm. The nature of individual premises influences the development of meaning perspectives. These premises, and more particularly, premise distortions, are discussed below.

Premise distortions. Mezirow (1991) asserts that some of the premises and presuppositions (the perceptual filters or the key concepts) by which we make meaning in our lives are distorted, and problems in our lives may arise as a result of these distortions. This does not suggest a single, defined set of “correct” premises, however. He defines a distorted premise as one that “leads the learner to view reality in a way that arbitrarily limits what is included, impedes differentiation, lacks permeability or openness to other ways of seeing, or does not facilitate an integration of experience” (p. 118). Nor are adults permanently confined to these distorted premises. Adult learners confront their distorted meaning perspectives through critical reflection, the act of analytically addressing their experiences. Critical reflection on premises “leads to more fully developed meaning perspectives, that is, meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable (open), and integrative of experience” (p. 111).

As Mezirow’s adult transformative learning theory is complex, it may be helpful to visualize these main ideas in a tabular form. Table 1 elaborates on epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological premise distortions.
Table 1
Premise Distortions Created from discussion in Mezirow (1991).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example in literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological premise</td>
<td>Distorted assumptions about the nature and use of knowledge;</td>
<td>Use of descriptive concepts as prescriptive; trust only empirical validation (p. 128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distortions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance of socially developed roles and expectations, including racism, sexism, etc. (p. 131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic premise</td>
<td>Faulty understanding and ability to function resulting from social</td>
<td>A prohibition rooted in emotionally charged learning continues to monitor feelings and control ways of interacting with others even after the episode is forgotten (p. 139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distortions</td>
<td>and linguistic limitations of perceptions and understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Ways of feeling and acting that cause pain due to self-concept inconsistencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>premise distortions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In this table, premise distortions are defined, and examples from the research literature illustrate how these distortions might affect an individual’s action. The three domains may be independent of one another, leading to inconsistencies in thought and action, or they may be mutually reinforcing. In the epistemological domain, the learner may adopt a descriptive concept as prescriptive, believing that because something is so, it must always be so. For example, the observation that work at X school begins at 8:47 a.m., and has always begun at 8:47 a.m., may lead to the belief that the working day must not begin at any other time. Clearly, this kind of thinking inhibits efforts to create new paradigms to supplant old ones. More damaging distortions include gendered or ethnically based observations that may inhibit an individual’s ability to perceive others apart from a stereotype. Such observations may be reinforced by sociolinguistic distortions about racial or gender roles. Likewise, if an individual’s epistemic and
sociolinguistic premises presuppose gender or ethnic differences, psychological distortions may include misinterpretations of encounters between the individual and someone of another gender or ethnicity. For example, the media have often represented members of visible minorities as criminals. The label “Asian gangs” carries with it the implication that all Asians are inclined toward dishonest activities (sociolinguistic premise). Given that implication, and the heavy weight of historical prejudice based upon past negative experiences (psychological premise), if a storekeeper of Asian heritage makes an error in tallying up a sale, the non-Asian individual may interpret the error as confirmation of his or her premises.

The transformation cycle. Mezirow’s theory originated in his research among women who enrolled in college re-entry programs, and considered the immediate reasons that the women chose to return to post-secondary education. Thus, his research focused on actions at a specific point in time, leading him to postulate a “disorienting dilemma” that provided the impetus for personal change. He theorized that a disorienting dilemma prompts critical reflection, the act of analytically addressing our experiences. Just as premise reflection supports development of more permeable and inclusive premises, critical reflection supports transformation in meaning perspectives. Mezirow theorizes a transformation equation in which an individual experiences a disorienting dilemma, reflects upon the disorienting dilemma, reappraises her or his situation and circumstances, then adopts a new perspective. In an aborted or incomplete transformation, the individual retains the previous meaning perspectives. Critical reflection and reappraisal are non-linear and recursive. However, for the purposes of example, Mezirow describes this part of the transformation equation as a set of stages, acknowledging that
individuals may move forward or backward through them, creating a dialectic of critical reflection. Table 2 summarizes the stages of the transformation cycle.

Table 2
The Transformation Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-examination</td>
<td>Cognitive process of self appraisal and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reappraisal of assumptions</td>
<td>Careful judgment of the efficacy and utility of assumptions in light of new information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alienation from past roles and expectations</td>
<td>Disjuncture between past roles and new understandings resulting from reflection, self examination and reappraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provisional efforts at new roles</td>
<td>Attempts to adopt newly desirable roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movement between new and old roles until new role adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan course of action</td>
<td>Consider alternatives and make plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of needed new knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Education efforts, within or outside the confines of institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintegration into social roles</td>
<td>Adoption of new roles and meaning perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integration into society in new role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In theory, the “transformation equation” is set in motion by a disorienting dilemma. The stages that follow are all aspects of critical reflection. The individual examines aspects of the self with a view to determining those aspects that should be retained and those that must be modified. This self-examination is susceptible to the same premise distortions as all the other thinking the individual does. There is no guarantee that the individual will make a “right” decision about herself or himself, nor is it implied that a single “right” decision exists. This is equally true for the next stage, reappraisal of assumptions. Here, the individual assesses how well toward changing that paradigm. This means that old roles no longer fit comfortably, and the
individual begins trying out new roles. Different courses of action may be considered until she or he decides upon and implements the one that seems most suitable. Along the way, new knowledge and skills may be required, and the individual may return to self-examination, critical reappraisal, alienation from roles, more efforts at new roles, and planning a different course of action, until she or he adopts the new role and reintegrates into society.

Other Adult Learning Theorists

I have described Mezirow’s adult transformative learning theory at some length, for it provides the essential underpinnings of this study. Clearly, Mezirow is only one among many adult learning theorists whose ideas are relevant to this study. Mezirow examines transformative learning within adult learners’ personal psychology. The theorists cited below retain the notion of personal agency, but variously emphasize the role of external forces such as culture, context, socio-political condition, and patriarchy.

Cognition, culture and context. Asserting that every adult is a learner, Jarvis (1995a, 1995b) describes a cultural dialectic of learning, stating that “a potential learning situation occurs when there is a dynamic tension between individuals’ experiences and the agencies of transmission of the culture of society” (1995a, p. 54). In terms of this study, back-to-the-landers eschewed mainstream society for an alternative, sustainable lifestyle. Cultural frictions stemming from conflicts between social and parental expectations, and direct experiences of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War and the women’s liberation movement played a part in their decision to leave society. According to Jarvis’ theory, the roots of their return to mainstream culture may be found in the tension between their values and the new culture in which they situated themselves.
Situated cognition, as its name suggests, refers to learning within the context of the current situation. Wilson (1993) argues that cognition is a social activity that occurs “in the relations among people acting in culturally organized settings” (p. 76, italics in original). In his view, learning is social, culturally defined, and situated in the real world. However, Wilson’s main purpose is to make a case for contextualizing educational activities, creating what he calls authentic activity for the adult learner, similar to the notion of primary experience. This view of learning may be helpful in examining the narratives of the back-to-the-land women as they describe their experiences, activities, and emotions during their time on the land.

Freire: Learning as social activism. In the latter decades of the 20th century, theories based upon social or personal transformation have gained ascendancy. Paulo Freire (1970/1993) is credited with opening the flood gates and challenging the status quo in adult education. His work with peasants in his Brazilian homeland legitimized the dialogue between learner and educator. He resisted the notion of “banking education,” a deposit-like system of filling the learner with facts, and promoted “conscientization,” in which the learners become aware of their oppression and work toward social change. Freire developed a system of literacy instruction that takes as its central purpose the explicit goal of social change. Working from a Marxist perspective, he sought to develop a dialogue with the learners, one that derives from their own experience and assists learners to verbalize previously implicit understandings of their position in the sociopolitical world. In the practice of “conscientization” the learners then would recognize their oppression and work toward social change. “Praxis,” the vital link between reflection and action, is a keyword of Freirean transformational practice, for the goal is social
change, not simply understanding and making meaning. Therefore, praxis is an essential ingredient in learning that transforms the individual’s interior landscape.

**Feminist epistemologies.** Oppression forms a starting point for Freire’s explicitly Marxist ideology, and in this respect we find links to feminist pedagogy (e.g., Grumet, 1988; Hart, 1990; hooks, 1995; Stalker, 1998). Feminist theorists challenge the white male hegemony, which traditionally has determined the academic and educational (and other) norms in North American society. Feminists reject an artificial, scientific objectivity and insert subjectivity and personal experience into the discussion of learning and teaching. In this discussion, I adopt the view that engagement in learning and construction of meaning are essential elements of transformation. This view is expressed variously in the feminist pedagogies that follow.

Hooks (1995) explices a black feminist pedagogy of liberation and contextualization. Locating the black experience of racism at the centre of her pedagogy, she suggests that the individual must experience a sense of worth and centrality in order to learn well. Reclaiming education for black women, for hooks, means realizing the (white) patriarchal norms and confronting differences of class and race. She advocates an “engaged pedagogy” which emphasizes well-being of the learner and the educator. Although hooks speaks primarily from an institutional standpoint, she positions the learner, not the institution, at the centre of a learning environment.

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3 This discussion of feminist epistemologies is far too brief to do justice to the richness, depth and complexity of feminist thought. An entire study could easily be devoted to a feminist examination of women back-to-the-landers.
In applying their understanding of women’s ways of knowing, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) move the discussion to learning outside the classroom. They, like Wilson (1993), assert the primacy of contextualized learning, and comment that:

the women we interviewed nearly always named out-of-school experiences as their most powerful learning experiences. The mothers usually named childbearing or child rearing. The kind of knowledge that is used in child rearing is typical of the kind of knowledge women value and schools do not. Much of it comes not from words but from action and observation, and much of it has never been translated into words, only into actions. (p. 201; emphasis added)

Belenky et al. (1986), emphasize out-of-school experiences as among the most powerful learning experiences. Their taxonomy of women’s modes of knowing and thinking about the world suggests that women’s epistemological development moves from an external orientation (received knowledge) to emphasis on an internal orientation (subjective knowledge), and develops into a blend of the external and internal orientations (procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge). They acknowledge and honour women’s subjective knowledge:

By telling us about their voice and silences, by revealing to us how much they could hear and learn from the ordinary and everyday (“hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat”), women told us about their views of the world and their place in it. Clearly, the kinds of learning involved in child rearing go far beyond behaviorist theories that still tend to prevail in our educational institutions. (p. 19)

In their examination of “women’s ways of knowing,” Belenky et al. (1986) propose a taxonomy of epistemological development (Figure 1) in which an individual may move from a
position of silence, unaware of her potential participation in knowledge construction, to a fully voiced awareness of her ability to take in, analyse, and synthesize knowledge. In this scheme, women who have little autonomy in their lives are silenced by their lack of belief in their ability to learn and by gendered stereotypes that tell them “men are active and get things done, while women are passive and incompetent” (p. 29).

Women who depend upon received knowledge for their understanding accept the word of authorities in everything from health matters to religious, political, or educational matters. They are not silenced, but feel more secure in expressing opinions, beliefs, and values that have been formulated by others. Moving from received and subjective knowledge is dependent upon awareness of and openness to differing points of view, and speaking to those viewpoints with

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**Figure 1** From silenced to fully voiced: women’s epistemological development

(Adapted from Belenky et al. (1986))
one's own voice. Literary analysis provides one example. A student who is in the received knowledge position of development would explain a poem in terms of one particular literary theory, citing a specific example from text. Subjective knowers would discuss the same poem only in terms of personal experience or how it made them feel, without reference to authority or theory. Further along the developmental taxonomy, women who have made the transition to subjectivism rely upon their own sense of inner conviction, but often with hesitation, stating "It's just my opinion" (Belenky et al. 1986. p. 66; italics in original) as though assuming contradiction by others. Procedural knowers would address the poem with a combination of their own voices and the received wisdom of authorities, and would present the integration of these points of view with assurance that their voice is being heard. Those in the constructed position of epistemological development would also combine the received body of knowledge with their own point of view, but, having analysed, synthesized, and evaluated various theoretical interpretations, would speak with greater security in their personal voice.

Like any taxonomy, this one implies a separation or distinctness between categories that does not exist in life. Women exist on a continuum of silenced to fully voiced, achieving higher levels in some areas of their lives than others, and the separation of "Silenced" and "Received Knowledge" from the voiced categories is somewhat arbitrary. Belenky et al. discovered a loose

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4 Procedural knowledge is subdivided into two forms, separate and connected knowledge, that indicate different ways individuals may understand or analyse procedures and systems. Clinchy (1996) explains that separate knowledge looks for flaws in reasoning, considers possible misinterpretations, and seeks to discover whether contradictory evidence has been omitted. Separate procedural knowledge rests on standards agreed upon and codified by experts. Connected procedural knowledge is concerned with empathic understanding. For the purposes of this paper, I have addressed only the general category of procedural knowledge.
correlation between women’s educational levels and their position on the epistemological hierarchy. Lower levels of epistemological development were more likely to appear in women with lower levels of academic achievement. Frequently, further development coincides with higher levels of education, but can be triggered at any age or educational level.

![Analytical framework of epistemological development](adapted from Belenky et al. 1986)

Procedural knowledge moves beyond received and subjective knowledge to include awareness of accepted analytical or interpretive frameworks. Another way to characterize the categories depends upon the level of analytical thinking in which one engages. Figure 2 represents an analytical model of this epistemological taxonomy. It is evident from the two figures that the voiceless to full-voiced continuum corresponds closely with the analytical
continuum. As women develop confidence in their own voice and intuition, they often seek experiences that allow them to develop in other ways. Frequently, but not always, this means returning to school for more education. The combination of more life experience and higher education develops their analytical skills, in turn giving them more confidence in their own voice. Education is not required for epistemological development, however. Individuals may move along the continuum as they reflect upon their life experiences. The early stages of epistemological development are characterized by wholesale acceptance of information. Received knowledge relies completely on the voice of authority without analytical engagement by the learner. According to the taxonomy, subjective learners rely on their intuition and gut feelings, and fail to analyse their subjective experiences. Procedural learners apply their analytical skills, but they are systematic thinkers, dependent upon the systems of analysis they have learned. They remain tied to structures imposed by the external authorities. Constructed knowledge goes further yet, and the learner at this stage of development is capable of creating new analytical lenses and paradigms.

We use our subjective knowledge to construct our views of the world at large and our role within that world. This accords with constructivist notions of learning, which recognize that learning comes from action and observation, and suggest that the learners are engaged in active cognitive processes that affect their views of the world. Tisdell (1993) directly addresses the socialization of women, foregrounding the personal psychological processes of the learner. Stalker (1996) is direct in her attack on the androcentric bias in research. Some of her charges seem to be old stories, and changes in socially accepted norms have replaced some of the most egregious examples she raises. For example, women are no longer linguistically invisible, and
the terms firemen and chairmen are nearly obsolete (although firefighters are still almost exclusively male). In other cases, prejudices that have been observed for some twenty years have not been obliterated. For example, the notion that research is neutral has been challenged for many years; nonetheless, the subjectivity inherent in even the most rigorous of laboratory tests remains ignored by many of those who espouse the quantitative, or the scientific method.

Although, for reasons of time and space, I have not chosen to directly confront the question of androcentric bias, the choice of research subjects and methods is supported by the ideas expressed in her work.

Summary

I have outlined a number of approaches to adult learning, beginning with the specifically personal, psychological view delineated in Mezirow's (1991, 1992; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) adult transformative learning theory. This theory forms the foundation for the examination of the back-to-the-land women's narratives. The discussion of how we develop distortions in our premises and the steps through personal transformation are key to the discussion of returning to mainstream society. However, the women who shared their stories with me lived in a particular time and place, motivated by socio-cultural beliefs. In order to flesh out this aspect of their learning, I have discussed theories that develop the role of culture, cognition, and context in adult learning. Finally, several radical approaches to education have been briefly outlined. Freire (1970/1993) worked with Brazilian peasants, while hooks' (1995) ideas are based on her experience as a black woman. Belenky et al. (1986) discuss the possibility of a uniquely feminine epistemology. In each case, proponents advocate an approach that allows individuals to
reflect upon their own experience and to act upon their reflections in order to support learning and education.
Chapter Four

Method

Research in the field can only be credible if it moves from an androcentric base toward a feminist one and from shallow tokenistic acknowledgement of feminist agenda toward in-depth theoretical analyses which acknowledge the social construction of women’s realities and oppression.

— Joyce Stalker, “Women and Adult Education”

Rather than entrenching this study in any single discipline or methodology, I drew on anthropological, educational, and feminist methods. This multiple methods approach is not unique. Reinharz (1992) tells us that feminist research often draws on multiple methods in order to express the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks. Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, “data gathering” and action, and individual behavior with social frameworks. In addition, feminist researchers use multiple methods because of changes that occur to them and others in a project of long duration. . . . Multiple methods increase the likelihood of obtaining scientific credibility and research utility. (p. 197)

This approach implies certain assumptions. Learning is layered and complex; it cannot be understood in discrete “bytes” of decontextualized information. Reflection and praxis are ongoing processes with various triggers, and can best be captured through use of a recursive design. The study was designed to be recursive, allowing review and time for critical reflection, as well as collaboration in the construction of the study.
Participants

Participants were selected by a convenience sampling method (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Four of the five women came from a group of back-to-the-landers who moved to the “Lakeside” area in central British Columbia in the early to mid-1970s. I met them during the years 1974-1978, when we all lived in the Lakeside area. Over the course of approximately five years (roughly 1972 to 1977) many young people moved to this area, most with the idea of living a simpler, less materialistic lifestyle. Though I did not do a formal count, a brief mental tally reminds me of twenty young couples who moved into the area during that time. For the study, I chose four women with whom I had maintained contact. An additional participant from a similar area in the B.C. interior, approximately 200 miles from the Lakeside area, was recruited to give additional perspectives to the study. The “Riverside” area was isolated from large population centres by its location across a river. The main access was by riverboat or railway. Although this area was known to me as another site for back-to-the-landers to settle, I have never visited it.

The study participants were from American, middle class families. As was the case at the time, the status of most of the families of origin derived from the father’s occupation: a small business owner, an aerospace engineer, a manager and an accountant. The final participant’s father had rejected his “birthright” of a Wall Street career by moving to a small town.

The participants all had completed high school, and all had some post-secondary education. One participant had completed an undergraduate degree prior to moving back to the land; two had completed one year of post-secondary education; and two had completed three
years of post secondary education. One of the participants was an only child, whereas the others had two or three siblings. Curiously, though probably irrelevantly, only one of the participants had a brother; the remaining siblings were all sisters. All were in their early or mid-twenties when they moved back to the land. Four of the participants had been born and raised in large cities. All but one had made a first move from the city to the country prior to settling in the Lakeside or the Riverside area; that participant grew up in a small town. One was born and raised in the east, two in the mid-west and two in the west (California). Three of the participants moved back to the land with a partner or significant other, and two moved on their own, though one of these had married prior to coming to the Lakeside region. All of them began their families after moving away from mainstream society, one before moving to the Lakeside region.

The “invisible” participant. As one of the “earth mothers,” I have personal experience of the back-to-the-land movement. It is important that I situate myself within the procedure and the context because my impressions, perceptions, assumptions, biases, premises, recollections, and memories influence and inform the data collection and its interpretation. In addition, the position of friendly interrogator can create problems of conflicting recollections and interpretations of events. Reinharz (1992) describes the difficulty for a researcher “[in trying] to avoid substituting her experience for that of others (ie., autobiography for history) or failing to ask questions that would challenge her assumptions” (p. 27). That caution is particularly salient, given my close association with four of the five participants over many years.

Just as we were collectively situated within the social context of the 1960s and early 1970s, each of us was situated within her personal context. I elaborate here to make explicit the personal assumptions, biases, attitudes, and beliefs I bring to the interviews, the transcription of
I was born and raised in a small town in northern California, the oldest of seven children (two biological and four adoptive siblings). At the beginning of their marriage, my parents had moved from Montana to California. My mother was a nurse and my father a residential painter, giving our family a working class point of view with a middle class income. By working class, I mean to suggest a constellation of values based on hard work and independence. My family valued basic education, but did not expect nor encourage post-secondary education; to this day, they continue to advocate vocational work over white collar or professional careers. They discouraged “getting a swelled head,” but encouraged us to take pride in our work without vanity.

As a child, I was free to wander first along the beaches of the Pacific Ocean, and later on the 300-acre farm leased by my parents for our horses and cattle. I completed high school, then attended college for a year and half, where I absorbed the anti-war and counterculture rhetoric of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I internalized the anti-establishment sentiment that rose from the Vietnam War, my brother’s and friends’ eligibility for the draft, and the shooting of students at Kent State University. I adopted an individual-as-agent-of-social-change perspective from texts and magazines that warned of environmental collapse or extolled the virtues of a simpler lifestyle based on harmonious relationships with the land and with other people (eg. Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*, Carson’s *Since Silent Spring*, Angier’s *How to Live in the Woods on $5 a Day*, *Mother Earth News*, and *Organic Gardening*). I went back to the land with the idea that all members of my generation who moved to remote locations and raised a garden and/or animals were as disenchanted as I was with the current political climate, as distrustful of big business...
and the consumer culture, as fearful of environmental collapse and committed to environmental protection, and as desirous of collective or cooperative living.

This discussion provides parallel demographic information and situates me in the back-to-the-land movement. In the “Limitations” section, I will elaborate more fully on the implications my perspectives and memories had on the interview process, the interviews themselves, and the analysis of the interviews. Let me simply state at this time that I identified a variety of factors that affected the data collection and analysis.

**Procedures**

I gathered two kinds of data: artifacts and personal narratives. The procedures were outlined in the Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix A) and the Oral Narrative Protocol (Appendix B), which were mailed to and signed by each participant prior to her participation. Each collection procedure is defined and elaborated below.

**Artifact collection.** By “artifact,” I mean material objects personally selected by each participant. The participant was asked to choose and bring to the interview “one or more physical artifacts of that time. These may include (but are not limited to) objects or tools used during your back-to-the-land experience, photos, letters, journal or diary entries” (Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent). During the first interview the participant was encouraged to describe and explain the artifacts chosen from her personal journey. One of the participants chose to present photographs that represented her experience of the time and place; one brought a material object and photographs; two brought objects symbolic of their back-to-the-land experiences; and the fifth participant (interviewed by telephone from her home on the East Coast) described a collection of memorabilia from the time, including hand written notes, letters
from friends, and newspaper clippings. The artifacts provided an entry point into the discussion, but did not add significantly to the questions about learning and success in academia. The women’s desire for confidentiality meant that the photos could not be printed. For these reasons, I chose not to include the artifacts in the analytical process.

