

# **‘NATURE AND I’**

**An Ecotherapy Journey**

**A Heuristic Inquiry into Nature’s role in Healing, from a  
psychotherapy perspective**

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**Figure 1: ‘Nature’ in Centennial Park**

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## Abstract

The human –nature connection is intrinsic to human beings, and the beneficial effect of Nature on health and wellbeing is well known. However despite this link, it seems that psychotherapy does not fully acknowledge Nature’s role in healing. This dissertation, in the form of a heuristic inquiry, provides an in-depth exploration of some aspects of the relationship between human beings and Nature. As a means of investigating this, the author, a beginning psychotherapist, embarks on an ecotherapy journey in native New Zealand bush, where she navigates her grieving process. Her journey traverses Ireland and Aotearoa, moving between contemporary experiences through historical and social/cultural themes. In the heart of the North Island, New Zealand, she has a profoundly transforming experience of coming home to herself, her profession, and her new home as an immigrant, in the company of *tangata whenua* –the indigenous people of this land. Nature accompanies her throughout this process. One notable theme discovered was the opportunities that Nature afforded in “moments of meeting”, providing nourishment, and creating healing in the form of transformation of Self and others. Her experiences in Nature inspired her poignant writings, which abound this dissertation. The author encourages therapists to deepen their connection with Nature for their own personal development and self care. She believes that clinical practice will benefit in a myriad of ways from this pursuit. She proposes ecotherapy as a community mental health initiative, with psychotherapists playing a central role in this.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which, to a substantial extent, has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

**Marie Franklin**

22 May 2017

## **Dedication**

*Ursula you brought Nature to life for me*

*Your biggest gift to me.*

*one that will accompany me on my journey on this Earth.*

*You have given Nature life*

*My love of you has ignited Nature for me.*

*You provided a bridge between me and Nature.*

*You held the part of Nature so revered, -*

*That finally I saw, I felt, I know I am.*

*You are the bridge through which I crossed to see to experience*

*the transition though is through my heart losing you & finding*

*in losing you I have found Nature in a new way & myself.*

*I am finding Nature & myself in new ways.*

*With deepest Gratitude.*

*Go raibh mile Maith agat. (9<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

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## Chapter 1. Introduction ‘Te Kākano’ - The Seed

*Te whenua, te whenua*      *From the land, the land*  
*Te oranga o te iwi*      *Comes the wellbeing of the people;*  
*Nō ngā tūpuna*      *By the ancestors its been passed down, passed down.*  
*Tuku iho, tuku iho.*

In this introductory chapter I shall begin with the land. I open with the special relationship that Māori have with the land, because this dissertation is situated in Aotearoa New Zealand, and Māori are the indigenous people of this land. Moving on from Te Ao Māori, I introduce the relationship that human beings have had with the land historically, referring to other indigenous peoples and their connection to Nature. I make reference to some of the literature written about the human –nature relationship, within the realms of philosophy, psychology, and psychotherapy. I then introduce myself, referring especially to my background in Nature, explaining how I came to choose this particular inquiry. I explain the importance of investigating the human-nature connection in relation to psychotherapy. I then clarify the aim of this study, and the methodology and method used to conduct it. I explain my hope for this work's importance within the psychotherapy domain. I conclude this chapter by briefly outlining the chapters that will follow.

### **Aotearoa**

The opening verse illustrates the relationship that Māori have to the land. Te Ao Māori recognizes people's intrinsic connection to the natural surroundings, acknowledging Nature's contribution to health and wellbeing.

*“It is not a coincidence that the word for land, whenua, is the same as the word for placenta. Both sustain life; both provide a link with the wider environment, just as bonding between a child and its mother is generally regarded as a necessary prerequisite for optimal development, so bonding between the individual and the land is considered to be important for the development of a secure identity” (Durie, 2001, p. 79).*

Through the practice of formally introducing oneself in a *pepeha*, Māori begin by acknowledging their connection with the natural world. Drawing from their place of origin, they name the mountain and river they are affiliated with, as foremost of their

*whakapapa*, linking them to their homeland. This powerful ritual shows the rootedness of *tangata whenua* to the land, their name translating to “people of the land”. Whether this kind of embodied connection with the land could be embraced more fully in psychotherapy in *Aotearoa* and further afield, will be an important question to explore in my dissertation.

## **Origins of Nature and People**

Humanity’s connection with Nature has been identified for thousands of years, dating back to the expressive archaic depictions of ancient Aztec civilization, and the pagan ritualistic monuments of the Irish. This co-creative relationship has existed since the inception of human beings into the world, founded in the societies of global indigenous inhabitants, who lived in intimate connection with the natural world. We can imagine a culture of nature-human reciprocity, through the example of the Native peoples of the Americas, living in harmony with land for thousands of years. The Celts, who were also highly attuned to Nature, believed that spirits inhabited mountains, rivers and trees. In honour of Nature, they built some of the world’s oldest and most revered architecture. One example is the entrance passageway of a burial tomb in Newgrange in Ireland, built 5,000 years ago, constructed in alignment with the sun’s rays on the shortest day of the year, in order to illuminate the inner chamber (Mallory, 2013). Acknowledging these amazing feats of people in tune with Nature in the past, I now travel forward to look at the thinking around Nature’s role in society today.

### **‘Nature’ in this study**

I use a capital letter to denote ‘Nature’ to highlight the significance of Nature in the study. This distinguishes ‘Nature’ from the nature of things in general. In this thesis the word ‘Nature’ includes land (earth), whether this be fields or forests, meadows or orchards. It includes the vegetation and animal life on the land, such as plants and trees, and natural features such as water in its myriad of forms, and rocks and minerals in the soil. Nature includes both wilderness spaces, and places managed by humans, such as gardens and parks. Nature is present in a single leaf as it is in a forest, the difference being the sheer volume of Nature present in the forest.

## **Nature's place in philosophy, psychology and psychotherapy**

More recently human beings' interrelatedness with Nature is becoming core to contemporary literature in both philosophy and psychology (Seed, 1988; Macy, 1991). Nature and people are intertwined at a fundamental level - regardless of whether this connection is conscious or not. Ecopsychology seeks to make us aware of our repressed links with the ecological unconscious, thus healing the separation between the person and the environment (Roszak, 1992). Buber's I-thou philosophy of intimate and reverent relationships between people can be applied to the relationship between human beings and Nature (Sponsel, 2012). Spiritual Ecology and Deep Ecology expand ecopsychology further by placing human beings into their natural environment, and referencing the ultimate source of both the human and the natural world, creation itself.

Allured (2011), recognizing the interconnectedness of all life, states "The self is not able to exist without its environment; it is embedded in a way that makes actual separateness impossible" (p. 260). However, despite our inherent connection with Nature, our modern day disconnect is evidenced by our use of Nature as a mere resource for the satisfaction of our own needs. This attitude towards Nature is without due consideration for the impact on the land, the community, and our children (Roszak, 1992; Dubos, 1972; Macy, 1991). The consequences of this disconnection are serious at the individual as well as planetary level, because as we distance ourselves from Nature, our risk for psychopathology tends to increase (Searles, 1960; Roszak, 1995), and we have a greater likelihood of destroying our environment too (Macy, 1991; Dubos, 1972). Psychotherapy often comes at significant financial cost, and may be available for a limited time period only; whereas Nature is free, and will outlive our practice rooms and us! Understanding the beneficial effects of Nature might encourage therapists to consider creative ways of including Nature in their work.

### **My Story**

As a younger person, I grappled with questions such as "How are we to live?" trying to make sense of my world. Searching for answers, I studied Agricultural Science qualifying in Horticulture. Following this I began growing organic vegetables in the

heart of the countryside in Ireland. There, I raised both my family and crops simultaneously. Working with the land brought me into close proximity with Nature in a practical way. My guiding philosophy was informed by traditional farming methods, which value the intrinsic life force of the earth as a whole, and from this position I began incorporating more co-creative practices with Nature. I lived in this scenic sanctuary in County Wicklow, the garden of Ireland, for 16 years. Despite the tranquil setting (or perhaps because of it), I became aware of my own inner disharmony, which prompted me to start my own psychotherapy treatment back then.

### **How I came to my question**

Subsequently (20 years later), I trained as a psychotherapist. During this programme I became so engrossed in psychotherapy theory, that I lost sight of Nature's role in healing. I was reminded of this at the psychotherapy forum 'Deep Ecology-A Shared Experience' in December 2015, where four psychotherapists spoke about the ecological focus of their work. Two of these speakers, Selena Clare and Michael Apathy, have written dissertations in this subject area at the School of Public Health and Psychosocial Studies. Apathy's (2010) "Beneath our feet" is an exploration of ecopsychology, and Clare (2014) investigated ecotherapy. At the forum, Clare (2015) recounted the moving story of an ecotherapy session she held with a client by the sea. Her message reminded me of the support that Nature has provided for me at times in my life when I have felt deeply distressed. Remembering these, I realized that both Nature and psychotherapy are vital for my wellbeing. I wondered if others were aware of the healing power of Nature. As a new member of the psychotherapy profession, I felt a responsibility to communicate the therapeutic power of Nature. I knew Nature had a place in psychotherapy, what I wanted to know was, what that place was? I was one possible link between both these worlds. I wanted to connect both, for the healing of mankind and thus I felt called to explore Nature from a psychotherapeutic perspective, and bring back the findings to the field. If the evidence of Nature's therapeutic effect is strong and getting stronger (Jordan, 2014; Snyder, 1988; Seed, 2017), and psychotherapy practice aims to facilitate client's wellbeing, then how might we consider Nature's role in psychotherapy?

Six months later, when I was visiting Ireland, one of my closest friends there died unexpectedly. Upon my return to New Zealand, I began visiting a bush reserve close to where I lived, in order to find solace for my sorrow. These particular circumstances changed the course of my inquiry. Prior to this I had been lost in a sea of literature on Nature, not knowing which pieces to gather for the task. The opportunity arose for me to focus on my own direct experience of Nature, which seemed likely to uncover the material I was seeking. An in-depth inquiry felt like a more tangible task. I wonder also whether my inquiry into Nature in the first instance may have been born out of feeling separate from my homeland and longing for my *Turangawaewae* (place of belonging)? After all, Nature is universal and does not differentiate between cultures and ethnicities. Hence, this dissertation was born out of my desire to understand my own journey with both of these healing phenomena, and my desire to share this with the wider world for the purpose of healing.

Nature's absence from psychotherapy was always a noticeable gap in the field for me. Investigating Nature in relation to healing capacity seemed like one way of bridging this gap, in both psychotherapy and myself. The link between Nature and psychotherapy for the purpose of healing is where my interest lay, and so my initial research question was "How can psychotherapy understand Nature's role in healing". Realizing the all-encompassing nature of this question, I chose to offer myself as a conduit between both worlds and a means of reducing the territory to a more manageable one. Thus my research question became "**How might I explore Nature's role in wellbeing and communicate this to psychotherapy for the wellbeing of clients**"?

### **Aim and Scope of this research inquiry**

To sum up, the aim of my research project is to explore Nature's part in wellbeing, and to consider the implications of this for psychotherapy. I will conduct my research using a heuristic methodology, the method being my own ecotherapy journey, which involves immersion in, and reflection on Nature. I will then discuss this journey and consider some possible implications for the growth and development of psychotherapists and clients. Exploring Nature and focusing on its role in wellbeing, my intent is to illuminate the human-nature relationship further, including its potential

to assist therapists to expand their responses to clients and themselves. I hope this research will contribute to psychotherapy practice by offering insights into ecotherapy that might encourage practitioners to reconnect with Nature for their health, and the health and wellbeing of clients.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have introduced myself, and my journey into undertaking this piece of research. I have identified Nature's absence in psychotherapy training and practice, which coupled with my connection with Nature, has inspired me to undertake this inquiry. I have outlined some of my thinking in arriving at my research question, and described my rationale for conducting such an inquiry in this field at this time. I will refer further to this in chapter two where I introduce literature pertinent to this topic. Chapter three explains my choice of a Heuristic methodology, and the methods I employed in service of this. The fourth and fifth chapters provide full and descriptive accounts of my adventures in Nature, including some of the significant literature I encountered during this time. In chapter six and seven, I will discuss my findings in detail, highlighting patterns and themes that emerge. I share the personal and professional significance of this work for me, as well as the potential implications for the discipline of psychotherapy and beyond.

## Chapter 2. Literature review ‘Whakapapa’ - Lineage

My task in this chapter will be to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the literature pertaining to my topic. The chapter is divided into four sections; Psychotherapy encounters Nature; Science; Ecopsychology and Ecopsychotherapy; and Ecotherapy- Nature journeys. The writings are presented in this order, beginning with psychotherapy literature, moving through biology, and into the psychology of the mind, on to where ecology connects with human psychology and psychotherapy. The final section of literature reports on ecotherapy, an embodied practice of human beings’ personal journeys in Nature. I present the findings of these writings, together with a critique, bearing in mind that this is a synopsis of writings, which are full and complete works in their own right. The literature that I researched included material from the disciplines of philosophy, psychotherapy, psychology and the social sciences. I drew from both the written word and oral communications such as stories told in forums.

### **Psychotherapy encounters Nature**

The topic of human–nature relations is vast; whilst exploring the literature I initially felt somewhat overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information on the subject. Starting with the origins of psychotherapy, which are closely associated with the work of Sigmund Freud, we find that Freud was inspired by a poem on Nature, to train as a medical doctor. His first major work “The Interpretation of Dreams”; was written during a stay in the Austrian mountains (Allured, 2011). Apparently he considered Nature dangerous, attributing our fear of it as characteristic of the human response (Ivanhoe, 1997). Freud deemed our desire to manipulate Nature as an attempt to escape our vulnerability (Rust, 2008). Bernstein (as cited in Cook, 2007) says, “Nature has been suppressed by our concepts of it because these conceptions also mask nature in the self” (p. 58). Freud’s intra-psychic or one-person focus has since been expanded to a two-person psychology, however with the development towards a more relational psychology, we may have reduced our biological connections to the more than natural world (Totten, 2011). Clarkson (1991) points to the origin of *physis* being nature, and thus physician deriving from this:

*“I would like to do over the next few years is to reintroduce ourselves to physis, the life force, of which I believe we are the servants in psychotherapy. I believe that life force is in individual people and the task of psychotherapists and educators is to allow people to get back in touch with that inner force inside themselves. That is what the job is about, about letting people get back in touch with first nature” (p. 35-36).*

Searles (1960) believed the human-nature relationship to be so crucial to our wellbeing that any ambivalence towards Nature was deemed to be the source of psychological problems. Psychology and psychotherapy have tended to ignore that person and species development are embedded in place (Spitzform, 2000). Ecopsychology recognizes this separation as core to human psychological distress and environmental destruction (Spitzform, 2000; Jordan, 2014). While the mother-infant dyad is prioritized in psychotherapy, this is confined to our human mother, tending to ignore our earth mother (Macy, 1991; Allured, 2011). Allured (2011) captures this in the following;

*“We explore to the nth degree feelings of conflict about the patient’s relationship to the analyst, the patients relationship to their lover, their child, their mother, but steer clear (as if this was the politically correct thing to do) of conflicts in the patient’s relationship to nature and the nonhuman environment” (p. 256).*

The privileging of human relationships over those with the natural world might be a serious limitation of psychotherapy, since this relationship could be critical to clients’ wellbeing (Searles, 1960). Thus, Searles and Myers advocate reformulating our understanding of health to include our ecological sense of self (Spitzform, 2000). Spitzform (2000) exploring developmental theory in psychotherapy noticed a gap, which overlooked the role of the natural world in the emerging human self. She too advocates an “ecological sense of self”, in line with the inherent wisdom of indigenous cultures. These embody a deep sense of ecological place, that she mourns is absent from western psychotherapy (Spitzform, 2000). Awareness and attention to ecotherapy opens up new avenues of responding to clients clinically (Akhtar, 2001). This could be simply listening out for communications from our clients about Nature and responding to these. This introductory search of psychotherapy for a hint of Nature, gave me the confidence to pursue my research question. Then I began unearthing empirical studies in science, which investigated the biological and psychological link between Nature and human beings.

## **Science of the Matter**

### **Microbiology**

Renee Dubos, a microbiologist, medical scientist, and eco-philosopher, has had a tremendous impact on science, medicine, and the environment (Moberg, 2005).

A French environmentalist, he demonstrated the link between human health and the environment, when he discovered the first antibiotic (Moberg, 2005). His greatest influence was the idea of the interrelatedness between environmental health and human health, something he advocated all his life (Moberg, 2005). He proposed studying humans in their natural habitat, as a way of creating health for people and the earth alike: “If you want to study life, study the environment” (Moberg, 2005, p. 158). His definition of Nature included humanized landscapes, which have been co-created in a manner as to reveal inherent characteristics originally concealed, as well as wilderness (Dubos, 1972).

Dubos (1972) recognized man’s intrinsic connection with creation where we seek contact with living things because we have evolved in association with them, and thus he considered the mind as “a mirror of the cosmos’ (Dubos, 1972, p. 40), deeming mans need for contact with Nature to be vital for his sanity. Dubos understood the mechanism of man and Nature’s connection, as ‘creative adaptation’, whether these are microbes, humans, or landscapes. He claimed failed adaptations lead to disease and destruction, and that successful adaptations create and restore health (Moberg, 2005). He warned that we might have adapted so unconsciously, that we do not know our food and water sources, or where our rubbish is dumped. This sounded disturbingly accurate to me.

Contrary to popular opinion at the time, Dubos advocated, “improving” Nature. He encouraged people to become active participants in their communities, rather than passive observers. Focusing on how Nature could be transformed, he believed there were only two ways of doing this: either constructively or destructively (Dubos, 1972). He encouraged the cultivation of beautiful, tranquil, and nourishing environments for human beings to connect with (Moberg, 2005). “Shape the raw stuff of nature into patterns which integrate the materials provided by the wilderness with those of our human nature-a truly creative symbiotic process” (Moberg, 2005, p.170).