**Personal narratives.** I chose the term personal narrative (Reinharz, 1992) to distinguish the discussions from oral histories, which I consider to be much longer and to encompass anything from birth forward, and from structured interviews, which have a narrower focus and are defined primarily by interviewer’s needs; my intent was to record the participants’ recollections of a delimited time period. Initially, I planned to meet face-to-face with each of the participants to audiotape the first personal narratives. In the end, I was unable to meet with one participant and interviewed her twice via telephone. I recorded one face-to-face interview with four of the five women; those were followed by telephone interviews for explanation, elaboration, and clarification. These secondary interviews were also tape-recorded (except in one instance in which the tape recorder failed). Initial interviews were transcribed verbatim following a transcription protocol that developed in the transcription process. The supplemental interviews were summarized and edited for clarity. Each participant’s transcript was returned to her for her amendment, clarification, deletion or addition of information, as well as to maintain the collaborative atmosphere I hoped would prevail. Each participant stated that she read the transcript, but only one requested changes. The requested changes were mostly for clarity and to delete the non-verbal utterances and pauses natural to speech.

I used prompts in the form of open-ended and closed questions to stimulate recall and to provide a framework for the discussion. I considered the recall stimulation necessary because of
the lapse of time (most of us moved away from the “subsistence” lifestyle and back to mainstream society about ten years ago). I wanted the participants to reflect upon their back-to-the-land experience prior to the interviews, believing that a “cold call” with only open-ended questions (e.g., “Tell me about your experiences at Lakeside”) might elicit little response or masses of irrelevant stories and information. I mailed a set of questions to each participant for her consideration prior to the interview (Appendix B: Oral Narrative Protocol). As a discussion framework, the twenty-eight questions covered a broad range of topics, including questions regarding the initial decision to move back to the land, living conditions and social life, personal values and goals, and the return to mainstream society. I intended the initial prompts to explore motives for the women’s move back to the land for use as a benchmark for their later move back to mainstream society. As a part of the collaborative development of the process, participants were given a list of prompts and asked to comment on their appropriateness. I encouraged them to suggest, delete, or modify prompts. None of the participants suggested changes.

During the first interview, I did not follow the set of questions, but began each interview with a request that the participant share with me the artifacts that she had chosen:

M: And so, you brought some artifacts.

Zerbina: Yes, Molly, I did bring some artifacts. Would you like to see them?

M: I would, sure

or

M: Say who you are and um, where we are and the date, and then just describe your artifacts and what meaning they have for you (Audre).
In each case, the participant went on to describe the artifact and its meaning for her without further prompting:

Zerbina: Okay, let’s see. What else, oh, here’s what I wanted to show you, right here.

(Both laugh)

M: Okay, for the record, you’re going to have to describe and explain this one!

Zerbina: Okay, this was- this project was a grant that was given by the provincial or federal recreational fund. We decided we would create jobs for ourselves, so we decided we would write a grant to build picnic tables and expand the Trout Lake picnic site.

Okay, there’s another funny picture here. (Sorts through pictures)

As in the example above, the interview then turned to each woman’s story and experiences. In no case did the interview follow the order of the question set. Instead, the end of the artifact presentation signaled the next stage of the personal narrative; for example:

M: So. That was one of the things that you had to do that obviously had a lot meaning for you. What other kinds of stuff [trails off]. Maybe we should just go back and why don’t you tell me a little bit about how you came to go to Lakeside, how you came to kind of do the back-to-the-land sort of thing. And we’ve talked about tons over the years but if you just kind of – for you, what were significant points, what were things that you did, things that- special memories? (Gloria)

or

M: So what took you there to begin with? (Zerbina)

Except for the initial description of the artifacts, the interviews followed no set pattern. Although only one articulated the way she expected the interview to unfold, each appeared to
have a mental model of the interview. Maya brought the previously circulated list of questions to
the interview, and had written notes on some, but did not refer to it until near the end of the
interview, and then only as an aid to her memory. Audre’s narrative included more personal
stories that she had specifically selected for sharing in the interview. Debra, who was available
only by telephone, requested that I ask questions by their number to begin with. She stated that
she had written down some ideas that she did not want to forget. Zerbina, who had brought many
photographs, moved easily into her recollection of the times without reference to the question
list. Gloria’s narrative was distinctive for her many gestures and facial expressions which added
to the conversation, but were lost in transcription.

In each case, I encouraged the participant to talk and asked questions for clarification,
interjecting some points that I thought may be left out. For example, I prompted one participant
that

M: One of the things that I remember is that we didn’t have phones.

Maya: No!

M: So you didn’t call somebody up and say, “Can I come over?”

Maya: No.

In the “Limitations,” I will elaborate upon my role in these interviews which were
conversations between long-time friends. Here I will comment only that my own stories are so
deeply woven with four of these participants that it was sometimes difficult to make the
judgment call of when to interject with my own knowledge and when to remain silent.

Unrealized data collection process. I asked participants to keep a journal or diary,
including written or visual representations of their reflections on the narratives. The purposes of
the journals were threefold: to encourage each woman's reflection on both her back-to-the-land experiences and the interview itself, and perhaps most importantly, to allow her to maintain as much control over the process as possible. My intention was to review and analyse the journals and to ask for more elaboration during follow up interviews. Although each participant agreed to keep a journal, in the end, no one did so.

**Ethical Considerations.** As previously mentioned, a Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix A) was mailed to and signed by each participant prior to her participation. These letters are kept in a secure location for access if necessary. The Letter of Informed Consent outlined the purpose of the study and the parameters of their participation in it. In the first interview I repeated the information that no one would see the full transcripts except the participant and me, and that any references to individuals would be sufficiently decontextualized to prevent easy identification. The single caveat, noted below, is that I lived in the Lakeside community for fifteen years. Any close friend and community member reading this study may be able to identify individual participants because of her role in the community.

Participant confidentiality and personal identity protection is maintained by use of pseudonyms. The “Lakeside” and “Riverside” communities are not described in sufficient detail for location by the public at large, although anyone who knows me personally quite likely will be able to identify both communities. Although I have included demographic and personal data such as marital status, none of it is attached directly to the participant. It would be a wily reader, indeed, who could identify the participants by those means. The tapes and transcriptions are stored in my personal office space, unavailable to any one but myself.

Mies (1991) emphasizes an ethical requirement for research to overcome previous
scientific exploitation and oppression of women. One benefit of the collaborative, recursive approach is that it allows the participants to maintain control of the data and to debrief, serendipitously reducing the hierarchical distance between the researcher and “the researched.” The participant can clarify, correct, or choose to omit statements.

**Data Analysis**

**Artifact analysis.** I requested that each woman begin with the artifact presentation, allowing her to control the focus and presentation of her own identity and role. Artifacts, Kingery (1996) reminds us, are more than simple objects; they are “metaphors expressing underlying and often subliminal reflections of the cultural belief structure of the object’s creator” (p. 4). I anticipated that artifacts would carry meaning beyond their simple function. The “formation process” by which everyday objects are chosen for preservation or destruction differs from individual to individual; therefore, the artifacts chosen by participants varied from one woman to another. My emphasis was on the artifact as metaphor and as a stimulus to recall rather than deep analysis of particular artifacts. This perspective subverts, but does not contradict, Prown’s (1996) assertion that

> [t]he quest is not to gather information about the object itself and the activities and practices of the society that produced it, but rather to discover underlying cultural beliefs.

The language of objects, like the language of words, employs a second level of abstraction analogous to figures of speech. (p. 22)

In the end, the artifacts provided an opening, a way into the narratives, but offered little in the way of information about the transformation process or the women's return to mainstream society. They were inherently interesting, but their analysis became irrelevant to the topic under
Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis included a number of activities. First, the interviews were transcribed, then read for meaning and themes. Following that I coded them, developing the codes as I went along. Further coding took place after all transcripts were coded. The following section describes the analytical process in detail.

Transcription conventions. I began with a set of transcription conventions (Lindsay, 1999, Appendix C) that had been developed for analysis of linguistic acts. It quickly became apparent that the level and form of the analysis were not appropriate for my study. Lindsay’s conventions included nonverbal and paralinguistic acts such as pauses, stress, and tone which were not part of the analytical units. As a result, I discarded those that were irrelevant and worked from a limited set of conventions that included location and duration of pauses, abrupt changes or interruptions in speech, and overlapping talk (Appendix C). A common element in all the interviews was laughter of varying kinds. Although their interpretation is strictly subjective, I used “chuckles” to indicate a short, quiet laugh, and “giggles” to indicate a longer, deeper laugh. Common to both “chuckles” and “giggles” was a personal, private enjoyment of the idea that evoked the laughter. “Laughs” or “both laugh” connote shared amusement, or that the intention was to encourage.

One unfortunate result of sharing the unedited transcriptions was that three of the participants commented negatively on their own perceived performance in the interview. This accords with other findings that transcriptions are very different from speech acts, and raises the caution that thoughtless use of verbatim transcripts could stigmatize the speaker (Lapadat,
2000). Gloria commented, “I didn’t sound exactly brilliant,” while Maya observed, “I learned that I use ‘you know’ a lot.” Debra, the only one who chose to edit the transcript, deleted all filler words. For this reason, I edited the supplemental interviews for clarity before returning them to the participants; by “clarity” I mean that pauses, filler words (“umm,” “you know,” “like”) and abrupt termination of sentences were deleted where there was no loss in the verbal intent. An example of an unedited segment looks like this:

But I found stuff and I liked it, so I kind of tacked it onto my clothes already! That’s kind of what I did with the rest of my life: I found something and tacked it onto my life you know (chuckles)? It’s kind of the way it went, you know, pretty free flowing? I mean, I think it’s still like that. I, I think that’s one thing I wanna still keep, that I, you know, that, that I had back then. Umm, probably I was a little more structured even in terms of what I didn’t like about what was going on with my life, you know, and wanting to change things. I am pretty much more accepting now, I think.

The same segment, edited, would read like this:

But I found stuff and I liked it, so I kind of tacked it onto my clothes already! That’s kind of what I did with the rest of my life: I found something and tacked it onto my life (chuckles). It’s kind of the way it went, pretty free flowing. I mean, I think it’s still like that. I think that’s one thing I wanna still keep, that I had back then. Probably I was a little more structured even in terms of what I didn’t like about what was going on with my life and wanting to change things. I am pretty much more accepting now, I think.

The edited versions are easier to read and understand. More importantly, they allow the participant to focus on the intent of her speech act rather than on how she sounded during the
conversation. For the purposes of this study, I believe that the edited version was more respectful of the participant.

The narrative coding process. Since I was seeking two kinds of information, first, back-to-the-land women's narrative, and second, real-life examples of Mezirow's (1991; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) adult transformative learning, I did both inductive and deductive coding. I transcribed the tapes and coded each sentence or group of sentences according to both kinds of information. Using WinMax Pro 98 (Kuckarz, 1998) computer assisted data analysis software, I assigned multiple codes to the participants' utterances (Appendix D). Because of the overlapping of ideas that is part of normal conversation, a particular utterance was sometimes assigned to more than one code. The units of analysis were subjectively derived "meaning units" rather than morphological units. These meaning units varied from single clauses to multiple sentences. A segment may have more than one code. For example, a discussion with Zerbina about the hand-made papier-mache claws she had made for her son's Halloween costume was coded as "women's work," "values: aesthetics," and "self-reliance: hand work."

In my deductive search for evidence of transformative learning, I named categories specified by the transformation cycle, premise distortions, and changes in meaning perspectives and schemes (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). An example of such codes is "Epistemic premise: assumptions about the nature and use of knowledge; applied when participant makes direct reference to beliefs about knowing." A textual segment assigned to that code was:

having gotten a good education, a quality education, I had the tools to know how to learn. I believe in them firmly and I think that what I project in my own teaching now, is that it
doesn't really matter what it is that you're learning as long as you know how to learn it.

(Audre)

Part of the purpose of the study was to explore back-to-the-land women’s narratives. I wanted commonalities and differences in the participants’ experiences to emerge naturally from their stories. This inductive process required reading and re-reading the texts, and identifying appropriate code names and definitions. Dey (1993) provides several methods of finding themes in the complex mesh of qualitative data (Table 3). Beginning with interactive reading, Dey proposes a series of steps in developing the themes for analysis, including creating categories, assigning categories, splitting and splicing, linking data, and finally, making connections. The table below summarizes Dey’s suggestions for “getting inside” qualitative data. Coding is a “live” process, and ideas emerged as I read and re-read.
Table 3
Finding themes through interactive reading.

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<tr>
<td>Interrogatory quintet</td>
<td>Brings forward underlying processes. Ask the questions, “who, what, why, when, where?” E.g., Why did the related event cause the response? Who shared that event and response? When did it occur?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive checklist</td>
<td>Identifies issues of concern before the transcript reading; focus on issues. E.g., Activities, events, reflections, responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Identify similarities and differences between experiences. E.g., All gave birth during that time period; X had outside work; Y and Z had no electricity or running water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting Focus</td>
<td>Move from a macro lens to a micro lens: consider individual experiences. E.g., “A” made yogurt on a woodstove; how did that affect her?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Move from a micro lens to macro lens; think of the overall perspectives and issues that unite the concepts. E.g., The community culture was essentially male-dominated; how did that affect the women?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting Sequence</td>
<td>Read the data in various sequences. E.g. Read entire transcript of each participant (First A, followed by X, Y, and Z,) then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read responses to same prompt of each participant.</td>
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</table>

The table shows the various tools used for reading the narratives, but some were more than useful others. First I used a shifting sequence, reading the entire transcript, then reading responses from each participant. I was then able to use the interrogatory quintet and comparisons, asking questions such as, “Why did the participant choose to relate this anecdote or story?” or “What is the importance of this piece of information?” “How does carrying laundry affect her view of herself?” In using comparisons, I discovered similarities amongst the
narratives—common themes that emerged. For example, Debra, Gloria, and Maya all stressed the importance of good, healthy food for their families. I noted, too, differences in attitudes, beliefs, and environments. In addition to the readings, I listened to some of the taped interviews again in order recapture the texture and flavour of the narratives.

**Creating and defining codes.** During the reading process, I developed a set of definitions for the codes (Appendix D). Early in the coding process, textual segments were coded before the definition was fully created. In those cases, I simply assigned words or phrases that captured the meaning of the block of text, and after I had assigned the code a few times, I reviewed the text segments to understand the commonalities among them. I used these commonalities to develop the definition. I felt that I was the only one who needed to understand them, so, although I did make efforts at coherence, comprehensibility, and accuracy, I did not prepare them for others’ viewing. My choices may make the list more difficult for someone else to follow, but the definitions appear exactly as I used them, typographical errors and all.

Nearly every utterance in the transcripts was coded, and only those that were clearly irrelevant were omitted. Examples of irrelevant utterances would include descriptive material, such as Zerbina’s observation about goat milk: “My son actually called milk ‘goat pee’ when he was little. That might tell you something.” This information, while evocative to Zerbina, was not relevant to her ability to change her lifestyle, environment, and dreams.

In coding the narrative texts, I began with concepts derived from Mezirow’s theory to try to explain the women’s success in education and mainstream society in terms of the transformation cycle. To this end, I used codes specific to the parts of the transformation cycle and the epistemological positions outlined by Mezirow (1991). These codes, “meaning
perspectives," "epistemic premise," "psychological premise," "sociolinguistic premise,"
"transformation cycle," "alienation from past roles," "crisis/disorienting dilemma," "new skills
& knowledge," "plan of action," "questioning assumptions," "reappraisal of roles,"
"reintegration of social roles," "self examination," and "trying on new roles," formed the heart
of the analysis of learning theory and epistemological development. However, they were not
enough to do justice to the richness of the narratives.

The interviews were purposely structured to allow the women broad latitude in
describing what was important to them. Therefore, a great deal of material of interest was not
captured by coding based on theory. I created new codes as themes emerged (Table 4). The set
of questions I presented to the women prior to the interview encouraged them to think about
their experiences while they were on the land. Their experiences frequently dealt with the
physical environment and relationships with others, giving rise to codes such as empowerment
and support networks. Another focus of analysis was the women’s relationship to society before
they went back-to-the-land and when they chose to return to mainstream society; these were
coded as “Leaving: Society, Subsistence Lifestyle.”
Table 4

Examples of Emergent Codes and Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowerment</strong></td>
<td>Generally used as superordinate code; occasionally used to indicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(supercode)</td>
<td>participant’s own perception of gaining power, self esteem, self efficacy,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>self confidence. Being capable, being able to verbalize capability.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal strength</strong></td>
<td>Activities and conditions that, addressed successfully, contribute to the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participant’s ability to accept psychological, spiritual or emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hardship or challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical strength</strong></td>
<td>Activities that indicate or increase the participant’s ability to do manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>labour, use the body’s musculature for work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support networks</strong></td>
<td>That emotional support given or accepted to an individual that, because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of the personal and interpersonal nature of the contact, is not necessarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>available to all members of the community. (Contrast with Support: social)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leaving</strong></td>
<td>No textual attachments. Subcodes, “Society” and “subsistence lifestyle”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(supercode)</td>
<td>include coded segments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Society</strong></td>
<td>Verbalized reasons for moving back to the land; include political,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emotional, spiritual, values-based reasons for moving to isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsistence</strong></td>
<td>Reasons for leaving subsistence lifestyle and returning to mainstream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>lifestyle</strong></td>
<td>society. Includes circumstantial (eg, divorce; lack of work) political,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emotional, spiritual, values-based reasons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The italicized codes served as supercodes, with the underlined codes subordinate to them. In some cases, the supercode had no textual elements assigned to it. It was a placeholder, indicating the group of ideas that were assigned to it as subcodes. This was, in part, a result of the constraints of the qualitative analysis software I used, but it also allowed me to cluster ideas. An example of this kind of coding was “Leaving.” As a category, it said nothing, so had to be broken down into parts called “Society” and “Subsistence Lifestyle.” Another code was a catch
all. In a memo\(^5\) regarding a particular interview, I described the catch-all code this way:

In some interviews, there are so many ideas that don't seem related to either my questions or to the ideas of the other interviewees. She has such a different outlook that much of her talk doesn't fit the codes. I'll store those things in the "zoned" code for now, and try to make sense of them when they're done.

I chose the word "Zoned" primarily to have a code that began with "z" so it would be easy to find when coding. It also indicated that the phrase or idea was outside the common zone of information I was reading from the other women. In a later review of the texts and codes, I chose to recode some textual segments, while other segments remained in that category because they were irrelevant to this study.

The coding was complex and layered, and in the end, not all of the codes were used for analysis. Narrative segments designated under the supercode, "Values," were rarely used in the pedagogical analysis, but were considered in the narrative summaries. Likewise, the codes "Employment: Previous and New," "Living Conditions," and "Shared History" emerged from the narratives, but were not directly relevant to the transformative learning analysis. Developing and applying these codes helped me to understand such ideas as the women's commitments to their lifestyles or their perspectives on aspects of the lives. In spite of the lack of a direct link to the pedagogical analysis, such codes contributed to the final analysis in that they helped me develop an understanding of the importance of storying one's life.

\(^5\)The WinMax Pro 98 program provided for the creation of memos that could be attached to coded segments of text or to the codes themselves. These memos were the basis of the definitions of codes (Appendix D) that I developed during the analytical process.
Limitations

A limitation that I have perhaps not adequately dealt with is a sense of protectiveness toward the participants. I became aware of this when deciding whether or not to include the phrase “dinner and smokes” in one of the quotations. “Smokes” in this case could refer to non-tobacco substances. Was it appropriate to include that phrase in the narrative? Another example was the inclusion of the “f word” in the narratives. My initial reaction in each of these cases was to omit the phrases and words. However, when I examined my impulse, I recognized that I would be editing the women’s experiences and censoring their words. In the end, I chose to keep the language and the ideas as true to the original as I could. Nonetheless, this impulse toward protectiveness may have influenced decisions in ways I did not detect.

Perhaps my most serious concern was the possibility of imposing my own beliefs on the women’s narratives. As noted previously, I was a back-to-the-land woman who returned to post-secondary education and mainstream society. I have left many of the aspects of the back-to-the-land lifestyle, and now live in a “normal” home with all the accoutrements of the middle class, including professional status and a mortgage. While analyzing the narratives, I tried not to impose my own recollections of the back-to-the-land lifestyle and the values and belief systems that led me to live that life. It has been difficult at times to separate myself from the narratives. In some cases I chose to insert my own recollections, but I tried to keep them to a minimum, allowing the women to speak for themselves and to draw their own pictures of their lives.
Chapter Five

Personal Narratives

We tell ourselves stories of our past, make fictions or stories of it, and these narrations become the past, the only part of our lives that is not submerged.
— Carolyn Heilbrun, Writing a Woman’s Life

The research questions, why and how did a particular group of women make changes in their lives and were the changes reflective of the transformation cycle postulated by Mezirow, lent themselves to both deductive and inductive analysis. In order to facilitate that analysis, I present the stories in two parts. In this chapter I present the women’s stories. Here I share in the construction of the narrative, reshaping the chronology of the interview to a loose chronology of the time on the land. In the next chapter, I analyse the women’s comments with a view to shedding light on the research questions. In that chapter I elaborate upon the transformation cycle and speak to the process of perspective transformation and to premise distortions in a stepwise fashion.

In this chapter I describe the women’s stories and processes in their own words. Beginning with their personal narratives and my own perspectives opens the door to further examination of personal transformations and their divergence from or congruence with adult transformative learning theory.

Narrative authenticity

Before discussing the narratives, it is worthwhile to consider their validity. This consideration emerged from a concern I had at the beginning of the process. Getting to the “stories under the stories,” the problem of painting the past with a different colored brush, was
identified as an innate feature of the narrative process. As Cruikshank (1998) reminds us, “meaning does not inhere in events, but involves weaving those events into stories that are meaningful at the time” (p. 2). At the beginning of the project, I had asked the women to share parts of their stories, and had provided a guide in the form of the Oral Narrative Protocol (Appendix B). The stories they chose to tell were necessarily influenced by those factors, and further by the fact that each wanted to be helpful to my intended thesis. It is, of course, impossible to reflect one’s past without some perceptual coloring, for all memories are reconstructions that vary depending upon the context in which they are retold. However, it is possible to be aware of personal interpretations and to try to develop our stories as fully as we can. Self-awareness and reflection on one’s own experience are useful tools in recalling the past. The women I interviewed are especially articulate and self-reflective. During our discussions it was apparent that each one was introspective, naturally examining her internal processing. As a result, each one recognized that her recollection of the past was probably not completely accurate, and quite possibly changed by the passage of time. I specifically addressed this question with Zerbina:

ME: I was asked, “How will you get to the stories under the stories?” Like right now we’re looking back at it, so we’ve re-storied, in a sense. I think it would be a really fun thing to do, to look at how we now view what we did then as opposed to how we viewed it then.

Zerbina: Yeah, it’s funny. How we viewed it at the time, that’s a good one. (Pause) At the time, I was caught up in the myth. And it’s like when you’re living something, you don’t realize how bad it is.
Or in Gloria’s words, “Having left there twelve years ago, the bad things are not so bad and the good things may be better than they were.” With these words, each acknowledged that she was a participant in creating the story she told me. With those thoughts in mind, it is time to let the women speak for themselves.

Gloria: Beginnings in the Laundromat

My first recollection of Gloria is different from her first recollection of me. I remember washing clothes in the laundromat, the washers thumping and churning, dryers tumbling. The air was humid and hot. A thin woman, whose long straight brown hair I envied, was pulling clothes from a dryer and putting them onto the narrow tables provided for folding clothes. She raised her arm and with an exasperated shake said, “I guess this shouldn’t have gone in the dryer!” “This” was a hand-knit wool sock. Once soft, warm, and smooth with lanolin, it was now shrunken into a hardness suitable for casting a doll’s leg. I do not remember much of the conversation, just a shared chagrin. Gloria remembers the shrunken sock, but she swears that we met at the Credit Union when my son, Jeremiah, pushed her son, also Jeremiah, off a chair. She remembers it distinctly because I admonished my son with these words: “Jeremiah, don’t push him off that chair.” She still laughs when she tells me how surprised she was that I knew her son’s name. She never says that she thought it rude of me to scold her son for something done by my obviously aggressive youngster.

Although either of those incidents was our first official meeting, we did not become close friends until years later. Through the years, I came to know some of her history, and when I interviewed her for this project, she added a lot of information that I hadn’t known before. Like our first meeting in the laundromat, my view of her Lakeside history differs slightly from hers,
but in no substantial manner. Where relevant, I will weave our differing perspectives together. For the obvious reason that Gloria is the authority on her life, her interpretation and knowledge of events is privileged. In this, as in the following stories, my own interpretation and information supplements what she told.

Gloria grew up in southern California, the only child of middle class parents. She attended a Catholic all-girls school. She attended university in California’s central valley, where she met her soon-to-be husband. Before moving into the B.C. wilderness, Gloria and her husband moved to Washington, where they built an eight-foot by ten-foot cabin, then a larger log house. Gloria kept chickens and a milk cow there, and grew a large garden. Their first child, Jeremiah, was born in Washington. When they were in Washington, they cut firewood for a living, and she says:

after having sold firewood in Washington State for three years, we could probably still go do a cord of wood, even in our extreme old age, better than most other people because we had the rhythm down perfectly. We had the tools and we had the rhythm to do it, so I’m sure we could probably still go do it right now. Change my shirt and go do a cord of wood, and feel like (laughing) “Unnhh!” tomorrow!

When we were both still Lakesiders, she described to me one of her early impressions of her husband: “He was riding his bicycle across campus with a dead sheep on the handlebars!” His willingness to act outside the bounds appealed to her, and suggests the sense of adventure that characterizes Gloria and the other women who participated in this study. When I asked her why she moved to Lakeside, she articulated it thus:
G: The adventure, I think. I don’t know, that’s what I’d say now.

ME: What would you have said at the time?

G: Same thing. ‘Cause when [George] went to Alaska he read *The Hobbit* and the Trilogy so he thought of it as an adventure and uh, “America: Love it or leave it,” so we left it.

The house in Washington is still there. In the summer of ’99, Gloria and I drove to California, stopping on the way to see it. Gloria wondered if the log cabin, which she remembered so fondly, still stood. I was excited to see where she and George had started their back-to-the-land life and to share her enjoyment in going back. We drove the hills, her instinctive recall of places overwriting the changes made in the twenty years since she had left. She unerringly directed me to the location, where we saw a “For Sale” sign. Ignoring it for the moment, we drove up the driveway. The short drive was punctuated by her exclamations: “There’s the cabin!” “They’ve let the garden grow over.” “That’s where I kept the cow.” The house was large and impressive. “They’ve added a new wing,” she told me. “We built that main part.” We looked from the car at the house, and Gloria knocked on the door. No one was home, so we drove slowly back down the drive, stopping now to look at the “For Sale” sign. “How much is it?” she asked. I leaned my head out and read “$330,000.” Gloria, astonished, was unable to take my word for it. She leaped out of the car, scurried to the sign, and read it aloud: “$330,000. We sold it for $30,000.” Shaking our heads, we drove away, thinking and talking about the changes that have taken place since she moved to Lakeside, and the about the “might have beens” had we not each chosen to move to the North. Now, as we drove along the Washington backroads to return to the freeway, Gloria’s consciousness seemed split in at least
It took two summers to build the house. George worked as a logger while Gloria stayed at home with Jeremiah. They made friends among their neighbours. Given the distance between houses at Lakeside, proximity was a primary factor in determining social life. Like many things at Lakeside, socializing added new dimensions. Gloria remembers

There was lots of stages of [our social life.] Most of the people were not quite old enough to be our parents, but just about. Many had lived there almost all their lives. Bob was a farmer who'd been to Prince George, but he'd never even been to Edmonton, never been to Vancouver. And had a totally – and extremely – different lifestyle than I had ever experienced, but that was what was very interesting, to find things in common with people you would never usually [have met, like] a dairy or cattle rancher in central British Columbia who doesn't have a lot of education.

These people were a source of important information, too. They knew the climate, how to cope with snow and ice, and what would grow well there. Gloria grew a large organic garden and raised chickens, but with a growing family, no longer wanted other animals. She was proud of her ability to provide food for the family. She told me,

I really enjoyed all that, the doing things on your own. There’s really no monetary value and it’s hard to explain to other people who haven’t done that the real personal satisfaction of it, ’cause they say, “Oh, so what if you grow your own.” We never bought potatoes the whole time we lived up there, once I got the garden going. And people will say, “Well, you can buy fifty pounds of potatoes for $5.98 in September. What’s the value of this?” But there is extreme value in being able to say, “These are my potatoes. Yes, they’re scabby because I planted them in fresh cow manure or just too much lime in
two directions. With one part of her mind, she directed me to the freeway and provided a quasi-historical commentary on changes to the places, buildings, and towns we passed. My impression was that she was simultaneously reminiscing about the past, remembering activities and people, and considering the implications of decisions she had made then and since. She was, perhaps, thinking about the events that took her north to Lakeside.

When Gloria and George moved to Lakeside, they initially bought a house to live in the first winter. They wanted to know that

it wouldn’t be too much. We wanted to know we could manage it, buy the property and build a house rather than saying, “Oh, yeah, we can camp! We’ve never been in 40 below before; we’ve never lived in snow before!” It seemed like the intelligent thing to do, especially with a little kid.

With typical grit, determination and optimism, they built their third log structure. To move the logs, they used the skidder George had bought in Washington for his entrepreneurial life in B.C. Gloria recalls that

We didn’t have power with the first house, so we had power with the second house, ‘cause we’d drilled all the holes by hand, everything – once is enough. [In Washington we] hand mixed all the cement. Up there we had the cement truck come. I peeled every log in the house. I wouldn’t let anybody else peel the logs because I wanted to be able to say that! ... We didn’t have a draw knife, so we just hacked away with a spud [a flat-edged, long-handled tool for peeling logs]. Just hacked, and there were still bits on some of the logs. Little bits, about two inches long.
the soil,” or whatever it was. But who cares if they’re scabby potatoes? They’re your scabby potatoes! And it’s very personally satisfying to be able to prove to yourself that you can do something. The basics. Really beyond feeding yourself, clothing yourself, keeping yourself warm. Those are the real important things. And once you know you can do that, you can go beyond that.

In addition to maintaining the household and providing the essentials of life, Gloria was part of the family’s logging business. Since the only year-round jobs available at Lakeside were in logging and teaching, being “support staff” was typical. Most women tried their hands at treeplanting or cone-picking at one time or another, but with a home to care for and children to watch, it was not a viable way of making a living despite the relatively high pay and seasonal nature of the work. Gloria described her role as the stay-at-home mom and housemaker, slash, parts-picker-upper, organizer, banker, bookkeeper, all the small but significant bits that one must do to run one’s own business. George would go out and do the “hard” stuff, which was the log truck driving, but I was ... support staff! I would end up driving to town with a skidder tire in the back (lovely!) and picking up six 5-gallon pails of big greasy parts. Lots of ’em.

Gloria only worked for one day in paid employment (elections return officer), but, as if her other jobs were not enough, she volunteered to create and sustain a public library, a job she loved. The task involved setting up the library, getting volunteer staff, being always on call if the volunteer failed to arrive, bringing books from the main library, and maintaining the record system.
While doing all these things, raising food, sewing "lots of clothes," building the family’s dining table, chopping wood, Gloria developed a sense of personal strength. She said of that time:

It made me more self reliant. So many women in particular are terrified of – besides bears – mechanical objects and fixing things themselves. I don’t know a lot of mechanics, but one sentence: Wiggle the battery terminal. Ninety percent of the time, that’s the problem. No, you also had to put on chains, change tires, or wire the goddamned muffler back on.

By now, Gloria had four children. She recalls that her social life revolved around the circle developed largely by her children’s friends: “It was good for both us and the kids . . . it was always dinner at someone’s house and drinks and smokes and go home, so that the kids’ social life interwove with our own. That was really nice.” One of the bad things she recalls about Lakeside was that school was far away (perhaps 20 kilometres) and “any extracurricular activities were frankly impossible for most parents.” The constraints of distance and isolation were sometimes difficult. She recalls that

there was really no support like there is now, you know, if you’re at your wits end. My kids never went to babysitters, which means that I never went anywhere without them, which gets to be a drag. But I wouldn’t say that’s so much an aspect of living up north, it’s more an aspect of George’s and my personalities. . . . [It was a] bad, bad place to be with four small children and no support.
Gloria, like many other Lakeside women, spent a lot of time alone with her children, but she had intellectual resources to help her cope. Speaking of taking courses both at Lakeside and later when she had moved away, she told me:

going back to school was great. I loved it. . . . I really loved learning something. I was just fascinated to learn something again. I can’t say that gardening wasn’t learning something, but this was book learning. And the ability to do something well – I can’t say I didn’t enjoy staying home, making cookies, sewing clothes, and having just said it was very personally satisfying, I can’t say it wasn’t, but I just wanted to do something else.

After 12 years, Lakeside was no longer the adventure they were looking for, so George and Gloria moved. “Both George and I are from the coast,” she told me, “and I think we both felt that we’d spent enough time inland. . . . Not because we’d mastered things or were even bored with them, but it was time to move on.” After they moved to a town on the coast, Gloria took a job and took more courses. Talking about the first long-term, paying job she had had in her adult life, she said,

it was an excellent job for me in lots of ways because it was very unstructured. Someone trusted me and just said, “Do it.” And I know it was a lot of the background from there, from saying, “Oh, yeah, I can do that. And I can do that.” That gave me that job.

She and her husband separated, and Gloria is now a full-time graduate student. We are still in frequent, regular contact, but that is not part of this discussion. Instead, we move to another story, that of Zerbina.
North to Alaska, that was Zerbina’s path. She moved from her family home in California, where her father was an aerospace engineer and her mother was a musician and music teacher, to Alaska, then south again to Lakeside. When I asked what prompted her move back-to-the-land, she told me,

[The move] was initiated at least as much by me, if not more by me than Brad. We had moved from the San Francisco Bay area to Ketchikan, which was a small town, and I guess we were kind of going in a direction of wanting to escape even more. We were in the escapist mode. We wanted to escape urban garbage. When we escaped the San Francisco Bay area, we were leaving, it was kind of a turmoil time. I remember as we were driving north, we were hearing about the Kent State riots on the radio sort of like that same weekend, when all that stuff was happening. Students were being shot and the war was going, and it just seemed like a really good time to be getting out of California. Ketchikan was a real redneck little town, but it was kind of an experience. I never wanted to stay there. I saw it as just an adventure. But I think from Ketchikan we wanted to be somewhere even more rural, and so we were lured by the promise of cheap land.

Zerbina and Brad’s first attempt to buy land gave her the first inkling of the difference between her values and those she would find at Lakeside. They were interested in a parcel of land, hundreds of acres, primarily because it was forested. The clash of values came over cutting trees to clear land:

After we talked price, Hank said, “Well, I’m clearing it right now with my cat,” and we said, “We’re only interested in it if you don’t push down any more trees. We like the
trees.” And, you know, Hank said, “Well, I’ve got this cat and I’m clearing this land.”

And he said that “Every day, every week that you don’t buy it, the price is going to go up because I’m clearing the land with my cat.” This guy’s insane, right? So we went back to Ketchikan, not having bought any land, and sure enough, Hank had pushed down acres more trees with his cat because he’s nuts. So needless to say, we didn’t buy his place.

Eventually they found a place to buy, and in the spirit of the 70s, did so with six other people. The 200-plus acres had everything: rolling hay pastures, deciduous and coniferous forests, a lake and an old house insulated, as they later found out, with sawdust. A typical insulation in older houses, the sawdust slowly settled and packed, leaving a large uninsulated portion of wall that made the house very cold in winter.

Zerbina and Brad are generous and gregarious by nature. Along with their love of music – Zerbina played the piano, and both played guitar – those qualities made their house a gathering place. The house had running water, electricity, and wood heat, making it a magnet for the showerless back-to-the-land souls who sometimes needed a long, luxurious, hot bath. Zerbina recognizes the contradiction posed by their back-to-the-land ideals and the place they purchased:

When the collapse came, we wanted to be able to can our own food. That was definitely part of it. Did we articulate it that way? Maybe sometimes we did. We didn’t go around like saying it, and we weren’t building bomb shelters or anything, but we wanted to be off the grid. We never really were. I mean it was bullshit, because we always had power, and we always drove cars, but we kind of had the illusion that at some point we might be able to be off the grid.
In spite of the apparent contradiction, they were idealistic about living on the land. Having bought the land with others, they fully expected to build their own home. Most of the original shareholders quickly realized they were not going to move to Lakeside, so Zerbina and Brad bought them out. One couple remained on the farm, and built their own log home.

Although the others were important in her life and experience at Lakeside, they did not become a focal point of our conversation. Instead, we talked about Zerbina’s back-to-the-land experiences. Unlike Maya, Audre, and Debra, Zerbina was not happy in the isolated, rural environment. The disenchantment was quick, and in hard contrast to her ideals:

I read Thoreau when I was in high school and I think that really was a strong influence. I think I always wanted to do that, you know, to have sort of my own little acre, my own little, you know, whatever, 200 acres. My own little piece of paradise. I always wanted to do that. But I think that it was in an idealistic, kind of impractical city way that I wanted to do it. And I realized that – after I had the misfortune to sell everything and move there – all I ever really wanted was a little country cottage that I could go to weekends. I think I really hadn’t defined what I wanted, but I don’t really think deep down I really wanted to live on a farm for 15 years. It just kind of happened.

ME: When did you find that out?

Zerbina: Oh, about the first six months I was there. Part of it was Brad really wanted to stay there, and it took a long time to convince him that he was not thriving there. I think he also had this idealistic vision of this. It was a very different kind of a male vision of this self-sufficient man who would go out and log and then build all these things, you know? It was funny. We had the same weird hallucination. Kind of different versions of
it, I guess. You know, I saw myself making goat cheese and canning vegetables, I mean, god, what vegetables can you can there? Beets. I canned- What a fucking waste of time. You know, spinach. (Both laugh) Why’d I do these things?

In spite of her rapid disillusionment, Zerbina did stay for 15 years. Feeling like a fish with a bicycle, she played the role she – and alternate society – had created for her. As she recalls, they had all the animals from goats to rabbits, and it was her responsibility to feed and water them. We both laughed when she showed me the picture of her milking a goat. “That was a different me in the picture. Why I had the goat, I’m still not sure. It was just something I felt I needed to do at the time,” she said in explanation.

Being naturally ambitious (a label she may reject), Zerbina joined forces with another woman to propose a make-work project for women. In her words, “part of the rationale behind the government giving us money was they were supposed to be training women to use chainsaws. Now was that a 70s notion?” We laughed at the photos she brought, and the resemblance of the group of women (I was a substitute worker) to a chain gang:

ME: Well, you know, it has a certain resemblance to a chain gang to me (both laugh).

You know, marching along, it’s black and white –

Zerbina: (sings) “It’s a nine-pound hammer.” Doesn’t it look like we’re singing, and it looks like I’m snapping my fingers and singing, doesn’t it? Hauling buckets of god knows what. I’ve no idea what’s in the bucket. Molly, in this picture, you’re holding the chainsaw, and it looks like you’re calling out something like, you [know, “Tote that bucket!” or

ME: Call and response-]
Zerbina: Yeah, call and response. Like those Marine drill teams, you know?

ME: Yeah. I don’t- can’t think of any right now but-

Zerbina: “Well, we’re gonna kill trees!” You know, that sort of thing!

We laughed, but we agreed that the experience was actually useful. The women built picnic tables from squared logs, cut brush and burned piles, and learned to sharpen and service a chainsaw. When I asked how that experience contributed to her sense of herself, she told me, “It made me feel more self-sufficient.”

Zerbina completed the grant project and looked for other things to do. At Lakeside, it was difficult to find paid employment, but she did what she could. Zerbina picked spruce cones in the fall and pine cones in the winter. She planted trees. In spite of her industry and activity, she was sometimes depressed:

I remember waking up every morning and thinking, “It’s going to be exactly like yesterday.” Every morning. I mean, I’d look around me, and I’d know that I wouldn’t see anybody new and I’d be lucky to see anybody. (Laughs) You know? And it was going to be a day just like the day before, where I’d cook and I’d clean up and I’d look around and I’d see the trees and I’d see what was around us. And maybe I’d go to the store; maybe I’d see someone at the store.

This was not the spiritually enhancing wilderness experience that she hoped for when she moved to Lakeside. Still, making the best of her abilities and resources, she began to teach guitar and piano lessons. She joined a local rock and roll band, and frequently played at dances.

Although she did not mention it in the interview, I recall that she took piano lessons, working toward completion of the Royal Conservatory Grade 10. Music, previously little more than a
creative outlet, became central to her existence at Lakeside. Chronology is a little hazy here, because she needed mobility to get to the lessons. Since money was scarce and women had few financial resources, she found a way to get a vehicle that suited the place and the times. Zerbina and I bought a car together.

Zerbina: Libby was the car you and I bought in Prince George. What was it- Libby was a silver Datsun, is that right? Station wagon. And, um, $75 bucks? And it burnt up coming home? The guys fixed the clutch.

ME: I don’t remember that part, but I remember the rag. It didn’t have an oil cap, but it had a rag instead.

Zerbina: And ate up the rag and wrecked the engine. And there was some way that it didn’t become an issue between us.

We shared “Libby” by trading back and forth on a week-by-week basis. If one of us needed the vehicle during the other’s time, we simply made arrangements to share. Laughing, we discussed what it meant to have a car:

Zerbina: It’s like being lost at sea in a life boat and then having someone come up and, and give you a, a little, you know -

ME: Motor for it.

Zerbina: (Both laughing) Motor! Well, hey, you’re still adrift in the sea, but you could go faster.

By now, Zerbina was well established as a music teacher, and regularly traveled up to two hours to teach students in the nearest town. It was a wearing schedule. Not least of the difficulties was the lack of support that she found at Lakeside for women. During the interview,
we discussed this at some length, reflecting some of the discussions we had held while we both lived at Lakeside:

Zerbina: You know, I considered myself a feminist and it was a very weird to be a feminist, as you know! I think that was probably was the worst of it for me. Really, that’s the heart of why I hated it there because of what it did to men and women. We fell into these archaic roles. I mean, I actually wanted to learn to use a chainsaw. I wanted to learn skills that would make me feel stronger as a woman. I really did. Yet, we fell into these roles where you know, Brad would go out logging, I’d be home with the babies, bored to tears every fucking day. It was very schizophrenic in that I loved being able to be home with my kids and I loved them growing up in that place where – you know, we looked through those pictures and you could see how much freedom they had. It killed my soul. No, it didn’t kill my soul, but it tried to.

ME: Yeah. And your soul as a woman.

Zerbina Yeah! And my soul as a musician, my soul as someone who reads books and wants to talk about them. I mean, I felt completely intellectually, artistically, spiritually stultified through that whole time. So it was sort of a cruel, ironic twist that the very things that I had hoped to have nurtured in me which were my feminine independence and strength, and my spiritual awareness, were actually the things that were crushed.

ME: Yeah, that’s another thing that I’d like to pursue sometime is the idea that we did, as feminists, go back there and, and at the same time, we wanted to be Earth Mothers. Didn’t we see the conflict?
Zerbina I don’t totally believe that that’s a conflict. But it was then and there in that place. The men were not aware. They were totally caught up in this cowboy myth that they were trying to live, and that was not conducive to my growth. That was stultifying.

ME: We as budding feminists of the second wave, it really put us in a conflict with the –
Zerbina: – the Earth Mother thing! It’s a good point, and in fact it did turn out to be a conflict. In my mind I never saw it as a conflict, and I think it was because we didn’t have the support of the men. I don’t think that the men were – The men weren’t feminists! I remember sitting next to one guy at a party and something came up about roles of men and women on television. I can’t even remember how it came up, and I said, “Yeah, the men get all the good lines.” And he turned to me and said, “Don’t give me that feminist shit.” That was so inappropriate, but he felt that he could say that at a party.

The men were macho guys and they didn’t listen to women very much of the time. At the parties the men would go off in the corner and talk about their chainsaws and their trucks. The women would go off and talk about their babies and their gardens. I got to point I wouldn’t even go to parties any more the last couple years we lived there. I couldn’t handle it. You know, that’s how it was. You’re right, and it was completely awful to be a feminist and to live that life.

Finally able to convince Brad that the family would be happier somewhere else, they eventually moved to a town near the coast. Brad gave up logging and went into environmental activism, while Zerbina took a job at a music school, took a degree and got a teaching certificate. For a few years she played with an all-women band and she currently teaches full
time in the public school system as well as keeping several private piano students. The move
finally allowed her to blossom as she had hoped she would at Lakeside:

And you know, it’s working out really well. Really well. It worked out so well it was just
amazing. Everything worked out when we made the decision to move. It was so totally
right. . . I thought I’d moved to heaven. The day we moved there, after that fruit
depression – after 15 years – the day we moved there was July 6th or 7th, which was when
the cherries were all ripening and it was a bumper crop. You know that 30-foot cherry
tree we had? And they were hanging in bunches like grapes. And I’m serious, Molly, I’m
not exaggerating, there are just bunches of cherries, big, sweet- the best cherries I’ve ever
tasted. . . It was a hot sunny day.