Dubos (1972) foresaw the current environmental crisis, and encouraged quality of life rather than quantity of production. Unfortunately the climate at the time chose to invest in railways instead of his waterfront project in New York, and Dubos had to wait 20 years for this, the largest waterfront project in America, to be completed. He deemed that the real environmental issue was the progressive degradation of the environment, the cause of which he attributed to our disconnection from Nature. He cited technology and the lack of direct contact with the earth as the source of this disconnect (Moberg, 2005). Dubos explained the reason for our desecration of the environment was not because we use it for our own purposes, but because we deny the sanctity of Nature. As a consequence of this, we are practicing “biological warfare against nature, ourselves, and especially our descendants” (Moberg, 2005, p. 157). Warning against this, he predicted a fate worse than death where we “may be doomed to survive as something less than human” (p.157). His message ‘Think globally act locally’ he coined to empower people to actively respond to their health and the environment (Dubos, 1972, p. 45).

Reading Dubos’ work reminded me of the agricultural science principles underlying ecopsychology. My thinking around “wilderness” changed in line with his, moving from an idealistic/ purist view of “wilderness”, to the understanding that even wilderness areas are managed and maintained to some degree, in order for us to access them. I was utterly inspired by this man’s devotion to communicating his simple message of health and wellbeing for over 20 years, where he lectured across America and Europe, writing many books on the subject. He died on his eighty first birthday in hospital, having just summoned the materials to write his next book, *Le Printemps m’appelle – Spring is calling me*.

## **Biology**

Nature’s role in wellbeing is becoming increasingly well documented in the literature (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich, 1984). Three recent theories investigated the scientific basis of Nature’s healing power. The Biophilia Hypothesis provides some empirical evidence that human beings’ innate need for Nature is biologically based, and includes a deep emotional kinship with the natural world, that meets emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs (Jordan, 2014). The Attention Restoration Theory

(ART) proposes that engaging in natural surroundings evokes a ‘soft fascination’, which is both stimulating and restorative (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). A third study conducted over a ten-year period demonstrated that recovery from surgery was enhanced when patients had a view of trees from their hospital window (Ulrich, 1984). This study formed part of psycho-evolutionary theory, which holds that as human physiology evolved in a natural environment, our brains are tuned to efficiently process natural content, without which physiological and cognitive depletion occur (Valtchanov & Ellard, 2015). These three studies appeared in many of the studies I read signaling Nature’s therapeutic value. These studies revealed Nature’s healing power, especially when even just a view of Nature hastened recovery. Next I became curious as to how Nature heals, by what mechanism?

### **Psychology of Healing**

In pursuit of this, I discovered two articles both of which were titled “Nature as Healer”. The first one (Olds 1989) offered a detailed analysis of the therapeutic properties of Nature. This article focused on the relationship between wellbeing, and setting or place. It was written following a research study conducted by the author, where 300 participants including students, parents, social workers, psychotherapists, and designers, envisaged a time when they or someone else felt wounded or in pain, paying particular attention to the setting. The participants were then asked to visualize placing the wounded person in a healing environment and drawing this. The drawings depicted the quality of healing places, which were consistent in theme and colour.

75% of the healing places drawn were outdoor scenes, and the remainder contained natural elements. Motion featured prominently in the drawings, either as water flowing, birds flying, people walking, or animals moving. This was thought to enliven the senses. Light was depicted throughout the pictures, and considered essential for wellbeing. Nature was thought to provide safety, security, and privacy, and a space to move freely in. The spiritual significance of Nature was noted, with Nature taking on a transcendent quality symbolizing something greater than us. “It was as if the embrace of nature’s physical wholeness and harmony itself transmitted psychic wholeness and tranquility” (Olds, 1989, p. 31). It was found that beauty in Nature heightened the awareness of this in the participants. Connection, belonging, and freedom were themes noticed. The author, who was a teacher, expressed the

importance of children connecting with Nature. The value of this research lay in its identification of some of the therapeutic components of Nature. In comparison with other articles, many of the same features of Nature were reported. My criticism of this study is that it reported participant's imagined healing places as though they were real places, the author should have stated this clearly in the findings.

### **Therapeutic Qualities**

In the second article, also titled "Nature as Healer", Marcus (2015) reported on the findings of three different studies. In the first, the author questioned 154 students about a time when they were distressed. The second study asked 65 participants specifically about outdoor spaces, and the third study questioned 143 staff, (patients and visitors), in a hospital, about their use of the garden space on the premises, and how this affected them. The findings revealed 95% of people reporting a positive change in their mood following visiting the gardens; two-thirds cited plants prompting this improvement. Half the participants reported the senses of smell, touch, and sound, as the core stimulants of change in mood.

In the first study the qualities in Nature cited by the students as contributing to their improvement in mood were:

- Natural elements, such as vegetation, birds and animals, and water.
- Sensory qualities including quietness and smell and colour.
- Qualities evoking safety and comfort, sometimes indoors.
- Privacy and solitude.
- Expansive view.

### ***Phases of Change***

Describing how the student's moods were affected by the practice of being in Nature, four categories were noted. These were; achieving calmness; enhancing perspective; remaining with the feelings; and distracting from the feelings. The second study correlated with the first in relation to the categories found. The author also cited a different ten year study of young people who had taken backpacking trips which revealed a sequential pattern of mood change as noted in their journals (Kaplan and Talbot, cited in Marcus 2015). Wilderness leader Segal (1988 as cited in Marcus 2015) uncovered a similar sequence, which was also reflected in the second and third study. The phases of change were described as follows:

- Journey from a place where the participant experiences the distress, to another space with room for a different experience.
- In this new place the senses are stimulated and engaged.
- A return to the self occurs.
- Spiritual connectedness between self and the environment is formed.

The value of this study lay in its outlining phases of healing in Nature. Interestingly visits shorter than 15 minutes did not induce the final stage. The author cited Benson et al (1994) relaxation response, listing three basic elements necessary to elicit this response: a quiet environment, a comfortable posture and a mental focus, sound or word encouraging receptive awareness. Benson (1994 cited in Marcus 2015) believes that poets and writers elicit the relaxation response upon immersion in Nature.

Even though the sample sizes were small, the findings correlated to other studies conducted in the field, (Snyder, 1988) and (Clare, 2014) whom I discuss later in this chapter. The effectiveness of natural settings seems to lie in both the capacity to escape from a stressful environment, and the draw to a potentially healing environment. The findings support the visual benefits of Nature affecting psychological and physiological outcomes. The benefits of wilderness experiences suggest that environmental restoration increases cognitive functioning, and rejuvenates emotional wellbeing. Both of these articles contained similar themes.

These studies, along with the scientific theories, add empirical support to the widespread recognition that development of gardens and gardening in the mental health sector can be therapeutic (Jordan, 2014). I appreciated the explication of the qualities of Nature, which may have influenced what I focused on when I was in Nature. I was particularly intrigued by the phases of the journey described, because I identified similar themes in my journey. I was curious about the time needed to evoke a spiritual connection. An investigation of ecopsychology was my next step.

### **Ecopsychology and Ecopsychotherapy**

Searching through textbooks on ecopsychology to familiarize myself with these principles, I soon discovered experts in the field, such as Roszak (1992; 1995). In these early days, Martin Jordan's (2014) book 'Nature and Therapy' orientated me to

ecopsychology principles and the application of these in psychotherapy practice, as ecotherapy.

### **Relational fourth**

Elizabeth Allured's (2011) chapter in 'Loneliness and Longing', 'Lonely for the other mother: Nature and the relational fourth', provided a key resource on my literature quest in this realm. In this article she outlined four different types of human - nonhuman relationships categorized by Macy (1991). These are: world as battlefield-good and evil; material world as a trap; world as lover; and world as self. Allured (2011) outlined the benefits of a mature relatedness to the nonhuman environment as described by Searles (1960): relief of anxiety or painful affect; self-realization; groundedness; and compassion for all creatures. The significance of this chapter is that the author places the human- nonhuman relationship in the context of the other psychotherapeutic relationships such as intrapsychic, interpersonal, and intersubjective ones, naming it the relational fourth. Allured (2011) warns how spending time alone or in Nature can mean turning away from human relationships, and she advocates exploring our longings for our natural mother. She offers excerpts of her own experiences of Nature throughout the chapter, and while I enjoyed her bringing her personal thoughts, I found them quite abstract. Her musings seemed quite fragmented amidst the other writings, evoking a sense of bewilderment.

Allured (2011) hypothesized that psychotherapists might be reluctant to introduce ecology into their practices because, "perhaps this is unexplored territory for most of us, and we do not know how to lead a journey into a wilderness that we have not traversed ourselves metaphorically or otherwise" (p. 256). She may have discovered the kernel of the issue! The value of her chapter to me was that she located Nature in the psychotherapy domain, naming this the relational fourth. Her hypothesizing that therapists may not feeling confident to explore ecotherapy encouraged me to continue on my quest, since I may have something important to offer other therapists from my experiences. There are two further special pieces of work that are pertinent to this inquiry and to the school of public health and psychosocial studies also that I will now introduce.

## **Ecopsychotherapy Ideology**

Ecopsychology and ecopsychotherapy provide foundational works in the field, from a psychotherapeutic perspective. Michael Apathy's thesis (2010) 'Beneath our feet: An exploration of the ways psychotherapists think about the human-nature relationship and the clinical implications of this in Aotearoa-New Zealand', brought the relationship with Nature into the School of Psychotherapy at AUT, Auckland. This provided a comprehensive analysis of ecopsychology within a psychotherapy paradigm. His political and social evaluation of these principles is pertinent to our understanding of ecopsychology in Aotearoa. He divided the literature he chose into dialectics of philosophical materialism and idealism, coupled with the psychotherapeutic techniques of analysis and empathy. These groupings facilitated a thorough analysis of the literature using psychotherapy theory such as the Oedipus complex, and analyzing our entitled (narcissistic) relationship with the environment.

This study presented research endorsing the powerful relationship between the natural environment and human beings' physical and psychological wellbeing. His findings point to Nature's capacity in regulating emotions and Nature's contribution to a sense of self, themes mentioned in other literature (Durie, 2001, Snyder, 1988; Spitzform, 2000). He also described a reciprocity that emerges in this bond that benefits both. Apathy (2010) advocated therapists supporting clients facing their responsibilities in relation to the destruction of the environment. This is core to Macy's ecological identity group work (Seed et al, 1988). Another great strength of Apathy's (2010) work is his wealth of insights into biculturalism in New Zealand, where he cautioned against imposing western ecopsychology principles on the indigenous peoples. I share his concerns regarding assertion of the dominant culture. Spitzform (2010) warns against this too.

Apathy's (2010) work makes an enormous contribution to the field of ecopsychology and ecopsychotherapy in Aotearoa, offering insights into the philosophy behind the colonization of Aotearoa. Like Dubos (1972), Apathy too cited technology as alienating people from Nature, which can lead to dominating Nature. Similar to Dubos (1972), he highlights the importance of place and things being local, and he

notes the absence of place in psychotherapy trainings around the world. Interestingly his final call to therapists is to adapt to change, something Renee Dubos would approve of too. The significance of this piece of work lies in that it carved out a space for Nature in the discipline of psychotherapy.

Despite Apathy's talent, I struggled to read his thesis completely until close to the end of my research, finding it too theoretical and difficult to connect with. His theories about romanticizing and idealizing Nature were quite confronting for me to consider at a time when I was overflowing with poetry! I did however note this viewpoint, and later found other authors echoing this. At this later stage, I could tolerate the critique, and found it orienting rather than critical. He described his thesis on human- nature relationships as the frame of the puzzle, with the centre largely incomplete. While he called for therapists to find their own voice in relation to Nature, he edited out his own reflections on his relationship with Nature prior to publishing, for privacy reasons. Surely this was a central piece of the puzzle? Apathy (2010) called for studies on emotional and experiential processes in Nature, hoping these might fill the gaps. One such piece follows.

### **Ecotherapy Guidelines**

While Apathy (2010) may have provided the frame at a conceptual level, Clare (2014) in her thesis "The eco-friendly therapist: an interpretative literature review of obstacles and solutions to practicing ecotherapy", offers practical guidelines on how psychotherapists might include Nature in their practice. Her work presents an overview of Ecotherapy, outlining five perceived obstacles to practicing as found in a survey by Wolsko and Hoyt (2012).

- Lack of time and money
- Boundary, confidentiality and legal concerns
- Poor location
- Ecotherapy was considered irrelevant to treatment goals
- A lack of awareness or confidence in implementing ecotherapy

Clare (2014) addresses these issues thoroughly in an attempt to dispel any myths, and to provide information for therapists considering ecotherapy. She outlines numerous ecotherapy modalities: green exercising, wilderness therapy, horticultural therapy,

expressive art ecotherapy, outdoor ecotherapy, eco-dreamwork, animal assisted therapy, and group work for sustainability, outlining the many benefits of these practices.

The significance of Clare's (2014) research is that it provides a comprehensive exploration of ecotherapy in psychotherapy practice, examining the benefits and challenges pertaining to this. Clare (2014), like Allured (2011), invites therapists to use ecotherapy with their clients, and while I endorse this in principle, in practice, I believe therapists need to find their own connection with Nature first. She, together with Apathy (2010), mourns the lack of in-depth case studies for training ecotherapists, and sees this as a limiting resource for therapists. Ironically she inspired mine! My only critique of her work is that while she hinted at her own connection with Nature through the high country of the South Island, unfortunately she didn't elaborate on this further. This would have provided a rich contribution to the field. She did however prepare the way for future case studies such as this, by laying the foundations of ecotherapy work. Clare (2014) expressed her frustration at being deprived of Nature while writing her dissertation (something that Konrad Lorenz (2002) also bemoaned when he was writing his book), and when she finally did go for a walk on the beach, she connected with her deeper feelings, revealing her real heart break.

*“Please, find the places that bring tears to your eyes, that touch your heart, and where you feel at peace, allow these places to bring forth your love for this world, and let this love show you how to protect and care for this earth”* (p. 73).

My heart responded to her plea, and this was for me the most poignant moment in her work. Here she revealed her deep love of the earth, and her serious concern for its demise. Perhaps her end was my beginning? Both Clare (2014) and Apathy (2010) believe that ecotherapy is a forum for clients to express their despair regarding climate change, a belief also core to the work of Macy (1991). Clare (2014) reports the benefit of ecotherapy being expansiveness, giving rise to a sense of belonging; themes revealed in other works (Snyder, 1988). The value of this research to me, and perhaps others, was that it placed ecotherapy on the psychotherapy map, in a very real way. Reading her work again later in my research, I recognized my work as an

ecotherapy journey, something I had remained unaware of until near the end of my dissertation. I noticed while reading these and other writings on ecopsychology and concepts of ecotherapy that I struggled to connect fully with the writings. While I knew I was in the right field, I was not at the right depth. I needed experience rich material, 'Nature stories'.

## **Ecotherapy- Personal Journeys**

### **Feeling Connected to Nature**

'The experience of really feeling connected to nature' (1988) is a heuristic study, where the author, Joan Snyder, interviewed 15 women about their experience of Nature. Four central themes emerged from her investigations of their relationship with Nature. These were reported as: nature being perceived as sacred and inspiring; a sense of oneness and unity was evoked in encounters with nature; emotional, physical and spiritual needs are fulfilled in nature; and a desire to reciprocate and care for nature was evoked from the connection. This study emphasized that the most significant aspect of connecting with nature is its nurturing capacity; the author expands as follows:

*"In times of stress, pain and sorrow, resolution comes through encounters with nature as we garden, journey to the ocean, mountains or desert, walk in a meadow, woodland or along country roads. Our private pain drifts away"*  
(p. 134).

Snyder's (1988) thesis also addresses the environmental crisis, and she recommends connecting with Nature as the solution to this despairing situation. This echoes Allured (2011); (Macy, 1991) and (Clare 2014), and the findings are in alignment with these works also. My lecturer forwarded this study to me in mid October, just after my immersion period in Nature. It was inspiring to read this rich source of information on Nature connectedness. It was most reassuring to find this wealth of information on Nature, reported in a psychological context in an academic forum. This encouraged my perseverance of straddling both worlds, which the author bridged so eloquently. The author's experience of Nature resonated with my own, evoking joy and celebratory feelings of connection with a fellow traveller (twinship). Recognizing my own feelings of connection to Nature was key to my findings. This writing was the most powerful piece of research I read throughout the whole

investigation. The writer's experience of Nature captured in the above quotation, described the essence of my healing journey in Nature.

### **Group Work in Nature**

A final excursion through the literature revealed a study of a group ecotherapy session in a forest on the Cherokee Indian Reservation, in the southern Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. 'Ecotherapy: Tribalism in the Mountains and Forest' by Davis & Atkins (2009). Seeking to foster the link between planetary health and personal health in an embodied way, a small group of ten counselling students taking a course in ecotherapy were accompanied by their two lecturers, and one elder from the Cherokee tradition. Forming a group over one weekend, they undertook tasks and rituals, which included gathering stones proportionate to the burdens they were carrying, walking with these, and eventually depositing them in a ceremonial process. They also built shelters from natural materials, and created Nature mandalas depicting their place in the group, and the groups' place within the whole. The author described the bonding that occurred within the group in the natural setting, and how this created a powerful collective healing resource. The participants shared a sense of belonging and renewal, as well as a sense of deep humility in the presence of great beauty. The author describes the experience as follows, "It is simply a feeling of innate connectedness and healing that words cannot describe, yet is known when one feels it" (p. 281). The author recommended training programmes, introducing experiential work in Nature, as part of their courses. These stories stimulated my thinking about offering trainings of this kind on our psychotherapy training programme. Perhaps a shared experience in Nature might help bridge the gap between psychotherapy and Nature?

Introducing literature would not be complete without mentioning an author that inspired me greatly on this journey. While it is not within the scope of the study to review his many writings, it feels important to acknowledge the significance he had on this work. The author is John Muir, the great naturalist, often referred to as 'John of the Mountains'. I discovered his work immediately following my trip to the mountain, when I entered the search term: 'Nature Writers'. His childhood experiences were a rich and nourishing read, transmitting a joyful enthusiasm for Nature, which was invigorating. He embodied his connection with the great outdoors

in his writings, and was passionate about inviting others to find theirs. He is responsible for the whole National park conservation movement. He recognized the oneness of all life, including death, unmistakable in Nature, and mourning town children's deprivation of Nature he wrote;

*“But let children walk with nature, let them see the beautiful blendings and communions of death and life, their joyous inseparable unity, as taught in woods and meadows, plains and mountains and streams of our blessed star, and they will learn that death is stingless indeed, and as beautiful as life”*  
(Gifford, 2006, p. 32).

Muir's passion for Nature made for compelling reading and Terry Gifford presents Muir's writings in a way that makes them highly accessible to today's reader. However, in contrast to this is the story 'Into the Wild' by Jon Krakauer (2009); the true story of a young man who walked into the bush in an attempt to live in communion with Nature, who died following a twist of fate that led him to starve to death. Reading this story I resonated with his loneliness and I identified with his passion and idealization of Nature, as perhaps the only presence he could trust in the world. It was heartbreaking reading the details of his last days and reminded me of Allured's (2011) claims that we cannot survive on a relationship with Nature alone. This young man's story illustrates one of Macy's categories of relationship with Nature, where the material world is renounced in favour of the sacred (Macy, 1991). Despite the groundedness that is often cited as a benefit of connecting with Nature (Snyder, 1988) & (Searles, 1960), sadly it may have been the absence of groundedness that led to this young man's death.

### **Connecting to the Source**

Another teacher and renowned author that influenced the present work is Eckhart Tolle. His chapter on Nature in 'Stillness Speaks' (Tolle, 2003) has been a source of inspiration for my thinking on Nature. Tolle (2003) considers that we need Nature for more than our physical survival; we depend on it to show us the way home, out of the prisons of our minds. "We got lost in doing, thinking, remembering, anticipating – lost in a maze of complexity and a world of problems" (p.77). Instead, he recommends that in the presence of Nature, we become aware of ourselves. Tolle

recommends being still and quiet and fully present in Nature. Listening deeply to Nature's sounds allows us to become aware of ourselves and transcend the 'me', which he considers the problem. He speaks of the sacredness beyond the sounds, and suggests approaching Nature spaciously, where "it will respond to you and participate in the evolution of human and planetary consciousness" (p. 81). Even his thinking on Nature is expansive, themes other authors have recognized inherent in Nature (Searles, 1960); (Snyder, 1988); & (Clare, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

I have introduced literature that I found important in my inquiry, each of which has played a role in my heuristic journey. Describing some of the meanings these hold for me, I have sought to communicate as well as critique the major findings of these works, and I will return to some of these authors in my discussion chapter. I turn now to the methodology of my investigation.

## Chapter 3 Methodology ‘Runga Kakano’- *Seed Dispersal*

*“Once one enters into the quest for knowledge and understanding, once one begins the passionate search for the illumination of a puzzlement, the intensity, wonder, intrigue, and engagement carry one along through ever growing levels of meaning and excitement. A unique, temporal rhythm has awakened in one’s absorption and sustaining gaze, a rhythm that must take its own course and that will not be satisfied until a natural closing occurs, and a sense of wonder has fulfilled its intent and purpose”* (Moustakas, 1990, p. 54-55).

In this chapter I will articulate my choice of methodologies and the rationale behind these choices. I discuss the philosophical origins of heurism exploring the characteristics of a heuristic inquiry. I describe the six phases of heuristic methodology: initial engagement; immersion; incubation; illumination; explication and creative synthesis (Moustaka’s 1990), and offer a case example of each one from my heuristic journey. I discuss the methods employed in service of the methodology, including the practice of specific characteristic processes such as focusing, indwelling and tacit knowing. I explain the inclusion and exclusion criteria of this inquiry, and finally, I critique the heuristic method of researching.

### **Place of research**

This research took place between November 2015 and May 2017. Initially located in the discipline of psychotherapy in the School of Psychosocial Studies, in the Auckland University of Technology on the Northern Campus, the location changed in August 2016 following a shift in methodologies, to a small Nature reserve called *Centennial Park*, in Campbells Bay. Situated on the North Shore, it is typical of the reserves dotted around Auckland. It was within walking distance from where I lived and en route to the sea. The data was collected here, during the immersive period in Nature, which took place in this bush between August and October 2016. Important data was also collected in Tongariro National Park in September 2016. The first visit to the bush during this inquiry took place in early August, where over a period of six weeks I visited the bush every second or third day.

## **Heurism**

Heuristic research originated from Moustakas' exploration of loneliness, within which he searched for a method to encompass the processes essential to investigating human science. Emerging from the philosophy of existentialism, it is a uniquely creative inquiry into the nature of the phenomenon as it is portrayed in human experience (Moustakas, 1990). A heuristic inquiry usually begins with a question arising in the researcher in relation to some aspect of their life (Douglas and Moustakas, 1985). My question was my desire to understand Nature as a healing power, in relation to the practice of psychotherapy. The philosophy underpinning this method comes from Husserl's understanding of the "value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear in their essence" (Moustakas 1994, p. 26). This was an authentic place to locate my research, since the question arose in me in the first instance, hence answering my question with my own experience seemed fitting.

### **Characteristics of heuristic research**

The core characteristic of a Heuristic inquiry is the relationship with the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1990). In my inquiry I explored my connection with Nature. As a framework, heurism offers a unique approach to researching human experiences without prescribing a methodology (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). The absence of a prescribed method is a key feature of this methodology allowing the researcher freedom and flexibility to guide and direct the method according to their internal process rather than imposing an external structure. To participate in heuristic self-inquiry requires remaining internally focused; dwelling within the feelings (Sela-Smith, 2002). The six phases involve surrendering to the feelings in each phase, releasing control of what these may be, without focusing on completing the phase either (Sela-Smith, 2002). Feeling directs the process, and unlike steps on a ladder, Sela-Smith, (2002) states

*"Each phase is experiencing stepping off and falling into feeling all that occurs in the process. Each phase is an uncharted territory because the ground is not formed until the inquirer creates both the territory and the path by surrendering to the unknown and then walks the territory to discover what is there" (p. 64).*

This is the method, and to execute this requires a steady inward gaze, which allows for intimate and authentic self-exploration in order to generate original autobiographical data that reflects one's lived experience. The understanding is that knowledge is gleaned through comprehensive self-searching, self- dialogue and dialogue with others. Diving into a process rooted in my own self, I began attuning to my thoughts and emotions becoming aware of these in depth. I pursued this through authentic self processes such as self-dialogue in poetry, prose and journaling, to uncover the inherent meanings. The steps in my process unfolded spontaneously in response to my desire to reveal the phenomenon; I just followed the energy of these shifts.

*My dissertation*

*dissertation like a river, weaving its own path  
meandering & coming to the sea.*

*Earlier galloping across terrain, mountains like a gazelle, panther  
(9<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)*

### **Alignment with methodology**

Knowing how to proceed demonstrates 'Tacit Knowing' something, which underlies heuristic discovery (Moustakas, 1990). Intuition is the bridge between the tacit and the explicit (Moustakas, 1990), and I relied heavily on mine throughout this research. Intuition guided my every step, and my discipline was my sensitivity to my internal experience, knowing when to persevere, pause and reflect, or change focus, in order to gather the data or make meaning of this. Flexibility and openness in searching lead me to specific literature, and particular places and people on my quest. The overall focus of a heuristic inquiry is to recreate the lived experience of the experiencing person (Moustakas, 1990). The chapters 'Nature & i', and "Cead Mile Failte" give a comprehensive representation of my internal and external journey simultaneously. This phenomenological methodology suited my research primarily because it demands staying as close as possible to one's experience, which is what I was most interested in pursuing. Training as a psychotherapist taught me to prioritize the subjective experience, and being a client myself, I am learning to surrender to my feelings and trust these as my guide. Thus this methodology really suited me, and the task I was undertaking.

## **Initial engagement**

The objective of this phase is to discover an area of intense interest or passionate calling to something personally compelling, as well as socially important (Sela-Smith, 2002). The researcher cannot ignore this, as this would be to deny something important in the self (Sela-Smith, 2002). Retrospectively I can see that discovering my topic in the forum was actually the beginning of the first phase of the heuristic inquiry the 'Initial engagement' with 'Nature as Healer'. My research question emerged from deep within the recesses of myself, seeking to know Nature's role in Healing. This stage requires the researcher to be autobiographical and often involves significant relationships and social contexts (Sela-Smith, 2002). My question brought me back to my relationship with the land, which has a particular significance for me culturally. The question is developed via theories and hypothesis, which stimulate exploration. I have written about the development of my research question in chapter one and two.

With the overall aim being to investigate the human-nature connection and how this affects wellbeing, I originally embarked on a hermeneutic literature review. Investigating phenomenology from an interpretative paradigm seemed suitable to illuminate the humanistic and philosophical enquiry I was undertaking. I wanted to learn about people's experience of "Nature as healer". Interpretivism seeking the meanings people attach to their experiences (Grant & Giddings, 2002) seemed an appropriate starting point. Drawn to literature on indigenous peoples' relationship with Nature, I read these embodied pieces of work (stories), which included the writer's interpretations. Unfortunately, conducting a hermeneutic review of literature on 'Nature as Healer' was not bringing me closer to my goal. My dissertation was not gaining traction but instead was becoming progressively larger and less manageable. In an attempt to shed light on this large topic, I was collecting literature from all peoples on the earth, which was overwhelming, and the volume of this was amassing rather than forming a cohesive body of literature.

Following my sudden bereavement and my subsequent feelings of loss, I became absorbed in my own internal process, where I visited the bush in order to support

myself. Thus began my own personal experience of “Nature as healer”. I now had become the subject of my research. What I did not realize was, that in following this path I was falling into a “Heuristic Inquiry”. “In heurism spontaneous creation of new methods or changing methods in midstream is not only allowed, but is encouraged” (Barrineau and Bozarth 1989, as cited in Moustakas 1990, p. 103). I was already diving deeply into my subjective feelings and thus entering phase two of a heuristic inquiry.

### **Immersion phase**

*“If you hold and serve the question...and you really believe in your question, it will be answered; the break-point will arrive when you will suddenly be ‘ready’. Then you must put your hand to the plow and not look back; walk out onto the water unmindful of the waves”* (Pearce 1971 as cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 42).

This phase is characterized by coming into intimate contact with the phenomenon being investigated, which involves living and breathing the question, a process that happens naturally (Sela-Smith, 2002). There is continual movement between the inner experience of the researcher and the phenomenon in the outer realm that inspired the inquiry. People, places and meetings provide possibilities of contact with the phenomenon for the researcher, who enters life in public and social contexts where the theme is being expressed.

As my own process began, I had the felt sense of the rightness of this for the Nature research and I did not doubt it for a moment. Not surprisingly at this exact point the location of the inquiry changed. Moustakas (1990) suggests the challenge of the researcher is to follow the path that will most effectively reveal the nature of the phenomenon and elicit the data being sought. The bush became my university. “ But I was only leaving one university for another, the Wisconsin university for the University of the Wilderness” (Brennan, 2014, p.142). It makes sense that my path for this inquiry into Nature would be in Nature! In the following extract, I documented my experience of being fully immersed in Nature, which illustrates the heightened sensitivity of this phase.

*Nature has come to the foreground, I notice the trees the power the birds. I hear they're sounds, the wind the rustling. Alert to Nature I am, aware of every minute chord & movement even silent presence. Nature is right there, just as it always has been, It is I who have altered my position, I who have ears that begin to listen*

*My eyes can see when before were blind*

*My heart responds; it is as if my world has come alive, & I in it I breathe deeply in my place have found my home,*

*Just where it always was only now I have come home to myself*

*Nature has been the way. (11<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

The freedom and flexibility in heuristic research affords space to the researcher to follow their intuition, and move according to how they feel called. Freedom and openness in searching have led me to the places where I have gathered data.

### ***Acquiring data***

At some unspecified point, the researcher knows (tacitly) the point at which to collect the data (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). This is simply that which will extend understanding of the question. This phase requires focused attention and alertness, which guides the researcher towards that which is most significant and experiential. (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). While this requires a disciplined procedure, spontaneous creation of methods is encouraged, due to the recognition of the contribution of subjectivity to knowledge (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). In the following extract I describe how during the immersion phase I focused and remained alert in my actions in the bush, gathering data.

*I'm usually stopped in my tracks, by either a noise, or a sight. This can be a bird sound or call, or the fluttering of a bird, a bird flying out having been disturbed by my arrival. it can be the sight of a burst of colour before me the awe of a beautiful form, leaf, tree, river usually standing in the light, "A picture" Sometimes it's the movement or flutterings of a leaf that draw my attention & stop me in my tracks. Then I become the bird watcher, still & Creeping slowly, paying close attention to some particular place in a canopy or ground. I can be drawn in for a number of minutes depending on what happens next. Usually I get to see something that I didn't see walking on. Sometimes I am rewarded with the prize, 2 rosella's flying or standing, often not but my senses engaged alert following cues alert attention. After some time when I become aware of the waning of the call to that place & that my energy*

*becomes less engaged & connected, I leave the place and walk on: until this happens again. (13<sup>th</sup> August 2016).*

This process was unique to Nature and I; specific sounds alerted me, something like call and response. The rest of the time I just walked. At home in the evening, I jotted down details about my experiences during the day. These took the form of poetry and prose: passionate outpourings capturing the essence of my feelings and insights. This rhythm and flow is consistent with the heuristic method (Moustakas, 1990). Research from outside sources comes later in the process so as not to detract from the internal process (Moustakas, 1990). My visit to Mount Ruapehu was the pinnacle of the immersion phase after which this tapered off naturally, demonstrated by less frequent visits to Nature, though I continued to experience Nature at a new depth. However, I stopped documenting my experiences having become saturated with data, and needing space to process that which I had gathered. This was actually very hard to do, since I had become so accustomed to writing my experiences. I had to reign myself in in order to write the dissertation itself, which required a more disciplined kind of writing.

### **Incubation phase**

In this phase the researcher retreats from the intense focus previously held, engaging instead in a soft focus, where surrendering to being rather than doing is key (Sela-Smith, 2002). This facilitates the expansion of knowledge gleaned in the immersion phase, allowing the inner tacit dimension to reach its potential, clarifying and extending understandings not yet in conscious awareness (Moustakas, 1990).

Underpinning this is the idea from Polanyi (1964, as cited in Moustakas, 1990) that deliberate mental operations do not create discovery but rather new discoveries emerge “by a process of spontaneous mental reorganization uncontrolled by conscious effort” (p.29) when given the time and space to do so. New ways of thinking, being, feeling, seeing and understanding emerge from this.

During this dissertation I have experienced many incubation periods. The following is one example of the process of incubation, which led to illumination.

*Today when I was incubating in my sunroom lying out looking at the sky and tree tops- I thought of where would I go tomorrow? what nature place  
I remembered Konrad Lorenz. & his joy at the magnificent day that was the perfect day to go to the Danube river with the dog.*

*'dog days" he called them  
Anyway I said  
Where will we go tomorrow,  
Where will I take you,  
And the next day & the day after & all the days  
I realized I was taking my grieving heart in relation to Ursula  
My grief opened and in that moment a cat appeared on my conservatory roof  
staring in at me.  
I felt immediately Ursula in a Nature form, Ms McGonagle appearance.  
I considered going to it, feeding it owning it minding it & then surrendered.  
Then it jumped down  
I moved to see where, was it  
Outside the door, it was gone,  
So was the moment.  
Just like that  
Grief came, cat came,  
Curiosity took over (11<sup>th</sup> August 2016).*

I had visited the bush four times in ten days, and I really only became conscious of my reasons for going there during this quiet and reflective time away from the bush in my sun room. This is typical of incubation, in that it takes place in a relaxed environment when one is less focused on the topic. This incubation process took place simultaneously within a period of immersion. The phase for me was characterized by knitting and resting in my sunroom. I knit solidly for three weeks until the green scarf was completed, during which time I was also visiting the bush; the knitting contained some of my anxiety.



*Figure 2: Knitting and decomposition book', in sunroom on yoga mat.*

A wider incubation of sorts has been taking place since the conception of this inquiry in Nature, particularly since the process has deepened in the past 9 months following the death of my friend, and the subsequent coming into form (birth) of this dissertation.

### **Illumination phase**

This phase following on from incubation occurs spontaneously and involves a breakthrough in conscious awareness, bringing new interpretations, meanings and understandings, which reorganize knowing and allow deep transformation.

Awakenings to new aspects of an experience, synthesis of fragmented knowledge or hidden meanings uncovered, are characteristic of this phase, which changes the experience of the self and the world in a moment or in waves over time (Sela-Smith, 2002). The above example portrays this phase. Finding Julia Cameron's book 'The Right to Write' and reading this for the first time that night, I awoke the following morning at 5.30 a.m. bursting with insights about how Nature was healing me. This piece illustrates the illumination phase of my heuristic inquiry, where I experienced a breakthrough in my conscious awareness.

*Nature has given me a story to tell, a hundred times which wherein I define myself and grow and refine myself listening to my own narrative.*

*Nature has found my inner creativity to write poetry & read it. My actor  
Through nature I have found my inner child to play and enjoy the bush, the trees the birdsong to climb*

*Nature has brought to me my writer, wherein*

*I have some subject to write upon, with which I am stimulated by  
Which writes through me  
a story that wants to be told, & written.*

*And then*

*Nature has given me a life to live, a song to sing a reason to run,  
some place to go, something to see, my life to love.*

*Nature has taken me through & takes me through my life*

*Introduced me to my grieving self*

*Holds me in this, a companion*

*For my lonely self, a living container (9<sup>th</sup> September 2016, 5.30 AM.)*

Throughout this heuristic inquiry I received numerous insights, most of which I have documented in detail in the following three chapters. Illumination took place throughout the heuristic process, rather than occurring at one stage, however at this point immersion was tapered off and passionate insights became available. Finding Moustakas' (1990) book 'Heuristic research: Design and methodology' in the library was a pivotal 'Eureka' moment and was vital to the dissertation coming into form. I describe the enlightenment and clarification of this early illumination in the following,

*In the library feeling found by every word in his first chapter outlining how he came to this reference. Grief coming through, as I understand my process in the context of my dissertation*

*The loss of my friend*

*the finding of my dissertation.*

*The losing of my friend in human form*

*The finding of her teaching*

*finding/understanding her teaching*

*The grief and relief at being found by Moustakas, allowed me to weep the tears in my heart for myself & my process,*

*gave me a place to cry*

*surrounded by others I wept as I read. (9<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

Finding this research methodology was crucial to progressing my dissertation in an academic form. This deepened my trust in the process that was taking place, which facilitated my surrendering further. I had already entered the unknown, and was discovering the territory, which is true to heurism (Sela-Smith, 2002); (Moustakas, 1990).