ME: Yeah. And you know what? I believed you had a cherry tree, but I couldn’t really
believe it until I saw it myself. After all those years on the Lakeside, I didn’t believe fruit
trees actually existed!

Zerbina: It was so funny because people on the Lakeside are– I found them very small
minded and jealous. I would tell people, “We have a 30-foot cherry tree.” “Aw, you’re
full of shit! You can’t grow cherries there!” and I’m going, “Okay, all right, fine!” I
remember people telling us how much we wouldn’t like it. It was small, provincial
mentality. Everybody should be as miserable as I am kind of mentality.

ME: Yeah. “This is as good as it gets.” Earlier you talked about going back to places that
were more kind of pure, cleaner, simpler and stuff. And so when you moved to town, did
you have any regrets?
Zerbina: Not one! I remember Denise saying to me at one point, “Doesn’t it bother you to be right next door, and if you’re cooking in your barbecue to look out and see your neighbours?” And I went, “Nope! Not one bit!” I said, “I’m so grateful,” I remember telling her, “Every time I drive to work and it takes me 4 minutes to get to work, I’m grateful.” Something goes wrong with the toilet, and I have to drive 2 blocks to a building supply place, I’m grateful I don’t have to make a half a day trip to town. Oh, no, I mean, no, I never looked back. I literally didn’t look back. I had no regrets. Not one.

Zerbina lives in the same town now she and Brad moved to, and our children are much older. Both her son and mine live in the same city and, in spite of living in different towns for eleven years, they are once again close friends. The bonds made at Lakeside go on.

Maya: Back to Basics

“I’m going to take some eggs to Maya,” my husband told me before setting out on a horseback ride of close to three miles. We frequently exchanged goods with Maya, our eggs for the oil or grains she purchased in bulk from the food co-op. Maya was raised in a city in the mid-west, and moved to Lakeside through a series of “approximations.” She had lived on farms for a time in Ohio, in Arizona and in B.C.’s Fraser Valley before settling in the B.C. interior. Although she wanted to “get away,” she did not have a clear idea of where she wanted to settle. She wanted to get away from “The war, you know, all the crap in the US that I didn’t subscribe to. I wanted to get away from that, but to get beyond it and do something different and something better.”

Maya, like others, talked about her reasons for moving to Lakeside in terms of personal beliefs. For her, the decision was both political, as outlined above, and deeply personal
I think we wanted a clean life, you know, clean living where the air was clean, the water was clean, you could go to a mountain stream and drink it and not have to worry about it being polluted. You know, things like that, where you made the decisions and every decision you made counted and you could see the repercussions of your decisions. You made those decisions and you couldn’t blame anybody else but yourselves for whatever you did. So maybe it was that kind of self-sufficiency. Maybe we couldn’t grow everything for ourselves, but we depended on ourselves and when we needed help, we got help from people who were willing to give it and we didn’t have to go and pay everybody to do everything that needed to be done. We all helped each other. There was a real sharing that went on. I think that was something that came from being there all together and going through all this together, but nobody intentionally was there for that purpose. It was a side trip, sort of a side benefit.

Part of the impetus for change was to do as much as she could for herself, to take personal responsibility for her production and consumption:

I thought that, in order to drink milk, you had to have a cow. In order to eat meat, you have to have animals to raise. . . . if you have to provide those things that you have in your life you have to work backwards to see where it is you can have them. “Okay, am I gonna wear wool clothes? I have to spin the wool and knit the socks” and that means that you have to have sheep. So if I wanted to wear wool, how far was I gonna take this? I didn’t know until I got there.

At the time my husband made his jaunt for supplies, she and her husband lived in a tiny log cabin where she kept the house going, chopping wood, keeping the home fires burning,
making sure they had water, and cooking while her husband worked for a local rancher. She made many of their clothes on a treadle sewing machine. We laughed with shared memories when we discussed the sewing:

ME: Okay, so how did you back up, how did you do reverse stitch?
Maya: Oh you had to turn it around; there was no reverse. If you wanted to back up and kind of fix the end of your stitching, you just turned the material around and went forwards for that little ways then turned it around again, and that was your backwards stitch, but there was no reverse on it, no zigzag. It was just a straight stitch, one way only.
ME: Yeah, it’s amazing how much time even that little bit of backing up takes.
Everything took longer.
Sewing typified all the activities of daily living: They simply took longer. She describes doing laundry in terms that few people can comprehend:

I was staying home doing laundry and being a homemaker, and walking nine miles to do the laundry and thinking it was fine. . . . You stick it in a duffle bag or whatever and stick it on your back in a backpack and walk. I remember walking and it was twenty below and it was crystal clear and absolutely gorgeous. I didn’t think this was a hardship at all; I thought this was a heck of a good way to be living.

Soon, Maya left her marriage to live in a communal setting with her new partner, Fergus, and his brother and his family. The families had their own dwellings, but shared chores. After living in a very small cabin and giving birth to her first child, she and Fergus built their own log home. In keeping with her desire to be as basic as possible, to “work backwards,” they used horses to haul and move the logs for the house. Both Maya and Fergus were committed to
spiritual development, and during their time together they moved to a Zen Centre in a large city in the U.S. After trying to keep a foot in each world, Maya returned to Lakeside and lived on her own. Now she began earning money to support herself and her son. To do this, she made and sold tofu, and accepted a variety of jobs. She was variously a housekeeper, a substitute teacher, and a project worker. The latter job was part of Zerbina’s grant to make a beach and picnic area at a small lake. The grant’s purpose was to train women in non-traditional jobs. I asked Maya if she had ever, as a child, had a vision of herself with a chainsaw. She responded humorously and emphatically:

Never. I remember doing something to the fence at the house and my sister had been visiting. She walked down to our place and here I was, sawing the fence, and she goes, “My god, you know, I come down to have breakfast and here you are chainsawing something!” You know, she was just flabbergasted, but I was like, “Oh, yeah, well, you need to do this and how else you gonna do it? You’re not going to nnnnnnnnn-nnnn-nnnnnnnnnnn [sound of sawing] on a saw by hand and be there for five days.” So yeah, you learn how to pull the cord and rank on the saw.

In an employment environment that was not woman-friendly (most work was in logging or farming), Maya continued to work where she could. In addition to the jobs cited above, she babysat for neighbours, worked at the Lakeside Day Care Centre, and then found a full-time bookkeeping and band management job with a First Nation. The latter gave her some financial independence, which she could invest in “mod cons” such as running water. When the other family brought hydroelectricity to the property at great expense, Maya was able to set up a gravity fed water system from their pump. After a time, she became so “civilized” that she
installed an on-demand, propane water heater. Now she and her son could have showers and wash dishes without heating all the water on the wood stoves.

After a time, she was ready to move on, and left Lakeside for a more remote area of the province, where she taught computer courses at the community college and once again, found a job as bookkeeper for a First Nation. She lives there now, in another house with gravity-fed water, although this time the water does not run inside the house. We keep in touch and spend time together whenever we are in the same neighborhood. A few weeks ago I drove her from the airport to her old home at Lakeskide where she met her first grandchild (a granddaughter) for the first time. We have a precious relationship, based on sharing the good and the difficult things in our lives.

Debra: A long and winding road

I do not recall exactly when and how I met Debra. I had been at Lakeside for a couple of years, and heard through the grapevine that some “hippies” had bought a local farmer’s ranch and were planning to raise sheep. The locals were a little miffed at this idea, since this was cattle country, not sheep country. The hippie population was happy that others were attempting a communal living arrangement. When did I meet Debra then? I do not remember, but I remember tramping her barnyard with one of the men, and I recall Debra in an oversized overcoat feeding a bottle to an orphan lamb. I also remember staying at her house to help out when she was in hospital giving birth to her second child.

Her original decision to go back to the land was a purely personal one. She had participated in a single anti-war demonstration and found that people were hostile to the anti-war
message. She realized then that she could not change society. She moved back to the land in order to live a simpler, more spiritual life, and to work hard.

She went back to the land in stages, first as a student in Illinois, living with other students in a farmhouse they rented for $25 a month, with no running water. When she was in B.C., she met the man she later married. He already had a farm in the mountains and was raising a few sheep. Debra told me that she knew all along that this man was a dreamer and a doer, the kind of man who took large steps, and made big changes in his life. They were married and left the mountain farm where they had gone from 25 sheep to 100 sheep in a year ("that wasn't enough for him" she commented) to move to Lakeside. There they had many more sheep (I recall 1000 including lambs, but she didn't specify numbers), milk cows, and a garden:

D: Even though I had already done a degree of [living on the land], I still expected it to be some idyllic, peaceful utopia. I knew how much work was involved and what a struggle it could be because we also did have sheep. As far as actual living, you know, trying to live off the land, we did have that going in the southern area of British Columbia as well, but I just thought it was going to be easier, it was going to be better.

Her husband sometimes worked in the local sawmill when the farm needed money. She stayed at home and did farm wife work. When they had people living there and working for them, Debra would cook breakfast, settle the kids, make lunch, clean up, and start on dinner. Food was important to her, not only for the physical nourishment it provided, but as a centre for socializing. She had participated in a food co-op, "Mr. Natural," in her previous home, and along with Maya and others started a co-op at Lakeside:
D: The activities outside the home included the food cooperative which was really great. Several of us got together and got food from Vancouver and divided up bulk goods. That was another social outlet because it was at least once a month. It could have been less often in the winter, but we always had a lot of positive, constructive energy around food. If you look at animals and the garden, that's certainly food, and I think that's, if I didn't bring up before, that's certainly something else that drew me to land was fresh food and quality of food.

The land, too, was important to her. She was born and raised in the city, but spent time at her grandparents' farm as a child. She felt a strong connection to the earth and to the beauty of wild things, and remembers watching the moose swim the lake, the geese flying over head and watching the eagles fishing. Spirituality played a role in her decision to move to the land. During that time, she was exploring her inner being and trying to find meaning and purpose in her life. She became close friends with a man who was deeply committed to the theosophical movement and he was a source of spiritual strength and support for her:

I didn't talk a lot about the spiritual stuff, but I really wanted to make sure that it was in there, that it was part of my reason. As it turns out I did meet my "spiritual grandfather," I call him, a crusty old Englishman gardener

Debra had two of her three children when she lived at Lakeside. The first pregnancy, she told me was "warm and beautiful." At my prompting, she said that she did not worry about the ferry or the distance to town for medical care. The second pregnancy followed closely on the first, giving her little time to recover and prepare. In addition to the work she did in the house, she participated in the farm work.
Running a working farm was hard, and one of the most difficult things for her was that the animals sometimes died. Part of that was "ignorance" and part was circumstantial:

the cost of having all those animals was that we had to watch many animals die. That was really difficult in a lot of ways because some of it was due to our ignorance and there were a lot of health problems unbeknownst to us. On that place, there was actually some tetanus in the soil from the cattle that they had and the tetanus affected the lambs. I'll never forget a cow calving in the "wilderness" on the property, and she could not have the calf. We ended up having to somehow rig some chains and a tractor, and had to watch [trails off]. I believe she died, but the calf did live. There were a lot of pretty heavy duty operations. Once my husband had to do a caesarean on a sheep and the lamb survived, but the sheep did not. We really had to attempt as much of the veterinary care as we could on do our own, but that was difficult.

They had to rely mostly on themselves for veterinary work because the vet, who lived in a distant town, came to the nearest community only every week or two.

Debra describes herself as "a traditional woman," now as much as then, preferring to stay home with the children, prepare the food, and keep the home. She admired the farm women on the Lakeside who could drive a tractor, string barbed wire, cook and raise children:

D: The farm women were my role models. I just thought women like that who did everything were wonderful!

M: And by everything, you mean . . . what?

D: Well, I mean, they could drive a tractor, butcher sheep, have kids, cook meals, go fix the fence. You know, they could do it all.
M: What words would you use to describe them?

D: Well, they had a good balance of male and female. They could do anything. You know, they were still female, but they were able to do “male” tasks, you know, like pulling barbed wire in a fence or using a chainsaw, that sort of thing.

Debra admired the farm women, and, although she described herself as traditional, she remembers that she was also drawn to emerging feminist ideas:

My initial response was that I was just kind of traditional. I wasn’t that involved in the women’s movement. And then I started thinking about what I did. I actually wrote a presentation for CBC radio. I did a little blurb on the history of the women’s movement in Canada, and I did a little radio show. I still have that piece.

Ten years after they left the land, she went back to school, and she now has a master’s in library science. While talking about the paper she had written, she chuckled and said, “If somebody asked me twenty years ago in British Columbia if I ever thought I would be a librarian today, I would probably have to say, ‘Yes!’ even at the time. Because I always did like to do research.” As we talked a bit more about the women’s movement and what it meant to us at the time, she raised another issue:

D: When the women’s centre opened, I remember that when I had to go to town I would always stop in. And one of the things I felt was important at the women’s centre was relating to native women because I didn’t relate really to native women there, and so the

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6Debra shared with me her original copy of the manuscript, which begins, “We women must seek out our own story. It is not provided for us in history books written by men.” The statement remains true.
women's centre was a place for that. In fact, I was reading through the notes of the final copy of my history on the women's movement in Canada, and I saw that I had hand written in some notes, "Native women didn't get the right to vote until the 1940s." Even then I realized that there was something missing in this picture. We were dealing with the white struggle mostly.

She told me that, looking back, the time in B.C. made her believe she could do anything and that, having survived at Lakeside and the events of that time of her life, she feels she can survive anything. She spoke, too, of things being right in the larger scheme. Although she didn't want to leave B.C., the move allowed her to live close to her family where her children could meet and play with their grandparents. That was particularly important to her because her father died soon after.

The decision to leave B.C. came from her husband. She did not know at the time she went to B.C. that she, herself, had a "genetic trail" in B.C., but later learned that her grandfather had traveled through the area and she even had an uncle in a community near Lakeside. These roots, her love of the land, the work they were doing, and the closeknit community of the Lakeside were the reasons that she hated to leave. However, there were financial hardships, as well as her husband's intellectual and professional desires, that caused them to move.

She cites the book, Radical Agriculture, as the text that impelled her husband to return to graduate school. His degree in economics from Harvard was not enough to preserve their farm in the face of falling cattle prices and increased oil prices. Their farming practices were good, but market conditions were against them:
D: This was the later seventies when the market had just completely dropped in cattle prices, and the oil embargo was up. Everything was so expensive, and even though we did really well as far as quality of goods that we produced, the expenses were outrageous. Basically he decided to go back to school, get a degree, focus on some intellectual work rather than physical to see if using his brain would make us more money. ‘Cause we did have two small children at the time.

She felt strong conflict when they decided to move, and their living conditions changed dramatically. In married student housing (an apartment), she was more socially isolated than she had been on the farm in the B.C. interior. Her husband, who had been in the house or on the farm most of the time, was now at classes, in the library, or studying or writing. There were fewer women with whom she could socialize. They remained in the apartment for only one year, then found a farmhouse to live in.

We ended the narrative tale there, but our friendship continues. The bonds forged in that place and time remain strong.

Audre: Creativity and mindfulness

Audre is creative and multi-talented. I recall being aware of Audre in a variety of settings after I moved from my bush home to the city. Perhaps the first time that I recall is when she performed in a local coffeehouse with an a cappella group, “Out of the Kitchen,” as in, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!” The next time I heard of her, she catered a delicious dinner for a celebratory after-the-play dinner for members of the amateur theatre group. Yet another time, Audre played harp with a violin-playing poet who was doing a local reading. These occasions were all before I officially met Audre, and I was predisposed to like anyone with those
talents. She took the same teacher-certification course that I did, although a year or two later, and our paths began to cross in our more immediate social circles. I was drawn to her particular energy and vivacious life force, and now count her among my close friends. I was not surprised to learn that she, too, had gone back to the land in the 1970s, and when this project was born, I decided to ask her to participate.

Audre came from upstate New York, another refugee from the chaos that seemed to be the sixties America. She grew up in a small town with parents who were "Luddites in their own way." She attributes her move to Riverside to her childhood freedom, recollecting that:

when I was a kid I had an idyllic childhood and I roamed around free. I was really attracted to farms and old tools and all that kind of stuff as a really little kid, and I started finding things as a child. I still have things that I got when I was eight or nine or ten years old that seem now to me, looking back, like funny things for a kid that age to find appealing.

Audre’s childhood contributed to her desire to live in a rural setting, and after three years of college, she roamed a bit. She had been hitchhiking for about six months with only her backpack and her dog when someone told her about Riverside. She decided to see what the community was like, and was enchanted by its remoteness and beauty. To get there, she had to go on the "way freight":

it had originally been established as a local freight service for the valley to connect all the little towns along the Fraser Valley that did not have roads to them or had minimal access. It had a couple of freight cars and it also had another car that would carry passengers. It was an antique, half passenger and half freight, and there was an old oil
stove in the freight part, and in the passenger part the benches were wooden with that kind of arched ceiling with the molding that came up in a sort of rounded thing and there was all this beautiful woodwork around and there were brackets for kerosene lamps and it was this really quite an ancient thing and it would kind of creak along.

It collected people from all the flag stops and all you had to do was put the flag out if you wanted to get on the way freight and you could come into town and you’d have to spend the night and come back out the following day but it enabled people to do their shopping. The old grocery stores and the [hardware store] and places like that used to deliver stuff to the way freight for you ‘cause most people came in that way. They were on foot, and they’d order their groceries and get them sent on the way freight.

The way freight symbolized a great deal about life in Riverside. It was older, slower, and less convenient, but had a romantic beauty that resonated with Audre. She decided to stay, at least for a while, and she lived in a variety of homes. As a single woman, she was available to housesit for others, one way of living in the area without making a financial commitment to it. She lived for some time in a house for which she paid the annual taxes in lieu of rent. In that place she had a short walk to the creek to get water, and she heated with wood. Her financial needs were small, so in the first years of her sojourn, she went to California to work for a few months each winter. She met the man who was to become her husband and they moved together to Riverside. They began a reforestation company, then bought land and built timber frame house with logs milled nearby. She loved the property and the house, she grew a large garden and cleared some of the fields herself:
another piece of property just a little further down the road came up for sale and it was
the loveliest piece of property in Riverside. It had a couple creeks on it. The lay of the
land was beautiful and it had the convenience of having the water flowing closer to the
door and so on without having to dig a well. It was just 120 acres, and we lived in this
tiny cabin, like about a 12 by 24 cabin with Fanny, who was by that time around three. I
had a great garden there and it was just a wonderful spot. And I cleared most of the fields
myself by hand, well, with the tractor and pulled all the roots of the birch in the area, and
then I seeded it and turned it into a pasture.

Clearing the land, hand seeding pasture – these are old ways, the ways of a previous
century, and that appealed to her. She enjoyed the old timers who lived there and learned a lot
from them. First she described a neighbour of whom she was particularly fond:

there was an old guy who’d lived in Riverside all his life. He was a quiet, shy guy who
lived very simply. He knew a lot of stuff about how to live where he lived. He was one of
many siblings, and the only one left who was actually living out there on this quite large
piece of land right on the river. He had a bunch of horses, and he fished and had his fish
trap in the river, and his major means of transportation was this ancient Ford tractor, the
Thousand-Year-Old Tractor. He used to do things like he would suddenly turn up in your
yard and say, “My horse just foaled. Do you want to come and see it?”
So you’d sit on the fender of the tractor and hang on for dear life and go rattlin’ down the
road, and just look at the new horse and just get right off on it. And then maybe you’d
walk down through his fish trap and there might be a Dolly [Varden trout] or whatever in
it. So you’d just bring the Dolly back and sit there and chat and clean the fish out back on
a piece of wood. He’d start the wood stove in the house then he’d cook ya a Dolly and some spuds from last year. You know these were really lovely, simple little interactions that I found so satisfying. It was very, very spiritually satisfying.

Spiritually satisfying or not, living in Riverside was difficult once children came along. She and her husband decided that for the sake of their two daughters, they would have to live nearer a town. They purchased property near a larger centre so the girls could go to a regular school. This worked briefly, but after all the work and love that went into building up the Riverside property, she had to give it up when her marriage broke down a few years later. She was now a single mother, with all the challenges of raising two children in the near-poverty that too often characterizes single-parent families. Obviously a resourceful woman, she took up the challenge:

I was standing there with a BA in my hand, unable to find any kind of employment that paid more than minimum wage and not being in a position to create a job for myself. That was a real dilemma because Deirdre and Fanny were going through this major upheaval in their lives. I really felt strongly that the most important thing to do was to be there for them and defer my own stuff until I could actually in good conscience go off and do it at a point when they would both understand what I was doing and why and not be victimized by it. So, I made the choice to continue living in poverty for a few more years and that’s basically what we did, we just sort of held steady. I was lucky enough to get local work like at the nursery out here, seasonally. It bought the propane in winter and stuff.
She worked in a bookstore and for a friend who had a forestry consulting company. She also did some catering before finally going back to school to become a certified teacher. Now she lives about five minutes down the road from me and grows a fantastic garden, raises chickens and goats, and teaches in the public school system.

Narrative Summary

These are profiles of five strong, adventurous women who went back to the land, planning to live a subsistence lifestyle. Each woman made a series of moves from her childhood home to land in the B.C. interior. They all followed similar steps in their lives, finding a partner, building or buying a home, having children. In this, they followed a stage process laid down by culture and biology. However, each did it in her own, individual way. Gloria, Zerbina and Debra purchased homes with electricity and running water. Their challenges were less physical in some ways, but given the remoteness and isolation of the location, equally challenging in the social and emotional areas. Their experiences were somewhat different from those of Maya and Audre, who chose to “take it all backwards” from the shirt to the wool, in Maya’s words. They participated in building their homes and did a great deal of hand labour, such as grinding grain for tofu (Maya) and scattering seed for a newly cleared pasture (Audre).

I stated at the outset that the five women I interviewed for this study are adventuresses, idealists, and dreamers. I did not realize at the beginning how big a part that would play in their willingness to reflect upon and transform their interior landscapes. Each of them left the comfortable middle-class environment in which she was raised to risk a new beginning in unknown territory. During her efforts at an alternative lifestyle or subsistence living, each reflected upon her circumstances. Each articulated ongoing appraisal and reappraisal of her
external roles and her internal needs. All of them were willing to make changes. Their earlier willingness to make change, to adapt and improvise, to take risks and accept challenges, allowed each one to change her circumstances once again to go to a new place and create a new life yet again. Was this a transformation in meaning schemes and perspectives? Did the women’s fundamental premises change in relation to the subsistence lifestyle, their roles in their back-to-the-land movement, and/or to the direction in life? The answers are unique for each of them, and none appear to be a result of a disorienting dilemma which directly precipitated critical reflection. Rather, each of these women appears to have previously established a mode of reflection and appraisal of their lives.