### **Explication phase**

This phase is characterized by fully examining that which has awoken in consciousness in the previous phase, in order to understand the layers of meaning in this unique to the experience (Moustakas, 1990). It requires the researcher to attend to awareness, feelings, beliefs and judgments in conversations with others (Sela-Smith, 2002). Methods used in this stage are focusing, in-dwelling, self-searching and self-disclosure (Moustaka's 1990). The new meaning becomes embodied in the researcher who moves consciously with this.

Throughout this dissertation process I have examined my experiences, insights and understandings. I have been engrossed in self-searching in order to examine the essence of my thinking and feeling, and I have shared my thoughts in conversations with my supervisor where ideas, themes and nuances have emerged. I engaged in long periods of focusing and indwelling, and the methods I applied were journaling, walking, photographing my subject, and dialoging with others. These helped me to identify the components of my experience in order to generate greater comprehension of the overall experience. One noteworthy example of illumination followed closely by explication using self-disclosure as method, occurred after I discovered Moustakas' research method, and I realized that the process that was naturally unfolding was, a heuristic inquiry. I wrote the following email to my supervisor explaining my process, which had just become clear to me.

*Dear Jonathan,*

*I thought i might update you a little on the latest happenings in relation to my dissertation! Well the storm has passed and I am in a creative phase, Thank God.*

*I am at present writing poetry on Nature and prose, inspired and engaged creatively in a very particular way, which is both exciting and energizing as well as exhausting! Mostly in Immersion phase of Heuristic method but also some creative synthesis.*

*Anyway my idea for my presentation is some slides of pictures I have taken on my path, together with the "story of how I came to my topic" which upon writing it which I have done now, I believe it will eventually lead me into my introduction chapter of my dissertation.*

*As for my method I devoured Moustakas (1990) Heuristic Research book and felt so found in that method that I feel very relieved that I am completely on track with my dissertation. I intend to discuss the stages of this method and explain how I can relate my process to them. This will eventually become chapter two. As for the heart of my dissertation, which is my own direct experience of "Nature as healer", I will mention that I have been catapulted into this process since the death of my friend and teacher, and so far this immersion is in process. They will have to read the dissertation to get this communication, or I may speak of it in a forum some day when I have gained further illumination on it. At present it is still raw and being born so I feel protective of this as yet, at this stage. Very much in process (11<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

Finding this methodology was significant in terms of my progressing the dissertation. It offered me a place of refuge in the turmoil I was experiencing. I was already deeply engaged in my process, whilst at the same time struggling to compose my dissertation.

How these were connected was critical to the task at hand, and heurism was the key. It revealed the overall map of the research inquiry, of which I was already immersed in! I knew they were connected, but now I knew how. The form was clear; the understanding of the stages, and the structure to write the dissertation into, became apparent. Finding this book two days earlier catalyzed a reorganization of thought, which clarified my experience, orchestrating a plan for the overall dissertation.

Other articles that I read focused on themes present in my process with Nature, which assisted my reflecting on my experience. Often with great synchronicity appropriate readings became available just when I needed them. In Mount Ruapehu, having gotten lost in the bush, I was given ‘Container contained’, by my friend, which explained aspects of my experience. The literature I read hugely facilitated the explication of themes from my internal experience of my journey with Nature. The earlier readings on the therapeutic qualities of Nature helped me identify these parts of the whole experience. Readings on ecotherapy facilitated my recognizing this aspect of my journey with Nature. Reading “ The experience of really feeling connected to nature” (Snyder, 1988) facilitated my identifying this significant aspect of the inquiry.

### ***Writing as method of differentiating***

Focusing, indwelling and differentiation are necessary practices of heurism (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985) that are techniques used to analyze. Writing was one of the primary means by which I turned inwards expressing my feelings, often writing reams of pages paying attention to my thoughts, beliefs, feelings and judgments. Cameron (1999) understands writing as an act of focusing on something when we want to see things more clearly. “Writing is the art of a listening heart” (p.28). I used this method to explore my thoughts and feelings, especially to help me process my sad or anxious feelings. However, I also wrote when I was angry after my presentation, and this provided some processing of my rage, which eventually subsided (ten days later), allowing the deeper truths to emerge. Cameron (1999) recognizes writing as alchemy where we “metabolized the injury into art” (p.31). I expand on this in a later chapter.

### ***Walking as method of indwelling and self-searching***

Cameron (1999) also describes how our bodies hold heartache and grief, and in moving them we access these feelings. I usually walked between one and two hours when I was in the bush and thus walking featured heavily as one of my methods during the immersion phase. Cameron (1999) recognizes the power of writing as “ a psychological as well as a physical activity” (p.28). All my journaling was done by hand as were my notes on articles and books too. I have only come to the keys at the final stage! I have filled 3 x 160 pages of “decomposition book” and one other larger journal, so far. Cameron advocates picking up a pen a paper and unlocking awareness, rewriting our life.

*“Entering or bodies we are entering our hearts. “Heart” is where the art is. This is why writing by hand, even when it seems clumsy and inconvenient, can lead us to a deeper truth than our flying fingers at the keys.”*

Writing and rewriting helped me to make meaning of my thoughts. An example of this follows:

*Every time I write the details of the tree in Ireland and the rose or these it brings out more of the grief. I get back to these feelings again & feel them again. I am glad in a way that I get to write and rewrite these pieces. I'm glad I have some place to cry these tears. Maybe when I finish I will always be able to cry these tears for Ursula when I read my dissertation story. (23<sup>rd</sup> October 2016)*

### **Creative synthesis**

*“This new whole draws some expression of creativity out of the researcher to reveal its presence in the outer world. The new whole and its expression cannot be scheduled or preplanned; it is born, and the researcher is perhaps the midwife who is there to assist its emergence. There is something transpersonal about what emerges that seems to take on a life of its own. It is an amazing time of synchronicity, harmony, connection and integration” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 69).*

The final stage of the heuristic inquiry, ‘creative synthesis’, also known as ‘realization’, occurs when the five other phases have unfolded naturally. The

researcher, who is familiar with the themes illuminated and explicated in the inquiry, recombines the fragments assembling them into a new whole (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). This is achieved in a rhythmic way listening for the meanings within the meanings for what is in the heart of all that has been revealed (Sela-Smith, 2002). Creative synthesis emerges using tacit and intuitive powers and inspiration, and usually takes the form of a narrative depiction (story) using verbatim material, though it can be some other form of creative expression also (Moustakas, 1990).

A number of expressions of creative synthesis have emerged throughout this inquiry to date. The first was the emergence of the presentation, which came into form following the illumination of Moustakas methodology. I speak of this in greater detail in the next chapter. The peak of my immersion phase, in mount Ruapehu inspired a spontaneous ritual to transpire, forming another creative synthesis. A third significant creative synthesis emerged from the opportunity to speak at a colleague's funeral, where I transmitted my journey in Nature on this sad yet special occasion. This dissertation itself, embodies verbatim material from the heart of my experiences within narrative depictions, and so qualifies as a creative synthesis. Different levels of creative synthesis have arisen in spirals throughout this inquiry, and I expect these will continue to emerge.

I organize the data, presenting it in chronological order, focusing on the experiential aspects of the journey, allowing the themes to emerge since this is fundamental to heurism. I synthesize the data in accordance with peak experiences of the researcher, which embody transformation.

### **Material chosen**

This inquiry includes literature published in English referring to the relationship between human beings and Nature. Literature written from a philosophical and psychological perspective, as well as psychotherapeutic, is included. Writings from social science and the arts are also referred to. Ecopsychology and its application in practice, ecotherapy, are contained in this work because they are the forefather and mother of this work respectively. This study does not cover the areas of food and natural medicine because while these are forms of Nature, they do not pertain to psychotherapy specifically. Horticultural therapy, animal therapy and adventure

therapy are not part of this inquiry because their focus is on an external activity rather than being internally focused.

### **Critique of this methodology**

Heurism differs from other research methods in that rather than proving or disproving a hypothesis, heurism is concerned with discovering the truth as presented in the experience, emphasizing connectedness and relationship (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). Unlike hermeneutics the researcher remains personally involved in the inquiry to the end (Moustakas, 1994), affecting the outcome in a myriad of ways. This methodology requires that the question formulated be simple, clear and concrete, allowing all aspects to be explored by the total engagement of the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). Should a lesser question be chosen in avoidance of feelings, unconscious processes might affect the development; causing chaos and confusion. The question must come from the centre of the researcher otherwise they will not have the passion to bring it to a meaningful conclusion (Sela-Smith, 2002). Sela-Smith (2002) cautions against using this methodology to fulfill a master's thesis requirement, citing that the question may not arise naturally or the full immersion timing might be jeopardized, when the focus is on the institutional requirements. Another concern she raises in using this method for a thesis is that it may cause the story with its embedded wholes to disappear in a research manuscript (Sela-Smith, 2002).

I privileged the timing of the heuristic process over externally imposed time frames, which meant I did not rush my process to fit into the required academic timeframe. I secured a six-month extension to honour my process, though this incurred significant cost. Colleagues in the field have reported being rushed through the immersion phase (Grennell, 2014), which may reduce expansion of the self, or hinder the creative synthesis or the full transformation. A longer time frame would be more suited to this methodology. Resistance in the researcher, such as avoidance of feelings, may jeopardize the process, which requires surrendering to the feelings. This could result in a managed process without real transformation taking place in the researcher and subsequently, the reader of the story (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Another critique of this methodology is its lack of structure. For some people this might be too spacious; however, the passion evoked by the hunger and dedicated quest for new insight, distinguishes it from other modalities, offering new revelations above and beyond other methodologies (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Being a psychotherapist my focus is on the subjective experience, and so this methodology suited my instincts. One serious critique of this methodology is that while freedom and flexibility in the method is proposed, an external set of steps (phases) is imposed. This requires the researcher to fit the process to an external reference, rather than remaining only with the experience of the self.

### **Overview**

I have introduced heurism and its place in this inquiry, demonstrating how my research is aligned with this methodology. I have cited my rationale for choosing this methodology. I have critiqued heurism as a methodology, evaluating this based on my experience and that of other authors. It is now time to tell my story.

## **Chapter 4: ‘Nature & i’**

This chapter introduces my process with the dissertation prior to my returning to Ireland. I speak about the event that changed the course of the dissertation. I communicate the experiences I had in Nature following this. I describe how upon my return to New Zealand, I gravitated to the bush where I carved out a niche for my self. I offer some of the writings that arose out of these experiences, including some photographs that I took on my journey. I conclude this chapter showing some of the slides I presented as part of my dissertation process, and I comment on how this process was for me.

### **Background**

In the six months prior to returning to Ireland my research primarily involved seeking out literature, which told people’s stories in Nature. Starting with the first peoples, I read Aboriginal and Māori history. Themes involving dispossession of land emerged following colonization, and the loss of life that ensued. Feeling called to a deeper understanding of my own history; I began reading “Annals of the Famine in Ireland”, (Nicholson & Murphy, 1951) an account written by an American woman who had walked the length and breadth of the Irish countryside for a few years documenting what she saw. I was very impacted reading these heartbreaking stories, ‘witnessing’ my people dying of starvation. I felt saddened to the core of my being. My topic began shifting from “Nature as Healer” to “Land and Survival”. I stopped reading this book in order to prepare for my trip home; however, the real truth was I didn’t want to read anymore because of how painful it felt. I was afraid of getting stuck in the grief.

### **Heartbreak**

While in Ireland, I visited my friend and Nature teacher, Ursula Selwood. It was the first time we had met in six years. We spent a special Sunday afternoon together reconnecting; Ursula playing her latest crystal prisms for me. Four days later I received a phone call telling me of her death. I was shocked at the news. Within the first hour of hearing this news I picked a blush pink rose from my mother’s garden; I held onto it smelling its beautiful scent every few moments. It helped calm me somewhat. Ursula had taken many beautiful photographs of flowers over the years, making them into cards and pictures. I associate roses with her.

The day between her death and her funeral, I visited Newgrange the ancient burial chambers in Ireland, dating back over 5,000 years. These were built in Tara, the seat of the high kings of Ireland. Ursula was a shamanic healer. She made her own flower essences for her clients. It seemed fitting to be in this ancient sacred site on that day, accompanied by my very close friend and our families. The following day was another glorious day (in Ireland these are particularly cherished), and we travelled through the familiar countryside to Ursula's homeland in Wells, in county Wexford for her funeral. The chapel is adjacent to the restored Victorian house and gardens where she grew up, which are now open to the public. The vicar read Mary Elizabeth Frye's poem "Do Not Stand at my grave and weep"

*"Do not stand at my grave and weep  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry;  
I am not there. I did not die"* (1932).

I have a beautiful version of this sung by a boys' choir, and I had to agree with the vicar, that Ursula might approve of this choice. After the service we went outside into this country graveyard amidst glorious sunshine. I reconnected with some old friends most of whom I had not seen in many years. Soon everyone was leaving and I began to leave reluctantly. On the way back to the car there was a little piece of 'no man's land' adjacent to the graveyard, which had a large oak tree and a grassy area. I wandered in here in an attempt to find some space to be with my feelings. I was struggling to leave Ursula. I could see her grave from here. Realizing that I was struggling to let her go connected me with my sadness at having to separate from her.

I remembered a practice from Perelandra Nature Research Centre that I had learned many years earlier in my grower days. It is to ask the Nature spirits of the tree being cut down, to enter an adjacent tree. I asked Ursula's spirit if she wished to enter the oak tree; I seemed to have difficulty leaving her in the ground. Thinking these thoughts provided the bridge for this to take place. My youngest daughter came up to me afterwards and we walked together linking arms. My other daughter sat on the swing under the tree. I had found my way forward. The process felt complete and I could leave. We followed our friends into Wells house for lunch, after which we took a special walk in the woods that Ursula, had been instrumental in saving.



Figure 3: 'Grainne and Niamh', Wells House and Gardens, Wexford, Ireland (18<sup>th</sup> July 2016).

## Grieving

It was really only when I returned to New Zealand that I became aware of the shock I was carrying in relation to the sudden loss. I was anxious and unsettled. Another one of my daughters, Kathy, had bought some wool and was awaiting my return to help her knit. I subsequently began to knit her a green scarf. This provided some relief from my anxiety, however it was not enough to alleviate my distress. On my first free day, (five days later), I took myself off to the bush. When I first emigrated from Ireland, I used to walk the East Coast Bays beaches most days to get some relief from

my homesickness. Two years later during another difficult time, I walked the beaches everyday for respite from my agonizing feelings. Sometimes I was lucky enough to be accompanied by a very special friend; but mostly it was just Nature and I.

On a beautiful winters day in early August I went for my first bush walk since my return. I had found this bush about 4 months earlier, on my way to the beach and had taken this route to the beach a number of times since. On this occasion about fifteen minutes into my trip, I became aware of a low unsettled feeling in the pit of my stomach. I continued walking and came upon a beautiful glade with a little wooden bridge over a gushing stream. I leant on the balustrades here, looking into the water, and I began to cry. I sobbed tears into the water, weeping very fully; my nose and mouth dripping too. Coming out of this process I wondered what I would do if someone came by. Some part of me wished to be found in my sadness. Walking on somewhat lighter from the experience, I came upon a stand of magnolia trees, one of which was in bud. Delighted with the sight, I took a photo, and doing this I felt connected to Ursula who had a passion for photographing flowers. Beside this tree was a lone white magnolia flower on a bare tree; this image was striking, and reminded me of Ursula too. It looked like a Steiner doll, an old fashioned homemade doll for children (Ursula was German). Later that afternoon I photographed a camellia in full bloom in my back garden. I was most captivated by the profusion of flowers lying on the ground under the tree, which I made sure to capture in the photos. The following day in preparation for presenting my dissertation, I documented my feelings, in order to communicate these in the presentation.

*A restless sparrow on a boughs end,  
A flitting fantail on a fern frond  
My heart is heavy as a leaden log,  
sad as a sad song,  
Lonely as an eagle in a vast sea,  
Limp as an animal injured.* (4<sup>th</sup> August 2016)

The following day in contrast to the above I wrote

*I have fallen in love with Nature  
Drunk on its wine,  
Those birds who drink & get drunk on the berries  
Well this is Mine.* (5th August 2016)

That first weekend back in New Zealand I spent on Marae. At the powhiri just as the guests were approaching, a shaft of light entered the dark room through the slightly open door. I wrote;

*I saw them standing in the soft rain in the distance  
When they entered I noticed a shaft of light entered the room onto the floor.  
It was the light in the darkness- signified their light that we were  
wanting/needing  
They brought us the light of their beings  
We brought the cradle of our whare.  
We needed them, they needed us.  
Our Kaumatua spoke of them as birds with two wings coming to us.  
I felt the exultation of these beings (people) & as they became this that they  
are / as they remembered who they are, I remembered who we are,  
My heart felt the oneness & the preciousness together' (8<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

The following morning back at home I was suffering again, and I wrote

*An ache in my heart  
Light through the window beaming  
the sound of the ticking clock & smoke alarm battery  
I breathe wondering how I will do this day.  
My heart is heavy.  
I wonder if it is the grief of the losses  
or what I have done yesterday  
that weighs heavily on my heart.  
Now as I write my eyes tear up my sadness in my heart becomes apparent and  
my eyes brim with tears.  
I gasp & sigh  
I hear a bird & I start to cry.  
Now I break-  
Then the chirping – life is here  
I am not alone  
Met with light & sound, bird song.  
Even the battery in my smoke alarm cheeps  
I cry as I realize that that too holds me. (8<sup>th</sup> August 2016 AM)*

I went to the bush again later that day, looking for relief. This time the form of Nature caught my attention. The configuration of the leaves, the roots on the ground, the decayed leaves on the tree, and most particularly how the light illuminates the water.

On this walk I photographed Nature's myriads of forms. My grief opened during that trip at one point too, allowing me to cry some of my tears.

The next day I attended a colleague's dissertation presentation of "A Therapists Experience of Grief". Hers was a heuristic enquiry. Here I was introduced to Moustakas', heuristic method and I identified myself in the immersion phase. During this I realized that I was 'bereaved'. I resonated with her when she spoke about losses being inevitable, but how they become traumatic when we are not met in our grief. After class I struggled to contain my process. I was overwhelmed with my feelings of grief coupled with the anxiety of presenting my dissertation the following week. I voiced my concerns about translating my process into a dissertation at all. My lecturers were hopeful that we could put a structure around this. I left with my supervisor whom I then told about my friend's death and the significance of our relationship. Having a space to speak about my loss relieved me a little. I then met a close colleague with whom I continued to tell my story. At a peak moment in our conversation a tui landed in a tree right beside us and began playing on a branch. This distracted me from my feelings, and I became enthralled by his antics. I felt Ursula's spirit join me in this form.

Immediately after this I sought out Moustakas' book "Heuristic Methods", and I read the first two chapters of this. I felt so found by his words that I wept silently, feeling like there was a way for me after all. I felt deep gratitude to Moustakas for having written this method for people like me. That afternoon to capture the essence of my experience, I wrote;

*The tui arrived right beside us  
& stayed in the tree like it was she:  
She played in the branches so close by &  
it was special  
I could see her colours  
Dark green on her breast-  
and then speaking about my children I wrote*

*Ursula supported me while I was mothering them.  
These were her legacies  
They are her work  
This is the fruit of her labours too. (9<sup>th</sup> August 2016).*

And then I wrote the dedication to Ursula (see page vii)

Later again in the evening I wrote,

*Today in Uni-A therapists Exp of grief  
illuminated/reminded me of mine  
my immediate bereavement  
one louder, the other more sad & lonely, quiet & unable to be voiced yet.  
The shock of one death & the silence of the other  
Beautiful yet profoundly sad for me death  
2 deaths -2 lives stark contrast*

*Held by two lecturers in the distress & chaos of how to be  
with my dissertation  
my topic  
& myself. (9<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

The next evening in preparation for my upcoming presentation I wrote how I came to my topic. I wrote about my years in Ireland in Ballyknockan house, my home, my Nature sanctuary. The following is an excerpt of this writing.

*Only surrounded by the rawness and realness of nature, and the warmth of my family, could I begin to discover my own dis-ease and unrest, my own grief and sadness. My own sorrow and rage. My discomfort and unsettledness. This was not a pleasant discovery for me. I felt like a panther in the garden. This did not come easily. I fought these realizations as I fought my family as I fought myself. I did not surrender to these realizations gracefully; in fact I did not accept them at all then. I believe Nature had a place for the wild animal in me, the wounded child, however I did not wish to see these aspects of myself, perhaps too much shame, guilt, grief at my choices, and certainly I was not willing to take responsibility for my destruction and wrecklessness. Would that I had only listened then? Would that I responded to myself then as I might now. (10<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

The next morning in the shower I remembered the name Ursula called her work with Nature. 'Nature & I'. That afternoon I visited the sea and while I was there I noticed the patterns in the water as the waves came in. After this, lying in my sunroom looking at the sky and treetops, I remembered Konrad Lorenz's chapter called 'Dog Days'. Lorenz (2002) whose dog accompanied him on these adventures, wrote

*"I swim across the Danube and lie in a dreamy backwater of the great river, like a crocodile in the mud, amongst scenery that shows not the slightest sign of the existence of human civilization, then I sometimes achieve that miraculous state which is the highest goal of oriental sages. Without going to*

*sleep, my higher centre dissolves into a strange at one-ness with surrounding nature; my thoughts stand still, time ceases to mean anything and when the sun begins to sink and the cool of the evening warns me that I have still another three and a half miles to swim home, I do not know whether seconds or years have passed since I crawled on to that muddy bank”(p. 140)*

I realized that I was taking my broken heart on these expeditions. I have included the poem I wrote depicting this. (see page 28). Next I wrote the following plan in preparation for presenting my dissertation.

*I will write my introduction  
& I will explain my method.  
& the heart of the matter I will keep with me for now. (11<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

### **The heart of the matter**

In therapy that day remembering my writings the previous night, I spoke of my special relationship with Nature since my time in Ballyknockan in Ireland. After therapy I wrote these poems to capture expanding on what I had said (I read these poems at my presentation).

*Nature has been there for me for the agonies of my existence.  
Nature is always/ has always accompanied me;  
When I am lost, sad, angry, devastated, numb.  
Nature has & is present to me changing through the seasons.  
My backdrop/ not just mine.  
A leaf flutters a sky changes the scenery changes a butterfly lands;  
Nature is my rock; My secure base, My secure place  
Nature never challenges me,  
Nature never interrupts me  
Nature accompanies me & I Nature (11<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)*

#### *Nature just is*

*Nature’s presence accompanies me  
supports me  
protects me  
Interests me  
plays with me  
heals me  
loves me  
holds me  
Nature cocoons me*

*sometimes Nature expells me  
but I always return  
again and again for  
another encounter  
with my friend Nature  
Nature is my friend  
Nature engages me  
Nature awakens me  
Nature enlivens/ me  
Nature brings me to life  
Nature holds me close,  
I allow Nature close  
Nature and I.  
Nature stands strong  
Nature remains,  
Nature witnesses my process  
I witness Nature's  
We are one and the same  
Nature and I, are woven  
of the same cloth  
Nature & I are one  
Nature & i are whole  
Nature reflects to me who I am  
Nature reflects to me the whole  
Nature holds for me the whole,  
When I lose sight of that.  
Nature reminds me of who I am,  
Nature in its wholeness reflects mine.  
Nature is my Healer  
& not just mine. (11<sup>th</sup> August, 2016)*

And then attempting to capture how my relationship with Nature has changed since I began this research journey.

*Nature has come to the foreground  
Everywhere I see Nature  
Everywhere I hear the bird song  
Life is in colour,  
Nature is centre stage,  
Life has sound now  
Silence and birdsong interplayed  
Life has form  
-leaves moving  
sky changing*

*everything a web,  
everything a form, or a potential one (11<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

### **Bird watching**

The following day I went through the bush and down to the sea again. This time I chose a different path, and no sooner than I had taken a step on this path, I felt the familiar forlorn feeling in my solar plexus. A clearing opened in the bush and some small birds rustling in a low bush caught my attention. I stopped to investigate, placing my hand onto a small tree trunk. Touching this brought forth my tears and I stood here sobbing watching the little birds flitting in and around the thicket. After a little while a Tui arrived, flying into a tree close by and he began to sing. I was enchanted by this sight and sound. I only moved on when a black Labrador came charging through with his owner following close behind, and the moment was gone.

My next stop was when some butterflies hovering around a group of flowering Manuka trees caught my attention. I stood and watched them fascinated by their delicate fluttering wings, trying to capture them on camera. I remembered Ursula's flower pictures again, often featuring a butterfly or a bee in the centre of the flower. On the way back, I photographed the first daffodils of spring, another image she used to capture with delight, signaling the arrival of spring. Returning through the bush, I caught my first ever glimpse of rosellas in the bush. I stood staring at these through the trees. Ironically I saw them later again. Were they following me, or perhaps it was a different pair? Leaving the bush that day I felt very blessed and rewarded. Later that evening I wrote;

*Nature and I are lovers now  
I am carrying Nature's child  
Nature revealed himself to me;  
Exquisitely beautiful paraquets  
Butterflies flowers and trees.  
Nature bestowed on me sacred moments  
Special surprises, & when I was leaving & on my way home  
Nature surprised me more.  
I am full with Nature's child  
With thoughts of eloping together and being free  
Living my life on the valleys & the fiords-  
Just Nature & me. (12th August 2016)*

## Painting

Two days later, on Sunday afternoon, I joined my youngest daughter Niamh doing art at the kitchen table. My subject was (not surprisingly) the camellia tree in the back garden, which I could see from my kitchen window. Reaching for the paints, I tried to re-create the image on the page. As I struggled to portray this, I became highly aware of Nature's ability to create these colours; the green and pink. I wondered how Nature really made these colours? Recognizing the master craftsmanship of Nature, I felt somewhat frustrated at my difficulty in replicating this. The following picture is my second attempt at capturing this!



Figure 4: 'Impressions of a Camellia tree' (14<sup>th</sup> August 2016)

That evening, preparing for my presenting 'The story of my dissertation so far', I wrote;

## Announcement

*It is with great joy & great sadness  
That I am announcing the birth of my dissertation  
On Nature, We are not ready yet to present you with this only to tell you that  
yes, the child is born. Nature and my child has been born.  
We are very much still in process of this, but I can tell you this:  
The child is very beautiful & special & delicate, yet strong & true.  
His heart flutters like a butterfly wing,  
A delicate veil a translucent, yet strong as a tree trunk stands, a bough  
That bends a silver birch, & Eucalyptus tall and strong with patterns.*

*His eyes are as the water with tears that glisten, they shine with the light of his own soul  
His lips are red like berries & flowers  
Open & full, beautiful & pink.  
His hair is black almost, so dark & luscious  
He's Nature's child, moves like the wind, stands like the noble pine,  
Rushes like the running stream  
Light falling on his face,  
He is beautiful, magnificent as the oak,  
Strong as Tane Mahuta in the Waipou,  
Our child he sings birdsongs for all human hearts,  
The sound of a brook, & buzzing bees  
He is also silent as the night sky  
& humming of the Amazon basin  
His silence touches ours, Holds us; & yet,  
Moves us beyond ourselves, to that which we call Heaven  
Though here it is on Earth, He brings it to us;  
Our child brings Heaven to Earth A messenger of love.  
He brings me great joy  
I go to the woods to be with him  
To nurse him, or is it me, does he nurse me. (14<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

### **Running through the bush**

Later that evening I participated in a Kirtan yoga chanting session. During this I experienced energy flowing through my body as if I was plugged into a grid. The next day my visit to the bush was quite different; I ran through, and my thoughts were of fitness and strength. My relationship to Nature had changed. *I* was the primary focus, and Nature was secondary. My power was more fully engaged. Instead of tiptoeing through the bush bird watching, I galloped through. I even enjoyed the impact I had on the birds like a small child might when chasing them! I felt much more connected with my physical body in the bush that day.

### **The beauty of Nature**

When I came upon the magnolia tree again I turned around to reach for my camera. I noticed the most magnificent deep pink magnolia flowers way up high in another tree, situated majestically against the clear blue sky. I was overcome with emotion at this sight. I stood gazing at the tree in awe, feeling very moved. It was a sacred feeling, like I was witnessing creation. I sat down on the grass close by to savour the moment, and I received a text from my colleague at the university who was also preparing for

her presentation. I sent her a photo of the first magnolia tree, wanting to share with her some of the beauty I was witnessing, as inspiration for her work. I continued on down to the beach, to the sea. On my return I stopped by the stand of magnolia trees again, to further appreciate them. This time I met a woman walking with her dog. I showed her the special flowers way up high, and we talked about the beauty of the park. I told her that I was researching Nature and healing, and she shared with me that her mother's death wish was to be taken to the park or the sea. However, she told me that due to an injury she herself was carrying at the time, she could not bring her mother. Sharing her hearts truth, the pain about not being able to grant her mother her dying wish, opened. Though I was acutely aware of the significance of the healing taking place, the conversation felt very natural in the place. I felt nourished by the depth of connection that opened between us in Nature, and how the three of us co-created this. Nature and I were doing our work together and perhaps this lady was our first client! That evening I wrote the following poem to capture my experience of my new Self in the bush.

*Last week I have fallen in love with Nature  
and last few days I'm carrying Nature's child  
Today; I came as myself to Nature  
Today I ran, I played tuned  
into fitness & strength.  
I felt my own strength.  
I realized that my appetite for Nature  
was today to become fit, perhaps to be  
well & guard against death.  
(15<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

And then to capture the magnificence of the tree, I wrote

*New Experience - My heart wept for joy on feeling  
Pink Magnolia in branches high in the sky  
I couldn't photograph  
I was so moved, I couldn't move.  
I stood in awe, Yet knowing  
For sure, the Magnificence of Creation.  
(15<sup>th</sup> August 2016)*

**Presentation** 14<sup>th</sup> August 2016

On the morning of my presentation I gathered a bundle of camellia flowers from the ground under the tree in my backyard. I choose only the fallen ones, pink and brown.

I placed these in a terracotta bowl on the table at my presentation. I felt both anxious and excited about my impending communication. I felt vulnerable because my grief was so close to the surface, though also excited to be sharing the story of ‘Nature & i’. I put on an energetic shield before hand, a practice I use if I feel I might be exposed. Usually when I do this, I envisage some armour or crystal dome of protection, but on this occasion the image of a dense willow dome arose, like one I had seen in the bush. This felt significant given the co-creative nature of the work, and I felt Nature protecting me on our first public appearance together.

At the start I was quite nervous, but reading my Nature poetry soon settled me. I showed a set of images of the bush that I had captured on my excursions (see pages 53-55). I played one video clip so the audience could hear the sounds of Nature in the bush. The final image I showed was the rosellas in the bush, which I had captured the previous day triumphantly, and considered to be the ‘jewel in the crown’. I concluded my presentation by reading my poem “The Announcement” announcing the birth of my dissertation. While I started shakily, I gathered momentum and by the time I was finishing, I felt connected and standing in my power. I asked the audience for their felt response to my sharing.

### **The Aftermath**

The first response was tears from my one of my lecturers, some of which he said were joy, that I had found my way with my dissertation; He had supported me in my distress the previous week. He mentioned that my love for Nature touched him, reminding him of his love for his young son. I was very moved by his heart response to my presentation. However, shortly after this my willow dome was put to the test. I was accused of “colonizing Nature’. Labels of romanticism were cast over Nature and I, and the last straw was the rosellas wrecking havoc in the native bush. I felt ashamed of my ignorance. I had seen them as exotic birds, having no idea that they were an introduced species, destroying the native bush.

I had mixed feelings; while I was proud of my achievement and my communication, and pleased with being met and received by some, I also felt angry about what I perceived as ‘critical’ responses. I felt hugely protective of my work with Nature, and

experienced the feedback as a kind of attack. In truth I was really quite vulnerable, and was unable for critical feedback at this stage of my process. After I had processed fully my anger, I could begin to consider the challenging responses. The rosellas were the immigrants and they were colonizing the native bush, competing and overpowering the native species. Am I the immigrant, guilty of this too? After a number of days oscillating between victim and perpetrator, and much support, I finally surrendered my position, and my heart opened to the heartbreaking grief of *tangata whenua* in *Aotearoa*. This was/is not a small grief. Connecting with this led me to connect to my experience of this in my homeland. I could then understand my lecturer's conflicted position regarding my presentation, and my empathy deepened towards him in response to the sheer magnitude of the pain he may be carrying in relation to his people. I then found myself becoming curious about how Nature might respond to him?



*Figure 5: Tree outside psychotherapy clinic, AUT Northern campus 2/8/2016*



*Figure 6: 'Foliage' Centennial Park 3/8/2016*



*Figure 7: 'Canopy' Centennial Park 3/8/2016*



*Figure 8: Tui on AUT Northern campus 12/8/2016*



*Figure 9: 'Light falling in a stream', Centennial Park  
8/8/2016*



*Figure 10: 'Steiner doll' Magnolia, Centennial Park  
4/8/2016*



*Figure 11: 'Magnolia Tree' Centennial Park, 4/8/2016*



*Figure 12: 'Heart shaped Magnolia', Centennial Park 4/8/2016*

## Chapter 5: Céad Míle Fáilte- *A hundred thousand welcomes*

In this chapter I present data from my visit to Tongariro National Park in late August 2016. I was invited to accompany a friend who was unwell at the time and wished to go to the mountain, where she believed she might recover. Communicating her longing for the mountain my thoughts went to the story of Heidi, since I had just seen a new version of the movie (on the airplane). Remembering how returning to the mountain rejuvenated Heidi, and the miraculous recovery of her invalided friend Clara, I decided to go. Two days later we were there!

### **Lost in the woods**

My first day in Tongariro National park, I went out for a walk just to explore the territory. After walking a short distance, I came upon a cross roads, three roads, and the fourth was a grass road signposted Urawera, pointing into the bush. I had no hesitation which path to take! I embarked on the little path excitedly, enjoying the magnificence of this mature bush. After a few minutes I came upon a very large tree lying down across the path. Climbing over it, I ventured forth tentatively because I could not find the path on the other side. I told myself as I walked on, that it would be just straight back to the fallen tree. Soon I came to a dense thicket, which stopped me in my tracks, and so I turned back. I walked for a few minutes and came upon a fallen tree, however it was a different one. I searched around for “My” tree and realized instantly that I was lost.

I looked up at the tall *Kahikatea* and wished I had used these as my reference point instead of the fallen one. As I looked at them I became acutely aware of the difference between my species and theirs, and I sensed their inability to help me in my conundrum. They were trees after all; I was a human being. They had a kind of neutral presence, witnessing my process. I realized that walking any further could bring me deeper into the bush, as a degree here or there would take me in a completely different direction. My mind went to the young man who died in the wilderness. I felt quite frightened and completely lost, even though I had not travelled far. I heard a helicopter in the distance and imagined it rescuing me. I did a quick inventory of my supplies, food and clothing, which re-assured me somewhat. I took

out my phone to check for a compass, and realized that even if I knew north or south, I had no idea which direction was out. Miraculously in this large bush I had phone signal, and so I called my friend. We spoke on the phone and she walked from the entrance to the fallen tree. After we disconnected the call, I waited for the sound of her voice calling out to me. This was the moment my anxiety peaked. How lost was I really? Hearing her faint voice I followed the sound, like a lamb to its mother, call and response, until we were together. I felt enormous relief. I was found.

### **Contained**

That evening I read the first chapter of Biran's (2005) book 'The courage of simplicity: Essential ideas in the work of W.R.Bion'. My friend a psychotherapy colleague, had this! I rediscovered the concept of container and contained and felt somewhat contained by this. The content (themes) and also the words themselves provided a containing function for me, one of clarity and calmness (Biran, 2005). I subsequently re-remembered my terrifying thoughts of death which I had had earlier in the bush, which I had completely repressed. I identified these as my unthinkable thoughts, my beta elements. Biran (2015) refers to these as 'frightening B-elements, which the patient cannot think verbally, are residues of material that were left untranslated in infancy and have now come back to attack the inner world" (p .7).