In Mezirow’s (1978) terms, they already were “emancipated learners,” that is, critically reflective of their assumptions and premises, before their move back to the land. It is outside the purview of this study to determine how they came to be emancipated learners prior to their back-to-the-land experiences. Instead, I will examine the parts of the transformation cycle that pertain to each. Following that, I will move beyond transformative learning to discuss some characteristics that apparently enabled them to adapt and adjust to new circumstances.

The brief descriptions I have given do not begin to do justice to the flavour of their lives nor to the strength, adventurousness and vitality of these women. They serve primarily to set the stage for an analysis of the transformations that took place as they left their back-to-the-land existence and returned to mainstream society. Having set the stage, I now turn to the more difficult task of teasing out themes of relevance to Mezirow’s adult transformative learning theory.
Chapter Six

Beyond Transformative Learning: The Role of Gumption, Perseverance and Self-Reliance in Academic Achievement

“Improvise, Adapt, Overcome!”

—My sister’s slogan when she cooked at the Stewart Hotel, Stewart, B.C.

Initially, I hypothesized a transformation in the lives of the women I selected as participants in my study. I assumed that, since each had left a subsistence, back-to-the-land lifestyle to return to mainstream society, she had changed her basic ways of thinking about, looking at, and living life. I assumed the completion of the transformation equation postulated by Mezirow (1990, 1991, 1995; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978), beginning with a disorienting dilemma and moving through various stages of critical reflection and reappraisal of meaning perspectives. What I found was both similar to and different from Mezirow’s theory. The differences likely stem from the differences in research purpose and population. Mezirow (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) studied women enrolled in college re-entry programs and applied his findings to an evaluation of the programs. From the surveys, he postulated a transformation equation. Many of the women in his study had returned to education because of a perceived lack or disjuncture in their personal lives. Their expressions of lack or disjuncture embedded a deficit orientation in transformative learning theory. Furthermore, Mezirow generalized his findings of this specific, goal-oriented population to the adult population at large.

In my study, I aimed to examine presumed transformations in the lives of women who had gone back to the land and then returned to mainstream society. I found it difficult to apply
his theory to time – up to 15 years – under study. The basic elements of the transformation equation are a disorienting dilemma combined with critical reflection and reappraisal. These in turn may lead to a change in meaning perspectives. A disorienting dilemma, by definition, takes place within a reasonably short period of time. For example, while the effects of job loss, marital separation, marriage, or the birth of a child have long-term impacts, the specific event occurs over days, weeks or months. Rather than a single disorienting dilemma, I heard evidence that the women reflected on daily events over a long period. It appears that the time frame of this study reduced, negated, or erased the importance of the individual events that paved the way for a return to mainstream society. I suggest that the women I studied made only minor changes in their meaning perspectives when they left the land. My point, then, is that no complete transformation cycle occurred in any case, but that elements of the transformation cycle formed part of each woman’s of adaptation to the vicissitudes of her life.

In the subsequent discussion, I discuss the major points of Mezirow’s theory that specifically relate to the women in this study and consider relevant elements of the transformation cycle. I elaborate on the learning domains and learner types outlined earlier (in chapter 2) as they apply to these participants. This section, called “Application of Transformative Learning Theory,” applies key elements of transformative learning to the narratives. This is followed by “Beyond Transformative Learning” where I address key findings that are not directly linked to adult transformative learning theory, but whose importance were emphasized by the women through their narratives. These findings fall primarily into the categories of self-concept and personal values. My participants’ comments often reflect the contextualization of learning described by the feminist epistemologists (Belenky et al. 1986;
hooks, 1995; Kitchener & King, 1990; Stalker, 1996; Tisdell, 1993). In the end, it appears that those personal characteristics that allowed or encouraged the women to move back to the land were essentially the same ones that led them to return to mainstream society. These characteristics included tolerance of flux, the facility for improvisation, and an ability to adapt to circumstances. The time on the land developed latent strengths that gave the women confidence to overcome the challenges of life. I argue that these personal characteristics, newfound strengths, and increased capabilities form the foundation of their successful adaptation to new circumstances.

**Application of Transformative Learning Theory**

**Disorienting dilemma.** In the following section, I discuss the narratives as they relate to the disorienting dilemma. Generally, the narratives did not reveal specific disorienting dilemmas that led to a rejection of the back-to-the-land lifestyle. Although it is possible, even likely, that disorienting dilemmas occurred within that time frame, only Zerbina’s encounter with Hank, the logger, described what could be considered a disorienting dilemma directly related to subsistence living. In some cases, a disorienting dilemma may have occurred before the time period I considered in the study. For example, Debra told me that:

I realized as a freshman in college when I went on this peace march that there was no way that I was gonna change society. It was one of the things that sort of crushed me. I realized, “People are not nice out there,” you know. “This is not a pleasant environment, so I’m gonna get away from it!”
That experience – immediate recognition of a challenge to her sociolinguistic premises – initiated a transformation cycle summed up in that brief paragraph. However, no such event heralded her move back to mainstream society.

Zerbina’s experience, both her emotional response to Lakeside, and her choice to move away, were very different from the others’. Her emphatic assertion that she knew within six months of moving to Lakeside that she did not want to live there may be considered a disorienting dilemma. When I asked her directly if she experienced a disorienting dilemma during those first months on the land, she couldn’t remember a specific one; instead, she stated emphatically, “The whole thing was a disorienting dilemma. I am not speaking figuratively here.” My own analysis suggests that her disorienting dilemma was initiated during the incident with Hank, the logger who threatened to clear the land of trees, then to increase the price of the land. His environmental pillaging, coupled with other comments he made during their exchange, indicated to her a fundamental crudeness that she abhorred. Looking back, she reflects that the beauty of the land was what had drawn her there in the first place, along with her fantasy of “my own little piece of paradise”; however, that was not enough to feed her psychologically. Even so, she remained at Lakeside for fifteen years, testing the limits of the vision that had brought her there.

Lakeside was not conducive to Zerbina’s personal growth and expansion. Instead of being a peaceful retreat into nature, she found it stultifying. Worse, the isolation and remoteness of Lakeside conflicted with her feminist values and her beliefs about herself and her needs. Zerbina is the only one who may be said to have transformed her premises as a result of her experience at Lakeside. She no longer values remoteness for its own sake. She still revels in the
beauty of the land and relishes occasional weekend of solitude with like-minded friends. For example, this winter she went to a cabin to cross-country ski with friends, and loved the physical exercise, the clean, fresh air, and the quiet of the cabin. However, she no longer imagines that she wants to live in those conditions.

In contrast, leaving the subsistence lifestyle was emotionally difficult for both Audre and Debra. Audre and her family left so her daughters could go to bigger schools. Shortly after this, her marriage broke down, and she believed that the constraints of being a single parent made it impossible to return to Riverside, even if she had wanted to. Debra followed her husband in his return to higher education. Economics dictated much of that choice, and they, too, wanted to provide greater opportunities and more security for their families. Each of them valued their time on the land, and would have liked for it to continue. Neither Audre nor Debra articulated a discrete event that caused her to rethink her move to the land. Instead, each of them adapted to new experiences and circumstances, accommodating herself to the demands of the competing values of work and family.

Gloria and her family moved simply because it seemed to be time to do so. They had done much of what they had come to Lakeside to do: build a log home, live beside a lake, grow healthy food, and start a family. Although she was a willing participant in their first back-to-the-land endeavour, she had been reluctant to move to Lakeside. And, in spite of the fact that she was proud of her ability to provide healthy food for her family, she knew she needed something that Lakeside did not offer. As she explained it, “I just wanted to do something else. It’s hard to say because I don’t want to denigrate that lifestyle whatsoever, and I’m not. But maybe you just do something for a while and it’s time to do something else.” Gloria did not describe any
specific event that led them to decide to move; instead, she attributed the decision she and her husband made to move to an accumulation of time and experiences, along with a desire for new horizons and challenges.

Maya never did truly leave the back-to-the-land lifestyle. She remained at Lakeside after her marriage broke up, staying until her son moved away to attend school. The disorienting dilemma of divorce had no effect on her desire to live a subsistence lifestyle. In fact, she became more firmly entrenched:

I had more support than I ever had because I although I wasn’t ready to let go of my marriage the first time around, when it was time for us to actually part, Lakeside was where I wanted to be if I was going to be by myself. I felt very confident by myself. I was fine. So I made tofu for a while.

Making tofu provides an apt symbol for the self-sufficient, organic principles that embody the back-to-the-land movement. Maya cooked the beans on her wood stove, using water she hauled in buckets, ground them by hand, and pressed them into tofu. No modern conveniences were employed in the process. As she told me, “Time was more precious than money,” and using her time this way was compatible with her ideal way of living. Today, she has moved to an even more remote location where she continues to heat with wood, live off the power grid, and carry water from the gravity-fed pipe outside her door.

An implicit aspect of the disorienting dilemma is the assumption that an individual is passive and lacks agency. The disorienting dilemma, also called a “trigger event” (Brookfield 1986) or a “life crisis” (Cranton, 1994), is an external event that causes a response in the person. In other words, the individual is acted upon and responds to unpleasant stimulus. This passive,
reactive model does not account for the changes that I heard in the narratives or saw in the lives of the women back-to-the-landers. They were active agents in their lives from the first decision to adopt a subsistence lifestyle. During their back-to-the-land lives, they made choices and took action based upon events as they unfolded, but there was little to suggest that they waited passively for events to determine their choices. Even the women who were less happy with the Lakeside environment were not passive. Gloria, who found herself isolated with four small children, reached beyond that world to accept the challenge of creating and maintaining a library. Zerbina’s challenge was to persuade her husband that continued existence at Lakeside was not in their best interests. Although it took her 15 years to do so, nothing in the interviews or my recollection suggests that she was a passive, reactive agent. Instead, she taught music under grueling conditions of climate and distance that would have stopped a weaker woman. When Brad was finally ready to move on, she was prepared with plans and ideas of her own about where and how they would live.

It is tempting to assume that Mezirow (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) expressed the initiation of the transformation cycle as passive and reactive because he studied women’s re-entry programs. Women traditionally have been perceived as passive, and their roles have been deemed less important than the active and more visibly social roles adopted by men. Women are not passive; they initiate, as well as respond to, events (French, 1985; Leon, 1997; Miles, 1993). Historically, the findings of scientific studies done on populations of white males have been applied to other, diverse groups. Mezirow inverted that practice by applying his findings of re-entry women to all adults; however, the premise that women respond to conditions and events
rather than creating new conditions or initiating events, underlies his study, and consequently, adult transformative learning theory.

Theoretically, a disorienting dilemma starts a cycle of reflection and action. Supposing a disorienting dilemma occurs, reflection uncovers distortions in premises that inhibited the learner's way of thinking, consequently constricting the possibilities for action. However, even without a disorienting dilemma, premises can be questioned, challenged and changed. In the following section I discuss the premises within the context of the back-to-the-land lifestyle and the women's decisions to move back to mainstream society.

Premises. We develop premises about every aspect of our lives. They are the assumptions that underlie our meaning perspectives, and the lenses through which we view the world. As such, they determine how we respond to circumstances, experiences, and situations. They affect our interactions with the environment and others. Premises that are narrow and constrictive, or that inhibit, limit, or restrict an individual's ability to perceive and act knowingly in aspects of the world are described by Mezirow (1991) as distorted premises. We develop epistemic, psychological, and sociolinguistic premises that inform our ways of thinking about knowledge and knowledge acquisition, how we think about and assess ourselves, and how we interact with and make assumptions about our social world. Movement toward premises that are more permeable and inclusive and that better describe our world may initiate or support changes in our habitual ways of perceiving comprehending and remembering -- that is to say, in our "meaning perspectives" (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1978, 1991).

Mezirow (1991) suggests three general meaning perspectives: sociolinguistic, epistemic, and psychological. It is self-evident that each of us has a wide range of premises in each of the
various perspectives. For the purposes of this study, I discuss only those textually coded premises that I perceived as relevant to learning and education or to the back-to-the-land experience. For example, premises that reflected a particular participant’s spiritual or religious values were coded, but did not add to my analysis of her learning style, epistemological development, or point on the transformation cycle. However, if a woman had verbalized the view that she moved either back-to-the-land or to mainstream society because of her spiritual or religious views, those premises and their coding would have been pertinent to and included in my analysis.

Sociolinguistic premises. To examine whether these women experienced a transformation in sociolinguistic meaning perspectives, I considered their initial premises about the land and subsistence lifestyle, and compared those with their premises after leaving the land. Why did they go back to the land in the first place? Gloria, Maya, and Zerbina articulated concerns about the society they lived in and their personal safety in that society. Gloria told me:

We were probably both sort of worried about nuclear war and we thought that, living in the middle of nowhere, we could be self-sufficient because there wouldn’t be so many people around. You had the land, you had the resources. It was a safer place to be.

Maya’s reasons were more political; she said, “I was sick and tired of the way people my age were immediately – well, not the women, but the men were – it was assumed that they should be going out there and dying for their country.” Zerbina echoed that sentiment, saying, “We thought society as we knew it was going to collapse. We really believed that.” They considered their options, and decided that a more rural existence would be safer. They also spoke about the value of a better natural environment. Each articulated this in her own way:
Gloria: I can see that having clean water is important. You might not have to have it running into a dishwasher, but clean water and a clean environment is important. I mean, 20-25 years ago, we were worried about pollution, and all sorts of things, and we still are.

Maya: I think we wanted, not a pure life, but I think we wanted a clean life, you know, clean living where the air was clean, the water was clean, you could go to a mountain stream and drink it and not have to worry about it being polluted by somebody's diapers being put in it.

Zerbina: We were very idealistic, we wanted to get out of the consumer kind of mindset. We wanted to live a more pure lifestyle. I read Thoreau when I was in high school and I think that really was a strong influence. I think I always wanted to have sort of my own little acre, my own little 200 acres. My own little piece of paradise.

Although these three talked in terms of both society and environment, Debra and Audre spoke about their motives in more personal, and less global or political terms:

Debra: You asked the question about environmental concern. I think for me, it was a selfish environmental concern. You know, living in the purest environment possible so I could have the best food and the quality of life and air and water. So, it was a sort of selfish environmental concern. It wasn't a global concern.

Audre: I really was drawn to [hand tools] and to the whole natural environment. Maybe it was because I was a child of the fifties and without realizing it, I was responding to the sterility of life, and not finding that there was much satisfaction in it or there wasn't much appealing to me about it. I guess I didn't care about money enough to want it badly enough. It wasn't a political decision.
Other ideas they articulated included a desire to grow their own food, to be self-sufficient and not reliant on mainstream society, and to form networks with close friends. The premises underlying these ideas were assumptions that food grown organically was healthier and demanded less of the environment than agribusiness crops maintained by chemicals and high water use. Social collapse would be followed by chaos, cut supply lines, or possible violence, but self-sufficiency would allow them to survive and care for their families. Values of networks of close friends and shared work, and communal or cooperative living, sprang from the assumption that social contacts are psychologically rewarding and functionally practical. Community and cooperation were also valued on the basis of a rejection of the competitive model of social organization.

These premises – with the exception of fear of imminent social collapse, and the felt necessity to be self-sufficient – remained essentially intact. Each of these women has maintained her connection to the land through gardening and raising food for herself or her family. Debra and her family, rented a 200-acre farm on the East Coast. Maya, in northern B.C., grows cantaloupe, squash, tomatoes, and cucumbers in a greenhouse, while outdoors the Swiss chard and broccoli – hardy crops – require plastic cloches to keep them from untimely summer frosts. On Vancouver Island, Gloria has small raised beds of tomatoes and basil, and proudly shows me the three-year-old grape vine that is already bearing fruit. Zerbina plans to stop growing tomatoes because her entire garden is infested with a blight; however, each year she has raised enough tomatoes and peppers to make salsa for a year. In the Central Interior Audre grows a huge garden and raises chickens and goats. Although Audre and Gloria never aspired to community living, the others had experimented in one way or another with alternative forms of
living. None of the women presently espouses community living, and each lives in her own version of a single-family unit, some with partners, some single parenting, and some simply single. The desire for self-sufficiency has found new expression in a recognition of self-reliance, competence, and capability.

Epistemic premises. According to Mezirow, epistemic premises are assumptions about the nature and use of knowledge. I did not query the women directly about their attitudes toward education, preferring to let their views arise naturally. I gleaned some notion of their epistemic views from the level of education each had attained prior to her back-to-the-land years, and some from comments volunteered in the course of our discussions. Each of the women I interviewed had attended at least one year of university before she went back to the land, suggesting that each was conversant with and capable of succeeding in the academic environment. I do not interpret their attendance at post secondary institutions as evidence of success in academia, but as evidence that they had successfully negotiated secondary schooling. Thus, their views of themselves would have incorporated belief in their ability to learn.

Their premises about learning and knowledge remained essentially the same during their back-to-the-land experiences, as they applied that ability to learn to new and different circumstances. Audre prized her ability to learn for its survival value, telling me, “As long as you know how to learn something, you’ll never want for survival skills or whatever. You learn whatever presents itself before you as an opportunity to do so.” “Surviving,” in the context of the late 20th century meant adapting to circumstances and making the best of what was at hand. The women developed flexibility and adaptability to overcome difficulties. As Gloria explained, “I know that that experience is what led me to know that if you don’t have the proper tool, use what
you've got because you didn't always have the right thing, but you made do." Further elaborating on the concept of improvisation, she told me this story:

Once we were down here on the Island at Mount King. We were gonna go skiing, had all the kids – this was probably 12 years ago – and we didn't know it was closed. We got stuck in the snow, in the Suburban, on the road to Mount King, and we dug ourselves out with a frying pan. I mean, how many people would think that "We don't have a shovel, we didn't even bring the chains because we were coming down here!" None of our tools that you normally have up north. What did we have? A frying pan. We weren't stuck very badly, just a little bit, so we made it slick underneath and pushed the car back on the road. You learn those things that, if you don't have a shovel, use a frying pan. And I still have that frying pan!

Gloria spoke of surviving in terms of overcoming a difficult situation in the potentially dangerous environment of a closed mountain road. Similarly, in most back-to-the-land contexts, surviving meant coping with isolation, lack of tools or communications systems, or distance from medical attention. In contrast, Debra thought about her learning and survival in a deeply personal way. She related her learning on the land to her ability to withstand pain and loss:

I look back on that period and I really appreciate myself. I can say I learned that I can do anything that I have to do and that I am an organized person who can handle a lot of responsibility. It's funny, but I think all those changes I went through then almost helped me prepare for the changes of losing my father and my husband in the same year.

The thread of being able to do anything, to adapt to situations, and to cope with difficult circumstances ran through all of the narratives. An additional insight into epistemic views came
from Zerbina. As I had done with the others, I asked her what differences she saw between herself and those who had elected to remain. We speculated together about this question. Earlier in the evening, I had told her about an adult educator who described the literacy learners she worked with in an isolated part of B.C. as concrete thinkers with a disproportionately high number of learning disabled. This idea captured some of what Zerbina had already internalized but not verbalized about Lakeside, and expresses her epistemic views:

Z: What we were talking about at dinner was very intriguing to me. The possibility that people who live there, who are actually attracted there, happy there, and stay there, are people who might not be comfortable in the mainstream society that maybe have learning disabilities. A lot those people are very physical people, and they learn in kinesthetic ways and really concrete visual stuff. And that's the kind of people that were there. And I think, if you're not a bookish type, you might be quite happy there. I'm a bookish type, so I wasn't.

M: I might be putting words in your mouth, but would you say that people who live there are happy without that level of abstraction?


I kind of expected some aspects of it, at least, to be more contemplative. [I saw] a lot of spirituality in nature and so I thought these people must, too. But, no they were not there for contemplative reasons.
Elaborating on the notion of concrete learners\textsuperscript{7}, Zerbina gave the example of one back-to-the-land woman who did the plumbing and even hooked up the propane system in the log home she built with her husband. While she acknowledged the contribution instrumental learning had made to her sense of self confidence, she added the idea of being “bookish.” Contemplation and abstraction are key terms for Zerbina’s epistemic premises. Learning is abstract and knowledge provides tools for contemplation. These are the views she took with her to the land, and they resisted the challenges of her subsistence existence. Returning to mainstream society meant that she was better able to express her own learning. Like four of the five participants, she returned to her interrupted post-secondary education, attaining a degree and a certification.

The above examples can be interpreted to provide some of the women’s epistemic premises: Learning is pragmatic. Learning has survival value. The women can learn and put their learning to use in physical and emotional/psychological contexts. Learning arises from the environment. Learning can be used in contexts different from the originating context. Although each woman’s experience is separate and independent, I attribute these premises to all of the women, for each discussed in her own way her view that learning included an ability to do anything and to overcome adverse circumstances. The exception to my attribution is Zerbina’s ideas about concrete and abstract thinkers, which may have come from her subsequent training.

\textsuperscript{7} Deconstructionists and feminists remind us that using labels such as “concrete vs. abstract learners” is inherently dangerous, assuming, as most labels do, notions of superiority and inferiority. I will return later to the questions raised by the concept of concrete versus abstract learners.
as a teacher. None of the other participants discussed the concepts of concrete and abstract thinking, ideas that are paid considerable attention in the education field.

The women’s epistemic views appear to have been developed in their formative years, as evidenced by their attendance at post-secondary institutions and their willingness to accept the challenge of moving back to the land where they adopted a new lifestyle. No one articulated challenges to her epistemic views, so it can be inferred that none of them experienced a transformation in their epistemic meaning perspectives. However, the meaning perspectives do not stand alone, and, in fact, overlap in significant ways. For example, ways of thinking about knowledge and learning have a significant base in individual psychology. In applying Mezirow’s (1991) epistemic meaning perspectives to these interviews, I used the women’s stories about overcoming adverse circumstances as evidence of their epistemic premises. These stories can equally be applied to the women’s psychological premises, described below.

Psychological premises. In his discussion of psychological premises, Mezirow (1991) elaborates upon distortions that block the individual’s functioning. These psychological blocks, generated from a traumatic episode in childhood, prevent the individual from taking appropriate action. The individual is immobilized because she fears that she may regret what she has done (pp. 139-143). Such inhibitions probably occur in everyone’s life, and I suspect that the women I interviewed experienced some such blocks in various areas of their lives. One may, for example, choose to not confront one of her children’s teachers because of a childhood experience that left her fearful of confronting authority figures. In her “analysis of regret” she could say, “I may regret taking this action because the teacher may take it out on my child.” This kind of premise distortion is beyond the scope of this study. Here I limit myself to consideration of psychological
premises that describe the women's perceptions of themselves in relation to their ability to succeed in the wilderness environment and to achieve the lifestyle they had envisioned when they made the decision to move back to the land, and subsequently, to leave the subsistence lifestyle.