I wrote the following words in my journal that evening;

*A bit shook; Stupid, Wreckless, dangerous, silly*

*Very judgemental of myself. I felt very scared; helpless vulnerable to the forest.*

*A bird called out & I felt accompanied somehow I feel some grief about it, like*

*I had a bit of a shock; at my mortality*

*Could I make it.*

*afterthoughts.*

*During my "being lost" I looked at the trees for help, wishing I had looked at them earlier as signposts. Also I knew /felt/ thought that I was human & the forest was nature & the forest could not help me; though I looked to it for help but felt my difference from it & believed it could not help me; I was a different creature*

*I did have the realization that perhaps If I listened to my intuition I could be guided by the spiritual realm out, & I sought the support of my father. A bird*

*called out and I felt slightly reassured. However I did not feel confident in this & did not open fully to this but rather went to a different Human for help. It was as if my B elements could not be translated by the forest. This was a significant realization. The forest was a forest not my mother.*  
29<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

Biran (2015) writes of the infant's role in developing the container,  
*"Container and contained are developing a kind of interrelation, in which the infant has considerable influence over the mother's ability to contain"* (p.6)

It seemed like that there was a synchronicity to my being contained. Was I co-creating my container? Mitchell (1999, as cited in Allured, 2011) describes relocating the mind from the individual to the group where there is continued mutual influence. Providing a containing function is very much an active process, seeking, examining and questioning (Biran, 2015). My friend rescuing me was most definitely an active provision of containment, and my reaching out to her, and my reading the book also demonstrates this. The mother's aim is that eventually the infant internalizes this process (Biran, 2015). *"This internal container arranges our world, distinguishes inside from outside, and possible from impossible. It is involved with acknowledging limitations, which, in turn, generates creative freedom"* (p. 10).

In translating my own feelings, into thoughts, and naming these, was I providing my own alpha function where I could think my own thoughts? I realized that because I was not native to this land, I had no reference for navigating it. We have no bush in Ireland. My friend who rescued me was also an immigrant, however she was more familiar with the area.

## **Koro**

Upon waking on the second morning, I saw the mountain standing like a giant white crystal in the clear blue sky. This was a truly magnificent sight. We went skiing that day. As a novice, I stayed on the beginner slopes until my confidence grew somewhat, and then I ventured up the next level of the mountain. This was not an easy feat as it involved riding a chair lift, which soared high up over rocks, and the view, while wonderful, also involved steep drops. I felt afraid and out of my depth.

Unable to descend by skiing, (I was afraid of falling off the mountain), I ended up off track and trudging through snow uphill, unlike everyone else who was skiing downhill. In my struggle my thoughts went to my Nature teacher's father, who had walked in snow barefoot in Russia during World War 11. His predicament had actually saved his life because he was chosen on this basis, to board a train out of Russia. In writing my accounts of my escapades that evening I noticed my dismissal of my challenging experience. I became curious about my rejecting this experience and chose to explore this at greater depth. Later that evening I wrote the following;

*D. Day on the Mount!*

*I felt concerned for my safety and others! I felt insecure and out of my depth making the leap from beginning slope to winter garden-intermediate & in ways though I had a whole mountain pass- I was not sure I could handle it; apparently the views were great; but I did not feel ready for this. I find it interesting that that was what I wanted; My desire – was to see the whole mountain; though my fear stopped me. I did not feel ready for the altitude. Could this be indicative of my process of self discovery  
My desire to see everything etc. & know everything & yet my lack of training & readiness to proceed past a certain place. More practice was needed. I would stay at the basic level til I got more experienced / proficient, then when I was ready I could go. Anyway, slight disappointment & huge anxiety opened at those times though huge elation upon success & achievement and challenge. The energy was pristine there today I had a smile on my face –most of the day. I really enjoyed myself.*

And then

*Realization that yesterday's lost in the forest/bush & today's experience on/ off the mountain; Nature was not containing or holding for me in the same way as usual. These experiences may be growthful – a factor in the therapeutic alliance*

*Usually nature Safe*

*My bravado into new places inexperienced meant that I got to experience Nature uncontainng for a change; however people provided this containing function for me. (30<sup>TH</sup> August 2016)*

I was encountering Nature on a grander scale. Did I feel overpowered by Nature? Had I been dabbling in Nature in my backyard, and suddenly found myself confronted with Nature in its full power? There was definitely a change in my relationship with Nature. Both days my friend had rescued me: both experiences connecting me with my vulnerability. I had feelings of exhilaration and excitement, yet also terror.

## **The Epiphany**

### **Kuia**

On my final day at Tongariro National Park, I set off for a bush walk. I visited the office at the base of the mountain, in search of a map. Upon entering, I was formally greeted with “*Nau Mai Haere Mai*”. Here I was shown a huge wall map of the terrain, and I reported having gotten lost in the bush two days earlier. These people were *Ngati Rangī* and their role was *kaitiākanga* of that side of the mountain. The woman who greeted me accompanied me outside, signaling to me that she was bringing me to meet Kuia. I knew the significance of this in Te Ao Māori, and I felt very honoured. We crossed the road to the river *Mangawhero*, (*Kuia*) where my guide said a *karakia* by the water’s edge. She explained to me that she was introducing me to the ancestors so they would know I was in the area. We sang a *waiata* together and she showed me how to bless myself in the river. She told me she was on her way to clean up an old church preparing it for renovations, and so I offered to help. We set off together on a journey across her ancestor’s lands upon which originally stood 14 Marae; now only two remained. She brought me to the primary one, *Tirorangi*, which means ‘look to the heavens’, and welcomed me on with a call. The views of ‘*Koro*’ the name she called Mount Ruapehu, were outstanding from here.



Figure: 13 'Koro', Tirorangi Marae, Tangiwai (31<sup>st</sup> August 2016)

### **Te Reo Whakamoemiti**

We drove onto the other Marae, which contained '*Te Reo Whakamoemiti*' (The little house of Prayer) on its field. The church resembled a small cabin on the outside; the inside was wooden and reminded me of Noah's arc. We swept and dusted, and I wondered why I had signed up for this? It reminded me of renovating my house in Ireland. My new friend was preparing an arrangement of leaves outside when she noticed a piece of paper that had blown out from the dust. She read it out loud;

*"If you rearrange the letters in the word Earth, you get Heart,  
So know that if you have lost someone from the Earth,  
You can find them in your Heart".*

This brought my recent loss to mind and so I told her of my trip back home and the death of my friend. I heard myself ask if we could sing a Waiata for my friend in the church, saying I had no one over here to share her death with. As I spoke my heart's truth, my grief came through. We held a small impromptu service for Ursula in the

church, also attended by the dog, which seemed fitting because of Ursula's dogs. The similarity between these two women, one a Rongoa the other a Nature Healer and flower essence practitioner, was uncanny. Following this C took out a picture of Jesus from her bag and placed it beside the visitor's book, where I had written a blessing earlier. This prompted me to read her the blessing.

***Cead mile failte romhat a Iosa do an Sanctoir***

I translated this for her

***A hundred thousand welcomes to you Jesus to this Sanctuary***

My Māori guide began to cry speaking of being guided by Jesus to restore this little church over the last 3 years. This time it was her heart that opened. We moved the picture to the altar and I sang a verse of the Irish Hymn *Cead Mile Failte Romhat* with her standing by my side. This felt very special and significant, me singing this beautiful Irish invocation into the church, accompanied by *tangata whenua*. We knew our work was done, and we left feeling fulfilled, but hungry for lunch. We shared a joyful *Hakari*, what each of us had in our lunch boxes! We returned to *Mangawhero* and closed our day's work with a *Karakia*. After we parted I took a photograph of *kuia* and the light shone down into the trees at that moment.



Figure: 14 "Kuia" Mangawhero river, Tongariro National Park (31<sup>st</sup> August 2016)

That night I wrote the events of the day, which concluded with this poem.

*I met my Koro today ,Koro Ruapehu.  
I met my Moanga.  
I met my Kui today,  
Manga Whero, she blessed me, my awa.  
I met my church today,  
Te Reo Whakamoemiti, the little house of prayer.  
I will go to the cathedral valley in Whanganui,  
She will take me there some day.*

*I mourned my friend today in this land,  
I found a church, a sanctuary  
to say goodbye on this land.  
I met a friend today who Korero 'd my beloved,  
Who sang with me my hearts goodbye to my friend.  
Though my heart knows she is not dead, but living in Nature;  
The mountain, the river, the land,  
The honeybee, the swallows, you and me. (31st August 2106)*

My external journey over the three days began with my getting lost in the bush. Douglas and Moustakas (1985) describe a lost and found aspect to the Heuristic journey as follows

*“A feeling of lostness and letting go pervades a kind of being wide open in surrender to the thing itself, a recognition that one must relinquish control and be tumbled about with the newness and drama of a searching focus that is taking over life” (p. 47).*

### **Coming home**

Did losing my way in the bush enable me to find something else? My experience left me feeling very peaceful and joyful and connected with my people, my land, my true Self, and my God. My overarching experience was one of being found, welcomed

back into the fold and ultimately coming home to my true essence. This ‘coming home’ I felt most profoundly at the spiritual level, my soul.

Returning from the mountain nourished, I was inspired to search up ‘Nature writers’ and to my great delight I discovered the writings of John Muir. Gifford (2006) cites Muir saying “*And in going to the mountains as a whole person, could we find that, as John Muir promised, going to mountains would not just feel like going home, but actually be going home?*” (p. 16). This captures the essence of my experience in Mount Ruapehu; my felt sense of coming home. My outward adventure over the three days in Tongariro National Park lead me to my inner most centre, in a way that I had not expected. On my first morning back in Auckland, I wrote the following words,

*I was lost and you found me,  
Took me to your rivers, land and church.  
Welcomed me like an old friend and brought me to your home.  
You washed me, clothed me,  
quenched my thirst; took me in  
treated me as your noble guest.  
You have touched my heart and soul,  
Your love heals me.  
Your manaaki moves me, opens my heart,  
touches my grief at not being received like this  
but once before, -or perhaps having been received by this before though  
losing this somehow.*

#### My Dad

*It was today you left; today you died,  
You never left you say; you never died  
You tell me  
I thought you died; I told myself you died,  
That was my lie Dad that was my lie:  
Where will we go today Dad,  
To the cathedral in the skies,  
Take me Dad to where you are  
You & I together are hearts joined together.*

(2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016, My Father’s Anniversary)

I told the story of the little church many times over the next few weeks, feeling really called to share it with many. Perhaps I was forming my identity in this process? However my homecoming foundations were about to be tested.

### **Desecration**

On the night of my return home I read online that the mountain was under threat. There was a proposed pesticide drop scheduled for Tongariro National Park over the coming days. I was horrified. I felt a surge of angry feelings reminiscent of my organic grower days against the use of chemicals. I felt torn and enraged, desperate to do something about the situation. I envisaged myself in my horticulturalist capacity working on ecological issues for Māori. I felt torn between responding externally, and processing this internally. I decided to ask my Māori friend if she would like to hear my views and when she said she would, I gave voice to my feelings and thoughts; I was now heart connected to this land, and honouring this I decided to speak up. I formulated the following email in my journal later that first day back, followed by writing my process.

*Dear C,*

*It gave me huge joy to accompany you on Wednesday meeting Koro and Kui in restoring Te Reo Whamoemiti. Yesterday I read of a proposed pesticide drop on Koro this month. My heart was torn, my newfound grandfather, was this true, was this right. It saddened me profoundly. I read that while this is alien to Māori culture, somehow this is going ahead; & I wondered if powers of persuasion & greed were once again robbing Māori of their lands in the name of something else. Surely if Māori want to eliminate stoats and possums they would. Surely it is the farmer's pressure for their industry that is driving TBfree. Surely they should look at their own sustainability & practices & not expect Māori to subject their land to poisoning. Surely Māori will find their own solution to their bush problems; surely this is being driven by Meat & Dairy industry who wish to eradicate their issues by poisoning elsewhere. Surely Māori will not be deceived again, cajoled & pressurized. Surely Māori will feel in their hearts what is right & if this be so, and Māori believe in their*

*hearts that this is the right action, then so be it, then I rest my case, but now  
that I am connected, I will grieve this*

*I pray for right action to be taken*

*Na mihi mahana*

*Marie*

*My tears now are for the destruction of beautiful places, for our land, for  
nature, for us mostly, for we are connected to Nature & we deprive ourselves  
of our own mother & father & healing.*

*We are lost, & we annihilate our homeland, on which we live & on which we  
grow*

*how will we find our home if we destroy it, if we poison it*

*who will we become if we cannot live in our fullness. (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016.)*

In writing this, I felt profound sorrow, I also identified my fear of the mountain being harmed. From seeing Nature in this vulnerable position, I switched to the magnitude of nature's power, thinking that Nature would survive this attack. This soothed me somewhat. Crying tears of helplessness in the face of this desecration, I lost my sense of powerlessness. I sent a revised email and the response I received provided me with a number of significant insights. Māori experts had carried out a thorough scientific investigation of this, and while they did not wish to use this pesticide, they were torn, wanting to protect the native bush. Māori have a proverb "when our ngahere are silent, so too is the voice of the people". This means when the bush is silent so too is the voice of the people. The pests in the bush were silencing the native birds and thus action was needed. My Māori friend in her korero had told me of the sacredness of this mountain and that it hadn't been permitted to play (ski) on it up til recent times. Tacey (2010) in his writings on Ayres rock speaks of this too.

*"Once sanctity is restored to creation, respect is restored to the environment,  
and one could almost say that the resacralisation of nature is the prime  
foundation upon which any ecological program should be based"(p.7)*

Stockton (1995 cited in Tacey, 2010) mentions that aboriginals are giving the gift of belonging, to white Australians, however they do not know how to receive this. Tacey

(2010) attributes this to the lack of maturity in the psyche of the white Australian. He calls this the spiritual blessing of the land, which brings forth a belonging to the land. He also cites the reason of non-belonging as a consequence of guilt over the injustices committed. I wonder if it is easier for me to belong and receive the blessings because of my own experience of occupation in Ireland, and my lack of resonance as Pakeha? Tacey (2010) goes on to say that “*We come home to ourselves and our land when we come home to the sacred*” (p.9). This resonated with my experience.

I became aware of my projections onto Māori of being both incompetent and also victims. These felt/ feels important for me to reclaim. I felt ashamed of my primitive thinking and concerned that I may have offended my new friend. However I was glad that by engaging, I had found some of my preconceptions. This affected my opinion of Māori; I lost my sense of Māori as victims of colonization. I then noticed myself feeling somewhat separate from Māori; this felt like a differentiation of sorts.

Gifford (2006) believed Muir’s sole reason for publishing was his desire to help human beings find their relationship with Nature: “A right relationship for our species within it” (p.28). Gifford himself is a writer and teacher of creative writing in Nature. He presented a poem written by a student on a nature retreat, which is titled “The Coming of the Mountain Spirit “ which depicts the spirit of the mountain in distress because of an ecological crisis (Gifford, 2006). This poem evoked further sadness in me, as it personified the mountain as an old man in distress about the happenings taking place. Reading this helped me to see the universality of my experience with Koro. Within days I had volunteered my services for a school trip to mount Ruapehu the following year, with my daughters school. I began dreaming of leading creative writing ecology workshops, and also wondering if my Māori friend might meet the students and introduce them to the land from *Te Ao Māori* . This author cautioned against romanticizing nature in poetry, and he advocated writing Nature poetry without succumbing to this style. At this stage of my writings I could hear this critique and found it somewhat orientating.

*Come Home*

*Come home you are so close my love,*

*Come oe’r the mountains*

*Come o'er the seas,  
Come home to me, where we can be.*

*Come home again my love for you are near  
And over mountains rivers so clear,  
There is nowhere you don't know  
You know the way, why stay afar.*

*Come home my love a thousand calls/times,  
Come home my love a thousand falls,  
Come home my love a thousand tears,  
Come home my love a thousand years.*

*Why banish yourself in frozen snow,  
Why will you not just warm and thaw,  
Would you just let the ice melt  
So your heart can feel again,  
Then you will be taken home,  
Never ever being left alone.*

*Come home my love I whisper to you  
I know you can hear me  
I know you are near  
Come home, come home my Dear.  
Welcome my love listen to the cheer. (9<sup>th</sup> September 2017)*

I shared this poem with my sister in Ireland that night, (her morning), hot off the press! It reminded her of a hymn. This reminded me that it was actually a prayer, which had been written in a moment of intense suffering, where I pleaded with myself to come home to the truth of myself. I then realized its similarity to the prayer on the back of my father's memorial card. I had already been aware of the synchronicity of the timing between my experience in Mount Ruapehu, and my father's anniversary, however I had not yet realized the full significance of this. My first weekend home from Mount Ruapehu led me to seek out a new place, Fernglen Gardens,

Birkenhead. I could not just return to my usual place after witnessing such magnificence!

*Reflections on my visit to Fern Glen gardens, and the nearby Kauri bush.*

*In my initial encounter with the bush I required more of an expedition, a conquering of the land and a connection with myself as primate. I felt excited discovering new terrain and also a certain kind of nervousness hoping I could navigate my way. While this was invigorating and energetic, I was really tired afterwards, though fulfilled too. The gardens provided respite for the weary traveller after their long journey. Here I lay out on a wooden seat soaking up the energy til I was repleted somewhat in order to continue on. At the top of Ben's ridge I discovered a plant called Maire (the Irish for my name). I felt very honoured to have a native New Zealand bush bearing my name. This was a special moment of connection for nature and I,*

And then

*I began to consider ways so that I could be in this garden. These included me managing it, running therapy groups in the community etc. A myriad of exciting plans arose some of which may develop over time, though firstly I will receive fully the gift myself. My heart opened in this special place, the first day of conservation week this year. And I will return as my heart is called.*

(12<sup>th</sup> September 2016)

## **Jo's Farewell**

Five months have passed since I began this in depth journey with Nature. It is now Christmas time and a colleague, and close friend, Joanne Adams has died unexpectedly. On the morning of her funeral I went to the bush to reflect on my feelings prior to the event. It was the height of summer now in the bush; many weeks had gone by since I'd last visited. I was struck by a feeling of spaciousness. A tui followed me as I walked, and I felt my friend's presence accompanying me. I cried when I saw a beautiful pohutakawa in full bloom, knowing that I would remember her when the New Zealand Christmas tree flowered. Later that day, I spoke at her funeral paying tribute to Jo. I began by speaking of my visit to the bush earlier that morning, mentioning my intent to reflect on my feelings in preparation for this event. I shared how the tui accompanied me on my travels in the bush, and how I perceived this as

Jo's presence. I did not share my process in the bush; I wanted to leave space for theirs. Her family seemed heartened by my story. They looked up at me hopeful and interested as soon as I began telling my story of Nature. Feeling their attention on me, I felt enormous responsibility in that moment, to bring them light and hope for their suffering. I offered them Nature in my *Korero*, so that they might go to their special Nature places and receive some comfort for their sorrow there. That was my hope; that they too would find nourishment in Nature. Afterwards a few people expressed their gratitude to me in relation to my sharing. Later that evening I found myself alone at home, and feeling low. I visited my usual beach where I watched a huge pristine white ship slowly leaving Auckland harbour, passing the island of Waiheke (where Jo had lived). It was travelling way out towards the horizon. This felt like Jo's farewell.

### **Summary**

In summary I have spoken about my experiences in Tongariro National park. I have shared my experience of getting lost in the bush, and my challenge on the ski fields. I have written about the literature, which I read during this time that helped me elucidate my experience. I shared the story of the special day where I formed a kinship with my Māori friend, and together we moved seamlessly between culture, the natural world, and spirituality in an unmistakable woven-oneness. I have written about the threat to Mount Ruapehu and my distress at the possibility of losing my newfound love. I also open my creative yearnings in taking this Nature work further. And finally, I have shared a very precious creative synthesis of my work with Nature, which I will develop in the following chapters.

## **Chapter 6: Woven Oneness – *A co-creative synthesis.***

In this discussion chapter I offer my reflections on the heuristic inquiry, starting by briefly summarizing my journey from its inception, through to the synthesis of the data, as represented in the chapters ‘Nature & i’ and ‘Cead Mile Failte’. I elucidate the themes that emerge in my experiencing Nature during this inquiry, offering a synthesis and meaning of these. I highlight ‘peak moments of experiencing’, as an approach to discussing the findings, and presenting patterns as they are revealed in the work. I weave in other studies, where the findings are similar or different, as a way of contextualizing this inquiry.

Since amalgamating the data it has felt important to sit with the stories that have developed, since these are the embodied work: the creative synthesis. Instead of analyzing these, I have allowed the overarching meanings to emerge, in keeping with this methodology. The process of synthesizing the data has been exciting, while at the same time exhausting in its myriad of challenges. Nature, during this whole process, while in constant flux, has remained a constant; it is I who has oscillated between suffering and freedom! So what remains to be said? It seems fitting at this point to revisit the inception of this study.

### **Inception**

In this final stage of the Heuristic Inquiry, synthesis, also known as realization, occurs, where the fragments are assembled into a new whole (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). This involves examining the data in creative combinations, in a rhythmic way, listening for the meanings within the meanings, for what is in the heart of all that has been revealed; what are the overarching qualities inherent in the data? Revisiting the beginning of my journey with Nature in this context, I noted my returning to my homeland. Reconnecting with my family and friends in the presence of Nature in familiar surroundings was critical to what ensued. In the midst of this joyous reunion, I also experienced the loss of one of my people. This changed the course of the dissertation.

Just prior to my returning home I found a Native American article, which suggested finding one’s own metaphors and meanings. Rather than searching other people’s

experiences, I needed the truth of my own experience. Ursula had advised this too. I am used to walking in Nature when I feel upset. Clare (2014) advocates walking in Nature to support overwhelming feelings “I often use nature to feel restored, so I trusted my intuition about what would help me find some space” (p. 66). Macy (1991) wrote of a friend of hers who upon suffering a personal loss, and experiencing extreme loneliness, walked the streets for months, healing herself. She reported this woman saying, “I learned to move in the world as if it were my lover” (p.9). I am reminded that Moustakas (1990) created his methodology out of a period of intense loneliness where he described himself walking the streets at night. My journey with Nature was born out of my loneliness too. In losing my friend I felt lonely.

I found healing in those initial encounters in the bush, which drew me back again. I moved from a macro enquiry of “Nature as healer”, to a micro inquiry of Nature as my healer. Ironically though, through my process of connecting with Nature, I found myself connected with something greater. Thus, zooming in from a wide lens to a narrow one, I glimpsed the whole. I will continue to explain my understandings. I felt that I was mourning losing Ursula, which opened the heart pain of previous losses, which might also include any loss of myself.

## **Tapestry**

### **Threads**

Having really walked this journey, photographing Nature as I was moved to, written my impressions and my reflections at length, I have opened my heart and soul to this topic. I have immersed myself in literature and theory, scrutinizing the data, choosing pieces that would elucidate the themes and essences depicting my experience. Since this is a heuristic inquiry, and experiencing is core to the methodology, I am choosing to focus on ‘peak moments of experiencing’ as a way of identifying features in the work and gathering the threads of this study. The first thread is myself; in heuristic the researcher remains fully present in the findings (Moustakas, 1990). My Poetry reflects myself and Nature, which is another thread, woven with mine, co-creating this tapestry. Psychotherapy is yet another thread, woven into this tapestry. So what are the peak moments of experiencing embroidered in this tapestry?

One distinguishable feature of the tapestry is the experience of feeling really connected to Nature. Like Snyder (1988), and her participants, I too felt deeply connected to Nature. This is evidenced by my many poems on Nature throughout the journey. While this relationship was fundamental to my inquiry, I also felt really connected to myself, and a heightened connection with others too. Nature seemed to catalyze this. I garnered a huge sense of my Self through my relationship with Nature, some of which is expressed in the following,

*In nature I have found my courage a landing place- my voice my omnipotence, my frightened scared self, my terrified psychotic self, my vulnerable self, my sad lonely self, my innocent self and my heart self. Through, with and in nature I have found my natural self, my true self, my researcher self, my reporter self, my orator, my passionate self, so many aspects of myself and the absence of myself, my free spirit, my environmentalist self, my preacher self, my teacher self, my broken self, my helpless self, my real self, my shining self, my motivated self, my raw self, my lost self, my found self, my sense of humour, my surrendered self, my crazy self, my nerdy self, my naked self, my unrestricted self. (9<sup>th</sup> September 2016).*

Nature provided a self-object function for me, gathering together many facets of my self. Apathy (2010) spoke of the increased sense of self from Nature too.

### **Patterns emerging**

From this bird's eye view, I noticed a particular sequence occurring. Connecting with myself in Nature first, followed by a heightened connection with others. I felt profoundly met by Nature, which nourished me, and others responded. I will highlight these occurrences in the dissertation as their pattern formed the overall design. Revisiting my early experiences in the bush, the overarching theme of these experiences could be encapsulated by 'moments of meeting', which followed a specific sequence. Setting out on my walks was normally precipitated by feelings of restlessness. Segal (1988 as cited in Marcus 2015) recognized this as the first stage of the journey, moving to a new place, where there is space for another experience. Being in the bush initially amplified my distress; perhaps Nature's wholeness highlighted my stuckness. At these times I felt very alone. A change of scene or an alert of some sort prompted the release of my anxieties. A bird's call or movement, patterns of light, or running water could be the trigger. This stimulation and engagement is documented as the second phase of change (Marcus, 2015). These qualities of Nature were identified as therapeutic, in Olds (1989) and Marcus (2015).

Nature provided a haven for me to experience my inner most feelings. Often I felt safe in Nature, which catalyzed my surrendering into my grief. This is akin to a safe therapeutic space in psychotherapy, without which healing cannot take place (Mc Williams, 2004). Nature provided this structure and function for me, and as I grew to depend on this, my trust in Nature grew.

*“Let go and fall into the river. Let the river of life sweep you beyond all aid from old and worn concepts. I will support you. Trust me. As you swim from an old consciousness, blind to higher realities beyond your physical world, trust that I will guide you with care and love into a new stream of consciousness. I will open a new world before you. Can you trust me enough to let go of the known and swim in an unknown current?”* (Roads 1987 as cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 13).

Searles (1960) highlights the natural world’s capacity to relieve painful anxieties. Branden (1976) describes a mechanism of healing in psychotherapy that might explain my response:

*“In being helped fully to experience his feelings, they are expressed and discharged-they do not remain trapped in him. He is able to assimilate the painful experience and therefore move beyond it: His natural healthy sense of reality is now able to assert itself and bring him to a wider view of his context”*(p.30).

Nature was the physician, and I was the client. Nature had the capacity to evoke my feelings, bringing these to the fore, as well as distracting me from overwhelming feelings at times too. Marcus (2015) reported students identifying these qualities of Nature too. This release triggered feelings of relief, and subsequent expansive feelings. These kinds of feelings were also noted in response to Nature in; Snyder, (1988); (Clare, 2014); (Olds, 1989); (Marcus, 2015) and Apathy (2010). Feelings of awe and wonder often followed the release, as though I was experiencing the magnificence of creation for the first time. Self-realization was outlined as a benefit of nature relatedness to the natural world in Allured (2011). I have recently received a significant insight into my poetry, which reflects my psychological state at the time. The yearning and longing expressed in these writings seems to come from a felt sense of being profoundly lost. And my heart is crying out to my Soul, to come home to

myself finally, to who I really am. This plea is the call, and sometimes I wrote my response when this call was answered. These writings often followed sacred experiences, (see page 63), or writing them was a profoundly sacred experience.

In my writings Nature provides a relational function; a close friend and companion, or teacher. Evidence of becoming attached to Nature can be seen in the following writings where, having been in the bush earlier in the day, I was experiencing separation anxiety when my feelings of despair began to arise again.

*A Tui calls,  
& I am reminded, that I am still surrounded  
& Nature has not left me alone at all.*

and then

*This Nature thing has definitely set my spirit free.*

And dreaming of eloping with Nature,

*Living my life on the valleys & the fiords-  
Just Nature & me. (12th August 2016)*

Apathy (2010) recognized the therapeutic power of merging with Nature in ‘This joining experience is essentially empathic and healing, being an experience of wholeness’ (p.35). The intensity of our relationship increased during a specific phase of ‘Nature & I’. With attachment occurring in the midst of intense emotional experiences (Apathy, 2010), it is clear that Nature and I were indeed becoming attached. However, Allured (2011) believes that Nature cannot provide the intimacy that human beings require without having first had our human attachment needs met. I find myself curious about my attachment history. While I believe receiving psychotherapy treatment has been healing of my attachment trauma, I do not believe this is a prerequisite for connecting with Nature!

## **Co-creative Synthesis**

### **Natural co-creative synthesis**

The most organic co-creative synthesis took place the day before my presentation when I met the woman and her dog in the bush. I felt profoundly met by Nature that day, when I saw those flowers; I was deeply nourished by the experience. I connected with this woman because my heart was full of joy and I simply reached out to her. We celebrated the beauty in front of our eyes, and because of this healing connection with

Nature, her and I, her heart opened. In that moment she felt the pain in her heart relating to her mothers death. This therapeutic moment felt completely natural and supported in the setting. This was a beautiful example of the healing power of “Nature and I”. The encounter drew from my psychotherapy skills, and my personal experience of loss, but it was our shared love of Nature that joined us. This was a very significant moment of meeting between psychotherapy, and Nature and I, and the work felt honouring of all the energies present. This felt hugely validating of the work I was engaging in.

I carried the rightness of this with me the next day to the presentation, though I did not mention the encounter. Looking back I can see my innocence in trying to link my new world with Nature, and my psychotherapy world, together. I was vulnerable because of my recent loss, but strengthened in my newfound relationship with Nature. In hindsight I might have benefitted with more time to integrate my process before sharing it, however my sensitivity coupled with the task at hand, ignited my creativity. My poems emerged in response to my desire to share my story.

### **Central Synthesis**

Moving to the centre of the North Island, it is not surprising that I had the pinnacle of my experiences in Nature in the domain of Mount Ruapehu, in Tongariro National Park. The sheer richness and magnitude of Nature’s presence here was incomparable to Nature as I was accustomed to. This provided me with a very different experience. I was also at a different stage of my grieving process. Here in this incredible beauty, I felt quite stimulated by Nature; even excited at times, yet also terrified too. I had a significant ‘moment of meeting’ in Nature like when I looked up at the trees in my moment of need, and noticed Nature’s silent witnessing presence. In this moment I became acutely aware of the difference between us. Two days later my experience was of connection with the Māori Rongoa. Ours was a very special meeting, a joyous reunion; the overall experience being one of connectedness and belonging. Gilligan (1997) refers to the relational self as the field connecting the person to the place or thing. He believes this field to be governed by the principle of belongingness:

*“The relational field may be experienced as spiritual (I belong to a higher power, and he/she/it moves through me); organismic (I belong to nature, and*

*it moves through me); social (I belong to my marriage/ family/culture/ community, and it permeates me and supports my consciousness); or psychological (my experience/ perspective is embedded within a larger field of experiences/memories/archetypes, and they guide/inform me)” (p. 56).*

Reconnecting all of these domains gave me a tremendous sense of belonging. Connection to a relational field usually enhances a person’s wellbeing (Gilligan 1997), and as an immigrant, finding my place in the community in my new land, was especially meaningful.

Salpitikorala (2015) found in her study of immigrant psychotherapists, that upon encountering Māori in Aotearoa, immigrants often have emotionally significant experiences. She attributed this to the welcome they received, and also a space for the immigrant’s own culture in the meeting (Salpitikorala, 2015). Both of these aspects were present in my experience. Biran (2015) mentioned that often in psychotherapy we are preoccupied with the inner world, rather than the social and cultural world we dwell in. Expanding this she wrote, ‘People are essentially social beings and they need to belong’(p.12). She presents Bion’s containing function of the group, where society and culture provide the containment. I wondered whether the bush might be my cultural container: it being native to New Zealand. As an Irish emigrant and a New Zealand immigrant, I have experienced a feeling of homelessness, belonging to neither land. Having just reconnected with my homeland again, perhaps I was now ready to connect with this land. This amazing day in Nature, with my Māori guide, the Marae and church, provided this social and cultural containing function for me. As *tangata whenua* her authority and connection with this land placed her in a position to provide this.

### **The Centre**

Gilligan (1997) wrote that our centre is first awakened by rituals; which can include blessings from special people. C’s first act was to bless me in the river. In his writings on the relational self, Gilligan (1997) speaks of each of us having our unique individual core or centre.

*“The center is both within and without. It is everywhere. But we must realize it exists, find it, and be with it, for without the center we cannot tell who we are, where we come from, and where we are going”.* (p. 53)

I experienced myself differently that day and afterwards, it was as if my centre was awoken. I felt completely fulfilled at the end of the day, and very peaceful. My overarching experience was one of being found, welcomed back into the fold and ultimately coming home to my true nature. Snyder (1988), describing participants' feelings in Nature writes, that they “came to feel whole, at peace, grounded, centered, and energized” (p.137). I experienced this as profoundly spiritual. I told the story of this day many times over the next couple of weeks and I am telling it now again. I knew it was highly significant for me; the birth of myself in New Zealand. Reissman (2008) recognizes narrative as sense making “Individuals and groups construct identities through story telling” (p.8). Seems like I may be constructing my new identity in this land.

The rituals performed that day seem to have created a sacred opening. I felt reborn into this land. One week later in Fernglen gardens I was christened ‘Maire’ the Native New Zealand plant. Its no wonder looking back, that finding this plant was so joyous for me! First I was born, and the following Sunday I was christened! I have only realized the full significance of the sequence of these events in hindsight.

### **Sacred bonds**

Bonding with Koro, meant that when Mount Ruapehu was under threat (pesticides), I became profoundly distressed. My fear of losing Koro, may have triggered my feelings around losing my father as a young child. My most poignant writings arose in response to this fear on my father's anniversary, where I wrote of mankind being deprived of our own mother and father and place (page 66). This despair echoes Clare's (2014) plea to take care of the earth. Mine reiterates Dubos who writes that we may become less than human without Nature ‘Nature is part of our humanity and without some awareness and experience of that divine mystery man ceases to be man’ (Dubos, 1972, p. 43).

Ursula's death most likely triggered my previous wounding associated with loss. Being present to this facilitated the healing flowing backwards in time to the old wounding. Claiming my agency in dealing with this loss has changed my relationship to loss. Now I feel more confident navigating new and challenging circumstances. This has involved integrating a number of key aspects: my grieving all losses those that have occurred and those that will occur, including my own mortality.

### **Treasured Creative Synthesis**

At the end of this inquiry when my psychotherapy colleague Jo died, I felt deeply saddened. While her death was unexpected, it preserved a thread of connection to life. "Death is not the opposite of life; life has no opposite. The opposite of death is birth. Life is eternal" (Tolle, 2003, pp.103). Moustakas (1990) speaks of a period of solitude and meditation being the prerequisite for inspiration that brings about creative synthesis. Olds (1989) describes a special quality of privacy afforded by Nature, 'Despite the aloneness, participants described themselves as feeling connected to life and the setting rather than isolated'(p. 30). Looking back on my visit to the bush on the morning of Jo's funeral, I realize it was pivotal in orienting me to the day. Reconnecting with Nature facilitated my connecting with myself, which prepared me for connecting with others. My tribute to Jo transmitted the energy of 'Nature & I', which offered a healing balm for the heartbreak that was present in the room that day. Their hearts responded to my *korero*. I felt uplifted in this communication with the group. Jo had given me a parting gift. That day I dispersed seeds from the fruit of the labours of 'Nature & I'. When we know something from our own experience, it's meaning is unmistakable to others, with no explanation required (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). This same principle operates in psychotherapy, where the therapist must walk their own vulnerability before they can assist others with theirs. Through my grieving journey in Nature, I was in a position to support others from the union of 'Nature & I' and psychotherapy; an embodied practice.

### **Inspiration**

Returning to my question of how might I explore Nature's role in wellbeing, and communicate this to psychotherapy, for the wellbeing of clients"? My journey in Nature is my response to this question, and my findings are that Nature meets us in a way that supports us meeting our real selves. This opens up our higher connection.

Snyder (1988), referring to her fifteen participants wrote, “Our souls are fed as we experience nature as sacred or as spiritual inspiration. We have a sense of oneness and unity with nature” (p.134).

In the peak moments I have described, I felt like a midwife assisting a birth of sorts. Having birthed my Self, I was open to a deeper connection with others. Clarkson (2002) writes of privileged experiences where we come into alignment, experiencing the fullness of our humanity, which includes the transpersonal. Clarkson (2002) recognizes that at these times, we vividly experience our connection with the rest of the universe. We are acutely aware of these moments in psychotherapy too. The synchronicity and harmony was tangible in the spaces when this was occurring. I experienced Nature as the catalyst for this newfound creative synthesis, and I identify with Rourkes (1984 as cited in Moustakas, 1990), capturing how the sea inspired her creativity: “You connect the fragments of my experiences enabling the flow of my dynamic spirit” (p.55).