Some of the psychological premises upon which these women made their decisions to go back to the land include willingness to venture, openness to change, expectation of positive outcomes, and belief in their skills and capabilities. My interpretation of these premises is based on their initial choice to leave their middle-class childhoods, explicitly or implicitly rejecting the political, social, environmental mores that had shaped them. None of the women left their homes under financial or physical duress, as had many historic immigrants. Instead they were impelled by personal ideologies or hopes and dreams. In this section, I use their words to describe their initial impulse to move back to the land, the psychological premises that arose from their experiences there, and the stories they used to illustrate and elaborate on these themes.

In each case, the women I interviewed had personal courage and a desire to "look over the mountain." As Audre explained to me, "There was always this urge to just see the world and learn from the world rather than just go to school, look at it in books." Or, in Maya's words, had I been raised on a farm and had single-paned windows and had to plastic them against the cold, that would be the last thing I would be interested in doing when I got out of there. Because I hadn't done any of this before, it was part of the adventure so everything was okay.

Each rejected essential elements of her known world, and left her family and friends to venture in a new arena. For most of these women, emigration was part of their heritage.
Zerbina's father was an Austrian who left his homeland as a young man because of the Nazi threat. Debra's father was the son of Italian immigrants, and her mother was of Norwegian descent. Gloria's roots were deep in the Mormon soil of Utah, which perhaps explains her relative reluctance to move so far away from home. Daughters of immigrants and pioneers, these women had few physical dangers to overcome, but the challenges they had to meet were equally hard. They set themselves the tasks of raising their families with good, healthy food in a safe environment. Their adventures were mundane, everyday things made extraordinary because they were simultaneously outside their own previous experience but within the broader experience of women everywhere. Consider the problem of diapers:

Maya: The laundromat is in [a small community two hours away] your car does not make it up the hill, it's two miles, walking with the toboggan full of pre-rinsed solid, because they're ice cold, diapers like lead on the toboggan. With backpacks with the kids, on snowshoes, chug, chug, chug out the road. It was just absurd. And we did it!

M: Why cloth diapers instead of Pampers?

Maya: Well, Pampers are plastic and they go burn and burn them. The issue was, we didn't want it to be hard on the environment, so it if was harder on us, that was okay because we could handle that work. Plastic wasn't natural. I think it's really important, the natural part and who does the work, you know. If they had recycling-plastic-diapers places, it might be different now. But I think the fact that they were disposable and that they didn't decompose and left a mess was why I chose [to walk] through the snow with the diapers on the toboggan, to go and wash them at the laundromat when I didn't wash them at home. We had a wringer washer and did that in summer, you know, slosh slosh.
But when there were three kids in diapers, it was too much for the well and we just didn’t have enough water for everything.

This story reflects both sociolinguistic premises ("We didn’t want it to be hard on the environment") and the psychological premise that she had the strength and will to undertake this physically challenging task. Far from being resentful, or considering this a hardship, Maya felt almost privileged to be doing this kind of work. It was a way of life she had chosen, and it had compensations she could not find in her previous home.

Maya reveled in her personal strength and the joy of movement in a cold, crystal world. This attitude of wonder was reflected in varying ways by other women. Debra spoke with awe of their courage and foolishness:

I thought nothing of walking in five miles to a fishing camp with my sister and her husband at the time. It was our first winter in British Columbia, we had no idea what we were doing, and there was probably at least four feet of snow on the ground! We had to snowshoe five miles and we almost didn’t make it. We got to this fishing camp and we were going to be there for a week or ten days ’til somebody was going to come and get us or pick us up or something. I got really sick, so I just curled up in bed for five days, but I’ll never forget that snowshoeing experience. We had no experience snowshoeing, but you’re twenty-one, twenty-two years old and you think you can do anything. And we did it.

The beauty of the land and the environment was a thread running through most of the narratives, frequently appearing as novel experiences with unique characters. Zerbina’s story of Hank, the logger, is the antithesis of that love of land. It created a negative backdrop for the rest
of her experiences with the local population. In contrast, Audre found compatible characters, who nurtured her love of the land:

There was an old Norwegian guy who was magic. He was wonderful. He lived in a little homestead up on the mountain with cedars, just these huge cedars all around, and a creek running down to his pond outside his door and every building on his place was handmade. . . . The skis in the barn were handmade and his sleds were just the most beautiful wooden creations. I used to go help him from time to time or I’d go get him to bring him to parties and stuff ’cause he was quite frail. So we’d drive up in the sleigh in the wintertime and pick him up and throw a blanket over him and take him to a party.

He did neat things, like he’d whittle these cool little wooden things with balls inside them. He’d whittle them right inside! And whistles, he could make whistles, and oh, just oodles and oodles of stuff.

Audre delighted in the people whom she met at Riverside, and was equally delighted by the odd experiences she had as a result of befriending them:

I remember one particular time when I ended up having supper at the old Norwegian’s and he was driving me on his tractor and by that time it was dark. You know how the toads come out in the summertime on the road? Well, there were just toads everywhere on the road and as soon as I realized it, I was going, “Ohh! Oh, be careful! Be careful!” and these toads were just exploding all over the road as the tractor came roaring along. He just slowed way down and he was driving all over this road. So it took me an hour to get home. (Laughs.)
Experiences like this were not for the faint of heart, and it required a special outlook to find and enjoy people like the old Norwegian. The psychological premises underlying Audre’s story include the value she put on handmade items, the immediacy of creating things from what was available. Other premises are more difficult to verbalize. How to describe the premises about travel by horse and sleigh? I remember my own experience with a cutter and pony we used to drive my son to the school bus during his first year at school. Exposure to snow or sun, always cold, the quiet shushing of cutter skis, and the clop-clopping of hooves against the hard-packed snow, the cooperation between human and animal – it is virtually impossible to express the aesthetics, the pure sensuality of that experience. It is, I think, a safe assumption that Audre valued these same things when she took the old Norwegian to the party. From these stories, it is clear that she cherished also the novelty of travelling by ancient tractor, and was horrified by squashing toads on the journey home. Her premises included the sanctity and value of non-human life. As well, she appreciated the practical knowledge and the local history that the oldtimer represented.

Sometimes the stories about the “oldtimers” had a comic quality to them. Zerbina laughs as she remembers this event:

The famous Halloween party. Do you remember Alvina? Normally Alvina wore bras that made her tits do this and they were like Viking bras, like armour. And then her hair was big and sprayed and she also had complete set of false teeth and she wore lots of makeup. For the party, Alvina didn’t wear her teeth, didn’t wear her makeup, didn’t wear a bra, didn’t do her hair, and that was it. That was her costume. And she went in just a sweat suit with a baseball cap. You know what? I didn’t recognize her. Nobody recognized her.
And she thought it was hilarious! Of course there was Roger dressed as a girl, and Dudley dressed as a mummy, who actually thought that Roger was a girl and put the make on him.

Zerbina’s pleasure in challenging social norms is clear in this anecdote. She mentions two ways in which residents either directly challenged or inadvertently subverted society’s dictates: Alvina’s defiance of notions of women’s beauty, and Dudley’s innocent attraction to a member of the same sex.

In various ways, the above stories all exemplify the women’s desire for new experience, their faith in their ability to adapt to and overcome obstacles or challenges they set themselves, their appreciation of natural aesthetics, or their subversive pleasure in transgressing social norms. These were not the only exemplars of their psychological premises. Other obstacles and challenges came in the form of daily living. Here, the stories often cross the permeable “boundaries” of sociolinguistic and psychological premises.

On the subject of feminism, Debra talked about her evolving ideas of her role as a woman:

My initial response was I was just kind of traditional. I wasn’t that involved in the women’s movement. And then I started thinking about what I did. I actually wrote a little presentation for CBC radio, a little blurb on the history of the women’s movement in Canada. Then I was reading through my notes about something else and, and ran across a reference to you know, Betty Friedan, the *Feminine Mystique* and I really don’t remember when I read that. Was it at that time or what? I think probably one of the
reasons I got involved at those levels was because I was going through a questioning of myself and my relationship. What was my role?

During this self-questioning, Debra was maintaining the household and doing the support work that farm women have traditionally done. She reflected on that role and its potential for stifling her personal development:

I remember finishing cooking breakfast and getting the kids settled, then starting lunch, 'cause I had to feed people. And then you finish lunch and you have a little time and you start dinner. I was not, to my recollection, resentful of that at all. I was very thankful I could live at home and enjoy that lifestyle and I didn’t mind being put in that role. But there were issues more closely related to my husband at the time and how we interacted. I didn’t want to lose myself because I am a giver and a nurturer and I wanted to watch for that. The process of talking with other women and dealing with who we were even in the context of having young children and being pregnant and going through that stage, trying to maintain your identity.

As she described her views at that time, she reflected on how she now perceives her younger self. Her statement reveals a negative assumption about feminism that may have prevented her from identifying with the feminist movement:

I look back and I don’t think I was an angry young woman at the time, but I remember one of the most powerful consciousness-raising sessions for me was when we were dealing with anger. Anger was a creative emotion and that was a totally new thing for me because in the context of my mother and father’s anger, that didn’t seem creative. But the women’s movement was looking at that from a different perspective – you know, why is
this happening and get to the roots – and so I know those were all important struggles. I would say to anybody who would ask me now that I’m a traditional woman in that I do like to cook, and I don’t mind doing laundry. I enjoyed my years at home with the family and I wouldn’t have had that any other way. But I guess I also would like to see that the person’s soul or identity does not get lost. So, that’s probably the core strength of the women’s movement for a lot of women is reminding you of your identity, your strengths and your rights. Especially for somebody like me, as I said, who is a nurturer. That’s an important thing to hang onto and it’s perhaps why I was as strong about it then as I was because that time in your life when you’re having children and newly married, and trying to fulfill all those other expectations, all those other roles, you neglect yourself.

Her use of the phrase “an angry young woman” suggests a premise that feminists were angry and dissatisfied. It reflects both a sociolinguistic premise that feminists were angry about their historic roles, and a psychological premise of personal enjoyment in the traditional role. Rather than articulating a feminist frame of anger, Debra developed premises that recast her anger in a creative and positive light. Her new premises allowed her to change the anger to a tool for maintaining her soul or identity in the face of nearly overwhelming demands from family and farm.

Debra identified an important challenge to stay-at-home women. In spite of the importance of the work done at home (Gloria’s “support worker”) or seasonal work, women’s primary roles were those of wife and mother. Like the women identified by Betty Friedan (1963), they may have suffered from “the problem that has no name.” Even more than their 1950s suburban counterparts, these women were isolated in their wildnerness homes. Only three
of the five women I interviewed had telephones, and these were on a party line, which limited their access. No one had television, so radio – especially the CBC – was the main link with the external world. Some of the isolation was welcome; some was not. Gloria talked about the challenges posed by her location:

The school was so far away that any extracurricular activities were frankly impossible for most parents. Maybe if they only had one or two children that were in the same thing. But having four, you really couldn’t say, “I’ll go pick up Jeremiah at 4:30 after gymnastics” because it might be forty below and you don’t want to bundle the three kids up and drive the ten miles. It’s just too much. There were not that many things for them to do in their own social context. Even for them, friends were very far away.

On the other hand, having four kids was not my idea of something to do, and frankly I was probably one of the worst people to have small children and be isolated, not having brothers or sisters myself. And there was really no support like there is now if you’re at your wits end. I didn’t like that. But there wasn’t that support – no grandparents, nothing. My kids never went to babysitters, which means that I never went anywhere without them, which gets to be a drag. But I wouldn’t say that’s so much an aspect of living up north, it’s more an aspect of our personalities.

Premises underlying their choice not to hire babysitters include the assumption that parents are the best caregivers for their children. Though Gloria attributes not hiring babysitters to her and her husband’s personalities, the concrete obstacles of population distribution, distance and climate may have had some influence on that choice. The babysitter pool was small. Our
friends were as much as 25 miles of gravel road away. The weather was often inclement. With no telephones, it was difficult to make the kind of contact that is taken for granted by less rural women. Gloria’s experience was echoed in some measure by Zerbina, who said simply, “A lot of the time I just felt lonely and isolated.”

It is difficult, sometimes, to separate myself from the experiences narrated by these women, for we were (excepting Audre) part of the fabric of each other’s lives. I, too, felt the isolation of being in a natural wonderland, where I experienced a profound loneliness and isolation. When my son was an infant, I was left alone with him for twelve hours or more a day with no telephone and no vehicle. The nearest neighbour was three miles away. In asserting that the underlying premises remained the same for most of the women, I am speaking also from my recollection of that time and the changes wrought in my life. As I grapple with the complexity of analysing narratives of that time and place, I look to my own experience of and reflections on that time. As I come to understand it more clearly, I recognize that while premises may not change, they may conflict with one another.

In discussing their choices to live on the land and to return to mainstream society, three of the women articulated premises about their expectations for their families and their children. Audre’s discussion of moving to town so her daughters could attend larger schools is echoed by Gloria’s comments that the school was so far away that her children could not participate in extra-curricular activities. Both of these views reveal premises about their children’s education that had a direct impact on their decision to leave the land. Each valued the social, athletic, and educational opportunities available in larger centres. In fact, Gloria’s son became a championship wrestler, something he could never have achieved had they remained at Lakeside.
Similarly, Debra and her family moved away from Lakeside because of falling prices for their lambs and wool. Their desire to live on the land and to gain their living from hard labour came into direct conflict with economics. For a time, they had put aside their dreams of living on the land, but that did not mean they rejected their premises about the values of that lifestyle. Her husband went back to graduate school, earning a Ph.D. that allowed him to provide a more secure and stable income for the family. Even so, they continued to honour their earlier beliefs by working the 200-acre farm they rented after he completed the degree and went to work in government.

Adult transformative learning theory accounts for specific events in an individual’s life. These events may be of relatively long duration, for example, the process of divorce or the events leading to job loss, but each has a fixed focal point, a disorienting dilemma, and each complete transformation cycle must, by definition, include changes in meaning perspectives. The long-term changes that I explored with the women back-to-the-landers do not fit neatly within this theoretical frame, although specific events during their time on the land may do so. Only Zerbina described a specific event that may be described as a disorienting dilemma. Her meeting with Hank, the logger, gave her a hint that the community into which she was moving included people with a vastly different point of view than her own. However, because that event preceded her time on the land, and she therefore could dismiss it as a single incident with an eccentric individual, it did not lead her to reflect on the premises that brought her to Lakeside. None of the remaining participants articulated a disorienting dilemma that instigated her move away from the subsistence lifestyle. Although the women had new experiences and learned new
skills, the basic premises which took them back to the land were essentially unchanged and the relevant meaning perspectives remained intact.

In spite of the hardships experienced, or perhaps because of them, the women I interviewed gained strength from that time on the land. Each of the women articulated this point; in fact, their individual awareness of their self-reliance, autonomy and independence was the strongest and most obvious common thread in their narratives. Their experiences and learning were too deeply embedded within the context of time and place to be neatly categorized within the boxes prescribed by adult transformative learning theory.

The Transformation Cycle

The elements of the transformation cycle go beyond the disorienting dilemma to include critical self-reflection, critical reappraisal of assumptions, alienation from past roles and expectations, provisional efforts at new roles, and planning a course of action. The women in this study engaged in each of these behaviors to a greater or lesser extent. The change was not linear, and the women moved recursively among the different stages. Zerbina put it in terms of the farming aspect of living off the land, telling me, “We did all that stuff [raising animals], and I found out that water was heavy, and that you had to carry it out to the animals every day in the winter because their troughs would freeze.” Gloria explained her reflection in social terms, saying, “Maybe it was time to start having more entertainment options, more social options.” Reflection and reappraisal led to trying on new roles. In many cases, these efforts included paid employment. When Maya went to work, it changed her in unforeseen ways: “I got to work at the band office. That’s when I became a member of society again. Even got a VISA card.”
Other efforts at new roles permitted the women to take up activities that they had abandoned in order to live on the land. Zerbina purchased a piano and worked toward her Grade 10 Royal Conservatory exam, in addition to teaching guitar lessons. Audre left the land, and then began learning new roles: “There were certainly aspects of my life that weren’t being fulfilled living out there and things that I did like to do and started doing more of once I came to town and was able to. Like singing. And I never would have gotten my teaching certificate.” Other steps in the transformation cycle include acquisition of needed new knowledge and skills and reintegration into social roles. The acquisition of new knowledge and skills often came hand-in-hand with trying on new roles. Debra worked hard with her husband when he was taking his doctorate, performing the research tasks that later led to her taking her own master’s degree in library science. Now a librarian, she completed the transformation cycle over a period of many years, not returning to her own academic career until ten years after she left Lakeside. Like Audre, Zerbina obtained a teaching certificate, and now teaches music. Maya’s work at the First Nation office led first to instructional work in a community college and to her current permanent position with a northern First Nation.

Although I reject the notion that a single disorienting dilemma occurred in the lives of the women I interviewed, I argue that each engaged in critical reflection about her life and her role(s) in the world. It is evident that reflection, reappraisal, trying on new roles, planning for change, and reintegration into society occurred independently of a specific disorienting dilemma or changes in premises. The women I interviewed did each of these things, suggesting that transformative learning theory might adequately account for specific episodes in a life, but its application is generally to small pieces of time, weeks or months, rather than to changes
occurring over years. These longer process of change are better called “transitions,” a word suggested by Mezirow (personal communication, April 2000) to describe these longer-playing changes. Transitions suggests a moment or space between two states.

Beyond Transformative Learning Theory: Epistemological Development and Learner Types

I initially posed the questions about the relationship of transformative learning to the back-to-the-land women’s experiences because I sought to understand the personal experiences and capacities that allowed four of the five to return to and successfully complete post-secondary education. I postulated that psychological or epistemological changes during that time led to their achievement when they had returned to mainstream society. After reviewing and analysing the narratives, I came to the conclusion that factors other than the women’s time on the land accounted for their ability to adapt. I struggled with how to frame my findings, and I realized during this struggle that I was blurring the lines between public education – the practices of educators and institutions – and the personal psychology that allowed the women to succeed upon their return to educational institutions. Educators want to know how to create conditions for learning. Institutions want to know how to manage the learning environment. These desires come into play only after the fact of the individual’s decision to return to academic study. I found that a key element in success for participants in this study was how the women perceived themselves as learners and knowers. In the following section, I make a provisional application of theory to their lives.

Learner types and epistemological development

This study examined women’s perceptions of their self-history over the course of many years. During this time, they developed in their learner styles (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) and
epistemological understandings (Belenky et al. 1986). For the most part, they were emancipated learners (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) when they moved back to the land, rejecting the inferior roles traditionally assigned to women, and seeking a place where they could act as full partners and complete beings. The narratives suggest that the women moved from emancipated learner to transformation learner over the course of years. In addition to the learner positions delineated by Mezirow (1978), I propose that the women also made changes in their epistemological development, moving from their youthful, tenuous balance between received knowledge and procedural knowledge, toward a more mature position of constructed knowledge. In the following section, I suggest that these positions are intertwined (Table 5). Conventional learners accept external authority and fit within the silenced and received positions of epistemological development. Likewise, threshold learners are open to new ways of viewing knowledge. Thus, they may be in the received, the subjective, or the procedural positions. Emancipated learners, alienated from the traditional roles assigned to women, may have developed the analytic powers required for the procedural epistemological stage. A transformation learner, like the constructed knower, rejects the definitions and limitations imposed on her by systems, procedures, culture, and society. She is confident in her ability to develop her own ways of thinking, being, and doing.

Categorizing and labeling is a risky business, and I hesitate to assert that all were in the same positions as learners and knowers. Still, accounting for personal belief systems, each clearly shows that she assimilated and analysed circumstances on her own terms. In writing this, I further caution myself not to see changes where changes do not exist, and to be wary of imposing theory on life.
Table 5

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<th>Relationship Between Epistemological Development and Learner Types</th>
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The women went back to the land in response to personal convictions, beliefs, and desires. In some respects they acted in defiance of the accepted social norms, but, perhaps paradoxically, they acted in accordance with an emerging philosophy and understanding of their social world. In varying degrees, each woman was capable of analyzing events and experiences in her life and felt confident in acting on that analysis. Zerbina, Gloria, and Maya all articulated their concerns about the war in Vietnam, and each rejected the belief of their parents’ generation that government acted in their best interests. This new “received wisdom” came through the music, through the nightly news, and through the networks of their friends. Their subjective interpretation of those events were in accordance with a newly popular desire to return to a safer environment. As well, the environmental concerns that were being publicly raised for the first time informed their decisions to move back to the land. Procedural learners, they took in the information coming from these sources and made choices based on their subjective interpretations of the importance of these events and circumstances, yet they continued their analysis within the new paradigm or system of interpretation.
Audre and Debra chose to go back to the land for less political, more personal reasons; however, they, too, took in the emerging world view of their generation and made choices that were against the social grain. In Gloria’s words, “It seemed other people were talking about doing it. Very few people really did it, but other people talked about doing it.” This faith in their ability to analyse circumstances and information puts them squarely in the procedural position of epistemological development during the period they moved back to the land. They had not moved into the position of constructed knowledge because they were still analyzing the situation with the analytical tools presented by the counterculture.

Alternatively, it is possible that they simply joined a flow of alienated young people, and leaped on the counterculture bandwagon. This interpretation seems unlikely, however. Even if that were the case initially, each woman’s decision to move to a more remote location came after some experience with the kind of life that she would be living. They variously tested the waters in Alaska, Illinois, Arizona, New Mexico, and Washington, so each of the women had tested the back-to-the-land lifestyle before she made a commitment to move to Lakeside or Riverside.

Likewise, each of the women had moved beyond the position of conventional knowers, who were fully assimilated within the traditional culture. Rejecting the then-current path of marriage, family and life in the suburbs, along with notions of government infallibility and environmental security, they had moved outside the American Dream established after World War II. I accept that each may have experienced a particular disorienting dilemma, unarticulated during the interviews, which led her to choose the back-to-the-land path; however, I believe that they had developed beyond the threshold learner position, during which the individual is actively
searching for new paradigms. Instead, at least three of the five had moved to the emancipated position, seeking a way of life that allowed fuller expression than that of suburban homemaker.