I felt inspired by Nature oftentimes in the presence of flowers; other times it was a close encounter with a bird. Irish monks and poets often chose to live in the wilderness for inspiration. O’Donoghue (1997) cites the two most essential ingredients in developing our spirituality are silence and solitude. Articulating the importance of solitude he writes “ We need to return to the solitude within, to find again the dream that lies at the hearth of the soul ” (p. 125). Nature embodies both of these qualities. Tolle (2003) recognizing that Nature brings us to stillness, expands on this:

*“When you look upon another human being and feel great love toward them or when you contemplate beauty in nature and something within you responds deeply to it, close your eyes for a moment and feel the essence of that love or that beauty within you, inseparable from who you are your true nature. The outer form is a temporary reflection of what you are within, in your essence”* (p. 97-98).

Perhaps this is how Nature really heals, we see the beauty in Nature and experience our own divinity. O’ Donoghue (1997) describes soul not being limited to a particular

form, but rather having an energy that is fluid, embodying different forms. I wonder about the synchronicity of birds and cats, and human connection (in the form of texts), in my inquiry. In moments when my grief peaked, often a bird or cat appeared and distracted me. Sometimes I received a text from a family member or close friend. At these times I felt responded to by the universe. This synchronicity was a feature of my findings. My understanding of this is that spirit responded to my need at those times harnessing whatever means (form) was possible in that moment, and often this was Nature. At these times I felt immensely responded to.

The dissertation itself represents a creative synthesis of sorts. It is the amalgamation of everything that has taken place on foot, by hand, by hearts and by technology with Nature. I documented how I have found my way home, and “Nature has been the way”, (p.26). Writing was highly therapeutic for me, facilitating further processing of my experiences, and containing these too. Writing for research, added a further dimension to my writing, thinking that my ideas might one day contribute to the field.

### **Support**

Supervision of this dissertation has usually involved my thinking out loud in the presence of my supervisor who listened to all my ramblings for the one piece of wisdom at the centre! He named this as “talking in circles”. He would identify this piece, and I would continue expanding this until it reflected my experience. After this I would translate (transform) this thinking into the form of the written word. This is how I took my escapades in Nature and wrote them into this dissertation. The bush adventures were easy stories to write and rewrite; what was challenging was encasing these into a dissertation. In keeping with this methodology I remained fully present in the data and also in my meaning making. I acknowledge the ongoing care and holding I have received during this inquiry from my therapist, supervisors, and close family members. Thus I cannot attribute my feelings of wellbeing to Nature alone, because I received so much support from other sources.

### **Christening**

The process of naming the study and each chapter was an interesting one for me. I originally thought I would call the study “Nature as Healer” but holding this name for a year or more, with two studies with the same name, I changed my mind.

Originally my intent was to demonstrate Nature's healing power, however as my own journey progressed, I became more interested in my relationship with Nature. Ursula had coined the name 'Nature & i' and I named my chapter in the bush this because it represented the crux of my relationship with Nature. However, the whole inquiry sat more comfortably under this title. I changed this to 'Nature and I' to include the higher self, which seemed more fitting.

The seed metaphor titling some of the chapters signals Nature's presence within this dissertation, as well as conveying the potential inherent in the dissertation. I draw on this symbol from my horticultural days, and I am pleased to sow this particular seed! I borrowed the title *Whakakpapa* from another colleague's literature review, hoping my research fits with my predecessor's dissertations in the same field. I include Māori lineage in Aotearoa because I would like my research to be part of this whakapapa too. Wanting a chapter with an Irish title, I chose 'Cead Mile Failte; my favourite Irish saying. Initially I placed it as the title of the introduction, however I found a more suitable place for this welcome to my true home. *Le printemps m'appelle* is my tribute to Dubos whose title this is. It carries a special significance, a transpersonal quality between death and rebirth, which is the story of my dissertation too. I have journeyed through many seasons since beginning my inquiry, both in Ireland and New Zealand. I have traversed four languages, Te Reo, English, Irish and French. It seems fitting to finish with French since this is the place where I began my journey into form (life), and inherited my name. I have come full circle.

## **Chapter 7: Dissemination** *Le Printemps m'appelle* *Spring is calling me*

This chapter addresses the significance of the study having sown the seeds, tended to the plants and as I begin to broadcast the seeds from these plants. I speak of how the study affected me both personally and professionally, and I anticipate the implications for psychotherapy practice. I consider the possible influence of this research on the health and wellbeing of people in Aotearoa and the wider world. I offer my recommendations based on my findings, including possible future research. Finally I offer some concluding remarks.

### **Personal significance**

#### **Life force**

According to Moustakas (1990) the researcher must cross a gap, making a connection that changes them evermore. There are a number of gaps that I have crossed in this inquiry. I have rekindled my passion for Nature, in whom I feel deeply nourished and energized. This relationship continues to rejuvenate me, reconnecting me with my Self; healing and strengthening me. Living this dissertation over the past eighteen months has been crucial to my wellness. Walking, and writing have connected me with my feelings, which have connected me with my life force. Journeying in Nature, and writing about these escapades has been tremendously therapeutic for me. While Nature is a huge part of who I am, most especially Nature inspires me to be all that I am. My sense of self has increased, which gives me the confidence to cross even more gaps and cover new terrain.

#### **Healing loss**

One significant gap that I crossed was that created by my earlier losses. This research inquiry has allowed me to tend very fully to my grieving process. The dissertation has provided a safe haven for me, holding me through two bereavements, and facilitating my processing of these in ways I did not anticipate. Having this forum to tell my story has supported my healing process immensely. Berzoff (2011) writes that the survivor constructs a narrative that is meaningful to them, which in turn increases the significance of the death, facilitating the transformation from unbearable grief to a social contribution. He recognizes that grief can be a powerful transformer, inspiring the bereaved in creative ways. "Mourners engage in acts of altruism and in narratives

that expand both self and identity in creative and unexpected ways” (p. 263). This is my bereavement narrative. This journey has woven threads together and is revealing a tapestry that is unique to me, and my psychotherapy work.

### **Psychotherapy practice**

Grieving is a large part of psychotherapy work, and walking my own grieving journey at this depth supports my accompanying others in their grieving process. The journey I have undertaken has brought me in touch with the felt sense of grieving, the visceral experience of this. This has deepened my understanding of grieving, which informs my clinical practice. I have noticed my capacity to respond to my clients grieving has deepened and widened as a consequence of this work. I feel confident in responding to them and I take a more active role in this. This kind of work feels natural to me now, since I have a fresh reference for the sadness being experienced. This may perhaps be the biggest significance of this research for me as a psychotherapist. When clients open into grief, I simply accompany them closely in their sadness. I reach towards my grieving clients more actively than before, supporting them (sometimes physically) so they do not feel lonely and abandoned in their grief (Alleyne, 2016). This philosophy of practice has been sculpted by my own experience of grieving in the bush. I find responding to others grieving especially fulfilling now.

### **Ecotherapist**

The heuristic method requires that the researcher be changed by the process (Moustakas, 1990). Embarking on my own ecotherapy journey as recommended by Allured (2011), I have a greater awareness of who I am in the world. Coming home to my new home in Aotearoa, I have also come home to my self as an ecotherapist, in my psychotherapy profession. I have carved out my own niche in Nature; this relationship strengthens me, and informs my psychotherapy practice. I often work with Nature in my sessions, whether this be with flowers in my room, or in the garden outside. I often refer to the flowers specifically in the room; sometimes we even smell the roses. Nature is universal and crosses cultural and language gaps effortlessly creating natural moments of meeting, which are the foundation for the healing. I acknowledge myself as a researcher and teacher with Nature, and I hope to offer ecotherapy workshops to psychotherapy students and practitioners. This is an area of

work that may open up for me. Nature provides security for me in my work, which has increased my sense of myself. This enhances my practice.

Nature embodies the wisdom from eons of lived experience! Mother earth is an embodiment of Nature. “ Nature as Healer” is Nature giving from Nature’s inherent Wisdom. I have found that spending time in Nature nourishes me profoundly. Muir wrote, “I only went out for a walk, but finally concluded to stay out ‘til sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in!” (Brennan, 2014, p. 8). I have joined my two worlds; Nature and Psychotherapy. How could they ever have been separate!

This inquiry forms part of the *whakapapa* of my family: Someday my children’s children may read this when tracing their lineage. They may come to know their grandmother a little more, and other family members and friends. They may hear the emigration story of their first family members in New Zealand.

A recent Mother’s day gift in the form of ‘Nature Cushions’, demonstrates the simplest of Ecotherapy interventions!



Figure 15: ‘Nature cushions’ (May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017)

## **Implications for Practice**

### **Valuable perspective**

In my research question I wondered how I might communicate Nature's role in wellbeing to psychotherapy, for the wellbeing of clients. This dissertation tells the story of Nature in relation to my wellbeing. Since I am familiar with the role of psychotherapist and client, and given my history with Nature, I am in a unique position to explore Nature and bring this information back to psychotherapy, to inform practice. So far my readers have mostly been psychotherapists or students of; thus I intend to support the wellbeing of clients by informing their practitioners of the many benefits of Nature, inspiring them to think creatively about how they might explore Nature in their own practices. Therapists might become more alert to client's referencing Nature in the therapy as a result of reading this study.

### **Ecotherapy practice**

Introducing my ecotherapy journey in this study offers therapists a reference point for their own ecotherapy journeys. Without real experiences in Nature, ecotherapy remains at a conceptual level rather than an embodied practice. Clare (2014) and Apathy (2010) have called for ecotherapy case studies to inform psychotherapy practice, and my journey is my answering them. Though Macy (1991) advocates exploring our feelings specifically about the destruction of the environment, I believe we need to open to Nature without directing the process to this aspect of the work. All feelings will arise out of opening our connection with Nature. John Seed's Psychotherapy Forum on Ecological Identity: Implications for Practice; recommended deepening our own ecological experience. This is really the way. Perhaps our training institutes could include ecotherapy experiences as part of the training programme for therapists, and follow in the footsteps of our human development and counselling colleagues in the Appalachian State University, North Carolina. These groups had a direct experience of the power of connection and healing in the natural world (Davis & Atkins, 2009). Feedback from the participants (many of whom were counselling students) valued the personal growth from these tribal experiences; "just being outdoors and having the experiential teachings within the group gave me a feeling of connectedness rarely felt in a more traditional classroom context" (Davis & Atkins, 2009, p. 281). Perhaps a paper on ecotherapy could be taught in the universities

teaching psychotherapists, psychologists or counsellors, so they could delve deeper into their own journey with Nature. The silence and solitude in Nature can enhance our listening skills (O'Donoghue, 1997), a core skill of psychotherapy practice. Developing our experiencing at this visceral level may heighten our skills.

### **Case study**

Another way this dissertation can inform practice is its' depiction of a grieving process. The experience of loss is central to psychotherapy, and the reader is invited into a grieving process. This could expand their understanding of this, highlighting Nature's supportive role in the process too. Therapists could learn new ways of responding to their grieving clients or themselves. I have answered Alleyne's (2016) call when she says "I am asking psychotherapists to reveal themselves more in their grief, to enter into open communication so as to support normal mourning" (p. 66). In this work I reveal myself, a psychotherapist experiencing grief. Reading my story might provide a kind of twinship for other grieving therapists, that Alleyne (2016) experienced as highly therapeutic in her process. Culturally responsive methodology encourages the sharing of knowledge, creating the potential for transformation.

*"Culturally responsive methodology creates a space where voices are not silenced due to race, ethnicity, gender, language, social status, family and immigration status. In this inclusive space possibilities abound"* (Nodleman, 2013, p.169).

The western embargo on revealing grief could be lifted and sharing our vulnerabilities might provide the connection and support so necessary. Sela –Smith (2002) understands the healing power of a story, when she communicates the following.

*"When a story is formed with the embedded wholes of the transformation in it, the story itself contains the power to transform anyone who dares to surrender to the listening"* (p. 64).

My hope is that my writing carries the transmission to transform the reader (psychotherapist and client). I reveal myself in this work in order to allow the full transmission for the benefit of practice. This is my gift to psychotherapy; in gratitude for the teachings and support that I have received.

## **Self care**

Spending time in Nature as part of a self-care routine is another application of this study for psychotherapy practice. Rejuvenation is vital for therapists especially since this profession has a high rate of burn out (Skovholt, & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). The effectiveness of the helping professional is dependent on their health and wellbeing (Skovholt, & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Therapists' relaxation leisure activities correlated significantly with decreased burnout (Hoeksma, Guy, Brown & Brady, 1994). A recharged therapist is likely to be more effective in their work since cognition is enhanced, and improved wellbeing means less fatigue and illness. As well as resourcing therapists spiritually and emotionally, ecotherapy offers the opportunity for movement and exercise, which is the anti-dote to sedentary work of which psychotherapy is usually placed. Ecotherapy provides a creative solution to these problems. Psychotherapists as members of the caring profession use their own self as their instrument in the work (Skovholt, & Trotter-Mathison, 2011), thus attending to themselves is vital to the work.

## **Research**

That this is one person's journey in Nature could be considered a limitation of this study, however Moustakas (1990) claims that even though it is autobiographical, it has a social and universal significance. Snyder, (1988) believes that there is a scientific place for even one person's experience. One way of addressing this concern is to carry out further research in the field. This could involve conducting ecotherapy sessions with individuals or groups, and carrying out a heuristic inquiry into these. In Aotearoa, Māori might benefit from an ecotherapy approach to psychotherapy, since Māori identity, indirectly a health measure, is intrinsically connected to the land (Durie, 2001). Since *tangata whenua* are overrepresented in mental health institutions, there is an urgent need of radical solutions to support this population group.

Polynesian cultures have identified their need for an integrated approach to health, which is communal, relational, and pragmatic, with an emphasis on oral and visual (Capstick, Norris, Sopoaga and Tobata, 2009). Ecotherapy might support this population's needs also. Nature has been found to provide a protective function for immigrants, supporting them emotionally by means of social cohesion, and physically nourishing them, reducing their overall stress (Hordyk, 2015). With the current crisis

of mass displacement of peoples, further research with this population could guide us in better supporting their resettlement.

### **The Wider World**

There is movement out from the specific to the general, from the individual to the community, to the universal, and beyond, to where the research question has a life of its own (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). The challenge lies in nurturing this, letting it mature in line with its true nature. The human- Nature connection is really important for wellbeing, and incorporated into health, this could be beneficial to many. The overall health of the population in Aotearoa and the world is declining, as diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, as well as cancer are on the increase. Many of these issues could be addressed by a lifestyle change, of which ecotherapy could be one part. Ecotherapy could teach participants how to begin their own journeys in Nature, or gather people weekly individually, or in groups. Family ecotherapy sessions could support families with loss. Further studies could be conducted to clarify the areas most conducive to ecotherapy. Community health and wellbeing could be enhanced by ecotherapy as group work, or simply bush treks. The biggest limitation might be the weather; working outdoors is less suitable in wet weather. Perhaps courses could be planned for the summer and autumn seasons in Aotearoa. Another limitation is that bush reserves are shared spaces, thus privacy could not be guaranteed, which might create unexpected challenges.

Connection with Nature fosters a reciprocal relationship with the earth, (Snyder, 1988; Clare, 2014) which is one solution to the global environmental crisis we are experiencing today. A renewed interest in the environment could reduce consumerism, and increase veganism, leading to reduced pollution, and less environmental degradation on a worldwide scale. Sustainable solutions are required, and connecting with Nature may be the first step. Nature reserves are everywhere in New Zealand, and each neighborhood could have their own Nature programme, 'Naturehood' implementing health and wellbeing in their community. This is in line with Dubos (1972) thinking "Think global, act local". Costs could be minimal, however the benefits to people, families and communities would be large, with large savings in health service costs. Therapists may be perfectly positioned to facilitate these groups. Like Apathy (2010), I too am advocating flexibility and adaptability of therapists in

order to support the current health and ecological crisis. This kind of work would train therapists, giving them experience in Nature, as well as triaging referrals for psychotherapy. Clare (2014) recognizes psychotherapists role in educating people, “Psychotherapists have a unique and valuable perspective on human behaviour that would expand and deepen the dialogue on the environmental crisis and human-nature relationship - benefiting our planet and its inhabitants, and increasing the reputation of psychotherapy” (p.69).

*“Children, as much as adults, need to have their spirits uplifted, their bodies and their psyches healed, through the nurturance and reassurance nature provides. Their current lives and their health and stability as adults depend on it” (Old, 1989, p. 32).*

Lack of renewal in Nature is a possible cause of urban stress (Olds, 1989).

## **Recommendations**

- Therapists to develop their own Nature connection further by spending time in Natural environments. This could expand their awareness of themselves, awakening their transpersonal selves. This would also improve their skills, and nourish them deeply, supporting their self-care practice.
- Ecotherapy workshops to be included in psychotherapy and other mental health trainings, to develop core skills and build relationships with Nature, self, and others.
- Group Ecotherapy offered in the community as an ongoing health intervention for the wider population.
- Ecotherapy in schools for the health and wellbeing of special needs students, as well as for the whole class.
- Ecotherapy for migrant populations particularly refugees, in light of Nature’s capacity to support people in distress, and integrating them in their new homeland.
- ‘Nature groups’- community groups, growing, clearing bush, or trekking together in Nature.

## **Future healing**

Nature has been around for millions of years, and will outlive our practice rooms (and us). Human beings have drawn on this resource for health for centuries (Hordyk, (2015). Since Aotearoa is a growing multicultural society with ever increasing numbers of immigrant families arriving, protection of the health of these, as well as nourishment for all peoples already living in this land, is vital. Hodson (2013), who walked the length and breadth of New Zealand says, “The source of everything is the land, travel on it, and always allow it to penetrate you” (pp. 356). The following poem embodies the kernel of my work, which conveys Nature’s role in wellbeing as I have experienced it, like others have long before me, and others will.

### **Go to the Mountains**

*Go to the mountains*

*so that you may be cleansed*

*by the winds of Tawhirimatea*

*and be free.*

*Go to the sea*

*So that you may feel the peace*

*Of Hinimoana’s song*

*And be inspired.*

*Go to the ngahere*

*That you may be revitalized*

*By the energy of Tane Mahuta*

*And be transformed.*

*Go to the inner source*

*So that you may listen to the power,*

*Of your inner essence,*

*and be enlightened.*

*For I am the Godforce within you*

*Te Ao Marama.*

Mc Clutchie in Wendt, Whaitiri and Sullivan (2003, p.121)

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