The possible exceptions were Maya, who told me, “My husband worked away from home, so he was gone most of the time and basically the person who brought the money into the relationship, and he supported us, and then I was the nurturer that kind of took that stuff,” and Debra, who verbalized her notion of being a “traditional woman.” Despite her assertions that she was a traditional woman, she articulated the desire to be strong, to be able to “do it all” like the farm wives. Recall, too, the program on women’s history she wrote for the radio, and her organization of a women’s consciousness-raising group and a women’s retreat. Although Maya and Debra articulated the wish to be homemakers, it became the default life on the land. Gloria and Zerbina both talked about the difficulties of being home with small children, their intellectual rejection of the idea that a woman’s fulfilment came from playing nurturer to her husband and family. Audre undertook “masculine” work on the land, telling me that she cleared and fenced land by hand.

Moving beyond the relative learner independence of the emancipated learner who feels alienated from the accepted social roles, the transformation learner recognizes the culturally imposed definitions of and limits on her self-conception, her lifestyle, and her options. She perceives the constraints of the rules by which she has been living. This new awareness initiates critical reflection about her life and her role(s) in the world. Similarly, the constructed knower is capable of integrating information received from the “authorities” and moving beyond the institutionally- or system-imposed analysis of the procedural learner. After their years of back-to-the-land experience, Zerbina, Maya, Gloria, and Audre came to the divergent knowing typical
of the constructed knower. This is clear in the choices each has made since she returned to mainstream society. This divergence is not readily apparent on the surface. Of these four, three have completed university degrees, two are teachers, three are employed in mainstream society, and one is completing graduate studies. These are relatively common choices, and in women who had recently received a secondary diploma, would constitute acquiescence to current social norms. Coming after a long period of living in a wholly different context, and in contrast to the far greater numbers of back-to-the-land women who remained at Lakeside, these choices offer evidence that these women are relatively unbounded by convention. Closer examination provides evidence of greater divergence than is immediately evident. Zerbina and Maya, both in long-term relationships, support their partners and families. Maya, though in a full-time, bookkeeping permanent position, lives “off the grid,” with only the running water that is gravity-fed through a pipe past her house. Audre raises her goats, chickens, garden, and daughter while working part-time. And at this writing, Gloria is in Mexico as part of the team of election observers. The sole exception is Debra, who completed a master’s degree and works as a librarian. The essential difference is not one of education or career, but a self-definition of the homemaker and nurturer. She continues to value the appellation of “traditional woman,” a term that each of the others rejects. It is interesting to note that she, too, has made choices “against the grain,” and that her self-definition is in conflict with the fact that she went to graduate school, a choice made by only a small minority of women.

I have spent a great deal of time on the learner types and epistemological position of these women because those go part way to explaining their success in their return to mainstream society and post-secondary education. They succeeded because of personal qualities that allow
them to adapt to circumstances, improvise solutions and overcome difficulties and challenges. Those can be catalogued through the learner types and epistemological positions, yet there is another, even more important theme that emerged which accounts for their ability to "improvise, adapt, overcome!" That quality, articulated by each, is self-reliance.

**Self-reliance: "I can do anything"**

The stories and anecdotes related by these women cover a broad spectrum of experience and points of view. They range from elegiac to bitingly funny to sad or nearly desperate. They demonstrate some essential contradictions of these women's lives, juxtaposing joyous celebration of nature and personal strength with the difficult aspects of isolation and disempowerment. As a group, these narratives provide a rich, textured picture of the women's lives. The most significant and obvious theme that helps account for the women's success in their return to academia and mainstream society was the belief that "I can do anything." Gloria was the first to use the term self-reliance, but it appeared in all the of the narratives in one way or another. The term means "reliance upon one's own efforts and abilities" (Webster's 1979, p.1043), but in the context of this study, it means "knowledge of one's ability to overcome obstacles and meet environmental, intellectual, and/or psychological demands with the tools currently available." This expanded definition embeds self-confidence within it; thus, I use the terms self-reliance and self-confidence interchangeably.

In educational psychology, the term self-efficacy is both a self-perception and an agent of action. As a self-perception, self-efficacy is the individual's judgments of her or his ability. The individual's beliefs about the sources of ability — a result of talent, a result of effort, or a result of the combination of both talent and effort — and experiences influence her or his assessment of
ability in a particular field of endeavor. The judgment of self-efficacy can develop from actual experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, or physiological arousal. Furthermore, self-efficacy acts as an agent, encouraging individuals to attempt those tasks they are confident they can perform, and discouraging them from tasks for which they have a negative perception of their ability (Stipek, 1993).

Most of the anecdotes associated with this theme suggest that instrumental learning—physical work based on a hypothesis testing model—had a significant effect on their self-perception. Each woman articulated this theme differently, depending upon her experience, personal psychology and context. Audre spoke in terms of learning to adapt, and—teacher to the core—expanded her thoughts to include her hopes for others:

You learn whatever presents itself before you as an opportunity to do so. That is a broad general theme. It’s why I found living in Riverside so satisfying. I would love it if other people had the means to feel that kind of satisfaction someway, somehow, somewhere in their lives, too.

The inherent satisfaction in learning reflects Audre’s view of her own ability to adapt and overcome challenges. Maya and Gloria echoed that sentiment, but couched it in pragmatic terms of maintenance, repair, and construction. They clearly articulated the instrumental learning that contributed to the women’s sense of self-efficacy and increased their self-confidence. Maya, the most committed then and now to a non-materialist, non-consumer ethic described it this way:

Maya: You could get by on a minimal amount of stuff. And if you could do that, you could do anything. That was part of it, too. I think the notion came after looking back:
“This is what I’ve done, well I can certainly do this.” You know, if I’ve been able to do all these things up well, I can do something else, too.

ME: So then you’d say that that’s affected you in the way you approach life?

Maya: Oh, definitely. You’ve got a lot of gumption, a drive to do what you set out to do. You know, these people weren’t a bunch of quitters, saying, “I think I’ll try this” and after a month going back. No. I think we all had ideals, and we weren’t driven people, but we had enough stick-to-itness to really get things done no matter what. And I think that stands us all in good stead now.

Maya pinpointed two key characteristics of back-to-the-landers: gumption and perseverance. Those qualities provide a subtext to the other anecdotes that describe the self-reliance and consequent self-confidence that the women gained. Gloria emphasized her ability to do complex physical tasks, not just wood chopping or water carrying that emphasized brute strength. In her view, courage to try is a key element in self-reliance:

Like building houses. Even now people will say something to me about “Oh, you couldn’t do that.” I tell ‘em, “Of course, I can do that!” I don’t have a fear of attempting projects, such as building things, gardening, just doing it yourself. I mean the worst you can do is, the worst you can do is nothing.

The other women echoed this sentiment, but not all of them incorporated the back-to-the-land skills into their mainstream lives. After years of attempting to prove to herself and others that she could overcome any obstacles and adapt to any circumstances, Zerbina was exhausted by the demands of what she perceived as an alien, sometimes hostile, environment. Although she found strength in the physical challenges, she rejected the usefulness of those skills:
Zerbina: I do think that believing in myself physically was a very big thing. Because, like I told you, I'm not a real physical person, and knowing that I could use a chainsaw — I cut some firewood with it, and I learned how to sharpen it and all that stuff. But I have to say in retrospect, it's done me very little good. I mean, I actively avoid doing those things. If somebody handed me even a little chainsaw and said, "Do you know how to use this?" I'd probably lie and say no.

Gumption, perseverance, courage: those qualities characterized the women who went back to the land, and account for the self-reliance and personal strength that gave them confidence in their ability to adapt and overcome challenges they set themselves. This finding adds depth and dimension to the cycle of adult transformative learning. Figure 3 represents a fundamental view of adult transformative learning theory developed from Mezirow's (1991; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) theoretical model. In this model, transformation results from a process of reflection and action that is recursive and non-linear. The model has a beginning, self-examination triggered by the disorienting dilemma, and an end, the reintegration into society. According to this model, each perspective transformation is a single, disparate unit, and the recursiveness lies within the particular transformation cycle. That singularity and separateness may explain why adult transformative learning theory does not account for changes on the broader canvas of a life.
The individual may stop at any stage of the transformation cycle or go back to any point on the circle. However, this simple model fails to account for psychological preconditions to transformation. Despite the assertion of a disorienting dilemma—arguably an emotional event with psychological repercussion—that triggers the transformation cycle, this model addresses only the cognitive activities associated with transformation. The women in my study appeared to have gone through the cognitive activities of the transformation cycle. After self-examination and critical reappraisal of their assumptions, all became alienated from their roles. In Debra’s,
Audre’s, and Maya’s cases, that alienation was not of their choosing. Debra continues to define herself as a “traditional woman,” and, as stated above, Maya and Audre continue as much of the back-to-the-land lifestyle as they can in their new careers and homes. The word “alienation” implies wilful or purposeful distancing from previous roles. However, in at least these instances, alienation includes or is followed by a sense of loss or bereavement.

After taking stock and moving beyond alienation, the individual is ready to experience the next stage of the cycle, planning a new course of action. Like the following stages, acquiring new knowledge and skills and provisional efforts at new roles, planning is primarily a cognitive activity.

Instead of focusing on transformation as a cognitive process, that is, a recursive set of actions within the brain, transformation can be seen as embedded in a ground of self-reliance and self-confidence. “Before a woman can take the first steps toward change,” Mezirow and Marsick (1978) say, “she must possess the self-confidence to try new roles” (p. 18). Cranton (1994) goes further, asserting that “One’s self-concept as a learner, as a worker, and as a person must be strong if any critical questioning of beliefs and values is to occur” (p. 86). These statements support my findings that “I can do anything” and an essential belief in one’s own ability to improvise, adapt and overcome are fundamental to success. If we embed the transformation cycle within a framework of self-reliance and self-confidence, it might look like Figure 4:
In this model, the stages of the transformation cycle are embedded in a ground of self-confidence and self-reliance. This model graphically represents interaction of the cognitive activities of transformation with a psychological state that may or may not support continued movement through the transformation cycle. Although placing the psychological state on the
inside may appear more intuitively consistent, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-reliance are not permanent states. Rather, these qualities are “worn” or “not worn” in the manner of a warm coat in winter (although self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-reliance are not consciously chosen in the same manner). If the individual is not self-confident or self-reliant, she or he may return to a previous stage of the cycle or stop the process of critical reflection altogether. On the other hand, the changes one experiences, especially the acquisition of new skills and roles, can lead to increased self-reliance, supporting the movement through the cycle. The final stage of transformation, “reintegration into society,” is placed in the centre to indicate that it may occur, but that it is not an inevitable result of the process of self reflection.
Chapter Seven

Re-visioning: The role of agency and self-reliance

[Our task is] to keep our sense of Adult Education open and permeable to all its practice; to develop a multi-centred, dynamic sense of the adult education world, with no margins and no single centre (Miles 1998, p. 250)

Reprise of Findings and Purpose of this Section

I learned four things from the narratives of back-to-the-land women. First, adult transformative learning theory does not adequately account for their experiences and choices. Second, the self-reliance they developed through overcoming difficult physical tasks gives them confidence that they can succeed in trying circumstances. Third, they have well-developed epistemological systems, with sophisticated ways of perceiving and understanding learning tasks. These systems, developed from childhood, amount to a site of privilege. Finally, the women’s repeated expression of self-reliance and self-confidence raised the notion of agency and centralized the storying of their lives.

My interest in interviewing back-to-the-land women first arose from my desire to improve the success rates of my Adult Basic Education students. The second purpose for this study was to present to the world a partial portrait of these women’s lives. Four of the women I interviewed had returned to post-secondary education after her time on the land, while the fifth used experience she had gained to become a college instructor. Two of the five attained advanced degrees. Their personal narratives provided a picture of strong, independent, courageous women, adventuresses who made personal lifestyle choices and lived with the results of those choices until they determined that change was necessary. I hoped that their stories would help me understand what led to their success in education.
First, I examined the interviews from the perspective of adult transformative learning theory, then from the perspective of learner types and epistemological development. Finally, I reviewed the transcripts in a holistic manner, allowing the voices of the women to move my analysis beyond application of theory to reflect what they perceived as important in their experiences. Thus, self-reliance and self-confidence emerged from the interviews as key factors in their adaptation to their environments. Self-reliance and self-confidence account in large part for their willingness to accept and overcome challenges, to direct their lives as they chose. In short, self-reliance and self-confidence are fundamental aspects of agency, the ability to choose consciously their own life direction (Cochran and Laub, 1994).

After the narrative analysis and development of my results, I was still dissatisfied. I read widely for ways to fit my findings into extant Adult Education theory. One sunny day the words leapt off the page directly into my brain: “Adult education has always been an enterprise too broad and diverse to be contained within any professionally defined field” (Miles, 1998, p. 250). Yes, I hear myself agree, that is precisely the case. The women back-to-the-landers’ experiences, their methods of learning, and their willingness to adventure do not lend themselves to simple theoretical models. Instead, the women’s voices call out in a chorus, point and counterpoint, that learning is messy and muddled. It may begin, be interrupted, and begin again. Their learning was embedded in their lived experiences, and only – perhaps – coincidentally in the academic environment. The women I interviewed drew the maps of their lives or wrote themselves into their own stories. What am I to make of these stories? How can I make meaning of what they told me?
In pondering these questions, I am skewered by the words “education” and “learning,” for these ideas, deeply intertwined, have come to live separate and distinct lives in my reading of the women’s texts. Consulting a dictionary, I see that education is a process; one is acted upon, “educated.” Learning, on the other hand, is an essentially internal activity during which one accumulates or transforms information. The separation between learning and education – action and being acted upon – helps clarify my confusion about women back-to-the-landers’ learning experiences and their relationship to educational institutions. During their back-to-the-land lives, the women were active agents, selecting those learning experiences that helped them survive a difficult environment and thrive. In the education phase of their lives, they relinquished authority to others who determined what was necessary for the women to survive and thrive in the careers they chose to pursue in mainstream society. The women negotiated the academic environments with confidence born of the strength they developed during their back-to-the-land years and their level of epistemological understandings. After considering these facts, I find myself drawn to these radical, yet obvious, conclusions: 1) educational institutions subordinate learners to the institution, 2) those who successfully negotiate the environment have adapted to the environment, not the other way around, and 3) learners accept and overcome difficult obstacles of their own volition. I develop these ideas around these key words: empowerment, adaptation, and agency.

Empowerment and Institutional Subordination

Before addressing the question of educational demands on learners, I need to unpack the notion of “empowerment.” One requires empowerment only if one has been disempowered. The terms are opposite sides of freedom (empowerment) and oppression (disempowerment). The
brief discussions in adult transformative learning literature relating to self-confidence and empowerment speak only to the roles of the program and instructor in empowering the student. The goal of “[getting students] convinced that they can do it” (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 18) is laudable, but it implicitly reinforces the hierarchical nature of educational institutions and their right to influence or control students and students’ goals. Although I agree that the climate for learners must be supportive and encouraging of their individual experiences, needs, and characteristics, this view of empowerment perpetuates notions that “Father Knows Best,” and that the learners are unable to act with confidence, self-knowledge, and power on their own behalf. This model assumes that it is the educator’s role to lift oppression, and further, that the specific oppression is psychological (get them convinced that they can do it), rather than a structural fact of the institution.

My findings suggest that the women back-to-the-landers did not rely on external permission to take action if or when conditions were oppressive. They considered their circumstances and options, and from the choices available to them, took those actions which best suited their needs. They accepted their own power, they empowered themselves. Their activity and agency stands in stark contrast to the previous model of top-down empowerment. There are two kinds of empowerment: a) the redistribution of institutional power or b) the result of critical reflection that transforms a life (Merrill, 1999). In a later section, I develop the notion of self-empowerment in terms of agency. Here, I contrast the women’s back-to-the-land experiences of learning with the activities within institutions. These include the notion of first-hand versus second-hand knowledge, rewards for learning, and the locus of responsibility for learning. Implicit in this contrast is the notion that learners are subordinated to the system.
The narratives that I heard and analysed reflected courageous, adventurous, active women learning in their own ways, in their own time, and on their own terms. Over and over I heard the refrain, “I learned to be self-reliant.” However, educational institutions, almost by definition, can deny students the very opportunities that seem to lie at the heart of these women back-to-the-landers’ ability to return successfully to academia and/or re-enter the world of mainstream work. Colleges and universities are characterized by second-hand knowledge, hierarchies of information and time, dominance of measures and evaluation, and submission to “expert” judgment; furthermore, they are predominantly cognitive, they separate learning from action, and they focus on the individual through the evaluative process (Thomas, 1994). In contrast to these characteristics, the women engaged in active, first-hand learning. They picked up chainsaws and pulled toboggans, milked cows and cleaned battery terminals. They melted snow and chopped wood. Institutional hierarchies were backgrounded to the need for survival. Getting and chopping firewood meant they and their families would be warm and could cook their food; melting snow or carrying water meant they could drink, wash, and cook. Daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms governed their work and learning rather than the tyranny of semester or course start times and endings. The “experts” were peers or old-timers who gave freely of their knowledge and wisdom, but never offered a grade or other evaluation. The speed with which the fire roared to life or the car started was the measurement of and the reward for their learning.

ABE courses are a bridge between secondary and post-secondary institutions, and as a result, have some of the characteristics of each. The ABE courses I taught and those I observed generally provided opportunity for practice, although the amount of class time allocated for each
course varies across the province. Furthermore, individual instructors provided varying combinations of lecture and practice. Some preferred to lecture the full class time, and others preferred to lecture briefly or not at all. In many first- and second-year university courses, particularly in large institutions, the main interface between student and professor is in a large lecture hall with hundreds of students.

"I can do it!" The reward for learning for women in my study was tangible, powerful, and immediate. But what is the inherent reward for a well-researched essay? In some cases, the new ideas that the student has uncovered from the labyrinth of journal articles, books, and electronic publications are sufficient reward. All too often, however, these painfully researched articles have been a journey of fear, frustration, and anxiety. After weeks of listening to lectures on the course content (frequently devoid of discussion), of hours spent studying texts and notes, and days and nights scouring the library, students "pull all-nighters" to prepare a document that purports to show that the student has "mastered" a body of information. Preparation for exams is very similar.

Where is the teacher, instructor, professor in this scenario? I have observed colleagues who, having previously scaled the heights, now work furiously to meet a publication deadline or complete a research project. Although those I have encountered as a student and worked with as a colleague have, almost without exception, taken pleasure in the teaching task and enjoyed exchanges with students, the internal and external pressures to conduct research leave them with little time outside the classroom. The perceived power difference between student and professor frequently inhibits the student from approaching the professor. Thus, the student is essentially on her or his own to master the material. This begs the question: Who is responsible for student
learning? The present academic contract normally requires learners to commit to a semester's worth of hours of being talked at and untold hours of learning on their own. Since we absorb and remember only about 20 percent of what we hear, students must acquire the other 80 percent through self-directed learning activities. In short, they learn outside the classroom. Clearly, in this situation, the vast majority of learning responsibility lies with the learner.

Educational institutions often fail to integrate first-hand learning into the curriculum, nor do they allow for the action of learning to occur in the classroom. Exceptions exist to prove the rule. One notable exception to this rule is the History of Barkerville course offered in the reconstructed gold-rush town of Barkerville, B.C., which I took as a graduate student. In this five-day course, taught on-site by University of Northern British Columbia Professors Robin Fisher and Mary-Ellen Kelm, students were immersed in the history of an era, proving—to my mind, at least—that first-hand experience creates the conditions for development of deeper understandings and permanent learning. Although there are many such exceptions, the demands of the institution all too often impose a set of rules that subordinates the students' learning to resource allocation, efficient use of professors' time, and funding constraints. Some would argue that efficient use of instructor and student time, institutional space, and financial resources demand the current model. Indeed, thousands of students (including myself and four of the five women I interviewed) have profited from university education. Nonetheless, the restrictions

These generalizations apply mostly to large, first- and second-year courses, particularly in large universities. Even in these situations, some professors choose to break the mold of lecture-only classes; and in many large classes, scheduled tutorials with small numbers of students are available.
inherent in educational institutions generally demand that learners have previously developed a predetermined package of academic skills and epistemological tools to succeed within the institution. The women in this study all came from white, middle-class backgrounds, and had the advantages that this implies: comfortable income, family support for learning, and an early adaptation to schools as a main site for learning. They were literate in “schoolese.” However, any or all of class, ethnicity, economic status, learning experiences, language, able-bodiedness, or gender may influence a student’s institutional learning literacy, and aid or prevent successful negotiation of the environment of post-secondary education. Although universities and colleges are adopting a variety of tactics, including orientation week, learning skills centres, and transition courses to assist the adaptation of newly enrolled students to the institutions, the present model of higher education effectively excludes those students who have never learned, or perhaps never desired, to negotiate or adapt to the institutional learning environment.

Adaptation: Negotiating the Environment

In the previous section, I discussed the demands of academic institutions in terms of the characteristics of the institution with a view toward developing the contrast between the back-to-the-land women’s learning experiences and the demands of the educational institutions. The women I interviewed were not empowered by something or someone from outside of themselves. They empowered themselves. Their ability to adapt to circumstances was initiated by and emerged from their sense of agency, the “I can do it!” notion of self-reliance. Having negotiated unfamiliar terrain in their move back to the land, the women were adaptable; they were “lean, mean, learning machines.”
Adaptation is a process of becoming aware of and assessing changed or changing circumstances; developing, considering and selecting from alternatives; and finally, taking action in response to the new circumstances. During their back-to-the-land lives, the women moved decades back in time from their middle class, American childhoods. Adapting to life without electricity or running water, and learning to start a fire and to cook on a wood stove challenged their personal strength, their resourcefulness, and their ways of viewing the world and themselves. They needed physical endurance to cope with hauling groceries and laundry, to feed the animals, to “buck bales,” or haul water or snow. When conditions were hard, they coped with the challenges, adapting their behaviors and ideas to circumstances.

By contrast, adapting to the environment of academia was relatively easy. Recall Gloria’s assertion that “I loved learning,” and that each of the women had previously completed at least one year of post secondary education. In fact, adaptations came in the form of renewing and relearning old patterns. They moved into familiar intellectual terrain, and modified their living conditions and family circumstances to accommodate the demands of the institutions. The most obvious case of adapting to the institution rather than the institution adapting to the women’s needs is the location of education. The women physically moved themselves and their families to larger population centres in order to achieve their educational goals. New employment, whether for the women or their husbands, was in order, and the children had to adjust to new schools. The women and their families all had to make new friends and develop new lives congruent with their beliefs and their new conditions. These adaptations were of much greater magnitude than those of course selection or writing papers and exams.
But suppose the women had no opportunity to move. Suppose that they had never completed high school, or that they were unable to read at a university level. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that they had been institutionalized by the welfare system or the penal system, made dependent through the paucity of choices available to them, and the prevalence of choices made for them. Suppose, in fact, that in these characteristics they were similar to the ABE students I taught? How can institutions enable such learners to negotiate and adapt to the academic environment? Is adaptation the responsibility of the learner? Can educational institutions change to meet the needs of the learners? The questions are rarely, if ever, asked.

Agency: Living their own stories

The most important idea arising from the narratives is that the women were active agents on their own behalf, taking in, assessing, and assimilating experiences to create their life stories. Self-efficacy (one's belief in the ability to achieve a goal) and mastery (the ability to perform a specific task) contribute to agency (Cochran and Laub, 1994), and the women integrated these attributes into their lives as a holistic sense of self-reliance. The central activity of their lives was not only making meaning, but "making stories." The women cast themselves as heroines of their lives and created intricate plots. In some cases, they wrote their stories ahead of them and their actions, visualizing multiple futures, not all of which came to fruition, but which allowed them to continue creating a strong, consistent sense of self and agency. In other cases, the stories developed as a response to circumstances. Cochran and Laub (1994) develop this notion of agency as story, differentiating between the patient, to whom things happen, and the agent, who discerns meaningful possibilities to guide courses of action.
Story assumes the development of plot, character, setting, and theme, and allows for variations on each within a larger structure of social and personal contexts. Theme and setting were similar for each of the women in that they all adopted the notion that subsistence living in a wilderness environment was a desirable goal. All of them moved to remote locations with small populations and restricted access to towns. They acted out their stories in slightly different ways, with Debra, Gloria, and Zerbina having running water and electricity in their Lakeside homes (although each lived without those amenities in previous subsistence experiences), and Maya and Audre electing to live without the “mod cons.” The subsistence theme was acted out by each of them through raising organic gardens and their own animals for eggs, meat, and milk. Debra made the greatest commitment to farming, participating in building up a sheep farm that numbered 1000 ewes and lambs at one point. The character of “earth mother” appealed to them all, even though Zerbina explicitly defined herself as a feminist and Debra, despite her assertion that she was and is a “traditional woman,” wrote for newspaper and radio about women’s history and consciousness raising, and offered her farm for a women’s retreat and consciousness-raising sessions.

Plot is “not just one thing after another, but one thing because of another,” (Cochran & Laub, 1994, p. 23), and the women storied themselves into the future as a result of the events and circumstances of their lives, and their perceptions of their own and their families’ needs. Recall that Gloria began a local library to meet her need for intellectual stimulation, Zerbina gave piano and guitar lessons and played in a rock-and-roll band because of her passion for music, and Maya ground organically grown soybeans and sold tofu to create a character and plot consistent with her ideas of a spiritually and environmentally aware woman. The women examined their
circumstances, and took actions that moved their stories in ways that were consonant with their beliefs and needs. They authored the stories from the broad range of possibilities that were open to them.

**Limitations of the study**

Great expectations pave the way for great disappointments. Although the women’s stories were dynamic, heroic, and interesting, my attempts to interpret their stories within one particular adult learning theory set too-restrictive bounds on what I hoped to learn. The limitations upon my study came from my expectations that existing adult education and learning theory could be applied to real-life narratives. Instead of opening my eyes, ears, and heart to the stories I was told, I tried repeatedly to fit them within the confines of various theories. I believe that I have not yet fully allowed the women’s stories to stand on their own, to tell what they must about learning.

I began with an enthusiastic view of adult transformative learning theory, expecting that it would explain how individuals’ perceptions of themselves as learners could be nurtured by educators with a view toward ensuring that all those who entered Adult Basic Education would gain the personal attributes for success. My research with back-to-the-land women failed to support the notion of a disorienting dilemma that initiated a successful progress through the transformation cycle. My expectation of examples of transformative learning that I could apply to Adult Basic Education courses was crushed by the evidence of longer terms of self-concept development, of adaptation to developing circumstances and needs, and of women’s agentive actions. Stymied by the lack of that disorienting dilemma, I struggled to find links between an extant theory and the women’s narrated lives. In addition, a disorienting dilemma followed by
critical reappraisal did not account for some ABE students' inability to learn in the classroom, that is to take in and apply new data, skills, and information. Thus, the theory itself became a strait jacket. I moved on from transformative learning theory to consider other views of learning.

Epistemological development (Belenky et al. 1986) better accounts for the women's ability to succeed in academic environments than did a hypothesized change in meaning perspectives. The women's previously acquired capabilities within academia largely explains their achievement of university degrees. Although notions of epistemological development were seductive and useful in theorizing the women's ability to learn, it left unanswered the question of how and why the women were able to adopt new ways of being when they went back to the land. Returning to my consideration of ABE students, I believe that epistemological development may account for some of the students' inability to succeed. Those who were in the subjective mode may have rejected new ideas and knowledge in favor of maintaining the views that they had developed to date. Received knowers may have been willing to take in new information from their courses, but perhaps lacked the analytical skills to use that new information in assigned work. Still unable to break the bonds of theory, I turned to the notions of story and agency, which better accounts for the women's lives and changes than either adult learning theory or epistemological development alone.

Further Research

In this study, I only "scraped the surface" of the lives of women back-to-the-landers. Restricting my research to women who had successfully negotiated the return to mainstream society made sense at the time. After all, I fully expected to see one or more transformations as defined by Mezirow's (1991; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) adult transformative learning theory.
Further studies may be done to more fully understand the applications of transformative learning theory to real-world learning. This would include further testing of his theory by applying it to real life. In addition, a feminist/gendered critique of his theory should illuminate—among other things—the biases and limitations imposed by unexamined notions of women’s passivity or reactivity to events.

Other possibilities rise directly from the narratives. What about those who remained on the land; who were they and what was their experience? The notion of concrete thinkers being happier on the land than those who are contemplative, abstract thinkers is appealing at first glance, but further reflection on the narratives brings to mind the contrast between Hank, the logger, and the old Norwegian. Both remained on the land, and each suggested different ways of being with the land. Zerbina remembered Hank for his destructive logging practices, while the old Norwegian was memorable for his creativity and his joy in the birth of a new foal. But as with any apparent dichotomy, nothing is that simple. Their stories, like the stories of the women I interviewed, are incomplete. The question of who stayed on the land and who left is further complicated by a brief look at the women I interviewed. Debra wanted to remain on the land, and her writing on women’s issues—especially raising the question about native women—showed a high level of abstract thinking. Clearly, there are no simple dichotomies. Further investigation into those who stayed on the land, their reasons for being there, and their ways of living with and being on the land would enrich our understanding of individuals and their relationship to the land.

Despite my focus on women back-to-the-landers, I avoided an explicitly gendered critique of the women’s lives or the intersection of gender and context, with education and
learning. By this, I mean that I did not develop my subtextual understanding of feminist critical theories, which I understand to be a deconstruction of power relations and the effects of patriarchal social norms. There was, simply, too little time to do justice to a feminist discussion, and I had chosen a particular theoretical lens that I was determined to pursue. The feminist critique and analysis remains to be done. Furthermore, the kinds of questions posed and the focus of my investigation shaped the information and analysis of these narratives. The dauntless, valiant nature of the women begs further illumination. For example, although I offered the interview transcripts for comment and correction, the collaboration between the women and me was limited. They offered their narratives, and I chose from those narratives that which I needed for my limited analysis. Following Lather and Smithies (1997), a more fully collaborative approach to the back-to-the-land women’s narratives could result in a fuller voiced, richer interweaving of their lives.

The fact that there were few, and marginal, jobs for women at Lakeside or Riverside, meant that the men earned most of the money. Like the traditional breadwinners of the past, they were largely responsible for the financial well-being of the families. Power imbalances arising from unequal earnings did not specifically arise during the interviews, but had an influence on our daily lives. The limited opportunities for women outside the home meant that they were, by design or by default, primarily responsible for child rearing and homemaking, traditional women’s roles. In addition to a collaborative re-writing, a feminist examination of the themes of the women’s lives could raise questions of power and control, gendered roles, socialized expectations, and/or internalized constraints on back-to-the-land women’s actions and aspirations.
My research, far from complete, whetted my appetite for following the stories of women who went back to the land. The centrality of agency and story begs for broader study with women back-to-the-landers who remained on the land, or who left the land to follow different courses. What stories did they write themselves into? Can those stories teach us anything about learning and the process of education?

In fact, thinking of the women at Lakeside, I realize that the women I interviewed were only part of a historical march of women who chose to leave mainstream society for the adventures of living in the backwoods of Canada. Sisters Susanna Moodie (1990) and Catherine Parr Trail (1990) are among the most famous, but the entire westward movement of European culture was aided by women who ventured beyond the safe and the known. At Lakeside alone, there are many women who accepted a challenge similar to that of the back-to-the-landers I interviewed. Women from the US and Europe have packed bags, dreams, children, and husbands to move to the wilderness. What drives them? What stories would they tell? How are those stories similar to and different from those of the back-to-the-land women? My mother presently is visiting me. She also moved to Lakeside years ago to live without running water or electricity, and she is still living there. Perhaps I shall ask for her help in telling and keeping these stories.

Not the End of the Story

My interviews with back-to-the-land women provided a snapshot of these women’s lives. It shows women who were -- and continue to be -- agents, active constructors of their life experience. Their narratives took me behind the public face of the back-to-the-land movement, both as a participant and as a researcher, allowing me to consider many aspects of those lives from a new point of view. The back-to-the-land women population has received very little study,
yet it is a very important part of the B.C. tapestry. The narratives are lively, entertaining, and fun. They portray these women, my friends, as they truly are: strong, courageous, self-reliant, sometimes boisterous, and always wonderful.

Their narratives gave me a springboard for examination of transformative learning theory, and uncovered an assumption that problematized the application of that theory to the women’s narratives. Rather than finding the women’s changes in lifestyle to be the result of a disorienting dilemma, the changes were the result of their accumulated experiences, their personal goals and desires, and their belief in themselves as active agents in the construction of their lives. Taking these findings further, I postulated a link between their ways of knowing and their successful return to mainstream society and academic institutions. From their privileged positions as middle-class, Euro-Americans who had completed some college prior to their back-to-the-land time, they had developed confidence in their ability to succeed in post-secondary education and already had developed as procedural learners.

Finally, I acknowledged what their narratives explicitly told me: “I can do anything.” This assertion, in various forms from all the women, laid the foundation for the ability to improvise in the face of unexpected challenges, adapt to new and difficult circumstances, and overcome the harshness of the new lifestyle they had chosen. They took these qualities with them on their return to mainstream society, improvising, adapting, and overcoming yet one more set of challenges. I am honored to have these women as friends and models, and to have been entrusted with their narratives.
References


Merriam (Ed.), *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education: An Update on Adult Learning Theory* (57), 91-103.


Appendix A: Letter of Informed Consent

(Date)

Dear (Participant's Name):

As a researcher in the field of adult education I have been studying the nature of the learning experience, that is, how adults learn. The major purpose of this work is to better understand how we learn, sometimes changing beliefs, attitudes, or even circumstances in response to events experiences in our lives. I am particularly interested in the internal transformations that take place and encourage or propel us to make changes in our lives.

I am focusing the present study on women who went back to the land in response to the social, personal, and cultural events of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I will interview only women who adopted the subsistence lifestyle, but later returned to participate in the mainstream of society.

I am inviting you to participate in this study. It will include a face-to-face interview, your journal reflections on your experiences and the interview process, and a final interview conducted face-to-face, by e-mail or telephone. You will be asked to bring to the first interview one or more physical objects of that time. These may include (but are not limited to) objects or tools used during your back-to-the-land experience, photos, letters, journal or diary entries. Your description of the artifact and its meaning for you will form the initial part of the first interview. With your permission the artifacts may be photographed or copied for use in the final research product. You will be invited to review the transcripts of your interview and correct, amend or delete material as you deem necessary. Finally, participants may be invited to gather for a reunion and focus group session.

All tapes, notes and transcripts will be kept in locked filing cabinet, accessible only by me. All information will be strictly confidential, and your anonymity will be protected. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw from the project at any later date. Transcripts may be used for further review at a later date. Your privacy will be maintained in any and all subsequent uses.

If you would like further information about this project, I would be glad to discuss it with you by phone at the university (250) 960-6692, or at home (250) 967-4049. You may also contact Anne Lindsay, thesis advisor, at (250) 960-6313. If you would be willing to participate in the study, please complete the form below and return it to me.

Thank you for your interest.

Molly Eichar

I, __________________________ (please print) would like to participate in this project.

______________________________  ______________________________
(Signature)                     (Date)
Appendix B: Oral Narrative Protocol

Oral narratives will be audio-taped and transcribed. The prompts will be general in nature and reflect a set of ideas rather than specific questions. The purpose of the prompts is to stimulate consideration, reflection and recall, not to structure the interview. Participants will be informed of the purpose and proposed use of the prompts, and encouraged to speak only to those they consider relevant. They will not be required to answer any of the questions. The initial list of prompts (below) will be given to the participants prior to the interview with an invitation to consider and modify, add or delete questions.

Participants will be given an opportunity to review the transcripts and invited to respond to their completeness and accuracy, as well as commenting upon the degree to which they believe the discussion and transcripts reflected the intent of the speech events.

Questions (not ordered)
1. Why did you decide to move “back to the land”? What motivated you?
2. Do you have any photographs, letters, recordings, documents, publications, journals or diaries to share that will help illuminate that time in your life? How do they express your feelings, beliefs or attitudes during that time?
3. When did you decide to go back to the land? How old were you, what were you doing?
4. What books, texts, documents or magazines were inspirational to you in this decision?
5. Were you consciously trying to change society, or was this a strictly personal decision?
6. What were your feelings about the women’s movement at that time? What did you consider to be a woman’s role?
7. What did you expect when you imagined life on the land?
8. Did environmental concerns have any bearing on your decision?
9. When you were living in the wilderness, what experiences did you have? How would you characterize these experiences?
10. What were the most beneficial aspects on living on the land?
11. What aspects were difficult for you?
12. Describe your living conditions when you were living on the land.
13. Did you raise animals, a garden? Did you build your own dwelling? Did you work for pay? What activities did you have outside your family and home?
14. Describe your social life during that time.
15. When did you know that you wanted to make a change? What was the impetus for this change? For those remaining: When did you decide that you wanted to go back to work? What was the impetus for that decision?
16. Did you feel any conflicts with your philosophical position when you decided to move? What were they?
17. Was your partner a part of this decision? In what way? How did he support or obstruct your wishes?
18. What changes did you make in your way of living? Did you pursue a career, education, different living conditions?
19. When you reflect on the changes that you made, what is your overriding impression of those changes?
20. What did you learn when you were a back-to-the-lander?
21. How has that time period affected your life? What effects did that period in your life have on you?
22. What would you differently?
23. What would you do the same?
24. Did you feel a social imperative to go back to the land? To return to mainstream society?
25. What do you think is the main difference between you and those women who chose to remain in that community?
26. How did your time on the land affect society as a whole?
27. Do you think that moving back to mainstream society has had an impact on society in general? If so, what?
28. Please describe the demographics of your family of origin. (Occupation, economic status, education, number of siblings, location).
Appendix C: Transcription Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(...)</td>
<td>Short pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(...)</td>
<td>Longer pause. Used when conversational flow indicates deliberation over a phrase or idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Long pause)</td>
<td>Used when speaker is apparently trying to decide whether to continue a line of thought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– (dash)</td>
<td>Interrupted speech. Word or speech may be interrupted (see also [ ]) Includes self-interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eg. wha–or–then</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Overlapping speech. Left bracket indicates beginning of overlap; right bracket indicates end of overlap. May continue across speakers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Chuckles)</td>
<td>Short, quiet laugh. Personal, private enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Giggles)</td>
<td>Longer, deeper laugh. Personal, private enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Laughs) or (Both Laugh)</td>
<td>Shared amusement, or intent to encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bold typeface</strong></td>
<td>Word or syllable strongly stressed. Used rarely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(inaudible)</td>
<td>Words unclear because of equipment or overlapping talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D: Codes and Definitions

List of codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>education</td>
<td>previous and new</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>employment</td>
<td>a. learned skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. unpaid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. value to self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>empowerment</td>
<td>a. personal strength</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. physical strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. support networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>leaving</td>
<td>a. society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. subsistence lifestyle</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>living conditions</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>meaning perspectives</td>
<td>a. epistemic premise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. psychological premise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. sociolinguistic premise</td>
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<td>meaning schemes</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>self reliance</td>
<td>a. adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. hand work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. independence</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>shared history</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>support</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. psychological/professional</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>transformation cycle</td>
<td>a. alienation from past roles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. crisis/disorienting dilemma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. new skills &amp; knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. plan of action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e. questioning assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f. reappraisal of roles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g. reintegration of social roles</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>h. self examination</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>i. trying on new roles</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>values</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c. family and home</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. feminism</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>i. men's work</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ii. women's work</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e. personal responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f. personal values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>g. social responsibility &amp; change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>h. spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>zoned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definitions of codes

1. Education: refers to education level achieved before back-to-the-land (bttl) experience; attitudes toward education; education attained after bttl experience.

2. Employment: primarily job titles of paid employment. The nature of paid work without the values based assignment of “learned skills” or “value to self” that suggest additional dimensions of the work. The work done for pay.
   a. Learned skills: skills learned during employment activities
   b. Unpaid work: anything done for the maintenance of the family or voluntary work within the community; no direct financial reward.
   c. Value to self: positive or negative impact on individual, physically or emotionally

3. Empowerment: generally used as superordinate code; occasionally used to indicate participant’s own perception of gaining power, self esteem, self efficacy, self confidence. Being capable, being able to verbalize capability.
   a. Personal strength: activities and conditions that, addressed successfully, contribute to the participant’s ability to accept psychological, spiritual or emotional hardship or challenge
   b. Physical strength: activities that indicate or increase the participant’s ability to do manual labour, use the body’s musculature for work.
   c. Support networks: emotional support given or accepted to an individual that, because of the personal and interpersonal nature of the contact, is not necessarily available to all members of the community. (Contrast with Support: social)

4. Leaving: a supercode with no textual attachments
   a. Society: verbalized reasons for moving bttl; include political, emotional, spiritual, values-based reasons for moving to isolated community.
   b. Subsistence lifestyle: reasons for leaving subsistence lifestyle and returning to mainstream society. Includes circumstantial (eg, divorce; lack of work) political, emotional, spiritual, values-based reasons
5. Living conditions: primarily physical conditions of living in isolated location; eg, carrying water, distance to neighbours.

6. Meaning perspectives: “sets of habitual expectation governing perception, comprehension and remembering” (Mezirow)
   a. Epistemic premise: assumptions about the nature and use of knowledge; applied when participant makes direct reference to beliefs about knowing
   b. Psychological premise: ways of feeling and acting; applied to verbalizations about ways of individual’s personal feelings about an event, situation or topic
   c. Sociolinguistic premise: social and linguistic perceptions and understanding; applied to verbalizations about individual’s perceptions of social ways of thinking and feeling (e.g. “But I really think that there are other people who have that situation.”)

7. Meaning schemes: “specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute experience” (Mezirow)

8. Self reliance: doing work for oneself without support or assistance from others; also, emotional or intellectual beliefs about relying on self.
   a. Adaptability: ability to work or function under difficult conditions, to change or modify actions to suit circumstances. Also emotional responses to difficult conditions.
   b. Hand work: working with non-electric tools, or in the case of wringer washers, outdated electric tools. Values associated with hand work. May overlap with personal values and/or aesthetics
   c. Independence: Articulations of working alone; includes aspects of isolation due to partner’s working away from home.

9. Shared history: events, experiences, ideas, values expressed by interviewer and accepted by participant as part of her views. Arises from insider position and used only when the concept is not specifically articulated by participant, only picked up and validated as part of the interview. Eg: ME: One of the things that I remember is that we didn't have
phones. M: no! ME: So you didn't call somebody up and say, “Can I come over?”: No.
ME: you didn't make an appointment. M: No.

10. Support: super category; no textual segments
   a. Opposition and difficulties: family or cultural oppositions to way of life and personal values.
   b. Psychological/professional: references to need or desire for professional counselling and/or support; differentiate from support networks, which were individual and perhaps incidental support.
   c. Social: support garnered from community; available to many community members; not based on individual affiliations. Eg: We were pretty much in the same places in our development personally and (...) what we were doing on the Lakeside. We had all come there in similar circumstances.

11. Transformation cycles: super category; no textual segments (from Mezirow)
   a. Alienation from past roles: disjuncture between past roles; new understandings resulting from reflection, self examination and reappraisal.
   b. Crisis/disorienting dilemma: a life crisis which challenges implicit, unexamined assumptions
   c. New skills & knowledge: education efforts, within or without confines of institutions. Code includes skills acquired both when on the land and during or after transformation
   d. Plan of action: considering and planning new activities
   e. Questioning assumptions: judgment of efficacy and utility of assumptions in light of new information
   f. Reappraisal of roles: review of previously accepted presuppositions about roles, and place in family, community, society.
   g. Reintegration of social roles: adoption of new roles and integration into society in new role
   h. Self examination: cognitive process of self appraisal and assessment
i. Trying on new roles: attempts to adopt new roles, also movement between new and old roles until new role adopted (or abandoned)

12. Values: super code; no textual segments
   a. Aesthetics: value of beauty of place, time, thing, activity
   b. Environment: articulations of value of natural environment
   c. Family and home: articulations of value of family, home; includes feelings of constraint as well as appreciation. Also explications of pregnancy, childbirth, role of children. Includes references to how family lived.
   d. Feminism: equality of sexes; expectations of equality.
      i. Men's work: work men did to support family; generally paid work, but includes instances of work at home
      ii. Women's work: work that supports family; generally unpaid, the functional work that keeps family running.
   e. Personal responsibility: Expressions of own responsibility for conditions, circumstances, experiences. Eg: Basic, not base, but basic. The most basic things because (...) Somebody has to do them, and it might as well be us. So I guess we wanted to go through the whole process. Similar to independence, but value based.
   f. Personal values: all expressions of emotional, spiritual, intellectual beliefs associated with worth of activities, circumstances, lifestyle.
   g. Social responsibility & change: articulations of views of own responsibility to attempt to improve society; in response to direct question: what effects bttl experience had on society at large.
   h. Spirituality: verbalizations of secular or non-secular beliefs and values of things beyond physical existence. eg: when you were making something or doing something it wasn't the only thing you did in the day but the way you created the space in the day to, to do these things and then have the pleasure of having nice things, nicely made things, often handmade things.